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A STUDY OF CHRISTOLOGY FROM A TRIBAL PERSPECTIVE

WITH

SPECIAL REFERENCE TO MIZORAM

NORTHEAST INDIA

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ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to interpret Christology from the perspective of tribal people in Mizoram, northeast India, with an objective to help them and their churches to understand Jesus Christ in a way meaningful to them. In this study, historical and socio-theological analysis is used to show that Christology and culture are always related, and that different Christologies have been developed in different cultural contexts. This analysis in turn helps identify the issues that must be addressed in the construction of a contextual Christology for Mizoram context. In this study, Mizo culture and experience are taken into account as essential theological source.

The first chapter discusses the need for a contextual Christology and examines the basic issues and methodological approaches surrounding the construction of contextual Christology. In the second chapter, the context of tribal people in Mizoram is analysed. Among the major issues that must be addressed in Christological construction, the thesis identifies the growing disparity between rich and poor within the state and the socio-economic alienation of Mizos from mainland India.

The third chapter surveys the Christological tradition in Mizoram from its beginning to the present. It finds that the Christological heritage in Mizoram is largely irrelevant to Mizo people because of its uncritical application of Western theology to this very different historical and cultural context. The idea of Christ introduced into Mizoram is basically individualistic, otherworldly and dualistic. Neither missionaries nor native church leaders have taken the local culture seriously into account in doing Christology.

The fourth chapter attempts to recover some major liberating cultural traditions of the Mizos as sources for Christology, including their concepts of pasaltha, humanity, land, God and spiritual beings, and life after death. The study reveals that, despite the Western overlay, there is a significant continuity and influence of traditional culture in Mizo Christianity.
On the basis of these findings, the fifth chapter seeks to reinterpret the significance of Jesus Christ in the Mizoram context, using a Mizo conceptual framework. It argues that the idea of the *pasaltha* incorporates much of the New Testament portrait of the person and work of Christ. Jesus’ self-giving life and ministry, incarnation, suffering and death on the cross, can all be seen as manifesting the principle of *tlawmngaihna*, which is an essential characteristic of the *pasaltha*. Jesus’ resurrection and exaltation can be seen as God’s response to Jesus’ person and work precisely as *pasaltha-trlawmngai*. Similarly, the kingdom of God, which defined and summed up Jesus’ message and mission, can be perceived in the Mizoram context as exhibiting the qualities of a communitarian society.
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7. BIBLIOGRAPHY
INTRODUCTION

1. The Purpose of this Research

The task of this study is to construct a contextual Christology from the perspective of tribal people in Mizoram, northeast India. This research project is derived from my conviction that, if in Jesus Christ God becomes human and reveals God’s message of salvation, then the message of Christ must be inculturated in and through every culture. To put it more precisely, if Jesus Christ is to be understood and confessed meaningfully in contemporary Mizo society, then Christology must be interpreted in relation to Mizo culture and experience. Hence, the purpose of this study is to provide a contextual understanding of Christology for tribal Christians in general, and for Mizoram in particular, so that the churches in tribal areas may understand Jesus Christ better and to confess him meaningfully in response to the challenges and needs of their own contexts. In this thesis, the main focus is on the soteriological or liberative aspects of the significance of Jesus Christ for tribal Christians in Mizoram.

Mizoram is one of the tribal-inhabited states in northeast India. At the close of the nineteenth century, Christianity came to this area through missionaries from Great Britain. Presently all the native people in this state have embraced Christianity and Mizoram has become one of the few Indian states in which Christians form a majority of the population. However, although Christians in Mizoram and other parts of northeast India come predominantly from a tribal background, no serious effort has been made to develop Christology in relation to the tribal context. Christologies developed in the contexts of Western Europe and North America have been simply reproduced in this region, and there has been no serious attempt to take the historical and cultural particularities of the local tribal people into account.

While Christianity has been welcomed and accepted by the tribal people of this region, the Christology that has come to them from Western Christianity is very individualistic and otherworldly. As we will see, this Christology is largely focussed upon the death of Christ on the cross and does not give adequate attention to other
aspects of Jesus' life and ministry. As a result, the existing Christological tradition in Mizoram is unable to address the political, social, and economic problems of the people. It cannot meet and respond to the needs and aspirations of contemporary Mizo society. Hence, this thesis hopes to offer a first contribution to the construction of a Christology for the Mizoram context.

2. Previous Research

No scholarly study has been done on the subject of Christology from the tribal perspective in the context of Mizoram, northeast India. However, some studies have been done on related theological issues that may be considered as resources relevant to the development of contextual theology from the tribal perspective. They may be classified as follows:

2.1. Studies Which Attempt to Develop Tribal Theology

Most of the earlier theological writings in Mizoram and also in other parts of northeast India are not the product of scholarly studies. They were mostly translations from Western evangelical writers or heavily dependent upon such models.

In the Mizoram context, the publication of *Towards a Tribal Theology: The Mizo Perspective* (1989), edited by K. Thanzauva, may be considered a pioneering work in the development of contextual theology. The book is the outcome of the first Mizo Theological Conference. Since then, Thanzauva has been working on a contextual tribal theology. He has written a doctoral thesis on *A Theological Basis for Social Transformation: Methodological Implications of Third World Liberation Theology in the Context of Mizoram, North East India* (1993) which was submitted to the Melbourne College of Divinity. This thesis and his professorial lecture on *Methodological Issues: Contextual Theology in North East India*, delivered on 26th July 1996 at the Eastern Theological College, Jorhat, dealt with methodological issues for contextual theology in northeast India. Later, Thanzauva published two books, namely, *Theology of Community: Tribal Theology in the Making* (1997) and *Transforming Theology: A Theological Basis for Social Transformation* (2002). Both of these books are adapted from his doctoral thesis. In the first book, the author
attempts to root Christian theology in the tribal culture of northeast India. He believes that all tribal cultures place emphasis on community and suggests that the concept of community, or "communitarianism", can be used as an organizing principle for understanding social ethics, ecclesiology, eco-theology and a vision for a new egalitarian society, in the context of tribal people in Mizoram. In his second book, Thanzauva attempts to provide a theological basis for social transformation in northeast India.

Another writer who has made a notable contribution to the development of tribal theology in northeast India was Renthy Keitzer, the late Principal of Eastern Theological College, Jorhat. Renthy wrote many articles in relation to the need for contextual Christian theology in northeast India. His articles have been later published subsequently in a book entitled In Search of a Relevant Gospel (1995). His edited book, Good News for North East India: A Theological Reader (1995), a collection of various articles dealing with different theological issues in northeast India, is another important resource for contextual theology among tribal people.

In more recent times, the newly established Tribal Study Centre, Eastern Theological College, Jorhat, has made a substantial contribution towards the development of contextual tribal theology in northeast India. Besides publishing a bi-month magazine called Journal of Tribal Studies, from time to time it organizes seminars. A.Wati Longchar, Dean of the Studies, has edited and published a number of books, including An Exploration of Tribal Theology (1997); Tribal Worldview and Ecology (1998); Doing Theology with Tribal Resources: Context and Perspectives (1999); An Emerging Asian Theology–Tribal Theology: Issues, Nature and Perspective (2000). These books mainly focus on methodological issues and the need for contextual tribal theology in northeast India. The Mizoram Theological Journal, a bi-monthly journal published from Aizawl Theological College, Aizawl, Mizoram, is another important resource for dealing with theology in Mizoram context.

2.2. Studies on the History of Christianity

One of the most scholarly studies on the history of Christianity in Mizoram is Christianity and Mizo Culture (1996) by Mangkhosat Kipgen. This book is the
outcome of the author’s doctoral dissertation. The book not only contains an historical account of Christianity in Mizoram, but also makes a unique contribution to an in-depth understanding of Mizo culture. Kipgen believes that the interaction between Christianity and the traditional Mizo culture involved change on both sides. As he studied the way in which the traditional culture shaped Mizo Christianity, he came 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 led to the rapid growth of Christianity in Mizoram.

F.S. Downs' History of Christianity in India: Northeast India in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries (1992) is an historical study, which deals with the social impact of Christianity in northeast India. Lalsangkima Pachuau’s book, Ethnic Identity and Christianity: A Socio-Historical and Missiological Study of Christianity in Northeast India with Special Reference to Mizoram (1998), the outcome of the author’s doctoral dissertation, is another invaluable resource for the study of Christianity and Mizo culture. C.L. Hminga’s The Life and Witness of the Churches in Mizoram (1987), a study of the history of Christianity in Mizoram from the Church growth perspective, and J.M. Lloyd, History of the Church in Mizoram (1991), an account of Christian mission and expansion, are additional scholarly studies of the history of Christianity in Mizoram.

3. Methodology of the Research

The method of research used in this study is based on the hypothesis that the lack of theological relevance among tribal Christians in Mizoram is due to the uncritical application of Western theology in this very different historical and cultural context of Mizoram. Having substantiated this hypothesis, an attempt will be made to construct a contextual Christology from the perspective of the tribal people with particular reference to Mizoram. This study will include historical and socio-theological analysis of the subject, based on materials drawn from various sources, including government documents, academic studies and church traditions. Attempts will also be made to recover liberating traditions of the Mizo people for understanding the significance of Christ.
However, the tribal Christians in Mizoram have provided little documentation of their theological ideas and worldviews, especially in relation to their understanding of Christ. Neither the missionaries nor the tribal churches have attempted to present their views of Jesus Christ in any extensive written form. In the absence of adequate written sources, this study has to depend heavily on fragmented sources, such as reports, sermons, songs, testimonies and the like. It will also use various cultural sources, including folk stories, myths and songs. In addition to these, the personal experience of this writer, as one who has been born and brought up in the tribal community in Mizoram and involved in Christian ministry among his own people for more than fifteen years, will provide additional source for this study.

In the attempt to construct a contextual Christology, it is nonetheless important to maintain the inter-connectedness of various theologies, to preserve the integrity and universal nature of the Gospel. This particular Christology from the tribal perspective needs to be integrated with the wider Christological tradition, especially with that of other Third World theologies. For this reason, this study will first look at the emergence of contextual theology in recent times and consider some basic issues involving in the construction of a contextual Christology. This study will not only provide a theological framework for the subsequent Mizo part of this study, it will also protect this work from theological isolation, and hopefully it may also able to contribute to a more holistic understanding of the significance of Jesus Christ.

4. Scope of the Research

In this study, we will deal specifically with one particular situation, that of the tribal people of Mizoram. This selection is made in order, on the one hand, to avoid the pitfall of analysis that is too general, and, on the other hand, to identify and focus on concrete issues affecting tribal people. The underlying assumption is that the issues and needs facing the tribal people in Mizoram will also be common to many other tribal peoples, especially in northeast India.

After discussing the issues surrounding the formation of a contextual Christology, the first objective of this study is to make a historical-theological analysis of the way Jesus Christ has been proposed by the missionaries and appropriated by the tribal
people of Mizoram. A second objective will then be to go behind this investigation to uncover the Mizo cultural and liberative traditions, which have persisted in these Christologies. Thirdly, this legacy will then be used to construct a contextual Christology from the perspective of tribal people in the Mizoram context.

5. Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is divided into six chapters, as follows:

Chapter 1: We begin with the fact that we propose to construct a contextual Christology for tribal Christians in Mizoram. We discuss why it is necessary to construct such a contextual Christology and examine in greater detail the basic issues and methodological approaches involved. This will provide the necessary groundwork for further discussion and direction of the thesis.

Chapter 2: Having explored the basic methodological issues of a contextual Christology, in the next chapter we turn to the context of tribal people in Mizoram and examine the problems they face. We examine their geographical and socio-cultural isolation and the major tribal policies adopted by the dominant groups in India, the British and the post-colonial Indian Government. We also look at the tribals’ struggle for liberation in the form of revolt. After that, we turn to problems of economic development, including the system of development programmes, the traditional agriculture system, the lack of trade links, influxes of immigrants; and examine the disparity between the rich and the poor in Mizoram. The purpose of this study is to identify tribal issues, which must be addressed in our attempt at constructing Christology.

Chapter 3: In this chapter we examine the Christological heritage of tribal Christians in the Mizoram context. The purpose of this analysis is to identify the extent to which the existing Christological tradition in Mizoram addresses the needs and aspirations of the Mizo tribal Christians. First we provide a brief overview of Christianity in Mizoram and then sketch in broad outline the Christological tradition inherited by the Mizo Christians. In this survey, we examine the Christology of early missionary preaching, including Christ as saviour from sin, as conqueror of evil spirits and as
entry into heaven. We then look at the understanding of Christ portrayed in four major revival movements and the Born-again movements. We also consider how Christ is portrayed in the doctrinal confessions of the two main churches in Mizoram, Presbyterian and Baptist, and also in two major sectarian movements outside the mainstream church. At the end of this chapter, we offer some concluding evaluation. This survey will show that the primary limitation of the existing Christological tradition in Mizoram is its failure to take the local culture into account.

Chapter 4: Having discovered that lack of cultural rootedness is the basic limitation of the existing Christology of tribal Christians, in this chapter an attempt is made to recover some common and liberative traditions of the tribal people for doing Christology in the Mizoram context. Here we explore key elements, such as the understanding of humanity, the Mizo concept of pasaltha, land, God and life after death. We also examine the legacy of traditional culture in Mizo Christianity. The study shows that there is a significant continuity of traditional culture in Mizo Christianity and that, to a great extent, traditional culture has shaped contemporary Mizo Christianity.

Chapter 5: In the fifth chapter, an attempt is made to construct a contextual Christology for tribal Christians in Mizoram, using the Mizo concept of pasaltha as a working model. We claim that the idea of pasaltha incorporates much of the New Testament portrait of the person and work of Jesus Christ. Here we look at Jesus’ solidarity with the people, particularly with the poor and the marginalized, and his prophetic ministry and heroic criticism of the unjust social and religious order of his time. We argue that, in all these ways, Jesus’ life and ministry exhibit the qualities of a pasaltha who always identified with his people and defended them from enemies and oppressive forces. We also look at aspects such as the incarnation. Christ’s work for others, his devotion to God, his suffering and his death on the cross. We find that all these qualities demonstrate the Mizo principle and practice of tlawmngaihna, which is the essential characteristic of a pasaltha. In the same way, we also look at the resurrection of Jesus and claim that it can be perceived among Mizos as God’s response to Jesus’ person and work as pasaltha-tlawmngai. Similarly, we propose that the kingdom of God, which defined and summed up Jesus’ message and mission, can
be perceived among tribal people as exhibiting the qualities of a communitarian society.

Recapitulating what have been discussed so far, a brief summary of the findings of the research is outlined in the conclusion. The primary thesis of this research is that, among tribal Christian in the Mizoram context, Jesus Christ can be perceived as *pasaltha* who always identified with his people and rescued them from destructive forces. Hence, the primary contribution of this thesis to Christian theology is the formulation of a contextual Christology for tribal people in Mizoram, using the traditional Mizo concept of *pasaltha*. 
CHAPTER 1

IN SEARCH OF CHRIST IN CONTEXT

My particular passion in this study is to find a Christology that will able to address the particular needs and aspirations of tribal people in Mizoram. It is my conviction that Christology is always an interpretation of the significance of Jesus Christ for the Christian community in a particular time and place.¹ In Christological construction, it is the context of the people that must determine the way Christology is articulated. Indeed, it is commonly agreed among contemporary theologians that every confession of Jesus Christ takes shape in a particular historical and cultural context. As Daniel Migliore observes, “Every understanding and confession of Jesus Christ grows out of a particular situation and both reflects and speaks to particular needs and aspirations”.² Jon Sobrino expresses the same view, when he says, “every Christology is elaborated within the context of a specific situation”.³

Thus, it follows that any changes in a situation or context call for a new formulation of Christology.⁴ More precisely, when the existing Christology becomes unable to meet contemporary local needs it becomes obsolete, and a new formulation of Christology is necessary. As Rienzie Perera points out, every generation attempts to reformulate their understanding of Christology in order to meet challenges and needs

¹ The term “Christology”, derived from two Greek words, Christos (Christ, meaning, “anointed one”) and logos (word), is the “study about Christ”. In Christian theology, the term is commonly used to denote the doctrine of Christ and, as such, it is by and large applied to the entire inquiry into the significance of Jesus Christ for the Christian faith. As a critical enquiry into Jesus Christ, a study of Christology seeks to reflect the significance of Jesus Christ for the Christian community and the world. See George Newlands, "Christology," in A New Dictionary of Christian Theology, ed. Alan Richardson and John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1983), 100. See also Gerald O'Collins and Edward G. Farrugia, A Concise Dictionary of Theology, Revised and Expanded ed. (New York: Paulist Press, 2000), 42; George S. Hendry, "Christology," in A Dictionary of Christian Theology, ed. Alan Richardson (London: SCM Press, 1969), 51.
particular to their situation. It is, likewise, to meet the challenge and needs of the situation of Mizoram that we are directing the Christological enquiry of this thesis. We now turn to examine more closely the need for a contextual Christology.

1. The Need for a Contextual Christology

In his study on contextual theology, Stephen Bevans explicitly states that “doing theology contextually is not an option”, but a “theological imperative”. According to him, there are both external and internal factors necessitating the development of contextual theologies. The external factor consists in a general dissatisfaction with classical approaches to theology. This includes, especially in the view of Third World Christians in Asia, Africa and Latin America:

1) the inability of inherited or traditional theology to make sense within local cultural traditions and worldviews;
2) the failure of traditional theology to respond to the experience and suffering of the local people;
3) the new awareness that there are significant values in native cultures which hitherto have been regarded by colonists as inferior and useless; and
4) a growing confidence, on the part of Third World Christians, in their ability to work things out for themselves.

The internal factor arises from the incarnational nature of the Gospel itself. According to the scriptural witness, God becomes a human being in the person of Jesus (John 1: 14) and shares God’s self with us. As in Jesus Christ God becomes human and reveals God’s message of salvation, so the message of Christ must be transmitted in and through every culture. As Migliore puts it,

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7 See Ibid., 5-10. See also Migliore, Faith Seeking Understanding, 198-99; Robert J. Schreiter, Constructing Local Theologies (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1985), 1-5. The term, “Third World” was originally used by Alfred Sauvy, a French demographer, in 1952 to denote the new nations that were moving toward independence from colonial powers. The term became a common designation for poor or developing countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America. Moreover, the term is also used supra-geographically to denote any peoples whose social conditions are marked by cultural oppression, economic dependency and political powerlessness. In this sense, the term can also be used with reference to poor and marginalized peoples of countries other than Asia, Africa and Latin America. See Virginia Fabella, "Third World," in Dictionary of Third World Theologies, ed. Virginia Fabella and R.S. Sugirtharajah (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2000), 202.
8 See Bevans, Models of Contextual Theology, 5-10.
Just as God’s decisive self-communication is through incarnation in a particular human life, so the transmission of the gospel message by the church makes use of concrete and diverse languages, experiences, philosophical conceptualities, and cultural practices.9

Moreover, the doctrine of incarnation proclaims that God’s encounter with the world through Jesus Christ takes place not primarily in ideas but in concrete reality. The world of things and all that has life on earth reminds us of the creative power of God (Psalm 19: 1ff). The ordinary things of everyday life are transparent of God’s presence. If the ordinary things of daily life are transparent of God’s presence, then we can also speak of culture as something revelatory of God’s presence.10 Hence, one important task of theology is to discern the “signs” of God’s presence in human history and culture and make that presence explicit. With this task in mind, we turn to the context of this work: the State of Mizoram in northeast India.

In Mizoram, the need to construct a contextual Christology arises from the failure of the existing Christology to meet the needs and aspirations of the Mizo people.11 Mizoram, which means “land of the Mizos”, is one of the few tribal-inhabited states in northeast India. The state is bordered by Bangladesh and the state of Tripura on the west, Myanmar in the east and south, and the states of Manipur and Assam on the north. Mizoram state has an area of 21,087 square kilometres, with a population of over eight hundred and ninety one thousand.12 The people in Mizoram are racially Mongoloid, socially classified as tribal and religiously they are Christian. Christianity came to Mizoram through missionaries from Great Britain in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Today all the Mizo people in this state have embraced Christianity and Mizoram has become one of the few Indian states in which Christians form a majority of the population.

Although Christians in Mizoram and other parts of northeast India come predominantly from a tribal background, and though Christianity has been with them for more than one hundred years, however, no serious effort has been made to develop

9 Migliore, Faith Seeking Understanding, 198.
11 A detailed discussion on this issue is given in chapter 3.
Christology in relation to the tribal context. Christologies developed in the contexts of Western Europe and North America have been simply reasserted in this region, and there has been no serious attempt to take the historical and cultural particularities of the local tribal people into account.

While Christianity has been welcomed and accepted by the Mizo tribal people, this thesis claims that the Christology they have inherited from Western Christianity is now inadequate to meet the needs and aspirations of the people. As we will see in our later discussion, the inherited Christology is very individualistic and otherworldly. It focuses mainly upon the death of Christ on the cross, and does not give adequate importance to other aspects of Jesus’ life and ministry. It presents Christ’s work of salvation primarily in terms of salvation for the individual soul, and invites the people to make a personal decision in response to the work of Christ. This approach to Christology is thus unable to address in an adequate way the socio-economic and political problems of contemporary Mizo society. Moreover, in the perspective of this inherited theological tradition, Mizo culture is seen as either evil or merely preparatory to the Gospel. Such a view not only undermines the values of Mizo culture, but also fails to provide for Mizo Christians with a theological basis for their struggle towards their religious identity.

Therefore, if the Gospel is to become truly good news for the Mizo people, a new Christology is necessary for Mizoram. Since theology is, as Devasahayam observes, a medium for the realization of authentic humanity, it is important that we engage in examining and critically evaluating the Christological ideas received from the West, criticise them and reconstruct them, so that they may serve more adequately as vehicles for fuller humanization. Indeed, it is my conviction that, if Jesus Christ is to be understood and confessed meaningfully in contemporary Mizo society, then Christology must be interpreted in relation to Mizo culture and experience.

Hence, in this pioneering work, I will attempt to reflect on, and speak into, the particular experience and needs of the tribal Christians in Mizoram. In doing so, this particular tribal Christology will address the fact that Mizos are not only a

marginalized community like other tribal peoples and dalits, but they are also further marginalized in relation to the rest of India.

2. Issues Surrounding the Construction of Contextual Christology

While this Christology is designed to reflect on, and speak into, the particular experience and aspirations of tribal Christians in Mizoram, it must also be seen as part of the explosion of contextual Christologies all over the world. Whether context be defined geographically, socially, ethnically, or in terms of gender, this Christology arises in partnership with a host of other contextual theologies. In order to come to term with this phenomenon, it will be helpful to consider first how the contextual approach to doing Christology has been developed.

2.1. The Emergence of Contextual Theology

We have stated that every theology is contextual, because it is developed out of a particular social condition and need. Until recently, however, there was no serious effort to take account of context in theological formulation. Philosophical abstractions, Church traditions and biblical texts, rather than the concrete historical situations and cultures of peoples, were commonly used as the starting points of theological reflection. This was true especially with regard to theology originating in Western Europe and North America, which was then regarded as a universal theology, applicable to all situations and times. This ‘Western’ theology was applied everywhere, and until relatively recently Western theologies of mission made no serious attempt to understand the contexts of non-Western peoples or to use them as sources for doing theology.  

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14 The term “dalit” means “broken” or “crushed”. Dalits are a group of oppressed people in India who are considered outcaste, or more precisely “no people” by caste Hindus. According to the caste system of the Hindus, Indian society is divided into four castes: Brahmans (priests, Kshatriyas (warriors), Vaishyas (traders) and Sudras (labourers). Dalits live outside this caste, and caste Hindus considered them polluted and untouchable. See M.E. Prabhakar, “Introduction,” in Towards a Dalit Theology, ed. M.E. Prabhakar (Delhi: ISPCK, 1989), 1-2.

15 See Virginia Fabella, “Contextualization,” in Dictionary of Third World Theologies, ed. Virginia Fabella and R.S. Sugirtharajah (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2000), 58. For the purpose of this study, we will speak of the countries in Western Europe and North America as “Western” and the theologies developed from that situation as “Western theology.”
However, in recent years, self-awareness has arisen among Christians in former Western colonies and marginalized peoples. These "new Christians" see themselves not as Westerners, but as people who have been colonised by Western people, and whose situation has been greatly influenced by Western political and economic interests. Robert Schreiter observes that, among these Christians, the most pressing issues are: 1) the problems of poverty and oppression; 2) the struggle to create a new identity in postcolonial situation; or 3) the question of how to meet the challenges of modernization and the commodification of the economy in traditional society. This new development in local theological awareness has been greatly encouraged by the achievement of political independence in former Western colonies, by the transfer of ecclesial authority from Missions to local churches and by movements for cultural independence. Accordingly, a new way of approaching Christian theology, commonly known as "contextual theology", has emerged.

The term "contextual theology" was first introduced in 1972 by the Theological Education Fund (TEF) of the World Council of Churches, which was then headed by a Taiwanese theologian, Shoki Coe. Before this, Westerners used terms such as accommodation, adaptation, inculturation and indigenisation to denote methods of theological expression in a non-Western context, methods which to a lesser or greater extent utilized the native culture and worldview as the basis of theological articulation. While contextual theology does not ignore traditional culture, it goes beyond it. According to Bevans, contextual theology takes into account:

- the spirit and message of the gospel;
- the tradition of the Christian people;
- the culture in which one is theologising;
- and social change in that culture, whether brought about by western technological process or the grass-root struggle for equality, justice and liberation.

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19 Bevans, Models of Contextual Theology, 1.
Bevans maintains that contextual theology is a new way of understanding the Christian faith, on the basis not only of scripture and tradition but also of concrete culturally conditioned human experience. Thus, while not ignoring the Scriptures and Church traditions, serious account is taken of the historical situation and the impact of outside forces on the people to whom the theological construction is addressed.

Today contextual theology has become almost a discipline in its own right. Not only are many contextual theologies emerging from different Third World contexts, but also there are divergences among these various theologies themselves. Different factors such as politics, economy, culture, gender and religion play their parts in the concrete circumstances and contexts of different countries. Schreiter observes that in former colonies, where local identities have been suppressed or denied in favour of an identity imposed by the colonizers, Christian communities usually look at their context as culture, and struggle mainly with problems of identity. Such reflections, according to him, are most common among indigenous communities and where Christians are a minority. But in situations where Christian communities are struggling for the transformation of their societies because of massive poverty, oppression and racism, people usually look at their contexts in terms of social structure, or as class structure, and seek for liberation and justice. Examples of these contexts are Latin America (class structure) and South Africa (racism as social structure).

The emergence of contextual theology has also brought with it, as Migliore says, "an unprecedented awakening of local or contextual Christologies" in different parts of the world that "speak of Christ and salvation in strikingly new ways". Examples of contextual Christologies which have arisen are: Latin American Christology, African American Christology, Feminist Christology, Hispanic Christology, the Christology of Minjung theology in Korea and the Christology of Dalit theology in India. In the

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20 Ibid., 1-2.
22 Schreiter, The New Catholicity, 2.
midst of such a "global flow", to use Schreiter’s expression, of local or contextual Christologies, one important question is: how does a particular contextual theology relate to other theologies?

2.2. The Particular and the Universal Dimensions in Contextual Christology

In the construction of a local Christology, a tension emerges between continuity with the classical tradition of the Church on the one hand and, on the other, openness to contextual expressions of Christ. These two concerns require us to consider seriously the question, "how to be faithful both to the contemporary experience of the gospel and to the tradition of Christian life that has been received". Or, as Wesley Ariarajah puts it, “Can Christian faith in fact be expressed within the culture of each and every place? How can the gospel be both universal and contextual?"

The Christian Gospel contains both universal and particular dimensions. According to the scriptural witness, the incarnation of God took place in a particular time and place. God becomes a human being in the person of Jesus, a first century Palestinian Jew, son of Mary and Joseph. Yet, this particular manifestation of God in Jesus has a universal significance. In and through Jesus’ life, activity, death and resurrection, God discloses the divine self and purpose for all humanity and the world. The New Testament itself bears witness to this testimony of God’s unique revelation in Jesus Christ in context. We have not one but four Gospels, and a number of other New Testament Christologies. Each of these Christologies confesses Jesus Christ in “a distinctive way that is shaped by its particular context”. Subsequently, Christians in different times and places have confessed their faith in Jesus Christ, in a manner shaped by each particular context. The Assembly of the Commission for World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) in Bangkok (1973) stated that:

The universality of the Christian faith does not contradict its particularity. Christ has to be responded to in a particular situation. Many people try to give universal validity

24 See Ibid.
26 Ariarajah, Gospel and Culture, 28.
27 Migliore, Faith Seeking Understanding, 199.
to their own particular response instead of acknowledging that the diversity of responses to Christ is essential precisely because they are related to particular situations and are thus relevant and complementary.\(^{28}\)

It is vitally important therefore, that one keeps intact the balance between the universal and the particular dimensions of the Gospel in theological formulation. On the one hand, if one emphasizes the universality of the Gospel by generalizing its message and stripping it of its entire historical contingency, one may fail to perceive not only the Gospel’s particular dimension but also its creative power to receive and transform human life in all its historical particularity and diversity. On the other hand, if one emphasizes the particularity of the Gospel, by developing one particular formulation of the Gospel in isolation from all others, one may fail to perceive the Gospel’s universal power.\(^{29}\) In order to develop a vital and coherent Christology, one needs to incorporate both the particular and the universal dimensions of the Gospel.

If our Christology is confined to our own and immediate context, then it will simply become a product of its surroundings. A vital and coherent Christology must have, as Schreiter says, “an ability to speak beyond its context, and an openness to hear voices from beyond its own boundaries”.\(^{30}\) Of course, however, one-sidedness in theological reflection may not be avoidable, given the need to respond to a particular situation. In fact, we all do theology partially. But one-sidedness in Christology should not become a hindrance to hearing the voices of others. As Darragh reminds us, in constructing local theology, one always needs to “keep a balance between doing theology in our own context and receiving theology from other contexts”.\(^{31}\)

In some circles, the existence of many diverse Christologies may appear overly confusing, or even unorthodox. In such a situation, some may want to dismiss local expressions of Christ and, instead, seek to take refuge in the already existing, more familiar, traditional Christological creeds and their interpretations.\(^{32}\) However, that would be a mistake. As Migliore rightly says, the theological issue we are facing

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\(^{29}\) See Migliore, Faith Seeking Understanding, 199.

\(^{30}\) Schreiter, The New Catholicity, 4.


\(^{32}\) See Migliore, Faith Seeking Understanding, 220.
today is to do not with “an either/or choice but with the need for dialogue.” If effective interpretation of Christology is to occur, both the particular witness of local Christology and also the Christological tradition of ecumenical theology are necessary. Migliore suggests that, if the local and the global dimensions in Christology are to be held together to enrich and correct each other, then:

First, every effort at ecumenical theology must be genuinely open to the voices of contextual theologies...Second, local theologies must be genuinely concerned to speak not only in and to their own context but from that context to the worldwide community of Christian believers.  

In this line of thought, Migliore proposes a “hospitality” metaphor for Christology. He maintains that in the midst of all our cultural and historical diversities, Christ can to be seen as a host who brings us together as his guests for purposes that transcend all our differences. At the same time, the same Christ can also be seen as a stranger who awaits our hospitality. The Christ, who brings together as people of different cultural backgrounds at his table, invites us also to be hosts to one another. He calls us to be sensitive to the needs of the poor and the needy, and to take seriously the particularity of others who are around us.

2.3. The Issue of the Local and the Global Contexts

In his The New Catholicity, Robert Schreiter maintains that, in the postcolonial world of globalization, where there has been unprecedented migration of people with subsequent fragmentation and mixing of cultures, theology needs to engage with two concepts of culture: the integrated and the global.

The integrated concept of culture denotes “patterned systems in which the various elements are coordinated in such a fashion as to create a unified whole”. Culture in this sense is to be found in traditional society, which is “relatively self-enclosed and

33 Ibid....
34 Ibid., 221.
self-sufficient, and governed by a rule-bound tradition.\textsuperscript{37} The global concept of culture, on the other hand, is more self-conscious with respect to change and to the fluidity of power relationships. In this concept of culture, society is perceived as "something to be constructed rather than discovered, and it is constructed on the stage of struggle amid the asymmetries of power."\textsuperscript{38} Similarly, the Fifth Assembly of the WCC in Nairobi (1975) records its concern for, and the need to engage with, both the "technological culture" and indigenous cultures.\textsuperscript{39}

In his article on "Postcolonialism and Indian Christian Theology", Sugirtharajah expresses a similar concern.\textsuperscript{40} He observes that one dominant tradition of Indian Christianity has been "the tendency to be retrospective or ironic". That is to say, in their search for a contextual expression of Christianity, some Indian Christian theologians look back to "the prime sites of ancient India" and draw on the Hindu religious and theological heritage for inspiration and new directions. Such an exercise has been perceived as being "innovative in its implicit opposition to the imported and universalising nature of Western methodologies". However, Sugirtharajah argues that in such an uncritical re-invoking of the past, theologians have overlooked the rational and sceptical aspects of Indian culture. In so doing, they have simply reinforced the image of India concocted by the 18\textsuperscript{th} century European Orientalists as "timeless" and "changeless", and thus failed to see "the struggles and miseries of the present".\textsuperscript{41}

Sugirtharajah insists that today we live in a postcolonial situation where there is intermixing of cultures, at both popular and elitist levels. The divide between local and global, or between rural and metropolitan, is shrinking. As a result of the globalization process, people's lives are rearranged and there are constant movements of people around the world. Theologians must take into account this "change of scenario in the theological firmament".\textsuperscript{42} In such a multicultural society, where there is an interlacing of traditions, histories and texts, it is "not always feasible to recover

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 48.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 54.
\textsuperscript{40} See R.S. Sugirtharajah, "Postcolonialism and Indian Christian Theology," \textit{Studies in World Christianity} 5, no. 2 (1999): 231.
\textsuperscript{41} For all these references, see Ibid.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 234.
the authentic ‘roots’ or even to go back to the real ‘home’ again”. In his view, “a quest for unalloyed pure native roots could prove not only to be elusive” but also to be a cause of disharmony among neighbours. According to him, “what postcoloniality indicates is that we assume more-or-less fractured, hyphenated, double, or in some cases multiple identities”. In such a context, the task of a theologian is not to assume the role of legislator, but to understand the reality of the situation.

In a similar manner, Jung Young Lee describes the marginalized situation of Asian-American people in United States as being a hyphenated people. He states that Asian-Americans live in two worlds: they are Asians in America, and Americans in Asia. They are perceived as “in-between” people, people who have a confused identity. They belong neither to the people of their residence nor to the people of their lineage. Lee argues that such an understanding of marginality is one-sided, and hence unacceptable. The idea is based on a Western exclusivist “either-or” mode of thinking, and focuses only on the negative aspect of marginality or the marginal people. Instead, he suggests that from the perspective of the marginalized people the idea of marginality includes the condition of being “in-both”. To affirm one’s being “in-bothness” is to affirm one’s racial and cultural identity, which means for the Asian-Americans to affirm Asian identity. But an awareness or affirmation of being on the margin, on the other hand, prevents the Asian-Americans from an affirmation of their cultural identity as exclusive.

Further, Lee suggests that in the context of the “in-between” and “in-both” of the Asian and the American worlds, one needs to be “in-beyond”. To be “in-beyond” or a person living “in-beyond” in such a context is to be a hyphenated person. He says,

As a hyphenated person, an Asian-American symbolizes the middle which is joined by two worlds... The hyphenated minority or the minority of “and” is extrinsically in-between because of societal pressure, but is intrinsically in-both... The condition of

43 For all these references, see Ibid.: 235.
44 Ibid.: 236.
45 Jung Young Lee, Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 42-64. See also Peter C. Phan, "Jesus the Christ With an Asian Face," Theological Studies 57, no. 3 (1996): 413-14.
46 Lee, Marginality, 44.
47 See Phan, "Jesus the Christ With an Asian Face," 414.
in-between and in-both must be harmonized for one to become a new marginal person who overcomes marginality without ceasing to be a marginal person. Indeed, it is very important that the theologian be fully aware of the changed circumstance in which s/he lives in the construction of a local Christology. Today, we live in a situation where our cultural values, patterns of relationship and worldviews have been drastically changed as a result of modernization. As we will see in our subsequent discussion, even the tribal community of Mizoram, which did not have an alphabet in the beginning of the twentieth century, today is exposed to a totally new world. In order to survive in this new situation, the people have to learn new technologies, adopt new ways of life and compete with others in various levels of the economy.

In such a situation, it will not be meaningful for a theologian simply to repeat the classical theological tradition of the missionaries, in something like a “translation approach”, or even to interpret Jesus Christ in terms of the past cultural traditions of the local people. We need to adopt a new way of doing Christology. We need to find ways to construct a Christology that will preserve human values and build community, a Christology that will affirm and enhance life as it is lived in this new context. This concern leads us to our next discussion, which is about criteria for an authentic contextual Christology.

2.4. Basic Criteria for Authentic Contextual Christology

The proliferation of contextual Christologies raises the question of how one should determine whether or not a particular contextual Christology is a valid expression of the Christian faith. It is not easy to work out working criteria for evaluating the authenticity of contextual Christologies. Wesley Ariarajah has pointed out that the ecumenical discussion on Gospel and culture in the WCC has often been paralysed by the effort to find theological criteria for judging culture. However, it is crucially important to have some working criteria, because there is a possibility that one can mix up Gospel and culture in a way that does not enhance, but compromises and

48 Lee, Marginality, 62. Italics are his. See also Phan, "Jesus the Christ With an Asian Face," 414.
49 See also Thanzauva, Theology of Community, 38.
50 See Ariarajah, Gospel and Culture, 42.
betrays Christianity. In that case, contextual Christology can simply become a kind of contextualism or a “culture theology”, rather than contextualization of the Christian faith.51

Thus, contextual theologians have searched for and proposed some criteria for evaluating the authenticity of contextual theologies. It is commonly agreed that no one criterion is adequate to determine the genuineness of a contextual theology. Rather, several proposed criteria have emerged. The following are some major ones:52

1). A contextual theology must have an inner consistency and a continuing relationship with Scripture and subsequent Church tradition. A new formulation of contextual theology should be oriented in the same direction as other successful theological traditions. It must be able to express fundamental Christian beliefs and ethical values such as God is Love. If the new contextual theology leads in a direction contrary to such intentionality, it cannot be an appropriate theological expression. Since theologies are constructed primarily for the Christian community, a new contextual theology must be believable by the Christian public who receive it, and it must be acceptable by the whole Church.

2). A genuine contextual theology must lead to the transformation of both society and individual persons, and any theological expression that would lead in a contrary direction cannot be considered to be authentic theology. In the context of the tribal and marginalized people of Mizoram in particular, a genuine theological expression must help the people in their struggle for justice and freedom from poverty. As Thanzauva has pointed out, “Any contextual theology is judged by its contribution to the achievement of its goal which is the realization of the Kingdom of God”.53 Similarly, K.C. Abraham has pointed out that a genuine expression of contextual theology today must be grounded and inspired by the principle of a “preferential

51 See Thanzauva, Methodological Issues, 10; Bevans, Models of Contextual Theology, 17.
52 For the following discussion of this section, see Bevans, Models of Contextual Theology, 18-19; Schreiter, Constructing Local Theologies, 118-21; Thanzauva, Methodological Issues, 11-13.
53 See Thanzauva, Methodological Issues, 12.
option for the poor". It must be judged by the criterion of whether or not it removes human suffering and promotes life.\textsuperscript{54}

3). A contextual theology must be adaptable to worship and other aspects of the Church's ministry. A new contextual theology must be able to be expressed in the forms of preaching, singing, dancing, prayer and different activities of the Christian ministry. If it cannot be carried over into such activities, the theological authenticity of that particular contextual theology would be questionable. Such a theology would likely become abstract and detached from its own context.

4). A contextual theology must be open to criticism and challenge from other theologies. It must be willing to learn from them and grow in dialogue with them. If, on the contrary, it were closed in upon itself and defensive, and not willing to learn from others, then the genuineness of that particular contextual theology would be doubtful. As Darragh says, a "good theology requires partnerships between different contexts".\textsuperscript{55} Samuel Amirtham and John Pobee expressed the same view, when they said: "Dialogue between contextual theologies is a non-negotiable part of doing theology in a world of peoples".\textsuperscript{56} In fact, one important mark of a genuine theology is an ability to challenge other theologies and to contribute positively to a dialogue among them.

5) Richard Grigg suggests that every expression of Christ must be judged by at least three criteria. First, a genuine Christ must bear a clear family resemblance to the New Testament Christs. Second, it must reflect the traditional belief that Christ is the presence of God. That is to say, in the local portrait of Christ, people must able to recognize that God is uniquely present and at work for them and the world. Third, every understanding of Christ must address the expectation that Christ provides redemption. In other words, a contextual Christology must able to meet the soteriological needs of the people to whom it is addressed.\textsuperscript{57}

\textsuperscript{55} Darragh, \textit{Doing Theology Ourselves}, 23.
\textsuperscript{56} Samuel Amirtham and John S. Pobee, eds., \textit{Theology By the People} (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1986), 20.
We have considered how contextual Christology must relate to classical or other Christologies. In line with these concerns, another important issue is how the New Testament and contemporary biblical studies inform the construction of a contextual Christology. Now we turn to this issue.

2.5. Contextual Christology and Biblical Studies

We have noted that confessions of Christ always take place in a particular time and place. The New Testament records that, during the lifetime of Jesus himself, there had been already some speculation among the people about who he was. Some thought him to be John the Baptist; others, Elijah; and still others, some other prophet (Mark 8: 28). Likewise, the New Testament itself contains a plurality of Christologies. As they reflect the particular context from which they were written, all these Christologies have their own particular emphases. Prominent among these Christologies are those associated with Paul, Mark, Matthew, Luke, John and the Letter to the Hebrews.\(^{58}\)

At first glance, this proliferation of Christologies in the New Testament and their diverse emphases may appear bewildering and raise the question: Whose Christ is the true Christ?\(^{59}\) However, diversity in Christology should not be regarded as something negative. Plurality in Christology is intrinsic to the nature of the Gospel itself. The Gospel message is meant for everybody. Every individual, or community of people, has the freedom to proclaim God's message of salvation revealed in and through Jesus Christ in any time and place.

Rather, the plurality of Christologies in New Testament testifies to the importance of context in the doing of Christology, and indicates that the development of a contextual Christology is both possible and necessary. If each Christology of the New Testament reflects something of the distinctive situation in which it was written, then the Bible


also must be read and interpreted today in relation to the reader’s own context. Indeed, as Moltmann says, reading the Bible with the eyes of the poor can be quite different from reading it with the eyes of the rich and those who are well. He argues that, “If it is read in the light of the experiences and hopes of the oppressed, the Bible’s revolutionary themes – promise, exodus, resurrection and Spirit – come alive.” At the same time, we must also read the context in relation to the Bible. A Christology without a proper biblical basis can be fatal, as the following discussion will show.

A related and important issue is the question of how contemporary research on the historical Jesus should inform the construction of a local Christology. For much of Christian history, there was no historical consciousness or attempt to understand Jesus Christ in relation to his context. Christological understandings have usually been established in the form of credal or dogmatic confessions. The dominant tendency of such confessions has been to perceive Jesus as a divine being, the pre-existent God the Son, who becomes a human being. Such an understanding of Jesus Christ faces the danger of dehistoricizing the human Jesus, and thus detaching him from the world of humanity and creation.

The rise of historical consciousness and the consequent application of historical-critical methods in New Testament studies saw new attempts to reconstruct the actual life and teachings of Jesus. In the nineteenth century, it was assumed that if one stripped away the dogmatic wrappings and “biased” faith confessions of the Church, then it might be possible to discover “the real Jesus”, who was assumed to be different from “the religion about Jesus”. This project is commonly known as the “quest of the historical Jesus”. It has its origin in the works of Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694-1768), who maintained that the real Jesus of history was quite different from the Christ of the Christian tradition. Albert Schweitzer, who wrote the dominant history

61 In his writing, published after his death, Reimarus argued that the real Jesus was a Jewish revolutionary, who died as a failure. According to him, Jesus intended to establish an earthly kingdom with himself as the kingly messiah. But after his failure to achieve his goal in a revolution that led to his sudden death, his disciples fabricated a story to cover up the truth. They stole his body from the tomb and portrayed him as a spiritual messiah who died for the sins of humanity, who was resurrected from the death, and who would come again. Accordingly, Reimarus interpreted Jesus’ message of the
and critique of this research in the early twentieth century, argued that most of the lives of Jesus that had been reconstructed in the nineteenth century were just projections and unhistorical fantasies. In his view, the investigations were like contemporary persons looking down into the well of history and seeing only their own faces reflected in the water. In Schweitzer's view, Jesus was rather a Jewish apocalyptic prophet whose message of the coming kingdom of God was in utter discontinuity with the present world order.\(^{62}\)

In the twentieth century, an enormous number of studies has been carried out in "quest of the historical Jesus". On the one hand, it is generally agreed that a construction of a biography of Jesus is not possible due to the very nature of the Gospels as documents of faith. On the other hand, it is acknowledged that an attitude of complete scepticism in regard to historical Jesus study is unjustifiable, and even perilous.\(^{63}\) Without critical historical-Jesus study, one can easily construct a Jesus-figure, based upon, and perhaps legitimating, one's own ideology and wishes. There is always a temptation for Christians to slip into a kind of docetism and concentrate on Jesus’ divinity, power and victory, or to domesticate Jesus in the dominant culture and lifestyle of the people.\(^{64}\)

Against any attempt at the domestication of Christology, contemporary historical Jesus research emphasizes the importance of setting Jesus in his Jewish and Galilean context. Since Jesus was a Jew, his teaching and ministry must be understood within the context of first-century Palestine, and indeed within his home area of Galilee. An American New Testament scholar, Ben Witherington, puts it in this way:

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\(^{63}\) See Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 164-65.

\(^{64}\) Ibid., 165. See also Wright, "Jesus in the Twentieth Century," 12.
The Jesus I learned about as a child spoke King James (or Revised Standard) English and seemed to fit without great difficulty into modern Western culture and values. But the historical Jesus spoke Aramaic, a Semitic language, and lived in a nondemocratic world very different from modern North America. This sense of cultural distance is important and must always be kept in mind if we are to remake Jesus and his world in the image of our own thoughts and world.65

As Witherington's statement testifies, the image of Jesus presented by the historical-critical study of the New Testament is sometimes quite different from images we inherited from the tradition. Sugirtharajah, for example, points out that one popular image of Christ in Third World countries was an eschatological hero who proclaimed the imminent end of the world and who warned people to repent before it was too late. Many preachers used such a view of Christ to turn the attention of the people away from their problems and struggles in order to focus on future blessings and on the world to come.66 In opposition to such a portrait of Christ, historical Jesus research has shown a quite different picture. Marcus Borg, for instance, maintains that the threatening sayings in the Synoptic traditions do not signify the end of the world. They are rather to be seen as Jewish-style prophecies that addressed the socio-political problems of their own context.67 What was coming to an end was not the world of space and time, but the oppressive religious-political and social structures of contemporary Jewish society. The prophecies were focussed against Jerusalem and the temple, which were the centres of political and religious, as well as social and economic power.68

In recent years, "historical Jesus" scholars have presented widely ranging views of how they see this historical Jesus.69 We are now up to the Third Quest for the Historical Jesus. However, we may also note that there are some important points of consensus. Jesus challenged and called into question the social structures of his day,

68 See Sugirtharajah, "Jesus Research and Third World Christologies," 388-89.
69 For example, a glance at the chapter headings of Ben Witherington’s book The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth, Downer’s Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1997 (Original 1995) will reveal among others: Jesus the Itinerant Cynic Philosopher; Jesus, Man of the Spirit; Jesus the Eschatological Prophet; Jesus, the Prophet of Social Change; Jesus the Sage or Wisdom of God; Jesus: Marginal Jew or Jewish Messiah.
including familial, religious and political relations. He also welcomed the poor and the dispossessed into his company. Most importantly, it is commonly agreed among New Testament scholars that the central focus of Jesus’ proclamation is the coming reign of God in which “the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them” (Luke 7: 22).

A contextual Christology thus has to face the issue of which scholar’s interpretation to choose and why. This in turn will be in part determined by the need of the local context and in part by the theologian’s interest. Much will also rest on the choice of a Christological model, a topic to which we now turn.

2.6. Basic Models for a Contextual Christology

Ever since the beginning of Christianity, the question of how Jesus Christ must be confessed in different cultures has been an ongoing issue for the Church. As the spread of Christianity from one place to another led to a series of interactions between Christ and culture, new understandings of Christ emerged, which adapted different socio-cultural traditions in presenting and reformulating Christology. As H.Richard Niebuhr observed:

The Christ and culture issue was present in Paul’s struggle with the Judaizers and the Hellenizers of the gospel, but also in his effort to translate it into the forms of Greek language and thought. It appears in the early struggles of the church with the empire, with the religions and philosophies of the Mediterranean world, in its rejections and acceptances of prevailing mores, moral principles, metaphysical ideas, and forms of social organization. The Constantinian settlement, the formulation of great creeds, the rise of the papacy, the monastic movement, Augustinian Platonism, and Thomistic Aristotelianism, the Reformation and the Renaissance, the Revival and the Enlightenment, liberalism and the Social Gospel...It appears in many forms as well as in all ages; as the problem of reason and revelation, of religion and science, of natural and divine law, of state and church, of nonresistance and coercion.

Today, there are several models advocated for constructing contextual Christology. Niebuhr identified five models of the relationship between Christ and culture, which

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reflect possible ways of doing contextual Christology: Christ against culture, the Christ of culture, Christ above culture, Christ and culture in paradox, and Christ the transformer of culture. In more recent times, Stephen Bevans has devised five basic models for the contextualization of theology, namely, translation, anthropological, praxis, synthetic and transcendental models. Along similar lines, Thanzauva has identified six different models, namely, transplantation, fulfilment, translation, dialogical, synthetic and praxis models. Since these models are often intertwined with or overlap one another, it is not possible to distinguish them absolutely. In what follows, we briefly outline five major models, drawing from the above authors.

**The Transplantation Model:** This model understands the missionary’s task as that of taking his/her culture and transplanting it into the local culture. Local people must enter into the transplanted culture to learn about Christ. To that extent they must leave their own culture behind. In this model, Christ is seen as “against culture”, confronting the people with the challenge of an “either-or” decision. In the contemporary period, this view represents the traditional Western missionary attitude that considered Western culture as the only valid expression of Christian culture, which must be adopted by Christians all over the world. Non-Western cultures were regarded as primitive and heathen. For those who subscribed to this view, therefore, there could be no dialogue between Christ and non-Western culture: a Christology constructed in the West must be transplanted to non-Western soil and non-Western people must accept it, whether they like it or not.

**The Fulfilment Model:** In this model there is a considerable affirmation of local culture. Here Christ is seen as the great hero of human culture, who fulfils the hopes and aspirations of all people. His life and teachings are perceived as the greatest human achievement. It is believed that in Christ the highest aspirations of human cultural values are brought to a point of

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72 Ibid.
74 Thanzauva, *Theology of Community*, 63-83.
75 Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 40.
culmination. Jesus Christ “confirms what is best in the past, and guides the process of civilization to its proper goal.” John Nicol Farquhar, a Scottish missionary who presented Jesus Christ as “The Crown of Hinduism” in India, maintained that Christ provides resolution and fulfilment to the religious quests of all people.

Practitioners of this model thus tend to recognize certain values in traditional cultures, but do not regard such values as compatible with the Gospel. As with the transplantation model, they perceive Western culture as the only valid expression of Christian faith. In their view, the criteria for what aspects of the local culture should be “accepted” and what aspects should be “rejected” rest on whether or not the local culture agrees with Western culture. Here, traditional culture is regarded only as preparatory for the Gospel.

