

**DEVELOPMENT OF LOCAL THEOLOGY OF THE CHIN (ZOMI) OF THE
ASSEMBLIES OF GOD (AG) IN MYANMAR: A CASE STUDY IN
CONTEXTUALIZATION**

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This thesis is dedicated firstly to my loving parents Albert and Hilda Ross from whom I got the work ethic required to complete this research.

Secondly, I dedicate it to the Chin people who were generous in telling me their stories, so I offer this completed research as a reflection for even greater understanding and growth.

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Abstract

This thesis examines the contextualization of Pentecostal theology, using the Chin (Zomi) of the Assemblies of God (AG) in Myanmar as a case-study. Harvey Cox's hypothesis that Pentecostals have a propensity to connect with other cultures' "primal spirituality" and mix with their practices is examined, which he claims has been conducive to Pentecostalism's rapid global growth. Firstly, Christianity's introduction to Burma is examined, including the Baptist missionaries who went to Chin state; the American AG missionaries who introduced Pentecostalism to other areas of Burma; the rise to independence of local leadership; the introduction of Pentecostalism to the Chin via locals and the subsequent renewal in Chin state. Three aspects of Chin ecclesiology are selected from Douglas Hayward's measurement of contextualization: liturgy, songs and theology. These three aspects are investigated using ethnographic methods and the findings are analysed theologically to examine the Chin's contextualization of theology to their local culture. Chin AG liturgy is analysed to consider the Chin's relationship to the Trinity, considering its western and primal religious influences especially. Thirty popular Chin AG worship songs are analysed using song-text analysis for their relationship to the Trinity, primal influence and practices or experiences. The Chin's propensity to syncretise their pneumatology is considered considering their primal religious background as Pentecostal converts. Theological discussion on syncretism and contextualization theory are used as a framework, which is examined for further application in other Pentecostal contexts. Alternative approaches are considered to address the issues surrounding the syncretism controversy in Pentecostalism. Retrospectively, I reflect on the development of my own theological framework in the course of this research.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO A CASE-STUDY OF CHINA CONTEXTUALIZATION

1. Introduction

Since the last century, Pentecostalism has grown rapidly and globally, far exceeding the growth expected by a movement which began with relatively few missionaries with often poor training.¹ Contemporary research is examining the reasons for Pentecostalism's exponential growth. However, although early Pentecostal missionaries were sent out fervently, they had little cross-cultural or theological training, which naturally led to numerous cultural faux-pas. Cultural insensitivity has concerned many from mainline denominations, who are developing the scholarship of inculturation and contextualization, in response to their recognition of the need to present Christianity in culturally sensitive ways. There is a gap for more research on contextualization issues, especially specific to Pentecostalism. Pentecostalism's growth and relationship to local cultures are both relevant to Harvey Cox's hypothesis that Pentecostalism has a natural propensity to blend with cultures.

1.1. Cox's Hypothesis

The American theologian, Harvey Cox has been fascinated by Pentecostalism's multiplication in tandem with globalization.² Ironically, Cox was renowned initially for his examination of theology within its secular context in *The Secular City* published in 1965.³ This book was a reinterpretation of Christianity when it is separated from its originating pre-

¹ Allan H. Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity*, 2^d ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 211, 215; Anderson, *To the Ends of the Earth: Pentecostalism and the Transformation of World Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1-2, 17; Anderson, *Spreading Fires: The Missionary Nature of Early Pentecostalism* (London: SCM Press, 2007), 58.

² Harvey Cox, "Spirits of Globalization: Pentecostalism and Experiential Spiritualities in a Global Era," in *Spirits of Globalization: The Growth of Pentecostalism and Experiential Spiritualities in a Global Age*, ed. Sturla J. Stalsett (London: SCM Press, 2006): 11-22.

³ Harvey Cox, *The Secular City: Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective* (New York: Collier Books, 1965; reprint, 1990; reprint, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

scientific worldview. Surprisingly, he abandoned this secularisation thesis in exchange for “the return of the sacred” in *Religion in the Secular City*.⁴ (Likewise Peter Berger, the sociologist who was renowned for developing the secularisation theory had a similar “conversion” experience in acknowledging the increase in religious consciousness.)⁵ Cox’s new interest in Christianity is not in a revival of mainstream traditional forms, but rather affirms Pentecostalism as a new movement in Christian history. The appeal of studying Pentecostalism correlates with his preference for examining affective and experiential belief systems, rather than cerebral.⁶ From Cox’s observations that cerebral traditional religion was declining in a secular age, and yet Pentecostalism grew, he developed his hypothesis.

Cox hypothesises that what contributed to Pentecostalism’s rapid proliferation was how Pentecostalism tapped into “primal spirituality” within people. “Primal spirituality” is defined by examining the terms separately. The term “primal” means first or basic, referring to its innateness. Its intended nuance in this research is to refer to fundamental human religious instincts. Spirituality is understood as ‘people’s awareness and lived experience of God.’⁷ So, primal spirituality in simple terms can be understood as a basic experience of God, or ‘an innate consciousness and experiences of God, especially spiritual gifts.’ Cox himself perceives that Pentecostalism’s primal spirituality is three-fold including: (1.) **Primal Speech**, referring to glossolalia characteristically practised by Pentecostals; (2.) **Primal Piety** ‘trance, vision, healing, dreams, dance, and other archetypal religious expressions’ and (3.)

⁴ Harvey Cox, *Religion in the Secular City: Towards a Postmodern Theology* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1984), 8-9.

⁵ Peter L. Berger, *Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Double Day, 1967; reprint, New York: Anchor Books, 1969 and 1990).

⁶ Harvey Cox, “Some Pentecostal Reflections on Pentecostalism,” *Pneuma* 15 (Spring 1993): 30. See also Peter D. Neumann, “Spirituality,” in *Handbook of Pentecostal Christianity*, ed. Adam Stewart (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2012), 199.

⁷ Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 192. (200 in first edition)

Primal Hope in Pentecostalism’s ‘millennial outlook’, expecting ‘a radical new age’.⁸ (For further discussion of terminology, see section 1.1.2.)

The significance of connecting with the primal spirituality is that touching the raw spiritual essence causes formerly suppressed worship to re-emerge, thus empowering Pentecostalism to connect with most cultures.⁹ Subsequently, Pentecostalism subconsciously integrates other religious beliefs and practices,¹⁰ thus facilitating Pentecostalism’s adaptation to other cultures.¹¹ Not only are Pentecostals typically unaware that they are mixing their beliefs and practices with those of other religions, but they actually refute this accusation.¹² This is because “primal spirituality” is experienced at an internal, invisible level, rather than externally, which would be more noticeable. Pentecostalism is recognised as having missiological benefits due to its adaptability to various contexts. Prior to observing Pentecostalism’s intermingling with local religious culture, Cox has also written about the mixing of superstition with popular and traditional religion,¹³ and describes Mariology, for example, as recuperating buried religious concepts, such as nature and fertility among “preliterate people”.¹⁴ Cox’s perception of mysticism is also noted in his description of his childhood experiences of Catholic mass.¹⁵

Cox identified Pentecostals’ unique characteristics as their spiritual gifts and eschatology, producing a positive outlook. The significance of his theory is its understanding of a wide range of Pentecostal groups, many of whom are influenced by folk spirituality. Yet Pentecostalism’s core spirituality also impacted westerners as the experiences of “ecstasy”

⁸ Harvey Cox, *Fire From Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-first Century* (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1995), 82.

⁹ Cox, *Fire From Heaven*, 81, 101.

¹⁰ Cox, “Some Pentecostal Reflections,” 31.

¹¹ Cox, *Fire From Heaven*, 101.

¹² Cox, “Some Pentecostal Reflections,” 31.

¹³ Cox, *The Seduction of the Spirit: The Use and Misuse of People’s Religion* (London: Wildwood House, 1973, 1974), 10.

¹⁴ Cox, *The Seduction of the Spirit*, 180.

¹⁵ Cox, *The Seduction of the Spirit*, 50, 23-52.

bypass culture. Likewise, the recuperation of buried spiritual nuggets is evident in African Pentecostalism, which I examine in an Asian context. Cox's theory suggests that Pentecostalism connects at a level deeper than the cultural level, at the spiritual level of supernatural gifts. However, this spirituality is also innately human, thus being inclusive. Cox's observations regarding Pentecostalism's spiritual gifts are not unique, but linking Pentecostal spirituality with its growth is helpful in understanding the profound spiritual changes which have taken place globally.¹⁶

Other scholars also have associated primal spirituality with Pentecostalism, referring to Pentecostalism's experiential nature and empowerment with spiritual gifts.¹⁷ Prior to Cox, Hollenweger claimed that Pentecostalism's African American origins and Catholicism's influences from "popular religion" has led to a dualistic tendency. Pentecostalism's dualism can be perceived as amenable to a primal worldview, because it similarly divides the natural and the supernatural.¹⁸ The common beliefs in a spirit world means that surrounding non-Christian traditions influence Pentecostal theology, including ancestral beliefs and traditional healing practices.¹⁹ Combined with Pentecostalism's lack of uniformity in interpreting the accompanied theological issues causes Pentecostalism to adapt to cultures, leading to varieties of Pentecostalism developing.²⁰ Due to these varied incorporated beliefs, Pentecostalism is perceived as being more easily contextualized to non-Christian religions than other denominations.²¹

¹⁶ Cox, "Some Pentecostal Reflections," 29.

¹⁷ See Stephen Hunt, "Sociology of Religion" and Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, "Pneumatologies in Systematic Theology" in *Studying Global Pentecostalism: Theories and Methods*, ed. Allan Anderson et al. (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2010), 228.

Allan Anderson has also discussed Cox's hypothesis of primal spirituality, see: Anderson, *Spirit-Filled World: Religious Dis/Continuity in African Pentecostalism Christianity and Renewal—Interdisciplinary Studies* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 5-6.

¹⁸ Walter J. Hollenweger, "An Introduction to Pentecostalsms," *Journal of Beliefs and Values*, 25, no.2 (August 2004): 127-8.

¹⁹ Hollenweger, "An Introduction to Pentecostalsms," 131.

²⁰ Hollenweger, "An Introduction to Pentecostalsms," 125.

²¹ Cox, "Spirits of Globalization," 17.

As a result, Pentecostalism may vary considerably depending on its location. This research examines an Asian Pentecostal context, which is an area somewhat neglected by scholars. Cox's work is based on his observations of Pentecostalism in North America, Latin America, Asia and Africa.²² As the historical revival in Azusa Street, Los Angeles is well-known, North American Pentecostalism has frequently been studied. The black African-American community's "folk spirituality" was influential from these beginnings,²³ suggesting a connection with primal spirituality.²⁴ Latin America's influential revivals which led to numerous converts from Catholicism to Pentecostalism has also attracted ample scholarly attention. Walter Hollenweger researched Pentecostalism in many contexts, including general references to the "third world",²⁵ but arguably his contribution to African Pentecostalism is most significant.

As the African Independent Churches (hereafter AICs) were accused of syncretism with African religions because of their unique spirituality, this controversy has been examined by several scholars.²⁶ One of the most substantial contributions of associating "primal spirituality" with Pentecostalism is its contribution to the acceptance of the AICs as African Pentecostals, which were formerly rejected.²⁷ Hollenweger specifically mentioned the AICs in his formal acceptance of varieties of Pentecostals, but he also highlighted areas prone to syncretism. Anderson concurs that there are similarities between the spirituality and phenomena in the AICs and in Pentecostalism, but he claims that the AICs have their own

²² Cox, *Fire From Heaven*.

²³ Cox, *Fire From Heaven*, 101.

²⁴ Kärkkäinen, "Pneumatologies", 238. He examines the spirituality of African and Asian religions and "primal spirituality".

²⁵ Hollenweger, "An Introduction", 125.

²⁶ Brett Knowles, "Pentecostal Future for Christianity?: Is the Future of Christianity a Pentecostal One? A Conversation with Harvey Cox" (paper presented at The Future of Christianity in the West Conference, Dunedin, 5-8 December, 2002), available from <http://www.otago.ac.nz/chaplain/resources/otago017072.html>; accessed 8 February 2017.

²⁷ Cox, *Fire From Heaven*, 245.

unique characteristics.²⁸ The process the AICs underwent in dealing with former spiritual practices has been well documented and because African religions resembled other primal religions, the AICs are used as a reference point in this research. This discussion is significant for groups who followed a primal religion before conversion to Pentecostalism, who therefore may be prone to syncretism.²⁹

Primal religions existed before text-based world religions and typically believe in spirits and have an oral tradition transferred down through the generations, rather than sacred texts. The term “primal religion” is maintained to avoid the negative connotations of “animism” or the ambiguity of “indigenous religion”. This term is preferred to “pre-Christian religion”, which does not recognise traditional religion in its own right, distinct from Christianity. The term primal religion is used here to describe popular religiosity. For similar reasons Aloysius Pieris chose the term “cosmic” religion.³⁰ Furthermore, the term primal religion maintains the association with Cox’s use of “primal”. I have selected for analysis Chin (Zomi) Pentecostals living in Myanmar who formerly practiced a primal religion, many of whom were initially evangelised by western Baptist missionaries.