The Translation Model: This model sets Christ above culture. It portrays Jesus Christ as the unchanging essence of the Gospel whose message can only be translated or communicated, but should not be altered. Practitioners of this model believe that the Christian Gospel contains an essential, supra-cultural message, which can be separated from culturally bound modes of expression. This “never-changing” supra-cultural Gospel, it is presupposed, is encased in a disposable cultural husk. Once the cultural wrappings are stripped off and the essence of the Gospel becomes revealed, one can communicate it by using the cultural categories of the receptor. Adherents of this view are concerned to communicate or translate the Gospel of Christ in terms of the cultural traditions of the hearers, rather than attempting to discern the presence of God in the culture and experiences of the local people. Once again, the local

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77 Niebuhr, Christ and Culture, 41.
79 See also Thanzauva, Theology of Community, 65-66.
80 See, Bevans, Models of Contextual Theology, 33. See also Thanzauva, Theology of Community, 67.
81 Renthy Keitar, a leading biblical scholar of northeast India, said: “The tribal thought forms, ideas, theological terms, life situations, and so on be [sic] adopted with adaptations in interpreting Christian ideas, so that the gospel truth can be made relevant to whom it proclaimed. The tribal way of thinking.
culture is not fully accepted, and the Western cultural form of this supra-cultural Gospel becomes normative for the local culture.

The Synthetic Model: This model maintains the conviction that God has always been working and revealing divine truth in the world, so that the divine presence and activities can be found in every culture in different ways. For practitioners of this model, revelation is something which can be discovered in the context itself, not brought from outside. The presence of God can be perceived in the cultural values, behavioural patterns and struggles of the people for justice and liberation. Hence Christ is present in every culture, yet in a hidden and imperfect manner.82

However, practitioners of this model insist that the truth in human culture is not adequate unless it interacts with the truth revealed in Jesus Christ. That is to say, “the hidden gospel in any culture is not adequate for faith until it is activated by the gospel of Christ”.83 This model, therefore, maintains the need of interaction between Christ of the Judeo-Christian tradition and the local culture in order to formulate a meaningful understanding of Christology. Thus, this model presupposes a synthetic interaction, in which, however, Western cultural forms are necessary to the interaction but are not necessarily normative.

The Praxis Model: This model presupposes full acceptance of the local culture, and of Christ’s presence in that culture. It recognizes the importance of culture in developing an understanding of Christ, and perceives revelation as God’s presence and action in history – in the events of the everyday life of the people, in social and economic systems, in situations of suffering and

has some affinity with Hebrew and as such the biblical ideas can easily be translated (or trans-communicated) to the tribal languages. But on the other hand, one should watch against the danger or tendency of assimilating animistic elements into Christian faith because such intrusions may distort the gospel truth. Any tribal theological terms or idea be used only as linguistic vehicle, a communication of the gospel truth through a medium of language”. Renthy Keitzar, In Search of a Relevant Gospel Message (Guwahati: Christian Literature Centre, 1995). 1. In fact, Renthy suggested that among the Nagas of northeast India the description of Christ as “Lamb of God” in John 1:29 should rather be translated as ‘the Rooster of God’, because, he said, “I do not think the Nagas ever sacrificed a lamb or a ram when they never raised sheep”. Ibid., 25.

82 Thazauva, Theology of Community, 74.
83 Ibid.
struggle for liberation. In this model the basic focus of theology is the transformation or liberation of the individual and the society, and so no culture is uncritically accepted or rejected. As Leonardo Boff said, the praxis model of doing theology involves “seeing analytically, judging theologically, and acting pastorally or politically, three phases in one commitment in faith”. Likewise, in the praxis model, theology becomes a critical reflection on the continuous dialogue of action and reflection.

As we have observed earlier, it is the change in situation that has led to the existence or formulation of different models in Christological construction. In such methodological formulations, it is usually the theological concern of the theologian and the context in and to which theology is addressed that determine the choice of a model.

In the Mizoram situation where, as noted before, the existing Christology is unable to address the needs and aspirations of the people, primarily because of its failure to take the local culture into account, this writer believes that a meaningful formulation of contextual theology must adopt a combined model of synthetic and praxis together. In Mizoram, the situation requires that we integrate and focus in our theological reflection both socio-economic transformation and the inculturation of the Gospel. In order to achieve this vision, in this thesis we will adopt a combination of synthetic and praxis models, which will take the local culture seriously and, at the same time, emphasize liberation and social justice.

The writer is aware that to opt for a synthetic-praxis model that takes seriously the culture of Mizo tribal people is to stand in tension with what seems to have been the “transplantation” or “translation” model utilised in various forms by the missionaries and many Mizo church leaders. However, if one is really concerned to proclaim the message of the Gospel in a way meaningful to contemporary Mizo society, one cannot

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84 See, Bevans, Models of Contextual Theology, 67-68.
85 See Thanzauva, Theology of Community, 79.
86 Leonardo Boff, "What are Third World Theologies?" Concilium 199, no. 5 (1988): 12. See also Bevans, Models of Contextual Theology, 70.
87 See also Thanzauva, Theology of Community, 83.
88 For the choice of a Synthetic-praxis model, I am indebted to Thanzauva. See Ibid., 84.
89 See also Ibid., 83-84.
avoid interpreting the Gospel in relation to the historical realities and cultural traditions of Mizoram. As the WCC Assembly at Vancouver (1983) states: “The Gospel message becomes a transforming power within the life of a community when it is expressed in the cultural forms in which the community understand it.”

In this connection, it may also be pointed out that there are several possible points of entry for doing a contextual theology. Some tribal / indigenous theologians, like Wati Longchar, have chosen creation. Though I could have chosen other theological themes, such as humanity, church, spirituality or mission, I have deliberately chosen Christology as the focus. There are two basic reasons in regard to this selection. First, the idea of Christology, as Douglas John Hall puts it, is “central to any belief that is professedly Christian”; it is a basis and criterion in relation to which all other themes of Christian theology are articulated. Likewise, the way in which we understand Christology affects all our other Christian beliefs. Christology provides us with a basis for our ethical behaviour, our Christian praxis. Everything we say, do and live as Christian is related to our understanding of the person and work of Jesus Christ. Indeed, as Clive Pearson says, “Christology opens up the route to considering the very nature of Christian identity.” Hence, Christology is central to the understanding of Christian faith and practice.

Second, Christology as “the doctrine of Christ” lies very close to the heart of Mizo Christianity in a particular way. Most tribal Christians of Mizoram, if not all, have no problems with or reservation about the divine identity of Jesus Christ. Among the Mizos, the traditional belief that Jesus Christ is the eternal God who becomes human being is normally undisputed. In the context of Mizoram, where the majority of the population are not only Christian, but also accept without dispute that Jesus Christ is

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94 This assertion is based on the personal experience and observation of the writer, who himself is a Mizo Christian, was born and brought up in Mizoram, and has served among his people as a Christian minister for more than seventeen years.
the revelation of God-self, I believe that a meaningful and liberative understanding of Christology can make a significant impact upon the life and attitude of the people. This assumption, in my opinion, is possible, if “there is indeed a close link between the images of Jesus we own for ourselves and our respective understanding of the Christian life”.

Therefore, in the later part of this thesis, I will seek to formulate an ethical, communally-based Christology for Mizoram, using a Mizo concept of *pasaltha*. The term *pasaltha*, which denotes a brave and selfless person, has in Mizo society considerable liberative value and cultural relatedness. The idea incorporates much of the New Testament portrait of the person and work of Jesus Christ. By reconstructing Christology using this model, the writer hopes that the tribal churches in Mizoram can be helped to understand Jesus Christ in a way meaningful to them and to follow him in a praxis related to their context.

We have discussed the basic models of contextual Christology and explained why we have opted for a synthetic-praxis model for understanding Jesus Christ among tribal people in Mizoram. We have also clarified why we have chosen Christology, rather than other theological themes. Now we turn to Christology and explore its two basic approaches, namely, the incarnational and the soteriological.

2.7. Incarnational and Soteriological Approaches

A study of Christology has to wrestle with two basic questions: “who is Jesus Christ” and “how does he help us”? The aspect of “who is” relates to the personhood of Jesus Christ; and the aspect of “how he helps” relates to the work of Christ, or Soteriology. Although the person of Christ cannot be separated from his work, however, in the history of Christian thought, a distinction has often been made between these two dimensions.

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96 See Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 163-64.
In much of the Christian history, more emphasis has been placed on the area of the person of Christ, rather than on his work or Soteriology. As John F. O'Grady observes, the most prominent model of Christology is the one that centred on the person of Jesus Christ as God the Son. He says,

In the past the chief paradigm for Jesus was the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity. This formed the basis for scholastic Christology that has been part of the official teaching of the Church for the past fifteen hundred years.  

The pivot upon which the emphasis on the personhood of Christ has rested is the doctrine of the incarnation. For this reason, this approach to Christology may be known as the incarnational approach. The doctrine of the incarnation, as we have mentioned earlier, perceives Jesus as the eternal God who becomes human (John 1: 1-14). This way of understanding Jesus Christ is explicitly reflected in the statements of the ecumenical church councils, such as the councils of Nicea (325 A.D.) and Chalcedon (451 A.D.). The Nicene Creed, for example, speaks of Jesus Christ as “the Son of God” who came down from heaven and became incarnate as a human being. Thus, in this approach to Christology the personhood of Jesus Christ occupies the central place.

The concept of incarnation is an essential basis of contextual theology. It posits an embodiment in a particular time and place. While, in that way, the incarnation implies the contextualization of the Gospel, nevertheless the concept has often been interpreted in quite a different way. In his work on “Cross, Incarnation, and Context”, Douglas Hall observes that the idea of incarnation has been characteristically confined in Christian doctrine and liturgy to the birth of Christ. If the incarnation is limited to the episode of the Christmas event, then incarnational theology hardly embraces other aspects of human life. However, as Hall points out, human beings not only are born, but also live and die. In the same way, the divine love, that is ready to suffer

99 See Ibid.
birth in human form, “must” follow through. God who became human in Jesus “must” suffer not only birth, but also life and death.\textsuperscript{101}

When one confines the doctrine of incarnation wholly to the Christmas event, to an event which occurred sometime in the past, then one fails to see how God in Jesus embodies the situation of actual human problems and miseries today. In such a Christological perspective, the significance of Jesus Christ for the socio-economic life of people is ignored. As Pearson has pointed out:

The metaphysical demands [of a Christmas-bound reading of the Incarnation] are such that there is little or no interest in the surrounding socio-cultural, political milieu other than to furnish a stage and a cast of supporting characters whose role is to deflect attention away from themselves onto the infant Jesus, Emmanuel, God-with-us.\textsuperscript{102}

In addition, Hall believes that it is such a “Christmas-bound” incarnational theology that provides a foundation for the “theology of glory” of Western Christianity, which has a strong tendency towards triumphalism.\textsuperscript{103} When our understanding of Christology is strongly focussed upon the person of Jesus as the eternal God the Son who descended from heaven to earth, it naturally follows that we make divinity dominant over humanity and earth. Accordingly, such a view creates a master-servant image of the God-world relationship, giving the impression that human beings and the physical world are of little importance, or even reducing them to passive or instrumental roles.\textsuperscript{104}

Perhaps it is as a consequence of this interpretation that the traditional Western Christology, as well some Western missionaries, have been criticized severely in Third World countries as imperialist, supremacist and oppressive towards poor people. Latin American theologians, for instance, have noted that in their countries one prominent image of Christ, introduced by Spanish Christians, was as a glorified “heavenly monarch”, or an “almighty Lord”.\textsuperscript{105} Such an image reflected Jesus Christ

\begin{footnotes}
\item[101] Ibid.
\item[104] See also Hendry, “Christology,” 52.
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as a powerful king, with absolute authority over all spiritual and temporal things. In consequence, the image was used as an ideological weapon by the Christian conquistadors to support their invasion, claiming that as representatives of Christ they had discretionary power over the lives and properties of indigenous peoples.106

Similarly, Sugirtharajah argues that in Asia Jesus was introduced as “a clannish god” of the Europeans, with authority to subjugate the local peoples and their cultures. He was portrayed and presented “as the totem symbol of the privileged and the powerful”107. Likewise, Dhyanchand Carr, a Dalit theologian, expresses his dissatisfaction with the attitude of Robert de Nobili, a renowned Catholic Jesuit missionary from Italy, towards the caste system. He points out that when de Nobili came to South India in the early seventeenth century and worked there, he identified himself totally with the privileged high caste Hindus and refused to have anything to do with the low caste and oppressed people, such as Dalits and tribals.108 As we will see in our later discussion, in Mizoram also the Western missionaries proclaimed Jesus Christ as a conqueror and as a way of entry into heaven.

The soteriological approach, on the other hand, approaches Christology from the perspective of what Christ has done for us. In the course of history, there have emerged several models for understanding the work of Christ. This was inevitable, because Christians from different historical and cultural backgrounds have expressed their understanding of what Christ has done for them in relation to their particular contexts. In fact, the New Testament itself has employed a number of metaphors or models to elucidate the significance of Christ’s death for us. In his work on “Models of Soteriology”, John McIntyre has identified as many as thirteen such models.109 As some of these biblical models were further elaborated, several theories of atonement

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109 They are redemption, salvation or the idea of being saved, sacrifice, propitiation, expiation, atonement, reconciliation, victory, punishment or penalty, satisfaction, example and liberation. See John McIntyre, The Shape of Soteriology: Studies in the Doctrine of the Death of Christ (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1992), 29-52.
or salvation emerged within the Christian tradition. It may be helpful to consider some of the main soteriological theories, which have emerged, for they in one way or another have shaped the tradition we have received today. Here we look at the models or theories of deliverance, satisfaction and manifestation.\textsuperscript{110}

**The Deliverance Model:** This model presupposes the human condition as one of oppression and being under a bondage, and perceives Christ’s work of salvation as deliverance from that bondage. This model, probably the oldest type of an atonement theology, has been designated the ransom theory. In his book, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of the Atonement*, Gustaf Aulen called it “the classical idea of atonement”, claiming that this theory dominates not only the biblical teaching about the cross but also the church doctrinal tradition.\textsuperscript{111}

The earlier form of this model viewed the work of atonement basically in terms of a dramatic battle between God and the forces of evil, and presupposed that humanity was under the bondage of evil.\textsuperscript{112} In the worldview of people in the early centuries, and also to a great extent of people in modern times, the world is full of demonic and supernatural forces. In the absence of medical knowledge and facilities, such things as mental and physical illnesses, diseases and misfortunes were usually attributed to demonic persuasion. In such a context, Christian theologians naturally adopted the current worldview of the people as a frame of reference for interpreting the Gospel message. Accordingly, in their interpretation, all human beings were seen as being under the enslavement of Satan, because of the fall, through which their ancestors, Adam and Eve, sinned and gave themselves to the service of evil. Here it is not merely the worldview, but the living condition of the people that matters. As Hall pointed out, many adherents of the earlier form of this

\textsuperscript{110} According to Douglas Hall, the prominent theories of atonement can be classified into these three theories. He calls them: soteriologies of rescue (Aulen), sacrifice (Anselm) and demonstration (Abelard). See Hall, *Professing the Faith*, 403, 16-33.


\textsuperscript{112} See Hall, *Professing the Faith*, 417.
soteriology of deliverance in the Greco-Roman world were slaves and citizens of the lower classes.\textsuperscript{113}

In the early Church, Christ's work of deliverance was presented mainly through metaphors and legends.\textsuperscript{114} In one legend, humanity was portrayed as being trapped in the belly of a sea monster, a symbol of the devil. God wanted to rescue the trapped victim. But it was not possible directly, because if the monster were slain, then the human being captive in its belly would also perish. So God decided to put forward another human being, a new human being or second Adam who was not affected by sin, as bait. The primeval monster could see in this new human being only what it saw in all other persons - a weak and easily tempted mortal. Not knowing the hidden hook of the person's divinity, the monster seized the innocent human-bait and swallowed him (in crucifixion). But the monster could not digest the bait; on the contrary, the monster itself was captured and the humanity entrapped in its belly was set free.

In this way, the deliverance model essentially perceives Christ's work of atonement as deliverance from the grip of oppression. In his exposition of this model, Aulen depicted Jesus as Christus Victor who fights the evil powers of the world, the "tyrants" under which humankind is in bondage and suffering. By his death on the cross and resurrection, Christ defeated the power of evil and thus set free human beings from the bondage of evil.\textsuperscript{115}

While this theory significantly recognizes the reality and power of evil that hold humanity in bondage, it has some basic limitations. First, the idea that God deceived the devil, or that the devil has rights that God has to respect, gives an improper understanding of God. Such a view implies that God is either immoral or not omnipotent.\textsuperscript{116} Second, the idea that the work of atonement is a matter of the cosmic battle between God and the forces of evil rules out any room for the participation of human beings for whom salvation is

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., 418.
\textsuperscript{114} I am indebted, in the following paragraph, to the work of Douglas Hall. See Ibid., 419.
\textsuperscript{115} Aulen, Christus Victor, 20-21.
\textsuperscript{116} See Frances Young, \textit{Can These Dry Bones Live?} (London: SCM Press, 1982), 39.
intended. Hence, the deliverance model of atonement fails to provide an adequate understanding of humanity. It portrays human beings as mere spectators of the cosmic battle, without any serious responsibility. Third, the model that portrays Christ essentially as a victor tends to invite triumphalism. The idea or metaphor of “victor” has often been associated with kings, rulers, invaders, colonists, the rich and the politicians in world history. Therefore, to ascribe the metaphor of “victor” to Jesus Christ tends to lead people, especially among the poor and lower classes, to identify him with worldly rulers and oppressors.

The Satisfaction Model: This model understands the redemptive work of Christ or atonement in terms of an offer of satisfaction. Sometimes this model is also known as substitutional Christology, or as penal theory. In his book Cur Deus Homo? (Why did God become man?) Anselm, archbishop of Canterbury, elaborated this model for understanding the work of Christ or atonement in relation to the worldview of the contemporary medieval feudal society of northern Europe. In medieval feudal society, vassals owed to their landlord “honourable service” in return for being given land to live on. Not only was such “honourable service” a legal and private matter, it was also a social factor that guaranteed order, peace, and freedom. Denying the honour due to the lords would lead to chaos. In the framework of this understanding of social order, Anselm understood the relation between God and human beings as one of a lord and his vassals, and described the significance of Christ’s work for the Christian community in these terms.

Anselm maintained that human sin disrupted the order of the universe, the harmony of all things that constituted the honour of God, the creator. As a result of this, human beings, who were created for obedience and service to God, were reduced to futility. The disorder of the universe had to be restored,

117 See also Hall, Professing the Faith, 419-20; Migliore, Faith Seeking Understanding, 183.
118 See Hall, Professing the Faith, 422.
or else punishment had to be imposed on the disruptors. If God were to seek to restore the disorder simply through absolute mercy, this would be contrary to justice. In feudal society, human beings who committed an offence were absolutely required to compensate for it. Since, moreover, the gravity of an offence against honour was measured by the dignity of the offended person, and since God’s dignity is infinite, the debt which each sinner owed God was infinite. Human beings, who not only already owed perfect obedience to God but were also sinners, were in no way able to pay the infinite debt of honour they owed to God. Only a person who was both human and divine could offer satisfaction that would restore the order of the universe and the honour of God. God’s merciful response was that in Jesus Christ God become human to restore this order.

Anselm further maintained that Jesus’ life of obedience was not sufficient for redemption, because any human being, as creature, was already bound to obedience. Satisfaction could be made only by doing something which Jesus, as a human being, was not otherwise bound to do. That was his death. As a sinless man Jesus did not owe the penalty of death. As Jesus himself had no need of that satisfaction, God could credit it as merit to all others. The deficit in the account of all other human beings was compensated by the surplus available in Christ. Through his death on the cross, Jesus thus readjusted the disrupted order of the universe and restored God’s honour, so that the sin of humans might was forgiven and atonement was achieved. In this way, Anselm’s theory of atonement portrayed Jesus’ death on the cross as offering satisfaction for the requirements of God’s justice while finding a way of honouring God’s mercy.

The strength of this satisfaction theory is that it recognizes the seriousness of sin and expresses the costliness of Christ’s work of redemption in a way intelligible to the medieval worldview. On the other hand, it has several drawbacks. Most important of all, it has difficulty in establishing an adequate concept of God. It sets God the Father and God the Son against each

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120 For the strengths and weaknesses of the satisfaction theory of atonement, see Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 184-85; Young, *Can These Dry Bones Live?*, 27-29.
other. While the Father tends to be legalistic and wrathful, the Son appears to be merciful and loving, voluntarily bearing the punishment inflicted by the Father on our behalf. Such a view is contrary to the biblical witness, in which Jesus is portrayed as acting on behalf of God in every activity. Also in this theory of satisfaction, God appears to lose his/her freedom and sovereignty. God cannot choose to become merciful; God has no freedom either in regard to the exercise of mercy or in regard to the requirements of the created order. God is bound by a principle.

The Manifestation Model: In this model of atonement Christ’s death on the cross is perceived as an utmost manifestation of God’s love, which challenges human beings to love God in return. This idea is particularly associated with Peter Abelard, a younger contemporary of Anselm. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, this model was commonly known as the “moral influence theory”, and became a popular way of understanding the work of atonement among liberal Protestant theologians.

Abelard opposed both of the previous models of atonement. He rejected the ransom theory that depicted Jesus Christ as a ransom-price offered to the devil. Similarly, he also rejected the Anselmian view. For him, the former view appeared too respectful of the demonic and suggested a lingering dualism. The latter theory depicted God as so cruel and wicked as to require the death of his “only begotten Son”.121

Unlike the adherents of these other models, Abelard did not understand the sin of human beings in the sense of “total depravity”. In his view, sin primarily meant contempt for God’s will. For this reason, his focus was on intention rather than commission or omission.122 In Abelard’s view, nothing was more powerfully able to move one from the will to sin than the sight of the one who suffered on account of our sins and bore the penalty of death in our stead. This view led him to perceive Christ’s suffering and death as the supreme

121 See Hall, Professing the Faith, 430; Young, Can These Dry Bones Live?, 30.
demonstration of God's love. When one saw God's love manifested on the cross, one was inspired to repentance and to love God in return. Accordingly, by the help of the Holy Spirit, one moved away from the will to sin and thus became transformed. Because of its emphasis on the subjective influence on the mind, this model of atonement is also sometimes known as a moral exemplar theory.

Like the previous models we have considered, the manifestation model of atonement has both strengths and weaknesses. Its strong points includes its ability to put God's love at the centre of the atoning work and also its perception that Christ's death on the cross must be understood in personal terms. On the other side, however, it tends to reduce Christ's death on the cross merely to a moral example for people to follow. By understanding the work of atonement in this way, the soteriology of manifestation not only overlooks the reality and escalation of sin in the structures of human society but also fails to relate the significance of Christ's death to the community life of the people.

These models reflect different ways of perceiving the significance of Christ's death for believers. While they are illuminating and helpful in certain situations, they are never exclusive explanations or the only valid models for understanding Christ's work of atonement.

The plurality of soteriological models shows that it is possible for a particular aspect of salvation to be emphasized in a particular situation. In this connection, Hall proposes the idea of "soteriological necessity", by which is meant that the human condition as experienced in a particular context requires a contextual understanding of Christ's work. In his view, "the atoning work of Christ can be considered so only to

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125 See also Migliore, Faith Seeking Understanding, 186.
the extent that it meets and in some way resolves a human dilemma or predicament”. Elsewhere, he says:

If the Christian message is intended for the world, if it is to be rendered in language and act that are in any genuine manner “address” (that is, being-spoken-to), then the specificity of contexts must be allowed to play a vital role in the theological reflection that serious Christian obedience and wisdom presuppose.

In a similar manner, Moltmann speaks of a “therapeutic relevance of the gospel”. By this expression, he means that Christ’s salvation signifies healing, and for that healing to become real, Christology must be relevant to the context of the people to whom it is addressed. Christology must confront “the misery of the present with the salvation Christ brings, presenting it as a salvation that heals”.

Thus, it is the soteriological needs of the people that must determine the way one understands the significance of Jesus Christ in a particular context. It is said that, for a hungry person, food is the first gospel. Similarly, if the person and work of Jesus Christ is to be good news, then the particular needs and problems of the people must be allowed to play vital roles in Christological construction. Indeed, it is the testimony of the New Testament that each disciple approaches Jesus from his or her own particular situation. A leper, for instance, seeks Jesus from his troubled situation as a leper and asks for healing (Mark 1: 40-42). As Sugirtharajah has suggested, the understanding of Jesus must arise out of particular contextual needs. In other words, Christology must address the real issues and questions raised by the particular context to which it is addressed.

3. “Who is Jesus Christ for us today?”

In his letters from the Nazi prison of Tegel, while awaiting the final verdict on his life, Dietrich Bonhoeffer asked, “Who is Jesus Christ for us today?” or more precisely,
"who Christ really is, for us today." At the time when Bonhoeffer raised this question about sixty years ago in Germany, his country, which had had a great Christian past, had become almost an anti-Christian society. People had not only moved into secularism but also embraced a definitely anti-Christian ideology. Today, though we may live in a different situation, this question has continued to become a standard methodological question for a Christology in context. Many theologians, who share in common a profound interest in relating the Gospel of Christ to their particular contexts, have asked the same question in the construction of their Christology. Some examples of such approach can be seen in the writings of Douglas Hall, John Macquarrie and Michael Welker.

As Douglas Hall observes, the question about Jesus is never just about Jesus. As a question of faith, it always involves the person(s) who asks the question. Therefore, in the construction of a contextual theology, the matters of “us” and “today” in Bonhoeffer’s question imply that the focus must be both context-specific and time-specific. The “us” in the question invites us to explore ourselves, and who we are. For whom as theologians are we writing, and to whom are we addressing ourselves? Similarly, the “today” in the question of “Who is Jesus Christ for us today?” raises questions vis-à-vis the past. This includes not only the classical past of theology and of theologians of other times and places, but also specifically the past of the local people in this place.

In this thesis, I propose to explore the question “Who is Jesus Christ for us today in Mizoram?” The “us” in this thesis includes primarily my own tribal people of Mizoram, and secondarily the Christian communities in various locations around the world. The “today” is addressed primarily to the struggle of my own Mizo community to move beyond their colonial past into a better present. Their “today”, on the one hand, corresponds to the realization of God’s reign or God’s desire for them and, on the other hand, corresponds to the Mizo people’s desire for a more just Christianity.

132 See, for example, Hall, Professing the Faith, 497ff; Macquarrie, Starting From Scratch, 31ff; Welker, "Who is Jesus Christ For Us Today?," 129-46.
133 See Hall, Professing the Faith, 498.
which is culturally their own. We now turn to the second chapter, in which we will explore in greater detail the situation of tribal people in Mizoram.
CHAPTER 2
AN ANALYSIS OF THE TRIBAL SITUATION
IN NORTHEAST INDIA WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO
MIZORAM

In this chapter we will explore the tribal situation with special reference to the context of Mizoram and try to identify the tribal issues that must be addressed in any Christological formulation. We have indicated in the previous chapter that the study of Christology, as an enquiry of faith, always involves the person (s) who enquire it. As Douglas Hall observes, Christological study “always involves anthropological analysis” and in particular an “analysis of what is problematic in the human situation”. Indeed, analysis of the human condition in a given situation is an important element in the doing of a contextual theology. This has to be so, because the way we understand Jesus Christ and his work for us is shaped by our own context. Hence, a critical analysis of the situation can reveal the particular problems and needs of the people, which in turn will be addressed in Christological construction.

In this thesis we select one particular situation, that of the tribal people of Mizoram. This selection is made, on the one hand, in order to avoid the pitfall of analysis that is too general, and on the other hand, in order to identify and focus on concrete issues affecting tribal people. Two underlying assumptions guide this study. The first one is that the problems facing the tribal people in Mizoram will also be common to many other tribal peoples. The second assumption presupposes that the problems faced and experienced by tribal people in Mizoram are very diverse and complex. They are in one way or another the product of the dominant groups’ attitudes and policies toward tribal peoples of northeast India.

Hence, in this chapter we will first examine the dominant attitude towards tribals in India in general. The study will then turn to the tribal situation in northeast India, and Mizoram where appropriate in particular, including its geographical and socio-cultural isolation, tribal policies adopted by the British and post-colonial governments. In particular, we will look at the policies of Assimilation, Isolation and Integration.

1 Ibid., 433.
Having examined these issues we look at tribal response in the form of revolt. The second part of the chapter turns to problems of economic development, including the development system, the traditional agriculture system, lack of trade links, and influxes of immigrants. The chapter ends with some comments on the disparity between rich and poor in Mizoram.

1. Dominant Attitudes Toward Tribal People in India as a Whole

The tribal population of India is considered to be the second largest in the world. In the 1991 census, excluding Jammu and Kashmir where the census could not be held, there are 67,758,000 persons identified as tribals. This constitutes 8.08% of the total population. The tribals in India are broadly classified into three major racial and linguistic groups: the Mongoloid, the Austroloids and the Dravidians. They are spread all over India, but are most concentrated in six major areas: 1) Northeast India – Assam, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, and Tripura; 2) the North Central Regions – Jharkhand, Bihar, West Bengal, Northern Orissa, and Chatisgarh; 3) Western India – Rajasthan, Gujarat, Western Madhya Pradesh, and Northern Mahararastra; 4) North West India – Himachal Pradesh, and part of Jammu and Kashmir; 5) South Eastern Regions – Southern Orissa, North Andhra Pradesh, Southern Madhya Pradesh, and Eastern Mahararastra; 6) Southern India – Western Ghats and the Nilgiri Hills in Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka.

It is believed that the origin of the idea of “tribe” in India goes back to the time of the Aryan invasions (e.g. seventh to ninth centuries C.E.). When the Aryans invaded the Indian subcontinent, the resident natives whom they called Dasya were defeated and scattered. Some of them were assimilated into the Hindu society as the lowest group of the caste system, while others were driven away to remote hills and forests. The assimilated group are today classified as “Scheduled Caste”, while the driven-away groups are known as “tribes”. Thanzauva believes that the people who are known as

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4 See Thanzauva, *Theology of Community*, 3.
tribes today are not really Hindu or Muslim. They are called “tribes” simply because they are believed to be the descendents of those who lived in the country before the Aryan invasion and they do not belong to the two major religious communities, namely Hindu or Muslim.5

The tribals in India are diverse not only in culture, language and ethnicity, but also in terms of socio-economic development. According to R.R. Prasad, tribals in India can be classified into four major categories based on their eco-cultural setting, levels of techno-economical development and acculturative influences.5 The first group is comprised of communities who may be called “primitive tribes”. They inhabit remote, isolated and inaccessible areas. They live a life of pre-agricultural pursuits such as food gathering, hunting, and fishing. Agriculture is not prominent in their way of life. The second group represents those tribes who are a little more advanced than the first one, practising shifting cultivation and having some contact with the outside world. The third group are the ones who are partly acculturated. They have contact with the outside world. Their agriculture is more advanced than the traditional shifting cultivation. They are in a transitional stage, likely to respond to development. The fourth group of tribals are already acculturated communities who have adapted to modern ways and technology. This group of tribals is more or less indistinguishable from the non-tribals.

The dominant attitude of the non-tribals towards tribal people in India has been very negative. Tribals are called by various contemptuous names, such as Vanyajati (caste of the forest), Vanvasi (inhabitants of the forest), Pahari (hill dwellers), Adimjati (primitive people), Adivasi (first settlers), Janjati (folk people) and Anusuchit Janjati (scheduled tribes). In the caste system of the dominant Indian society, tribals are classified at the bottom of the social structure. They are considered to be an untouchable, servile class, impure and, sometimes, less than human. Thus, according to Bishop Nirmal Minz:

5 Ibid.
The old Hindu political, economic and philosophical writings like Kautilya's *Arth Sastra* and *Manu Smrity* did not count the Dalits and the Tribes of India as human beings. The Vedas treated them as chandals [anti-social people] and Gita and Mahabharata showed them as wild animals like monkeys and Rawanas [vultures].

Peter Haokip expressed a similar view in regard to the tribal situation in Manipur. He says:

> The hill tribes in Manipur (till recently or still today in some places and by some) were called *hao* (a derogatory designation) and were not allowed to enter the houses of Manipur Hindus. It was considered to be a defilement. If a tribal wanted to meet a Manipuri Hindu, he could only shout from a distance in front of the courtyard of the house.

Hence, in the eyes of the dominant communities of India, tribals are outcasts and alienated people. Tribals of India are looked upon and treated as foreigners in their own country. This attitude becomes even more blatant in the case of the hill tribes of northeast India, to which we now turn.

2. The Tribal Situation in Northeast India

Northeast India comprises seven states, often known as the “Seven Sisters”, of the Indian Republic. They are Assam, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura. The region has an area of 245,993 square kilometres. As most areas of northeast India are covered by hilly terrain, the majority of the people live in the four plain areas: the Brahmaputra and Barak valleys of Assam, the Tripura plain and the Manipur plateau. The region is inhabited by many tribes and ethnic groups with diverse cultures, traditions and languages. According to Wati Longchar, about four hundred tribes live in northeast India, speaking hundreds of different languages and dialects. The majority of the inhabitants of the region are of Mongolian racial stock. Though there is no conclusive agreement among scholars concerning the origin of the inhabitants of the region, F.S. Downs has estimated that they arrived in the region during the past three or four hundred thousand years.

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10 Frederick S. Downs, *History of Christianity in India, Volume V, Part 5: North East India in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Bangalore: Church History Association of India, 1992), 1.
Tribal people of northeast India can be broadly classified into two groups based on geographical location: the hill tribes and the plain tribes. Hill tribes consist of the Mizo-Chin-Kuki group living in Mizoram, Manipur, Tripura and North Cachar Hills of Assam; the Naga group in Nagaland, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh; Khasis and Jaintias in Meghalaya; Garos in Meghalaya and Assam; and Arunachalis in Arunachal Pradesh. Most of the hill tribes of northeast India are Christians except for the Arunachalis who have been protected from Christian missionaries for many years. Racially they all belong to the Mongoloid stock. Except for the Khasis, most of the hill tribes came to their present habitat in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries from the east.

The plains tribals, on the other hand, are scattered in the river valleys of Brahmaputra and Barak in Assam, and in the plains of Tripura. They are the indigenous people who formerly had been owners of the land with their own kingdoms, but today are suffering from landlessness, displacement and assimilation. They are reduced to colonial status. The Ahoms in the Assam plains and the Meiteis in the Manipur valleys are actually sanskritized (Hinduised) tribals, though they claim themselves to be non-tribal and are not counted as tribal people by the Government of India.

Besides the indigenous tribals, there is another group of labourer communities that may also be considered as plains tribals. They are commonly known as Adivasis, working in the tea gardens of Assam. These people were brought to northeast India by the British tea planters as labourers in the years between 1840-1961, from Orissa, Bihar and Andhra Pradesh. Their population is considered to be approximately 1.5 million. These people live in bonded labourhood and are scattered around 800 tea gardens of the region. They are the major labour force of the Assam valleys. Although these people originally belonged to a scheduled caste or tribe, the Government of India does not give them such status, so that they are not able to enjoy the benefits guaranteed by the Constitution for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

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13 See Thanzauva, *Theology of Community*, 12.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
The tribal people of northeast India have experienced a state of alienation throughout their history. They suffered from the British invaders in the past, and they continue to suffer at the hands of the dominant communities of India today. A number of factors, most of them products of the attitudes and policies of the dominant groups, have contributed to the tribals’ alienation. The following are some of the major factors responsible for the tribals’ problems in northeast India, in Mizoram in particular.

2.1. Geographical and Socio-Cultural Isolation

The whole area of northeast India is geographically isolated from the rest of the country. It is linked to the mainland of India through a narrow passage in North Bengal of about thirty kilometres breadth, popularly known as the “chicken’s neck”. Northeast India has a long international boundary, approximately 5,000 kilometres long. To the north are China, Tibet and Bhutan; Myanmar is in the east and south, and Bangladesh in the west. Because of its geographical location, northeast India is politically a very sensitive region. It has been one of the most strategic regions of India. In terms of racial identity, the tribal people of northeast India are also isolated from mainland India. While the majority of the people in mainland India are of Aryan race, northeast India is predominantly inhabited by people of Mongoloid stock.

This geographical and racial isolation has been an important factor in the rise of a number of socio-cultural and political problems of the tribal people in the region. Because, as Lalsangkima has stated, the region is situated geographically and racially between two great traditions of “Indic Asia” and “Mongoloid Asia”, the tribal people of northeast India are exposed to confusion in regard to their identity. “Whereas they are politically Indian, they are racially and culturally Mongoloid”. In other words, geographical and racial isolation make the tribal people of northeast India feel themselves alienated from the rest of the country, thereby creating confusion and identity crisis. In fact, many of the revolutionist leaders of northeast India felt that the political integration of their region into the union of India was done against their will.

18 See Longechar, An Emerging Asian Theology, 16.
and approval. Moreover, the caste system espoused by the people of mainland India contributes to the isolated-ness of the tribal people, because they are not accepted as equal fellow citizens of the country.

The problem goes even deeper than this, however. It is not just that the tribal people of northeast India find difficulties in being accepted by the dominant society; not infrequently they are mistaken for foreigners in mainland India. The following statement was made by Mr. Lallhmingthanga, the then Finance Minister of the Government of Mizoram, in his “Foreward” to Animesh Ray’s book, *Mizoram Dynamics of Change*:

> On several occasions of my visit to different places of India like Delhi, Bombay, Madras, etc., sometime passport [sic] was demanded from me for my identity and when I explained that I am an Indian from Mizoram, it appeared many people do not know that there is a Union Territory called Mizoram in India. Not only this, I have come across a number of Parliament Members who cannot locate Mizoram in the map of India.

Many students from northeast India, including the writer of this essay, have had similar experiences. Wati Longchar even argues that isolation is one of the main reasons for the Government’s negligence and “step-motherly treatment” of the region.

We have seen the geographical and socio-cultural isolation of northeast India and their impact upon the lives of tribal people who live there. We now turn to analysing other factors affecting tribal situation. Here we look at the tribal policies.

### 2.2. Tribal Policies

As noted before, a number of problems facing the tribal people in northeast India are the products of the attitudes and policies of the dominant groups. Notable among these are the policies of assimilation, isolation and integration.

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20 See Longchar, *An Emerging Asian Theology*, 16.
23 See also Thanzauva, *Theology of Community*, 14.
2.2.1. Assimilation

The tribal people in India have been assimilated physically, culturally and religiously through various forms of contact with them. Most of the plains tribes of northeast India, who at one time had their own distinctive identities, cultures and languages, have become today victims of assimilation through Hinduism. Thanzauva provides a good summary of the situation:

At some time in history, the various tribes of the Bodo group Tibeto Burman family, such as Boro, Kachari, Chutyas, Dimasas, Karbi, Lalungs, Mechs, Mishings, Tipperas (Tripuris), Garo, Kochs, Hajongs, Dalus, Rabbas and others in the plain of Assam, all spoke their own dialects, and maintained their own independent cultural and territorial identity. They practiced tribal religions which are vaguely and perhaps superficially called animism. Today the sanskritized tribals in the plain area have, in some cases forgotten their own cultures and languages. The process of sanskritization was carried out in Assam, Manipur and Tripura under royal patronage. Later on, in the plain of Assam, it was mostly done by Hindu priests and immigrants.24

Unfortunately, when they become assimilated into Hinduism the tribal people not only lost their identity, cultures and languages but also were adopted into the Hindu caste system, in which they were assigned the lowest class of the social hierarchy. In the Hindu social system, becoming low caste means becoming a servile class within society.25

As a consequence of assimilation, today thousands of the plains tribes of northeast India have been reduced to lower social conditions, though a few people who have been accepted by those of a higher caste after embracing their religion may regard themselves as having climbed the social ladder higher than their unconverted fellow tribes. As Thanzauva observes, in the contemporary situation the yardstick of religious affiliation has already been replaced by the educational and economic achievements of individuals as the determinants of their social status. It is, therefore, unconvincing to regard a person as belonging to a higher social class just because of his/her religious affiliation.26 The hill tribes of northeast India who do not have contact with Hinduism remain free from the kind of assimilation experienced by the plains tribes.

24 Ibid.
25 Ibid., 17.
26 Ibid.
2.2.2. Isolation

The policy of isolation was adopted by the British Government for the purpose of protecting the tribal people from exploitation at the hands of outsiders. The policy prevented non-tribals from interference in the affairs of the tribes, and separated the tribal areas from the purview of normal administration. It was largely affected by the British Government’s “deliberate efforts not to develop communication in the tribal areas which, as a result, remained cut off from the rest of the population.” Prior to its adoption in India, a similar policy of isolation and indirect rule had already been introduced in some places in Africa and the United States where the tribal people were given the right of self-determination.

In India the policy began with the enactment of the Government of India Act of 1870. The Act specified a few areas as “scheduled tracts”: in the Himalayan region – what was then Assam, Darjeeling, Kumaon and Garhwal, what was then Tarai Paragnas, Jaunsar-Bawar, Lahaul and Spiti; in middle India - Chotanagpur and Santhal Pargana, Angul Mahal, Chanda, Chhattisgarh, Chhindwara, Manpur(Indore), Jhansi, Mirzapur, Ganjam; in western India - Panch Mahals, Mewasi(Khandesh); and in south India – Vizagapatnam (Visakhapatnam), Godavari, and Lakshadweep. With the passing of Regulation XIII of 1883, Chotanagpur became the first tribal area to be declared a non-regulated area. Meanwhile the Lieutenant Governor of West Bengal framed the Inner Line Regulation of 1873, which restricted entry of outsiders into specific hill areas. The Scheduled District Act of 1874 gave effect to both the Government of India Act 1870 and the Inner Line Regulation of 1873. Subsequently, a number of Acts and Regulations were enforced from time to time.

In regard to northeast India (formerly known as Assam), the whole region was declared a scheduled district with the enactment of The Scheduled District Act of 1874. However, a special arrangement was made for the administration of hill areas

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27 Vidhyarthi and Rai, *The Tribal Culture of India*, 413. See also Thanzauva, *Theology of Community*, 18.
30 Prasad, "Tribal Development in India - Strategies and Programmes," 84.
within the system through The Assam Frontier Tracts Regulation (Regulation II) of 1880. The Regulation adopted a policy of minimum interference in the affairs of the hill tribes, subject only to the maintenance of law and order. It stated that the operation of unsuitable laws should be barred from the hill districts of the region. According to the Regulation, power to administer the hill area was concentrated in the hands of a single Deputy Commissioner in charge of each district, who exercised the powers of Judge and District Magistrate simultaneously.

So in all the hill areas of northeast India, the policy of isolation was systematically implemented. The Inner Line Regulation of 1870 was applied to all the hill areas, except in Karbi (Mikir), Khasi, Jaintia and Garo hills where other regulations that strictly limited residence, business or property transactions by outsiders were enforced. According to this Regulation, the Government was empowered to prescribe, and from time to time alter by notification... a line to be called the Inner Line and to prohibit any subject living outside the area from living or moving therein... Beyond this line the tribes are left to manage their own affairs with only such interference on the part of the frontier officers in their political capacity as may be considered advisable with the view to establishing a personal influence for good among the chiefs and the tribes.

The Assam Frontier Tract Regulation of 1880 was applied in 1894 to the districts of Naga Hills, North Cachar Hills, Garo Hills, Khasi and Jaintia Hills, and Mikir Hills. The Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation (1) of 1873 was applied to Northern Lushai Hills, while Regulation V of the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation was extended to the Lushai Hills district under the Scheduled District Act of 1874.

Again in 1919, as a result of reforms suggested by Montague and Chelmsford, certain territories were declared “Backward Tracts” under the Government of India Act of 1919. The Act did not change the policy of isolation as such, but made certain additions and omissions in regard to the areas. Subsequent discussion following this Act resulted in the setting up of Simon’s Commission on 8th November 1927, to study the problems relating to further constitutional reform. As a result of the Simon’s

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31 See Downs, History of Christianity in India, 20.
32 Ibid., 21.
33 Ibid.
34 Thanzauva, Theology of Community, 19.
36 See Vidhyarthi and Rai, The Tribal Culture of India, 414.
Commission recommendation, the Government of India Act of 1935 was passed. This Act separated the hill districts into two areas, Excluded Areas and Partially Excluded Areas. Thus Sections 91 and 92 of the Government of India Act, 1935, embodied in the Government of India (Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas) Order of 1936, established as excluded areas the Naga Hills District, the Lushai Hills District, the North Cachar Sub-Division of Cachar District, and the Frontier Tracts (Arunachal Pradesh); and as partially excluded areas, the Garo Hills District, the Khasi and Jaintia Hills District, and the Mikir (Karbi) Hills Tracts of the Nagaon and Sibsagar districts. The main differences between the Excluded Areas and the Partially Excluded Areas were:

1). The Governor functioned at his own discretion in an Excluded Area, whereas he sought the advice of the Ministers of the Provincial Government in a Partially Excluded Area.

2). The expenditure in regard to the Excluded Area was non-votable, while the demands in the case of Partially Excluded Areas were subject to a vote of the Provincial Legislature.

3). The discussion of any matter regarding the Excluded Areas needed prior consent of the Governor.

In 1939 Verrier Elwin, Adviser on Tribal Affairs to the Government of Assam, advocated the establishment of a sort of "National Park" of tribals and advised that the tribals' contact with the outside world should be reduced to the minimum. In Elwin's view tribal people comprised three groups. The first group were those who had become assimilated into the Hindu hierarchy through continuous and intimate contact with them. The second were those who had been partially Hinduized and had thus "suffered moral depression and decay as a result of contacts". The third group comprised those who lived in isolated hill areas and had avoided becoming detribalised. In his view the "National Park" would be able to provide refuge for the

37 See Downs, History of Christianity in India, 24.
38 See Vidhyarthi and Rai, The Tribal Culture of India, 414. See also Prasad, "Tribal Development in India - Strategies and Programmes," 84.
39 Vidhyarthi and Rai, The Tribal Culture of India, 414.
second group and protect the third group. Accordingly, Elwin’s “National Park” policy of keeping tribal people as “museum specimens” became the model of administration for most hill areas of northeast India.

Three points can be made in conclusion to this survey of the policy of isolation. Firstly, as F.S. Downs observed, though the policy of isolation did to a certain extent help the tribal people to preserve their land and identity, in the process it reinforced a barrier that had already existed between the hill tribes and their plains neighbours. The gap between the hill tribes and the plains people increased, and the policy of isolation did not encourage communication between them. In the opinion of L.P. Vidyarthi and B.K. Rai, lack of communication between the hill tribes and the rest of the population of the country, promoted by the policy of isolation, is the root cause of tribal separatist movements.

Secondly, the whole concept of an isolation policy was insufficiently positive. On the one hand, the primary objective of the policy was a negative one: to protect the tribal people from exploitation at the hands of the dominant community by means of certain laws and regulations. This focus on protection meant, on the other hand, that it did not give sufficient importance to the development of tribal socio-economic conditions. As Thanzauva comments, “the protection of tribals does not simply lie in the promulgation of laws, but in their socio-economic development”.

Thirdly, since the policy adopted an objective approach to tribal problems, there was not sufficient room for the participation of the tribal people themselves in the realization of their dreams and visions. In short, what the tribal people need is not mere protection, but empowerment to make their own economic and political decisions and thus better protect themselves from the various forces of oppression.

In the wake of the Indian nationalist movement, the British policy of isolating the tribals was regarded as causing a sense of separatism. In the post-Independence era,

41 See Downs, History of Christianity in India, 22-23.
42 See Vidyarthi and Rai, The Tribal Culture of India, 413-14.
43 Thanzauva, Theology of Community, 24.
therefore, the Government of India adopted integration as its major policy towards the tribal people. We now turn our attention to this phase.

2.2.3. Integration

In post Independence India, although some administrators still preferred a continuation of the policy of isolation, the majority of politicians rejected this policy on the ground that it had become a threat to national integration. Führer-Haimendorf observes:

While anthropologically minded administrators advocated a policy of protection, which in specific cases involved even a measure of seclusion, Indian politicians attacked the idea of segregation and seclusion on the grounds that it threatened to deepen and perpetuate divisions within the Indian nation, and delayed the aboriginals’ [tribals’] integration into rest of the population.44

The Government of India therefore adopted a policy of integration. The main objective of the Government’s integration policy was to make the tribal peoples “an integral part of the Indian nation even while maintaining their distinct identity and culture”.45 The policy drew its objectives from Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru’s Panchsheel, five principles of his vision for tribal upliftment:

1). People should develop along the lines of their own genius and we should avoid imposing anything on them. We should try to encourage in every way their own traditional arts and culture.

2). Tribal rights to land and forests should be respected.

3). We should try to train and build up a team of their own people to do the work of administration and development. Some technical personnel from outside will no doubt be needed, especially in the beginning. But we should avoid introducing too many outsiders into tribal territory.

45 Bipin Chandra, The momentum of social reform was lost by the early 1950s: Bipin Chandra, the eminent historian, evaluates the achievements and failures during these fifty years of freedom (Rediff On The Net, 2000 [cited 29 November 2001]); available from http://www.rediff.com/freedom/20bipin.htm, 2.
4). We should not over administer these areas or overwhelm them with a multiplicity of schemes. We should rather work through, and not in rivalry to, their own social and cultural institutions.

5). We should judge results, not by statistics or the amount of money spent, but by the quality of human character that is evolved.  

In the opinion of the policy makers, tribal protection and upliftment considered were “an integral part of the development of the Indian people as a whole”. A Subcommittee, under the chairmanship of Shri A.V. Thakkar, a close associate of Mahatma Gandhi, was constituted by the Constituent Assembly to study the minorities’ problems. The Committee emphasized the need for protecting tribals’ economic interests, safeguarding their way of life and ensuring their development so that “they might take their legitimate place in the general life of the country”. It also recommended that “considering the past experiences and the strong temptation to take advantage of the tribal simplicity and weakness it is essential to provide statutory safeguards for the protection of the land”.  

The concerns of the Government’s integration policy are expressed in the Constitution of India itself in various ways. Article 46 states that “the State shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people and, in particular, of the Scheduled Caste and the Scheduled Tribes and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitations”. Article 164 creates provision for the appointment of a minister to look after the tribals’ welfare exclusively; Article 224 creates provisions for special administration; Article 275 provides for financial grants from the central consolidated funds to the State Governments for tribal welfare. Articles 330, 332, and 334 provide for reservation of seats for Scheduled Tribes in the House of the People and State Legislative Assemblies. Reservations of jobs for Scheduled Tribes in the government services are

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46 See Vidhyarthi and Rai, The Tribal Culture of India, 419. The “we” refers to the Indian Government.
48 Ibid.
49 Cited by Vidhyarthi and Rai, The Tribal Culture of India, 415.
50 See Ibid., 414.
provided in Articles 335 and 338. Article 339 makes provision that the President of India appoint a Commission to study and report the welfare of the Scheduled Tribes at the end of every ten years.\(^5\)

In relation to northeast India, soon after Independence, the Interim Government of India in 1947 constituted a Sub-Committee headed by Gopinath Bordoloi, the Chief Minister of Assam, to make an on-the-spot study of the situation. The Sub-Committee acknowledged the strategic situation of the tribal areas and felt that the tribals should be granted adequate safeguards so that they might be free from any fear of domination by the more sophisticated peoples from the plain. Animesh Ray describes the feeling of the Committee:

> because of the strategic position of the tribal areas, the people living there should be free from any fear of exploitation or domination by the advanced section of people from the plains and that they should have full freedom in respect of their own manners, customs, inheritances, social organizations, village administration, etc., and unless they could be guaranteed adequate safeguard in maintaining their characteristic way of life their bonds with unity with the rest of the country would not be consolidated and strengthened.\(^5\)

Following the recommendation of the Sub-Committee, the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution was implemented for the administration of the hill areas in northeast India. Under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, autonomous district councils were created in all the hill areas except in Nagaland, which demanded separation from Assam.\(^5\) Moreover, the Constitution also made provision that, where there were different scheduled tribes in an autonomous district, the Governor might divide the areas inhabited by them into autonomous regions. In accordance with this provision, Pawi-Lakher Regional Council was created for the Pawi (now called Lai) and Lakher (now called Mara) tribes in southern Mizoram.\(^5\) In this way the new government duly provided statutory safeguards for the protection of the land from expropriation and virtual servitude under moneylenders. However, a large number of tribals living outside the areas of such scheduled districts were not protected.\(^5\)


\(^{52}\) Ray, *Mizoram Dynamics of Change*, 93.

\(^{53}\) Thanzauva, *Theology of Community*, 23.

\(^{54}\) Ray, *Mizoram Dynamics of Change*, 94.

\(^{55}\) See Vidhyarthi and Rai, *The Tribal Culture of India*, 415.
Within a short period after its institution, however, the hill tribes felt that the powers vested in the District Council were "extremely inadequate for the protection and development of their society." As the powers and authority provided in the District Council did not meet their aspirations, the tribal people started to agitate for their independence from the Government of India. The discontentment eventually led to armed struggle; firstly in Nagaland, and then in Mizoram, and also more recently in Manipur and Assam. A.P. Sinha has observed:

No responsibility and powers were given to the District Councils, to be established under the provisions of the VIth Schedule, for development planning and administration of their area. It was more a measure to provide protection [rather] than provide opportunity for experimentation in development. It was in no way different from the earlier British policy of isolation and preservation rather than assimilation and change. The British legacy was maintained.

So despite the Government’s intention to improve the lot of the tribal people, there was a serious lack of implementation of development policies by the administrative authorities. There was no effective follow-up of Government policy and of recommendations made by various Study Teams to improve the life situation of the tribal people. The concerns of the integration policy enshrined in the Constitution, and the visions of policy makers like Nehru, were largely unfulfilled.

As a result, the tribal people in northeast India began to lose hope and confidence in the Government of India. Add to this their experiences of encounter with the dominant communities of the plains people and the miserable condition of their fellow tribals who had been assimilated and exploited by the dominant communities, and it is little wonder that the hill tribes of northeast India should feel that the national policy of integration is nothing but a modern version of assimilation, a policy designed to assimilate them into the dominant Hindu culture. Thanzauva describes the attitude of the tribal people of North East India towards the integration policy thus:

the prejudice that has been created in the tribal mind in North East India is that national integration for them means assimilation into Hindu culture at the expense of their own cultural identity. This attitude has developed among the tribes not from the study of

56 Thanzauva, Theology of Community, 23.
58 Ibid., 340-41. See also Thanzauva, Theology of Community, 23.
what scholars have written about the policy of national integration but from their daily encounter with their neighbouring plain people. In their encounter with plain people in the markets and some other places, they have been the victims of cheating and exploitation. They also saw the miserable conditions of their fellow tribals who were assimilated and exploited by the plain people. These experiences contributed to the development of negative attitude towards plain people which eventually erupted into violent struggle.60

In addition to this, one dimension that has often been overlooked in relation to the issue of integration of the tribal people with the rest of the Indian population is the racial dimension. As mentioned earlier, most of the tribal people in northeast India are of Mongoloid stock. They therefore differ in appearance from the dominant population of India. Any measure of cultural and linguistic assimilation or integration cannot remove the fact that a Mizo or a Naga looks quite different from the Bengalis or from the dominant people of any mainland Indian city.61 This racial difference, as noted before, has been an important factor in the dominant Hindus’ attitude towards the tribal people of northeast India. In spite of all the Government policy and efforts to integrate the tribal people with the rest of the Indian population, the dominant caste Hindus do not accept tribal peoples for intermarriage, commensality and intimate social intercourse.62 As long as a social barrier is maintained on the basis of caste and race, there cannot be true integration.

2.3. Tribal Revolts

Armed-revolutions by tribal people erupted in northeast India largely because of the failure of the Government of India to address their suffering and aspiration. For reasons already mentioned earlier in this chapter, the tribal people became extremely discontented. They developed a sense of distrust and suspicion towards the dominant communities and the Government they represented.63 All these factors, plus their

60 Thanzaiva, Theology of Community, 30.
61 See also Füller-Haimendorf, Tribes of India, 314.
62 ibid., 315.
63 The States Reorganization Commission that examined the political situation of North East India in 1955 found that these conditions existed among the peoples of North East India: 1) Suspicion and distrust of the people of the plains by the tribal people of this area; 2) diversity of races and cultures and different levels of social, educational and political development in the different areas of this region which had prevented the tribal people from coming up to the level of the people in the plains; 3) lack of communication in these areas which had made it difficult for the various tribes to come in close contact with the rest of India; and 4) economic backwardness of the region. Report of the States Reorganization Commission, Ministry of Home Affairs, New Delhi, 1956, 185 cited by Ray, Mizoram Dynamics of Change, 295.
apprehension about losing their land and identity, have contributed to the tendency for tribals to take up arms and struggle for political separation. The first of such movements in northeast India began with the formation of the Naga National Council (NNC) in the early nineteen fifties in Nagaland, which was followed by The Mizo National Front (MNF) in Mizoram in the mid nineteen sixties. Others followed.\textsuperscript{64}

In the case of the Mizo revolt, it was the miserable experience of hunger following the mautam famine, and the Government failure to respond to their problems, that served as the background to the armed revolutionary movement. In 1959 a specific type of bamboo flowered all over the Mizo Hills and there was an incredible multiplication of rats. When the rats exhausted the bamboo flowers, they attacked and devoured the standing crops, bringing about a great famine, which the Mizos called mautam. The Government of India in general, and the Assam State Government in particular, was initially unaware of the suffering of the people. Only very late did food relief come from the Government and, furthermore, this food had to be earned as wages.\textsuperscript{65} There was a great deal of discontent and frustration directed against the Government. Meanwhile, a welfare organization named Mizo National Famine Front (MNFF) was formed under the leadership of Laldenga, to help the people in distress. The widespread discontent and frustration against the national Government that had already existed combined with the experience of the mautam famine and eventually led the MNNF to convert its organization into an armed revolutionary movement, changing its name to the Mizo National Front (MNF).\textsuperscript{66}

Revolutionary movements turned the northeast of India into one of the most troubled and disturbed areas of the country. The Government acted to maintain law and order in this situation by deploying thousands of para-military and armed forces to the region. Armed encounters between the Indian army and the underground

\textsuperscript{64} Later, a number of other movements erupted. These included: the Tribal National Volunteer (TNV), Tripura National Liberation Front (TNLF), All Tripura Tribal Force (ATTF) and Tripura National Army (TNA) in Tripura; United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) and Boro Security Force (BrSF) in Assam; the People’s Liberation Army (PLA), People’s Liberation Army of Kanglai Pak (PLAKP) and Kuki National Army in Manipur, etc. to name a few of them. See also Thanzauva, \textit{Theology of Community}, 29-30; Pachau, \textit{Ethnic Identity and Christianity}, 46-57.


\textsuperscript{66} See Ray, \textit{Mizoram Dynamics of Change}, 133.
revolutionists brought immense suffering to the people of the region. To cite just one example:

On the 9th July 1987, the Assam Rifles posted in the Oinam village was attacked by a group of freedom fighters believed to belong to the NSCN [National Socialist Council of Nagaland]. Nine soldiers were killed and three seriously injured. A large quantity of arms and ammunitions were taken away by the attackers.

Oinam village and neighbouring villages were cordoned off by the Assam Rifles and on 11th July began an extensive operation in an attempt to recover the arms. Around 30 villages have been affected by the combing operation. During the combing operation a wide scale human rights abuses were reported including torture and extra judicial executions.

Naga People Movement for Human Rights stated in their report that at least fifteen were killed by the Security Forces in the course of operation. More than three hundred villagers were beaten, some were very severely. They were arbitrarily arrested and detained, tortured, denied medical care, deliberately killed after torturing, etc. The victims included children, senior villagers, and leaders of the community. Even Human Rights activists and leaders of student organizations were not spared. Press services were completely sealed off and whoever ventured to enter was sent back beaten severely. Pregnant women were not spared too. People were often kept in open ground or [inside] the church for hours without allowing them to attend their needs even. In one such occasion two women gave birth to their babies in full view of the jawans. Many women were sexually assaulted and raped.

Hundreds of men were tortured and subjected to third degree methods of tortures, hung upside down, buried alive and given electric shocks. The soldiers not only harmed the persons but also brought innumerable damages in terms of burning and dismantling houses, looting grain stores, vegetable plots, domestic goods and livestock. Churches and schools were converted into concentration camps. People were made to defecate the holy pulpit. Villagers were used as porters and labourers without any payment.67

Suffice it to say that a number of Oinam-like incidents have occurred in different parts of tribal areas of northeast India during army operations. The tragedy is that, in the course of such counter insurgency operations, the people who suffer most are the innocent villagers, women and children. Though some movements, such as the Mizo National Front, no longer exist as armed movements, quite a number of them were still very active even in 2004.

As such tribal movements intensified and the demand for political autonomy increased, the Government of India felt its national integrity was threatened. Especially after the Chinese aggression in 1962, the threat for the Government was

that, if the tribal problems in northeast India were not immediately addressed, tribal people might support Chinese expansionism. As it came to see that military operations failed to suppress the tribals' struggle for liberation, the Government of India adopted a policy of accommodation in the form of granting statehood to various areas inhabited by tribals. Thus the erstwhile Assam state was eventually divided into four new tribal states, namely, Nagaland (1963), Meghalaya (1972), and Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh (1987). Hence, the establishment of these tribal states in northeast India was directly or indirectly the outcome of the violent struggles of the tribal peoples for liberation.

Here it may be noted that, in most cases, it was the passion for liberation from their impoverished condition of life that compelled the tribal peoples of northeast India to take arms and demand political separation. This suggests that, in the context of northeast India, economic problems have been the root cause behind violent movements. If this is the case, economic transformation must become the primary agenda for both the churches and the State governments in northeast India. In the following section, we turn to the issue of economic development among the tribal people.

2.4. Problems of Economic Development

As mentioned earlier, the Constitution of India makes several provisions for the development of tribal peoples. It was the vision of India’s first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, that tribals should be developed “along the lines of their own genius”. In spite of these concerns, however, tribal development in northeast India has been a very neglected project. Though the country’s Five Year Plan began in 1951, it was not until the Fourth Five Year Plan was implemented (1966-71) that any substantial effort was made to develop the economic status of the tribal peoples of northeast India.

68 Thanzauva, Theology of Community, 32.
69 Ibid.
70 Ibid., 33.
In 1969 the Government of India appointed a committee, with Shilu Ao as its chairman, to study the situation of tribal development in northeast India. As a result of this Committee’s recommendations, the Fifth Planning Commission introduced a ‘Tribal Sub-Plan’ with the objectives of eliminating all sorts of exploitation, speedy implementation of socio-economic development, building the inner strength of people, and improving tribal organizational capability. Eighteen tribal concentration areas were selected for intensive implementation of the development plan, including Assam, Manipur and Tripura in northeast India. However, states and union territories where tribal people formed a majority of the population, such as Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Lakshadweep and the Darra and Nagar Haveli, were not included in this scheme. Responsibility for development planning of these states were given to the tribals themselves, with an understanding that tribals themselves should plan development in tribal areas.

Development planning in the tribal states was to be directed and approved by the Central Government, and the approved plans financed from Government of India’s consolidated fund, in accordance with the provision of the Constitution of India Article 275. Tribal-inhabited hill states of northeast India received from the Central Government funds for both planned and non-planned expenditures. Besides these measures, tribal states of northeast India also received a number of centrally financed schemes meant for rural developments, such as, the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), Border Area Development Programme (BADP), Intensive Agricultural Development Programme (IADP), National Rural Employment Programme (NREP), Integrated Child Development Service (ICDS), Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA), and others.

As a result of Government development programmes and financial assistance, there have been substantial improvements in certain sectors of tribal society, as Table 1 on the progress of literacy in Mizoram indicates.

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72 Ibid.
73 Ibid.
74 Ibid., 46.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tr>
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<td>46.15</td>
<td>16.70</td>
<td>31.14</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>60.48</td>
<td>46.70</td>
<td>53.80</td>
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<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>64.45</td>
<td>54.91</td>
<td>59.88</td>
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<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>85.60</td>
<td>78.60</td>
<td>82.26</td>
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<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>90.69</td>
<td>86.13</td>
<td>88.49</td>
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In spite of improvements in certain sectors, however, a majority of the tribal people of northeast India are still economically very backward and dependent. As we will see in the latter part of this survey, in reality, the rich and those who are in a privileged position are becoming richer, while the poor people become poorer. A number of factors have contributed to this problem. In the following section we will examine the effects of the development system, the traditional agriculture system, the lack of trade links and the influxes of immigrants.

2.4.1. The Development System

As mentioned earlier, in the present system, the development programmes for tribal areas of northeast India are sponsored by the Central Government. In this system, planning is done under an elaborate structure of Central guidelines and approvals, and the Government controls all the planning and development administration. As a result, the people have no place in the formation or governance of development plans and measures; even in those that affect them intimately they are merely recipients. As Thanzauva has said, the present system of development planning is the government’s programme with the people’s participation, whereas it is supposed to be the people’s programme with government participation.

77 Thanzauva, Theology of Community, 47.
Exclusion of the people from participation in the development process has had very negative consequences within the implementation process, often leading to misappropriation of development funds. When government officials control the whole direction and administration of the development schemes, the poor villagers lack both knowledge about the details of development programmes and an institutional forum in which to express their views and aspirations. By taking advantage of the absence of people’s participation, the bureaucrats and their subordinate development officials, together with the local politicians and the rural rich, often monopolise the whole development process. As a result, millions of rupees expended on rural development benefit mainly those charged with delivery of policies and the rural rich. L.C. Jain and his colleagues have commented thus:

If present arrangements persist they would lead not only to a loss of scarce resources but also to an accentuation of inequality and corruption and an incalculable loss of respect for government as a just and honest institution; worse still, they would extinguish the slender hopes of the poor to see a better future.78

In most states of northeast India, development activities are highly politicised and huge amounts of money granted for the economic development of the people are siphoned off for political purposes. Politicians in power, in their bid to survive in electoral politics, often misappropriate development funds to further their political aspirations.79 Such politicization of development schemes not only cripples development work, but also fosters corruption in the region.

78 Jain, Krishnamurthy, and Tripathi, Grass Without Roots, 197.
79 Sreeradha Datta has noted that huge amounts of development funds were often siphoned off through collusive arrangement between politicians and underground insurgents in Nagaland:

A recent study emphasises the rather stark presence of the black economy in this region. Leakage account for virtually the entire pool of development resources and relief supplies allotted to states afflicted by terror. This study also highlights our common misperception that terrorist activities in the state are in violent confrontation with the government. In fact, they are all part of a complex collusive arrangement where various legitimate power elites facilitate a continuous transfer of resources into the underground economy. This nexus has its conception right from the very first movement that began in the northeast. This is clearly visible in the case of Naga insurgency: it started with a process of incorporation of the Naga hills in 1947 and then creation of statehood in 1963, which soon resulted in the emergence of a bourgeois class among the Nagas having considerable control over the economy as well as polity of the Nagas in Nagaland. The major share of central funds went directly to the unproductive sector, mostly to support the administrative structure without leaving any substantial space for the productive sector to grow. Politicians in their bid to survive in electoral politics had a trade-off with the Naga underground movement, who had regrouped themselves in the meanwhile after the Shillong Accord. The underground movement also received the necessary logistical support from the politicians.
In addition to the above limitations, the governing ideology behind the present tribal development programmes is inadequate. In this regard R.R. Prasad has pointed out that the main objective of tribal development in India is just “to make tribals catch up non-tribals in the race for social, political and economic prosperity.” Such a predetermined objective of development both undermines tribal society and also restricts growth. Though it may be quite desirable that tribal people should also come up to the level of the non-tribals in terms of economic development, tribals do not necessarily need to follow in the footsteps of non-tribals. What tribal people would wish for is economic development in harmony with tribal society.

The cultural dimension is another area that has been often overlooked in the development process. In most cases, it has been economic factors that have dominated the whole idea of development in relation to the tribal development programme. It has been assumed that an improvement in income will bring growth and prosperity to the tribals. Consequently, fund allocations have been increased, and more development blocks created. However, other aspects such as the cultural background of the community, the system of implementation of the schemes and the moral behaviour of the people have usually been overlooked, leaving room for corruption and failure to uplift the common people.

This mutual interdependence between the constitutional and extra-constitutional forces has not largely impaired the legitimacy of the state, but large amounts of funds have been siphoned off by the insurgents in the form of protection money, professional tax and various other means from both the tribal bourgeoisie and their national collaborators. And the regional Press is often highlighting this aspect of extortion and siphoning off of funds to extremists groups. And despite a general awareness of such events, no one is in a position to check these activities. Commissions have been set up to check these situations, but there is a general tendency to be wary of such commissions, for they have not managed to alter the dynamics of the political economy of the region.


80 See Prasad, “Tribal Development in India - Strategies and Programmes,” 83.

81 See Thanzauva, “A Theology of Development in the Context of Hill Tribes in North East India,” 47.
2.4.2. The Traditional Agriculture System

Two types of agriculture are practised in northeast India. The first is “settled agriculture”, and the second is “shifting agriculture” (or popularly known as jhuming). Settled agriculture is practised in the plain areas, in the foothills and on terraced land on hill slopes. Shifting or jhum cultivation is the traditional agricultural practice of the tribal people; the tribal people in all the hill states of northeast India practise it.  

Since jhum cultivation has been the traditional agricultural practice of the tribal people throughout their history, it has become an integral part of their life. A number of their stories, songs, dances, times and regions are related to jhum cultivation.

Despite its low yields and de-forestation consequences, jhum cultivation continues to be the major agricultural practice of the tribal people in northeast India even to this date. A large number of tribal families in northeast India are dependent on it. Sreradha Datta has noted that, among the states of northeast India, Nagaland has the largest area of jhum cultivation: about 101,000 hectares or about 35% of its forestland. The figure is about 25% for Manipur and Meghalaya states; and about 4% for Arunachal Pradesh and Assam. The problem of the jhuming system of agriculture, however, is that in spite of the large number of families practising it, it cannot provide the amount of food required. As a result of this, the people have to depend on outside supplies of food. The failure of traditional jhum cultivation is one of the main factors in the tribals’ economic dependency in northeast India.

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82 jhum cultivation involved the following process:

A section of hill is set aside each year for the whole village by the village chief in consultation with his elders or the village council in some cases. Each family selects a plot of land, slashes the jungle in the month of January and February and exposes it in the sun for some days to dry the slashes. It is usually burnt in the month of March, which is followed, by dibbing and sowing the seeds, weeding, watching and protection of their crops. Then come the harvesting, threshing and transporting to home, culminating in the harvest festival. The common characteristics of jhum cultivation may be summarised as: a) Rotation of field rather than crops, b) Use of human labour as chief input instead of employing other power such as animal and machinery, c) Nomadic life is required when the duration of cycle of land becomes shorter and less fertile, d) Land is usually owned by community and e) Crops are generally grown mixed, with a variety of crops in the field.

See Thanzauva, Theology of Community, 37, note 53.

83 Ibid.

2.4.3. Lack of Trade Links

The partition of India severely affected the traditional trade link, and economy of the tribal peoples in northeast India, particularly the Mizos. Before the partition the Mizos had established a certain sort of trade relations in small quantities with the people of Chittagong Hill Tracts and the Chittagong District. They used to sell their jhum products, such as rice, cotton, oranges, and chillies; and in exchange they imported consumption articles, like food items other than rice, and kerosene, clothing, utensils, and agricultural implements. But when the Chittagong Hill Tracts and Chittagong District went to Pakistan at the time of the partition of the country, the main traditional trade route was practically closed. This had an adverse affect on the economy of the Mizo people, especially of the southern areas.85

After the partition, the only trade links the Mizo people enjoyed were with the Cachar District of Assam in the north. The people had to depend upon commodities that come through the Silchar – Aizawl road link. Consequently, they had to pay high prices for their purchases. Animesh Ray has noted that, after the partition, prices of commodities which the Mizo people obtained from the pre-independence Chittagong side increased six to ten times, whereas the prices of their exported commodities fell appreciably.86 Sometimes when the Silchar-Aizawl link road was closed, owing to landslide or agitation, the whole Mizoram state was virtually cut off from the rest of the country. In fact, Mizos produce large quantities of ginger, bananas, orange, squash and chillies. Owing to the lack of trade links, however, large quantities of these articles have been left to rot every year.

Lack of infrastructure in communication, transport and market access has severely hindered the economic growth of the tribal people in northeast India. Ascending and descending lists of the top ten states in the country’s infrastructure facilities in Table 2 and 3 below indicate that the whole region of northeast India is falling far behind the rest of the country in infrastructure facilities. Not a single state from northeast India figures on the list of the top ten most infrastructured states. Hill States such as Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Sikkim, Nagaland and Meghalaya, where tribal people

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85 See Ray, Mizoram Dynamics of Change, 189.
86 Ibid.
of Mongoloid racial stock formed a majority of the population, are the poorest states in infrastructure facilities.

Table 2. List of the top ten states in infrastructural facilities, in ascending order.\(^{87}\)

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<td>West Bengal</td>
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Table 3. List of the bottom ten states in infrastructural facilities, in descending order.\(^{88}\)

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<td>Orissa</td>
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This is not a mistake, but an act of negligence on the part of the Government of India. With the improvement of India’s political relations with neighbouring countries like China, Myanmar and Bangladesh, there was hope that border trade relations would be opened up. But even this possibility has been severely hindered because of a lack of proper communication links with the neighbouring countries, especially in areas such as Mizoram predominantly inhabited by tribal people.


\(^{88}\) Ibid.
2.4.4. Influxes of Immigrants

Ever since the British occupation of the region, northeast India has witnessed accelerated phases of economic migration both from within India and from without. There have been large-scale influxes of Bengali-speaking people from neighbouring East Bengal (now Bangladesh), followed by the Nepalese and some tribal people from central India.

Though there had been some migrant flows in earlier times, large-scale immigration in northeast India occurred during and after the British colonial expansion. The first wave happened when, in the process of their economic venture, the British brought a number of Bengali clerks, officials, central Indian tribal peoples and Biharis as labourers to the tea gardens and oil fields. These immigrants scattered to different parts of the plains areas. The second wave came along with Independence in 1947. When India was partitioned, there was a large influx of refugees and economic migrants from what was then East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). A lesser number migrated from Nepal, Bhutan and Burma (now Myanmar). Thirdly, in the wake of the Bangladesh war in the early seventies and in the aftermath of the oppressive military regime in Myanmar, large numbers of refugees from Bangladesh and Myanmar penetrated into the region.

It was the second and third influxes that swamped the tribal-inhabited areas of northeast India. The large presence of migrants in the region caused acute socio-economic and political problems for the native tribals. Since the majority of these immigrants were uneducated and unskilled, they sought to settle in forestland for agriculture and related purposes. In the process of their settlement, a number of land-related problems emerged, such as forceful occupation, purchase and mortgage of

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90 During the British period the land presently known as Bangladesh was called “East Bengal”. When the British left Southeast Asia in 1947, the country was annexed to Pakistan and it became “East Pakistan”. Later, in 1972 when it attained political independence, it assumed the name “Bangladesh”.
91 The most noticeable migrants who settled in tribal areas were the Chakmas and the Hajong refugees from East Pakistan, who settled in Arunachal Pradesh; the Bengalis from East Pakistan settled in Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura; the Chin refugees from Myanmar, Chakmas and Brus (or Riangs) from Bangladesh settled in Mizoram; the Nepalese from Nepal and West Bengal and other refugees from Myanmar settled in Nagaland and Manipur.
tribal lands, paving the way for the alienation of land from the indigenous people.\textsuperscript{92}

For instance, in Tripura, Bengali immigrants now hold most of the key posts in the State Government and public sector undertakings. Likewise, many tribal communities in the plains of northeast India were uprooted from their land and lost their identity as a result of immigrant population influx across the region.

The population of northeast India increased rapidly as a result of immigration. In certain parts of Assam State, the immigrant population now constitutes more than 70 percent of the total population. The native Assamese-speaking population has declined noticeably, while the Bengali-speaking population has increased considerably. In Tripura State the tribal population, which constituted two-thirds of the total population three decades ago, represented only 28 per cent in 1991, according to the census.\textsuperscript{93} Demographic changes brought about by large-scale migration have often caused conflicts and battles over resources, employment, language, and education. Fear of being assimilated demographically, culturally and economically has aroused political tension among the tribals, often leading to agitation, violent struggle and insurgency activities.\textsuperscript{94}

The presence and continuing influx of foreign immigrants have further aggravated already existing difficulties, causing enormous political problems for the region. The rapid growth of the Chakma population from the former East Pakistan in southern Mizoram (as shown in Table 4), which led to the creation of Chakma Autonomous District Council in 1972, became a sorry story, resulting in regrettable loss of land for the indigenous Mizo people. This example serves to illustrate similar problems for the whole of northeast India. In fact, several violent movements in northeast India are rooted in the foreigner issue. The All Assam Students Union (AASU) engaged in anti-foreign agitation, which then became an election issue in 1978. The students concentrated on issues such as: 1) the intrusion of foreigners from Bangladesh; 2) the prevention of Bengali domination; 3) the prevention of exploitation of Assam by both

\textsuperscript{92} See Datta, \textit{Northeast Turmoil}, 3.

\textsuperscript{93} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{94} Ibid.
nationals and by outsiders. Likewise, the tribal revolts in Tripura were primarily because of the domination by Bengali migrants from Bangladesh. The All Arunachal Pradesh Students Union (AAPSU) launched an anti-foreigner movement against Chakmas and Hajongs that has caused many political problems in the State. Similarly, the presence of large populations of Bangladesh refugees and Biharis in Bodo-inhabited areas of Assam has also given rise to a great deal of violence.

Table 4. Population of Chakmas in Mizoram, 1901-1991, with percentage rate of growth of their population.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>302</td>
<td>52.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>680</td>
<td>125.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>836</td>
<td>22.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>5088</td>
<td>508.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>15297</td>
<td>200.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>19337</td>
<td>26.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>22393</td>
<td>15.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>39905</td>
<td>78.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>54194</td>
<td>35.80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the Chief Ministers’ meeting on 7th July 1991 at New Delhi, Mr. Manik Sarkar, Chief Minister of Tripura, said that insurgent groups used the porous border between India and Bangladesh as their corridor for movement to and from their camps in the neighbouring country. The Public Interest Litigation (PIL) filed in the Supreme Court of India by the All India Lawyers Forum for Civil Liberties through its President, Mr. O.P. Saxena, also alleged that more than ten million Bangladeshi migrants had illegally entered India, causing severe strain on the resources of northeastern states and West Bengal. Foreign migrants were also reported to have committed a number of crimes in the region. For instance, on 17 January 2000, robbers who were Myanmar migrants robbed the State Bank of India, Lawngtlai

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98 Ibid.
Branch, Mizoram, and snatched Rs. 5.75 crores.\textsuperscript{99} Foreign migrants have also been involved in illegal drug trafficking in the region. Drugs originating in the “golden triangle” of the Myanmar-Thailand border enter northeast India via the border towns of Moreh in Manipur and Tamu in Myanmar. A number of crimes and ethnic clashes between Nagas and Kukis in Manipur in recent years have been related to drugs and narcotics smuggling.\textsuperscript{100}

An immediate solution to the problem of the migration influx is the need of the hour in northeast India today. The issue must be a common concern for the Government and also the churches. The popular idea of fencing the border may not be a practicable measure to check the future inflow of cross-border migrants. Atul Sarma has suggested that there is a need to upgrade the states’ farm and other sector technologies, which would require employment skills on the part of immigrant labourers. As most of the immigrants do not have such skills, a requirement to obtain a certain level of technological skill in order to be considered for employment would consequently reduce future immigration into the region.\textsuperscript{101} This suggestion could be one alternative. Moreover, there is also a need to eradicate a “schizophrenic” attitude at the local level, which on the one hand prefers cheap and pliant immigrants for farm labour but, on the other, disavows them publicly.\textsuperscript{102}

2.5. Disparity between the Rich and the Poor

Our final point in this survey of the tribal situation in northeast India, and of Mizoram in particular, is that of the growing disparity between rich and poor. In the process of modernization, there have been unprecedented social changes among tribal people of northeast India. The tribal society, which traditionally had a subsistence economic system and a communitarian society, now comes to experience a new society divided along the lines of the “haves” and the “have-nots”. It also begins to face a new world


\textsuperscript{102} Ibid.
where it has to learn new technologies, adopt new ways of life and compete with
others in various levels of occupation. Since these changes are so rapid and radical,
in the process they have created for the tribal people, who are not yet equipped with
necessary technological skill and work patterns, problems of dependency and identity.
During this transition, a few people, who with the opportunity to hold important
positions in Government offices and business undertakings, have emerged as a
wealthy elite amongst the tribal people.

In Mizoram, a new class of tribal capitalists emerged with the attainment of the status
of Union Territory in 1972 and full statehood later in 1987. Huge amounts of money
from the Central Government came in accordance with the provisions of the
Constitution. The early-educated tribals, who at that decisive moment were
privileged to become politicians and officers in the State Government, together with a
few business tribal rich, had unlimited opportunities to control and monopolize the
economy and the politics of the State. In due course these people emerged as a
wealthy elite in the modern tribal society.

This elite group has lived a luxurious life in the midst of the poor masses. In stark
contrast to the massive poverty of the people, they own multi-storeyed buildings fitted
with the latest technological comforts and luxuries, and live a consumerist lifestyle.
In the midst of many landless labourers, they own all the accessible lands alongside
the main roads that are cultivable, leaving no land and forest for the poor. They are
comparable to the Israelites whom Isaiah described as those “who join house to house,
who add field to field, until there is room for no one but you” (Isaiah 5: 8). Today, a
poor cultivator who lives in any sizeable town of Mizoram, must either steal from
someone’s land or work almost the whole day just to get one bundle of bamboos.

According to the State Government records, while the people of Mizoram who lived
below the poverty line in 1991 were 52.69 percent, in 1992 the figure was 58.50
percent. Similarly, while in 1994 there were 15,400 persons officially registered as

104 See also Vanlalthlana, "A Critical Appraisal of Mizo Christian Revival Spirituality in the Context of
105 See also R.N. Prasad and A.K. Agarwal, *Political and Economic Development of Mizoram* (New
106 Ibid.
unemployed in Aizawl District, in 1995 the number increased to 20,204 persons.¹⁰⁷ Likewise, even in the literacy rate described earlier, while the average in Mizoram was 88.49 percent in 2001, in rural areas like Lawngtlai District, it was only 56.46 percent.¹⁰⁸ A study has also revealed that, as on March 2003, in Lawngtlai town, which is one of the eight district headquarters in Mizoram, out of the total 3404 families who live there, only 460 families (or 13.51 percent) have water connection in their home. And even among those who have the connection, the water supply comes only for two hours in a week during the summer season.¹⁰⁹

Constitutionally India is a democratic country, a country ruled by the people. But in practice, it is not the people but the rich who rule over the country. For instance, in Mizoram State, a general election is conducted every five years to elect people’s representatives for the State Legislative Assembly. But the tragedy is that the whole process of politics is dominated by the local elite, so that people do not really have freedom to elect their own representatives. Through various political parties the local elite decide upon candidates for election. Since it is the few rich people who selected the candidates for election, it is the same rich people who control the elected members of the State Assembly. So under this situation, it is the interests of the elite, not the masses, which become the main concern and the priority of the State political institution. Consequently, political decisions are biased in favour of the rich; and the poor are powerless.

Even the churches of Mizoram, which originally began as movements of the poor and marginalized people, today appear to be more an institution of the elite, rather than an agent of God’s liberating power, in the eyes of many poor people. As we will see in the next chapter, the poor and minorities who have been unable to integrate within the

¹⁰⁹ L.H. Chhuanawma, "Lawngtlai kawpui dihman leh a hmalam hun tur thlirlawkna (Problems and Prospects of Urbanization in Lawngtlai)," in Hmasawnna Kailawn, ed. R. Ramthara (Aizawl: Lai Reformation Forum, 2003), 86. Lawngtlai is the home of this writer, and the statement that "the water supply comes only for two hours a week during the summer season" is written from his personal experience.
established structure of the so-called “Mission churches”, have often broken away from them in search of self-identity.

3. Concluding Remarks

We have seen that the Mizo people, like dalits and other tribals in India, are one of the marginalized communities in India. They have been alienated socio-culturally and economically by the dominant community of mainland India. Together with other indigenous peoples of India, Mizos are classified as tribal people; to become a tribal in caste-ridden Indian society is to be regarded as an outcaste or non-person. This social alienation becomes exacerbated for Mizos and other hill tribes of northeast India, because of their racial and religious distinctiveness. The social alienation of the Mizo people from the dominant community in India has become so great that, according to Mr.Lalhrningthanga, there are “a number of [Indian] Parliament Members who cannot locate Mizoram in the map of India”.  

In terms of economic condition also, the people of Mizoram suffer large-scale alienation. We have noted, for instance, that the state of Mizoram has only one highway, which runs between Silchar to Aizawl, to connect with other parts of India. If this road is blocked for whatever reason, be it by natural causes such as a landslide or political causes such as agitation, then the whole region of Mizoram becomes totally cut off from the rest of India.

In addition to the socio-economic alienation from the dominant community in India, there has developed an increasing disparity between rich and poor within the Mizo community itself. In the process of modernization, a new class of tribal capitalists has emerged in Mizoram. This small number of capitalists owns and controls most of the State’s economy and political decision-making. Consequently, there is a wide gap in living conditions between those who have and the have-nots. The elites live in a luxurious and consumerist life-style, and own multi-storied buildings fitted with the latest technological comforts and luxuries. For a poor cultivator of the land, however, life is hard and full of toil. While in the traditional society, land was accessible for any

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10 See Lalhmingthanga, “Forward”. In Ray, Mizoram Dynamics of Change, vii.
person, in Mizoram today, the rich own all the cultivable lands alongside main roads. A landless labourer who lives in any sizeable town of Mizoram today, requires almost a whole day just to get a bundle of bamboos, unless he or she is willing to steal from someone’s land or garden.

Today the Mizo society, which had been traditionally an egalitarian society that lived together as one family and shared together their possessions, achievements and misfortunes, has become sharply divided. People have become more and more individualistic and self-centred. This would be an issue for any formerly communitarian society, but the question is sharpened by the fact that the majority of the population is Christian. Why have these Christian people become so self-centred and divided? Certainly Christology needs to address this question. I believe that without taking these realities into consideration there cannot be a meaningful reflection of Christology in Mizoram.

Thus, having identified some of the major problems facing the tribal people in Mizoram, we will look in the next chapter at the Christological tradition in Mizoram and examine how Christ has been introduced among the tribal people of this region.
CHAPTER 3

THE CHRISTOLOGICAL HERITAGE
OF THE TRIBAL CHRISTIANS IN MIZORAM

In the preceding chapter we identified some of the major issues in the contemporary tribal situation in Mizoram and maintained that, in order to present Jesus Christ meaningfully among the Mizo people, the issues facing the people must be taken seriously. In this chapter, we will consider the Christological tradition, past and present, in Mizoram and examine the extent to which it addresses the needs and problems of the people. In Mizoram, the dominant tradition of Christology has emanated from the West. It was introduced by the missionaries towards the end of the nineteenth century, and, up till now, its legacy has remained the dominant understanding of Christology. The purpose of this investigation is to identify the adequacy of this Christology, which may also be characterised as “Mission Christology”, in the context of tribal people in Mizoram. We will thus situate our analysis with a brief overview of Christianity in Mizoram, then sketch in broad outline the Christological tradition and, finally, offer a judgment as to its adequacy with some concluding remarks.

1. A Brief Overview of Christianity in Mizoram

Christianity came to Mizoram (formerly known as Lushai Hills) from Great Britain in the last decade of the nineteenth century. J.H. Lorrain and F.W. Savidge, both members of Highgate Road Baptist Church, North London, came to Mizoram under the Arthington Aborigines Mission. They arrived in Mizoram on 11 January 1894 and settled in Aizawl. During their four years’ stay in Aizawl, they learned the local Duhlian dialect (now commonly known as Mizo) and reduced it to writing. They also translated the Gospels of Luke and John, and the Acts of Apostles. They produced a small catechism, a hymn book, a Lushai Grammar and a Lushai-English Dictionary. Since their sponsor did not allow them to stay long in one place, but instructed them

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...to travel around to preach the Gospel, they were compelled to leave Mizoram by the end of 1897. They made no converts.  

Meanwhile, the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Mission, later known as the Welsh Presbyterian Mission (hereinafter referred to as the Welsh Mission) had adopted Mizoram as its mission field in 1892. A few months before Lorrain and Savidge left Mizoram, D.E. John, the first Welsh missionary, arrived at Aizawl (31 August 1897). He continued the work of these pioneer missionaries. Raibahadur, a Khasi evangelist sent by the Khasi Presbyterian Church (from the present-day Meghalaya State), assisted him. A year later, Edwin Rowland, from the same Welsh Mission, joined them. The Welsh missionaries took the whole of Mizoram as their mission field. They divided their areas of responsibility, with D.E. Jones taking charge of pastoral ministry and Church organization, and Edwin Rowland of education and youth.

The Baptist Missionary Society (hereinafter referred to as the BMS), which had been working in India since the time of William Carey in 1793, became interested in working in southern Mizoram. Rev. George Hughes, at that time BMS missionary in Chittagong, was sent to enquire and report on the possibility of working in southern Mizoram. He went up to Lunglei in September 1901, and strongly advocated that South Lushai Hills be adopted as a BMS mission field. The BMS Home Committee immediately took up the matter and negotiated with the Welsh Mission for transfer of South Lushai Hills to the BMS. Despite the objections of D.E. Jones and Edwin Rowlands, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Wales, in its meeting...
in Liverpool in 1902, agreed to the transfer. The BMS sent Lorrain and Savidge, who at that time were working among the Abor and Miri tribes in what is now known as Arunachal Pradesh, back to Mizoram. They arrived in Lunglei on 13th March 1903.

Initially, the Presbyterian and Baptist mission stations concentrated on the dominant Lusei (or “Lushai” as the Europeans called it) tribe, who spoke the same language and had the same culture in Aizawl and Lunglei. However, there were some smaller tribes in Mizoram who had different languages and cultures. One of them was the Mara (then called Lakher) tribe. They inhabit the extreme southeast part of Mizoram, now part of the Saiha District. Reginald A. Lorrain, the younger brother of J.H. Lorrain, was interested in evangelising this people. He formed the Lakher Pioneer Mission in 1905, and eventually he and his wife offered to be the first missionaries. They arrived at Serkawr on 26th September 1907 to start their work among the Mara people.

Subsequent to the arrival of these three different missions, three different churches were established concurrently in Mizoram: the Presbyterian Church in the north with Aizawl as its headquarters, the Baptist Church in the south with Serkawn as its headquarters and an Evangelical Church of Maraland (hereinafter referred to as ECM) with Serkawr as its headquarters. Thus the western missionaries planted two denominational churches (Presbyterian and Baptist) for one particular Lusei tribe, and one independent church (ECM) for the Mara tribe. However, other tribes of Mizoram who had equally maintained their distinctive identity, culture and language were not reached. The three churches planted by western missionaries called themselves Mission Kohhran, meaning, “Mission Churches”.

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7 At that time there was already a small Christian community of about one hundred and twenty-five in the south, the first fruits of the Welsh mission. Some Christians from Sethlun village (now part of Lunglei town) went and received the new missionaries at Tlabung (also known as Demagiri), a border village located at a distance at 97kms west of Lunglei, carrying their baggage free of charge, as a welcoming gesture to the new missionaries. See Hminga, The Life and Witness of the Churches in Mizoram, 55.
8 See ibid., 105-07. See also Mangkhosat Kipgen, Christianity and Mizo Culture (Aizawl: Mizo Theological Conference, 1997), 204.
9 In the process of conversion, other tribes of Mizoram, to whom no missionary was sent and who had no independent church established, were gradually assimilated socio-culturally into the dominant Lusei (now generally identified as Mizo) identity. The assimilation process was further reinforced when the Government gave the Christian missions responsibility over the District’s education and literature activities. The duhlian dialect (the language of the Lusei tribe) was made the medium of education (except in Mara areas where Mara was used), and the Bible and hymnbook were translated into this
At its inception, Christianity was not attractive to the Mizo people. Mizos looked at the missionaries with a contemptuous attitude and watchful eyes. When they saw them carrying their own baggage, they perceived them to be of less importance than their contemporary British officials and called them "White Fools" or "White Vagabonds". Upon their arrival in Aizawl, Lorrain and Savidge could not even find labourers to construct their house. They sought help from the Superintendent of Lushai Hills who gave them permission to issue salt, without which they could not have completed their house. Neither did many people show interest in their message. On most occasions their hearers were children and those who wanted to see the white man. Perhaps in the eyes of the chiefs and the ruling class, Christianity was a threat to both their socio-cultural tradition and the orderly administration of the village; hence they were hostile to it. Some early converts were even persecuted and expelled by the chiefs from their villages. Accordingly, the early converts in Mizoram were mostly from the poor and marginalized within the community.
Despite suspicion and opposition from the chiefs and the ruling section of the community, Christianity grew at an extraordinary rate in Mizoram. While in the 1901 census there were altogether only 45 Christians in the whole of Mizoram, by 1951 the Christian population had reached 80.31%, and Mizoram could virtually be called a Christian area. The following table shows the growth of the Christian population in Mizoram, 1901-1991.

Table 1. Statistics showing decadal growth of the Christian population in Mizoram, 1901-1991.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>TOTAL POPULATION</th>
<th>CHRISTIAN POPULATION</th>
<th>CHRISTIAN PERCENTAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>82,434</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>91,204</td>
<td>2,461</td>
<td>2.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>98,406</td>
<td>27,720</td>
<td>28.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>124,404</td>
<td>59,123</td>
<td>47.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>152,786</td>
<td>98,104</td>
<td>64.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>196,202</td>
<td>157,575</td>
<td>80.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>196,063</td>
<td>230,505</td>
<td>86.64</td>
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<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>332,390</td>
<td>286,141</td>
<td>86.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>493,757</td>
<td>413,340</td>
<td>83.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>686,217</td>
<td>569,560</td>
<td>83.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The main factor in the rapid growth of Christianity in Mizoram was a succession of revival movements. The first revival movement occurred in 1906. Others occurred in 1913, 1919, 1930 and beyond. In the wake of these movements a number of voluntary evangelists, both individuals and groups, emerged, adopting names such as Kraws Sipai (Soldier of the Cross) and Fangrual (Evangelistic Travelling Team). These evangelists actively participated in the task of evangelism. They travelled from village to village, proclaiming the Gospel through preaching, singing and dancing. As

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17 And out of this 45 only four were Mizos, the rest consisted of the missionaries, British officials and non-Mizo Christians, mainly Khasis. See Kipgen, Christianity and Mizo Culture, 209.
18 Thanzauva, "A Theological Basis for Social Transformation", 179.
a result of such endeavours, hundreds and even thousands were added to the church membership. 20

Initially, the Welsh, the Baptist and the Lakher Pioneer missions were the only Christian missions working in Mizoram. During the British period, the District administration did not allow other mission agencies to enter into Mizoram for fear of causing disharmony and administration problems among the people. 21 In the absence of other missions, these three Missions had immense opportunities to convert the people and consolidate their establishments. Amongst one another, they maintained a policy that if any member crossed from one area to another, the person should be admitted into the membership of the church operating in that area. That is to say, if a Baptist member went to the Presbyterian area, s/he should be automatically admitted into the membership of the Presbyterian Church, and vice versa. 22 Thus they worked hand in hand with mutual understanding and cooperation.

In the process of the development of Christianity, several other new churches were also formed. Some of these new churches were merely late-arriving denominations from the West. Among them were the Salvation Army (1921), the Roman Catholic Church (1925), the Seventh Day Adventists (1941) and the United Pentecostal Church (1949). 23 Some others were independent churches, such as Isua Krista Kohhran (Church of Jesus Christ) of south Mizoram (1970) and Pawiram (later changed to Lairam) Baptist Church (1982). These two churches, whose members are drawn mainly from the Lai (Pawi) tribe in southern area, merged into one in 1999, forming the first organic church union in Mizoram, under the name “Isua Krista Kohhran Lairam” (Lairam Church of Jesus Christ). Besides these newly established

20 One of the itinerant voluntary evangelists, namely Pu Thangthawnga, alone led more than four thousand people to Christ. See Lalsawma, Revivals the Mizo Way, 98. See also Hminga, The Life and Witness of the Churches in Mizoram, 272. Comparative statistics records can show that, while the average rate of church membership growth in the seven years preceding the outbreak of the first revival movement (i.e.1901-1905) was approximately 57 members per annum, in the following seven years after the irruption of the revival movement (i.e.1906-1912), the rate increased to an average of 370 members per annum. In the year of the second revival movement in 1913 alone, the Christian population grew from 3999 to 7423, an increase of 3425 members. See Lalsawma, Revivals the Mizo Way, 219-21: Kipgen, Christianity and Mizo Culture, 342.


22 See Pachuau, Ethnic Identity and Christianity, 75. See also Thanzauva, "A Theological Basis for Social Transformation", 184.

23 See Kipgen, Christianity and Mizo Culture, 205-08.
churches, there were also some radical sectarian movements, such as Tlira Pawl (The Tlira Sect), Thiangzau Pawl (The Thiangzau Sect) and others. Most members of these new churches and sects were the poor and those who were socially marginalized, politically powerless and religiously neglected within the community.

The formation of these new churches and sects was the result largely of the failure of Mission Churches to respond to the needs and aspirations of the poor and marginalized people. For instance, the Lai people who broke way from the Baptist Church of Mizoram and formed Isua Krista Kohhran in south Mizoram felt that, as a minority tribe and socio-economically weaker section, their experience and aspirations were not properly listened and responded to. Similarly, those who were dissatisfied, and unable to integrate within the forms and structures of the Mission Churches, broke way and formed the United Pentecostal Church and other sectarian groups. As more and more churches were formed, even the Mission Churches were no longer able to maintain cooperation and harmony among themselves. Denominational competition broke their relationship apart in the nineteen eighties, to the point where they could not even send delegations to each other’s annual Assembly meeting.

Today Christianity in Mizoram, which began as a movement of the poor people, has become respectable and very powerful. For instance, in 2001 the Presbyterian Church alone had 744 local churches and 159 preaching stations. Its financial receipts between 2000-2001 amounted to Rs. 23,47,14,721/- (rupees twenty three crores, forty seven lakhs, fourteen thousand, seven hundred and twenty one). If the churches

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24 The Christian census jointly conducted by the Presbyterian, Baptist and Evangelical Church of Maraland churches in 1980 identified as many as 60 denominations in Mizoram. Many of these denominations no longer existed at the time of the census, and some that existed at that time were very small in number. At the time of the census there were 13 established churches, 14 sectarian groups and five other religious groups in Mizoram. See Thanzauva, Theology of Community, 48-49, footnote 71.
25 They maintained that, even when they asked the Church authority to open up a bookstore or a medical store in their area, since such facilities were too far away for them, their requests were ignored. So also in matters such as selection for theological training or nursing training, they felt discriminated against. See Raldawna, Isua Krista Kohhran To Bul (The History of Church of Jesus Christ) (Lawnglai: Isua Krista Kohhran Press, 1994), 15-16.
27 See Pachuua, Ethnic Identity and Christianity, 75.
were united and committed to the cause of the people, they would have the potential and necessary resources to transform the life conditions of the people of Mizoram.

2. The Christological Legacy of the Mission Churches

The missionaries who came to introduce the Gospel in Mizoram were products of the western missionary movement of the nineteenth century. This movement was rooted in the Evangelical awakening that swept through Western Europe and North America in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. In Britain, the new religious movement was largely associated with the Methodist movement led by the Wesley brothers. This movement laid strong emphasis on the saving power of the Gospel and the necessity of personal conversion and an intense moral earnestness.29 It aroused new awareness of, and concern for, the poor and underprivileged. As a result of this, a number of charitable institutions such as schools and hospitals were established, and religious tracts were distributed. This concern for the poor in the society later developed into a concern for the salvation of the non-Christians in other countries.30 Consequently, several mission societies were formed, and a number of missionaries were sent out. The missionaries who came to Mizoram were part of this missionary movement.

Renthy Keitzar, the former Principal of Eastern Theological College, Jorhat, has summarized the main features of missionary theology in northeast India in ten points:

1. The inerrancy and the authority of the Bible, including the plenary inspiration of Scripture and Christo-centric interpretation.
2. The deity of Christ.
3. The virgin birth of Christ.
4. The creation of man in the image of God and an historical fall into sin, including the universality of sin as inherited.
5. The substitutionary atonement of Christ and the belief that salvation is achieved solely by the blood of Christ.

6. Salvation by faith alone through the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

7. The necessity of every believer to have an assurance of salvation.

8. The doctrine of the Trinity, and the presence of the Holy Spirit as a person with believers for spiritual generation.

9. The universality (catholicity) and spirituality of the Church which rises above sectarian prejudices.

10. Christ's physical resurrection and bodily return to earth (i.e. in His Second Coming) for judgment and the millennial reign, with the believers to enjoy bliss with God and the unbelievers to endure torment in hell until the final judgment, when they will be punished with everlasting destruction.  

Renthy maintains that, despite their denominational differences as Baptists, Presbyterians or others, the churches in northeast India today basically hold these common features of Evangelical theology as a legacy of the past missionary era. He argues that, “our academic discipline in biblical or theological studies has not made any breakthrough in this hangover of the missionary religion or theology”.

In Mizoram, the main objective of Christian mission was to evangelise the “savage Lushais”, as J.H.Lorrain puts it, and to convert them from their tribal beliefs to Christianity. In fact, most western missionaries who came to India during the British period had as their main thrust of mission, the saving of the souls of individuals whom they considered heathens. Speaking about the American Baptist missionaries in northeast India, F.S. Downs, who himself was one of them, said, “They would have their work to save souls”. It was in this endeavour to evangelise and save the souls of the people that the main ideas of their Christology were reflected. In Mizoram, however, neither the missionaries nor the churches made any elaborate attempt to present systematically their understanding of Christology in written form. Hence, in the absence of documentation, this study has to be heavily dependent upon fragmented sources, such as reports, sermons, songs and individual testimonies, and the like.

32 Ibid., 39.
33 See Baptist Church of Mizoram, The Annual Reports of BMS, 7.
34 Cited by Minz, Rise Up, My People, 27.
2.1. Christ in Early Missionary Preaching

In their mission fields the missionaries generally reproduced the forms of Christian life and tradition they had experienced in their own country and church denominations. So when they came to Mizoram, they sought to produce individual conversions following conviction of sin among the native people. The portrait of Christ in early missionary preaching in Mizoram, 1894-1905, may be broadly described under three headings: saviour from sin, conqueror of evil spirits and entry into heaven. We will examine each of these Christologies in turn.