1.1.1. How Cox’s Hypothesis Links to the Chin Case Study

Cox’s hypothesis of Pentecostalism’s tendency for theological overlap and growth provides a useful theological framework for researching the Chin people. The question of whether Chin Pentecostal growth is associated with tapping into Chin “primal spirituality” is examined, including the emergence of worship, connecting to Chin culture and integrating different

²⁸ Cox, *Fire From Heaven*, 245 in Allan Anderson, “Intercultural Theology, Walter J. Hollenweger and African Pentecostalism” in *Intercultural Theology: Approaches and Themes*, ed. Mark J. Cartledge and David Cheetham (London: SCM Press, 2011), 133. Anderson interacts with Cox’s observations about the AICs.

²⁹ Hollenweger, “An Introduction”, 126.

For example, Kankana-ey Pentecostals in the Philippines have a comparable background to the Chin as they also were formerly “head-hunters” and adhered to a primal religion. Julie Ma researched if the Pentecostal converts from the Kankana-ey people group imported primal beliefs into Pentecostalism. See Julie C. Ma, *When the Spirit Meets the Spirits*, vol. 118 (Frankfurt Am Main: Peter Lang, 2000), 239.

³⁰ Aloysius Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation* (New York: Orbis, 1988), 71-2.

practices. This study considers the possibility that the Chin combine former primal beliefs and practices relating to ancestral spirits with belief in the Holy Spirit and Pentecostal practices, causing syncretism.³¹ Theological issues of Pneumatology, beliefs in ancestral spirits and traditional healing practices are particularly relevant, considering some Pentecostals also believe in supernatural healing and deliverance. These will be examined in chapter six in particular.

1.1.2. Rationale for Selecting the Term “Primal”

Harvey Cox uses the term “primal” to describe Pentecostal spirituality which is described as “elemental” and “that largely unprocessed nucleus of the psyche” that continues to search for meaning,³² and his usage of the term is not intended to be derogatory. However, in his classification of Pentecostalism’s “primal piety” including spiritual phenomena such as trances, visions, healing and dance, his use of the term “primeval”³³ is more problematic, as it gives the connotation of being primitive. Scholars have ongoing debates regarding the appropriate choice of terminology. In particular, James Cox has written a book devoted to analysing the terms: primitive, primal and indigenous. These are examined in more detail below.

James Cox criticises the term “primitive religion” as denoting backward, uncivilised beliefs, alongside a theory that these religions gave insights into an early religion of superstitious beliefs from which Christianity has evolved.³⁴ He prefers the term “indigenous” as it acknowledges that religions vary according to their place of origin,³⁵ because the spirits

³¹ Hollenweger, “An Introduction”, 126.

³² Cox, *Fire From Heaven*, 81-82.

³³ Cox, *Fire From Heaven*, 81-82.

³⁴ James L. Cox, *From Primitive to Indigenous* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing, 2007), 9, 142, 143.

³⁵ C.V. “Indigenous”, Stephen Muecke in *New Keywords: A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, eds. Tony Bennett, Lawrence Grossberg and Meaghan Morris (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 181. Andrew Walls, “Primal Religious Traditions in Today’s World,” in F. Whaling, ed., *Religion in Today’s World* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1987), 252, in James L. Cox, “The Classification “Primal Religions” as a Non-Empirical, Christian Theological Construct,” *Studies in World Christianity: The Edinburgh Review of Theology and Religion* 2: 1 (1996): 56.

appeared in such religions are ancestral and therefore associated with a particular locality. He opposes the generalising of such religions.³⁶ I used the term “primal” rather than “indigenous” religion, because “indigenous” is a traditional term with the connotation of native and colonial, reminiscent of host cultures receiving from the missionary, and of the three-self “indigenous” church planting movements. Although primal religions do vary according to their locality, I believe there are nevertheless some undeniable similarities in their oral traditions and rituals.

James Cox disputes the use of “primal” as he associates it with derogatory terms such as “animistic”, “tribal” and “primitive”.³⁷ His main objections are, firstly, that this word acts as a non-empirical invention of western scholars to unify religions,³⁸ and secondly, the associated view that there is a primal base in all religion which does not respect indigenous religions in their own right, but sees them merely as preparatory foundation for religions such as Christianity.³⁹ James Cox argues that the term “primal religion” is not scientific enough to meet the requirements for classifying religions, yet he does acknowledge that the term is still used for theology,⁴⁰ which is the field of this research. Even though the term “primal” is not perfect, I have maintained it as Harvey Cox aptly uses it to describe why humans’ subconscious spirituality leads to the mixing of Pentecostalism and other spiritualities, including shamanism, and Asian and African belief systems. Whilst considering that the Chin’s primal religion is associated with their local spirits, particularly within Chin state, I have observed that it bears resemblances with other people groups’ religions. While recognising the derogatory connotations of the term “primal”, relating to “primitive”, I

³⁶ Cox, *From Primitive to Indigenous*, 63, 89-90; Cox, “The Classification,” 74.

³⁷ Cox, “The Classification”, 55.

³⁸ Rosalind Shaw, “The Invention of African Traditional Religion,” *Religion* 20 (1990): 339-53 in Cox, “The Classification,” 56.

³⁹ Cox, *From Primitive to Indigenous*, 23.

⁴⁰ Cox, ‘The Classification’, 64.

choose to maintain it because it was used prior to the formation of the cultural distinctions which denigrated it and it preserves Harvey Cox's terminology.

1.2. The Chin's Call for Contextualization

1.2.1. A Brief Introduction to the Chin People

Firstly, I outline the background of the Chin people, showing how they provide a relevant context for a case-study of contextualization. The Chin are a Tibeto-Burman people living predominantly in Chin state, western Myanmar.⁴¹ Estimated at approximately 1.5 million,⁴² the Chin are a minority constituting 2.2% of the 56,890,418 people in Myanmar, whilst the majority people group, the Burmese (Burman), comprises 68% of the population.⁴³ Thus the Chin are a minority group among other people groups.⁴⁴

I have used the term "Chin" for the people group in this research because the interviewees used the term "Chin" to describe themselves and reminisced about "Chin state", from where they had originated; thus, the term "Chin" had a nostalgic connotation. It is also the term used by other people groups to identify the Chin. However, I am aware that "Chin" was a term originally assigned by the British colonial powers, as a nickname denoting their perception that the Chin's features resembled the Chinese. The alternative terms "Zomi" or "Zo" are

⁴¹ Burma's name was officially changed to "Myanmar" on 18 June 1989 by the military junta. Some scholars and political bodies refuse to acknowledge this name change to express their opposition to the government and as an expression of sympathy with pro-democracy movements. However Myanmar was the country's original name and "Burma" was the name assigned by the British. The borders have changed since British rule and so the name "Burma" did not originally include some of the minority groups' regions. In this research "Burma" will be used before 1989 and "Myanmar" after that date. The usage of "Myanmar" is selected because it is in accordance with the Chin's own usage, and no political statement is intended. whilst acknowledging that the name change involves complex issues. Bertil Linter, "Myanmar/Burma" in *Ethnicity in Asia*, ed. Colin Mackerras (London and New York: Routledge/Curzon, 2003), 174-5.

⁴² Accurate statistics are difficult to obtain, but 1.5 million is estimated. Myanmars.NET 1998-2012, available from <http://www.myanmars.net/myanmar-people/myanmar-chin.htm>; accessed 13 September 2014. Sein Tin, *Statistical Year Book 1995*. The Government of the Union of Myanmar, Yangon, Myanmar. The population of Chin state is 0.571 million in Chin state from the year 2012-13. *Statistical Year Book 2015*, available from <http://www.csostat.gov.mm/myan1.asp>; accessed 23 May 2016.

⁴³ "The World Factbook," Central Intelligence Agency, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bm.html>; accessed 8 February 2017.

⁴⁴ Even though Myanmar nationals describe themselves as tribal groups, without an awareness of the negative connotations of the term, most likely because English is not their first language. The terms "people group" or "ethnic group" are used in this research instead.

now more commonly used as more official terms to represent their identity more accurately. In fact, the Chin are not one simple grouping, but are further divided into sub-groups, each having different regional dialects and cultural traits.⁴⁵ This research focuses on the Tedim Chin, who originated from Tedim township in Chin state.

Myanmar is one of the poorest countries in Asia, and Chin state is particularly under-developed. Their poor economy relates to their political context as Myanmar was ruled by an oppressive military junta until 2011, which isolated Myanmar from the outside world and oppressed the Chin as minorities. The Chin were described as “head-hunters” and “primitive” before World War I.⁴⁶ British colonisation introduced western education in conjunction with the Baptist missionaries, which was instrumental in the transformation of the majority of Chin society through economic development and Christianisation. However, even as late as the 1960s the Chin were described as “uncivilised”.⁴⁷

1.2.2. A Brief Background of Chin Primal Religion

In Myanmar, 87.9% of the population would identify as Buddhist, and Buddhism is associated with Myanmar’s national identity. Christianity represents a minority of only 6.2% of the population of Myanmar. However, an estimated 85-95% of all Chin have converted to Christianity from their own “Zo” primal religion which appeased ancestral spirits.⁴⁸ The Chin believe that the spirits are those of their deceased⁴⁹ ancestors’ souls or spirits.⁵⁰ They believe

⁴⁵ Many Chin who live near Tedim and Tonzang townships prefer to be called “Zomi”. The Zomi and Tedim groups overlap as some people belong to both. Yi, interview by the author via facebook private message, 2 November, 2014.

⁴⁶ Do Suan Mung in Thomas Sian Za Kham, *Glimpses of Zomi Animism in Retrospect* (Yangon: Hebron Printing Press, N.D.), Foreword V.

⁴⁷ Ming, interview by the author, Yangon, 9 April 2010; Chao, interview by the author, Yangon, 16 April 2010; En, interview by author, Kalaymyo, 26 April 2010.

⁴⁸ Sing Khaw Khai, *Zo People and their Culture: A Historical, Cultural Study and Critical Analysis of Zo and its Ethnic Tribes* (Manipur: Khampu Hatzw, 1995), 158.

⁴⁹ Yan, interview by author, Kalaymyo, 26 April 2010.

⁵⁰ Khai, *Zo People*, 158.

that after a person dies, his/her spirit remains on earth for a time,⁵¹ before its passage across a river to the spirits' resting place.⁵²

They believe that despite being their ancestors, the spirits' nature is mostly malevolent and powerful enough to inflict sickness or misfortune, so the Chin used to be afraid of upsetting local spirits.⁵³ They believed that the spirits could be living anywhere in their natural surroundings,⁵⁴ so they made offerings near big trees, streams⁵⁵ or stones,⁵⁶ because they believed that inanimate objects such as trees, earth or stones had a soul or spirit.⁵⁷ They also believed that spirits lived in their houses, and they referred to them as "household gods".⁵⁸ They appeased the spirits by performing animal sacrifices; however they deny that this was a form of idol worship.⁵⁹ However, some of the spirits were considered to be "good-natured" and able to bless them with health and prosperity, one such spirit that they referred to as "Amputee" allegedly used to heal them, despite having only one leg.⁶⁰ Another, known as "Elf", was thought to provide them with oxen, thus blessing them financially.⁶¹

The interviewees in my research mostly used the term "spirits", but sometimes used the word "souls" as an alternative; they were unable to differentiate between these terms. Other terminology used reflects their current theological views, as they also refer to the aforementioned ancestral spirits as "evil spirits", "demons",⁶² "devils" or "gods".⁶³ The transition between spirit beliefs and Christianity poses challenges for the translation and

⁵¹ Yan, interview by author, Kalaymyo, 26 April 2010.

⁵² En, interview by author, Kalaymyo, 26 April 2010.

⁵³ Joel Za Hlei Kap, *Chin Church History* (Falam: Zomi Theological College, 2007), 15.

⁵⁴ Min, interview by author, Yangon, 14 April 2010.

⁵⁵ En, interview by author, Kalaymyo, 26 April 2010.

⁵⁶ Yu, interview by author, Yangon, 30 April, 2010.

⁵⁷ Za Kham, *Glimpses of Zomi*, 3.

⁵⁸ Khai, *Zo People*, 160.

⁵⁹ Khai, *Zo People*, 158.

⁶⁰ Wei, interview by author, Yangon, 12 April 2010.

⁶¹ Fan, interview by author, Kalaymyo, 25 April 2010.

⁶² Yan, interview by author, Kalaymyo, 26 April 2010.

⁶³ Fan, interview by author, Kalaymyo, 25 April 2010.

meaning of terms. The variety and contradictory nature of the terms, using both “devils” and “gods”, indicates that they have not developed a uniform theological concept of the spirits.⁶⁴

As the spirits resemble biblical concepts of “false gods” and “idols”, this suggests that Christianity has changed their interpretation of their former primal religion.

Conversely, Chin religion has undoubtedly influenced the Chin’s perception of Christianity, despite the fact that only 0.8% of the Chin population still follow primal religious practices.⁶⁵

Chin primal religion is virtually extinct, as some Chin Christians are now fourth generation converts. So predominantly it is the older generations who remember primal religion, from whom the younger generations merely hear about it.

1.2.3. Reasons Why the Chin were Selected for a Case-Study of Contextualization

The Chin are a minority Christian group in Myanmar, where Buddhism is recognised as the national religion. Being a minority impacts how the Chin perceive their own religious identity in comparison with others, which influences their approach to contextualization issues within Christianity.