2.1.1. Christ as the Saviour from Sin

The missionaries proclaimed that Jesus Christ was a saviour from sin and called upon the people to accept him. However, the people did not understand the meaning of their message. In his report to BMS Home Board in 1913, Lorrain said:

Our first message, as soon as we could speak the language, was of a Saviour from sin. But the people had no sense of sin and felt no need for such a Saviour.\(^{35}\)

This phenomenon was by no means unique to Mizoram. Missionaries of the Church Missionary Society (hereafter referred to as the CMS) and the Wesleyan Methodists adopted a similar approach in their attempt to convert the Maori people of New Zealand in the 1820s. When the missionaries first told the Maori tribal people about eternal punishment and the torments of hell, the Maori response according to Augustus Earle was, “they were quite sure such a place could only be made for white faces, for they had no men half wicked enough in New Zealand to be sent there”.\(^{36}\)

Furthermore, when they were told that all human beings would be condemned, the Maoris “burst into a loud laugh, declaring ‘they would have nothing to do with a God who delighted in such cruelties; and then (as a matter of right) hoped the missionary would give them each a blanket for having taken the trouble of listening to him so

\(^{35}\) Baptist Church of Mizoram, *The Annual Reports of BMS*, 93-94.
Perhaps these sorts of responses were not unexpected, because the messages were quite unrelated to the experience and problems of these tribal peoples. It is against the background of the poverty and harshness of the life situation of the Mizo people that the failure of the Christology of Christ as saviour from sin is to be understood. The life situation of the people in Mizoram at the time of the missionaries' arrival was very hard and uncertain. Abject poverty and sickness were their daily experience. As Lorrain himself said, "there has been much fever, especially during the rains". In the absence of modern scientific knowledge and medical facilities, the people attributed all sicknesses and misfortunes they met to the works of evil spirits, whom they believed to be living everywhere – in the trees, rocks, water, mountain and caves. They were in constant fear of these evil spirits. When someone fell ill or was visited by misfortune, the only solution they knew was to appease the spirit, who in their view had caused the particular illness. The local priest or sorcerer, whom Mizos called Bawlpu, would be consulted, for he was supposed to know which particular evil spirit had caused the suffering and what kind of offering was to be given. As the poor conditions of life caused a lot of sickness and suffering, a number of sacrifices had to be offered. The economic effects of these sacrifices added further misery to their already impoverished condition. What they needed, therefore, was precisely, as Dorothy Glover has stated, "Freedom from fear, not freedom from sin, of which they were quite unconscious".

In their second phase, therefore, the missionaries set aside their "saviour from sin" Christology and sought to reinterpret the significance of Christ within this framework of Mizo religious beliefs and life experiences. The result was a Christology of Christ as the conqueror of evil spirits, to which we now turn.

2.1.2. Christ as the Conqueror of Evil Spirits

In their second attempt, the missionaries proclaimed Jesus Christ as a vanquisher of, and as saviour from, the power of evil spirits. They claimed that this new presentation

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37 Ibid.
38 See Baptist Church of Mizoram, *The Annual Reports of BMS*, 8.
was well understood, and it “exactly met” the need of the Mizo people. Lorrain thus stated in his report:

Then we found a point of contact. We proclaimed Jesus as the vanquisher of the Devil [sic]—as the One who had bound the “strong man” and taken away from him “all his armour where in [sic] he trusted” and so had made it possible for his slaves to be free. This to the Lushais was “Good News” indeed and exactly met their need.  

Accordingly, the missionaries emphasized Jesus Christ as a saviour from the power of evil spirits and called the Mizo people to accept him and discard their old religion. They proclaimed that Jesus Christ was stronger and more powerful than evil spirits. He has already defeated the Devil and thus liberated them from the power of evil spirits; the Mizos therefore no longer need to offer sacrifice to them. Lloyd noted that, according to Zathanga, who later became a minister of the Baptist Church of Mizoram, the message he had heard from missionary D.E. Jones’ first visit to Pukpui village contained the following:

Mizo sacrifice is the worship of evil spirits. They are worthless in the sight of God, the Maker of all things. He is greater than all such spirits. Whoever worships Him has no need to sacrifice. God will heal him, for God alone can heal.

Similarly, in his report to the Welsh Mission Home Board, 1898-99, D.E. Jones stated that the Mizos were very delighted to hear that Jesus had defeated evil spirits. The story of his resurrection from death was of particular interest to them. He wrote:

The first difficulty which the Lushais raises against accepting Christianity is the danger that he will be killed by the Evil Spirits, and when it is said that Christians do not become the prey of the Evil Spirits, they say in answer that our religion does for us and theirs for them. Yet some are ready to believe in Christ if they will be kept from illness in so doing. Any sickness which they cannot understand is attributed to Evil Spirits.... The Lushais are fond of hearing that Jesus Christ has conquered the Devil and Death. Perhaps it is the truth of the Resurrection that strikes them most at first and often people come to us to tell them about Jesus.

Accordingly, the influence of the missionaries’ teaching was also reflected in the testimony of the Mizos themselves. Sometime in 1903, Thanga, one of the earliest Mizo Christian songwriters, composed a hymn entitled, Kan Chatuan Pa zawng rawh

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40 Baptist Church of Mizoram, The Annual Reports of BMS, 94.
41 Lloyd, History of the Church in Mizoram, 48.
u (Seek our Eternal Father). In the hymn Thanga called upon his people to seek the Eternal Father and encouraged them not to be scared of evil spirits. The first and second stanzas stated thus:

\[ \begin{align*}
Kan \text{ Chatu} & \text{an Pa rawn zawng rawh } u, \text{ ramhuai hlau suh } u, \\
Anmahni[Amahin] & \text{ a hum eng che } u, \text{ lokal thuai rawh } u; \\
Salte leh bawi riangvaite & \text{ ni tihchhuah dawn chu,} \\
Tlu kan dinchhuah lehma tur.
\end{align*} \]

\[ \begin{align*}
\text{Keini'} & \text{' min timangang leh retheiah niin kan ring.} \\
\text{Min titlawn leh tirala lokal a ni silo;} \\
\text{Min chhandam leh tungdinga lo kal a ni zawk e,} \\
\text{Chu chu a lang fiah ta e.}\]
\]

This may be translated into English as follows:

Seek our Eternal Father, and do not be scared of evil spirits,
He will protect you, come quickly;
Slaves and poor servants, he will liberate us,
Fallen, we shall rise again.

We thought of him as causing us poverty and trouble,
He came not to defeat and to destroy us;
But it was to save and restore us that he came,
That becomes manifest now.

The understanding of Christ as victor over evil spirits proved to be an effective instrument of evangelisation in Mizo society. It helped them to overcome their constant fear of evil spirits and the costly sacrifices they used to offer to them. In his annual report to BMS Home Board in 1908, Lorrain described how the story of salvation from evil spirits has changed the life of one local exorcist:

The evangelists arrived at one village at what at other times would have been a most opportune moment. The people were just preparing for a big sacrifice to demons which was to take place at sundown. Pigs lay bound and squealing on many verandahs ready for the appointed hour, while the Exorcist-Priest was busy preparing his curious sacrificial paraphernalia. Fresh from times of blessing elsewhere, the evangelists began undauntedly to proclaim the Message of Salvation. The same unusual interest which they had seen in other villages soon began to be manifest, and before the sun set the Exorcist Priest was so convinced of the truth that he flung away the strange things which he had been making, and declared that he would offer no more sacrifices to demons. This action so impressed the whole village that the pigs were unbound and set at liberty, and, instead of a great feast that night, there was

\[ ^{43} \text{See C. Vanlallawma, "Pu Thanga leh a hlate," in Mizo Hla leh A Phuahtute (The Mizo Songs and their Composers), ed. B. Lalthangliana, et al. (Aizawl: Hrangbana College, 1999), 25.} \]

\[ ^{44} \text{See Ibid., 25-26. The underlying assumption is that Jesus Christ is the incarnation of God the Father.} \]
much earnest conversation until a late hour about the claims of the Great Spirit who is able to save men from sin and from the power of the Evil One.  

The belief in Christ as the victor over evil spirits also became for the new converts a reason for overcoming the temptation to drink rice beer.  

When medical missions supported this Christology in practice, it became an effective instrument of conversion. When asked by a visiting missionary why he became a Christian, one Mizo villager replied, “I became a Christian, because I found that eight annas (half a rupee) worth of mission pills did more good work to my sick relatives than thirty rupees spent on sacrifices to devils”.  

Lorrain stated that sometimes the patients put too much faith in missionaries’ medicines, so that “they often put them under their pillows instead of in their mouths and imagine the result will be the same”.  

C.L.Hminga, in his study of the early interaction between the Gospel and Mizo society, found that “many actually became Christian because they could get physical healing without the costly sacrifices, but by taking the white man’s medicine and by prayer to the Christians’ God”.  

2.1.3. Christ as the Entry into Heaven

Another major emphasis of the early missionary preaching portrayed Christ as the way for entry into heaven. Hminga has pointed out that when he interviewed Rev. Zathanga, who became a Christian in 1902, the latter told him that the first message he had heard from D.E.Jones at his Lungmawi village in 1899 was: “Believe on ‘Pathian’ [God] Jehovah and worship Him, then you don’t need to sacrifice to the demons any more. Even when you die you shall go to ‘Pialral’ [paradise]”.  

It should be noted in this connection that the attractiveness of the hope for heaven has roots in traditional Mizo religious belief.  

According to the Mizo religious tradition,

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45 Baptist Church of Mizoram, The Annual Reports of BMS, 49-50.  
46 Ibid., 17f. In the early Mizo Christian tradition, the drinking of rice beer was perceived as an element of traditional religion. Hence, total abstinence from drinking of rice beer was one way of expressing that one had truly left one’s former religion. See also Lloyd, On Every High Hill, 48, 58.  
47 Hminga, The Life and Witness of the Churches in Mizoram, 269.  
48 See Baptist Church of Mizoram, The Annual Reports of BMS, 79.  
49 Hminga, The Life and Witness of the Churches in Mizoram, 94.  
50 Ibid. 66. Mizo Christians used the words Pialral or vanram for heaven, to which believers would go after death.  
51 See also Downs, History of Christianity in India, 174.
after death human spirits go to either Mitthikhua (the village of the dead) or Pialral (paradise). Mitthikhua was believed to be a somewhat shadowy, dull and colourless underworld where life became more troublesome and difficult than the world of the living.\(^5\) Most spirits, particularly those of ordinary men and women, go to this place. It was believed that at the entrance of this village there was a horrific man called Pawla. Pawla used to shoot spirits who passed through his residence with his large bow, and the wound he inflicted was so painful that it would not be healed for three years. Pialral or paradise, on the other hand, was believed to be a place where the spirits of those who performed a series of ceremonial feasts called thangchhuah would go. Those who went there no longer needed to work or cultivate *jhum*. They would be supplied with husked rice. Pawla also did not dare to shoot at those who had performed *thangchhuah* and were destined for Pialral.

There were two ways to perform *thangchhuah*. The first is *in lama thangchhuah* (a *thangchhuah* connected with domestic animals), and the second was *ram lama thangchhuah* (a *thangchhuah* connected with wild animals). In order to become *in lama thangchhuah* one had to give a series of public feasts, perhaps as many as seven or eight in number. This involved a large amount of expenditure and might take a lifetime even for the wealthiest person. To become *ram lama thangchhuah*, a person had to kill an elephant, a bear, a wild bison, a stag, a barking deer and a wild boar. He would gain greater honour if he also killed a viper, an eagle, a flying lemur and a man. Mizos believed that the spirits of men or women whom a person had killed in his earthly life would serve him as slaves in Pialral.\(^5\) Since to become *thangchhuah* in either of these two ways was a very difficult thing, only very few people could hope for Pialral.

Therefore, the possibility of entering into Pialral without becoming *thangchhuah* but through faith in Jesus Christ was indeed “Good News” for the Mizo people. Through Jesus Christ even the poor people, and women too, could thus hope for Pialral.\(^5\) In fact, the hope for entry into heaven was one of the main reasons behind the Mizos’

\(^5\) Hminga, *The Life and Witness of the Churches in Mizoram*, 36.


\(^5\) In traditional religion, no woman could hope for a place in Pialral except for the wives of those who had performed *thangchhuah*.
mass conversion to Christianity. C.L. Hminga, in his study of the early response to Christianity in Mizoram, found that the desire for heaven was one of the main reasons for the people becoming Christians in early days:

When I asked them why they have become Christian, many of them replied that they became Christian because they feared 'hremhmun' [hell]... Others said they became Christian because they want to go to 'Pialral' or 'Vanram' [heaven]... Others said that they became Christians because it was the way to get healing from sickness without sacrificing to the demons.55

In the subsequent development of Christology, the hope of entry into heaven became a prominent way of understanding the work of Christ among the Mizo Christians.

It appears that it was the needs and aspirations of the people that shaped the understanding of Christology during the period under study. The proclamation of Jesus Christ as the saviour from the power of evil spirits and the means for entry into Pialral became good news for the people, largely because of their impoverished condition of life and yearning for liberation. In the subsequent development of the understanding of Christology, revival movements became another important factor.

2.2. Christ in the Revival Movements

We have already noted that there has been a series of revival movements throughout the history of Christianity in Mizoram. Most notable were four major movements, in 1906, 1913, 1919 and 1930.56 Since the first movement in 1906, however, revival has not fully left Mizoram till the present day. There have been times, of course, when revivalism was weakened, yet it has often gathered strength once again. Thus revivalism has had a far-reaching impact upon the life and thought of the churches. These revival movements have become a springboard for the further development of Christology in Mizo Christian thought.

The revival movement in Mizo is called *horhna*, which means, “awakening”, or “renewal”.\(^{57}\) The revival movement in Mizoram has its root in the Welsh Revival, which began in the mid-eighteenth century under the leadership of Howel Harris.\(^{58}\) As with the contemporary movement in England, headed by John Wesley, preaching occupied an important place in the Welsh revival, and the cross of Christ constituted the central theme of the revival message. There was a strong denunciation of sins with threats of Divine judgement, and a free offer of God’s forgiveness, salvation and eternal life through Jesus Christ.\(^{59}\) For many people, the message of the cross became so fresh that they heard it as if for the first time in their life. They were crying and groaning as the Holy Spirit convicted them of their sins and the impending dreadful punishment to follow. But as they found the forgiveness of their sin through the death of Christ, joy and thanksgiving filled their hearts again and shouts like “Hallelujah”, “Glory” and “Thanks to Him forever” could be heard in every revival meeting.\(^{60}\)

The Welsh revival that had a direct bearing on the Mizoram revival movement occurred in 1904-1905 in Wales under the leadership of Evan Roberts. The characteristics of this revival were more or less the same as those of the previous movement. It was marked by brokenness and praise. In Wales, this revival worked especially among the young people. There was a tumult of emotion, and an overpowering influence of the Holy Spirit and conviction of sin. Prayer, praise and personal testimonies were the most characteristic expressions of the revival.\(^{61}\) The central message of Evan Roberts contained challenges like:

1) The past must be clear, every sin confessed to God and any wrong to other neighbours must be put right. Unless one has forgiven everybody, he/she should not expect the forgiveness of his/her sins.

2) If you are unsure whether something in your life is good or evil, do away with it. There must not be a trace of a cloud between you and God.

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\(^{57}\) See also Thanzauva, "A Theological Basis for Social Transformation", 362.

\(^{58}\) See Lalsawma, *Revivals the Mizo Way*, 11-12.

\(^{59}\) See Ibid., 13.

\(^{60}\) Ibid.

3) One has to observe obedience, prompt, implicit, and unquestioning, to the Spirit of God. At whatever cost, one must do what the Holy Spirit prompts without hesitation or fear.

4) One must make a public confession of Christ.62

Some Welsh Presbyterian missionaries who had been on furlough had brought the Welsh revival to the Khasi Church in 1905.

2.2.1. The First Revival Movement, 1906

As mentioned above, the first revival movement in Mizoram came from Wales through the Khasi Church. When the Christians in Mizoram received the news about the revival movement happening in the Khasi Hills, it aroused great expectation for a similar revival to happen among them. Jones wrote:

We used to receive newspapers giving accounts of the miracles of grace occurring in Wales and had letters from friends naming some of our acquaintances who had known the power of the Spirit. We gave a resume of these in weekly meetings and it roused in us a deep desire to see something of this nature in Mizoram.63

Prayer meetings were conducted regularly that a like revival movement should occur in both the north and south Mizoram churches.64 Afterwards, in the hope of sharing the revival, both Welsh and Baptist missionaries in Mizoram jointly decided to send delegates to the Khasi Church.

In 1906, ten delegates attended the assembly of the Khasi Presbyterian Church at Mairang in the Khasi Hills (presently Meghalaya State).65 The Mizo delegates at first marvelled at what they saw in the revival meetings. On the final day of the Assembly, they were invited to come forward at the platform of the meeting and the whole congregation of about 8000 men and women prayed for them and their land. Thanga,

62 Ibid., 180-81.
63 Cited in Lloyd, History of the Church in Mizoram, 89.
64 See Ibid. See also Kipgen, Christianity and Mizo Culture, 216-17; Pachuau, Ethnic Identity and Christianity, 114-15.
65 They were Chawnga, Khuma, Thanga, Pawngi, Thangkungi, Vanchhunga and Siniboni from the North Lushai Hills, and Thankunga, Parima and Zathanga from the South. Lloyd, On Every High Hill, 52.
one of the Mizo delegates who attended the meeting, said, “At once all the people present there united in a mighty chorus of prayer. We stood there weeping and trembling. Not one of us remained unaffected”.66 After returning to Aizawl, on Monday morning, 9th April 1906, during a farewell prayer meeting to the southern delegates for the Mairang assembly, the long awaited revival movement broke out.67

As in the Welsh and of the Khasi revivals, the outbreak of the revival movement in Mizoram aroused enormous conviction and confession of sin, and the resultant experience of divine forgiveness.68 As a result, the Mizo people, who earlier had no consciousness of sin, began to appropriate the Missionaries’ idea of sin. They wept and wailed, and confessed their sins as “the Holy Spirit convicted them of their sin”. At the same time, they also “experienced the joy of sin forgiven which gave the Christians contentment in whatever state they were”.69 Lalsawma described how on the very occasion when the revival movement broke out, on Monday morning, 9th April 1906 at Mission Veng, Aizawl, Mrs. Hlunziki confessed her sins. He said:

Mrs. Hlunziki, wife of Duma (the first Mizo baptised) stood up before the congregation and danced continuously and made a spontaneous confession of sins, a confession which affected all deeply.70

The physical appearance of the revival movement in Mizoram was more or less the same as that of the revival in the Khasi Hills. They engaged in prolonged meetings, singing and waving their hands, their bodies swayed back and forth, some clapped their hands and some danced. Kipgen maintained that, though singing and dancing have always been part of the Mizo culture, “in the first revival the forms were not traditional but an imitation of the Khasi revival”.71 According to Mrs. John Roberts, the Khasi revival in 1905 took the following forms of expression:

Babel of voices arose in prayers followed by a hymn of victory sung with great enthusiasm, all waving hands, swaying bodies, and keeping time with their feet.

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66 Cited by Lloyd, History of the Church in Mizoram, 92. See also L.Z. Zolawma, "Mizorama Harhna (Revival Movement in Mizoram)," in Hruaina Eng VIII (Aizawl: Synod Publication Board, 1986), 79.
67 For further details on the first revival movement, see Lalsawma, Revivals the Mizo Way, 31ff; Kipgen, Christianity and Mizo Culture, 219ff.
68 See Lalsawma, Revivals the Mizo Way, 37.
69 Hminga, The Life and Witness of the Churches in Mizoram, 72.
70 Lalsawma, Revivals the Mizo Way, 36.
71 Kipgen, Christianity and Mizo Culture, 252.
People came running in to see the sight, but only to be swept by it. The meeting lasted 6 hours.72

The main Christological emphasis during this revival movement was the work of Christ on the cross, which was seen as forgiveness of sin. This Christology, which presupposed human beings as sinners, reaffirmed the Missionary Christology of Christ as the saviour from sin. Reginald A. Lorrain, a pioneer missionary among the Mara tribe in south Mizoram, described the content of his preaching among the Mara people:

I rose from my little stool and started on the old theme of God’s Love for them, that He had given His Son Jesus Christ to die in their stead, and pointed out to the best of my ability how that they were striving in the wrong way and in the wrong path, how to get the best out of life, leading them to the foot of the Cross and pleading with them to think of the Wonderful Words of Life which Jehovah in His wonderful love and kindness towards them had sent to them through ourselves, and pointing out very definitely to them the difference between ourselves and the Great Love of the Almighty God in sparing His Son Jesus Christ to die for them, who through sin were the enemies of God, and in the Great Love of Jesus Christ in offering up Himself as a willing sacrifice in their stead that they might live if they would only repent and turn to the Only True and Living God, Whom to know is Life Eternal.73

In the missionary theology, all Mizo people were considered to be slaves of sin. J.H. Lorrain said, “Satan had held complete sway for ages, and in seeking to appease him with sacrifices the Lushais had lost almost all knowledge of God”.74 In his other report, he said, “Nowadays, prayer and songs of praise are rising to God from many villages in this wild country, where recently Satan ruled supreme”.75 In this way, the missionaries perceived the people of Mizoram, with all their religious beliefs and cultural traditions, to be slaves of sin living under the “Power of Darkness”. However Jesus had liberated them through his death on the cross. Through the death of Christ, the forgiveness of sin became available for all the Mizo people.

Hence, one of the favourite songs of this revival movement, translated from the Khasi, *Isu, nangmah chauhvin misualte I ngaidam thei* (Jesus, you alone can forgive

74 See Baptist Church of Mizoram, *The Annual Reports of BMS*, 14.
75 Ibid., 25.
sinned), described Christ as a saviour from sin. The first and second stanzas of the English version read:

Jesus, Jesus, only you can
Forgive sinners as we are,
In your kindness and compassion,
You have purchased us by your blood.
  Remember us, remember us,
O Jesus our Saviour Lord.

Stronger than the highest mountains
No human sin is in you,
Only you our nearest kinsman
Have suffered our miseries.
  Remember us,
O Jesus our Saviour Lord.

In his BMS Report for 1906, Savidge described the testimony of one Lakher (now called Mara) boy, in which Jesus was pictured as a saviour of the “wicked” person. He wrote, “Then in a simple yet intelligent way he told the story of the wonderful love of Jesus, and the marvellous way in which he could save even a poor wicked Lakher boy”. 76 One of the most popular songs in southern Mizoram during this time was Enge saul tifat thei ang? 77 This song was translated from the English hymn, “What can wash my sins away?” The first stanza and its chorus stated as follows:

What can wash away my stain?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus!
What can make me whole again?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus!

Oh, precious is the flow
That makes me white as snow!
No other fount I know:
Nothing but the blood of Jesus! 78

In what may be regarded as the first article dealing with a Christological theme in the Mizo language, entitled, “Isuan a bual tawh che em?” (Has Jesus washed you?), published in August 1912 in Krısta Tlang-au (Herald of Christ), the significance of

76 See Lalsawma, Revivals the Mizo Way, 54. The Mizo version of the song is found in Presbyterian Kohhran leh Baptist Kohhran, Kristian Hla Bu (Christian Hymn Book) (Aizawl: Synod Publication Board; reprint, 2001), No. 130, 51.
77 See Baptist Church of Mizoram, The Annual Reports of BMS, 35.
78 See H. W. Carter and H. S. Luaia, eds., Mizoram Baptist Kohhran Chanchin (The History of the Mizoram Baptist Church), Revised ed. (Serkawn: Baptist Church of Mizoram, 1945; reprint, 1981), 68.
Christ’s work was portrayed as cleansing the sin of human beings, through which alone they could enter into heaven. In the article the unknown writer explained the work of Christ in the form of a story, which may be summarized as follows:

Once a young boy saw in his dream his friends playing happily inside a walled city. When he sought to enter the city, the gatekeeper told him that he was so dirty, and dirty children were not allowed to enter the city; he must therefore go home, wash his clothes clean, and then come afterwards. The boy did as he was told. But when he came back, again he was told that he was not clean enough, he must wash his clothes again. The boy repeatedly washed his clothes for three times, but could not clean them. Sadly, he cried! Then a young man came and asked why he cried. The boy told him his experience. Accordingly, the young man helped him and washed the boy’s clothes. When after this the boy went again to the city, the gatekeeper said, “Now you are clean, you can enter the city”.80

The story equated Jesus Christ with the young man who cleansed the clothes of the boy, and accordingly reflected the significance of Christ’s work as cleansing the sin of humanity. It said, “Unless Jesus cleansed the sin of humanity, no one can enter into heaven”.81 Thus, during the First Revival Movement, Mizo people began to appropriate the missionary Christology and to perceive Jesus Christ as a saviour, not only from the power of evil spirits, but also from individual sin.

According to the understanding of this Christological tradition, in order to receive the forgiveness of God and attain salvation, people had to become Pathian thuawi, which means “Obeyers of God”, a Mizo term used for denoting Christians. Becoming Pathian thuawi involved discontinuity with most pre-Christian belief and practice, for anything that had connection with the old religion was regarded as being part of the rule of Satan. As quoted earlier, the usual pattern of missionary preaching was, “Believe on ‘Pathian’[God] Jehovah and worship Him, then you don’t need to sacrifice to the demons any more”.82 Usually, in those early days in Mizoram, the sincerity of a convert was measured in terms of whether or not the person gave up drinking zu (rice-beer) and surrendered the kelmei charm.83 Likewise, the first annual meeting of the South Lushai Church in 1904 resolved that: 1) No Christian should work on Sunday, 2) No food sacrificed to evil spirits should be taken, and 3)

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80 Unnamed, "Isuan a bual tawh che em? (Has Jesus washed you?)," Krista Tlang-au XIII (1912), 123. Krista Tlang-au (Herald of Christ) was the first Mizo monthly Christian journal published by the Welsh Mission in Mizoram. The publication began in 1911, and it was later renamed Kristian Tlangau (Christian Herald).
81 Ibid.
82 See previous footnote number 50.
83 Lloyd, On Every High Hill, 48.
Christians should not drink rice beer.\(^{84}\) Similarly, M.E. Bowser described the condition of church membership in South Mizoram during the early period of Christianity:

> to become a church member in Lushai means a definite break with old traditions, customs and habits. Total abstinence is insisted on, old forms of worship must be abandoned, the Sabbath must be kept and regular attendance at church recorded. Every candidate for baptism and membership is subject to a course of instruction, and evidence is sought of a true change of heart and a personal spiritual experience before the privileges of church membership are conferred. Every member is expected to contribute a tithe of his possessions in money or kind during the year of the support of the church.\(^{85}\)

In this way, Christianity in Mizoram took the form of a direct attack against traditional culture. And in order to become Christian many people discarded their traditional cultural and customary practices. Speaking about the situation following the First Revival’s emphasis on conviction of sin, Lalsawma said:

> And from that time the Church was able to put a complete ban on strong drinks, participation in worldly feasts and festivals, on native songs and tunes together with religious chants of any kind, on fornication and adultery and on any other practical association with the old religion.\(^{86}\)

Since, in traditional tribal society, most of the cultural practices and customs were in one way or another interconnected with religious beliefs, and there was no clear cut-division between religious practices and secular socio-cultural practices, a blanket condemnation and prohibition of activities associated with the old religion led to the destruction of many traditional cultural and customary practices. The Church either openly prohibited or discouraged drinking of rice beer, participation in festivals, eating of a sacrificial meal, working on Sunday and the use of native songs and tunes. The use of native drums and participation in any cultural entertainments were also discouraged.\(^{87}\)

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\(^{84}\) See Carter and Luaia, eds., *Mizoram Baptist Kohhran Chanchin*, 50.


\(^{86}\) Lalsawma, *Revivals the Mizo Way*, 38.

\(^{87}\) See also Chalhunua, "Mizo Kristian hmasate Pathian thu pawmdan leh lanchhuahtr dan (The early Mizo Christians' way of understanding and doing of theology)," *Aizawl Theological College, Annual Magazine*, no. 16 (1994), 42-43.
Probably owing to this attack on the traditional religious-cultural heritage, a traditional cultural resurgence commonly known as *Puma Zai* (Puma’s song) emerged in Mizoram following the First Revival Movement. This movement served as one immediate background to the development of the Second Revival Movement.

**2.2.2. The Second Revival Movement, 1913**

Prior to the occurrence of the second revival movement, two significant events occurred in Mizoram: the *Puma Zai* movement and a severe famine. *Puma Zai* was a two-lined traditional chant, usually sung by a group of people, with dancing to the beat of a drum. The *Puma Zai* movement emerged from Ratu village sometime around 1908, and immediately became very popular throughout Mizoram.\(^8\) It was celebrated with great enthusiasm and public feasts in almost all the villages where it spread, and in most cases the whole village community would join together in singing and dancing. Because of the community nature of this activity, it was later called *Tlanglam Zai* (Community Dance-Song). It became a kind of public entertainment, and an effective means of expressing cultural patriotism.

In the wake of the *Puma Zai* movement, the Gospel rapidly lost ground. The people took no interest in other matters, and the evangelists virtually found no one to listen to their messages. Preaching became a burden. The following statement by J.M. Lloyd underscores the impact of *Puma Zai* on the Church and society from the missionaries’ point of view:

> One of the severest tests came in 1908, when there was a sudden resurgence of heathenism. An old Lushai tune was set to new words and became immediately popular. The words were generally in praise of a great village chief. It was reputed and believed by many, to have been a song sung by a jungle spirit. It spread like wild fire to all parts of the hills. Amazing manifestations of feelings accompanied the singing – almost as though the Revival were being parodied. Great feasts were held during which the young men and girls danced in ecstasy. These demonstrations were made in every village. The cause of Christ seemed doomed in Lushai. The travelling preachers complained that preaching was a burden. The Gospel was losing ground and no one wanted to listen to it.\(^9\)

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As indicated in Lloyd’s statement, the missionaries and most of the early Church leaders condemned and regarded the *Puma Zai* movement as the work of Satan to prevent the spread of the Gospel in Mizoram. Lorrain called it a “device of Satan, to retard the progress of the Gospel in these hills”. Liangkhaia considered it “a great manifestation of the power of darkness”. For C.L.Hminga, it was the work of Satan, comparable to the “‘Ghost Dance’ movement among the Western Indians of the U.S.A”.

On the other hand, for the leaders and those who were involved in the movement, the *Puma Zai* was an indigenous cultural movement comparable to the contemporary Christian revival movement. In their view, *Puma Zai* was “authentically indigenous, whereas Christianity was foreign”. One of the *Puma Zai* chants stated insultingly:

Lehkhabu keng Vai lem chang.  
*Chanchin hril reng reng, Puma!*  
(He who carries a book and preaches in the open air is imitating a foreigner,  
Let him be Puma!).

While the movement of *Puma Zai* was at its height, the second significant event occurred. In 1911, there was a severe *Mautam* famine, the nature of which was already noted in the previous chapter. The famine caused a severe setback to the *Puma Zai* movement. Due to the scarcity of food, neither the preparing of rice-beer nor feasting became possible, and the celebration of *Puma Zai* became impracticable. Though the singing of the song itself remained, the popular movement eventually came to an end. The decline of the *Puma Zai* movement and the misery of life the people experienced during the *Mautam* famine were significant for the outbreak of the Second Revival Movement.

As well as these two events, the repression of traditional Mizo culture itself played an important role. Traditionally the Mizos used to celebrate life with drinking of rice-beer, singing and dancing along with the beat of a drum. In the Western form of cool

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91 Quoted by Kippen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture*, 230.  
93 Kippen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture*, 230.  
95 See also Kippen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture*, 234; Lalsawma, *Revivals the Mizo Way*, 56.
and meditative worship services, Mizos had difficulty in expressing their feelings and aspirations. So they sought to express their emotion through movements like the earlier revival and the *Puma Zai*.\(^96\) At the time of the First Revival Movement, the Christian population was very small, so that the scope of its influence was limited, whereas the *Puma Zai* movement we have just mentioned developed among the non-Christian majority. But as the *Puma Zai* declined, the thirst for expressing the celebrative nature of the Mizo tribal life contributed to the development of the Second Revival Movement. At the same time, the physical hunger and suffering they had experienced during the famine prepared the people to be more open and more receptive to the Gospel.

The second revival started in March 1913 and lasted for two years. This movement was more extensive and powerful than the previous one, but its phenomena were more or less the same.\(^97\) The main theme of the second revival was the second coming of Christ, which was expected to take place in the very near future.\(^98\) The hymns sung, the sermons preached and the testimonies confessed centred around this theme. The most favoured songs sung during this revival included songs such as *En rawh Chhum zingah A lo kal* (Lo! He Comes with Clouds Descending), *Lalpa chu A lo kal leh ang* (The Lord is Coming By and By), *Pawte u, En ru Hriatna* (Ho! My Comrades, See the Banner) and others.\(^99\) Lalsawma has pointed out that, at the height of the revival, some people literally ran in the streets shouting, “The world is coming to an end now”.\(^100\)

Accordingly, the dominant theme of Christology during the Second Revival Movement was in relation to the second coming. Jesus was expected to come again very soon. Many people stopped working, believing that time would not permit them to wait for the harvest. Lalsawma describes the situation during this time:

\(^{96}\) See also Thanzauva, "A Theological Basis for Social Transformation", 368.
\(^{98}\) While this theme was the main emphasis among the majority northern area, Kipgen says that among the minority Baptist churches in the south the theological emphasis was upon the crucifixion of Jesus. Kipgen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture*, 258. The cross, being the central theme of the third revival, will be dealt with in the next section.
\(^{100}\) Ibid., 68.
Some stopped working in their jhums for time would not permit to wait as long as the harvest while others would not mend their houses. One old man at Durtlang said, “At that time, even the knives (chem) were uselessly blunt” for they were not attended to. One old lady at Khawbung told that as a girl of 15, she disposed of all of her additional dresses… for the certainty that the ones on her body would not wear away when Jesus come [sic]. Hrangkima of Biate lamented that the End would surely come before he could marry his sweetheart. Tuvea of Hmunhmeltha[,] a skilled hunter[,] distributed all his store of smoked meat in view of the impending end.101 Messages like, “Accept the Kingdom of God and the Salvation of Jesus Christ, for the world is coming to an end, yes be quick before it is too late!” constituted the central content of Church proclamation during this time.102 Saiathanga said that some children born during this time were even named “Tawkruaia” or “Tawkruaiai”, which means, “almost at the point of meeting [Jesus Christ at his second coming]”.103

This Christology of Christ’s second coming must be understood also within the framework of the understanding of Jesus Christ as the way to heaven. As we have noted earlier, the desire for heaven was one of the main reasons behind Mizo conversion to Christianity in the early period. Undoubtedly the same desire for heaven was also the main factor behind the emphasis on the second coming of Christ. The majority of indigenous Mizo Christian songs composed in the 1920s and 1930s had as their main theme the second coming of Christ and the hope for heaven. Lalsawma has noted that, out of 212 songs in the Mizo Kristian Hla Thar Bu (Mizo Christian New Hymn Book), 1939 edition, 95 or 44.8% consisted of songs related to the second coming and the hope of heaven. And of these, Mizo Christians directly composed 83.104

In this period, the Mizo Christian understanding of heaven was developed much further than the pre-Christian Mizo understanding of pialral, which was noted before. While pialral had been believed to be a place where there would be no famine and hunger, in Mizo Christian thought, heaven was considered to be much more than just a place where one would get sufficient food. In one of the earliest Mizo Christian

101 Ibid., 67.
102 Ibid.
103 See Saiathanga, Mizo Kohhran Chanchin, 56. The endings “a” and “i” in the two names indicate a male and a female respectively.
104 Lalsawma, Revivals the Mizo Way, 133. Note that this period covers the Third Revival, which we shall examine shortly.
songs, composed by Patea in 1920, *Ka Ropuina Tur leh Ka Himna Hmun* (A Place Where I Shall Be Honoured), heaven was pictured as a place where one would be honoured and safe, where there was no feeling of insecurity or fear of enemy. In another song, *Tunah A Thor Hmangaihna Eng Nuamah* (Now It Becomes New in the Blissful Light of Love), composed by R.L. Kamlala in 1922, heaven was pictured as a place where gladness would blossom like a flower without withering, where the groaning in the world of sorrow would become songs of gladness.

The fact that Jesus was understood as the way to heaven thus practically implied that he was seen as the way to a future where there was no famine and hunger, where one would be honoured and safe, and where one’s groaning would become songs of gladness. In other words, Jesus Christ was seen as the key to wholeness of life, or in existential terms, as Thanzauva puts it, to "hope for better life". Mizo Christians hoped to share this heaven through the work of Jesus Christ on the cross. They expressed this hope in song:

*Van hmun ropui I malsawmna famkim a ni,*  
*Kalvari tlangah kei min pe e.*  
(The wonderful heaven is the perfection of your blessing,  
It was given to me at Mount Calvary).*

Similarly, in one of the earliest indigenous Mizo Christian songs, composed in 1922 by R.L. Kamlala, *Rinin Thlir Thiam Ila* (When Looked At in Faith), the poet expressed his hope of going to heaven because of Jesus Christ. The fourth stanza of the song stated:

*Angel varte lenna,*  
*Ni ila seng lo ram khi,*  
*Aw thisen I zarah*  
*Engtik nge ka thlen ve ang?*  
(Where the white angels live,  
Where the sun never sets,  
Oh, through your blood  
When shall I be there?).

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106 Presbyterian Church of Mizoram, *Hla Bu Te*, No. 71, 39. For the composer of this song, see Lalhangliana et al., eds., *Mizo Hla leh a Phuahtute*, 157-68.

107 Thanzauva, *Theology of Community*, 222.

108 For the full version of this hymn, see Presbyterian Church of Mizoram, *Hla Bu Te*, No. 93, 52.
It was no wonder that the tribal people who lived in isolated hill areas of Mizoram, stricken by abject poverty and diseases, were longing deeply for heaven. The experience of severe Mautam famine could certainly have intensified this longing. Thus, we have seen that the Second Revival movement in Mizoram was inspired largely by an indigenous cultural revival movement, or Puma Zai. Hence, it may be regarded as the Christian version of the Puma Zai movement. In regard to its theological emphasis, however, it was primarily centred on the second coming of Christ. On the one hand, this understanding and expectation of Christ’s imminent return to the earth to take them to his kingdom gave the early Mizo Christians strength to endure and overcome persecution and hardship. In this sense, it gave them “a new identity and better means of living here on earth”. The belief also created a great concern for their neighbours in terms of a desire to evangelise them before the end. Hence, many people went out on preaching tours, and evangelistic groups were formed. As a result, church membership increased rapidly.

On the other hand, not all the elements of this Christology were positive. As pointed out earlier, the emphasis on heaven and the imminent return of Christ led people to adopt otherworldliness and a negative attitude towards the present life. Therefore, a Christology that emphasized the purpose of Christ’s redemption as a better life beyond this world largely failed to give the Christian community a sense of responsibility for the social, economic and political problems facing the society. Instead of participating in the struggle for social changes, people tended to adopt a life style of waiting for heaven in desperation.

2.2.3. The Third Revival Movement, 1919

The third revival movement in Mizoram occurred approximately five years later in 1919. It was preceded by the outbreak of the First World War and a severe influenza epidemic. In May 1917 the colonial British Government sent 2100 Mizo men to Europe, as the Lushai Labour Corps, to render manual help to the Allied Forces. After

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109 For a detailed version of the song, see Ibid., No. 235, 128. English translation is mine.
110 See Thanzauva, Theology of Community, 222.
111 In the year of 1913 alone, the Christian population grew from 3999 to 7423, an increase of 3424 members. See Kipgen, Christianity and Mizo Culture, 342-43.
a year of service in France and Mesopotamia, 2029 men returned home on 1 July 1918.112 This participation in the European war considerably affected the Mizos’ worldview and attitude towards the British. As Lalsawma observes, the participation in the war not only widened the mental horizon and worldview of Mizo society as a whole, and of the participants in particular, it also created a new sense of belonging to the British Empire, resulting in further acceptance of their domination. Lalsawma writes:

So far, Mizos attitude to the British was that of the conquered to the conqueror, but from this time, participation in the world war created a new sense of belonging to the wider British Empire, resulting further into ready acceptance of the British domination.113

Immediately following the war, an influenza epidemic broke out. It swept through Europe and many other countries, and reached Mizoram in early 1919.114 The epidemic was so severe and widespread in Mizoram that the year 1919 was remembered in Mizo history as Hripui Vej Kum (Year of the Great Plague). A large number of people died in different parts of the country.115 The plague turned Mizoram into a gloomy place of sorrow and desperate bereavement. People became nervous and lost confidence in earthly matters. At the height of this epidemic the third revival broke out and, hence, many people considered the occurrence of the third revival as “the coming of the Holy Spirit to comfort us in our bereavement”.116 The movement broke out in 1919 and spread quickly throughout Mizoram. It even went beyond their borders and reached Tripura and Manipur states, where other Mizo people lived.117 Kipgen says that it also reached other tribal people, especially Tangkhul Nagas.118

The central message of the Third Revival was the cross of Christ and his redemptive suffering for the salvation of human beings. It was proclaimed powerfully through

112 See Hminga, The Life and Witness of the Churches in Mizoram, 40. See also Kipgen, Christianity and Mizo Culture, 236.
113 Lalsawma, Revivals the Mizo Way, 83.
114 Kipgen, Christianity and Mizo Culture, 237.
115 Liangkhaia estimated that in the North Lushai Hills, not less than forty people died in every village and in some low lying areas the death toll rose to as many as one hundred and twenty people. In the most affected village, the death toll was estimated to be as high as four hundred. See Ibid.
116 See Lalsawma, Revivals the Mizo Way, 84.
117 Interestingly, the movement started on Saturday night 26 July 1919 simultaneously at three different villages, viz, Nisapui in the north, and Zotlang and Thingsai in the south. Nisapui village is located 40 kilometres north of Aizawl. Zotlang village, which has now become part of Lunglei town, is about 238 kilometres south of Aizawl, and Thingsai is 206 kilometres south east of Aizawl. For further details concerning how the event started, see Ibid., 84, 87-96.
118 Kipgen, Christianity and Mizo Culture, 238.
sermons, hymns and various other ways. People wept and sobbed as they heard the message of the cross. Some even physically symbolised the crucifixion of Christ. They stood against the wall, or lay prostrate for a long time on the floor in the midst of the meeting, stretching their arms out after the manner of the crucified Christ. Other revivalists around them would visualize them as Christ suffering and weep at them. As we have seen, the message of the cross was neither a new theme to Mizo Christians nor unique to their understanding of Christology. It had been the main christological theme of the First Revival, which came to them from Wales through the Khasi Church. Lalsawma says:

The preaching of the Cross was not new at that time...it always formed the basis of missionary preaching from the beginning, and several hymns of the cross were already in use at that time.\textsuperscript{120}

The Third Revival made the death of Christ on the cross real and personal in the Mizo Christian experience. It became a basis of hope for salvation from God and life after death in the context of their suffering from “the great plague” and the impoverished condition of their life. Kaivungi recalled how the revival started on the night of July 26, 1919 in Nisapui village:

Three of us [Kaivungi, Buti and Ziki] were singing and praying in our house on that night, and all at once we were made to see the reality of Christ’s suffering for us so that we could not contain ourselves but wept bitterly for joy and sorrow. We continued singing and praying the whole night.\textsuperscript{121}

There were two significant indigenous characteristics of this revival. One was the introduction of a native drum in Christian worship. As people expressed their emotion through the revival, the native drum, which had been hitherto rejected in Christian worship because of its association with non-Christian festivals and drinking of rice-beer, was reintroduced. It was gladly accepted and used in all the churches throughout the country, except in the two Mission station churches at Mission Veng, Aizawl and Serkawn.\textsuperscript{122} In these two churches drums were introduced only in the 1970s, after the western missionaries had left the country.

\textsuperscript{119} See Saiathanga, \textit{Mizo Kohhran Chanchin}, 61. See also Zolawma, "Mizoram Harhna," 98.
\textsuperscript{120} Lalsawma, \textit{Revivals the Mizo Way}, 85.
\textsuperscript{121} Cited in Ibid., 87.
\textsuperscript{122} See Hminga, \textit{The Life and Witness of the Churches in Mizoram}, 117.
The second characteristic was the development of indigenous Christian songs. Till then, most of the hymns used in worship services had been translated either from English or from Welsh. In the wake of the Third Revival, however, many people began to compose indigenous Mizo Christian songs with new tunes, amalgamating English and traditional Mizo tunes. These new songs were sung both in the church services and in the community home gatherings, commonly called in Mizo Lengkhawm. However, while the form of worship changed, the songs retained the theology of the missionaries. The Mizo Christians themselves thus introduced into their indigenous form of Christian worship the very concepts of Christ as saviour from individual sin and as entry into heaven, which the missionaries had been proclaiming since their arrival in 1890’s. We look at some of these hymns.

According to Saiaithanga, two songs that had been most popular sung during the Third Revival Movement were “Ka thla thlawk la, thuro angin” (Fly my spirit like a dove), composed in 1921 by Kapliana, an elder of Zotlang Baptist Church, and “Thisen hlu, thisen hlu” (O precious, precious blood). In these hymns, Jesus’ death on the cross was depicted as an act of redemption on behalf of sinners. In the hymn, Ka thla thlawk la, thuro angin, the poet passionately appealed to his hearers to have a personal experience of the suffering of Jesus, whom he portrayed as a “Redeemer” (Tlantu) who was “squeezed” by sinfulness (suahmain a sawr). He described the significance of Christ’s suffering as opening the door of the eternally blissful heavenly house (chatuan lawman van in). A second popular hymn, translated from

123 Ibid.
124 See Saiaithanga, Mizo Kohhran Chanchin, 61. Other songs popularly sung during the Third Revival besides these two were: Thu mak ka sawi nin theih lah chu (The news I’m not tired of telling), Ka Lalpa misualah an chhia (They counted my Lord as sinner), Ka sual rit tak phurh leh lei ninawm hi (Weary of earth and laden with my sin), Thlarau Thiangklim rawn tir ang che (Send the Holy Spirit), Khawvel hi bo mahse Issua ka net (Fade, fade, each earthly joy Jesus is mine), Issua chanchin ka hre zual ang (More about Jesus would I know), Aw hmandaish na khawvel entu (Oh Love the illuminator of the world), Rinin thir thiam ila (When we looked at [him] in faith), Ka Chhandamtu ka fak ang che (I will praise you my Saviour), Aw Halleluiah, Lalpa ropui ber (Oh halleluiah, the most glorious Lord), Rinna thla zar ila (If we stretch our wings of faith), En teh, Chhandamtu I Lal chuan (Behold, the Saviour your Lord), Chhandamtu lungnaihna Kalvari lam (Towards Calvary, the agony of the Saviour), Aw khawiah rge Chhandamtu chuan (Oh, where the Saviour suffered his passion), Lei lal puan ropui chu a lawm ang (The earthly royal gown will fade away), En ru, Pathian Beram No (Behold, the Lamb of God), Dam lai tuipui fowm piab lamah chuan (Beyond the wave of the sea of life) and A ral mek lei ninawm hi (The troubled world is passing away). These are to be found in Lalhmuaka, Zoram Thima Ata Engah, 150.

125 See Presbyterian Church of Mizoram, Hla Bu Te, No. 53, 30.
the Welsh, was Thisen hlu, thisen hlu, which clearly re-expressed the Christological understanding introduced to Mizo Christians:

The precious, precious blood,
That flows on the wooden cross,
It redeemed me from the power of sin
And justified me, a sinner.
Where the blackest sinner became white
Was the precious blood of Calvary.

The precious, precious blood,
The opener of the heavenly way.
You will become our song of ceaseless praise
When we reach heaven.
There we will sing ceaselessly, saying
Blood, blood, blood, blood.126

In this hymn Christ’s death on the cross was depicted as an act of redemption from the power of sin through which a sinner becomes justified. We have seen that this way of understanding the significance of Christ’s death had been appropriated by the Mizo Christians since the First Revival Movement.

The Mizo acceptance of the notion of sin in the wake of the revival movement needs to be set in context. While the notion of “sin” had been unfamiliar, the notion of sacrifice was part of their culture in two ways. Firstly, Mizos in their pre-Christian religion used to offer sacrifices to appease different spirits who they thought were causing sickness and misfortune. Secondly, Mizos were very familiar with the idea of laying down one’s life for others and, in particular, the community.127 Here we note that when the missionaries interpreted the significance of Christ’s death in terms of a sacrifice offered on behalf of the Mizo people for their salvation from the power of evil, the Mizos had no difficulty in appropriating this message. Edwin Rowlands, one of the earliest Welsh missionaries in Mizoram, even considered the traditional Mizo sacrificial system as a kind of a praeparatio evangelica. Lloyd stated that, in Rowlands’ view, “the shedding of blood in the sacrifices pointed forward to the need for the ‘one perfect sacrifice’”.128

126 For the full Mizo version from which this hymn is translated, see Presbyterian Kohhran leh Baptist Kohhran, Kristian Hla Bu, No. 141, 163.
127 We will examine this notion in Chapters Four and Five.
128 Lloyd, On Every High Hill, 79.
Hence, Mizo Christians began to accept the Christology that perceived Jesus Christ as one who died to redeem human beings from punishment for sin. In his hymn, *En r’u Pathian Beram No* (Behold, the Lamb of God), Thanherha thus described the significance of Christ’s death in terms of the washing away of human sin. The chorus and the third stanza go as follows:

*Chhandumtu nak thianglimah chuan
Thisen leh tui a lo luang chhuak;
Ka thinlungin theihnghilh suh se,
Misual faina lui chu.*

*Tupawh chu thisen luia inbual chu,
An sual vur aiih a var ang;
Aw, I sual bawhhlawh chu rawn silfai la,
"Lo kal rawh aw," Chhandumtu’n a ti.*

The English translation reads:

> From the holy side of the Saviour  
> Blood and water came flowing out;  
> Let my heart never forget it  
> The river of cleansing for the sinner.

> Whosoever takes a bath at the river of that blood,  
> Their sin shall be washed as white as snow;  
> Oh come and clean all the dirt of your sin  
> The Saviour is calling, “Come”.

While in the traditional religion, sacrifices were performed primarily for the purpose of recovering from illnesses, in early Mizo Christian thought the emphasis was in relation to life after death. Those who believed in Jesus Christ and became *Pathian thuawi* would not only escape hell but also go to heaven. Thangbawnga, one of the most popular itinerant evangelists in the 1920s, whom we already mentioned as instrumental in the conversion of more than four thousand people to Christ, used to appeal to the people, saying:

> I ask you to become Pathian Thuawih (God's obedient). You all need to be free from the bondage of the demons. Otherwise, you will surely go to the place of eternal torment, the great lake of fire. But if you obey God, you will go to heaven.*

The Mizo Christian appropriation of Missionary Christology is not surprising, if we look at the context of Mizoram at that time. As mentioned earlier, during the British

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129 See Presbyterian Kohhran leh Baptist Kohhran, *Kristian Hla Bu*, No. 175, 99.
occupation, Mizoram was an “excluded area”. It had no proper communication link with other parts of the country. The people were poor, illiterate and dependent. They had very little knowledge of what was happening in other parts of the world. In this situation, the Western missionaries who brought the Gospel and planted the churches were looked upon as models of Christianity. Since they were the only Christians the Mizo knew, whatever the missionaries said and did was regarded as the Christian way of living and doing. The new converts imitated and followed them in various ways of life. People who in their past used to keep long hair cut their hair, put on long pants, and began to say, “Ka pu, chibai” (Good Morning, Sir).\footnote{131} It is therefore quite natural that Mizo Christians accepted and appropriated the Western theology they received through the missionaries without question.

When Mizo Christians perceived Christ’s suffering and death as an offer of sacrifice to remove their sins, they were deeply moved. On the one hand, it led them to break into tears, resulting in repentance and conversion. On the other hand, however, this way of understanding the work of Christ was very individualistic. Its significance was mainly confined to moralism, and the salvation it expressed effected a change primarily in the spiritual life of individual persons, rather than in the conditions in which people lived.\footnote{132} Hence, the individualistic approach to Christology overlooked the corporate structure of the tribal society and had very little significance for the community as a whole.

\subsection{2.2.4. The Fourth Revival Movement, 1930}

A further major revival movement was kindled sometime around 1930. Like the previous revivals, this revival was preceded by two severe natural calamities, namely, a great landslide and a bamboo famine called Thingtam. An incessant downpour of monsoon rain in June 1929 caused massive landslides and floods all over Mizoram. Roads were blocked, streams swelled and the whole state was cut off from the rest of the country. As a result, the importation of goods became impossible. The landslides

\footnote{131} See also Z.T. Sangkhuma, \textit{Missionary-te Hnahma (Footprint of the Missionaries)} (Aizawl: M.C. Lalrinthanga, 1995), 177-78.

\footnote{132} In this regard the views of Simon S. Maimela are relevant to Mizo context. See Simon S. Maimela, "The Atonement in the Context of Liberation Theology," \textit{International Review of Mission} LXXV, no. 299 (1986), 262-63.
also washed away a number of forest granaries where the previous year’s paddy harvest was stored in halfway houses between the rice fields and the villages. It also destroyed many rice fields where cultivation was going on, causing an inevitable failure of the rice crop and leading to eventual famine.