As the American Baptist missionaries initially evangelised the Chin, their initial approach to Chin culture was formative. Their assumption that “everything Chin was non-Christian” led them to discard aspects of Chin traditional culture which they associated with primal religion.⁶⁶ The Chin responded variably to the missionaries’ imposed cultural changes.⁶⁷

Those who desired to maintain aspects of their traditional culture, despite being instructed to reject them by the missionaries, experienced regret concerning their cultural loss. The Chin’s

⁶⁴ Cf. Birgit Meyer, *Translating the Devil: Religion and Modernity Among the Ewe in Ghana*, International African Library 21, ed. J.D.Y. Peel, David Parkin and Collin Murray (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999). Also, Allan Anderson refers to African popular religion reappearing in Pentecostalism, see “Translating the Spirit World” in Anderson, *Spirit-Filled World*, chapter seven.

⁶⁵ “The World Factbook”, Central Intelligence Agency; available from <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bm.html>; accessed 8 February 2017.

⁶⁶ Ding, interview by the author, Yangon, 8 April 2010; Ming, interview by the author, Yangon, 9 April 2010.

⁶⁷ See discussion in chapter three.

subsequent perception of their identity and their retrospective reconsideration of the compatibility of their traditional culture with Christianity are examined in the next chapter.

While acknowledging that many Chin first converted to a Baptist form of Christianity, this research examines the Chin who subsequently converted to Pentecostalism. The Assemblies of God (AG) is the most significant Pentecostal denomination in Myanmar and had been introduced by American AG missionaries.⁶⁸ The AG is the most representative of Chin Pentecostalism and the Myanmar AG is composed predominantly of Chin people.

Significantly however, Pentecostalism was introduced to the Chin by local leaders because the American AG missionaries did not actually reach Chin state, but ministered in other regions of Burma. In fact, most churches in Myanmar have grown indigenously, especially since 1966 when the government expelled all foreign missionaries from Burma.

Pentecostalism in a mission context, where locals have developed indigenously, provides an interesting dynamic for examining contextualization issues.

As the Chin are in the majority as a people group within the Myanmar AG, the Chin AG were selected for this research. The Chin AG context was distinctive because Pentecostalism spread indigenously to the Chin from other local people groups. As all missionaries were expelled from Burma in 1966, there had been minimal contact between the Chin AG and foreign missionaries. This context of minimal missionary input, followed by internal isolation imposed post-war by the Burmese government facilitated the opportunity to develop local theology. Their perception of Christianity as a foreign religion would have been less pronounced than those in host cultures with consistent exposure to overseas missionaries. The Tedim Chin are significant because they experienced an influential renewal in the 1970s with numerous conversions to Pentecostalism and reports of exuberant spiritual manifestations.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Anderson, *An Introduction*, 129.

⁶⁹ Xiu, email conversation with the author, 8 February 2010. The Zomi/Tedim Chin compose a large percentage of the AG membership in Myanmar, with the largest AG church being in Tedim. Also, Chin Khua Khai,

Alongside these, the renewal inspired the composition of numerous indigenous worship songs. All of these factors indicate a vibrant form of Pentecostalism.

Another important reason for selecting Chin Pentecostals is that they provide an apt context to examine Cox's hypotheses. If Pentecostalism connects with primal spirituality, then Chin Pentecostalism would have the potential to overlap with their former primal religion.

Pentecostalism's propensity to tap into what Cox describes as suppressed worship will be examined through Chin worship experiences and spiritual gifts in the context of their liturgy. Since primal religion had pervaded Chin culture, influencing ethics and societal roles, the Chin's own local Pentecostal theology emerges from this interplay, and so contextualization is an underlying theme. The Chin experience therefore provides an appropriate context to examine Pentecostalism's adaptation to local culture and the assimilation of former practices.

A common perception of contextualization is how it facilitates evangelism. Nowadays the Chin have virtually all converted to Christianity, and there is little need to evangelise their own ethnic group, so it is interesting to consider what would motivate them to explore theological issues and to contextualize further?

The main reason for considering the question of contextualization is because the Baptist form of Christianity, to which they had first responded, is perceived as a western import, which never truly took root in Chin culture. This dilemma is traced back to the way in which Baptist Christianity was introduced by western missionaries. So, the Chin's perceived benefits of developing a contextualized theology would be to demonstrate that Christianity may be

"Pentecostalism in Myanmar: An Overview." In *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 5:1 (2002): 58-9. This also appears as a chapter in Allan Anderson and Edmond Tang eds., *Asian and Pentecostal: The Charismatic Face of Christianity in Asia* Regnum Studies in Mission, Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies, Series 3 (Oxford and Baguio, Regnum Books International and APTS Press, 2005).

culturally relevant, and not necessarily completely counter-cultural.⁷⁰ Chin leaders perceive this would be an invaluable legacy for future Chin generations.⁷¹

It has been observed that second generation theologians tend to be more willing to develop their own theology than first generation Christians.⁷² This is understandable as they have objectivity with hindsight and have had time to process some issues. The younger generations of Chin are more apt to consider contextualization, which entails learning about their traditional culture, sometimes through anthropologists' records. Some Chin are fourth generation Christian, and because of their distance from their ancient cultural traditions, they are prone to "romanticising" primal religion and would be more amenable to restoring certain aspects, because they lack the negative associations which the older generation have. This recent interest from younger scholars in writing a contextualized Chin theology has so far been limited to a merely academic exercise, because contextualizing with their traditional culture would cause objections from the older generation.⁷³ This is concomitant with how these first generation converts are often the strongest opponents of previous cultural practices, and in this case former religious practices also, as they were the ones with first-hand knowledge and experience of primal religion.

Developing a contextualized theology involves consideration of what cultural aspects can be retained within Christianity, and what Christianity might look like in their culture.⁷⁴ Some Chin suggest reclaiming traditional Chin stories to express Christianity in culturally

⁷⁰ Hua, interview by the author, Yangon, 30 April, 2010.

⁷¹ Simon Pau Khan En, "The Impact of the Gospel on Chin Culture" in *Christianity and the Chins in Myanmar*, ed. Cung Lian Hup (N.P. Cung Lian Hup, February 2003), 3.

⁷² Cox, *Fire From Heaven*, 215.

⁷³ This is the author's broad conclusion from discussions with Chin interviewees.

⁷⁴ R. Daniel Shaw, "Contextualizing the Power and the Glory," *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, 12/3, (1995): 158-9.

appropriate ways.⁷⁵ However, re-incorporating traditional culture as “redemptive analogies”⁷⁶ causes concerns that they also risk reaffirming past beliefs. The Chin’s criteria for selecting which aspects of their traditional culture to revive is based on whether it is deemed compatible with Christianity. However, due to the foreign missionaries’ condemnation of Chin culture, there remains some tension between the Chin’s cultural and Christian identities. Another benefit of developing a Chin contextualized theology is considered to be its potential to present Christianity as amenable to other people groups.⁷⁷ This reveals their association between contextualization and evangelism. In my fieldwork, I observed that one Chin Pentecostal church attempted to present Christianity to Burmese Buddhists as less foreign. Their adaptations included external factors, such as clothing, greetings and speaking Burmese, as opposed to engaging in explicit theological dialogue.⁷⁸ Considering how their own culture had been changed by foreign missionaries, they have decided not to replicate this pattern, and are willing to adapt to Burmese culture.

Another reason why contextualization is relevant to the Chin is because they themselves claim that aspects of Christianity, especially Pentecostal Christianity, was naturally well contextualized to their primal religion. This is examined in the next section. The associated potential for syncretism is examined subsequently, as the older generation of Chin especially are wary of their own propensity towards primal religion, resulting in their attempts to distance themselves from it.

⁷⁵ Hua, interview by the author, Yangon, 30 April, 2010.

⁷⁶ The term “redemptive analogy” are usually attributed to Don Richardson, especially his book “Peace Child”, it refers to a local belief or practice, which has a parallel in the Christian gospel, which may be used to teach a Christian truth.

⁷⁷ Yong, interview by the author, Yangon, 16 April, 2010.

⁷⁸ Church “Blue” which was observed in Yangon.

1.2.3.1. Similarities between Primal Religion and Christianity

Many Chin perceive that their primal religion was theologically similar to Christianity, resulting in Christianity being easily understood by their ancestors.⁷⁹ The similarities included belief in a Supreme Creator,⁸⁰ a spirit realm and life after death, which they expressed as the spirit's resting place.⁸¹ The Chin primal worldview already believed in a supreme Deity, with the concepts of "Lordship" and "unseen power".⁸² Furthermore their sacrificial system resembled the Levitical system, which made Jesus' sacrificial death understandable for the Chin. At the same time, Chin Christians wanted to maintain clear distinctions between their new faith and primal religion, because of their fear of syncretism.⁸³ In addition to the appeal of Christian theology, Pentecostalism's emotive, experience-based spirituality is perceived to be particularly suited to Chin culture. The spontaneity and participation in Pentecostalism was felt to be similar to certain aspects of their primal rituals, including participatory roles for the sacrifices and celebratory functions, including singing and dancing. Interestingly, Chin Pentecostals permit emotional expression during church

⁷⁹ The Chin had stories similar to the biblical accounts of the Garden of Eden, the Tower of Babel, the Flood and even the Virgin Mary. Therefore these biblical accounts did not appear new, but built on the foundations already present in Chin tradition. This contributed to a perception of Christianity being indigenous for the Chin. Lian H. Sakhong, *In Search of Chin Identity: A Study in Religion, Politics and Ethnic Identity in Burma* (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2003), 232-3.

Christianity is associated with a written Jewish history, whereas primal religion was based on an oral Chin history, however the Chin perceive themselves as the lost tribe of Israel, as they identify their heritage with Israelite history. As well as a similar sacrificial system, genealogies and ancestry were important to Chin identity, this link is unfounded but demonstrates cultural nostalgia. In the Old Testament other people groups surrounding the Israelites shared similar sacrificial practices (for example Baal worshippers sacrificed bulls in the encounter with Elijah) but yet they were condemned as idol worshippers by God, worshipping God rather than sacrifices was unique to the Israelites, so sacrifices do not necessarily connect the Chin to the Israelites, especially when the Chin didn't worship God formerly.

⁸⁰ This was also found to be the case in their work among the Kachin people group: Herman G. Tegenfeldt, *The Kachin Baptist Church of Burma* (South Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1974), 82 in G. D. Stafford, "A Brief History of the Assemblies of God of Burma," Dec. 1977, 9.

⁸¹ Qin, interview by the author, Birmingham, 15 April 2009.

Min, interview by the author, Yangon, 14 April 2010, translated by Yi. Chin AG members commonly relate that Pentecostalism later presented an encounter with the Holy Spirit experienced through manifestations, connecting their pre-concept of interacting with the spirit realm. During the Pentecostal revivals there was a fear in the sense of conviction of sin as well as a sense of celebration in worshipping God.

⁸² Betram S. Carey and H. Tuck, *The Chin Hills: A History of the People, their Customs and Manners, and Our Dealing with Them* (Calcutta, India: Tribal Research Institute, Aizawl, 1976), 195.

⁸³ Several leaders expressed concern regarding the possibility of syncretism with Chin religion in the church.

services, despite emotionalism being criticised by the Chin people in other cultural contexts.⁸⁴ Likewise, Chin leaders relate that they permit congregants to express themselves freely during services, even though some of their behaviour, which congregants claim is led by the Holy Spirit actually reminds them of how the people acted during their traditional religious rituals. However, they usually permit it for fear of hindering the Holy Spirit.⁸⁵ Arguably, those who formerly followed indigenous religions transfer their familiarity with the spiritual realm into their Pentecostal experience.⁸⁶ How Chin Pentecostal worship and theology are contextualized is analysed in this research.

In contrast, the Baptist missionaries who ministered among the Chin used literary forms including the biblical text and hymnbooks using the written script;⁸⁷ these forms required literacy. This cerebral style differs from the oral tradition and participatory rituals which the Chin were accustomed to in their former religion. Consequently, Chin Pentecostals critique the Baptists as “dry” with a lack of the movement of the Holy Spirit.⁸⁸ As a result, many Chin transitioned from traditional evangelicalism to Pentecostalism, like many Christians in Asia, Africa, and Latin America have done.

However, another consideration of the similarity between primal religion and Christianity concerns the Chin’s rationale for converting to a foreign religion from their own local religion. Initially, Christianity appealed to them as a “cheaper religion” as there was no further need to make animal sacrifices, which they considered too expensive.⁸⁹ However, the

⁸⁴ Ding, interview by the author, Yangon, 8 April 2010; Also, in discussion with the translator Yi in Yangon.

⁸⁵ En, interview by author, Kalaymyo, 26 April 2010.

⁸⁶ Gary B. McGee, “Power from on High: A Historical Perspective on the Radical Strategy in Missions,” in *Pentecostalism in Context: Essays in Honor of William W. Menzies*, eds. Wonsuk Ma and Robert P. Menzies (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 334.

⁸⁷ Mung in Za Kham, *Glimpses of Zomi Animism*, Foreword V.

⁸⁸ Tao, interview by author, Kalaymyo, 22 April, 2010.