The landslide was further aggravated by a famine known as Thingtam. A medium type of bamboo called Rawthing flowered all over the country in 1929. It caused an incredible multiplication of jungle rats that attacked and devoured standing crops in the fields, causing famine. Although the destruction caused by the rats during this time was not so extensive as the Mautam famine that had occurred earlier, the experience of the famine and the landslides together caused considerable misery and hardship to the people. In addition to these problems, a dysentery epidemic occurred in Aizawl during this time, and many people died. The experience of all these hardships, as Lorrain observed, turned the thoughts of the people towards God.

These experiences in turn contributed, in the writer’s view, to the occurrence of the Fourth Revival, which broke out around 1930.

The Fourth Revival was marked by a strong emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts. Every aspect of revival activity was considered as the work and gift of the Spirit. Besides the usual ecstatic dancing, and healing through prayer and laying on of hands, this movement introduced some new elements, such as, speaking in unknown tongues, transference of the Spirit by touch, symbolic gestures, trances and visions. Revivalists encouraged people to join the dancing during the singing, which was regarded as the expression of the work of the Holy Spirit. Those who danced were considered thlarau mi (spiritual persons), and those who did not dance were considered tisa mi (nominal Christians or carnalists). Any church leader who pleaded for self-control was branded as anti-Holy Spirit, and those who did not dance

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133 See Baptist Church of Mizoram, The Annual Reports of BMS, 225.
134 The last known Thingtam famine had happened in 1880. See Kipgen, Christianity and Mizo Culture, 243.
136 Baptist Church of Mizoram, The Annual Reports of BMS, 255.
137 The actual date the Fourth Revival started is obscure. Carter and Luaia have traced it to 1926, V.L. Siama dates it in 1930, J.M. Lloyd in 1933 and Saiathanga in 1935. Lalsawma maintains that it started around 1930. See Lalsawma, Revivals the Mizo Way, 151.
138 See Lloyd, On Every High Hill 56 and Lalsawma, Revivals the Mizo Way, 155-70.
or speak in tongues were considered as not having received the Holy Spirit. At the height of the revival some revivalists even tended to regard themselves as super-spiritual, claiming to have received direct revelations from God and foretelling things to come. Such visionary persons included even a serving minister. 

In this Fourth Revival, the gift of the Holy Spirit was perceived as an outward sign of subjective appropriation of the salvation of Christ won on the cross. As they experienced the gift of the Spirit in their lives, people were filled with gladness and joy. Mizos believed that because Jesus Christ had suffered and died on behalf of all human beings, salvation become attainable free of cost, without costly sacrifices. By believing in Jesus Christ they could not only achieve salvation from the power of evil spirits, but also enter into heaven and escape mei dil (the great lake of fire), a place of eternal torment for life after death. Hminga states that Rev. Liangkhaia “told me that the great majority of the Mizo first generation Christians became Christian for fear of hell”. In fact, from the situation of the poor and unsuspecting tribal people, the possibility of escaping hell and attaining heaven through believing in Jesus Christ was no small thing. It was this conviction of faith that made Mizo Christians so happy that they danced enthusiastically during the revival movement. E.M.Chapman and M.Clark, who worked as BMS women missionaries in South Mizoram during this period, stated thus:

In his life and death Jesus has made the one and only sacrifice needful. All receive eternal life, not by our own efforts in making many sacrifices, but by faith in Him. To live amongst converted animists was to realise how much this meant to them. All their favourite hymns were those dealing with this theme and it was to these they danced more than to any others, overcome with joy that through faith in Jesus they could have eternal life, and thanksgiving that God would give them this.

For tribal people like the Mizos, the sacrificial model of interpreting the death of Christ was quite intelligible. As mentioned before, it moved their hearts to repentance.

139 Hminga, The Life and Witness of the Churches in Mizoram, 162; Suaithanga, Mizo Kohrpan Chanchin, 68-69.
140 Rev. Chhawna was one such visionary person, who even published his visionary book, entitled Pastor Chhawna Inlarne. Lalsawma, Revivals the Mizo Way, 163.
141 Hminga, The Life and Witness of the Churches in Mizoram, 269. Chalhmuna also noted fear of hell as one primary factor that led many Mizo people to embrace Christianity. See Chalhmuna, "Mizo Kristian hmasate Pathian thu pawmdan leh lanelhuahntir dan," 43.
142 See E.M. Chapman and M. Clark, Mizo Miracle, ed. Marjorie Sykes (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1968), 90-91. E.M. Chapman arrived in Mizoram in 1919 and served as a school teacher till her retirement in 1952. She was called by the Mizos, Pi Zirtiri (Ms. Teacher).
when they contemplated the sacrificial love of Christ revealed on the cross. E.L. Mendus, the Welsh missionary in Mizoram, described in the late 1930s how the Mizo people were touched by the influence of the cross during the revival movement.

The revival in the North Lushai Hills has brought untold blessings to thousands of people especially when it centred in the truth of the Cross. During those years the name of Calvary became better known even than the names of their own hills. Everywhere people’s hearts were melted by the story of the Passion of our Lord and they were led into an experience of conviction and forgiveness of sins.143

By way of criticism, however, we may observe that this sacrificial perspective for understanding the work of Christ is very objective in its approach. It perceives Christ’s death as something accomplished objectively for human salvation without human awareness or participation. Hence, it does not give adequate emphasis to human participation in the economy of salvation. As Macquarrie says, human beings cannot be saved as, for instance, a burning building can be saved, by an action that is entirely external to them. Human beings can be saved only when they respond to, and appropriate into their existence, the saving activity that has been directed toward them.144

2.3. Christ in the Born-again Movements

From the Fourth Revival up to the present, the theological legacy of the churches in Mizoram has been largely influenced by a strong movement of spiritual regeneration or awakening commonly known as piantbar harhna (or “born again” revival). The movement was part of the legacy of the evangelical theological movement associated with the Evangelical awakening of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Europe and America. It emphasized the need for individual spiritual conversion (or being “born again”) from nominal Christianity to what is claimed to be committed Christian discipleship. The idea of being “born again” is derived from Jesus’ words, “You must be born again” (John 3: 7). It is applied to mean a Christian who experiences “a change of heart brought about by accepting Christ by faith as personal Lord and saviour”.145 Hence, “You must be born again, otherwise you cannot enter the

143 Cited by Kipgen, Christianity and Mizo Culture, 268-69.
144 Macquarie, Principles of Christian Theology , 316.
145 K. Thanzauva, Transforming Theology: A Theological Basis for Social Transformation (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2002), 238.
Kingdom of God" formed the central message of proclamation in this revival movement.

The Born-again movement in Mizoram can be broadly divided into two waves. The first wave started in the mid 1920s, the second wave started around 1960 and continues up till this day. In both cases, the movement came from outside Mizoram.

2.3.1. The First Wave of the Born-again Movement


Dohnuna was the son of Chhunga, who was an elder in the court of the Sailo Chief, Kairuma. He passed the Lower Primary School examination in 1903, becoming one of the earliest Mizos to achieve this status, which was a rare opportunity for the people of Mizoram in those days. He then became a shopkeeper and by the year 1911 had became the richest businessman in Aizawl. The Second Revival Movement in 1913 changed his life. He left his business and joined the ministry of the North East India General Mission (hereinafter referred to as NEIG Mission) and worked there in the neighbouring area outside Mizoram till his death in 1931.

In the mid 1920s, three men of North East Khawdungsei village (hereinafter referred to as Khawdungsei), namely, Chhunga, Dengkawnga and Darneihzova, sought intensively for salvation through prayer and Bible reading, even to the extent of refusing to sleep with their wives. They happened to read the *Spurgeon Sap Thurawn*. The book immensely enlightened their hearts. Through their reading of the book the three friends came to understand that salvation was to be achieved not by works, but by faith in Jesus Christ alone. The new discovery filled them with great joy. They said:


What an easy thing it was as this book simply said, ‘It is by faith that we become saved!’ For us, we sought it intensively for a long time and did not find it; apparently we had followed a roundabout way.\[148\]

They then began enthusiastically to proclaim their new experience of salvation and the new teaching subsequently filled the whole village. In this teaching, the death of Christ was interpreted as God’s act of grace by which sinful human beings were counted righteous or justified before God. Hence, the new teaching portrayed the significance of Christ’s death on the cross in terms of justification. A strong emphasis was placed upon “by faith alone, not by good works”, as the way of appropriating the salvation offered through the work of Christ.

The teaching of justification “only by faith” created enormous confusion in the Church. Most members of the Church could not accept the idea. The area pastor Rev. Thangkhuma rejected the teaching as tapchhak zawl thu mai mai (homemade doctrine).\[149\] In their view, this teaching undermined the necessity of good works in one’s daily Christian life. They argued:

Even though we believe that the blood of Christ has redeemed us, still then we can commit sin. Your teaching that ‘I am already justified, or I am already saved’ is a false teaching. You emphasized only one aspect to receive salvation, and that is wrong. For it is said, ‘Faith without works is dead’.\[150\]

While the controversy over this issue of justification by faith alone was going on, the Secretary of the NEIG Mission in New York, USA, Mr. Howard Dinwiddie, visited their mission field in northeast India. On his way to Burma in December 1925, he came to Khawdungsei village with Rev. Rohmingliana. They stopped for one Sunday in the village and Dinwiddie preached on the theme of justification by faith. After the worship service, Dinwiddie held a discussion with the local church elders, in which he was reported to have supported the idea of salvation not by work, but by faith in Christ alone and affirmed this by interpreting 2 Timothy 1:9: “…saved us and called

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\[148\] See Lalruali, Zoram Hmarchhak Harhna, 37. The English translation is by the writer.

\[149\] Lalawma, Revivals the Mizo Way, 115. In Mizoram, churches belonging to the same denomination are divided into several administrative units, such as presbytery or area church council, pastorate and local churches. Generally, about five to ten local churches formed one pastorate. Each pastorate is looked after by one ordained minister, who is called pastor. The Rev. Thangkhuma was a pastor; the Khawdungsei local church fell under his pastorate.

\[150\] Lalruali, Zoram Hmarchhak Harhna, 38.
us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace".\(^{151}\) After that the strong opposition against the new teaching began to subside in the village.

Nevertheless, the new teaching continued to arouse extensive discussion and debate with those who disagreed with the idea. Wherever it spread, the debate became so disturbing that, when it reached Ngopa village, some of those who disagreed with the new teaching reported the matter to the Welsh Mission centre in Aizawl. It is reported that, in 1942, Welsh missionary Rev. E.L. Mendus went to Ngopa village and affirmed the new teaching.\(^{152}\) In 1946 another Welsh missionary, Rev. Basil E. Jones, went to Phullen village and affirmed the theological validity of the Born-again movement. With great pleasure and satisfaction he was reported to have commented, “Now even if all the missionaries leave Mizoram, the fire of the Gospel will not fade away”.\(^{153}\)

Unlike the revival movements we have discussed before, most people who experienced being “born again” claimed to have assurance of salvation. The usual way they came to experience being “born again” was, that in a sudden moment they received enlightenment, and came to believe that they had attained salvation and thus become the children of God. Thangpuiliana, a villager of Saiitual who claimed to have the “born again” experience, narrated his testimony of how he received salvation:

While we were cultivating in the rice-field on 18th August 1949, I came to receive the assurance of salvation through this hymn: ‘Before everyone of us is set Christ’s measuring scale, the empty and the full [sic] will be revealed when it is measured. Your victory on Calvary, O Jesus, has been put on my side, so that I will be able to outweigh the righteousness of the other side.’ The Lord Jesus has already outweighed the righteousness set on the other side of the measurement, which I could not outweigh by my own. I was to believe this. I believed it, and felt as if my body was lifted on high above. Just like Mr.Christian [of John Bunyan’s Pilgrim’s Progress], whose burden fell away, I felt like jumping and running.\(^{154}\)

The experience of being “born again” gave many people immense happiness and a passion to save “lost souls”. For some revivalists, however, the idea that in Jesus

\(^{151}\) Ibid., 39. See also Lalsawma, Revivals the Mizo Way, 116. For the visit of Dinwiddie, see also Lloyd, History of the Church in Mizoram, 243.

\(^{152}\) See Zolawma, “Mizorum Harhna,” 105. See also Lalu, Zoram Hmarchhak Harhna, 43-44.

\(^{153}\) Lalu, Zoram Hmarchhak Harhna, 51. The English translation is by the writer.

\(^{154}\) Cited in Ibid., 56. The English translation is by the writer. The quotation of the hymn is from Presbyterian Kohhram leh Baptist Kohhram, Kristian Hla Bu, No. 210, first stanza, 237.
Christ human beings were already redeemed from sin and that by faith in Christ, this salvation became attainable, gave an impression that they had no other responsibility, but were free to do and live however they liked. “If we believe, it’s enough” became the attitude for some of them. This line of thought resulted in the formation of extremists groups, such as that of Zakaia and his party who, according to Lalsawma, held the conviction: “My salvation in heaven is so sure that it could not be forfeited had I even live [sic] with another man’s wife”.

The first wave of the Born-again movement did not spread widely. It was confined mainly within the northeastern area of Mizoram. In the subsequent period, however, a more powerful movement occurred, with wide-ranging influences, to which we now turn.

2.3.2. The Second Wave of the Born-again Movement

While the First Born-again movement was gradually spreading in the northeastern area, a more intensive movement occurred in Mizoram around 1960. By this time, Mizoram had already celebrated the Golden Jubilee of Christianity and the process of the Mizos’ conversion to Christianity had also been completed. So the Born-again movement occurred as a form of re-conversion, with an emphasis on the inner change of the individual person. Most writers have maintained that this second wave of the Born-again movement came to Mizoram through educated Mizo lay-leaders, who had received their education outside Mizoram. While they were at their studies, these lay-leaders attended salvation crusades or campaigns and from there they became “born again”. So when they came back to Mizoram, they organized the same form of

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155 See Lalhmukha, Zoram Thima Ata Engah, 160.
156 See Lalsawma, Revivals the Mizo Way, 181. Zolawma noted that Kaphranga, a native of Hnahlan village, held the same idea, that even if he committed adultery the salvation he attained in Christ would not be lost. See Zolawma, "Mizoram Harhma," 105.
157 Mizoram celebrated the Golden Jubilee of Christianity in 1944 with a theme Zoram tusanah Krista lo ial rawh se (Let Christ reign throughout Mizoram). Most Mizo church leaders felt that by 1960 the Mizo conversion to Christianity had been completed. See Lalsangkima Pachau, "Robert Arthington, Jr. and the Arthington Aborigines Mission," Indian Church History Review XXVIII, no. 2 (1994), 123; Kipgen, Christianity and Mizo Culture, 209f.
salvation campaigns and retreats and sought to reproduce the spiritual experience they received outside Mizoram. Notable among them was Dr. R.K. Nghakliana.\textsuperscript{159}

Dr. R.K. Nghakliana returned from his study in 1957 and worked as a medical doctor at Presbyterian Church of Mizoram Synod Hospital in Durtlang, Aizawl.\textsuperscript{160} He was greatly interested in the Born-again movement. Whenever he got the opportunity, he shared the message of salvation with others, starting from the sick people and the hospital nurses, and with local youths and different churches in Aizawl town. From 1958 on, he conducted spiritual retreats and camps, through which many people began to experience being “born again” in their lives. Subsequently, a number of such salvation camps, retreats and crusades were conducted in different parts of Mizoram and in these endeavours several evangelistic groups and individuals were involved. In the beginning, the born-again campaigns were organized mainly by youth fellowships and voluntary evangelistic groups, but later this became a movement in which all churches in Mizoram were actively involved.

In the born-again campaigns, certain procedures were usually followed.\textsuperscript{161} In the early campaigns, the preacher used to invite the people towards the close of the preaching to commit their lives to God in prayer. The devotee had to pray, “O Lord, my God, I accept this day/night your Son Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Saviour. Help me in my weaknesses”. In subsequent campaigns, this form of prayer was abandoned. Instead, the preacher invited the audience as follows: “Whoever accepts Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Saviour, please stand up from your seat or raise your hands up or come in front of the pulpit”. So any person who decided to accept Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Saviour would respond to the challenge and become “born again”. As a result of such born-again campaigns, a number of people confessed to being “born again”. Thanzauva states that, according to research he conducted, during 1965-

\textsuperscript{159} See Zolawma, "Mizorama Harhna," 107. Other persons notable for the spread of the Second Born-again Movement in Mizoram included Vanlalnghaka, Dr. Lalnuntluanga, Rokamlova, Thanchhunga, P.C. Muanthanga, Lalchungnunga, F. Lalruia, Darchhunga, Lalrammawia Ngente, C.L. Muana. Some of these names are mentioned by Lalruali and H.S. Luaia; see Lalruali, Zoram Hmarchharek Harhna, 96-102; Luaia, Mizorama harhna alo thel dan, 14.

\textsuperscript{160} For a brief account of Dr.R.K. Nghakliana’s “born again” ministry, see Lalruali, Zoram Hmarchharek Harhna, 96-103.

\textsuperscript{161} Sangkhuma, Harhna hi le! Harhna leh a enka wldan, 27.
1985 about 500,000 persons heard the message of salvation or being “born again”; and out of these people 90% confessed to being “born again”.162

The basic perspective of Christology in the second wave of the Born-again movement was not different from those of the previous movements we have discussed. Generally, the movement emphasized the utter depravity and lost-ness of human beings, following the Fall.163 It interpreted the death of Christ on the cross as a punishment of sin on behalf of human beings and proclaimed that, through the death of Christ his Son, God justifies sinful human beings. It held that, in order to attain this justification, one has to accept Jesus Christ in faith as personal Lord and Saviour. And as in the previous movement, in this second movement too there was strong insistence on the need of having assurance of salvation. In one of the contemporary Mizo Christian Gospel songs, the condition of human beings in this “born again” theological perspective is reflected in this way:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Misual thi tur ka lo ni} &\quad (x\ 3) \\
\text{Chhandam ngai misual ka ni} &\quad (x\ 2) \\
\text{Chhandam ngai, misual ka lo ni.} &
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Boral ngei tur ka lo ni} &\quad (x\ 3) \\
\text{Kun khua a boral tur chu} &\quad (x\ 2) \\
\text{Kun khua a boral ngei tur chu.} &
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Thihna ata min tin} &\quad (x\ 3) \\
\text{Lal Isuan min chhandam ta} &\quad (x\ 2) \\
\text{Lal Isuan min rawn chhandam ta.} &
\end{align*}
\]

This may be translated into English as follows:

I am a sinner who is condemned to die (x 3)
A sinner who needs salvation (x 2)
I am a sinner who needs salvation.

I am judged to perish (x 3)
Judged to perish eternally (x 2)
I am judged to perish eternally.

He has delivered me from the death (x 3)
Lord Jesus has saved me (x 2)
Lord Jesus has saved me now.

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162 Thanzauva, “A Theological Basis for Social Transformation”, 371.
163 Some revivalists, like Thangliana and his followers, who later left the Church and formed a sectarian group, took this idea extremely, to the extent of regarding human being as “nothing but just a stone he [or she] has no power to believe and has no faith of his [or her] own”. See Lalbiaktluanga, “Theological Trends in Mizoram,” 70, 71.

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When a person confessed Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and was born again, the person was believed to have attained the salvation of the soul for life after death and so to have escaped the horrors of hell. For most tribal people like the Mizos, the existence of heaven and hell is undisputed. As mentioned earlier, a desire to go to heaven was a dominant reason for the conversion of many Mizo people in the early days of Christianity, and still, even today, the same factor continues to be a reason for the re-conversion or “born again” experience of many people. During his pastoral ministry in southern Mizoram, the writer asked two devoted women leaders and a male church elder, each of them on different occasions, why they wanted to follow Jesus. The answer he received from them was, because Jesus offered them a place in heaven. When he asked them whether they would still like to follow Christ if he did not offer them a place in heaven, they could not answer.

As mentioned earlier, those who confessed to being “born again” usually developed great zeal for evangelism, which was understood primarily as saving of lost soul. That is to say, they understood the saving of lost soul to be something that gives greatest pleasure to Jesus Christ. In one Mizo Christian Worship hymn, entitled, *Min nga idam rawh aw, Lalpa* (Forgive me, O Lord), it was stated:

> I lawman her Lalpa thlarau bo chhandam,  
> I hna tul her khawvela Chanchin Tha hrilh.  
> (Your greatest pleasure, O Lord, is to save the lost soul,  
> Your most important task is to preach the Gospel to the world).164

As reflected in this song, most Christians in Mizoram today believe that the fundamental task of the Church is saving of the lost souls and see this as Christ’s “greatest pleasure” and central concern. In other words, “to preach the Gospel to the world” has come to be viewed primarily as “saving the lost soul” for life after death.

While the Born-again movement has brought spiritual renewal to many people and thus contributed appreciably to the growth of the churches in Mizoram, it has also several limitations. Firstly, in this perspective of Christology there is a general tendency to reduce the entire work of Christ to the cross. This one-sided emphasis gives an incomplete witness to the person and work of Jesus Christ. It gives the impression that Jesus Christ came into the world for the sole purpose of dying on the

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cross, and hence it overlooks Jesus’ historical identification and involvement with the struggle of the poor and marginalized people of his time.\footnote{See also Roger Gaikwad, "A Reconsideration of the Significance of the Death of Jesus Christ in the Context of Religious Plurality," Mizoram Theological Journal II, no. 1 (2000): 33.}

Secondly, in contrast to the tribals’ worldview, the Born-again Christology posits a dualistic view of reality, particularly in its understanding of the human person.\footnote{See also Thanzauva, "A Theological Basis for Social Transformation", 375.} It perceives Christ’s work of salvation primarily, if not exclusively, in terms of the salvation of the individual soul and insists on the necessity of accepting Christ “in faith, not by work” as personal Lord and Saviour. This approach trends to internalise Christianity and proposes to reduce the significance of Christ’s redemption to the realm of moral pietism. It conceals the saving impact of Christ for the community life of the people.

Thirdly, Born-again Christology tends to portray sin largely as a personal or individual problem and perceives faith and decision to accept Christ as matters of individual concern. This way of understanding the Christian faith not only fails to address the problem of sin in society, but also supports individualism. It also tends to reduce Christianity to a matter of private dealing.\footnote{Ibid.}

Fourthly, some of the concepts employed for interpreting Christology, for example, “justification” and “faith alone”, are unfamiliar to the tribals’ worldview, so that they create great confusion and misunderstanding among Mizo Christians. As we have seen, these ideas not only were difficult to understand, but the overall substitutional model for understanding the death of Christ itself created moral laxity for many people in Mizoram. When people perceived that Christ had done all they needed for salvation already on the cross, they tended to become relaxed and irresponsible in their moral and ethical life. Hence, this theological viewpoint led to the formation of sectarianism.

While the Born-again movement remains the dominant theological tradition in Mizoram to this day, the two main churches, namely, the Presbyterians and the Baptists have both written doctrinal confessions. Perhaps these doctrinal confessions
may be regarded as the most explicit expressions of the Christological legacy of the Mission Churches in Mizoram. Let us also briefly see how Christ has been portrayed in these confessions.

### 2.4. Christ in the Presbyterian and the Baptist Doctrinal Confessions

The Presbyterian Church of Mizoram has produced its doctrinal confession in a small booklet. In this confession, the doctrine is divided into ten points. It is stated in the preamble of the Confession that these ten doctrines are to be firmly accepted by ministers, evangelists and elders of the Presbyterian Church of Mizoram.\(^\text{168}\) Although no date of its publication is given in the booklet, a commentary on this doctrine written by Rev. Sajaithanga indicates that the confession has been in use since 1961.\(^\text{169}\) The doctrinal confession of the Baptist Church of Mizoram, on the other hand, was produced in 1988, after being accepted and adopted by its annual Assembly meeting of that year.\(^\text{170}\)

Both churches accept the christological confessions of the Apostolic and the Nicene Creeds and, in fact, their doctrinal confessions are heavily derived from these sources. Both confessions firmly hold that Jesus Christ is the incarnation of the only Son of God. Confession No. V of the Presbyterian Confession states:

> Human beings transgressed the Law of God by their own will, and thus gave themselves to transgression and condemnation. In order to deliver human beings from transgression, condemnation and punishment, and to give eternal life, God who has endless love sent his only eternal Son Jesus Christ into the world; through Him human beings could be saved. The eternal Son became human, as truly one human being with two natures. He is eternally truly God and truly human. By the power of the Holy Spirit, the Virgin Mary conceived him, delivered him, but he has no sin. For the benefit of sinners, he perfectly obeyed the Law of God; in order to fulfil God’s requirement of justice and to reconcile human beings with God, he offered himself as the true and perfect offering; he died on the cross, he was buried, he rose again on the third day from the dead. He ascended to the right hand of God where he intercedes for his people; from there he will come again to raise the dead and to judge the world.\(^\text{171}\)


\(^{170}\) See Baptist Church of Mizoram, *Zoram Baptist Kohhran Thurin Puanchhuah (Baptist Confession)* (Serkawn: Baptist Church of Mizoram, 1988), e.

\(^{171}\) See Presbyterian Church of Mizoram, *Kohhran Thurin leh Thumun Dante*, 3-4. This text is translated from the Mizo version by the writer.
The Baptist Confession confesses Jesus Christ in the following way:

Jesus Christ is the only Son of God, God sent him into the world, he became a human being, and in him alone God became human being. He is truly God and truly human being, but he has no sin. By the power of the Holy Spirit the Virgin Mary delivered him. In order to reconcile God and human beings he offered himself as a perfect sacrifice. He was crucified on the cross, he died, he was buried, he has risen on the third day from the dead, he is seated on the right hand of God. From there he will come again to judge the living and the dead.\footnote{172 See Baptist Church of Mizoram, \textit{Zoram Baptist Kohhran Thurin}, 9.}

For most tribal Christians of Mizoram, who in their past religious tradition believed in the existence of spirits and superstitions, the supernatural expressions in the Bible and of Western theological traditions are normally unproblematic. The concepts of Christ’s virgin birth, his miraculous activities, the resurrection and the second coming are largely accepted without question. In fact, most Mizo Christians accept all expressions about Jesus Christ in the Bible literally. Interestingly, the Mizos’ name for the Bible is \textit{Pathian Lehkhabu Thianghlim} (The Holy Book of God) and, as such, the Bible for them is the holy book of God! However, as noted earlier, for tribal Christians of Mizoram the most emphasized theme of Christology remains the death of Christ on the cross, which is perceived primarily as facilitating salvation from sin and entry into heaven.

As revealed in the Presbyterian Confession, the dominant tradition of Christian theology in Mizoram perceives human beings as sinners condemned to punishment following the Fall and on this basis, Christ’s death on the cross has become interpreted as God’s act of salvation. The Baptist Confession agrees with this idea and states that whoever repents his/her sins and accepts Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour receives the salvation God has offered for all humanity in Christ.\footnote{173 See \textit{Ibid.}, 10-11.} The Baptist Confession uses expressions such as “justification”, “forgiveness”, and “redemption from sin” to describe the significance of the death of Christ on the cross.\footnote{174 \textit{Ibid.}, 11-13.} Similarly, the Presbyterian Confession describes the purpose of God’s work of salvation in Christ as follows:

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
  \item In Jesus Christ God has offered holistic salvation to everybody free of cost, on condition that they repent their sins and believe in Jesus Christ as their saviour. God has commanded them that by imitating Christ, human beings should live a humble
\end{itemize}

and holy life according to the will of God. Those who believe in Christ and obey his words are saved; they received forgiveness of sin, justification, sonship of God, holiness through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and eternal glory. Even in this present life believers can receive the great joy of the assurance of salvation.  

Although there is no denial or doubt about other areas of Jesus' life and ministry, such as his public ministry among the ordinary people of his days, nonetheless this aspect is not emphasized. The churches in Mizoram have not yet developed a concrete theological foundation for siding with the poor and oppressed towards the struggle for justice and liberation in their society. We have noted that it was partly the failure of the Mission churches to respond the needs and aspirations of the poor people that led to the formation of sectarian movements, causing further division of the Church in Mizoram.

Before we conclude this survey of the Christological legacy of the tribal Christians in Mizoram, let us also look briefly at the understanding of Christ among the sectarian movements outside the established Church.

2.5. Christ in Sectarian Movements Outside the Church

We have mentioned the existence of several sectarian movements in Mizoram. Most of these sectarian movements hold quite distinctive theological outlooks and practices. Though some of these movements no longer exist today, their teachings still prevail. The established churches have strongly opposed and condemned them. Despite a number of their limitations, the life and the views of these movements reflect a strong desire for the indigenization of the Gospel. They have reacted against the churches planted by Western missionaries. Although they have not been free from the legacy of Western theology, they have sought to reinterpret the Gospel in relation to the socio-cultural tradition of the people. It is important, therefore, that we examine some of these views and see their significance for understanding Christology in the tribal context.

175 See Presbyterian Church of Mizoram, Kohhran Thurin leh Thunun Dante. 5. The English translation is by the writer.
Since we will not be able to look at all of them, we shall select the views of Tlira Pawl and Khuangtuaha Pawl as representative movements. However, owing to the unavailability of the original resources, this study is dependent upon the sources produced by people who were not members of these movements.

2.5.1. Tlira Pawl

Tlira Pawl (the Tlira’s sect) was the first sectarian movement in Mizoram. It was founded by Khawliantlira, or Tlira as he was commonly known, in 1913. Hence it was called “Tlira Pawl” (Tlira’s sect), after his name.176 Khawliantlira, the fourth child of Teithanga and Nokiri, was born in 1878.177 He studied at Lower Primary School at Aizawl, while working as a cleaner in the army barracks. After he completed his study, Tlira worked for some time as a substitute teacher at Biate village and married there. Later he moved to Champhai village and worked as a Primary School teacher and the village Khawchhiar (census enumerator).

While he was teaching at the Champhai Primary School, the Second Revival Movement broke out with its strong emphasis on the second coming of Christ. The newly converted Mizo Christians all over the country were eagerly expecting the return of Christ to take place at any moment. They believed that when Christ returned on earth there would be a rapture of the saints followed by his thousand years with them. Tlira was also caught up in the movement, and he even went across the border over the Tiau River into Myanmar and preached the message of the Second Coming of Christ among his fellow tribesmen and women. However, he soon became quite frustrated, when the second coming did not physically happen as he enthusiastically preached and expected.178

After he returned from his preaching tour, on a Sunday evening, Tlira was asked to preach and give a report of his preaching tour. As he went up into the pulpit, he chose a hymn. While the congregation was singing the hymn, Tlira had a mysterious vision. In the vision he saw an incredibly large and dreadful python snake, lying prone at the

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177 For a brief historical background of Khawliantlira, see Lalsawma, Revivals the Mizo Way, 62. See also Z.T. Sangkhuma, An Danglamma te (Their Distinctives) (Aizawl: Rinzawna, 1991), 66-68.
178 Lalsawma, Revivals the Mizo Way, 62.
sandy bank of the Tiau River. The snake’s mouth was opened wide, and inside he saw a great number of Christians singing and waving their hymnbooks and Bibles. He felt that the inside of the python’s belly was the place where he was awaiting the Second Coming of Christ. He became very frightened, shaken with fear and horror. He also came to know that if the big python shut its mouth, no one would be able to open it except the Son of Man in his Second Coming. As he told the congregation about his vision after the singing, a certain church leader stood up and declared that Satan was present amongst them, so that the meeting should be closed. And so, they closed the meeting.

From that time, Tlira was no longer able to remain in the Church. He felt that the python of his vision was no other than his own Church, planted and shaped by Western missionaries. Within a short time he thus formed a small separate group. Tlira and his followers neither organized themselves as a church nor had any particular building for worship services. They did not even maintain membership records, or have an organizational constitution. Outsiders simply called them “Tlira Pawl” (Tlira’s Sect), though they themselves never gave any name to their group. The Presbyterian Church of Mizoram, in its autumn presbytery meeting in 1914, expelled them from the Church as a sectarian group. When he died in 1952 at the age of 75, his sect had almost vanished; but their teaching continued.

Tlira emphasized the experience of Christ’s Spirit in the believer’s life and took this as the basic frame of reference for interpreting his understanding of the Christian life and thought. As the Second Revival emphasis on the second coming of Christ did not happen as expected, Tlira came to believe that Christ’s second coming had already taken place when believers believed in Jesus Christ and Christ came to them by the Holy Spirit. He maintained that, apart from his coming in the Spirit, there would be no other second coming of Christ. For Tlira, the experience of Christ’s Spirit in the believers’ lives became the basis and the central fact of all Christian life and thought, and the thing by which everything else was to be measured.

180 Lalsawma, Revivals the Mizo Way, 63.
181 Dokhuma, Zoram Kohhran Tualto Chanchinte, 3.
182 Kipgen, Christianity and Mizo Culture, 262.
183 See Dokhuma, Zoram Kohhran Tualto Chanchinte, 6.
Tlira rejected the physical second coming of Christ as a wrong and dangerous theological idea. He saw in a vision that to uphold such a belief was like being inside the belly of the big python snake. It could lead to missing the very second coming of Christ itself, which was actively happening through the Spirit. He felt that, as the Jews failed to recognize the first coming of Christ, the Christians of Mizoram also failed to recognize Christ at his second coming. For him Christ had already come again in Spirit, and the millennial reign of Christ had started. In the same vein, he also rejected the idea of the rapture of the saints. He taught that there would not be any physical rapture of the saints as expected by the Mizo Christians of his days. According to him, Christ’s coming in the Spirit to those who believe in him was itself the rapture of the saints; apart from this there would be no other rapture.

Similarly, he also taught that there would be no resurrection of the dead. He held that all human beings were born sinners and in need of a saviour. God sent his Son Jesus Christ into the world to save human beings from sin. Christ suffered and died as expiation for human sins and rose again from the dead. By the blood of his atoning death, Christ cleansed human sins and offered salvation from sin. Those who believed in Christ and became united with him experienced the coming and indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Those who have Christ in the Spirit were the children of resurrection. Tlira argued that, according to the Bible, any person who did not have the Holy Spirit was dead. He held that a person might be physically alive, yet if he/she did not have the Spirit, he/she became dead and was in the tomb from God’s perspective. But the moment a person found God and had the Spirit of Christ living in him/her, the person became resurrected. So according to Tlira, having the Spirit of Christ was the mark of a complete resurrection; apart from this, there was no other resurrection.

Consequently, Tlira advocated abolition of all the rites and observances of the church, such as, Holy Communion, Baptism and Sunday observance. He argued that, according to the Bible, those who believed in Jesus Christ were no longer strangers and aliens, but citizens with the saints and members of the household of God. He

184 See Lloyd, History of the Church in Mizoram, 176.
185 Dokhuma, Zoram Kohhran Tualho Chanchinte, 6.
186 Ibid.
187 Ibid. See also Kipgen, Christianity and Mizo Culture, 262.
asked: If the believers were already the members of the household of God and had become co-sharers of God’s treasures (ro luahpuitu), what else was needed? What was the need of ritual observances? In his view, those who have not yet become members of God’s family might observe and practise such rituals. As long as they were not yet united with Christ and remained strangers to him, it could be necessary for them to observe all ritual practices. But for those who were already united with Christ and had become members of God’s household through faith in Christ, there was no need of ritual practices.\(^{188}\)

In regard to Holy Communion Tlira observed that Jesus Christ, before his death, instituted this with the following command “Do this in remembrance of me”. On the basis of this, he argued that the practice of Holy Communion was necessary for those who sometimes did forget Christ. But for those who have Christ and lived in him, there was no need of it.\(^{189}\)

In a similar manner he also did not see the need of baptism. He maintained that, since in Jesus Christ all the requirement of baptism was already fulfilled, there was no need of any other baptism for those who believed in him. He observed that, before he took baptism, Jesus said, “It is proper for me to fulfil all righteousness”. On this basis, he argued that in Christ all the laws and requirements were fulfilled. As he suffered and died for us, in baptism too he had taken and fulfilled “all righteousness”. He thus maintained that if we were united with Christ in his death, we were also united with him in his baptism. In Tlira’s view, therefore, it was no longer necessary for believers to take any other baptism.\(^{190}\)

At the time when Tlira launched his sectarian movement there was a general tendency in Mizoram to keep all biblical injunctions as strictly as possible. Sunday was observed very strictly. In some villages, no Christian would even carry water on Sundays; overnight journeys and killing of animals, even chicken for the evening meal, were strictly prohibited on Sundays.\(^{191}\) Against such prohibitive attitudes, Tlira taught that all days belonged to God, and there was no need of observing a particular

\(^{188}\) See Dokhuma, Zoram Kohhran Tualto Chanchinte, 7.
\(^{189}\) Ibid.
\(^{190}\) Ibid. See also Kipgen, Christianity and Mizo Culture, 262.
\(^{191}\) See also Chalhmuna, “Mizo Kristian hmasate Pathian thu pawmdan leh lanchhuahtir dan,” 42-43.
day as the day of rest. He maintained that every day was *Pathian ni* (the Mizo word for Sunday, meaning "a day belonging to God"), and all days were equally important.\(^{192}\) In his view, all those who were in Christ have rested in him who was the Lord of the Sabbath. The observance of a day of rest with restrictions, therefore, need not rule over us. According to him, whether or not one observed a particular day as a day of rest did not make one more pleasing to God.\(^{193}\) Hence, Tlira practically advocated the abolition of Sunday observance.

We have stated that, in the early days of Christianity in Mizoram, in order to become Christian a person had to give up drinking of rice-beer and avoid participation in all celebrations of traditional feastings and festivals. Rev. Zairema has noted that among the early Mizo Christians even a lover’s glance was considered a form of adultery, so that every Christian was required to avoid looking at a woman. He said that, in one village, the elders, in their precautionary attempt at helping the church members to avoid from falling into this sin, had indeed made all the women sit facing the side wall of the church building.\(^{194}\) In this situation Tlira insisted that whatever a person has done in the body could not affect his/her soul. He maintained that as human beings we need entertainments, comforts and happiness; we cannot avoid them even after we have become united with Christ.

Tlira insisted that no external activities, be it religious abstentions or sinful activities like theft or immorality, could cause spiritual death.\(^{195}\) Based on Paul’s statement that everything was permissible for him but that he would not allow himself to be enslaved by them, Tlira argued that everything was permissible for believers. For him the only sin that could cause spiritual death was the sin of “unbelief”. In his view, what Mizo Christians normally considered sinful things, such as stealing, lying, sexual intercourse, drinking, feasting and festivals, could not affect the salvation that believers have in Jesus Christ. Nonetheless, he advocated that sinful practices should be avoided, for it was bad for human beings to be enslaved by bad practices.\(^{196}\)


\(^{196}\) Ibid. See also Kipgen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture*, 262.
In conclusion, three points may be underlined in regard to Tlira Pawl’s understanding of Christology in the context of Mizoram. Firstly, the Tlira Pawl movement has shown the need to relate the Gospel to the present worldly life and experience of the people. The sect rejected notions such as the physical return of Christ on earth, the rapture of the saints and the resurrection of the dead. It seemed to them that these ideas were unrealistic and irrational, too far away from the life and experience of the people. Instead they emphasized having Jesus Christ in one’s own life, and preferred to speak of the second coming of Christ in terms of Christ’s coming in the Spirit into the life of believers. All these attempts reflect the need for a realistic interpretation of the Gospel. In other words, there is a need to make Jesus Christ real, meaningful and comprehensible to the life and experience of people.

Secondly, the failure of Tlira Pawl to understand the significance of the traditional Christian rites, such as the Eucharist and baptism, and their eventual rejection of these, must be taken as a challenge regarding the need of inculturating the Gospel in the tribal context. For many tribal people in Mizoram, traditions like Eucharist or baptism, with their traditional Western elements, are indeed very foreign and unfamiliar. These traditions were unknown to tribal custom and culture. Thus, it is quite understandable that tribal Christians should have been unable to see the value and necessity of these practices. Even when the meaning and message of these rites is known, these traditions are not a really meaningful and convincing means to express the Gospel to tribal people. As the Gospel has come to them from the quite different historical and cultural background of the West, there is indeed a great need to inculturate the Gospel, so as to make it meaningful and relevant to their situation.

Thirdly, Tlira Pawl theology portrayed a dualistic view of humanity. It overlooked the importance of the physical dimension of human life, and emphasized the spiritual aspect even to the extent of undermining the value and role of a bodily life. Its rejection of the ritual practices and its insistence that “whatever a person has done in the body could not affect his/her soul” clearly reflected this movement’s dualistic view of the human person. In this regard, Tlira Pawl was not free from the legacy of Western theology, even though they criticized it.
2.5.2. Khuangtuaha Pawl

Khuangtuaha Pawl (the Khuangtuaha sect) was founded by Khuangtuahthanga, a person commonly known as Khuangtuaha. Several years after Khuangtuaha’s death the sect assumed a new name, “Lalpa Kohhran Thar” (The New Church of the Lord), but the name “Khuangtuaha Pawl” continued to be the most popular name of the sect. Sometimes it is also called “Chana Pawl” (Chana sect), after the name of its second leader, Challianchana, a younger brother of Khuangtuaha.

Khuangtuahthanga was born in 1891 in Sialsuk village. In his early twenties, in 1912, he participated in the British war with the Abors of the present Aunachal Pradesh. He also joined the Lushai Labour Corps in 1917 and went to France during the First World War. Later he moved from Sialsuk to Lamchhip and then to Hmawngkawn. While he was at Hmawngkawn the Fourth Revival Movement arose and Khuangtuaha was also involved in this movement. As he joined the movement Khuangtuaha fell into khurbing (a love-relationship between two individuals, or even more in some cases, mostly of opposite sex, in name of “the Spirit” during the revival movement), for which the Church banned him from participating in Holy Communion, as an act of discipline. Thereafter, because of his moral laxity and teaching, he was repeatedly expelled from one village after another. The British Government, too, imprisoned him twice, and then eventually in 1942 the Presbyterian Church of Mizoram excommunicated him from primary membership of the Church.

Despite such repeated expulsions, imprisonments and disciplinary actions of the Church, Khuangtuaha persisted in collecting adherents, with whom he formed a fellowship in the name of the Holy Spirit. After he was released from his second imprisonment, he settled at Hmawngkawn village. There a number of his admirers from different villages used to come to him to hear his words and, from the year 1950, many of his adherents, who were unsatisfied with occasional contacts from distant places, migrated to him at Hmawngkawn. At Hmawngkawn, Khuangtuaha and his

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197 For a brief historical account of Khuangtuahthanga, see Dokhuma, Zoram Kohhran Tualto Chanchinte, 30-33. Lalsawma, Revivals the Mizo Way, 184-86.
198 Lalsawma, Revivals the Mizo Way, 186.
followers lived together as a separate community and, in due course, their population outnumbered the original inhabitants of the villagers themselves.

To his followers Khuangtuaha was not merely a spiritual and temporal leader. They looked upon him as their father and every member of the community addressed him as Ka pa (father). In various aspects of his ministry, his younger brother Challianchanha, or Chana as he was commonly called, assisted him. Like his brother, Chana also had a charismatic personality. Like other sectarian movements of the country, Khuangtuaha Pawl did not have a written constitution, but depended upon the guidance of the Spirit that came through their leader. Apart from Khuangtuaha and Chana, the sect also has priests. In sharp contrast to the practice of Mizo Christians, Khuangtuaha and his followers were not averse to polygamy. Khuangtuaha had five wives, Chana seven and Zionghaka, Chana’s son, five.

Khuangtuaha died on 30th March 1955 and thereafter Chana took over the leadership responsibility of the movement. When villages were grouped in 1967 in the wake of the Mizo armed-revolutionary movement, Hmawngkawn village was brought to Baktawng and the whole Khuangtuaha Pawl community was also moved to the new place. Although the sect continued to live as a separate community even at Baktawng, their life and outlook gradually underwent change. As no new member was added and some of the members deserted, the Khuangtuaha Pawl membership slowly diminished. In 1971, Mr. Darhmingliana, the Administrative Officer of Baktawng, renamed the sect “Lalpa Kohhran Thar” (The New Church of the Lord). They gladly accepted this new name. Today they are scattered in a number of places, and many of them can be found at Baktawng.

The main thrust of the Khuangtuaha Pawl movement was the millennial reign of Christ, which they expected to be inaugurated in the near future with the second coming of Christ on earth. They maintained that God had already abandoned the Israelites as his people and, in their stead, the Khuangtuaha Pawl became the “new

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199 See Dokhuma, Zoram Kohhran Tualio Chanchinte, 38.
200 Ibid., 35ff.
201 Lalsawnra, Revivals the Mizo Way, 187.
202 Dokhuma, Zoram Kohhran Tualio Chanchinte, 52.
Israel”. As he promised the land of Canaan to the Israelites in the Old Testament, they believed that God would make Mizoram a land of promise and blessing. Just as God has led the Israelites of the Old Testament through Moses and Joshua, God was leading them to possess the promise through Khuangtuaha, Chana and his son, Zionghaka. They hoped that Jesus Christ would return very soon on earth and inaugurate his millennial kingdom.

According to Dokhuma, Khuangtuaha Pawl expected that in the coming millennial reign of Christ, there would no longer be suffering and sorrows, sickness and death; the present world of insecurity, and fear of army atrocities and wars, would be overcome. There would be only one “vengtu” (watchman or leader) and people would be free from criticism and back biting. They hoped to attain the millennial reign of Christ without death, and they expected this to happen in Mizoram. They expressed their longing for this millennial reign of Christ in song. Lalsawma provides the English translation of one song as follows:

The Old Adam is failing to see,  
Millennial Reign that it [sic] soon and sure to come,  
Wherein shall wolves and lambs dwell in peace.

As noted before, they adopted the name, “Lalpa Kohhran Thar” (The New Church of the Lord) and claimed that they were the first fruit of the coming New Kingdom of God. Lalsawma described them as “an eschatological community looking forward to the physical inauguration of the Millennial Reign of Christ”.

Khuangtuaha Pawl loved the Mizo traditional past. They reacted against the Church’s banning of traditional Mizo tunes. They rejected Western forms of Christian hymnody, and instead used their own three-lined hymns, which were set to the tune of traditional Tlanglam Zai. In such three-lined songs, they expressed their rejection of the Church hymnal, which they called “Bookroom songs”. According to Lalsawma, one song goes thus:

204 See Sangkhuma, An Danglamna te, 86-87. See also Vanlalehhuanga, An Zirtirnate, 50.
205 Dokhuma, Zoram Kohhran Tualto Chanchinte, 33, 42-43.
206 See Lalsawma, Revivals the Mizo Way, 188.
207 Ibid., 187.
We are not at home with Bookroott's songs, instead, we sing new Canaan with tlanglam zai. Let them speak ill of us far and wide.²⁰⁸

Apart from singing to traditional tunes and dancing to the beat of a drum or drums, sometimes they also chanted *hlado* (a chant composed by the warrior/hunter in self-praise for success in the expedition or hunting), while drinking traditional rice beer.²⁰⁹ They reacted to the Church’s banning, not only of traditional tunes, but also of festivals and the drinking of rice beer. In their view nothing was unclean by itself. They believed that God loved and blessed human beings; there is no reason why God should not allow human being to enjoy the fruit of blessings, such as the drinking of rice beer. They expressed their views in songs. Lalsawma translates thus:

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Oh! How strange it is the spirit’s way!
Some of us are going back to beer drinking,
At the root of all is Lord Jesus.

You did say drinking was unlawful!
But when I enquired afresh from Calvary,
"Take it if you will" he said to me.²¹⁰
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In the view of Khuangtuaha Pawl, there is nothing unclean, nothing banned, and no immoral act, for those who follow the guidance of the Spirit that comes through their leaders, that is, for true believers. But for the carnal person, who does not follow the guidance of the “Spirit”, or the “unbeliever”, everything becomes unclean, banned and immoral.²¹¹ In other words, they held that for “believers” in God, everything becomes permissible and clean, but for “unbelievers”, whose intentions are just self-enjoyment, activities such as drinking of rice beer, singing of traditional songs and dancing, and merry-making, could all become unclean and banned. Goswami explains: “Khuangtu’a’s followers believe in Christ, but they say that this should not debar them from leading a way of life which they think is best”.²¹²

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 188.
²¹⁰ See Lalsawma, Revivals the Mizo Way, 118.
²¹¹ Ibid., 187. See also Dokhumma, Zoram Kohhran Tualto Chanchinte, 49f.
²¹² Goswami, “Hill tribesmen of north-east India,” 126.
So for Khuangtuaha Pawl, the most important and authoritative guidance for their life and belief is the dictates of the Spirit received through their priests.\textsuperscript{213} Though they recognize the value of the Bible, they do not consider it as important as the dictates of the Spirit. The Bible for them becomes useful only in so far as it helps the Spirit’s dictation that comes through their leaders.

The most significant contribution of the Khuangtuaha Pawl movement may be its hope for the realization of God’s reign on earth. Although they expect that the new world will come only when Christ returns to earth, their very belief that new life will happen here on earth, not up there in heaven, is a significant move. It changes the ultimate focus of life from heaven to earth, and affirms the reality of the earth. Besides this, it also departs from the dominant Mizo Christian understanding of Christ as primarily facilitating entry into heaven, and emphasizes hope for a new world where there will be peace and freedom. This is an important dimension for understanding the significance of Christ. Moreover, Khuangtuaha Pawl’s appreciation of traditional Mizo culture, and its attempts at indigenisation, is another important dimension.

3. Concluding Remarks

In this chapter we have examined the Christological legacy of the tribal Christians in Mizoram. We have found that the existing Christological tradition in Mizoram came from Western Christianity through the missionaries and the successive waves of the revival movements. The missionaries introduced Christ to the tribal people of Mizoram as a saviour from sin and a conqueror of, and saviour from, the power of evil spirits. To a great extent, the Missionary Christology helped the Mizo people to overcome their fear of evil spirits, to which they used to offer costly sacrifices. It also helped many to embrace Christianity.

However, we also found that the presenters used the idea of Christ’s victory over the power of evil spirits as a theological weapon for attacking the socio-cultural traditions of the tribal people. The missionaries and the native Church leaders did not give

\textsuperscript{213} See Dokhuma, \textit{Zoram Kohhran Tualio Chanchinte}, 35-38. See also Lalsawma, \textit{Revivals the Mizo Way}, 187.
adequate attention to the tribal cultural tradition in presenting Christ to the Mizo people. Anything connected with the old Mizo religion was regarded as being part of the rule of Satan. Since, in tribal society, cultural practices and religious beliefs are closely interconnected, a blanket condemnation of the whole system of tribal religiocultural traditions led to the destruction of many traditional cultural and customary practices. Hence, under the Christology of Christ as saviour from the power of evil spirits, the power of the Gospel, instead of becoming a redeeming and transforming power, rather became a weapon of destruction for Mizo cultural traditions and practices.

The legacy of such a negative attitude towards traditional, or any “non-Christian”, culture is still quite visible in the life and witness of the Mizoram churches today. For instance, in a memorandum published to its members in 1984, the Presbyterian Church of Mizoram reiterated its earlier decision made in 1963 that, “Christians should not do anything to revive the old culture and lifestyle which they have discarded”. Similarly, in the Baptist churches, the term “mission field” [of the church] is interpreted as ramthim (dark country), which implies that the “non-Christians” to whom the church’s mission work is directed are conceived as people who lived in darkness. Such a negative attitude towards indigenous culture not only undermines the values of traditional culture but also suggested the turning of one’s back on one’s own culture.

The survey reveals that there has been a marked emphasis on the death of Christ on the cross in the overall theme of Christology. This one-sided emphasis gives an incomplete witness to the person and work of Jesus Christ. It also overlooks the significance of other aspects of Jesus’ life and ministry and their significance for the social-economic life of the people in Mizoram. Moreover, it also overemphasizes the significance of Christ’s death as atonement for sin. This emphasis tends to reduce the liberating power of the cross to atonement of individual sin alone. This understanding of Christology thus fails to see and address the power and persistence of evil in the society and the world.