⁸⁹ Qin, interview by the author, Birmingham, 15 April 2009.

Ironically, the alleged certainty of heaven was also an obstacle as it meant neglecting their ancestors and separation from those who had died pre-Christianity. Chao, interview by the author, Yangon, 16 April 2010.

Christian concept of tithes and offerings may have been cheaper than sacrifices, but still had a financial cost.⁹⁰

As well as economic reasons for conversion, there were socio-political reasons as Christianity was the religion of the colonisers who had overpowered them, and the Chin worldview respected power and protection in their primal religion. Theologically, Christianity appealed to some because of its offer of forgiveness of their sin and the assurance that they would go to heaven after death, which were important values in the Chin worldview.⁹¹

Unlike primal religion, the Chin argue that Buddhism differs greatly from Christianity. Buddhist philosophy, sacred writings, the identification of Buddhism with Burmese national citizenship, and the negative connotation of Christianity being associated with colonialism precludes the Buddhists' interest in Christian doctrines.⁹² However, there are some similarities with their concepts of the spirit world, as the Buddhists in Myanmar also believe in spirits, which they call *nats*. Even though the Buddhists' concept of spirits somewhat resembles that of primal religion (cosmic), fewer Buddhists (metacosmic) in Myanmar converted to Christianity. This is not surprising, as "cosmic" religions are known to be more amenable to Christianity than "metacosmic" religions.⁹³

1.2.3.2. The Wider Implications of the Chin Case-Study

The wider implications of this research are based on my personal encounters and reflections on the Chin. This research examines the Chin's struggles to develop a contextualized theology, while avoiding syncretism; these observations could be generalised for many similar contexts. The challenge, for the Chin, of writing a contextualized theology is

⁹⁰ Similarly, Amos Yong asks if animal sacrifices may be considered as a tithe of goods rather than monetary in the context of the Kankana-ey people in the Philippines. See Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 49.

⁹¹ Tao, interview by author, Kalaymyo, 22 April, 2010; Jie, interview by author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 22 April 2010.

⁹² Hua, interview by the author, Yangon, 30 April, 2010.

⁹³ Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, 55.

considered in light of the oppressive context in which the Burmese government have censored all written theology, forbidding the use of theological concepts which either resembled or contradicted Buddhism. This restriction on written theology results in an emphasis on oral theology instead, which is why this research examines songs, liturgy and pneumatological practices. Notwithstanding the restrictions imposed, some Chin object that contextual theology is liberal. However, one Chin scholar argues that liberalism itself is a western concept.⁹⁴ Ironically, they have adopted some western theology, which is also a contextualized theology, because every theology is contextual.⁹⁵ However, the ramification of not addressing contextualization purposefully is the increased danger of reverting to the primal beliefs.⁹⁶

A wider implication of the Chin developing their own contextualized theology is relinquishing their dependence on western theology. One scholar's perceived urgency for developing contextual theology is combined with requesting western teachers and funding,⁹⁷ and this appears contradictory. Western teachers typically teach western systematic theology, rather than equipping the Chin to develop their own theology, and western funding promotes dependence. This propensity is accentuated further by the absence of theological resources in Chin or Burmese, which are only available in English, thus diminishing the distinction between Christianity and western theology.⁹⁸ This raises questions of how to boost the Chin's confidence in their ability to theologise for themselves, and develop their own theological

⁹⁴ Hua, interview by the author, Yangon, 30 April, 2010.

⁹⁵ Stephen Bevans, "Models of Contextual Theology", *Missiology: An International Review* 13, no.2 (April 1985): 185.

⁹⁶ Hua, interview by the author, Yangon, 30 April, 2010.

⁹⁷ Chin Khua Khai, *The Cross Among the Pagodas: The History of the Assemblies of God in Myanmar* (Baguio: APTS Press, 2003), 220.

⁹⁸ Wei, interview by the author, Yangon, 12 April 2010.

materials. Other scholars consider how a more symbiotic relationship could be developed between western and non-western scholars.⁹⁹

Acknowledging the magnitude of Chin cultural change which has occurred, the retrospective restoration of traditional Chin forms would now be artificial because their traditions are no longer relevant to contemporary culture.¹⁰⁰ For many of the interviewees, it is too late to redeem traditional culture, as they no longer value it.¹⁰¹ While this seems regrettable, and I am not defending how the missionaries prohibited cultural aspects, the reality is that most cultures change over time. Perhaps globalization would have transformed traditional Chin culture irrespective of the arrival of Christianity.

The next section examines the theological motif of contextualization and how the terms inculturation and contextualization can be used.

1.3. Definition and Background of the term “Contextualization”

Contextualization implies an effort to express the Christian message in a way which balances both orthodoxy and relevance to the cultural,¹⁰² socio-economic and political contexts.¹⁰³

Contextualization is a neologism of the post-colonial era used predominantly by Christian scholars. The term “contextualization” was coined by cultural anthropologists developing an appreciation for other cultures, while simultaneously challenging western ethnocentrism. The contextualization process includes seeing various local cultures as different, yet equally valid, and this shift impacted theology too. Bevans defended his choice of the term

“contextualization” because it incorporates the concept of culture as well as Scripture and

⁹⁹ Andrew Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark and New York: Orbis Books, 2002), 69.

¹⁰⁰ Ying, interview by the author, trans. Yi, Yangon, 13 April 2010.

¹⁰¹ Wei, interview by author, Yangon, 12 April 2010.

¹⁰² Stephen B. Bevans SVD, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Books, 1992), 1.

¹⁰³ Joseph Prasad Pinto, *Inculturation through Basic Communities: An Indian Perspective* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1985), 11.

tradition.¹⁰⁴ The superiority with which western theology had been esteemed was contested and there was an associated increase in the acceptance of local theologies from non-western cultures. Consequently, western theology is no longer automatically assumed to be the universal, standard theology, but is perceived as limited to its western context. This progression resulted from the recognition that all theology is formulated within some cultural context, so in fact “all theologies are contextual theologies”.¹⁰⁵

1.3.1. Dangers Associated with Contextualization—Syncretism

Syncretism can be defined as the act of mixing beliefs, but particularly practices, of one religion with (an)other different belief system(s). The contextualization-syncretism debate within a mission context can be described as a consideration of how to present Christianity appropriately, affirming the positive aspects of culture in order to make Christianity culturally relevant, whilst simultaneously maintaining theological orthodoxy, and avoiding contentious syncretism. As this process is subjective there are various approaches, but it involves understanding a group’s identity, their criteria for working out theology and their process of developing an optimal practical theology. Specific issues pertinent to Pentecostalism include emphasis on the Holy Spirit, spiritual gifts, rituals which encompass charismatic practices (such as altar calls), and the purported tendency to unwittingly blend with other belief systems, especially at the level of practices. This research culminates by examining established scholars’ views on syncretism, using the well-researched context of the AICs. This provides a framework in which to analyse the Chin’s criteria for examining their primal religion and their process of developing their own Christian theology in order to address, in particular, beliefs and practices pertaining to the spirits.

¹⁰⁴ Bevens, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 21.

¹⁰⁵ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 423.

It is recognised that only in recent decades that foreign Christian missionaries' detrimental approaches to other cultures has been challenged. Many cultures have needed to address the issue of their lost identities in the wake of missionaries' cultural insensitivity. However, the challenge of cross-cultural missionary work is recognised as being complex, due to the difficulty in addressing those aspects of the host culture which are considered contrary to Christian principles.¹⁰⁶ The interface between Christianity and other religious beliefs and practices often raises the issue of syncretism, which has negative connotations for theologians who are concerned about preserving orthodoxy.

For some, contextualization is conceived as a type of compromise, which has been researched most fully in the context of the African-Initiated Churches (AICs), where the Christian message either adapts or challenges traditional religions. Daneel refers to contextualization as a "dynamic process", which can range from a misrepresentation of the Christian message, to an authentic contextualization, where the Christian message is communicated relevantly and accurately.¹⁰⁷ This includes an examination of whether Christianity has been introduced on top of a layer of traditional religion. Contextualization in the AICs has involved a process of confrontation and theological conflict, while selecting which cultural aspects to permit or exclude in the church.¹⁰⁸ This sets a precedent that contextualization may involve a similar process elsewhere.

Contextualization can be compared to water passing through a filtration process, whereby it loses and adds aspects as it interacts with new cultures. If Christianity is embraced, it needs to be expressed within the recipient culture, and thus various versions of Christianity develop.

As Cox has observed, Pentecostalism has a propensity to absorb other religious practices, but

¹⁰⁶ Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today*, American Society of Missiology Series, no. 30, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2008), 388.

¹⁰⁷ Daneel, Inus. *Quest for Belonging: Introduction to a Study of African Independent Churches* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1987), 26.

¹⁰⁸ Inus. *Quest for Belonging*, 26-27.

ironically objects to allegations of syncretism. A case in point is the rejection of allegations of the shamanistic influence on Korean Pentecostalism.¹⁰⁹ The ensuing controversy illustrates the diversity among Pentecostals, as some see the missiological benefits in Pentecostalism's flexibility,¹¹⁰ considering it an example of good contextualization, increasing Pentecostalism's influence in Asia.¹¹¹ Others exercise extreme caution with contextualization and would criticise or refute "syncretism".¹¹² These issues will be defined and expounded in depth in chapter six.

Distinguishing between contextualization and syncretism is subjective, as the two form a continuum. So, the observation that Pentecostalism is more adaptable to other cultures than other forms of Christianity implies that it is both conducive to contextualization and susceptible to syncretism. This is especially the case when there are similarities in belief systems as subtle differences are also espoused.¹¹³ I have noticed that while Pentecostals are vulnerable to syncretising with various practices, they may still hold to a conservative theology in principle; there can therefore be a disconnect between their ideal and reality. The Chin's Pneumatology will be examined in detail because the Chin people converted from a primal religion. I will examine the influence of their primal practices on their expression of Pentecostalism.

Pentecostal scholar, Amos Yong took inspiration from Cox's book, *Fire From Heaven* in his efforts to create a Christian theology of religions. He also examines whether the Holy Spirit,

¹⁰⁹ Mark R. Mullins, "The Empire Strikes Back: Korean Pentecostal Mission to Japan," in *Charismatic Christianity as a Global Culture*, ed. Karla Poewe (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1994), 92.

¹¹⁰ Allan Anderson, "Introduction: World Pentecostalism at a Crossroads," in *Pentecostals After a Century: Global Perspectives on a Movement in Transition*, eds. Anderson and Hollenweger (Sheffield: SAP, 1999), 19-31.

¹¹¹ Andrew Eungi Kim, "Pentecostalism in Korea: Shamanism and the Reshaping of Korean Christianity," in *Pentecostalism and Shamanism in Asia*, Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture Symposium 16, ed. Paul L. Swanson (Nagoya: Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture, 2013), 24-25. Also Yong, *The Spirit Poured*, 50. Cox, *Fire From Heaven*, 219.

¹¹² Wonsuk Ma, "Asian (Classical) Pentecostal Theology in Context," in *Asian and Pentecostal*, 72.

¹¹³ Robert Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, (London: SCM Press, 1985), 152.

as experienced by Pentecostals and charismatics, is also working within non-Christian religions.¹¹⁴ In this research, I examine the Chin's concepts of the spirits from primal religion and how the Chin relate to the Holy Spirit. I examine Cox's hypothesis that Pentecostalism may tap into "primal spirituality". However, this research does not try to fathom the work of the Holy Spirit within primal religion or Buddhism.

Asians have tended to be loyal to the western theology that they have received from western missionaries. Yet it is possible that the growth of Christianity in non-western contexts and the general decline of Christianity in the West will cause this to change. Cultures grow to own what they have adopted from other external sources, and often the true origins are no longer distinguishable. It may be a natural result of globalisation that cultures mix and influence one another. There remain very few "pure" cultures which are still untouched by external influences.

1.4. Objectives and Questions

Cox hypothesises about Pentecostal primal spirituality, claiming that Pentecostalism possesses unique characteristics conducive to contextualization.¹¹⁵ Chin liturgy, songs and pneumatological beliefs and practices will be analysed in three related case-studies in order to observe contextualization in specific and concrete terms. I will firstly examine the various influences on the liturgy; secondly, I will investigate how their indigenous worship songs are representative of their culture; and thirdly, I will consider ways in which their Pneumatology reflects aspects of their primal religion. These three inter-related case-studies contribute to answering the overarching question: How contextualized is Chin theology?

Another consideration of contextualization is the way in which Christianity addresses the socio-economic and political context of the Chin people, and there will be some discussion of

¹¹⁴ Amos Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s): A Pentecostal-Charismatic Contribution to Christian Theology of Religions* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 20.

¹¹⁵ Harvey Cox, *Fire From Heaven* 1996, 81, 245.

this issue in subsequent chapters. This research entails identifying pertinent theological issues, without judging the Chin's theological processes as right or wrong, or resolving their conundrums. As I respect Chin theology as an authentic form of theology in its own right, any references to western theology are not intended as models to be emulated. However, dialogue with western theology is included as a point of comparison, recognising that the AG's origins are traced to American missionaries.

Additionally, Cox's claim that Pentecostalism engages on a deeper level with humans' "primal spirituality"¹¹⁶ is explored by examining how the Chin's former concept of spirits influences their Pneumatology as Pentecostals. Scholars concur that those who previously followed a primal religion often connect easily with Pentecostal spirituality.¹¹⁷ As primal religion had been an essential aspect of Chin cultural identity, what happened to former beliefs and practices? Did they disappear, completely replaced by western forms of Christianity, or was there some overlap and continuation of these beliefs and practices into Pentecostalism? Thus a discussion of contextualization, in this case, naturally includes a consideration of syncretism also.

Cox's observation that Pentecostals refute the assimilation of other religious practices is evident in the dissonance between the Chin Pentecostals' denial of syncretism with their primal religion, whilst conceding that older people "enjoy" some former practices.¹¹⁸

Furthermore, Cox observed that Pentecostals are generally unaware of syncretism;¹¹⁹ so Chin liturgy, songs and Pneumatology will be examined for aspects absorbed from primal religion.

In addition, I will analyse what the Chin themselves have said about contextualization and syncretism.

¹¹⁶ Harvey Cox, *Fire From Heaven* 1996, 81.

¹¹⁷ Hollenweger, "An Introduction to Pentecostalism", 127-8; Ma, *When the Spirit*, 235. Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 236.

¹¹⁸ Ying, interview by the author, trans. Yi, Yangon, 13 April 2010.

¹¹⁹ Cox, "Some Pentecostal Reflections", 31.

As the term syncretism has negative connotations, which have led to conflict among Pentecostals in the past, it is felt that the use of the term itself tends to shut down dialogue. Therefore, I will explore more balanced approaches to syncretism using different terminology, which may be significant for Pentecostalism in the future.

1.5. Expected Outcomes

As discussed above, Pentecostals oppose other religious beliefs, so it seems incongruent that they nevertheless assimilate the practices of other faith systems, despite neither wanting them nor agreeing with them theologically.

There is a dissonance within Pentecostalism between the doctrinal, theoretical level and the experiential, practice-based level. This is seen in Pentecostals' overt theological conservatism in excluding other religions, despite the inclusion of others' beliefs and practices. Some Pentecostal missionaries have been criticised for not adapting to local cultures or responding to social issues because of their over-riding focus on evangelism and church planting.¹²⁰ Other Pentecostals purposely incorporate non-Christian religious practices, often as an evangelistic strategy, to win favour with local communities.¹²¹ This is concerning for those with conservative theological approaches who are keen to preserve the integrity of their faith. In exploring these issues, however it is clear that Pentecostal practices globally vary considerably. I expect this research to have practical application for missiology.

From the outset, I can make some preliminary suggestions as to why Pentecostalism is more amenable to contextualization. Pentecostalism's global spread has meant that Pentecostalism has encountered a variety of cultures, unrestricted by geographical or structural headquarters,

¹²⁰ See for example Allan Anderson, "Christian Missionaries and 'Heathen Natives': The Cultural Ethics of Early Pentecostal Missionaries" in *The Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association*, vol. XXII, 2002, 4-29. Also David Bundy, "Social Ethics in the Church of the Poor: The Cases of T.B. Barratt and Lewi Pethrus," in *The Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association*, vol. 22: 1 (2002): 36.

¹²¹ The C1 to C6 spectrum has been developed by John Travis (pseudonym) is a continuum for stages of contextualizing Christ-centred communities, which are approaches within mission to Islamic communities are one example.

unlike some other denominations.¹²² Pentecostalism has no single organised strategy or plan, and because this spontaneity has the benefit of flexibility, Pentecostalism's fluidity has enabled it to adapt to diverse cultural contexts.¹²³ Its lack of clear statements of faith or guidelines on accepted practices leaves Pentecostalism open to finding commonality with other belief systems.¹²⁴ Additionally, the spontaneous participation of the laity in Pentecostal oral liturgy¹²⁵ feels familiar to those who previously participated in indigenous religious rituals.

The Chin themselves assert that their prior awareness of the spiritual realm has enabled them to connect deeply with Pentecostal worship because they were already a “worshipping people”.¹²⁶ Pentecostalism thus suited their culture more than the worship styles of other Christian denominations. An association between their primal religion and Pentecostal spirituality is therefore to be expected.

1.6. Contribution to Oral Theology

The theology in this research is predominantly an oral theology, examining the Chin's Pentecostal liturgy and worship songs which are expressed verbally and originate from a formerly oral culture. This section examines how my research compares with other cultures who also have a cultural tradition in order to situate my research in relation to other works and to highlight my particular contribution. Other research on Ghanaian and Chinese Lisu songs are examined below in order to analyse the songs' indigenous forms and the influence of recording the songs in writing on the theological aspects of oral forms. This research on

¹²² Hollenweger, “An Introduction to Pentecostals,” 130.

¹²³ Hunt, “Sociology”, 196.

¹²⁴ Hollenweger, “An Introduction to Pentecostals,” 130. A “lack of a common hermeneutical basis”

¹²⁵ Pentecostal liturgy is examined in depth in chapter four.

¹²⁶ Dian, interview by author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 26 April 2010.

Pentecostalism examines how spiritual gifts (which are also oral) and spiritual practices are used for practical purposes among the Nagas in Northeast India.

Oduyoye's book describes some indigenous features in the songs which share similarities with the Chin songs. Impromptu Ghanaian songs retell and interpret biblical stories,¹²⁷ and they imitate the Psalms,¹²⁸ as Chin songs do. Ghanaians personalise the songs by putting themselves into the story, such as "I am in the belly of the whale",¹²⁹ another feature shared with the Chin songs. The Ghanaians also used a similar phrase of awakening "my spirit", and indigenous words to evoke emotional responses, but the Ghanaians used indigenous tunes,¹³⁰ which was not the case with Chin songs. In a further parallel, Ghanaian songs reveal unique theological concepts including the nature of the Trinity and the community's relationship with God and how He helps them.¹³¹ They use even more contextualized descriptors for God such as "Hunter of souls" and "Bush of Truth",¹³² sometimes even revealing a distinctive binitarian concept of God and Jesus.¹³³ This confirms the theological value of songs, as an avenue to contextualize theology, but also suggests that these common indigenous features appear in diverse oral cultures.

Arrington's research examines how the Chinese Lisu who have an oral "singing culture"¹³⁴ utilise literary forms of hymn books, which record the lengthy verses of their adapted Victorian hymns.¹³⁵ Ong argues that written forms have a profound effect on transforming

¹²⁷ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing: Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1986), 45.

¹²⁸ Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*, 47.

¹²⁹ Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*, 46.

¹³⁰ Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*, 49, 47.

¹³¹ Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*, 46.

¹³² Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*, 49.

¹³³ Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*, 49-50.

¹³⁴ Aminta Arrington, "Christian Hymns as Theological Mediator: The Lisu of South-west China and Their Music," *Studies in World Christianity* 21, no. 2 (August 2015): 141.

¹³⁵ Arrington, "Christian Hymns", 142.

human consciousness, and thus powerfully impact oral cultures.¹³⁶ The compilation of the Chin songbooks were intended to preserve them in a convenient manner. Adding a literary form made Chin written songs more accessible, and thus reproducible and popularised, but it also formalised them, meaning that the songs were no longer purely reliant on memorisation and oral transmission.

The Lisu's translated hymns were indigenised by using four-word couplets in a repetitive pattern and using common Lisu words to convey abstract concepts in concrete terms. In contrast, the Chin adopted western tunes and structures, but likewise used indigenous "raw" terminology. Arrington expresses how the written hymnbooks accentuate the songs' theological role as "a spiritual handbook, a guard against heresy, a link to personal and collective history, a literacy primer and a resource for personal devotion; they are an embodiment of togetherness, a provider of stability and a mediator of theology."¹³⁷ This was due to the permanence and accessibility of owning a copy of personalised theology in common language. The Lisu used hymnbooks in daily life far more than the Chin used their songbooks, so the Lisu were more influenced by written forms than were the Chin.

The Chin Pentecostals followed a two-stage conversion, transitioning from primal religion (cosmic) to Baptist (metacosmic), and then reconverted to Pentecostalism, thus reverting back to a more cosmic spirituality, which they identified with because of their background. This next section examines traditional practices and their potential to overlap with Pentecostalism by examining research on the Nagas in Northeast India, who resemble the Chin in several ways.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London & New York: Routledge, 1982), 78.

¹³⁷ Arrington, "Christian Hymns", 151.

¹³⁸ The Nagas are also a minority group living in a designated area, who also experienced British colonisation and were converted from primal religion by American Baptist missionaries. Despite persecution they grew through revival and experienced similar manifestations of speaking in tongues, prophecies and visions, but also

Zeliang researched the Zeliangrong Naga Baptists who are charismatic, even though they still identify as Baptists.¹³⁹ They similarly composed revival songs but the Zeliangrongs use their own indigenous tunes, despite the association with primal religion, and they alter the timings in a “free style”.¹⁴⁰ Zeliang perceives that resuming the drum and dancing following the renewal contextualized Christianity,¹⁴¹ and that the similarities of the gifts used by charismatics and primal practitioners eased their acceptance within the churches, including speaking in tongues, “words of knowledge”, prophecy and seeing spirits.¹⁴² The spirits are still confronted in healing rituals, as the Zeliangrong “resort to exorcism” because of the familiarity of these practices.¹⁴³ Despite these similarities in primal and charismatic practices, Zeliang distinguishes the practices based on different sources in the following way: the charismatics rely on the Holy Spirit rather than local spirits and they produce the fruit of spiritual edification.¹⁴⁴ Zeliang differentiates between exorcism methods as Christians use their Bibles and fast rather than using physical weapons to ward off the spirits.¹⁴⁵ As an insider, he appears reluctant to admit that there must be similar underlying beliefs for the practices to continue in such similar ways.

Vibha Joshi examined the Angami, who are another Naga group using the notion of religious enthusiasm with an expectation that there would be mixing and different religious expressions.¹⁴⁶ Following their renewals, indigenous instruments and traditional worship forms were reintroduced, and testimonies of healings attracted new converts to the “Revival

faced allegations of extremes. Culturally, they also sang and played indigenous songs to traditional instruments, including the drum.

¹³⁹ Elungkiebe Zeliang, “Traditional Practices and the Charismatic Movement Among the Zeliangrong Naga Baptists in North East India,” *American Baptist Quarterly* 29, no. 1 (2010): 76-94. Incidentally, the fieldwork for this research was also conducted in 2010, in the same year that my fieldwork was conducted.

¹⁴⁰ Zeliang, “Traditional Practices,” 88-89.

¹⁴¹ Zeliang, “Traditional Practices,” 89-90.

¹⁴² Zeliang, “Traditional Practices,” 82.

¹⁴³ Zeliang, “Traditional Practices,” 86.

¹⁴⁴ Zeliang, “Traditional Practices,” 81-82.

¹⁴⁵ Zeliang, “Traditional Practices,” 87-88.

¹⁴⁶ Vibha Joshi, “The Birth of Christian Enthusiasm among the Angami of Nagaland,” *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, n.s., vol. xxx, no. 3 (December 2007): 542.

Churches”,¹⁴⁷ just as happened among the Chin. The older churches (Catholics and Baptists) are considered quieter and they are known to erect monoliths and wear symbolic clothing, whereas the younger (Revival) churches have more “vocally-explicit” worship,¹⁴⁸ including singing and speaking in tongues.¹⁴⁹ The Baptist liturgy, on the other hand, is more text-based.¹⁵⁰

Joshi does not equate noise levels to religious enthusiasm,¹⁵¹ but recognises that the Angami themselves may perceive noise as being of spiritual value, and as motivation to change denomination.¹⁵² The Pentecostal “Revival” liturgies are the most unique, as congregants shake while they experience spiritual trances. Joshi also describes congregants quivering, reeling and shouting to the accompaniment of quick and loud drum beats.¹⁵³ In other research, Joshi examines the continuity of traditional healing rituals within contemporary Angami Christian practice,¹⁵⁴ revealing diverse opinions regarding the source of diagnoses, healing strategies and the results being of either human or divine origin.¹⁵⁵ They mostly practice divination of spirits for healing, but they also acknowledge healing prayer within Revival churches,¹⁵⁶ thus attributing healing both to the Holy Spirit and to the local spirits.¹⁵⁷ Joshi’s openness to discussing the syncretism in the healing practices may be attributed to being Hindu, rather than Christian.

¹⁴⁷ Joshi, “The Birth of Christian Enthusiasm,” 551-2.

¹⁴⁸ Joshi, “The Birth of Christian Enthusiasm,” 541.

¹⁴⁹ Joshi, “The Birth of Christian Enthusiasm,” 554.

¹⁵⁰ Joshi, “The Birth of Christian Enthusiasm,” 554.

¹⁵¹ Joshi, “The Birth of Christian Enthusiasm,” 556.

¹⁵² Joshi, “The Birth of Christian Enthusiasm,” 557.

¹⁵³ Joshi, “The Birth of Christian Enthusiasm,” 555.

¹⁵⁴ Joshi, “A Matter of Belief”, 3.

¹⁵⁵ Vibha Joshi, “Human and Spiritual Agency in Angami Healing,” *Anthropology & Medicine*, 11:3 (2004): 282-3. Available from <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1364847042000296563>; accessed on 6 May 2019.