There has also been an overwhelming tendency to interpret the significance of Christ’s redemption as facilitating an entry into heaven, with a corresponding escape from the horror of hell. This emphasis makes the Christology otherworldly, and gives an impression that real life exists in heaven, and that believing in Jesus Christ is the key to achieving this end. While this understanding, on the one hand, rightly understands the significance of Christ’s work as the basis of hope for a better future, on the other hand, it fails to historicize it as the basis of hope for a better world. It leads people to adopt an otherworldly view and a negative attitude towards the present life. So, instead of participating in the struggle for social change, people tended to adopt a life-style of waiting for heaven in desperation, under this Christological perspective.

We have also seen that some of the terms or concepts employed for interpreting Christology, for example, “justification”, “substitution”, “faith alone” are unfamiliar to the tribals’ worldview, so that they have created immense confusion and misunderstanding among many people. We have noted that, for some people, the idea that Christ has died for their sins, and thus justified them, has encouraged moral laxity. Especially when this idea has been added to an interpretation that the forgiveness of sin has to be obtained by “faith alone in Christ, not by works”, people have tended to downplay the value and role of action and human responsibility in their moral and ethical life. Therefore, in order to present Christ in a way that is meaningful and understandable to the tribal situation, there is a need to discover new hermeneutical tools from the tribal socio-cultural tradition itself. The study also shows that there has been a great desire and even some attempts among the tribal people to indigenise the Gospel, particularly among the sectarian movements.

Despite the communitarian nature of tribal society, the overall characteristic of the Christological legacy in Mizoram is very individualistic. It portrays sin largely as a personal or individual problem, salvation as individual salvation and faith and the decision to accept Christ as individual affairs. This way of understanding the Gospel not only fails to address the problems in the society, but also stimulates individualism, reducing Christianity to a matter of private dealing.
The survey also reveals that one fundamental problem of the Christological legacy of the tribal Christians in Mizoram is its dualistic view of reality. We have seen that, contrary to the tribal understanding of human person, in which there is no separation between soul and body, the existing Christology perceives Christ's work of salvation primarily in terms of salvation of the individual soul. It stresses that, in order to receive the salvation, a person has to be born again spiritually. The survey reveals that, in relation to this experience of being "born again", it is the change of feeling that has been most emphasized. This approach to Christology, therefore, tends to internalise Christianity and proposes to reduce the significance of Christ’s redemption to the realm of moral pietism. It also conceals the saving impact of Christ for the community life of the people. We have also seen that this Christological perspective has led many Mizo Christians to view the "greatest pleasure" of Christ, and the churches' mission, as the salvation of individual souls, overlooking the importance of the society and of the world.

The overall weight of these observations is to show that the fundamental problem of the Christological legacy of the tribal Christians in Mizoram is its failure to take the culture and worldview of the people seriously. Instead of taking the cultural tradition and worldview of the people as essential source for doing theology, it has adopted an attitude of their condemnation and abolition. This has rendered the Gospel of Christ alien to the people and unable to take deep root in the tribal society. So, in order to present the Gospel in ways that are meaningful and understandable to the tribal people, we need to reconstruct Christology in relation to the socio-cultural tradition and experiences of the people. In the next chapter, we will explore the cultural tradition and worldview of the tribal Christians in Mizoram, and see their significance for interpreting Christology.
CHAPTER 4
REDISCOVERING A SOCIO-CULTURAL BASIS FOR UNDERSTANDING CHRISTOLOGY IN THE MIZORAM CONTEXT

In the preceding chapter we have observed that the primary limitation of the existing tradition of Christology in Mizoram was its failure to take the local culture into account in its Christological formulation. In this chapter, we will explore some common and liberating traditions and worldviews of tribal people, particularly from the Mizos, and seek to reclaim them for understanding Christology. However, in this task we face particular problems with regard to sources and, accordingly, to method. Tribal people tend not to have much documentation which might disclose their worldview. In the absence of adequate written sources, it is necessary to discover traditions and beliefs from observation of communal life and from listening to oral traditions where they exist. The personal experience of this writer, who is a tribal, will be an additional source for this study.

Moreover, it is not possible to investigate all elements of tribal traditions. For this reason, this investigation will focus mainly on the understandings of humanity, the concept of pasalitha, land, God and life after death. The intent of this study is not to make a comprehensive appraisal of all aspects of these selected worldviews, but to recover them as sources for interpreting Christology. However, before we explore these tribal traditions and worldviews, it will be helpful to consider some basic theological viewpoints that may undergird the direction of this study.

1. The Issue of Gospel and Culture in Theological Formulation

We have noted in Chapter One that there has been an emergence of many contextual theologies in recent times. This proliferation indicates that there are several forms of interaction between Gospel and culture. De Mesa observes that, among Asian theologians, some follow an economic model in line with Latin American Liberation theology; other theologians favour a cultural paradigm; and still others seek a
combination of the two.¹ For our purposes, we need to distinguish two possible theological approaches. In Models of Contextual Theology, Stephen Bevans indicates that, besides other possibilities, there are two basic theological approaches that are particularly common in the construction of a contextual theology or Christology. The first is that one can construct a Christology that is fundamentally redemption-centred. The second one is to do Christology from a fundamentally creation-centred perspective.²

Redemption-centred theology perceives culture and human experience as corrupt and in need of redemption or total replacement, and calls upon individuals, society or culture to be transformed.³ Redemption-centred theology presupposes that all human beings are sinful and are in the state of rebellion against God. Whatever comes from human efforts involve human sin and self-centredness, and thus humanity cannot reach God or attain salvation. All philosophical and non-Christian ideas of God are seen as mere projections of human thought and wishes, or even as idolatry. In this theological viewpoint, the saving knowledge of God is available only through God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ. Apart from Christ, there can be no possibility of any genuine knowledge of God. Hence, in this theology, God’s presence and activity in human culture is virtually ruled out. A classical example of this view can be found in Barth’s theology.⁴

Creation-centred theology, on the other hand, maintains a conviction that culture and human experience are generally good. According to this view, “grace builds on nature, but only because nature is capable of being built on, of being perfected in a supernatural relationship with God”.⁵ In other words, creation-centred theology perceives that there is a continuing presence and activity of God in every culture, though that may not be discerned or it is known only in an imperfect way. God does not just leave the world, after the first act of creation, to be governed by natural or

² See Bevans, Models of Contextual Theology, 16.
³ Ibid.
⁵ Bevans, Models of Contextual Theology, 16.
immutable laws, as the Deists advocated. Nor is the revelation of God restricted to certain particular place, group of people or particular culture. The presence of God can be discerned in the cultural values, in the people’s struggles for freedom and in the sharing life of tribal communities in different parts of the world. Indeed, some Indian theologians, such as Raymond Panikkar and M.M. Thomas, have insisted on the presence of Christ in Indian culture. In short, creation-centred theology sees some “continuity between human existence and divine reality”.

Nonetheless, creation-centred theology does also recognize that the Gospel does not take on everything in a culture. It does not perceive the world as perfect or sinless. In fact, it acknowledges the reality and ugliness of sin in individual lives, cultures or social structures. As the Vancouver Assembly of the WCC (1983) said:

> While we affirm and celebrate cultures as expressing the plural wonder of God’s creation, we recognize that not all aspects of every culture are necessarily good. There are aspects within each culture which deny life and oppress people. Also emerging in our time are certain forms of religious culture and sub-cultures which are demonic because they manipulate people and project a world-view and values which are life-denying rather than life-affirming.

Indigenous or tribal theologians who write contextual theologies are usually inclined to follow creation-centred theology, which tends to have more concern more for cultural identity. One example is Wati Longchar, a Naga tribal theologian of northeast India. Wati seeks to develop a tribal Christian theology using a tribal concept of “space” (or nature) as a frame of reference, which will “liberate tribals from their inferiority complex, from oppression and discrimination”. In his writing, he insists on the centrality of creation and emphasizes the integrity of all creation. In his view, the dominant theological tradition that puts human beings at the centre of theological systems.

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6 During the Enlightenment of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, some religious rationalists, commonly known as Deists, stressed the role of reason in religion; and they rejected any divine revelation and providential involvement in nature and human history. They maintained that, after creating the world, God had left the world to be governed by natural or immutable laws. See Gerald O’Collins, Christology: A Biblical, Historical, and Systematic Study of Jesus (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 217.


8 Bevans, Models of Contextual Theology, 16.

9 See Gill, ed., Gathered for Life, 32.

10 Longchar, An Emerging Asian Theology, 25.
reflection undermines the spirituality of tribal people who “live and work closer to the earth and creation as a whole”.\(^{11}\) He maintains that the distinctiveness of tribal theology from such dominant theologies lies in its search for liberation from their perspective of space. Awareness of the interdependence and interrelatedness of the whole creation is seen as the spiritual foundation for tribal people.\(^{12}\) Wati perceives Christ as an incarnate one organically related to the total eco-system, and the Holy Spirit as one who works in and sustains all creation. Human beings attain redemption only in relation to the rest of creation.\(^{13}\)

While both redemption-centred and creation-centred theologies are important for Mizoram, it is the creation-centred approach that is more relevant in the construction of this particular contextual Christology. In line with the creation-centred theological orientation, we will seek to rediscover in this particular contextual Christology the hidden or imperfect presence of the Gospel in Mizo culture and history. However, as noted earlier, it must also be recognized that not all aspects of Mizo culture are good. For instance, the Mizo customary practice of inheritance, in which only male children have the right to inherit the property of their parents, is unjust for female children. Such a cultural practice, which is “life-denying”, is obviously incompatible with the Gospel message. Likewise, we must acknowledge that traditional Mizo culture needs interaction with the Gospel of the Judeo-Christian tradition in order to 1) be judged, transformed and changed, and, at the same time, 2) become enriched and more explicitly revelatory of the hidden presence of Christ within it.\(^{14}\)

We have sketched out the basic theological principle underlying this study, namely, a creation-centred approach, which does not neglect the redemption side of the Gospel message. We now begin to explore the liberative traditions of tribal culture with particular reference to the Mizos. We begin with the concept of humanity.

\(^{11}\) Ibid., 67.
\(^{12}\) Ibid., 26-31.
\(^{13}\) See Ibid., 89-90. See also John C. England et al., eds., *Asian Christian Theologies: A Research Guide to Authors, Movements, Sources*, vol. 1 (Delhi: ISPCK, 2002), 352-53.
\(^{14}\) See also Ariarajah, *Gospel and Culture*, 34; Thanzaua, *Theology of Community*, 87-88.
2. Tribal Understanding of Humanity

The tribal understanding of humanity is important, not only because we are attempting to reformulate Christology from tribal perspective, but also because humanity was and is essential to Jesus Christ. For clearer presentational reasons, this section is divided into five sub-sections. We begin with the unitary nature of the human being.

2.1. The Human Being as a Unitary Being

Tribal people have traditionally perceived the world in terms of relationship. In their understanding of human nature, there was no sharp division between body and soul, or between sacred and secular. They believed that every human being had a soul, and yet the soul and the physical body were inseparably related to each other. If the body felt sickness or pain, the soul also suffered. The Mizos believed that if a person underwent a frightening physical experience, such as being mauled by a wild animal or being captured by an enemy, the soul was similarly frightened. In order to restore a proper or normal life to such an endangered person, a sacrifice had to be made. Sometimes the soul was believed to have detached itself from the person and then to be wandering around. A sick person might dream that s/he was still in the place where s/he had been before s/he got sick. In such a case, the soul was believed to have failed to return to the person and must be called home.15 In this way, body and soul formed inseparable parts of the same personal reality in the traditional tribals' worldview.

Because of this concept of the unity of the human person, traditional tribal religion had a concern for the total human being, both physical and spiritual. In traditional Mizo society, the sacrifices people offered to the evil spirits were made primarily for the purpose of recovering from physical illness. Because of this, Zairema has suggested that the word “sacrifice” (inthawina in Mizo) in the Mizo context should be more appropriately understood as “ceremonial cure”.16 In the previous chapter we showed that, in traditional Mizo belief, attainment of a place in paradise, or pialral, in

16 Ibid., 33.
the life after death was integrally connected with providing food to the people. In order to get a place in paradise, one had to become *thangchhuah* by providing a series of feasts to the community. Hence, in the traditional tribal worldview, faith in God and service to others were integrally related as soul to body; one could not attain paradise without attending to the physical needs of others.

### 2.2. The Human Being as a Societal Being

Among the tribal people, the idea of being human was perceived primarily in terms of community, rather than of the individual. For tribals, a person's humanity could not be realized unless s/he was in community. In traditional tribal society, those who lived in one village usually belonged to one particular tribe or clan. They were closely related to one another, and maintained a particular system of social organization based on family ties and blood relationship. Among the Mizos, every village had a chief, under whose leadership the village became a well-knit community. The chief ruled over the village, and a council of elders, appointed by the chief himself, assisted him in the administration. Although the chief held absolute authority over the village, his mode of life and dress were not different from those of the common people. Similarly, though chieftainship was hereditary, there was not a particular chiefly clan among Mizos. Any person could become a chief provided he had followers. Therefore, among the Mizos, if the chief acted in a cruel manner, his subjects could leave him freely by migrating to other villages.

Usually, the chief acted as a father to his subjects, and helped them when they were in distress and in need. In one of the earliest historical records, T.H. Lewin described the relationship between the Mizo chief and his people:

> The chief directs in war, and must be the first to attack and the last to retreat. Once, in Rutton Poia’s [sic] village, I noticed a drunken Lushai rudely push the chief out of his way. Rutton Poia [sic] said nothing, but gathered his mantle closer around him and continued his conversation with me. “What is this?” I asked; “do you not punish disrespect in your follower?” “Disrespect!” he exclaimed, “why the man is drunk and incapable of disrespect! But putting his condition aside, here all are equal. On the war path, or in the chase, if he did not obey me he would die, but here he is as in his own house.” If any man is in want, he walks into the chief’s house and takes what he

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17 See Hluna, *Church & Political Upheaval in Mizoram*, 2.
18 See also Kipgen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture*, 59.
needs. "He is a chief," they say, "and will receive plenty more gifts. All we have is his; so also his goods are ours. Who should give to us if our chief does not?" 19

As reflected in this quotation, the tribal people lived together as one family in the village. They developed a strong sense of community and oneness. It was in the community that a tribal found his/her true identity. In former times, if someone asked a tribal where s/he came from, the tribal would reply that s/he came from such and such a person's village, citing the name of their chief rather than the name of their village. So, in the traditional tribal society, the individual person's identity was subordinated to the community identity.

2.3. Kinship as the Basis of Life

In the tribals' worldview, to be a human was to live in relation with others in a community. In traditional tribal society, there were no written constitution, rules or regulations; the system of life was based on inter-personal relationship. People lived together in mutual trust and respect for one another. Their houses had no locks and keys and yet theft was hardly known. In the traditional Mizo house, a firewood stick was simply placed to obstruct the doorway, and it was quite sufficient to keep any person from entering the house. In Mizo society, people maintained high respect for the elderly. For example, when they sat together for a meal, no one would eat until the eldest one among them started.20 Likewise, a person never called one who was older than himself/herself by his/her bare name; titles such as “u”, “pa”, “nu”, “pu”, “pi”, “nute”, “pate” would be added before the addressee's name. The title a person used to address another person indicated the relationship between the two. For instance, if one called another person “pate”, the addressee was the younger brother of the person's father. In this way, they not only showed respect to the elderly people, but also maintained kinship order in very close inter-personal relationships.

Similarly, the tribal approach of others was usually inter-personal, rather than legalistic. For instance, in Mizo society if someone committed a crime against his neighbour, the offending family would immediately send their representative to the

19 T.H. Lewin, A Fly on the Wheel or How I Helped to Govern India (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1912; reprint, 1977), 243.
offended family. The representative would approach the offended family personally on behalf of the offenders and try to settle the problem by seeking forgiveness, not legal justice. When agreement was made, an animal was usually killed and eaten together to confirm the reconciliation. In 1871 some villagers of Chief Bengkhuia raided Alexandrapur in the Surma valley. They killed a Scottish tea-gardener, James Winchester, and took away his five-year daughter Mary Winchester. A year later, in 1872, a rescue party went to rescue the child. Colonel Tom Lewin, the Commander of the British Army, took an inter-personal approach to settling the problem. J.M. Lloyd described the event thus:

Lewin went alone and unarmed to meet Bengkhuia and the other hostile chiefs on the banks of the little river Chal, deep in the valley between the two villages [Thenzawl and Serchhip]. They made an agreement there which both sides carefully observed. According to Mizo custom a dog was sacrificed and cut in two to ratify the agreement. In consequence the chief agreed to release Mary and other captives held by him.21

In the tribals’ perspective, reciprocal relationship was the basis of human life, and unless relationship was established, life became impossible. For them, in John V. Taylor’s words, “the most important sins were those that damaged the relationships of the community”.22 Likewise, the Mizos had this saying: Thenawmte do ai chuan khaw sarth do a nuam zawk (It is easier to fight with seven villages than to fight with one’s own neighbour).

2.4. Life as Sharing

The Mizo saying, sem sem dam dam, ei bil thi thi (one who distributes will live, and one who eats all will die), reflected the traditional tribals’ perspective on the importance of sharing their life as a community. In the traditional tribals’ worldview, life was to be shared. In Mizo society, people helped one another and shared their possessions, success, sorrow and misfortunes. They regarded themselves as a thlum a al eiza (people who eat the sweet and the salty together). In the past, Mizo houses were built mainly with bamboo, wood and thatch. Particularly when the time came for constructing the roof, the person constructing the house would inform the villagers. At

21 Lloyd, History of the Church in Mizoram, 8.
least one person from every family, excepting the widows and the sick, would assist with the construction, so that the roof could be completed in one day. If there were widows and families who could not construct their house, the community would do it for them free of cost. Similarly, if someone wished to migrate to their village, the villagers would enthusiastically help them by transporting their goods. Even in *jhum* cultivation, those who had finished earlier would usually help a family or person who could not complete the work in time.

In the same manner, tribals considered that food was to be shared with one another. In the past, when a Mizo villager killed a deer or any animal, he would never keep it to himself. The meat would be distributed to every family. If the animal killed was a small one, it might be distributed to the first ten nearest families. When he next killed an animal, the distribution would cover the next ten or so families. In the same way, even when a family killed a pig or a cow, they ate together with relatives and friends. Similarly, they shared vegetables, rice, milk and other things, indeed all they possessed, with one another. In past Mizo society, if one family had a milking cow the village children would be lined up to receive milk. Even if the owner of the cow could milk only half a litre, he would distribute at least half a cup to each of his neighbours for mixing with tea.

Besides food and possessions, they also shared sorrow and misfortunes. If someone died in the village, the villagers would immediately gather together with the bereaved family to help and comfort them. If it was necessary to inform relatives who lived in another village, a messenger would be sent. The young men and women would dig a grave and take care of all the needs for burial. The villagers would continue to visit the bereaved family for several more days to comfort them. If there were any sick or dead who needed to be carried, tribals would do so willingly, no matter how difficult it might be. The missionaries were amazed to see how Mizos took care of Howard Dinwiddie, the American church leader mentioned in the previous chapter, who died in their country. J.M. Lloyd stated:

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23 This writer has seen villagers helping each other in these ways in southern Mizoram, in the days before motor vehicles could reach the villages.
Five days after he came, on a sunny day in late December, according to D.E. Jones, at nine in the morning, Dinwiddie died. At noon the Mizo Christians began to carry his body to Aizawl. There were deep valleys and mountains higher than Snowdon along the path from Champhai to Aizawl, but they were determined that he should be buried among “his own kind”. Normally it would be a six day journey but they carried the dead stranger by day and night, according to the ancient custom, and brought him to Aizawl, a distance of 87 miles, in 32 hours. It was a most astonishing achievement and a marvellous expression of compassion for an unknown foreigner.24

In this way tribals shared sorrows and misfortunes with one another. In all these services they rendered to others, they expected no fee or reward.

2.5. Life as Celebration

Tribal people celebrated life. They were fond of congregating, singing, dancing, eating and drinking rice beer together. G.K. Ghosh observed that tribal people in Mizoram were “colourful people who are fond of celebrating feasts of merits, festivals with pomp and décor”.25 By singing, the Mizos expressed their feelings of joy and sorrow, and their aspirations. Tribal people generally did not sit and meditate upon life. Instead, they expressed life by singing, dancing, ritualising, and feasting together. As Thanzauva puts it, “tribal people worked with singing, had fellowship in singing and conversed through songs and singing”.26 Similarly, Lalbiaktluanga stated that Mizos “used to shout at the top of their voice while working in the jhum, expressing their feeling[s] of joy”.27

Mizos had a number of feasts and festivals. The main festivals were Chapchar Kut (Spring Festival), Mim Kut (Autumn Festival) and Pawl Kut (Harvest Festival). Among these the Chapchar Kut was greatest. Chapchar Kut was celebrated toward the end of February or the beginning of March every year. Before the festival occasion arrived, the entire community would prepare with great eagerness. Each family hurried to slash their jhum, and tried to make themselves free from worries in order to celebrate the festival. Those who had completed their work would voluntarily help others who were not able to complete the jhum slash. Meanwhile, every family tried to brew rice beer for the festival. Young men rehearsed traditional songs and

24 See Lloyd, History of the Church in Mizoram, 243-44.
26 Thanzauva, Theology of Community, 215.
27 See Lalbiaktluanga, “Theological Trends in Mizoram,”, 64.
dances in their dormitory or Zawlbuk. During the festival, every family tried to enjoy the best food they could obtain. Pigs and chickens were reared for the festival. And beside these, a few days before the event, every man would go hunting to fetch meat. Some would make traps, others might go fishing or hunting with guns.

During the Chapchar Kut festival, there was much drinking of rice beer, public singing, and dancing and feasting. Everybody put on their best clothes, and enjoyed the best food. On the eve of the festival, children and young people gathered at the village's Lungdawh, or cemetery, which was usually located at the frontier of the village. There they shared their meals. This was called Chhawngnawnwt. The participants used to put rice and meat into each other's mouth with much merriment, while elderly ones might wail as they remembered their departed loved ones. At night, the community congregated in the village courtyard, where young men and women would perform a dance known as Chhai. In this dance, the dancers stood in a circle and held their arms round each other's shoulders, sang songs and danced together to the beat of a drum. While the dancing was going on, children would supply them with rice beer. The festival celebration usually lasted not less than three days. During the celebration, they held that no husband and wife should either dispute with, or show anger to, one another.

In the Mizo's worldview, except for those few who could provide a series of public feasts or thangchhuah, there was no hope for a better life in the hereafter. Their religion taught that, for the commoners, life after death would be even more difficult than the present one. So for the general public, life on this earth was the time to celebrate. But this did not mean that people should go wild and indulge in immorality. On the contrary, Mizos regarded immorality as a serious crime and they had a saying that a tiger would attack one who committed adultery. At all events, life was something to be celebrated. By feasting, singing and dancing together with the drum Mizos expressed their feelings and celebrated their life.

Having described something of the basic tribals' understandings of the nature of the human being, now we will look at specifically the Mizos' understanding of pasaltha, which may be considered as an ideal human character in the Mizo context.
3. Pasaltha

In traditional Mizo society, the concept of pasaltha denoted a person who was regarded as an exemplary character, or a model for perceiving the meaning of a true human being. The Mizo word pasaltha (pasal - man or husband, and tha - good) literally means “a good man”, or “an ideal man”. Pasaltha in Mizo society denotes “a brave and manly person” or “a hero” who has shown his/her integrity of character by acts of selfless service to others who are in need.28 Although the term pasaltha is etymologically a masculine noun, it could also be used in reference to any person, male or female, who demonstrated the qualities inherent in the meaning of the term.29

As noted previously, in the past tribal people who lived in the same village usually maintained a close relationship with one another. They helped and served one another according to their needs. But amongst Mizos there were a few individuals who showed outstanding bravery and selfless service to others. Such persons were known as pasaltha. Pasalthas in Mizo society were brave and lawmngai persons (individuals who practised the virtues of lawmngaihna, which include self-sacrifice, hard work, endurance, humility and unconditional service to others who are in need). They were also defenders of weak and defenceless people and, because of their selfless services to the community; they became highly honoured and respected. We shall consider the concept of pasaltha in more detail.

3.1. Pasaltha as Brave

In primitive Mizo society, a pasaltha functioned as a brave who defended the community and individuals who were in need, even to the extent of sacrificing his own life. In the past, Mizo people lived in isolated villages independent of each other, each with their respective chief. While the people of one or more villages which came under the rule of one chief, maintained a close relationship with one another, people who lived beyond the boundary of one’s own village or chiefdom were usually treated as enemies. Since Mizos were nomadic rice-cultivating people, their search for better

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28 See also Kipgen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture*, 70.
29 For instance, H.W. Carter and H.S.Luaia described Chhingi and her sister, the devoted Christians of Lungmawi village, as hmeichhe pasaltha (women pasaltha). See Carter and Luaia, eds., *Mizoram Baptist Kohkran Chanchin*, 52.
land for cultivation often brought them into conflict with people of other villages or clans. Hence, they lived under very insecure conditions of life. Constant warfare with neighbouring clans or villages, plus encounters with wild animals, made their lives relatively vulnerable and fragile. Even to live at the frontier of the village, or have a jhum at the borderline, was very risky. At any moment enemies could arrive on a mission of destruction without any warning.

In such situations, the pasalthas acted as the shield and defender of the people. One of the legendary Mizo pasalthas, Vanapa of Chief Vanhuailiana’s Tualte village, was said to be very brave. He was always at the frontier of the enemy territory throughout his lifetime. According to V.L.Siama, Vanapa proposed that he would site his jhum at the borderline, and wished the Chief to take the one nearest to the village and all the widows and the weak to take sites in the middle. In the same way, he suggested that he would establish his home at the frontier of the village, and wished the Chief to be at the centre and widows and the weak in the middle.

Among other early Mizo pasalthas, the bravery of Khuangchera and Taitesena was well known in Mizoram. According to the tradition, once during a jungle trip a tiger attacked Khuangchera and his friends. The tiger caught one of them and carried him off to the bush. Khuangchera was concerned that the tiger could devour the man’s flesh, so he quickly jumped towards the tiger. The tiger retreated and thus he was able to recover the man’s body before it was eaten by the tiger. Similarly, on one occasion Taitesena with three companions went to hunt for an injured tiger. A large group of people wanted to follow them. But as the situation was highly dangerous, they obliterated all footmarks so that the people were unable to follow. As the four went ahead, the tiger attacked them. Thus they helped each other, and protected their

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30 Vanapa’s original name was Thangzachhinga. He belonged to the Vanchiu family of the Chawngthu clan. He became more popularly known as “Vanapa”, meaning, “Vana’s father”. It is the custom of the Mizos to address a married man or woman by the name of his/her eldest child, which is a gesture of respect. Vanapa was known by this customary given name, rather than by his original name.
31 See Siama, Mizo History, 55-56. See also C. Lalbiaknema, Zawlbuik Titi (Memoirs of the Zawlbuik) (Aizawl: Mizoram Publication Board, 2000), 91.
32 Khuangchera belonged to a Ralte clan, and he lived at Reiek village. He died in 1890.
33 Taitesena was a legendary pasaliha of Serhmun, which was Chief Hrangvunga’s village. See Siama, Mizo History, 58.
34 See Sangkhuma, Missionary-te Hnuhna, 66.
people from the tiger. Taitesena was said later to have laid down his life for the sake of others.

Among Mizos there were many braves who showed the courage to sacrifice their lives for others. Sometime around 1937, Hanga and Vaidaia unexpectedly encountered a big bear while they were cutting bamboos at the side of River Tuirial. Vandaia shot the bear with his gun, but failed to kill him. The bear then attacked him. He had no time to load his gun; so he took his dao (big knife) to defend himself. But unfortunately, the handle of the dao was broken, so that he had no means of defence against the bear. Hanga immediately came to the rescue, fighting the bear with his bare hands, for there was no time even to take out his dao. Hanga’s willingness to sacrifice his life for his friends made the difference. Thus, they were finally able to kill the bear with their gun.

The legacy of the pasaltha, a tradition of bravery and willingness to sacrifice one’s own life for the cause of others who were in need, is to a certain extent continued in tribal communities today. For instance, sometime in the 1970s some young boys of Bungtlang village went to Mat stream to collect crabs. While they were at the stream, they were attacked by a large python snake. When they saw the snake moving, the children started running. But Rinsiana, the weakest boy among them, could not run and was caught by the snake. He was frightened and shouted for help. When Chhandama, one of the other boys, saw his friend’s fate, he turned back to rescue him and was able to release his friend from the grip of the python. The President of India presented Chhandama with a civil gallantry award called Jeevan Raksa Pradak for his bravery.

3.2. Pasaltha as Tlawmngai

Tlawmngaihna, a noun form from which the word tlawmngai is derived, is a Mizo ethical principle, which provides the people with a basis upon which to exist and function as a community. Among the Ao Nagas, the idea is known by the term

37 Ibid.
The term *tlawmngaihna* in Mizo (*tlawm* – being defeated, and *ngaihna* – having become necessary) literally denotes a state of self-denial or accepting defeat, in the context of helping others who are in need. There is no exact equivalent word for *tlawmngaihna* in English. As J.M. Lloyd put it, “Honesty, courage, self-discipline, mutual help, a readiness to organize and be organized were all highly appreciated and in fact were largely summed up in the untranslatable word ‘tlawmngaihna’.” J.H. Lorrain explained the meaning of *tlawmngai* in terms of several groups of attributes:

1) To be self-sacrificing, unselfish, self-denying, persevering, stoical, stout-hearted, plucky, brave, firm, independent (refusing help); to be loath to lose one’s good reputation, prestige, etc, to be too proud or self-respecting to give in, and so on.

2) To persevere, to endure patiently, to make light of personal injuries, to dislike making a fuss about anything.

3) To put one’s own inclinations on one side and do a thing which one would rather not do, with the object either of keeping up one’s prestige, or of helping or pleasing another, or of not disappointing another.

4) To do whatever the occasion demands no matter how distasteful or inconvenient it may be to oneself or to one’s own inclinations.

5) To refuse to give in, give way, or be conquered.

6) To not like to refuse a request, to do a thing because one does not like to refuse, or because one wishes to please others.

7) To act pluckily or show a brave front.

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40 See James Herbert Lorrain, *Dictionary of the Lushai Language* (Calcutta: Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1940), 513.
As reflected in this definition, the concept of *tlawmngaihna* embraces a wide spectrum of ethical virtues such as selfless service for others, humility, patience, stoicism, honesty, accountability and trustworthiness.

In the primitive past, Mizos used to teach their children the principle of *tlawmngaihna* both at home and at Zawlbuk (the bachelors' dormitory). Parents taught their children to practise *tlawmngaihna*, and not to receive or eat every gift others might offer them. *Pasalthas* and elder men taught younger folks the principles of bravery and *tlawmngaihna*, by narrating stories and their own experiences at the Zawlbuk. Accordingly, during outings in the jungle they practised what they had learned in the Zawlbuk. Younger folks would try to serve the older ones to their maximum capacity, and without waiting for any formal request. They normally knew what was needed in each situation and did it accordingly. In this way, *tlawmngaihna* is clearly an important virtue inherent in primitive Mizo society. N.E. Parry, at one time the Superintendent of Lushai Hills, noted several ways in which *tlawmngaihna* was practised in Mizo society. The following are some of them:

If a man falls sick in the cultivating season, his fellow villagers are expected to weed his fields for him. The chief will probably call for volunteers for this work and if the rules of *Tlawmngaihna* are properly followed in the village there will be numerous volunteers who will vie with each other to get the work done.  

In times of a hunting expedition, he said:

A hunting expedition offers many opportunities for the exhibition of Tlawmngaihna. A man who possesses endurance and is able to go on all day with very little food, who is courageous in following up wounded wild beasts, and thinks of his friends before himself, takes less than his share of the food, is industrious in building the shelter for the night and in collecting wood for the fire is said to possess Tlawmngaihna and according to the dictates of good form the young men are supposed to vie with each other in these respects. If two men one of whom has a gun come up to an animal, the man with the gun, if he follows Tlawmngaihna will offer his friend first shot. If a man gets hurt by a wild animal, his companions must stay and look after him and must not continue the chase and leave him alone. If a man got caught by a wounded bear or other animal it would be a fearful disgrace if his companions ran away and left him to his fate, they are bound to stay and help him.

In traditional Mizo society, the principle of *tlawmngaihna* was best expressed or embodied in the life and activity of the *pasaltha*. A *pasaltha* as *tlawmngaihna* was

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42 Ibid., 20.
always ready to help and respond to the needs and aspirations others. Even in the Zawlbuk, pasaltha Taitesena was said to have persistently occupied the most dangerous place, and if there were any call for help he would be the first to respond to it. During hunting trips, he became the one who cooked the meal and made everything ready while others still slept. Two traditional stories may serve as illustration. On one occasion during a hunting trip, an elderly person found a stone-cube that appeared to be very good as a knife-sharpener and said, “If it was not very far away from home, I should take this stone-cube home for a knife-sharpener”. As he heard this, Taitesena put the stone-cube in his bag secretly; and when they reached the entrance of the village he took it out and gave it to the elder man, saying, “Sir, here is your sharpener”.  

On another hunting occasion, there was no curry at evening mealtime. An elderly man among them, yearning for curry, said, “We should have collected some of the wild banana flowers we saw during today’s trip for the evening curry”. At mealtime, to the surprise of everybody, the wild banana flowers the elderly person had mentioned during the previous mealtime were served. What had happened was that, while others were sleeping, Taitesena went back to the tract of banana flowers, and collected some and prepared them for the morning meal. In these ways, the pasaltha practised tlawmngaihna, trying to help others and attempting to surpass others in doing his or her ordinary daily tasks efficiently.

The pasaltha as tlawmngai was also unselfish and delighted in serving others, even at considerable personal inconvenience. Another Mizo story tells us that, on one occasion, pasaltha Vanapa and friends went together on a hunting expedition. As they went, they all became very hungry. Vanapa had only one country loaf of bread, called chhangpai. He took out the bread and gave it to his friends, telling them that he already had had his share. In actuality, he gave them his own food and denied himself for the sake of his hungry friends.

43 See Siama, Mizo History, 58.
44 See Ibid.
45 Carter and Luaia, eds., Mizoram Baptist Kohhron Chanchin, 8.
Likewise, sometimes the precept of *tlawmngaihna* made Mizos very reserved and unwilling to express their needs, even to the point of not telling the truth. As Khuanga has pointed out, “A starving Mizo when one sincerely asks whether he likes food or not will certainly say ‘no’ because of the principle of Tlawmngaihna”.46 Because of *tlawmngaihna*, people who did not know the Mizo culture sometimes used to ascribe incorrect motives to Mizos. Carter and Luaia noted that in the Khasi Hills, when the Khasis saw Mizo students digging a grave enthusiastically when someone died, they ridiculed them saying, “Mizos were very fond of digging a grave”.47

Humility was another remarkable aspect of a *pasaltha*’s quality of *tlawmngaihna*. It is said that *pasaltha* Vanapa was very humble. Sometimes people did not believe his humility, and tested him by disturbing his work to see whether or not he would get angry. Once when someone destroyed the chicken cage he was making, he said to himself, “This could be perhaps still usable for a chicken nest. As for the chicken cage, I shall make another one”.48

In Mizo society, the *pasaltha* was a person who best demonstrated the principle of *tlawmngaihna* in his/her life. As Kipgen puts it, the *pasaltha* as *tlawmngai* was:

obedient and respectful to the elders; courteous in dealing with the weak and the lowly; generous and hospitable to the poor, the needy and the strangers; self-denying and self-sacrificing at the opportune moments in favour of others; ready to help those in distress; compassionate to a companion who falls sick while on journey or becomes victims of a wild beast in the hunt by never abandoning him to his fate; heroic and resolute at war and in hunting; stoical in suffering and in facing hardship under trying circumstances; and persevering in any worthwhile undertaking however hard and daunting that might prove to be.49

### 3.3. Pasaltha as Defender of the Weak

*Pasalthas* were not merely brave and *tlawmngai*, they were also defenders of the defenceless. Taitiesena was well known in Mizo tradition for his efforts to abolish ill

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treatment of younger boys at the hands of their seniors. In the Mizo society of his time children were not highly valued. One old Mizo saying said, “Naupang leh haite chu an piang leh zel a lawm” (Children and fruit would continue to be born). The implication was that, if one child died, another would be born. This attitude expressed itself in neglect of children and sometimes use of them for menial tasks. Some older youths in Taitesena’s village used to mistreat children. They would tell them to do something menial, and if they refused, the youths would punish them. For example, on a dark or rainy night, some older youths might ask young boys to go to distant houses, to fetch their smoking pipes or to do something else. Under no circumstances could the young boys refuse such commands from their seniors. They obeyed out of fear. To give another example, at the Zawlbuk senior youths would demand that young boys kindle a fire even if firewood were at their own feet.

Taitesena was very concerned about the ill treatment younger boys suffered at the hands of their seniors, and he wanted to abolish it. So he made himself available amongst the children at the Zawlbuk and, whenever people demanded that the children kindle a fire or fetch something, he quickly did it by himself in their stead. Acts such as these shamed the persons who were mistreating younger folk, and eventually led to better treatment of young boys in the village. We have already noted a similar attitude on the part of Vanapa, who suggested that the weak and the widows in the community should occupy a more secure middle place both at home and in the cultivating fields. The defenceless people must be protected from enemies and given security.

3.4. The Pasaltha’s Award

Pasalthis and those who had demonstrated the principles of tlawmngaihna in their lives were held in high esteem in traditional Mizo society, not only by the ordinary public but also by the Chief and his cabinet. The person who by the conventional judgement of the villagers was regarded to be the most tlawmngai in the community was highly honoured. On occasions of public feasting or festival when there was social drinking, a cup of rice beer called Tlawmngai No (the Tlawmngai Cup) would

50 See Thanga, Pi Pu Len Lai, 22.
be offered in recognition of his contribution to the community. At such times, no one would partake of the rice beer until the most *tlawmngai* person drank. Though the item offered might look very simple and insignificant, it was the highest honour in traditional Mizo society.

In recognition of Vanapa’s *tlawmngaihna* and his contribution to Mizo society, the present Aizawl town hall is named “Vanapa Hall”. In a similar manner, the erstwhile Mizo National Army, the military wing of the revolutionary Mizo National Front, named their battalions after legendary *psalthas* such as Vanapa, Taitezena, Khuangchera, Chawngbawla and Zampuimanga.51

In summary, the *pasaltha* in Mizo society functioned as an exemplary person, and hence the concept may be considered the best model or metaphor for understanding the image of a true human being in the Mizoram context. We shall return to this topic when we consider Christology from a tribal’s perspective. We turn now from the consideration of the tribal understanding of humanity to the tribal understanding of land.

4. The Centrality of Land

Traditional tribal understanding of land was born out of the context where human survival was directly dependent upon the products of the land. In that situation, a harmonious and respectful relationship with nature became essential for survival.52 Indeed, tribal people not only developed a strong sense of attachment to the land, but also showed great respect and care for nature as a whole. Hence, among the tribals land became very central to their life and worldview. Not only was it viewed as a source of life and as a basis of identity, but also became a primary framework within which most other realities were perceived. As Wati Longchar puts it, for tribal people “land is the centre and key for understanding our worldview. Human selfhood, the Supreme Being, the Spirit, history and ethics are defined and perceived only in

51 See also Thanzauva, *Theology of Community*, 129, footnote 18.
relation to land". In the following discussion, we shall try to highlight some of the main ideas concerning tribal understanding of land.

4.1. Land is a Source of Life

Tribal people regarded land as a source of life from which they got all the resources necessary for their livelihood. In the absence of other means of livelihood, traditional tribal life was directly dependent upon the produce of the land. Indeed, tribal people just lived by what the earth provided them. Their survival and well-being was totally dependent on the land and, without land, tribal people were like a child without a mother. As a mother feeds her baby, the earth fed tribal people with its resources. One Mizo folk tale, called Mauruangi Thawnthu (The Story of Mauruangi), portrays the relationship of tribal people with the land as a mother-child relationship:

Mauruangi was a poor little girl. Her mother was drowned in a river, and her father married another woman. Her stepmother severely maltreated Mauruangi so that she became very thin and pale. In utmost misery, she went to the river where her mother was drowned. In the river she found her mother had become a fish, and when the mother-fish saw her poor little girl she fed her with fish. So Mauruangi went to the river everyday and became increasingly healthy and fat. But when her stepmother found Mauruangi was becoming healthy and fat, she sought the reason. When she discovered the mother-fish, she caught and killed it. One of the bones of the fish Mauruangi’s mother turned into a Phunchawng tree. Little Mauruangi went to the tree and said, Ka nu, Phunchawng darhniangi, ka nu, kur diam diam (Mummy, my sweet Phunchawng, mummy, bend down). When Mauruangi said these words, the tree bent down and Mauruangi sucked juice from Phunchawng flowers and thus received new life again. When her stepmother discovered that the Phunchawng tree was feeding Mauruangi, she hired people to cut the tree down. While the tree was at the point of falling, little Mauruangi, who stood besides the tree, addressed the tree in song: Ka nu, Phunchawng darhniangi, ka nu tang fan fan (Mummy, my sweet Phunchawng, Mummy, hold on). Whenever Mauruangi cried with these words, the tree was restored again and would not fall. At last, people took Mauruangi away and only then could they cut the tree down.

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54 Land in this study is used to denote not only the earthly surface, but also the fauna and flora of a given place, including rivers, mountains, and all its natural resources, including minerals, oils and gases.
55 Longchar, "Dancing with the Land," 123.
56 This story is based on the personal memory of the writer, who had received the story as orally transmitted to him during his childhood.
As a result of their dependency on land, tribal people naturally developed a deep sense of attachment to the land. In fact, many tribal myths portrayed land as a mother from which their ancestors came forth. Mizos believed that their ancestors originated from Chhinlung (the bowels of the earth) and came to settle in their present territory under the leadership of a person called Phungshoko. Ilaitia Tuwere has noted that, in the languages of several Pacific Island nations, including Samoa, Tonga, Tahiti and the New Zealand Maori, the word for land is identical to, or related to, the word for womb or placenta. It is clear that, in many parts of the world, tribal people looked upon the earth as a mother from whom they were born and received resources for their living.

4.2. Land is Sacred

For tribal people, land was not only a source of life, but also a sacred reality, a living entity indwelt by spirit. Wati Longchar has stated that, in the dialects of some Naga tribes such as Ao and Sangtam, the Supreme Being is essentially called Lijaba (li means “earth” and jaba means “real”), meaning, “the Supreme Being is ‘the real earth’”. Or sometimes it is called Lizaba, (li means “soil” and zaba means “enter”), which means, “the one who enters or indwells the soil”. In the Nagas’ view, Lijaba was believed to have entered the soil in the same way as “a vital seed gets buried beneath the soil and germinates as the life of the plant”. In fact, in the primal religious worldview, everything on earth was perceived as being animated by spirit. Being indwelt by the spirit, land was sacred.

Perceiving it as an entity indwelt by spirits, tribal people looked upon the land as a living being and treated it with great respect. In most traditional tribal societies of northeast India, rituals were performed to show respect for the land and to incur its blessing. For instance, Yangkahao Vashum has pointed out that, among the Tangkhul Nagas, a taboo or genna for three days was observed annually to pay respect to and

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58 Ilaitia S. Tuwere, Vanua: Towards a Fijian Theology of Place (Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 2002), 36.
59 See Longchar, "Dancing with the Land," 119.
60 Ibid.
show care for, the land. During these days, nobody would dig the ground or collect mud from it. To do so would be considered an insult to the earth and hence punishment would be directed against such a culprit.\textsuperscript{61} As their livelihood was directly dependent upon its resources, tribal people developed a strongly reverential attitude towards the land. During ceremonial purifications of the earth, a priest would invoke the earth to bless the people and the seed they sowed. Among the Nagas, one such prayer uttered was:

\begin{center}
O Earth, wherever it may be my people dig, be kind to them. Be fertile when they give the little seeds to your keeping. Let there be rich harvest and until the paddy seeds are reaped, let no epidemics visit the village. Wherever seeds we sow in the field, let the crops be healthy as it \textit{sic} could be.\textsuperscript{62}
\end{center}

For tribal people, land was also a holy ground, or a temple, through which they discerned the will of God. Unlike other religious adherents, tribal people of northeast India did not have a temple or written scripture. For them land was both the temple and the scripture. It was on the land that they worshipped God and offered sacrifices and prayers. It was through the land that they read and discerned God and the spirits and knew their will. Like the Hebrew, “The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork”(Psalm 19: 1), tribal people read about God through the land. When Mizos saw a clear sky and a good sunrise on New Year’s day, they believed that the ensuing year would be dry; if it was cloudy, they thought that there would be heavy rainfall. Similarly, when in a year there was very good flowering of mango trees, they held that there would be a devastating cyclonic storm and people had to be prepared for it. Likewise, every movement of the earth and the things in it was perceived to be communicating an important message for the people. As Wati Longchar has put it, for the tribals:

\begin{quote}
Rocks and boulders, trees and rivers are not just empty objects, but religious objects; the voices and songs of animals speak of a religious language; the eclipse of the sun or of the moon are \textit{sic} not simply a silent phenomenon of nature, but it speaks to the community that observes it, often warning of an impending danger and misfortune.\textsuperscript{63}
\end{quote}

Since land was sacred, it should not be exploited for selfish gain. The Mizos held that it was a taboo to alter a \textit{jhum}’s boundary line to one’s advantage; it would result in ill

\textsuperscript{61} See Vashum, "Towards a Tribal Theology of Eco-Human Rights," 56.
\textsuperscript{62} Cited from L. Imti Aier by Thanzauba, \textit{Theology of Community}, 177.
\textsuperscript{63} Longchar, "Dancing with the Land," 122.
health and could lead to death. Similarly, it was also considered taboo to build a house obstructing a public path. People who did so would incur the curses of those who passed through the path, and problems and misfortunes would come upon them.\textsuperscript{64} It was taboo to privatise a fountain; it would incur suffering for one’s family.\textsuperscript{65} In the tribals’ perspective, therefore, land should be treated with care and respect; it should not be exploited and sold as a lifeless commodity.

4.3. Land Belongs to the Community

Like the Hebrews, who maintained, “The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it” (Psalm 24: 1), tribal people regarded land as the gift of God and perceived the community as the only legitimate custodian within a given geographical territory inhabited by them.\textsuperscript{66} In traditional Mizo society, each community owned land under the stewardship of a Chief, who acted as the guardian of the village community. Every year the Chief, in consultation with the village elders, selected a particular area for jhum cultivation for all the families of the village. In recognition of his chieftainship, the chief was entitled to receive from every family of the village a fixed amount of paddy called fathang. Within the perimeter of the community lands, every member of the village had the right and freedom to hunt, fish and gather the produce of the land.

As noted previously, tribal people perceived land as a living entity endowed with spirits; therefore they did not think that individuals could own land exclusively as personal property. In their view, individuals could not sell or give away the land to others without the consent of the community or the Chief. Of course, individuals might own some plots or fields for a certain period of time; yet this should be done within the wider understanding that the land belonged to the community. As Thanzauva stated, in the tribals’ perspective:

Private ownership may be an appropriate way of administering those resources for certain cultures, but private ownership means stewardship or trusteeship, not the right to exploit the land and deprive others from access to land.\textsuperscript{67}

\textsuperscript{64} See Kipgen, \textit{Christianity and Mizo Culture}, 128.
\textsuperscript{65} See Thanga, \textit{Pi Pu Len Lai}, 59.
\textsuperscript{66} See also Thanzauva, \textit{Theology of Community}, 184f.
\textsuperscript{67} See ibid., 185.
Community ownership of land implied that, for the tribals, land is the mark of their identity. Without land, tribal people could not envisage the existence of genuine community. If the land was lost, the tribe’s identity was lost. In the tribals’ context, it was the land that held the people together as a community.

This attitude towards land is by no means unique to the tribal people of Mizoram or northeast India. Writing in the Pacific context, Tuwere said, “One does not own the land; the land [rather] owns him”. The land gave tribal people an identity. In fact, it was the usual practice for tribal people to identify themselves with a village or tribe. For example, a stranger, instead of giving his/her name, usually gave the name of his/her village or tribe. Since land provided identity and unity to them, alienation of tribal people from their land would create among them identity crises and disintegration. The following observation, made by a team of the World Council of Churches, who visited the Australian Aborigines during June 15 to July 3, 1981, is a fair summary of the tribals’ relationship with land in general:

Land is their spiritual heritage. It is part of their being a people. Land was the basis of all relationships with Aboriginal human and physical environment. Land defined the clan, its culture, its way of life, its fundamental rights, its religious and cultural ceremonies, its patterns of survival and above all, its identity. Land was synonymous with Aboriginal existence. It could not be defiled, desecrated or cheapened. The exploitation, erosion, plundering, misuse or spoil amounts to the destruction of the Aborigines’ cultural and spiritual heritage; in contemporary understanding, it amounts to cultural genocide.

Thus, for tribal people land is not only a basis of life, but also a fundamental key for understanding their worldview. As reflected in the survey, the traditional tribal concept of land was integrally related to the understanding God, to which we now turn.

5. The Understanding of God and Spiritual Beings

Tribal people have often been described as animists and looked upon as having no religion of their own. Major A.G. McCall, the Superintendent of Lushai Hills during

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68 Tuwere, Vanua, 48.
the British rule, said, “Before the occupation of their land by the British the Lushais were wholly animists”. In the same way, David Kyles, in his biography of Rev. J.H.Lorrain, described the people in Mizoram prior to the introduction of Christianity as animists. He said:

That is to say, they have no religion at all. They do not worship any gods, or goddesses, but are keenly aware of the unseen spirit world of which they are terribly afraid every moment of their lives.

It is true that tribal people such as Mizos, in their traditional belief, acknowledged the existence of spirits, and that some of the spirits were thought to inhabit objects like trees, ponds, caves, mountains and streams. But to characterize them as not worshipping any god, or as mere “animists” does not sufficiently explain the character of tribal religion. Undoubtedly, tribal people had maintained their distinctive religion for centuries and were deeply religious in their own way. In what follows, we will briefly highlight some of the major Mizo concepts of God and other spiritual beings and, where appropriate, reference will also be made to the ideas of other tribal people.

5.1. Pathian

Most tribal people believed in the existence of a Supreme Being or God who is superior to all other deities. Among the Mizos this God was perceived to be a male deity, and they called him Pathian (pa means “father” and thian, derived from the word thiang, meaning, “holy”), which means “Holy Father”. This God was believed to be a benevolent being, and was considered to be the creator and sustainer of all things. Sometimes, however, Mizos also spoke of this God in feminine terms such as Khuanu. Khua means “weather” or “nature” and nu means, “mother”. Khuanu possibly mean “Mother of Nature” or “Mother Nature”. But the term Khuanu was

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72 See also Thanzauva, Theology of Community, 152.
73 See also Zairema, "The Mizos and their Religion,” 39. Mizo-related tribes such as Kukis and Chins also called God Pathian. Among other tribes of northeast India, the Supreme Being was known as Liaba in Ao Naga, Ukpenuafu in Angami Naga, U Blei in Khasi and Tartara Robunga in Garo. See Thanzauva, Theology of Community, 152.
used only in poetry, and because of this, Zairema has suggested that the term *Khuanu* might be considered to be a poetical name for *Pathian*.74

In the traditional Mizo worldview, God was conceived to be living in heaven with a family just like human beings. Therefore, beside the names *Pathian* and *Khuanu* which we have mentioned, they also spoke about other heavenly beings, including *Puvana, Vanhrika, Vanchungnula* and *Sichangneii*. When viewed in relation to this family image of conceiving God, *Pathian* could be depicted as a father and *Khuanu* as a mother.75 Likewise, *Puvana* (pu means “grandfather”, van means “heaven”) could be portrayed as a grandfather, *Vanhrika* (literally, “heaven’s lice”, which symbolically may mean “the permanent inhabitant of heaven”) as a son, *Vanchungnula* (a lady of the high heaven) as a daughter and *Sichangneii* (a star which has a feather tail) as another daughter, or as the personal name of *Vanchungnula*. When they heard roaring thunder Mizos used to say, “*Puvana* was pulling his big bowl”.76 In a similar vein, they spoke of the rainfall as *Vanchungnula* accidentally falling down and pouring out the water that she carried on her way home from a fountain. However, all these other heavenly beings, excepting *Pathian*, were never invoked in times of need or for a blessing.77

Generally, Mizos conceived of *Pathian* as a remote being who dwelt mostly in the high heaven, having very little to do with the daily affairs of human beings. They looked upon him as the creator, and sometimes they addressed him as *Siamtu* (Creator)78 or as *Pathian nak kalh pa* (Pathian who formed the ribs).79 Despite this general sense of *Pathian*’s remoteness, Mizos nevertheless also attributes to him some interest and involvement in human affairs. He was also considered to be the one who arranged marriages. Mizos used to describe a husband and wife who had a good marriage and enjoyed a close relationship as *Pathian samsuih* (ones whose hairs are joined together by Pathian). Likewise, they regarded *Pathian* as the source of blessing.