¹⁵⁶ Joshi, “Human and Spiritual Agency,” 286; Joshi, *A Matter of Belief*, 153.

¹⁵⁷ Joshi, “Human and Spiritual Agency,” 289.

The distinctive contributions of this research to oral theology are the ways in which it highlights the theological importance of worship songs for oral culture. I also refer to the cultural forms of the style and the language of the songs, but with an emphasis on the theological themes expressed in the liturgy and song texts, examining the western and primal influences in particular. Examining thirty worship songs permits a more thorough analysis of the theological and cultural themes used in indigenous songs. An openness to the possibility of syncretism between Christian spiritual gifts and primal practices is more evident to me as an outsider to Chin culture. My research demonstrates the important cultural and theological contribution of indigenous songs to the formation of their Christian identity and to their spiritual edification, which includes the songs' origination in the renewal.

1.7. Significance of this Research

The significance of examining contextualization is because it aims to present Christianity as relevant within its local context, whilst still being considered an orthodox form of Christianity, and whilst interrelating sensitively with other belief-systems. So, this research aims to examine any factors which contribute to Pentecostalism's ability to contextualize, so that they can be understood, consciously developed and deployed further to good effect.

The academic significance of this research is its original contribution, based on empirical fieldwork, contributing towards the contextualization-syncretism debate using the case-study of Chin Pentecostals. Contextualization has evolved as a scholarly topic in the last century, with development by Roman Catholic and Evangelical scholars, who have partnered with cultural anthropologists in developing missionary strategy for the future. Concurrently, the last century has seen a rapid global spread of Pentecostalism. However, not much scholarly work has addressed contextualization from a specifically Pentecostal perspective. This lack may partially be due to Pentecostalism's focus on evangelistic activity such as church

planting, and historical neglect of academic analysis or self-reflection.¹⁵⁸ However there has been more Pentecostal scholarship in recent years. This research aims to contribute to the gap in the study of contextualization in a Pentecostal context.

This investigation also addresses some of the qualities of Pentecostalism which have contributed to its rapid growth. Other denominations recognise this growth and often express their frustration, because as well as Pentecostals attracting new converts, they also attract members from other denominations.¹⁵⁹ Additionally, whilst those from primal religious backgrounds are generally more predisposed to conversion than those from other world religions, but in particular those from the majority world who seek spiritual power, are seen to be particularly receptive to Pentecostal spirituality.¹⁶⁰ The distinctive Pentecostal characteristics which contribute to contextualization, especially regarding primal spirituality, have not yet been researched in depth.

This research attempts to augment the repertoire of empirical research on a Pentecostal congregation whose ancestors have been converted from a primal religious background.

Issues are addressed at a “grass-roots” level,¹⁶¹ examining beliefs and practices relating to

¹⁵⁸ The reasons for this lack of focus on academia are varied. The rapid growth of Pentecostalism has resulted in little emphasis on internal scrutiny as its priorities have been on evangelism and church planting, accompanied in the earlier days with an expectation of the imminent parousia. As a new movement, Pentecostalism was perceived as being outside the mainstream churches and scholarship, but because of its rapid spread it is now being researched by cultural anthropologists such as David Martin and Birgit Meyer et al. and also theologians such as Harvey Cox, Ian Linden and Douglas Jacobsen. Roman Catholic and Evangelical scholars’ research on the dynamics of faith and culture is so extensive that Pentecostals have adapted these resources. Traditionally Pentecostal missionaries were trained to plant indigenous churches based on the teaching in Melvin Hodges’ book, “The Indigenous Church”, but they realised the weakness in the three-self model was excluding self-theologising and local forms, despite independence. See, Melvin Hodges, *The Indigenous Church*, revised ed. (Springfield: Gospel Publishing House, 1953, 1971, 1976, 2009). The C1-C6 contextualization model (see footnote 111) is simplistic in its classification of external characteristics of churches. A similar model was adapted for Buddhist cultures. However, there is an absence of contextualization theory, and this model has received much criticism for being very syncretistic and deceptive (especially C5 and C6), as Christians go undercover, pretending to be Muslims.

¹⁵⁹ This is a common phenomenon which I have often heard expressed among mainline denominations, not just in Asia, but also in Europe. In the case of the Chin, the Baptists were upset that some of their church members converted to Pentecostalism, as well as gaining converts from those from primal religion.

¹⁶⁰ Anderson, *Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 236.

¹⁶¹ Hwa Yung, *Mangoes or Bananas?: The Quest for an Authentic Asian Christian Theology* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, Regnum Studies in Mission, 2009), 233.

ancestral spirits, healing, the miraculous and exorcisms.¹⁶² These aspects, sometimes referred to as the “excluded middle”,¹⁶³ reflect questions regarding the supernatural, which are not satisfied by answers from western systematic theology.¹⁶⁴

As Asia is a vast and varied context, generalisations may not be accurate, and can leave theological gaps. Much of what is written about Asian theology is based on western missionaries’ accounts, rather than fieldwork among the locals. Asian Pentecostalism in particular has failed to attract as much scholarly research as its numbers have warranted. Pentecostalism has made a home in Korea, and the revival of Christianity in China bears many characteristics resembling Pentecostalism, even if not always recognised or labelled as such. Much of the focus of scholarship has been on South, South Eastern and Eastern Asia, including India, China, Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines and Thailand.

There is little theological research on Myanmar Pentecostalism, which has been written by scholars outside of Myanmar. Most of the research which has been done has primarily been done by Chin scholars, but their work within Myanmar has been limited because of government censorship of certain terminology, still in force at the time of this research.¹⁶⁵

Some Chin scholars conduct research abroad, as a migrant population with a retrospective view of their own culture. I have had the freedom to write exempt from such restrictions, but also with a foreign, outsider’s perspective, which has some degree of objectivity.¹⁶⁶ Clearly Asians are the most qualified to write their own theology.¹⁶⁷ My purpose is to examine the level of contextualization of their theology.

¹⁶² Yung, *Mangoes*, 229.

¹⁶³ Paul G. Hiebert, “The Flaw of the Excluded Middle,” *Trinity Journal* 30, no.2 (Fall 2009): 189-197.

¹⁶⁴ Yung, *Mangoes*, 230.

¹⁶⁵ Hua, interview by the author, Yangon, 30 April, 2010.

¹⁶⁶ As an outsider, one may misunderstand certain nuances of a culture as there is a tendency to use the categories from one’s own culture, even unintentionally. Schreiter questions if one can see one’s own culture clearly, because of becoming accustomed to issues and making assumptions not realizing why the culture functions in a certain way. For local theology, the native’s view of culture is important but not sufficient and an outsider may be more objective with a fresh outlook. See Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, 41-2.

¹⁶⁷ Connie Ho Yan Au, “Asian Pentecostalism” in *Handbook of Pentecostal*, 31.

Anderson has described Myanmar AG as having a “strong national character”, in reference to remote minority groups, (which would include the Chin) based on how local leaders worked independently from the missionaries.¹⁶⁸ Granted that the Myanmar AG is a predominantly indigenous movement, in the sense of its independence from an early stage, but there has not been sufficient empirical research to establish for certain how the churches have contextualized to their culture.¹⁶⁹ The local people also express that their voice on this issue has not been heard,¹⁷⁰ so in this research I have aimed to include local Chin views.

Missiology has changed dramatically since the middle of the twentieth century.¹⁷¹ However, despite missionaries’ cross-cultural and theological training nowadays, my observation of missionaries who continue to impose their culture has been an impetus for undertaking this research. Rather than examine mission strategy, I examine the host culture’s perspective, which considers the end-result of the missionaries’ work. I conducted primary fieldwork to observe local beliefs and practices, so that I could analyse the Pentecostal spirituality of local Chin congregations.

This research aims to contribute to the issues surrounding Asians’ previous reluctance to write their own theology and their dependence on western theology, by examining their own theological identity.¹⁷² The challenges which the Chin encountered in developing their own theology are that they have been influenced by western theological education and severely warned against syncretism with their primal religion. This research takes into account the

¹⁶⁸ Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 129.

¹⁶⁹ Hao, interview by author, Baguio, 8 April 2010.

¹⁷⁰ Hao, interview by author, Baguio, 8 April 2010.

¹⁷¹ In Roman Catholicism the second Vatican council marked pronounced changes by promoting mutual respect for the mission of local churches globally. The twenty first century has also witnessed dramatic changes in missions as a result of changes in society, politics and acquiring knowledge and respect for other cultures. See Bosch, *Transforming Mission*; Michael Pocock, Gailyn van Rheenen, Douglas McConnell, *Changing Face of World Missions: The Engaging Contemporary Issues and Trends* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005).

¹⁷² Hwa Yung, “Critical Issues Facing Theological Education in Asia,” *Transformation* (October-December 1995), 1 in Allan Anderson, “The Forgotten Dimension: Education for Pentecostal-Charismatic Spirituality in Global Perspective,” (paper presented at the 30th Annual Meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies, Oral Roberts University, Tulsa, Oklahoma, March 2001), 8.

Chin's independent decision-making, and the development of a sense of ownership of their own theology, once the foreign missionaries had left Myanmar. I recognise that the Chin went through a process to resolve their theological conflicts. This looks at how they dealt with former primal religious practices, as they transitioned from a primal to a Pentecostal understanding of the spiritual realm, including their healing and deliverance practices.

The corollary pastoral contribution of this research is for the Chin people themselves, as they may not currently be aware of the range of their own beliefs. Some patterns in their belief-system are analysed here, which provide insights into their local theology.

A variety of scholarly works were used to provide a theoretical framework for this research. Primarily, Harvey Cox's hypothesis regarding Pentecostalism's primal spirituality undergirds this research. Douglas Hayward's measurements of contextualization have been used because of their practical application to liturgy and worship songs,¹⁷³ which I apply because they are particularly relevant for Chin congregations.

Five theological scholars have been brought into dialogue with one another: Walter Hollenweger, Andrew Walls, Robert Schrieter, and the Asian scholars, Aloysius Pieris and Hwa Yung. This is a unique combination of scholarship used for the examination of contextualization. Options for creative terminology have also been explored, in order to overcome the limitations generally imposed by the negative connotations associated with syncretism.

Prior to transitioning to Pentecostalism, many Chin formerly belonged to a mainstream denomination, as they had formerly abandoned their primal religion. As this is a typical scenario in many other global settings, the findings for the Chin may be applicable to other contexts, especially in Asia and Africa. Incidentally, the Chin's journey is somewhat reflective of my own personal journey in conversion from traditional Anglicanism to

¹⁷³ Douglas Hayward, "Measuring Contextualization in Church and Missions", *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, 12, no. 3 (July-September 1995): 135-136.

embracing Pentecostalism. Having grown up in Ireland and having lived in the Philippines for almost three years, I am familiar with the overlap of popular religious practices with mainstream traditional religion, and this has helped me to understand the spirituality of the Chin people. Cox's work therefore constituted an appropriate framework to use for the Chin people in Myanmar.

1.8. Outline of Methods Used in this Research

This research examines the criteria and process that the recipients use in developing a local theology, and how contextualized the resultant product is. Douglas Hayward's measurement of contextualization was one of the initial inspirations for this research design.¹⁷⁴ Hayward was a missionary in Indonesia and is currently a professor of intercultural studies at Biola University, California. His practical model was designed because of his recognition that most models are so theoretical that they had limited application in the real world.¹⁷⁵ Out of his eleven criteria for measuring contextualization, I selected three because of their relevance to the Chin context: "Expression of Faith"; "Worship Patterns" and "Theological Reflection".¹⁷⁶ These three selected criteria were adapted for researching Chin congregations, as three case-studies: liturgy, worship songs and pneumatological beliefs and practices. These three criteria are examined in more detail below.

Hayward's criteria, "Expression of Faith" considers worship forms and preaching styles used in the liturgy, to examine whether local cultures are represented, or whether they have borrowed from western forms.¹⁷⁷ Liturgy was considered a relevant case-study for evaluating contextualization, because liturgy expresses how a church relates to God.¹⁷⁸ Therefore, the Chin's liturgy was selected as a case-study to observe and analyse theologically.

¹⁷⁴ Hayward, "Measuring Contextualization": 135-138.

¹⁷⁵ Hayward, ongoing email conversations with the author, 2011-2012.

¹⁷⁶ Hayward, "Measuring Contextualization", 135-6.

¹⁷⁷ Hayward, "Measuring Contextualization", 135.

¹⁷⁸ Hayward, "Measuring Contextualization", 136.

Hayward's criteria of "Worship Patterns" also considers whether worship music, dancing and collecting offerings are translated or indigenous forms of worship.¹⁷⁹ He claims that the composition of indigenous songs indicates that a congregation's faith is dynamic, whereas singing translated western songs hinders their local style.¹⁸⁰ This observation inspired the second case-study of the theological analysis of Chin worship songs. This fits with the Chin Pentecostals' emphasis on their indigenous worship songs.

Hayward's criteria of "Theological Reflection" considers whether local theologies have been developed to address relevant issues. This examines whether local theology addresses cultural norms and spirit beliefs and practices.¹⁸¹ This is linked with the third case-study of Chin Pneumatology as Pentecostals.

Hayward's other criteria also appear in the course of this research, but more implicitly, including: the importance of the vernacular, using familiar metaphors, symbols and images, cultural communication strategies, ethical issues, ecclesiological polity, Christian identity in oppressed contexts, and discipleship issues.¹⁸²

1.9. Outline of Research

This research firstly examines the Chin's background to ascertain the historical context of the introduction of Christianity and especially Pentecostalism and how the AG has developed following the missionaries' departure, especially for the Chin. The main data is from fieldwork in four Pentecostal churches in Myanmar and the translation of thirty worship songs. Due to the practical nature of examining a living theology, this research mainly uses ethnographic methods, including participant observation and interviews.

¹⁷⁹ Hayward, "Measuring Contextualization", 135-6.

¹⁸⁰ Hayward, "Measuring Contextualization", 136.

¹⁸¹ Hayward, "Measuring Contextualization", 136.

¹⁸² Hayward, "Measuring Contextualization", 135-8.

These methods of data collection concur with the lack of written Chin theology or other documentary sources as well as being consistent both with Chin's oral tradition and Pentecostals' oral theology. Pentecostals in general are described as being not just oral, but experiential, emotive and physically expressive in their worship, so "Pentecostals are often better understood through their preaching, testimonies, and worship activities than by what they write in books."¹⁸³ The Chin's oral theology is showcased, which is both in keeping with Chin's former oral tradition as well as an acknowledged form of Pentecostal theology, but I want to emphasise the significance of oral theology as traditionally written theology has received more recognition academically, and is expected especially in a western context.

These methods are described in more detail in the Methodological Perspectives in the second chapter, while also examining how the Chin developed their concept of identity. In the third chapter, the history of Pentecostalism in Myanmar is examined, especially how the Chin related to contextualization issues. Documentary sources including cultural anthropologists' and Chin historians' books, missionary's biographies and letters, and data from interviews are utilised. Chin AG liturgy is examined in the fourth chapter, using a theological framework by which Chin worship is examined, which was observed using participant observation and interviews during the fieldwork. The fifth chapter examines the texts of thirty popular Chin worship songs which were translated into English for this research, and evaluated using song-text analysis for contextualization themes, especially those of theological relevance. The sixth chapter examines the Chin's theology of the spirits¹⁸⁴ as gleaned from the fieldwork and how they relate to various theologians' integrated framework on syncretism, and finally contributing new vocabulary to the Pentecostal discussion. The seventh chapter is the

¹⁸³ Neumann, "Spirituality", *Handbook of Pentecostal*, 199.

¹⁸⁴ The theme of chapter six is referred to using the umbrella term of "Pneumatology", but it predominantly examines how Chin Pentecostals deal with beliefs in spirits now as Christians and it addresses the issue of syncretism. Even though Chin Pentecostals' relationship with the Holy Spirit is mentioned, it is not the predominant theme. Chapter six is entitled, "Towards an Integrated Discussion of Chin Theological Processes"

conclusion, which highlights the Chin's contextualization and identity issues throughout the research, and the contribution to Pentecostal contextualization in general.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

2. Introduction

In the first chapter, Cox's hypothesis was introduced, considering Pentecostalism's primal spirituality and its ability to connect with other beliefs and practices.¹⁸⁵ Since the Chin converted from a primal religious background to Pentecostalism, there are still unresolved issues regarding how to deal with their former concept of spirits, as well as the way this has influenced their concept of the Holy Spirit. This chapter examines the methodological perspectives for examining the issues pertaining to contextualization which are relevant to the Chin.

2.1. The Theoretical Framework of Contextualization

2.1.1. How and Why the Term "Contextualization" is Used

Contextualization is the term used in this research as defined in chapter one. Some scholars prefer to use the term "inculturation", and at times I maintain the term "inculturation" in an attempt to preserve these scholars' intended nuance. The term "inculturation" is limited in its reference to cultures only, whereas "contextualization" also includes the socio-economic and political contexts. Thus "contextualization" is the preferred term in this research, as it comprises a more complex, whole "context".¹⁸⁶

Contextualization is an apt core theme for this research because it incorporates both the theological and cultural dynamics, which are posed in the research problem.

Contextualization is employed in biblical hermeneutics to differentiate the cultural

¹⁸⁵ Cox, *Fire From Heaven*, 82.

¹⁸⁶ Aylward Shorter, *Evangelization and Culture* (New York: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994), 30.

expressions of the biblical authors from the universal truths in the theologizing process.¹⁸⁷

This pattern may be modelled for contextualization in missions: the biblical principles which are apt for the situation are selected, the generalizable principles are separated from the cultural “contexts” in which the biblical text is situated, and the principles are reapplied to the host cultures in an appropriate manner. Thus Christian “truths” are adapted in culturally relevant forms.

2.1.2. The Theological Motif of Contextualization

This section briefly examines contextualization/inculturation as a theological motif. Many theological scholars have used the analogy of the incarnation to explain the concept of inculturation. Shorter describes inculturation as the process whereby Jesus learnt to live within the culture that He was born into, and claims that this is a theological process, which is applicable to missional contexts.¹⁸⁸ He refers to the incarnation to illustrate how Christianity passes from one culture to another.¹⁸⁹ Using the incarnation as an analogy also concurs with Schreiter’s starting point of trying to understand a host culture. This is based on his belief that theology develops out of its cultural context. Once the culture is understood, the aspects of faith, which are considered relevant to the people can then be examined.¹⁹⁰

Formerly, contextualization was perceived as being directly linked with evangelism, and thereby viewed as a means to an end. However, this paradigm has been challenged. In more recent times, evangelism is expected to include deeper interaction with the local culture, as evangelism should comprise “dialogue, inculturation and liberation”.¹⁹¹ As discussed in chapter one, the development of the concept of “contextualization” has grown out of a

¹⁸⁷ Ivan Satyavrata “Mission ‘Made to Travel’ in a World without Borders” in *Pentecostalism and Globalization: The Impact of Globalization on Pentecostal Theology and Ministry*, McMaster Theological Studies, series 2, ed. Steven M. Studebaker (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications an imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2010): 185.

¹⁸⁸ Shorter, *Evangelization*, 35.

¹⁸⁹ Shorter, *Evangelization*, 38.

¹⁹⁰ Schreiter, “Culture, Society and Contextual Theologies,” *Missiology* (1984) 12:3, 261-273.

¹⁹¹ Shorter, *Evangelization*, 28.

reaction against the translation of western theology onto other cultures. Shorter warns against a type of acculturation,¹⁹² whereby indigenous aspects of a culture are merely inserted into western theological patterns. Instead, he advocates that indigenous forms of theology are created within the host culture.¹⁹³

Throughout history, Christianity has tended to adopt the identity of the culture where Christianity was predominant at that particular time. Western missionaries have been challenged for imposing their culture and have been challenged to value every culture as significant. In recent years, scholars have recognised that Christianity can be “incarnated” into each different cultures, and will therefore look different in each one.

Schreiter is concerned that people are enabled to develop their own local theology, which is contextualized to their particular culture.¹⁹⁴ In order to develop a local theology, it is necessary to understand what is meaningful in peoples’ everyday lives, which he perceives is grasped by observing the popular religion and listening to the voice of the local community.¹⁹⁵ Yung’s main concern is that Asians develop an indigenous theology, which meets peoples’ particular socio-political needs.¹⁹⁶ Asians’ worldviews of the spiritual realm are more open to spiritual causation,¹⁹⁷ and so inculturation would involve overcoming spiritual powers through healing and exorcism practices,¹⁹⁸ which are particularly relevant to Pentecostals but have been neglected formerly, as they clashed with a western worldview.¹⁹⁹ Shorter perceives that inculturation is a “community project”, rather than being the work of individual experts.²⁰⁰ This recognises the fundamental element of the congregation in

¹⁹² Acculturation is the term used for the process of learning from another culture, through a period of prolonged contact.

¹⁹³ Aylward Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1988), 266.

¹⁹⁴ Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theology*, 145.

¹⁹⁵ Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theology*, 143.

¹⁹⁶ Yung, *Mangoes or Bananas?*, 65.

¹⁹⁷ Yung, *Mangoes or Bananas?*, 72-3.

¹⁹⁸ Yung, *Mangoes or Bananas?*, 75-6.

¹⁹⁹ Yung, *Mangoes or Bananas?*, 71.

²⁰⁰ Shorter, *Toward a Theology*, 254, 266.

developing theology appropriate for their own culture. In my research, I have included the contribution of the Chin community by observing church congregations, and examining local beliefs and practices, rather than limiting my research to Chin theologians.

Schreier argues that Christianity should address practical, culturally relevant issues. He acknowledges that new questions have emerged within different cultures, and that the traditional answers are no longer satisfactory.²⁰¹ Some of the questions he poses include how to celebrate communion in cultural contexts where wine or bread are either forbidden or unavailable, and how to approach challenging polygamous practices?²⁰² These questions arise in real life situations and challenge the imposition of western theology as a “one size fits all” theology. Western theology clearly does not have all the answers. In my research, the Chin’s former spirit beliefs and practices are not all answered neatly by western theology, nor indeed by the Bible in a direct way. Chin Christians have needed to go through a process of answering these challenging questions in culturally relevant ways, while also aiming to maintain orthodoxy of their faith.

Pieris has a different approach to most of the other scholars, having a pluralistic view of religious beliefs, rather than viewing one as superior to another. He describes different faiths as “languages of the spirit”, either the human spirit or the Holy Spirit.²⁰³ As with languages, each belief system should retain its own rules and structure rather than forcing one set of rules on another.²⁰⁴ He objects to mixing or absorbing aspects of another faith in preference for the “symbiosis” of a mutual interchange, involving respect for one another, rather than proselytization. So, unlike the other theologians discussed, Pieris would not advocate

²⁰¹ Schreier, *Constructing Local Theology*, 2.

²⁰² Schreier, *Constructing Local Theology*, 2-3.

²⁰³ Aloysius Pieris, *Fire and Water: Basic Issues in Asian Buddhism and Christianity*, Faith Meets Faith Series, ed. Paul F. Knitter (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1996), 100.

²⁰⁴ Pieris, *Fire and Water*, 101.

inculturation as an evangelistic strategy, but rather living among other religions in a transformed way.²⁰⁵

Pieris warns that European concepts of inculturation are already “too late in Asia”, but as mentioned previously, he does recognise that cosmic religions have been more open to Christianity than metacosmic religions.²⁰⁶ Cox has also recognised the openness of primal religions to Christianity, but he considers Pentecostalism’s connectivity which occurs often organically at a deep spiritual level, rather than necessarily the imposition of an imperialistic view of culture, which Pieris assumes.

Interestingly, perceptions of contextualization differ depending on the context. For example, in the AICs, contextualization is portrayed partially as compromise, in the sense that “parallels” of traditional religions may be visible in churches. However, these parallels are not translated directly, but involve modification, using a process of “creative transformation”. However, contextualization can also be confrontational, where there are theological conflicts over which aspects of culture to permit or exclude.²⁰⁷ Organising and restructuring is then a practical necessity, as Christianity is introduced on top of a layer of traditional religion, and so theological decisions are required.

2.1.2.1. Stephen Bevans’ Contextualization Models

Stephen Bevans is a Catholic priest in the Society of the Divine Word, who is a mission and culture professor at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago. Bevans has designed five models of contextualization in his well-known publication, “Models of Contextual Theology”. These models entail his observations of the varying relationships between theology and culture. The five models are the translation model, the anthropological model, the praxis model, the synthetic model and the transcendental model. Such models are simplified, artificial

²⁰⁵ Pieris, *An Asian Theology*, 38, 41.

²⁰⁶ Pieris, *An Asian Theology*, 55.

²⁰⁷ Inus, *Quest for Belonging*, 26-27.

representations of different types of contextualization, which occur in more complex realities.²⁰⁸ As different dynamics of contextualization are highlighted in each model, Bevans did not intend to emphasise any one model in particular.²⁰⁹

The **translation model** aims to be as faithful to the Christian message as possible, and aims to present it without superfluous cultural wrappings.²¹⁰ This model has been commended for being biblical, and furthermore, all of the contextualization models use aspects of translation.²¹¹ However, it is critiqued for esteeming Christian identity more highly than cultural identity.²¹² It leads to the question of whether it is possible to present the “naked gospel” independent of culture?²¹³ It does not take into account the tension between cultural “particulars” and gospel “universals”.²¹⁴

The **anthropological model** esteems culture and the goodness of humanity more highly than the integrity of the gospel message,²¹⁵ based on the assumption that God is already present in every culture and so theologians need to be sensitive to observe God’s activity and manifestation in everyday life.²¹⁶ However, its downfall is being blind to the shortcomings of a culture.²¹⁷

The **praxis model** is associated with social change and in particular with a theology of liberation,²¹⁸ which requires action.²¹⁹ Even though the praxis model takes the cultural context seriously, it is criticised for focusing too closely on the negative aspects of society

²⁰⁸ I. G. Barbour, *Myths, Models and Paradigms: A Comparative Study in Science and Religion* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 6 in Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 24.

²⁰⁹ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 26.

²¹⁰ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 33.

²¹¹ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 30.

²¹² Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 35.

²¹³ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 36.

²¹⁴ Yung, *Mangoes or Bananas?*, 63.

²¹⁵ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 47.

²¹⁶ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 48.

²¹⁷ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 53.

²¹⁸ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 63.