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76 This refers to the practice of Mizo children pulling an iron bowl on a piece of string and thus making noise.
78 See Thanga, Pi Pu Len Lai, 80.
and goodness. When their jhum produced good harvest or they experienced good fortune they said, “Our Pathian is good”. In the same manner, when one luckily escaped a close shave with death, s/he would say, “If Pathian was not good, I would have certainly died”.\footnote{See Thanga, Pi Pu Len Lai, 80.}

Pathian was considered to be a kind deity, merciful and loving. People did not regard him as the cause of suffering and misfortunes and thus he was not considered to require appeasement with sacrifices and offerings. He was believed to be an active onlooker from heaven and it was to him that they prayed when in trouble. In times of extreme difficulties they used to console themselves by saying: Pathian a awm ang chu (Pathian would be there) or Pathianin bawkkhupin min thlir reng ang chu (Pathian is always looking down on us), meaning that he would come down and help them. One traditional Mizo story, entitled Liandova te Unau thawnthu (The Story of Liandova and his Brother), may serve as illustration. In this story, Liandova and his younger brother Tuaisiala were orphans. Their father died when they were infants and their mother deserted them for another man. The two brothers became very poor and often they did not have enough food. Tuaisiala, because he was still very young, used to cry for food. At such miserable moments, Liandova would console his hungry brother, saying, “Tuaisial, lungngai ma ta che, zangkhua ala bungbu thei a ni. Chung Pathianin bawkkhupin min en reng alawn” (Tuaisial, do not worry, history can turn upside down. Pathian above is looking down on us).\footnote{For a full version of this story, see P.S. Dahrawka, ed., Mizo Thawnthu (Legends and folk tales of the Mizo people) (Aizawl: Thankhuni, 1964; reprint, 1994), 66-82. B. Lalthangliana regards the reference to Pathian in this story as the earliest reference to the Supreme Being ever made in Mizo history. He thinks that this could date back to the time when the Mizos lived around River Run, possibly between A.D. 1350-1450. See B. Lalthangliana, "Mizo Society leh Sakhua," in Mizo hnam zia leh khawthlang nun siam thatna (Mizo Culture and Social Transformation) (Aizawl: Synod Publication Board, 1988), 4.}

Hence, Pathian was not conceived of as a mere spectator. He was the one who saw the people from above and was willing to help them and uphold justice. This is illustrated by the story of Liandova te Unau. One day a Chief of the region, named Lersia, visited the village of Liandova and his brother Tuaisiala in disguise. As the visiting Chief appeared to be very poor and sick, no villagers would provide him with accommodation. When Liandova and his brother found him, they pleaded with him to
spend the night in their hut. The visiting stranger later disclosed his identity and blessed the poor little brothers. The story says that eventually Liandova and his brother became very prosperous, even to the extent that Liandova was able to marry the village Chief’s daughter and provide a series of public feasts to become thangchhuah.82

In some traditions, Pathian or the Supreme Being was said to have come down on earth and blessed the people. Zairema describes a Lusei myth in which Pathian was spoken of as coming down to earth and blessing the Lusei clan:

One day Pathian came down from heaven to a mixed village. It was their custom to welcome all guests and so he approached a man of Hnante clan. That man had just performed one type of sacrifice that prohibited entertainment of guests. The Pathian had to approach a man of Lusei clan who welcomed him and entertained him happily. The family was somewhat puzzled at the behaviour of their guest but did all they could do to make him feel at home. Next morning the man went out with their guest to see him off. Pathian then disclosed his identity, instructed him to sacrifice a piglet promising perpetual blessing to the family, he [sic] then disappeared.83

After that, according to the legend, the Lusei clan became more and more prominent among the Mizos and their dialect, which was called duhlian, became the common language of Mizoram in due course.84

Similarly, Wati Longchar quotes a myth from Bendangangshi and Apok Aier in which Lijaba, the Supreme Being, was said to have visited a village in disguise and blessed two orphan sisters, Yarla and Asatula. The myth stated that:

Lijaba came disguised in the form of an old man, almost naked, having sores over all his body. He went from one [sic] door to door requesting for shelter but everyone gave their own excuses saying, “Behold we wait for the coming of Lijaba,” some [sic] would say, “we are observing anempong because a child is born to us today and so we cannot have you here”... None welcome [sic] him. At the end of the village there were two orphan sisters living in a small hut. They were Yarla and Asatula, daughters of Nokdensanger. Lijaba asked Yarla and Asatula for shelter. At first, they thought of refusing him because of their poverty and their house was a tiny thatched home and they also knew that the old man was not carrying anything with him. Thus they said, “We do not have enough food to entertain you grandfather”. Lijaba answered, “I am carrying enough food for three of us”. The two sisters invited him to their little hut. The old man asked them to set the pot on the fire. He took a grain of rice from his head and put it into the pot. To their great amazement, it turned into a

82 See Dahrawka, ed., Mizo Thawnthu, 66-82.
84 Ibid., 39.
pot full of rice. In the same way, he peeled a small piece of skin from his knee and cooked in another pot. It also turned into a pot full of meat. Three of them had a delicious meal that night.

The following morning, the old man casually looked towards the village fields and asked the two sisters to identify the owners of the fields. They named the owners of each field except theirs because their field was too small to be disclosed to others. But the younger sister disclosed it while the elder the elder sister went to get the comb that had fallen. However, her embarrassment was turned into a great blessing. The old man cursed all the fields that belonged to the villagers and blessed the field of the two orphan girls. He said, “let there be a good harvest”. The old man instructed them to cut string or rope out of their basket when they have enough [sic] harvest. Having blessed them, Lijaba left them and disappeared out of their sight. The two girls kept the old man’s word in their heart. The harvest time came. The field belonging to the two girls had a good harvest whereas others had not. Yarla and Asatula had rich and [sic] abundant harvest that they had no place to store their grains [sic]. Then, as instructed by the old man, they cut their basket-string and to their surprise the harvest was completed. When the villagers came to know what had happened to their harvest, they realised that the old man who visited them was none other than Lijaba.85

This Ao Naga myth is very similar to the previously related Mizo folk story of Liandova te Unau. In both stories the actors were poor young orphans who were neglected and hungry and in both stories, an old stranger in disguise visited them. In the Ao Naga myth, the actors were two sisters, Yarla and Asatula, whereas in the Mizo folk tale they were two brothers, Liandova and Tuaisiala. In the Ao Naga myth, the visitor in disguise was the Supreme Being called Lijaba, while in the Mizo story it was a Chief called Lersiu. Likewise, in the Ao Naga myth the one who blessed the grain harvest of the poor orphans was Lijaba; but in the Mizo story it was an old fairy woman.86 Whether both stories have the same origin, or are actually two different stories, is a moot question.

Thus, it may be well to conclude that, in Mizo religious tradition, Pathian was conceived not as a mere spectator from above. He was seen as one who had concern for, and identified himself, with the suffering of the people, particularly the poor and the vulnerable in the society. Later, the term Pathian came to be used in the Mizo Bible as the word for ‘God’.

86 See Dahrawka, ed., Mizo Thawnthu, 72-73.
Apart from Pathian, Mizo people also believed in the existence of a few other benevolent spirits. Among the most popular were Sakhua, Khuavang and Lasi. However, the identity of these spirits and beliefs concerning them were not clearly conceptualised, and sometimes the role and identity attributed to them were quite similar to that of Pathian.

5.2. Sakhua

The etymology of the term sakhua is unclear. Literally, the word sa means “animal” and khua “village” or “weather”. Zairema believes that sakhua was “the family or clan god”, who “built up, protected and cared for the family”. Hence, the term sakhua “probably means ‘life principle or basis’”. Kipgen gives a slightly different explanation. For him, sa stands for the god worshipped by the ancestors and khua for nature or creation. He maintains that originally, in both the concept and the practice of worship, the two words were separated. Sa, he says, was worshipped with an offering of a pig sacrifice, and khua was worshipped with the sacrifice of a mithun (or bull). This suggests that Kipgen regarded sa and khua as the names of two different deities.

However, to consider sa or khua or sakhua as the name of a deity is very ambiguous. Although a ceremony of worship to the deity performed with an animal sacrifice called sakhaw biak was a common practice, to identify the deity itself as sa or khua or sakhua was not common. In view of its linguistic derivation and the practice surrounding the tradition, therefore, it is more likely that sakhua should be understood as a practice in which an animal sacrifice was offered to a clan deity by the village community or family, rather than as the name of any particular deity. In fact, in common Mizo usage the word sakhua simply means “religion”.

According to Mizo tradition, every family used to rear castrated pigs, the largest of which, called Vawkpa sut nghak, were offered to the family or clan deity. They believed that if one neglected this sacrifice, their clan god might get angry and

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89 See Kipgen, Christianity and Mizo Culture, 112.
withdraw his protection against attacks from evil spirits. When they performed such a sacrificial offering, the priest used to invoke the god of their ancestors to accept their offering and pray for his blessing and protection. John Shakespear described one such chant or invocation, as follows:

Ah-h. Arise from the village, Aw-w
   And accept our sacrifice.
Ah-h. Arise from the open space in the village, Aw-w
   And accept our sacrifice.
Ah-h. Arise from your dwelling places, Aw-w
Ah-h. Arise from the paths. Aw-w
Ah-h. Arise from the gathering mists. Aw-w
Ah-h. Arise from the yam plots. Aw-w
Ah-h. Arise from the Bualchuam hill. Aw-w
Ah-h. Arise from Khawkawk hill. Aw-w
Ah-h. Arise from the Buhmam hill. Aw-w
Ah-h. Arise from above the road. Aw-w
Ah-h. Arise from below the hill. Aw-w
Ah-h. Arise from Vahlit hill. Aw-w
Ah-h. Arise from Muchhip hill. Aw-w

The spirits of three more hills are invoked.

Ah-h. Arise from the new village site. Aw-w
Ah-h. Arise from the shelf over the hearth. Aw-w
Ah-h. Arise from the village. Aw-w
Ah-h. Arise from the floor. Aw-w
Ah-h. Arise from the earth. Aw-w
Ah-h. Spirits prayed to by our ancestors,
   Accept our sacrifice.

Bless Luta’s spirit (householder’s name).
Bless us with sons, bless us with daughters,
Bless us while in bed, bless us round the hearth,
Make us to flourish like a sago palm,
Make us flourish like a hai [mango] tree.
Bless us while the sun shines.
Bless us while the moon shines.
May those above bless us, may those below us bless us.
Guard us from our enemies, guard us from death.
Favour us with flesh. (May we have success in the chase)
Favour us with the produce of the jungle.
For ten, for a hundred years bless us.
Bless us in killing man, bless us in killing animals,
Bless us in cultivating our jhums, bless us in cultivating the beans.
Guard us in the presence of men, guard us in the presence of animals.
Bless us in our old age,
Bless us when our heads are bowed down.
Guard us from the spear, guard us from the dah [sword].
Those whom our grandmothers worshipped guard us,

Those whom our grandfathers worshipped guard us,
Bless us in spite of the faults in this our chant,
Bless us in spite of the faults in this our worship. 91

The idea of God, his role and especially his identity, which is portrayed in this chant or prayer, shows that, in this example of Mizo belief, the clan god was none other than Pathian. 92 The clan god thus appears to be a dimension of Pathian or the Supreme Being, rather than a distinct benevolent spirit. Saiaithanga said that, if asked, even the person who performed such sakhow biak would be very uncertain about the name of the deity invoked during the ceremony. At best, he said, the worshipper might identify the deity as “Khuavang”. 93 Normally, Mizos would not worship the deity, or adopt the cult of another clan or people, unless they were sure that the new god was powerful enough to protect them against the power of evil spirits.

5.3. Khuavang

Khuavang was believed to be a benevolent spirit, who was active in the world, and was closely involved in human affairs. Zairema describes khuavang as “the God who blessed marriage”. 94 Sometimes it was also conceived as “the guardian spirit in whose hands lay the destiny of every human being from cradle to grave”. 95 In certain cases, however, khuavang appeared to be not much different from other evil spirits. Its appearance to a human being was thought to be able to cause illness. It was also believed that the khuavang spirit could possess human beings and makes them khuavang zawl (khuavang possessed or agent). 96

Sometimes, however, the role and identity of khuavang appeared to be identical with Pathian. For example, a mole on the skin is called khuavang chhinchhiah (the mark of khuavang). Likewise, the lines in the palm are known as khuavang zai (the cut of khuavang) and the natural boundary that exists between two cultivated fields or fruit gardens is known as khuavang ri kham (a boundary made by khuavang). Therefore, it

92 See also Thanauva, Theology of Community, 155.
93 See Saiaithanga, Mizo Sakhu, 16-17.
95 See Kipgen, Christianity and Mizo Culture, 115.
was no wonder that when the first Western Christian missionaries started to translate the Bible there was great debate among the Mizo helpers concerning whether the term Pathian or Khuavang should be used for “God”.97

5.4. Lasi

Lasis were believed to be a host of benevolent spirits who lived in the forest and were responsible for the welfare of animals. Shakespear recounts a Mizo story about Lasi as follows:

The Lashi [Lasi] folk are spirits which live in the Lur and Tan precipices. Formerly a Lushai young man went shooting alone. Beneath the Tan precipice a most beautiful Lashi maiden was weaving, and on seeing her the youth became love-sick and could not go away, so he stayed and courted her all day, till it began to grow dark; then the Lashi maiden, wishing to go to her house, asked him to roll up her weaving for her, but he would not. Then she said to him, ‘What animal would you most like to shoot?’ and on his saying an elephant she at once caused him to kill one and he bore its head back in triumph, while the Lashi maiden and her mother rolled up the cloth and disappeared into the precipice.98

Similarly, N.E. Parry said:

According to Lushais a spirit called the Lasi is the owner of all wild animals and he keeps a servant to look after them, who is called the Sakhal. Lushais believe that if before they go hunting they sacrifice a fowl or a small pig to the Lasi and another to the Sakhal they will be lucky. This sacrifice is known as Lashikhal. A man who is always lucky at hunting is known as Lashi Zawl.99

Because Lasis were conceived to be spirits who looked after and controlled wild animals, it was thought to be impossible to kill wild animals without the permission of Lasis. Lasis were mostly spoken of as female beings and, as we have seen above, they were said to be very good looking. Mizos believed that sometimes Lasi girls fell in love with men, and those with whom they fell in love were supposed to be very lucky in hunting wild animals. Lasis were also said to have personal names just like Mizo girls, e.g., Chawngtinleri, Neihpuithangi and so on. The precipices of the Lurh and Tan mountains were supposed to be the headquarters of Lasis in olden Mizoram.100

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98 Shakespear, The Lushai - Kuki Clans, 67-68.
99 Parry, Lushai Custom, 14.
100 See also Saiathanga, Mizo Sakhua, 4-5; Siama, Mizo History, 66.
5.5. Malignant Spirits

Besides benevolent spirits, Mizo people also believed in the existence of numerous malignant spirits. These malignant spirits were supposed to reside in various objects and places, such as mountains, rock, caves, large trees, thick forest, underwater in lakes and in deep pools of rivers. Like human beings, they were thought to consist of males and females, and also to have children. Mizos even considered them to have a chief in the same way as they did, with many servants. It was believed that sometimes these spirits could also make appearances to people like human beings; or some people would say that they could only heard their voices and the sound of their passing, but did not see them physically. On some occasions, it was said that they terrified people by shaking their hut in the jhum. Mizos believed that these spirits, known in Mizo as Ramhuai (spirits who lived in the jungle) followed certain paths. Hence, certain adjoining points of two hills were called ramhuai liam kawn, that is, a place where ramhuais passed through.¹⁰¹ These spirits were greatly feared.

In the traditional Mizo worldview, these malignant spirits were regarded as being more powerful than, and very jealous of, human beings. At the same time, they could be provoked and angered. People had to be very careful in their words and activity, particularly when moving about in the forest. This writer himself was told, during his early youth, that when walking in the jungle he should not throw or roll stones down the precipices, as they would hit the head of Ramhuais’ children. Likewise, when they had a meal in the jungle, tribal people used to throw a little piece of food to the spirits, saying Khua tlai (probably meaning, “a share for the spirit”).¹⁰² However, it was believed that they would not simply attack human beings unless they were provoked and made angry.

Yet, since the spirits were believed to live on the same land where people lived and from which they earned their livelihood, encroachment on their sacred habitat was inevitable. So when a person, even by mistake, happened to encroach on their sacred habitat, the malignant spirits were thought to get angry and cause illness or misfortune.

¹⁰¹ See also Carter and Luaia, eds., Mizoam Baptist Kohrnan Chanchin, 16.
¹⁰² See Ibid., 17.
to the encroacher. Hence, tribal people attributed all their sufferings and sicknesses to the work of angry evil spirits. Therefore, when they became sick or suffered under any circumstance, they would seek to appease the spirits by offering sacrifices to them. However, when the missionaries and Westerners saw tribal people offering sacrifices to the evil spirits, they thought that tribals were worshipping evil spirits and so characterized them as "animists". But from the tribals' point of view, sacrifices were offered to evil spirits just for the purpose of recovering from illness or misfortune. This was not considered to be an act of worship. Tribal writers did not regard their ancestors as worshippers of evil spirits.

In concluding this section, it may be said that in the pre-literate Mizo worldview, human beings, nature and supernatural beings were perceived to be closely interrelated with one another as one family. For Mizos, there were no clear boundaries between the natural and the supernatural and between the human and the non-human. Human beings, nature and spirits, including God, were all perceived to be part of the same reality. Although they distinguished between God, the spirits and human beings, in their worldview, these distinctions were not understood in the sense of ontological separateness.

6. Concept of Life After Death

As noted earlier, there was a definite concept of life after death in traditional Mizo religious belief. Mizos believed that, after death, human souls went to either Mitthikhua (the village of the dead) or Pialral (paradise). Mitthikhua was the abode of the departed souls of the common people. It was believed to be a dull and shadowy underworld, where life had to be continued just as in the world of the living. But life in this place was believed to be more troublesome and difficult than in the present world; everything in the Mitthikhua was said to be on a much lower scale than in the present world. For instance, one kind of black caterpillar, called Mitthi savawm (dead man's bear), was thought to become a bear in the Mitthikhua. Likewise, in the Mizo

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103 See also Zairema, "The Mizos and their Religion," 33.
104 See ibid., 33ff. See also Thanzauva, Theology of Community, 153; Kipgen, Christianity and Mizo Culture, 110.
105 See also Thanzauva, Theology of Community, 157.
106 See also Carter and Luaia, eds., Mizoram Baptist Kohhran Chanchin, 27.
folk story of Zawltlingi and Ngambawma, it was said that a leaf in the water became a fish, and a yam tree a timber tree in Mitthikhua.107

Pialral, on the other hand, was regarded as the abode of the departed souls of the rich and heroes. It was situated on the other side of Mitthikhua, beyond the Pial River. As Shakespear explains, "On the far side of Mi-thi-khua runs the Pial river, beyond which lies Pial-ral, an abode of bliss".108 Hence, the term Pialral literally means "a land beyond Pial River".109 Those who went there did not need to work or cultivate jhum. An abundance of husked rice would be freely supplied to them, so that they would enjoy the other world with plenty of rice, meat and rice-beer. It was also believed that the souls of enemies they had killed during inter-tribal warfare would become their servants in Pialral. But in order to attain a place in Pialral, one had to provide a series of prescribed feasts to the community and became thangchhuhah.

Mizos believed that, at death, the soul escaped through a crack in the skull of the deceased and wandered in the vicinity of the village for three months.110 During this period the departed person’s usual seat at the family meal would be kept vacant and some food would be set aside for him/her. If a woman had sexual relations with another man within the period of three months after her husband’s death, she would be treated as an adulteress. After three months, however, she could return to her parents if she so chose, for the departed soul was believed to have left the village and begun his/her journey to the other world. On the way every soul was believed to pass through the Rih Lake, which is presently located in Myanmar territory about three kilometres from the Mizoram border. From there, the soul reached a hill called Hringlang tlang (a hill from where the living are visible), from where the soul could see the village of the living and where s/he longed for his/her loved ones and friends. But as the soul went on and drank Lungloh tui (heartless water) and plucked a Hawilo par (flower of no turning back), the soul ceased to contemplate the living world and swiftly proceeded on his/her journey.

107 For the detailed story of Zawltlingi and Ngambawma, see Dahrawka, ed., Mizo Thawnthu, 164-70.
109 See Kipgen, Christianity and Mizo Culture, 118.
110 For the following section on the Mizo concept of life after death, see also Zairema, "The Mizos and their Religion," 40-42; Kipgen, Christianity and Mizo Culture, 118ff.
Then as the soul came to the entrance of the Mithhi khua, it encountered a dreaded man called Pawla who lived there. According to the tradition, Pawla used to shoot the souls who passed through his residence with his large bow, and the wound he inflicted with his egg-sized pellets was so painful and powerful that it would take at least three years to recover! No one could escape him, because there was a large stone covering the path. When the soul stepped on the path, the stone tilted, making a clicking sound. This would awaken him even if he was asleep. However, Pawla dared not shoot people who had achieved thangchhuah.

As we have mentioned before, there were two ways to thangchhuah. The first was in lama thangchhuah (a thangchhuah connected with killing of domestic animals), and the second was ram lama thangchhuah (a thangchhuah connected with killing of wild animals). In order to become in lama thangchhuah one had to provide a series of public feasts in prescribed order. In all of these feasts, it was customary that large amounts of rice, meat and rice beer should be provided for public consumption, for the whole community must be fed and satisfied. The man who desired to perform the feast normally announced his intention well in advance. Large quantities of paddy (unhusked rice) had to be husked for the meal and for making rice beer. In this task all the boys and girls would help the owner by pounding the paddy. While taking out and pounding the paddy, large quantities of rice would be intentionally scattered around as waste for the poor and needy people. On the day of the khuangchawi celebration, which was the culmination of the thangchhuah feast, the man and his wife who were providing the feast would be carried in procession around the village street. They would be accompanied by great shouts and beating of drums (or khuang), from which the feast derived its name. The man and his wife would throw their possessions, including ornaments, clothing, pots, gongs, mithuns and guns (some in the form of tokens to be followed in kind later), on the ground and the people would scramble for them. In this way, a fairly large portion of their possessions would be distributed to others during the celebration of thangchhuah feasts.

111 See Chapter 3, section 2.1.3, “Christ as the entry into heaven”.
112 These feasts included Chawng, Sedawi, Mithirawp lam, Sechhun and Khuangchawi. See Kipgen, Christianity and Mizo Culture, 121.
In a similar manner, in order to become *ram lama thangchhuah* one had to provide a substantial quantity of meat and provide feasts to the community. To do this, one needed to be a very successful hunter and a fairly wealthy person. Such a person had to kill an elephant, a bear, a wild bison, a stag, a barking deer and a wild boar, and the flesh of all these animals would be distributed to the public. One would gain greater honour if one also killed a viper, an eagle, a flying lemur and a man. Apart from killing the prescribed animals and providing their meat to the people, the person also had to perform a ceremony called *ai* or *sa aih* for each of the animals killed, by killing domestic animals for the public feast. It was believed that the souls of the human beings and animals he killed would accompany the *thangchhuah* person on his way to Pialral. Even Pawla would be frightened to see such a *pasaltha* or hero accompanied by so many wild beasts and would forget his bow and pellets and would hide behind the door.

Thus, in traditional Mizo belief, paradise in the life after death was attainable only by those few who were able to share their resources and wealth with others. No paradise seemed to be available for the greedy people who refused to share their wealth and resources with others.

The above-mentioned socio-cultural traditions have had considerable influence upon the movement of Christianity in Mizoram. Although the missionaries and the early Mizo church leaders did not seriously consider the tribal cultural heritage as a source for doing Christian theology, the impact of traditional culture can nevertheless be perceived in various aspects of Mizo Christianity. In the following discussion, therefore, we shall briefly consider some of this legacy and see how this shaped the life and ministry of the Church in Mizoram.

### 7. The Legacy of Traditional Culture in Mizo Christianity

As a result of the interaction between Christianity and traditional Mizo culture, Christianity took on several new features in Mizoram. The development of these new features was influenced by traditional Mizo culture. In turn, these new features were quite instrumental in the spread of Christianity in Mizo society. The followings are some of them:
7.1. The Use of the Drum in Christian Worship

The drum was one of the few musical instruments Mizos had possessed in their traditional society. It was considered indispensable for any group singing, either around a beer pot at home or during feastings and festival celebrations. On every festive occasion the beating of the drum usually accompanied singing, dancing and the drinking of rice beer. The Mizo saying, *Khuang lova chai ang* (dancing without the drum), which described doing something together without proper planning or a leader, reflects the importance of the drum in Mizo culture.

Because of its association with traditional religious ceremonies and drinking of rice beer, the use of the drum was banned in early Mizo Christianity. But as the revival movement occurred and the Mizo Christians began to express their feeling and faith experiences in singing and dancing, traditional drums were introduced in Christian worship to help the singing. Since then the drum has become an indispensable part of the worship service in all the churches throughout Mizoram.

The use of a drum coordinated the singing, and so helped and directed the congregation in their singing. It also encouraged the congregation to sing more enthusiastically and thus to participate more fully in the worship service. While the common practice in traditional society was to use a single drum, which was beaten with the bare hand, in Christian worship services two drums, a small and a big one, are used and beaten with drum sticks. During indigenous hymn singings and revival gatherings, the two drums would be used together to direct the singing. When singing Western tunes, however, a single drum is usually preferred.

In Mizoram today, every local church has at least two drums, and hence Mizo Christians could not think of singing praises to God in community worship without the accompaniment of the drum.

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114 For the use of the drum in Mizo churches, see also Lalsawma, *Revivals the Mizo Way*, 78-81; Kipgen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture*, 270-74.
7.2. The Practice of Lengkhawm

*Lengkhawm* (literally, “get together”) is an indigenous Mizo Christian home fellowship in which songs of praise to God are carried out to the beat of the drums. Dancing usually accompanies the singing. Sometimes this fellowship is also known as *Zaikhawm*, which means, “singing together”. Apart from singing and dancing, participants in this fellowship can also express their testimony, or offer prayer, or share the word of God. Usually these things happen during intervals between the songs. Hence, *Lengkhawm* provides an opportunity for all Christians, including women, youth and ordinary individuals, to express their spiritual experiences and aspirations. It can also become an occasion where people find new life and spiritual renewal.

The practice of *Lengkhawm* owes its origin to traditional singing and dancing practices such as *Chheih* and *Chai*. In the traditional *Chheih* singing and dancing, people squatted on the floor in a circle and sang songs to the beat of a drum or bamboo tube. The dancer stood in the middle and recited a song and performed a dance with various movements of limbs and body. Other persons who sang the song might also join in the dance. *Chheih* dance did not have a particular choreography, so that any person could perform it. Nor was there any particular occasion. *Chheih* singing and dancing could be performed on any occasion. It was usually performed in the evening.\(^\text{115}\)

*Chai*, on the other hand, was a community dance performed during the *Chapchar Kut* celebration. In this dance, boys and girls held their arms round each other’s shoulders, sang songs and danced together with the beat of a drum. *Chai* was usually performed in the village courtyard in the presence of the whole community, with the accompaniment of drum beating. While the dance was being performed, children used to feed them with rice beer. When they became Christians, Mizo adopted their *Chheih* and *Chai* traditions in the form of *Lengkhawm*, giving them new meaning and purpose as noted above.

7.3. Chawimawi

The practice of giving feasts to the glory of God, known as Chawimawi (literally, “honouring” or “glorifying”), is another indigenous form of Christian worship in Mizoram. In this practice, a particular family or the local church provides a feast for the community as an expression of thanksgiving and honour to God. The local church spends that day as a day of worship. Church services are conducted, normally in the morning and in the evening, followed by Lengkhawm at home. The practice of Chawimawi is adapted from the traditional thangchhual feast, in which wealthy individuals of the village killed animals and provides feast for the public. But unlike the traditional thangchhual feast, in the Chawimawi Christians have a different reason for the feast. Accordingly, the way in which it is celebrated is also different.

Along with the practice of Chawimawi, we may also consider the Christmas celebration. Although the way Mizo Christians celebrate Christmas differs in some respects from the usual Chawimawi practice, it is almost identical in regard to feasting. In the case of Christmas, the pattern of celebration has been very much influenced by the traditional Chapchar Kut. Like the Chapchar Kut of the past, Christmas is celebrated in Mizoram with great enthusiasm and festive mood. During Christmas time every family tries to unite together; students and those who work in other places also come home. Parents try to provide new dresses for their children; they also try to offer the best food they get. But the reason for the celebration of Christmas, and the way in which it is celebrated, are different from what is the case in the Chapchar Kut tradition. Worship services in the church, Lengkhawm and feasts are common features of Christmas celebration.

7.4. Tlawmngaihna and Pasaltha

Besides the indigenous forms of Christian practice we have mentioned above, the cultural traditions of tlawmngaihna and pasaltha have also had a considerable impact on the life and ministry of the Church. When they became Christians, Mizo converts

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116 See also Kipgen, Christianity and Mizo Culture, 281.
naturally adopted their cultural traditions of *tlawmngaihna* and *pasaltha* as a vehicle for expressing their faith in Christ. E. Chapman and M. Clark, BMS women missionaries who worked for several years in southern Mizoram, observed that, for Mizos, “to accept the teaching of Jesus meant to be *tlawmngai*, and this made them feel that it fulfilled their highest aspirations”.

The traditions of *tlawmngaihna* and *pasaltha* reinforced Mizo Christians in their commitment towards selflessness and hard working in various ways. For instance, when J.H. Lorrain and F.W. Savidge arrived on 13th March 1903 to be BMS missionaries in southern Mizoram, some Christians from Sethlun village (now part of Lunglei town) received them at Demagiri, a border village located 97 kilometres west of Lunglei, carrying their baggage free of charge. In the same manner, at the first meeting of the South Lushai Church in 1904, among other things, many promised to bring at least one person to Christ during the year and to give one tenth of all their produce to God’s work. Their love of and loyalty to Christ, coupled with the cultural traditions of *tlawmngaihna* and *pasaltha*, enabled Mizo Christians to give their life and possessions in the service of Christ.

Perhaps there was no other place in India where Christianity spread so rapidly as in Mizoram. We have already noted that, while in 1901 there were only 45 Christians in the whole of Mizoram (out of these only four were Mizos, the rest were Europeans and Khasis), by 1951 the Christian population had reached 157,575. This was not because Mizos were flexible and easy to convert to another faith. On the contrary, despite the fact that they were surrounded by people of different faiths, such as Hindus, Muslims and Buddhists, Mizos had never been converted to these religions. It was the cultural tradition that played a very significant role in the process of Mizo conversion into Christianity. The principles of *tlawmngaihna* and *pasaltha* helped the Mizos not only to accept the Gospel, but also to sacrifice their lives and possessions in Christ’s service. Interestingly, K.C. Saigal, a non-tribal Hindu who at one time was the Deputy Commissioner in Mizoram, made this observation in one of his speeches:

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Mizo people, you were the ones who had a tradition in which people laid down their lives for the cause of others, you were the *tlawmngai* race. People who gave their lives for others naturally held high regard for a person who sacrificed his life for others. So when you heard the story of Jesus Christ, the one who laid down his life for others, you admired him, followed him and became Christians.\textsuperscript{120}

Indeed, the Western missionaries admitted that, in the process of evangelisation, it was not themselves but the native Christians who did most of the evangelising work in Mizoram. J.M. Lloyd wrote:

But it was not the missionaries themselves who did most of the evangelising after all. That was done by Lushais and is an essential clue to the fact that hardly anywhere in the whole world of the vast continent of Asia has the Gospel been spread more rapidly and more effectively.\textsuperscript{121}

A number of voluntary individual evangelists and group evangelists, such as *Kross sipai* (soldier of the cross) and *Fangrual* (an evangelical travelling group), carried out this evangelistic work in Mizoram. They travelled from village to village, proclaiming the Gospel without pay. A number of people were converted to Christianity through the work of these voluntary evangelists. We have noted earlier that Thangbawnga alone occasioned the conversion of 4,431 people to Christ. Although their love and loyalty to Christ was apparently the main motive behind these activities, the influence of cultural traditions such as *tlawmngaihna* and *pasaltha* as a conditioning cultural background for reception of their message cannot be ruled out. In fact, on the memorial stone which the Baptist Church of Mizoram erected to him in front of its central church at Serkawn, Thangbawnga himself was described as “PATHIAN PASALTHA” (the pasaltha of God).\textsuperscript{122}

In addition, Carter and Luaia state that, in the wake of the revival movements in the 1930s and 1940s, Mizo Christians not only proclaimed the Gospel in words, but also rendered considerable humanitarian service to the needy. In line with the tradition of *tlawmngaihna*, Christian girls made house visits and helped sick and needy families by carrying water and pounding rice.\textsuperscript{123} In the same manner, when people went on *Fangrual* preaching tours, they used to help widows and others who were unable to complete their work on their *jhun*. In one place, non-Christians who saw such

\textsuperscript{120}Cited by Z.T. Sangkhuma from Upa Lalthankima, Dawrpui Vengthar, in Sangkhuma, *Missionary-te Hnubna*, 71. English translation is by the writer.
\textsuperscript{121}Lloyd, *On Every High Hill*, 32.
\textsuperscript{122}See also Carter and Luaia, eds., *Mizoram Baptist Kohhram Chanchin*, 64.
\textsuperscript{123}Ibid., 76.
humanitarian activity were reported to have commented with great surprise, saying: "God is indeed very good; God must be certainly present among these people". 124

The existence and development of all these new features shows that there was a significant continuity with traditional culture in Mizo Christianity. This in turn indicates that, in the process of the interaction between Christianity and Mizo culture, traditional Mizo culture was not totally wiped out, even though the general tendency of the missionaries and the early Mizo church leaders had been to discard anything that was associated with the old religion, or the old culture.

In addition, this study also shows that, to a great extent, the traditional culture helped the spread of the Gospel. Further, the traditional culture played a significant role in shaping Mizo Christianity. In fact, the concluding remark of Kipgen’s doctoral thesis holds that in Mizoram, traditional culture was one of the main factors in the rapid growth and indigenization of Christianity:

It is the primary argument of this study that it was the encounter between Christianity and Zo [Mizo] culture at its deepest levels that was responsible for the revivalism—which, in turn, was responsible for the rapid growth and indigenisation of the Zo [Mizo] churches in Mizoram. 125

In the next chapter we propose to take this encounter further by bringing some of these cultural insights to bear on Christology. Our hope will be to make Jesus Christ more culturally relevant to the tribal people of Mizoram.

124 Ibid. See also Kipgen, Christianity and Mizo Culture, 283.
125 Kipgen, Christianity and Mizo Culture, 318.
CHAPTER 5

JESUS AS PASALTHA
TOWARDS A CONTEXTUAL CHRISTOLOGY FROM MIZO PERSPECTIVE

In this chapter we turn to the task of constructing a contextual Christology from Mizo perspective, using the concept of pasaltha. In the process, we will pull together some of the results of our investigations in earlier chapters. In Chapter One, we outlined the main issues in the construction of a contextual Christology, and opted for a synthetic-praxis model. In the subsequent chapters we have analysed and explored the Mizo context with its inherited Christological tradition; as well as some of the basic cultural traditions of the Mizo people. In Chapter Four we found that the Mizo cultural traditions not only are connected to Mizo history and worldview, but also have significant continuity in their present life. We also discovered that these cultural traditions have been instrumental in shaping Mizo Christianity. This accords with what the World Council of Churches' Commission on World Mission and Evangelism 1973 Conference Report at Bangkok stated: “Culture shapes the human voice that answers the voice of Christ”.1

However, it is not just that the response to Christ of the Mizo people is culturally conditioned. As I have mentioned elsewhere, it is indeed my fundamental conviction that, if in Jesus Christ God becomes human and reveals God’s message of salvation, the gospel of Christ must be perceived, not only in and through Judeo-Christian culture, or Western culture, but also in and through every culture. The message of Christ must also be incarnated in the culture of the tribal people. In other words, if Jesus Christ is to be understood and confessed meaningfully in Mizoram, Christology must be reinterpreted in relation to Mizo culture and experience. As the Canberra Assembly of the World Council of Churches (1991) states: “The Gospel of Jesus Christ must become incarnate in every culture”.2

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1 See World Council of Churches, Bangkok Assembly 1973, 73.
Thus we turn to the synthetic task of applying the results of our investigations and of formulating a Christology based on the Mizo concept of *pasaltha*. Our first task is to justify the choice that we have made.

I. The Validity of the Pasaltha Model for Interpreting Jesus Christ in Mizoram

I propose that there are four reasons for the validity of our choice of *pasaltha*: 1) it is integrally rooted in Mizo cultural consciousness; 2) it incorporates both practical and theoretical implications for Mizos; 3) it is able to be used in a systematic theological framework; and 4) even though it necessarily has some limitations, it lends itself particularly to the construction of a uniquely Mizo Christology. We now discuss a little further the last two points.

As stated earlier, the idea of *pasaltha* has considerable liberative value and cultural relatedness, which allow it to reflect the significance of Christ in Mizoram. We have stated that, the term *pasaltha* not only stands for “good man”, but also it denotes an exemplary person, a model of an ideal human character. It is applied not only to traditional heroes of the past, but also to any person, male or female, who has exhibited the qualities inherent in the understanding and practice of *pasaltha*. It was applied to some early Mizo Christians who faithfully bore witness to the Gospel, such as Thangbawnga, Chhingi and her sister of Lungmawi village. In fact, Christ himself has been occasionally described as *pasaltha*, though there has been no systematic presentation or serious attempt to theologise this further until now.³

However, the choice of the *pasaltha* model in this study in no way means that other models are not relevant. In fact, we must admit that, to reflect the significance of Jesus Christ in Mizoram, no single model or metaphor will be truly adequate. Since models are a human construct, they are inadequate when used with reference to divine life and activity. As Sallie McFague said, “there is no one model able to encompass

³ For instance, in the third stanza, number 311 of the *Mizo Kristian Hlabu* (Mizo Christian Hymn Book), Jesus is described as “Pasaltha Isua” (Pasaltha Jesus). Similarly, Carter and Luaia described the story of Christ Rev.Edwin Rowlands had presented, in his sermon during the annual church conference held at Zotlang in 1921, as “Isua Krista Pasalhat thu” (the *pasaltha* activities of Jesus Christ). See, Carter and Luaia, eds., *Mizoram Baptist Kohhran Chanchin*, 75.
the riches and complexity of the divine-human relationship.” Moreover, we must also remember that models are only conceptual representations of reality, so that they are not to be treated as mirrors of reality. Although they are useful in simplifying a complex reality, they never fully capture that reality. A model can only provide a knowledge that is partial and inadequate, though this does not mean that it is a false or merely subjective view. Hence, according to McFague, “the key to the proper use of models is...to remember always the metaphorical tension – the ‘is and is not’ – in all our thinking and interpreting.”

So, in choosing *pasaltha* as the model for understanding Christ in Mizoram, I do not intend to disregard the possibility of other models, or claim that this model is a perfect one. On the contrary, I sincerely acknowledge that the concept and practice of *pasaltha* also has its own limitations. I would like to highlight two of them. The first is its lack of universality. Mizos in the past lived in isolated small villages politically independent of each other, and generally had a relatively narrow worldview and limited concern for others. Because of this, the understanding and practice of *pasaltha* was confined within a village community, and hardly extended to people of other villages, much less non-Mizo communities. The second is that some people who exercised the principle of *pasaltha* occasionally showed intense reserve about themselves, even to the extent of telling a lie. A seriously wounded *pasaltha* would tell his comrades that he did not feel pain, even if he was at the verge of death.

Suffice to say, therefore, that the concept of *pasaltha* is not a perfect model. It will indeed offer ways through which to know Jesus Christ for the churches in Mizoram, but will never exhaust the mystery of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ. Despite all these and other limitations, however, the concept of *pasaltha* is chosen here as a working principle for understanding Christ in the Mizoram context.

Having explained the validity and limitations of the *pasaltha* metaphor for understanding Christology, now we turn to look at the significance of Jesus Christ for tribal people in Mizoram using this conceptual framework. Our interpretation of Jesus

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Christ as *pasaltha* will include several sub-topics, considering Jesus as a brave, as a *tlawmmgai* and as the exalted one. We will also discuss the Kingdom of God in terms of a communitarian society. We begin with Jesus as a brave.

2. Jesus as Pasaltha-brave

Jesus Christ is perceived here as a *pasaltha* who bravely fights unto death against the powers of evil that divide and oppress human beings and the world. As noted elsewhere, the picture of Christ as conqueror of evil forces is not a new thing in Mizo Christianity. The pioneer missionaries, Rev.J.H.Lorrain and Rev.F.W. Savidge, had experimented with this metaphor, and found that it “exactly met their [people of Mizoram] great need”.7 Renthry Keitzer also advocated this metaphor. He suggested that, among tribal people of northeast India where belief in the existence of evil spirits is real, Jesus Christ could be interpreted as “Victor over sin”, “Conqueror of evil spirits”, and “Saviour and Lord”. He said, “Jesus Christ comes to us as ‘Christus Victor’ to liberate us from... evil spirits, from the superstitious beliefs of spiritism”.8

In Africa, also, it is reported that the concept of victor is a favourite metaphor for Christ among the tribal people. According to John Mbiti, a study showed that among the African Christians who are not under the control or direct influence of Western missionaries, Jesus is perceived most dominantly as *Christus Victor*. He said:

> The Christian message brings Jesus as the one who fought victoriously against the forces of devil, spirits, sickness, hatred, fear, and dead itself. In each of these areas he won a victory and lives now above the assault of these forces. He is the victor, the one hope, the one example, the one conqueror: and this makes sense to African peoples, it draws their attention, and it is pregnant with meaning.9

The attractiveness of this metaphor, according to him, was prompted by the African worldview in which various forces and powers are perceived to be at work: spirits, witchcraft, sorcery, fear, anxiety, sickness, disease, the power of evil and death.10 The

7 See, Baptist Church of Mizoram, *The Annual Reports of BMS*, 94.
10 Ibid. 54. See also Wessels, *Images of Jesus*, 110.
idea of *Christus victor* is also a prominent model for understanding the work of Christ in contemporary Christian theology.\(^\text{11}\)

While the metaphor of *Christus victor* or conqueror puts emphasis upon images such as "victory", "triumph", and "conquer", the metaphor of *pasaltha* seeks to reflect Christ's bravery and self-sacrifice in his work. This emphasis in no way means that we disregard the power of the Gospel over the forces of evil or Christ's victory over sin. It simply intends to avoid the danger of misunderstanding the victor or conqueror analogy. This is because, in the history of the tribal people, the image of the conqueror has often been associated with oppressive rulers, chiefs, invaders of their land and the colonizers. Moreover, images such as "conqueror" and "victor" also tend to denote power and authority, which in Mizoram today is closely associated with the rich and with politicians in power. On the contrary, the *pasaltha* model conceives that Christ never identifies himself with powerful invaders or rulers, nor does he ever fight against evil powers with the aim of achieving domination or getting a reward.

The idea of Christ as *pasaltha* fittingly describes much of the action of Christ. The testimony of his followers revealed that Jesus Christ was active among poor and oppressed people, bravely fighting with them in their struggle against the destructive forces of their lives. Jesus described his mission in terms of bringing good news to the poor, proclaiming release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, and liberating the oppressed people (Luke 4:18). Accordingly, as he proclaimed the advent of God's Kingdom, Jesus exercised God's power of healing upon the sick and cured many from various diseases. He encountered the demons and cast them out from persons they possessed. He fed the hungry. He shared the sorrow of those who were grieving and raised the dead. He dined and established friendship with sinners and outcast. He befriended women and rescued a helpless adulterer. And by the same token, he forgave sinners and restored their lives. In all this, Mizo people can see Christ as their *pasaltha*.

In a similar way, Christ's prophetic preaching can be seen as exhibiting the qualities of the *pasaltha*, who always identified with his people, particularly the poor. The

\(^{11}\) See Aulen, *Christus Victor*. See also Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement*, 74-82.
Gospels portray Jesus as one who bravely attacked the established social and religious order of his day that perpetuated oppression and discrimination for the poor. He confronted the scribes and the Pharisees, the mentors of the established religious and social order, and attacked the system that supported their wealth and status in society. He charged that they authored heavy loads of precepts and laws and laid them upon the people, whereas they themselves were not willing to lift a finger to move them (Matt. 23: 3-4). He condemned them for not practising what they preached. He sternly told them that they “neglect justice and love of God” (Luke 11: 42) and “devour widows’ houses” (Mark 12: 40), and said: “You are like unmarked graves, and people walk over them without realizing it” (Luke 11: 44). Similarly, he also confronted the priests who misused their office, driving them out from the temple, and overturning their business tables. He also denounced the rich people, because of their greed. Riches, according to him, removed a person from God (Mark 10:17-22; Luke 16:19-21); hence, one cannot serve God and wealth together (Matt. 6: 24).

As the movement Jesus initiated and his heroic denunciations gained ground, he provoked the anger of the wealthy ruling class, consisting of scribes, Sadducees, Pharisees, the elders and high functionaries of Jerusalem. The movement obviously threatened the very established social and religious order, which sustained their wealth and privileged social status. So the Pharisees and scribes began to grumble against Jesus (Luke 15: 2). They charged that he himself was possessed by the devil (Mark 3: 22), plotted cunning interviews with him and sought to kill him. Even then, Jesus was not intimidated. He kept on proclaiming the advent of God’s reign of liberation and justice for the poor. But as he saw Jesus’ popularity among the masses increase, the nervous high priest and his associates summoned a meeting, and together they sought counsel to kill Jesus. John’s Gospel records:

So the chief priest and the Pharisees called a meeting of the council, and said, “What are we to do? This man is performing many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation...Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, “You know nothing at all! You do not understand that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed” (John 11: 47-50).

Similarly, Mark’s Gospel states:

And when the chief priest and the scribes heard it, they kept looking for the way to kill him; for they were afraid of him, because the whole crowd was spellbound by his teaching (Mark 11:18).

Consequently, Jesus was sentenced to death, and was eventually crucified on the cross between two condemned criminals. Surely we can say, “Jesus was killed...because of his kind of life, because of what he said and what he did”. In summary, Jesus bravely laid down his life in defence of his defenceless and vulnerable people in a manner characteristic of a true pasaltha. Thus, the movement of God’s reign of liberation and justice, which he initiated and nurtured, finally cost him his life.

When we focus on his concrete life, ministry and death, we cannot but agree with the Judaeo-Christian confession that Jesus is the expression and embodiment of God’s self. He is Emmanuel, “God-with-us”. In other communities he might have been called “Messiah”, “Son of God” or “Lamb of God”. But among the tribal people of Mizoram, Jesus can be perceived as a pasaltha, or more precisely, the Pasaltha of God. Jesus is God’s Pasaltha par excellence, a brave defender of oppressed and vulnerable people. In him God shares the misery of the human condition and enters into solidarity with the poor and oppressed people of the world. In and through Jesus, God protests against innocent suffering and oppression of the poor, and promises us that God will be always with the people who struggle for justice and liberation.

3. Jesus as Pasaltha-tlawmngai

Jesus is not only brave, but also tlawmngai. He not only fought against evil powers and sacrificed his life in that struggle, but also essentially was born into the world and lived in the world for others. We have noted that the principle and practice of tlawmngaihna, which encompasses selfless service for others, humility, kindness, patience, honesty, hard work and trustworthiness, is not confined to the traditional Mizo pasaltha alone. It also finds significant continuity and expression in the life and activities of many ordinary Christian men and women. In fact, Saiaithanga held that the ethical teachings of Christianity, which advocate doing good and helping others in

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13 Sobrino, Jesus the Liberator, 209.
14 See also Hall, Professing the Faith, 497ff.
need, refined the principle of *tlawmngaihna*. In line with this thought, Khuanga regards *tlawmngaihna* as "the fore-runner of the Gospel", and for Thanzauva it is "a message of Jesus Christ hidden in tribal culture". Hence, it is in Jesus Christ, the central figure of the Christian faith, that *tlawmngaihna* is most clearly expressed. His incarnation, his selfless life and his death on the cross may all be perceived as acts of *tlawmngaihna*.

### 3.1. The Incarnation as Tlawmngaihna

The New Testament portrays that in Jesus Christ the eternal God became human and lived among us (John 1:14; cf. Phil. 2:5ff). In Mizo thought, an act of such selflessness, in which one denies his/her self-comfort and security to serve others voluntarily, is *tlawmngaihna*. From a Mizo perspective, therefore, the incarnation can be described as an act of God's profound *tlawmngaihna*. By the incarnation God expressed divine *tlawmngaihna* and assumed the totality of the precarious human condition with its worries and hopes, with its limitations and desire for perfection.

Out of love for us, and our world, God assumed human existence in Christ and showed what we meant and mean to God. By the incarnation in Christ, God revealed divine self in order that we may be reconciled to God. As Paul stated in Corinthians: "In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself" (2 Cor.5:19). Since Christ is the embodiment of God's self, we can also say that the incarnation is the expression of God's *tlawmngaihna*. Gerald O'Collins explains the meaning of the incarnation:

> The doctrine of the incarnation means that in this man, Jesus of Nazareth, we recognize characteristics (whether we express them philosophically or more biblically and experientially does not ultimately matter) that enable us to identify him as divine, God-with-us.

Here it may also be pointed out that, right from the birth of Jesus, God has shown another and permanent aspect of divine *tlawmngaihna* by opting preferentially for the poor and marginalized people. The Gospels assert that Jesus was born in the midst of squalor. He was laid "in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn"

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17 Thanzauva, *Theology of Community*, 128.
(Luke 2: 7). The historicity of this statement may be questioned, but it suffices to indicate that from the beginning of his life Jesus was always with the poor. This indicates that in Jesus Christ God not only assumed humanity, but also essentially became a poor human being. Turning to our Mizo tribal understanding, if poverty and rejection are conditions of life characteristic of tribal people, then Jesus Christ by tlawmngaihna becomes a tribal, a marginalized person.

3.2. Jesus' Life and Ministry as Tlawmngaihna

As Leonardo Boff observes, the existence of Jesus was an existence totally oriented to, and lived for, others and God. He was born, lived and died for others. He said to his disciples, “I am among you as one who serves” (Luke 22: 27). As noted before, he helped the needy, healed the sick, comforted the sorrowful and blessed the poor. He “went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil” (Acts 10: 38). He was open to all, received and accepted everybody as they were. He did not discriminate against any person on the ground of class, gender or race. He welcomed sinners, tax collectors and prostitutes into his company, transformed their lives and gave them new identity. He was there to serve others, not to be served. He was a person who emptied himself to be filled by others whom he received and accepted. As Bonhoeffer said, Jesus was “the man for others”. But, as mentioned before, he was not neutral. Jesus did not tolerate those who oppressed the poor and rejected God’s Kingdom purposes in their priorities of life.

Another aspect of tlawmngaihna is devoted service. To serve someone, one must be devoted to that person or community. The life of Jesus was totally devoted both to God and to the community of Israel. He addressed God as “Abba” (Father), an Aramaic word usually used by children to address their father, which indicated his relation and childlike trust in God. His intimate relationship with God allowed Jesus to subordinate his will to God’s purposes, and also to conceive his mission and destiny as one of doing God’s will, not his own. In John’s Gospel, he is reported to

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20 See Boff, Jesus Christ Liberator, 195.
21 Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison , 382.
22 See Boff, Jesus Christ Liberator, 196. See also Gerard H. Luttenberger, Who do you say that I am? An Introduction to Christology: In the Gospels and Early Church (Mystic: Twenty-Third Publications, 1998), 143.
have said: “I can do nothing on my own...I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me” (John 5: 30).

Even at moments of trial and temptation, Jesus did not ask for favour, but sought God’s will to be realized (Mark 14: 36; Matt. 4:1-11). His intimacy with God was so profound that various New Testament communities expressed this in different titles, such as the Son of God, the Messiah or Christ, the Lord and the Word of God. Titles such as these primarily indicate Jesus’ relationship with God. As Sam Amirtham and John Pobee put it: “To be the Son of God is to be dedicated totally to the purpose of God, even the suffering and death on the cross”.23

All this means that, for tribal people, Jesus is indeed the perfect tlawnmgai. His life was a perfect expression of the self-sacrificial love of God and was, at the same time, a loving response and devotion to God. However, his complete self-denial and existence for others in no way mean that he was less than fully human. Like any other human being, Jesus grew up physically, intellectually and spiritually in a particular time and place. He experienced hunger and thirst, anger and sorrow. He underwent approval and rejection. He was betrayed, tortured and finally crucified. Jesus was a true human being; but his was a new humanity.24 He was completely emptied of himself and was completely filled by God and God’s Kingdom purposes. He was a man for others, a perfect tlawnmgai.

3.3. The Cross as Tlawnmgaihna

In line with the above discussion, we may also perceive Christ’s death on the cross as the expression of God’s utmost tlawnmgaihna. We have noted that, among Mizo Christians, the message of Christ’s death on the cross has been a central theme of proclamation from the beginning. The cross was the theme of the third major revival movement during the early 1920s. Rev. E.L.Mendus once said, “The name of Calvary became better known even then the names of their own hills”.25 Obviously it was the traditional principle of tlawnmgaihna which provided a framework for the Mizo

23 Amirtham and Pobee, eds., Theology By the People, 15.
Christians' understanding of Christ's death on the cross. As we noted before, Chapman and Clark stated that, for Mizos, "to accept the teaching of Jesus meant to be lawmwngai".26 Similarly, K.C. Saigal remarked that lawwmngaihna helped the Mizo people to appreciate and admire Jesus Christ, who laid down his life for others.

In the Mizo context, therefore, Jesus' death on the cross may unhesitatingly be perceived as an expression of lawwmngaihna. We have noted that Jesus was crucified on the cross because of what he was, what he said and what he did. Jesus' death on the cross was neither an accident nor suicide, but a deliberate act of murder. He was killed because of his courageous self-giving and self-sacrificial solidarity and struggle with the poor and oppressed. Walter Kasper describes the historical reasons leading to Jesus' death:

The execution of Jesus of Nazareth on the cross is among the most securely established facts of his life...his breaches of the Sabbath commandment and the Jewish ritual purity regulations; his association with sinners and the ritually impure; and his attack on the Law. All these were a challenge to the fundamentals of Judaism. Since at the time of Jesus the Sanhedrin could not itself carry out a death sentence, a deceitful collaboration took place between the Jewish authorities and the usually hated Roman occupying power. Jesus was caught between millstones of power. Misunderstanding, cowardice, hatred, lies, intrigues and emotions brought him to destruction.27

Loewe puts it even more clearly:

During Jesus' ministry, by his parables, by his healings and exorcisms, by his associations, Jesus contradicted the expectations concerning the coming of the kingdom of God entertained by the elite among his fellow Jews. As we saw, he subverted the world in which it was self-evident that some people deserve to enjoy status and wealth to the exclusion of and on the back of others. Calling the world into question, he evoked hostility from those who enjoyed its benefits and in that hostility they revealed their true colors. They acted out the dehumanisation operative in the narrowness and distortion of the worlds they constructed. Acting out the violence embedded in those worlds, they grew murderous. Sin leads to death, and people whose identity is defined by their status and wealth grow violent in defending the system that favors them. Initially, then, Jesus' death results from one more spin of the ever-expanding cycle whereby sin leads to death. Dehumanised people act out their loss of humanity and reveal what lay beneath the façade of status, wealth and respectability by inflicting violence on others.28

Likewise, when one looks at the New Testament portrait of Jesus' death on the cross through the Mizo eyes, one is inclined to perceive that Jesus' death is a consequence

26 Chapman and Clark, Mizo Miracle, 90.
27 Kasper, Jesus the Christ, 113-14.
28 Loewe, The College Student's Introduction to Christology, 169.
of his *tlawmgaihna* as the Pasaltna of God. Although it is difficult to say with certainty whether or not Jesus foresaw his forthcoming death, he seems to have had some awareness that he would die for the sake of others, that his preaching and ministry would one day cost him his life.29 Early on in his ministry, he faced a charge of blasphemy (Mark 2: 7), for which the penalty was death (Lev. 24: 16; cf. Deut. 13: 5). He knew that whoever acted as he did must be prepared for dangerous consequences. He knew of the execution of John the Baptist (Mark 6: 14-29), and also of the fate of many prophets (Luke 13: 31-34; cf. Matt. 23: 34-37).30 In his last fellowship meal with the disciples, he said: “Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God” (Mark 14: 25). This saying is believed to be the genuine words of Jesus. Here, Jesus expects not only his impending death but also the realization of God’s reign along with it.31

Jesus recognized and accepted suffering and death as a necessary way of bringing about God’s reign in the world. His self-giving and self-sacrifice, or his *tlawmgaihna*, however, neither reduce his pain nor remove his apprehension and fear. The words recorded by the Gospels portray Jesus experiencing an overwhelming nervousness and grief in the final events of his life. In Gethsemane, he said to his disciples: “I am deeply grieved, even to death” (Mark 14: 34). There, according to the Gospel, he even asked God to rescue him from sorrow and death: “Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me” (Mark 14: 36). But even then, he wanted not his will but the will of the Father to be realized (Mark 14: 36b). Even in situations of anxiety and sadness such as this, Jesus thus emptied himself and gave himself over to God with absolute confidence. While apprehension and fear were part of his actual life experience and touched him very deeply, they could not overcome his fidelity to God and to his fellow human beings, whom he loved.

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29 According to the Gospels, Jesus predicted his forthcoming death three times (Mark 8: 31; 9: 31; 10: 32-34) and interpreted it in the tradition of the Last Supper as a sacrifice for the salvation of humanity (Mark 10: 45; Luke 22: 19ff.). Historical-critical study of the Bible, however, has questioned the historical authenticity of these predictions and has regarded them as post-resurrection statements, rather than as original words of Jesus. See Luttenberger, *Who do you say that I am?*, 187-88. See also Macquarrie, *Jesus Christ in Modern Thought*, 80-81; Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, 144.

30 See also Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 114-17; Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, 111-17.

According to the Gospels, on the cross Jesus likewise underwent extremes of suffering and isolation. He cried out: *Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?* which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15: 34; cf. Matt. 27: 46). He was rejected by his fellow Jews as a blasphemer and as a political rebel by the Romans, betrayed by one of his own disciples, and abandoned by others as well (save his mother, a few women and the disciple “whom he loved”). People who recently acclaimed him as “Hosanna! ...one who comes in the name of the Lord!” had already deserted him; and instead, the hostile crowd shouted at him: “Crucify”. Above all, he also experienced abandonment at the hands of God, whom he trusted confidently and served so bravely. In the final moment of his death on the cross, everything seemed vain and empty for Jesus. Even then, however, Jesus remained faithful to God. In crying out, “My God, my God”, he gave up his life, at the same time, giving himself confidently over to God.

Jesus’ death on the cross, the culmination of his self-emptying and self-giving for others, may be regarded as the supreme expression of his *tlawmngaihna*. By accepting death on the cross Jesus demonstrated not only absolute faithfulness to the God he called Abba, but also love for his fellow human beings and solidarity with them. The author of John’s Gospel, accordingly, introduced the passion of Jesus as the expression of love: “Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end” (John 13: 1). As Kasper puts it: “Jesus’ obedient death is...the distillation, the essence, and the final transcendent culmination of his whole activity”. In his life and in his death, Jesus was indeed the “man for others”, the perfect *tlawmngai*. He was completely emptied of himself and became completely full of the reality of others.

When Christians consider the suffering and death of Jesus on the cross, especially in the context of his life and ministry, they cannot avoid the conclusion that Jesus is the Son of God. If Jesus is crucified because of his message and activities for God’s kingdom and its purposes, the God whom he trusted so confidently and served so

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33 Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 121.
34 See Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, 196.
courageously is himself/herself involved in his death. As Jurgen Moltmann strongly asserts, “On the cross not only is Jesus himself in agony, but also the one for whom he lived and spoke, his Father”.\textsuperscript{35} The New Testament indeed portrays the one who was crucified on the cross as no other than God who emptied himself and became a human being (Phil. 2: 5ff). Likewise, according to Mark’s Gospel, the Roman centurion who witnessed the death of Jesus confessed: “Truly this man was God’s Son!” (Mark 15: 39). In the suffering and death of Jesus, believers perceived no less than the presence and suffering of God. As an event of God’s self-giving, the death of Jesus Christ on the cross is therefore an act of God’s supreme \textit{tlawmngaihna} towards humanity and the world.

In the light of our discussion of the cross as expression of God’s \textit{tlawmngaihna}, we may briefly underline five aspects of the significance of Christ’s death for the Christian community in the context of Mizoram.

1). The principle and practice of \textit{tlawmngaihna}, which encompasses self-giving and self-sacrificial love and service for others, is essential to the character of God revealed in Jesus Christ. In the death of Jesus, God discloses the deepest divine \textit{tlawmngaihna} by experiencing suffering and death with us. By willingly accepting suffering and death in Jesus on the cross, God demonstrated that God so values us and our world, and revealed what we meant and mean in God’s sight. Unlike the \textit{tlawmngaihna} of Mizo \textit{pasalthis} or tradition, however, God’s \textit{tlawmngaihna} in Christ is not limited to one particular community to individuals. God’s \textit{tlawmngaihna} embraces all people regardless of race, class, sex and culture. On the cross of Jesus, God totally emptied himself/herself and was totally filled by the reality of others. The cross discloses that \textit{tlawmngaihna} is a dimension of God’s nature and the very way by which God is revealed in the world. The cross is inseparably linked to \textit{tlawmngaihna}.

2). The death of Jesus is God’s condemnation and protest against violence and oppression in the world. We have noted that Jesus was crucified on the cross because of his message of God’s Kingdom. He was crucified because of his courageous \textit{pasaltha}-condemnation and attack against the established social and religious

\textsuperscript{35} Moltmann, \textit{The Crucified God}, 153.
structures of his days that perpetuate injustice and oppression for the poor. On the
cross Jesus assumed the condition of the blasphemer, the rebel and the one abandoned
by his people and God. By accepting death in Christ, God exposes God’s
condemnation and protest against injustice and oppression in the world.

3). The death of Jesus is God’s utmost *tao wngkaihma* with the poor. In Jesus Christ
God not only assumes full humanity but chooses to become poor. The cross as the
culmination of God’s self-giving in Jesus is the supreme dimension of God’s
solidarity with the poor and vulnerable people of the world. In the death of Christ God
takes the suffering of the world into himself and shares the misery and struggle of the
poor. As Fleming Rutledge puts it: “Crucifixion shows us how our Lord entered into
the condition of those who were powerless, those who were voiceless, those who were
made to disappear, those who were of no account in the world.”36 By assuming human
existence in Jesus Christ and by giving himself/herself totally for us in Jesus on the
cross, God promises that God will be always present in the struggle of the people for
justice and liberation.

4). The cross of Christ is also the expression of God’s love that mediates divine
forgiveness and friendship in the midst of violence.37 By selflessly taking up the cross
in Christ, God forgives sinners and invites them to receive new life. The cross is the
resume and sum of the message of the coming of God’s reign, which God in Jesus
proclaimed and called the people to receive with repentance (Mark 1: 14).

5). Seen in the light of the resurrection, Christ’s death on the cross opens a new future
for new humanity. The cross reveals that God’s compassion is greater than the power
of violence of the world; God’s forgiveness is deeper than the murderous acts of
jealousy and anger. On the cross of Christ, God did not bear suffering and death in
order to internalise it and leave us without any hope of overcoming it. On the
contrary, God willingly accepted death on the cross in order to put an end to the
innocent suffering and oppression in the world.38 In the light of the resurrection,
therefore, we can perceive that the cross is God’s way of creating a new order of

36 Fleming Rutledge, "Jesus and His Atoning Work," in The Truth about Jesus, ed. Donald Armstrong
37 See Migliore, Faith Seeking Understanding, 160.
38 See Ibid.
humanity in which there will be no toleration of violence, no willingness to live at the expense of victims, but only serving and sharing of one another in the power of the new Spirit.

Thus, we can conclude that in his life, ministry and death, Jesus is the expression of God’s profound tlawmngaihna. He is the expression of God’s outgoing tlawmngaihna towards humanity and the world and, at the same time, his total life and work expresses tlawmngaihna in response to God. As Kasper observed, “In his life and in his death, Jesus is the man for others. Existing for others is his very essence. It is that which makes him the personified love of God for men.”39 As an expression of God’s tlawmngaihna and self-giving in the world, Jesus Christ is the perfect Pasaltha of God.

We have concluded our argument that the Mizo people may see Jesus’ death on the cross as the expression of God’s utmost tlawmngaihna in the world. We now turn to examine the relevance of the resurrection to further aspects of Jesus considered as pasaltha.

4. Resurrection as God’s Exaltation of Jesus, the Pasaltha-tlawmngai

Along the lines of our preceding discussion, we may also perceive the resurrection of Jesus as God’s response to the person and works of Jesus and God’s exaltation of him as the Pasaltha-tlawmngai. The New Testament describes Jesus’ resurrection as the action of God and not as an action of Jesus himself. No New Testament account describes in the form of Jesus emerging from the tomb; there is no description of the act of the resurrection itself.40 What the New Testament says about the resurrection of Jesus is expressed primarily in the form of proclamations and confessions of faith.41 The resurrection of Jesus, therefore, is not to be conceived as resuscitation or a

39 Kasper, Jesus the Christ, 120.
41 The New Testament account of Jesus’ resurrection consists of two different traditions: the Easter kerygma and the Easter stories. The Easter kerygma includes statements of faith that were preserved in the form of preaching, liturgy, creed or catechesis. These materials are believed to be considerably older than the corresponding passages among which they are inserted, and they are found mainly in Acts of Apostles and the Pauline epistles. Easter stories are regarded as chronologically late narratives.
return to the old life, but as a new and transformed life beyond this world. The risen Christ did not return to decay or corruption (Acts 13: 34). Rather, Jesus’ rising from the dead is the beginning of the new creation (cf. 1 Cor.15: 42ff).42 In what follows we will look at the early Christian experience of Jesus’ resurrection in terms of God’s exaltation of Jesus as the Pasaltha-tlawmngai.

4.1. Jesus’ Resurrection in Early Christian Proclamation

The idea of the resurrection as God’s exaltation of Jesus the Pasaltha-tlawmngai corresponds well to many of the kerygmatic statements of the early Christians found in Acts and the Pauline letters. In Luke’s account of Peter’s preaching, which quite likely reflects the established creed of the early Church itself,43 the resurrection of Jesus is portrayed as God’s act of exaltation of Jesus who was crucified:

This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you both see and hear...Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified (Acts 2: 32-36).

Similarly, in the Christological hymn cited by Paul in his letter to the Christian community in Philippi, we also find Jesus’ resurrection as God’s act of exaltation. The hymn states that Jesus

humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on the cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil.2: 7-11).

They are found mostly at the end of the Gospels. Critical-historical analysis questions whether these stories are real historical accounts, or legends, which express beliefs in the form of narratives. Hence, some scholars regard these Easter stories, which include the discovery of the empty tomb, as secondary in importance to the Easter kerygma. The purpose of these stories, it is believed, is apologetic, and as such they are intended to demonstrate the reality and corporeality of the resurrection of Jesus, in contrast to attempts at spiritualistic interpretations. See Kasper, Jesus the Christ, 126. See also Raymond E. Brown, The Virginal Conception & Bodily Resurrection of Jesus (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1973; reprint, 1974), 78, 97-99.

42 See Kasper, Jesus the Christ, 144.

43 Since Peter was a leader among the twelve disciples and of the early Christian community, Peter’s sermon on the day of the Pentecost, preserved here, possibly represented the established creed of the early Church itself. See James D.G. Dunn, The Acts of the Apostles, ed. Ivor H. Jones, Epworth Commentaries (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 1996), 27-28. See also Luttenberger, Who do you say that I am?, 223.
Further on, other letters state, “He...ascended far above all the heavens” (Eph.4: 10); “He was...taken up in glory” (1 Tim.3: 16). All these statements reflect the early Christians’ belief that the resurrection of Christ is God’s act of exaltation of Jesus because of who he was and what he did. In the light of these kerygmatic statements of the early Christians, we may underline four aspects, which may aptly show Jesus’ resurrection as God’s exaltation of the Pasaltha-tlawmngai.

Firstly, the early Christian proclamations reveal that the risen Jesus whom God exalted was the same Jesus whom the leaders of Israel condemned to death and crucified. By pointing out this, the early Christians clearly declared that, though the high priests and his associates rejected Jesus as a blasphemer and killed him, God accepted Jesus’ person and ministry, and raised him from the dead. God approved the life characterised by tlawmngaihna, which Jesus embodied and expressed in his life and activities. As Pannenberg said, “If Jesus has been raised, this for a Jew can only mean that God himself has confirmed the pre-Easter activity of Jesus”.

Secondly, the proclamations also indicate that God not only raised Jesus from the dead, but also exalted him highly, granting him a place at the right hand of God. In Mizo perspective, this act of raising and exalting Jesus may be described as God’s responding tlawmngaihna to Jesus, the Pasaltha-tlawmngai who gave his entire life for others. God never fails those who practice tlawmngaihna towards others. God never fails those who trust him and do God’s will. As Kasper puts it: “The dying Jesus gives himself in obedience to the will of his Father; the Father accepts that obedience, so that Jesus’ self-offering fulfils its purpose, is accepted by God and signifies his exaltation”. Thus, here we have God raising his/her faithful and tlawmngai Jesus, exalting him and revealing God’s divine identity.

44 Other portraits of Jesus’ resurrection as exaltation are also found in other passages, including Luke 24:26; Acts 5: 30-31; Eph. 4: 8; 1 Pet. 1: 21.
45 For a complementary treatment of the following four points, see Luttenberger, Who do you say that I am?, 223-26. Wolfhart Pannenberg notes a similar structure, whereby the resurrection validates Jesus’ life and claims, which were called into question by his death. See Wolfhart Pannenberg, Jesus - God and Man, trans. Lewis L. Wilkins and Duane A. Priebe (London: SCM Press, 1968), 66-73.
46 See also O’Collins, Interpreting Jesus, 110.
47 Pannenberg, Jesus - God and Man, 67.
48 Kasper, Jesus the Christ, 148.
Thirdly, the disciples' testimony proclaimed that the risen Jesus is Lord and Messiah. As noted elsewhere, the title “Lord” is the name attributed to God (Yahweh) in the Old Testament. So to assign this title to Jesus is, in effect, to equate him with God. In the same manner, the title “Messiah” (anointed one) is also used in the Old Testament to designate the king of Israel, who was considered to be the representative of God. So also to assign this title to Jesus is to conceive of him as God’s representative, a mediator between God and humanity. In Mizo society, as pointed out before, the community used to honour renowned tlawmngai individuals with a cup of beer called Tlawmngai No in public ceremonies. Seen in relation to this tradition, the ascription to the risen Jesus of the titles “Lord” and “Messiah” may be perceived as an act of honour to Jesus, the perfect tlawmngai who gave his whole life for others.

Fourthly, the statements also reveal that God, in raising Jesus from the dead, not only revealed Jesus’ divine identity but also poured forth God’s Spirit upon all persons in and through the risen Jesus. On the day of the Pentecost, the disciples of Jesus experienced the presence of the risen Christ astonishingly in their lives. The crucified Christ lived among them in Spirit, and accordingly they were filled with great joy and proclaimed him courageously among people of different ethnicity. According to the Johannine Gospel, it was the risen Christ himself who appeared to the disciples and breathed on them, saying: “Receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20: 22). The disciples’ experience of the risen Christ’s presence in the Spirit was likewise one important ground for the belief that the resurrection was God’s act of exalting Jesus, considered as the Pasaltha-tlawmngai.

4.2. Jesus’ Resurrection as the Basis for Believers’ Resurrection

The concept of Jesus as Pasaltha-tlawmngai also fittingly illustrates the Christian belief that his resurrection inaugurated the new possibility for future resurrection of the believers. There are two points of connection with Mizo tradition here. The first is that Mizos believed in life after death, which may be considered as their version of resurrection of the dead. To this extent, the Christian message of resurrection aptly corresponds with the belief of Mizo people. In 1 Corinthians, Paul described Jesus Christ as “the first fruits of those who have died” and asserted that his resurrection from the dead is the foundation and pattern for the resurrection of believers (1 Cor.15:
20ff. cf. Col. 1: 18; Acts 26: 23). According to him, “If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised” (1 Cor.15: 13). To put this in other words, “If Christ has not been raised from the dead, there is no resurrection from the dead”. In his subsequent discussion of the same text, Paul made it clear that, since Jesus had been raised from the dead, there is possibility for the future resurrection of believers (vv. 15-16, 20).

The second point is the importance for Mizos of the bodily resurrection. Mizos not only believed that after death persons continued to live bodily, but also, in their worldview, there was no dichotomy between soul and body. In tribal conception, soul and body formed a single unity. To this extent, the Christian tradition may also fit with Mizo tradition. In his description of what he means by the resurrection of the body, Paul emphasized a tremendous transformation that is involved in the resurrection. He said:

So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory. It is shown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body (1 Cor.15: 42-44).

Here Paul identified the resurrected body as incorruptible, glorified and spiritual, whereas the earthly body is corruptible, dishonourable, weak and physical. Further on, he also maintained that whereas the risen body can enter heaven, the physical body characterized by “flesh and blood” could not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor.15: 50). Paul thus seems to have proclaimed a corporeal resurrection of believers, keeping in mind that the risen body is totally different from a tangible physical body.  

The spiritual body (soma pneumatikon in Greek), which Paul speaks about here in 1 Corinthians is not a body formed of phenomenal spiritual substance. It is not like a shadowy spiritual body such as the huai of the Mizo tradition, which we have mentioned before. Paul did not seem to think of an existence of being without a body after death. As with Mizos, in the Hebrew worldview there is no dichotomy between body and soul. The Hebrew did not consider the body as an outer cover of the soul, as

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50 See Brown, The Virginal Conception & Bodily Resurrection, 85-86. See also Fuller, The Formation of the Resurrection Narratives, 18-21.
it is for Platonism, or as a principle of evil from which the true human self has to set itself free, as Gnostics taught. The body is God’s creation, and is inseparable from the whole of human being. So when Paul described the risen body as spiritual, he points to a body entirely filled by the Spirit. As Kasper remarks, the spiritual body is a body characterized by the Spirit, a transformed body entirely directed by the Spirit of God.52

When Mizo Christians read the resurrection stories, they naturally interpret them as bodily resurrection. For instance, the Gospels describe the risen Jesus as having walked and talked with two disciples (Luke 24: 13-27), as presenting and sharing meals with his disciples (Luke 24: 29-31, 41-43; John 21: 9-14), as showing his hands and feet with the marks of crucifixion (Luke 24: 39; John 20: 20, 24-25). Moreover, the Gospels portray the risen Christ as quite different from his earthly body. The risen Jesus is not recognized by Mary Magdalene (John 20:14), nor by two disciples journeying to Emmaus (Luke 24: 15-16), nor by Peter and other disciples out fishing (John 21:4). While in Luke’s Gospel the disciples fail to recognize the risen Christ because “their eyes were kept from recognizing him” (Luke 24:16), according to Mark it is because “he appeared in another form” (Mark 16:12).53 Hence, the Gospels attest that the risen Christ was quite different, so that even his disciples could not recognize him easily.

In addition to this, the story of the “empty tomb” provides further testimony to the belief that Jesus rose bodily from the dead. All four Gospels assert that the women and the disciples who went to Jesus’ tomb three days after his death were greatly surprised to discover the tomb empty, and that the angel proclaimed to them that Jesus had risen (Mark 16: 1-8; Matt.28: 1-10; Luke 24: 1-12; John 20: 1-10). While the empty tomb idea in itself is quite ambiguous, because of literary-historical problems surrounding the texts, the story of the empty tomb clearly expresses that the Jesus who died and was buried is the same Jesus who was raised by God.54 The affirmation

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51 Kasper, Jesus the Christ, 150.
52 See ibid., 151.
53 See also Brown, The Virginal Conception & Bodily Resurrection, 111; Luttenberger, Who do you say that I am? , 231.
54 As noted earlier, there are substantial discrepancies between the four Gospel accounts of the story of the empty tomb, and therefore a question arises whether the empty tomb story is a real historical account, or a legend, which expresses beliefs in the form of narratives. One dominant view is that the
of the empty tomb thus substantiates the proclamation that the crucified Jesus was raised bodily from the dead. In all this, Mizo Christians can perceive Jesus as their *pasaltha*, whose resurrection has laid a foundation for their resurrection.

In Mizo tradition, one notable role of the *pasaltha* is to lead the way for others. In difficult situations, such as during a hunting expedition in unknown jungle or in conditions dangerous to life, the *pasaltha* would go ahead of others and try to clear the way for others to follow him. In a manner analogous to this tradition, we find in the New Testament that Jesus Christ, by his resurrection from the dead, has made the way of resurrection open for others who would follow him. According to John’s Gospel, Jesus himself interpreted his forthcoming death and resurrection in terms of preparing the way to the Father for others (John 14: 1-6).

The resurrection of Jesus is therefore the gateway of resurrection for believers. As Moltmann puts it, “Christ’s resurrection is the foundation and promise of eternal life in the midst of this history of death”.\(^{55}\) Through the resurrection of Jesus, the gate of heaven is opened now for all. Christian believers can now hope for their own resurrection. “If the spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you” (Rom. 8: 11).

### 4.3. Jesus’ Resurrection as Entry into Pialral

In the Mizo context, we may also describe Jesus’ resurrection as his entry into *Pialral*.\(^{56}\) According to Luke, the risen Christ, after giving instructions to his disciples, ascended into heaven in the full sight of the disciples:

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56 We recall for the reader that, according to the Mizo tradition, those who died went either to *Mitthikhua* (the Village of the Dead) or *Pialral* (Paradise). The former was the destiny of all commoners; the latter was the abode of those who had performed *thangekhua* (a series of ceremonial feasts) in their life.
When he said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven” (Acts 1: 9-11).

In this text, Luke presents Jesus’ ascension to heaven as the conclusion of the resurrection story. The ascension concludes the period of Jesus’ visible presence and opens up a new period for the arrival of the Holy Spirit and the beginning of the Church.

Here we may draw a connection between Jesus’ way of life, and his resurrection and exaltation, and see Jesus’ resurrection as the reward and vindication of his earthly life as thangchhuah. We have noted that, in traditional Mizo belief, entry into Pialral or heaven after death was possible only for a few rich and extraordinary pasalhias who performed thangchhuah. In order to achieve thangchhuah, one had to feed the community with food and meat several times, and put on a series of public feasts which involved much sharing of one’s own wealth and resources with others. In the New Testament we find that Jesus was the one who fed the hungry with food, healed the sick, and rescued the helpless, even to the extent of laying down his life. If persons who achieved thangchhuah were those who fed the people and shared their resources with others, Jesus is the perfect thangchhuah. Seen in this sense, therefore, we can describe Jesus’ resurrection, the ascension to heaven, as his entry into Pialral as the pasaltha-thangchhuah, in the Mizo context.

However, Jesus’ ascension to heaven or Pialral is probably not to be taken literally to mean that he was spirited away to an otherworldly place, somewhere “up there”. Luke’s description of Jesus’ ascension story is reminiscent of the assumption of Elijah by a whirlwind into heaven (2 Kings 2: 11). And likewise the cloud that took Jesus away to heaven is obviously a theological symbol indicating God’s vehicle and presence, rather than a meteorological phenomenon. Hence, Jesus being taken up by the cloud to heaven may be perceived as his being taken up into the sphere of divine presence and glory. In ancient Hebrew cosmology, heaven means the space above the earth, where God was thought to sit enthroned. Luke and many New Testament

57 See Kasper, Jesus the Christ, 148. See also Fuller, The Formation of the Resurrection Narratives, 127-30.
writers were familiar with this worldview and expressed their message within this frame of reference. Jesus’ ascension to heaven, therefore, may be perceived as signifying his being with God.

When we turn to Mizo tradition, we see that the idea of Pialral or heaven is primarily characterized by the hope that in heaven one will attain fulfilment of one’s earthly limitations and aspirations. Mizos believed that in Pialral there would be abundance of food and respite from hard labour. It was this sort of vision which prompted tribal Christians during the revival movements to long for heaven, which in effect led many to embrace Christianity. Since abundant life and the fulfilment of one’s own limitations and aspirations are available only in God, Pialral signifies the realm of God’s presence. To enter into Pialral is to be with God. The risen Jesus has entered into Pialral; his humanity has been wholly transformed with divine life. The risen and transformed Jesus is no longer corruptible or limited to time and space. He is alive and present in the world in Spirit forever. He said, “I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt. 28: 20).

To conclude our discussion on this section, we may identify four aspects of the resurrection of Christ that may be significant for the churches in Mizoram. Firstly, the resurrection is God’s action. Resurrection is not an action of Jesus himself, or the resuscitation of Jesus to his old life, but it is God’s decisive action in human history. In the resurrection, God brings Jesus from dead to eternal life and transforms his life beyond this world. The resurrection of Jesus is the transformation of his total humanity with the divine life. As God’s decisive act in human history, the resurrection of Jesus opens up the beginning of the new creation and has laid the foundation for the resurrection of believers. Here the Mizo people can see Jesus as the pasaltha who by his resurrection from the dead prepared the way for the resurrection of his community.

Secondly, the resurrection of Jesus reveals the nature of God. Jesus’ resurrection is God’s loving response to Jesus’ fidelity and self-giving life for God and the world. In

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59 See also Pannenberg, Jesus - God and Man, 69.
raising Jesus from the dead, God demonstrated divine approval and acceptance of Jesus and his work. By raising Jesus from the dead, God declared and revealed that God accepted Jesus’ way of life characterized by Ilawmngaihna expressed in self-giving and selfless service for others. Hence, the resurrection of Christ reveals God’s nature.

Thirdly, the resurrection reveals the true identity of Jesus. The resurrection of Christ is God’s loving response to the person and work of Jesus, and God’s exaltation of him as the pasaltha-ilawmngai. The resurrection revealed that, Jesus of Nazareth who blessed the poor and fought against evil forces that oppressed the people to the extent of laying down his life, is the incarnate Son of God. He is God’s celebrated Pasaltha. Neither death nor PAWLA could hold him down; he rose from the dead. He has entered into Pialral and is alive forever with God. In the light of their experience of his resurrection, the disciples came to confess unambiguously that Jesus is indeed the Lord and the Messiah, the Son of the living God.

Fourthly, the resurrection of Jesus stands as the divine promise for the transformation of life and the triumph of God’s Ilawmngaihna. By raising Jesus from the dead, God showed that God will not fail those who trust God and struggle for justice in suffering and pain forever. The resurrection reveals that God, who raised Jesus crucified in helplessness, is the God who liberates the oppressed and lifts up the downtrodden and raises the dead. In this way, the tribal Christians in Mizoram can perceive the resurrection of Jesus as inspiring a passion for justice, as containing a promise that justice will ultimately triumph, and that it is worthwhile to show constructive solidarity with the poor and oppressed people here and now. Likewise, the resurrection of Jesus is a sign of hope and victory for those who seek liberation and justice in the world of violence and oppression.

We have examined Jesus’ prophetic ministry, his self-sacrificial life and activities, his death and his resurrection, and concluded that in all these aspects Jesus Christ may be seen by Mizo Christians as the Pasaltha through whom God has expressed God’s self

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60 See Moltmann, "The resurrection of Christ," 80.
and purposes to them. In our subsequent and concluding discussion, we will look at the kingdom of God, which Jesus proclaimed and nurtured throughout his life, and see its significance in relation to the Mizo understanding of a community.

5. The Kingdom of God as Communitarian Society

The kingdom of God takes on special relevance for Mizo people. Firstly, it resonates with their experience of a communitarian society, a society in which people in the past lived together in mutual relationship and interdependency under the rule of a Lal (chief). Secondly, it fittingly exhibits the qualities of life nurtured by pasaltha and tlawmngathna. It is commonly agreed among biblical scholars and theologians that the coming of God’s kingdom is the central theme of Jesus’ message and mission.62 All the Synoptic Gospels summed up Jesus’ message in this concept (Matt. 4: 23; 9: 35; Mark 1: 15; Luke 4: 43; 8: 1). Matthew’s use of the expression “kingdom of heaven” in place of “kingdom of God” is merely to avoid direct expression of the name of God: in both cases the expressions have the same meaning. In contemporary discussions, too, some theologians prefer to use “reign of God” instead of “kingdom of God”, because they assumed that kingdom of God has connotations of male overlordship and superiority.63

According to Joachim Jeremias, the term ‘kingdom of God’ is a dynamic concept, denoting “the reign of God in action”, in contrast to the earthly monarchy and also to all rules in heaven and on earth.64 In a similar manner, Schillebeeckx believes that what Jesus intends by “kingdom of God” is “a process, a course of events, whereby God begins to govern or to act as king or Lord, an action, therefore, by which God manifests his being-God in the world of men”.65 As we have mentioned before, the kingdom of God in Jesus’ message and activities can be perceived among the Mizo people as a communitarian society, a society in which people, along with other

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64 Jeremias, New Testament Theology, 98.
65 Schillebeeckx, Jesus, 141.
creatures and God, live together in close relationship with one another as a family. In what follows we will examine how the kingdom of God, in Jesus’ message and activities, can be seen as manifesting the character of a communitarian society.

5.1. The kingdom of God, revealed as liberation of the oppressed in Jesus’ preaching and activities, exhibits the quality of a communitarian society

Jesus proclaimed the coming of God’s kingdom and called the people to repentance and to acceptance of God’s reign (Mark 1: 15; Matt. 3: 2). In the inaugural sermon of his public ministry in Nazareth, Jesus characterized his ministry of establishing God’s kingdom in terms of liberation for the oppressed. He read from the Book of Isaiah:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord.’ (Luke 4: 18-19).

Jesus accepted this lesson as a statement of his own mission, and said to his hearers, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (v. 21). Likewise, in his reply to John’s disciples who enquired whether or not he was the Messiah, he said: “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them” (Matt. 11: 4-5; Luke 7: 22; cf. Isa.29: 18-19; 35: 5-6). The Gospels in this way presented Jesus’ message and mission primarily as one of liberation and protection for the poor and oppressed. This image of God’s kingdom reflects the nature of traditional Mizo society, in which the widows and the weak were usually given protection and care by the community, especially by the chief and tlawmngai(s).

5.2. In his communion with others, Jesus the Pasaltha-tlawmngai revealed the kingdom of God as a communitarian society

Jesus lived in concrete communion with others. He welcomed in his accompany people of diverse backgrounds, especially the poor and the marginalized. He was able to share their joy and suffering, aspirations and apprehensions. He called fishermen to be his disciples (Mark 1: 16-20), shared table with “sinners” and tax collectors (Mark 2: 15-17) and lodged in the chief tax collector Zacchaeus’s house (Luke 19: 1-10).
talked to a woman of ill repute and even accepted her offer of anointing (Luke 7: 36-50). He also talked to a Samaritan woman who had had five husbands (John 4: 7-42). When a certain leper called upon his name, Jesus was moved with pity and dared to touch him (Mark 1: 40-41), even though leprosy in his day was considered an incurable communicable disease. Leaving aside the question of the historicity of these incidents, we may affirm that the tribal people in Mizoram can perceive in Jesus’ actions the reign of God understood as a communitarian society.

5.3. In his acts of exorcism and healing, Jesus the Pasaltha-tlawmngai revealed a communitarian society

Jesus healed people who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons (Mark 1: 29-34). By doing so, he rescued the people from the grips of various destructive forces and thus restored them to the community. In Jesus’ acts of healing and exorcism, God’s eschatological kingdom has been inaugurated and the new creation is begun. He said, “If it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you” (Matt. 12: 28; cf. Luke 11: 20). Accordingly, the coming of God’s kingdom is revealed in Jesus’ ministry as liberation for the oppressed and as destruction for the powers of evil, thereby creating a new fellowship among the people.

As we have mentioned, in Jesus’ ministry the sick and the disabled were not merely cured physically, but given access to the community. The lepers and the demoniacs who had been isolated from family and community were restored to the community (e.g. Mark 1: 40-55; 5: 1-20). Similarly, a woman who was bent over for eighteen years owing to infirmity was not only cured, but was restored to her dignity as a “daughter of Abraham” (Luke 13: 10-17).

5.4. Jesus the Pasaltha-tlawmngai advocated in his teaching and injunctions, the qualities of a communitarian society

Jesus taught that persons embracing the reign of God must show love and concern for one another. They should love not only their neighbours, but also even those who are their enemies (Matt. 5: 43-48). They must not insult their brothers or sisters, and must refrain from anger against them (Matt. 5: 22). People living in the kingdom of God must be like the light that enlightens the darkness; they must do good works that help others (Matt. 5: 14-16). In the same manner, Jesus also compared the kingdom of God to two debtors who owed some amounts of money to a certain creditor. When the debtors could not pay, the creditor cancelled the debts (Luke 7: 41-43). In this way, Jesus taught that life in the kingdom of God is characterized by cancellation of debt and forgiveness. As God forgives their debts, people living in the kingdom of God must also forgive their debtors (Matt. 18: 23-35; 6: 12). He said, “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful” (Luke 6: 36).

5.5. Jesus the Pasaltha-tlawmngai taught his disciples to live the life of the kingdom of God amongst themselves as a communitarian society. They should live for others. This echoes the Mizo principle of Sem sem dam dam, eibil thi thi (One who shares with others will live, one who eats by himself/herself will die)

Jesus’ teaching and activities portrayed the Kingdom of God as a community life in which people share their life and resources with one another. He said, “For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it” (Mark 8: 35; cf. Matt. 16: 25; Luke 9: 24). Likewise, he commanded his disciples, “Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment” (Matt. 10: 8). He said, “Give, and it will be given to you” (Luke 6: 38). According to Jesus’ teaching, persons seeking to embrace the kingdom of God must be willing to share their own possessions with others, especially those who have less (Mark 10: 17-21). Those who refuse to share their possessions with the poor cannot receive the kingdom of God (Mark 10: 22f). They are like the foolish man, who dreams of a great harvest, while God calls him to account that very night (Luke 12: 16-21).
5.6. Jesus the Pasaltaha-tlawmngai proclaimed the kingdom of God as God’s gift of life, which is to be shared with others

The Johannine Gospel describes the kingdom of God specifically as eternal life, which God in Jesus offers to the world (John 3: 16). People are called to partake of this life and share it also with others. Discipleship essentially involves sharing of our life and resources. In the story of Jesus’ feeding of the five thousand, which is found in all the Gospels, this idea is quite clearly reflected. According to the story, Jesus did not want to send his audience away hungry and asked his disciples to give them something to eat. Their response, in Mark’s Gospel, was to calculate the financial cost. In all the four Gospels, Jesus makes them share the little they have.

This story illustrates that for Jesus food is something to be shared, and that participation in the kingdom of God involves sharing of one’s own life and resources with others. Indeed, in one of Jesus’ parables, the kingdom of God is pictured as a great banquet in which all people, especially the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame, join with one another in fellowship with God (Luke 14: 15-24). In this regard the Mizo tradition is correct in its perception that one cannot attain Pialral without sharing one’s own food and wealth with others. Mizos honour the tlawmngaihna of pasaltha Vanapa, who refused to eat a piece of bread he had for his lunch, but gave it to his friends, who were hungry like him during a hunting expedition. Yet, it is in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ that the vision of legendary Mizo pasalthas such as Vanapa is fully revealed. In fact, it is most often our unwillingness to share our food and resources with others that make the world a situation of hunger and misery for so many people. In all these messages of Jesus, tribal Christians can see the kingdom of God as exhibiting the characters and values of their traditional communitarian society.

5.7. Jesus the Pasaltaha-tlawmngai revealed in his words and activities the communitarian life whose consummation is to be expected in the future

We have noted that the kingdom of God is not static, but a dynamic event. God in Christ has offered it in the past, and yet through the Spirit of the resurrected Christ God continues to offer the divine life to all people. The Gospels also portray that the coming of God’s kingdom as something to be prayed for and looked forward to. Jesus
taught his disciples to pray, "Thy Kingdom come" (Matt. 6: 10; Luke 11: 2). Likewise, Jesus' judgement parables and several of his Son of Man sayings project the consummation of the kingdom of God as future event (e.g. Matt. 13: 23-30, 36-43; 25: 14-46; Luke 16: 19-31). In his sayings, Jesus indicated that, even in its future consummation, the kingdom of God would belong to those who fed the hungry and thirsty, welcomed the stranger, clothed the naked, cared for the sick and visited the prisoner (Matt. 25: 31-40). According to Jesus, solidarity with the poor is solidarity with God.

Here the kingdom of God, as present and future reality, takes on considerable significance for the Mizo people. Although Mizos already lived a communitarian life in the villages, they longed for its fulfilment. They longed for abundant food, rest from their labour and freedom from diseases. This hope explains why they responded fervently to the Christian message of heaven during the revival movements and embraced Christianity.

6. Concluding Remarks

In this chapter we attempted to reflect the significance of Jesus Christ by using a Synthetic-Praxis model, centred on him as pasaltha, with special interest on his earthly prophetic ministry. We argued that the idea of Jesus as pasaltha incorporates much of the New Testament portrait of the person and work of Christ. For example, Jesus' solidarity with the people, his prophetic ministry and his eventual death for this cause, can all be seen as exhibiting the qualities of a pasaltha. Similarly, significant aspects of Jesus' self-giving life and activities, such as his incarnation, his existence for others, his intimate relationship with and devotion to God, and his suffering and death, can be perceived among the Mizos as expressing the principle of tlawmngaihna, which is an essential characteristic of a pasaltha.

In the same way, we also asserted that, in the Mizo context, the resurrection of Jesus could be perceived as God's response to Jesus' person and work as the Pasaltha-tlawmngai, and God's exaltation of him in that character. We also suggested that, in the Mizo tribal situation, the kingdom of God in Jesus' message and activities could be perceived as exhibiting the qualities of a communitarian society.
In this study, we are not able to explore all the issues fully. In line with our understanding of Christ as *pasalitha*, many other theological themes, including Christian mission, church, salvation and discipleship, can also be interpreted contextually from the perspective of tribal people. Indeed, there is much work still to be done.
CONCLUSION

In this study, we seek to interpret the significance of Jesus Christ from the perspective of tribal people in Mizoram. We maintain that Christology has always been an interpretation of the significance of Christ in a particular time and place. There is no single, monocultural Christology, which is universally applicable to all peoples for all time. There are rather many Christologies. In recent times, many contextual Christologies have emerged as Christian communities or theologians from different Third World situations formulate their own understanding of Christ in order to meet the challenges and needs particular to them. In Christological formulation, it is the context of the people that largely shapes the way Christology is articulated. In the context of Mizoram, the need for doing a contextual Christology arises from the failure of the existing Christology to address the needs and aspirations of the Mizo people.

The study identifies two major problems faced by tribal people in northeast India, and in Mizoram in particular. The first is the socio-economic alienation of the people from the dominant community in India; the second is a growing disparity between rich and poor within the tribal community itself. Like dalits and other tribal peoples, Mizzos are one of the marginalized communities in India. The dominant community in India do not accept tribals as equal citizens, but treat them as outcasts and foreigners, even as untouchables. Such alienation from the dominant community has become even worse for the hill tribes of northeast India, such as Mizzos, due to their ethnic difference and to the geographical isolation of their region. Consequently, Mizzos and other tribal peoples of northeast India have experienced alienation and discrimination from mainland India in various ways.

In Mizoram, in particular, the unproductiveness of the traditional agriculture system, the lack of trade links and infrastructure, immigration influxes and rapid social change have added their socio-economic alienation from the mainland India. Besides these factors, the emergence of a new class of small wealthy Mizo elites and the increasing gap between the rich and the poor have further damaged the already deteriorating situation of the people. As a result of all these factors, life is becoming very hard and
full of toil for the poor and landless people. We have argued that, if the person and work of Jesus Christ is to be good news for the Mizo people, then Christology must take seriously into account these problems and struggles of the local people.

The study also reveals that the Christological tradition in Mizoram, which comes from Western Christianity, is inadequate to address these problems faced by the contemporary Mizo society. In this Christology, which we named “Mission Christology”, there is a one-sided emphasis on the death of Christ. Further, the aspects of Jesus’ life and ministry and their significance for the socio-economic life of the people are not adequately dealt with. Mission Christology’s interpretation of the significance of Christ’s death is overwhelmingly individualistic and otherworldly. In contrast to the tribals’ worldview, the mission Christology posits a dualistic view of reality. It portrays Christ’s work of salvation primarily in terms of salvation for individual soul, and thus tends to reduce the significance of Christ’s work to the realm of moral pietism.

The study reveals that the fundamental problem of the existing Christology in Mizoram is its failure to take the culture and worldview of the people into theological formulation. Instead of taking the cultural tradition and worldview of the people as an essential source for doing Christology, the mission Christology rather adopts an attitude of condemnation and abolition towards the local culture. This attitude makes the Gospel of Christ alien to the people and unable to take deep root in Mizo tribal society. A reconstruction of Christology is therefore necessary in order to present Jesus Christ meaningfully among the Mizo people.

In seeking to reconstruct the understanding of Christ in the Mizoram context, some of the liberating cultural traditions of the Mizos are rediscovered. In the Mizos’ worldview, the human person is seen as a unity, with no sharp division between body and soul or between sacred and secular. The human being is perceived primarily in terms of community, rather than in individual terms. To be human is to live in close relation with others in a community. Reciprocal relationship, helping one another and sharing one’s own possessions, happiness and sorrows with others are seen as liberating characteristics of traditional tribal society. Generally, tribal people are fond of singing, dancing, congregating, eating and celebrating life together. In Mizo
society, in particular, the study shows that the image of *pasaltha* can be perceived as an exemplary character or a model human person. *Pasaltha* were braves who defended the people from exploitation and from their enemies. They were persons who best embodied the character of *tlawmngaihna*, the Mizo ethical principle which encompasses selfless services for others, humility, kindness, honesty, hard work and trustworthiness.

The concept of land, the beliefs in the existence of God and other spiritual beings and life after death are other important traditions recovered in this study. The study reveals that, among tribal people, land is perceived as a source of life, a sacred reality indwelt by spirit. Land belongs to the community, and should not be exploited or sold for personal benefit. Against European writers like A.G. McCall and David Kyles, who described tribal people in Mizoram as animists who did not worship any God, the study reveals that Mizos believed in the existence of God and other spiritual beings. God was known in Mizoram as *Pathian*, and was perceived to be a male deity, who dwelt in the high heaven. *Pathian* was regarded as a kind and merciful God, the creator and source of blessing. Mizos also believed in the existence of other spirits, both benevolent and malignant. Malignant spirits were perceived to be the source of all their illnesses and misfortunes. Mizos used to offer sacrifices to evil spirits for the purpose of recovering from their sickness and misfortunes. Mizos also believed that, after death, the human soul went to *mithikhua* (the village of the dead) or *piarlal* (paradise). The former was believed to be an abode for the spirits of ordinary men and women, where life was more difficult than this earthly life. The latter was a place of happiness and plenty, which was gained only by those few who performed a series of ceremonial feasts called *thangchhuah*. These fortunate ones were either very rich, or very good hunters.

The study shows that there has been a significant continuity of traditional culture in Mizo Christianity. Despite the general tendency of the missionaries and the early Mizo church leaders to discard anything that was associated with the traditional religion or culture, the traditional Mizo culture was not totally wiped out. On the contrary, the traditional culture helped to a great extent the spread of the Gospel, and also played a significant role in shaping Mizo Christianity.
Drawing together some of the results of our investigations, we have sought to re-express the significance of Jesus Christ in the context of the tribal people in Mizoram. For this purpose, we use the Mizo concept of *pasaltha* as our working model. We argue that the idea of Christ as *pasaltha* incorporates much of the New Testament portrait of the person and work of Christ. Jesus’ solidarity with the people, particularly the poor and marginalized, his prophetic criticism against the unjust social and religious order of his days, and his eventual death for this cause, can all be seen by Mizo Christians as exhibiting the qualities of a *pasaltha*, who always identified himself with and defended the people from enemies and oppressive forces, particularly the poor and the weak. Similarly, the aspect of Jesus’ self-giving and self-sacrificial life and activities – his incarnation, his existence for others, his intimate relationship with and devotion to God, and his suffering and death on the cross – expresses and yet transcends the principle of *tlawmngaihna*, which is an essential characteristic of a *pasaltha*. We therefore argue that in the Mizo context Jesus Christ can be proclaimed as the *pasaltha* through whom God’s self and purposes are disclosed to them.

In the same way, we argue that the resurrection of Jesus can be perceived in Mizo context as God’s response to Jesus’ person and work as *Pasaltha- tlawmngai* and God’s exaltation of him in this character. The resurrection revealed God’s approval and acceptance of Jesus *pasaltha*’s confrontation with the oppressive forces in the society and his self-giving *tlawmngaihna*. As God raised Jesus the *pasaltha- tlawmngai* from the dead and transformed his total humanity with the divine life, God will also liberate the oppressed from the grips of exploitation and lift up the downtrodden from their situation of helplessness. In this way, Mizo Christians can perceive the resurrection of Jesus their *pasaltha* as a promise of hope and victory in their search for fullness of life, justice and liberation. The resurrection of Jesus from the dead opens up the beginning of the new creation. Jesus’ resurrection becomes a basis for the future resurrection and promise of liberation for all believers of Christ.

In line with this, we emphasize that the kingdom of God is the central theme that defines and sums up Jesus’ message and mission. We argue that, in Mizo tribal situation, the kingdom of God in Jesus’ message and activities can be perceived as exhibiting the qualities of a communitarian society, a concept which expresses well...
how Mizos aspire to live. Jesus' solidarity with the people, especially with the poor and the outcasts; his healing activities and exorcisms, which not only cured the people from their physical illness but also restored them to the community; his teaching and injunctions to love, care for and forgive one another; his exhortation that persons seeking to embrace the kingdom of God must be willing to share their possessions with the poor; his feeding of the hungry and its implication that food is to be shared with others – all these exhibit the characteristics of a communitarian society. In addition, his teaching to pray "Thy kingdom come", and many of his parables and sayings, reflect that the kingdom of God has a future dimension. Yet, even in its future dimension, Jesus' teaching indicates that the kingdom of God will belong to those who live in solidarity with the poor and share their life and resources with them.

In this study, we have not been able to deal with many theological issues that need to be considered contextually in relation to the understanding of Christ. The concepts of Christian mission, church, salvation, discipleship, for examples, are some areas that can also be reinterpreted alongside the focus of our work – the understanding of Christ as pasalthe. There is much more to be done in order to relate the Gospel of Christ meaningfully to tribal people in Mizoram.
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