²¹⁹ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 66.

and re-reading the Bible with an over-emphasis on the specific aspects of liberation and transformation.²²⁰

The **synthetic model** is a combination of the translation, anthropological and the praxis model and it attempts to be true to the Christian message, whilst being sensitive to the culture.²²¹ It encourages dialogue so that cultural identity can be discovered.²²² It also acknowledges both good and bad aspects of culture, and it recognises that contextualization can be done by everyone, including ordinary people and expert theologians.²²³ This method is critiqued for being so inclusive that it leads to a pluralist approach.²²⁴

The **transcendental model** concentrates on the role of the theologian, beginning with subjective self-expression, followed by objectivity.²²⁵ However, because the focus is on the human experience with God, rather than biblical precepts or cultural contexts,²²⁶ the model's subjectivity hinders the ability to measure its authenticity.²²⁷

Bevans' five models provide a clear categorisation, which have been significant for much scholarship on contextualization. However, scholars have criticised these models for forcing the organisation of organic, contextual theologies into five distinct paradigms. For Moon, these models fail to take sufficient account of the "situational, cultural and political idiosyncrasies" which local and developing theologies have to navigate.²²⁸ Moon argues that Bevans' categorisation is too systematic, resembling western theology too closely, which is the very approach which contextual theologies try to avoid.²²⁹ Bevans' models are still a

²²⁰ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 69.

²²¹ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 81.

²²² Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 87.

²²³ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 85.

²²⁴ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 86.

²²⁵ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 98.

²²⁶ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 99.

²²⁷ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 102.

²²⁸ Cyris H. Moon, review of "Models of Contextual Theology," *The Ecumenical Review*, 47, no. 3 (July 1995): 395.

²²⁹ Moon, Review of "Models," 395.

useful “academic” tool, but local theologians should be free to create their own terminology.²³⁰

I found that because the above models are prescriptive and theoretical, they were too restrictive for the analysis of the Chin’s practical and living theology. However, Bevans’ models will be referred to again in the conclusion chapter, as they are so key to the overall contextualization debate. I also elaborate on Bevans’ definition of contextual theology below. As explained in chapter one, I have selected Hayward’s measurements of contextualization and Cox’s hypothesis. As Hayward’s measurements are practical, they are easily applicable to the Chin’s living theology. While acknowledging the simplicity of his measurements, I use them as a launching pad, and I have supplemented his measurements with more detail, which I consider relevant to measuring Chin contextualization in the three case-studies. Furthermore, Cox’s scholarly work is specific to the Chin’s primal background and to their conversion to Pentecostalism. Twentieth century scholars, Walter Hollenweger, Andrew Walls, Robert Schrieter, Aloysius Pieris and Hwa Yung, all pertinent to this debate are also examined in depth in chapter six.

2.2. Specific Chin “Contextual” Issues

Having examined some theoretical models for contextualization, the following section reviews specific Chin issues in developing their contextual theology.

2.2.1. The Adoption of Christian Identity Using Lewis Rambo’s Model

Lewis Rambo is best known for his conversion model, but I have not used his conversion model in this research because his model describes conversion which takes place as individual decisions, whereas the Chin’s conversion process also involved aspects of group

²³⁰ Carl F. Starkloff, review of “Models of Contextual Theology,” *Theological Studies*, 55, no. 3 (March 1994), 591-2.

decisions. Nevertheless, I have found Rambo's observations helpful to understanding the process the Chin underwent.

The Chin's almost 100% conversion is interesting in light of Lewis Rambo's observation that "indigenous cultures"²³¹ who experience a crisis or marginalisation are more amenable to conversion. This suggests that the Chin's subjugation during the Second World War and their subsequent marginalisation by the Burmese government were factors which played a part in their conversion to Christianity. Furthermore, Rambo observed that cultures which have been colonised are influenced relative to how powerful they perceived their colonial power to be.²³² As the Chin perceived British colonial rule to be very powerful, it is not surprising that the Chin were vulnerable to westernisation.

Since the missionaries made converts among the Chin, conflicts arose regarding the Chin's traditional music, rituals and ceremonies. Rambo has observed the process of how the Indian Uraon "tribal people" related to their former religion and culture, as new converts. These include five "stages": "cultural oscillation; scrutinization; combination; indigenization and retroversion".²³³ However, these stages may meander as new converts negotiate which aspects of their former and new religions to embrace or adapt, and therefore they may not be linear stages. Each stage contains useful considerations for what I perceive to be a similar process that the Chin underwent, especially in addressing issues dealing with their former practices.

²³¹ Satyavrata questions the evolving definition of the term "indigenous culture" due to pluralism and continuous changes in Satyavrata "Mission "Made," 189.

²³² Lewis R. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), 41-42.

²³³ The Uraon people originate from Chotanagpur, India. See Keshari N. Sahay, "The Impact of Christianity on the Uraon of the Chainput Belt in Chotanagpur: An Analysis of Its Cultural Processes," *American Anthropologist* 70 (1968): 923-42. Also Sahay, *Christianity and Culture Change in India* (New Delhi: Inter-India Publications, 1986), in Rambo, *Understanding Religious*, 100.

During the first, “oscillation” stage, the Chin considered the theological similarities between primal religion and Christianity, and the enticement of the perceived social and economic benefits associated with Christianity. However, at times of crisis, some reverted to their familiar primal system, mostly due to their fear of the spirits. This caused an overlap as they gradually leaned towards Christianity and abandoned more of their previous practices.

During the “scrutinization” phase, they would have examined Christianity more closely, and they subsequently adopted more of their new faith, whilst abandoning more of their own cultural practices. Thus, their conversion was a process of “leave and receive” as they abandoned not only primal religion, but also major aspects of their former culture, thus rejecting their own traditional and religious foundations.

The “combination” phase describes the mixture of Christianity and former practices, which were exacerbated by the ways in which Chin traditional culture was so entwined with their primal religion. The Chin adopted more of Christianity over time in a phase known as “indigenization”. As nearly 95% of Chin have adopted Christianity, Christianity is now considered the religion of the Chin.²³⁴ Formerly, primal religion had influenced traditional culture, but now instead, Christianity has shaped Chin culture and the Chin describe their culture as having been “Christianized”, because of their adoption of Christianity and they give the example that since conversion they drink tea instead of rice wine, which their ancestors used to drink pre-conversion.²³⁵ However, Rambo’s definition of “Christianization” relates to missionaries allowing pre-Christian forms, but applying Christian meanings demonstrating the missionaries’ affirmation of the indigenous culture. One example of how the Chin themselves Christianized pre-Christian forms is their preservation of their former deliverance practices, which are now conducted in a more Christian way.²³⁶ This research

²³⁴ Ming, interview by the author, Yangon, 9 April 2010.

²³⁵ Ming, interview by the author, Yangon, 9 April 2010.

²³⁶ Deliverance practices will be examined in detail in chapter six.

investigates how contextualized Chin Christianity has become, or whether it remains a westernized form of Christianity.

After being Christian for a few generations, the Chin have re-evaluated their traditional culture and faith retrospectively, in the stage known as “retroversion”. At this stage, they have the benefit of hindsight, and a degree of objectivity that passing time affords. If there are practices which they evaluate as redeemable, they may be re-incorporated subsequently, because the perceived threat of former practices subsides somewhat, as Christianity has been more firmly established. Rambo’s stages help to understand the process that the Chin underwent in developing their Christian identity, relating to their culture and grappling with their new faith.

2.2.2. Chin Identity Issues

A central theme of this research is how Chin Pentecostals contextualize theology and the influence of their primal religion. The Chin’s perception of their own identity has shaped their adoption of the Christian faith. Their identity is multi-faceted: they are Asians, Myanmar nationals, Chin (a minority people group with a former primal religion), Christians who were westernised in the process of conversion, and Pentecostals. Perspectives of Chin interviewees regarding their identity are outlined below.

2.2.2.1. *The Chin’s Asian Identity*

Chin interviewees did not emphasise the Asian aspect of their identity, and they did not often mention Asia. The Chin in Myanmar appeared somewhat insular and detached from other countries, although some Chin have travelled to other Asian countries to study or work; but on the whole, the Chin interviewees did not seem to have close connections with other Asians.

2.2.2.2. The Chin's Identity as Myanmar Citizens

In Myanmar the Burmese people group are a majority and they hold political power. It is well documented that minority groups within Myanmar have been disadvantaged, which is true also of the Chin. There were political and religious implications to the Chin's identity as a minority group especially in relation to the majority Buddhist Burmese people group.

Following Myanmar's independence, the government reacted against colonialism in the 1960s by nationalising mission schools and hospitals, expelling foreign missionaries and instating Buddhism as the national religion; this led to uprisings amongst the minorities,²³⁷ including the Chin. The government isolated them from Christians in other parts of the world, due to the government's perception of Christianity as a western religion. Nevertheless, Christian churches amongst the minorities grew more rapidly in number and in their own indigenous forms independently of the western missionaries.²³⁸

The Chin perceived that Buddhism differed greatly from their own spirituality, and turned against it, regarding it as the religion of the Burmese oppressors,²³⁹ and the Chin identified with Christianity instead. Some perceive that the Chin's conversion to Christianity and their association with the British was a form of protest against the Burmese Buddhists. For Burmese Buddhists, Christianity is perceived only as a western religion associated with colonialism. Correspondingly, the Chin did not relate so much to their identity as Burmese/Myanmar nationals.

²³⁷ Pum Za Mang, "Religion, Ethnicity and Nationalism in Burma," *Journal of Church and State*, 59: 4 (Autumn 2017): 643. He estimates that the minorities represent 30-40% of the population of Burma.

²³⁸ Za Mang, "Buddhist Nationalism", 149.

²³⁹ Pum Za Mang, "Buddhist Nationalism and Burmese Christianity," *Studies in World Christianity* 22.2 (2016): 161.

Some Chin disown,²⁴⁰ or debase their identity as Myanmar nationals,²⁴¹ expressing feelings of ostracism and rejection because of their Chin and Christian identities.²⁴² They consequently identify more strongly with their Chin identity than with their Myanmar identity.²⁴³ However, some Chin express neutrality regarding how they are treated as Chin citizens; others have become resigned to being discriminated against and being denied promotion by Burmese employers.²⁴⁴ Some Chin even express their sense of belonging to Myanmar,²⁴⁵ and loyalty to the government, regardless of how they are treated.²⁴⁶ It appears that younger Chin have more positive regard for Burmese culture,²⁴⁷ expressing greater affiliation to their nationality, and are more fluent in Burmese, whereas some of the older generation do not speak Burmese. The varied opinions represented by the interviewees corresponded to their experiences of oppression by the government. The younger generation have had less experience of these internal conflicts, indicating ongoing change in how the Chin perceive their nationality.

2.2.2.3. The Chin's Identity as the Chin Ethnic Group

This section examines how the Chin perceive their identity as an ethnic group. The introduction of Christianity to Asian countries which had been colonised provoked a sort of “identity crisis”.²⁴⁸ Following western dominance, there has been a propensity for Asian Christians to lose confidence in their own cultural heritage. Thus, it is important for them to re-establish their own sense of identity.²⁴⁹ The renewals in the 1970s, in which many additional Chin converted to Christianity, followed on from the conflict between the

²⁴⁰ En, interview by the author, Kalaymyo, 26 April 2010.

²⁴¹ Ying, interview by the author, Yangon, 13 April 2010.

²⁴² Na, interview by the author, Kalaymyo, 26 April 2010.

²⁴³ Fan, interview by the author, Kalaymyo, 25 April 2010.

²⁴⁴ Li, interview by the author, Kalaymyo, 25 April 2010.

²⁴⁵ Na, interview by the author, Kalaymyo, 26 April 2010.

²⁴⁶ Chao, interview by the author, Yangon, 16 April 2010.

²⁴⁷ Yu, interview by the author, Yangon, 30 April 2010.

²⁴⁸ Au, “Asian Pentecostalism,” 32.

²⁴⁹ Yung, *Mangoes*, 241.

minorities and the government in the 1960s. The Chin's identity as an ethnic minority was strengthened as seen in a phrase in a worship song which refers to the "land of Zomi".²⁵⁰ This song expresses their desire for the sanctification of Chin state, the land with which they are associated.

The Chin's perspectives of their traditional cultural identity are varied. Some Chin described their traditional culture as "primitive" and as "belonging in a museum".²⁵¹ They described their ancestors as "illiterate head-hunters",²⁵² and alcoholics who were prone to fighting,²⁵³ causing them to be inefficient at work.²⁵⁴ Their comments demonstrate the changes in Chin values, as they now appreciate education and economic development. The Chin who criticised their traditional culture would be less inclined to include aspects of their culture in their theology.

Other Chin are nostalgic about their wealth of cultural traditions. One interviewee claimed that "we can have our own museum" because Chin culture is "unique in the world".²⁵⁵ There is a tendency for perceiving traditional cultures sentimentally, retrospectively. One interviewee qualifies that he is not opposed to the advancement which Christianity brought, but he laments the loss of cultural heritage.²⁵⁶ In hindsight, they evaluate that they suffered some unnecessary cultural losses, and some now try to "reclaim our own Chin identity".²⁵⁷

The Chin express their Christian beliefs as being distinct from their former primal religion, they denigrate their ancestors' belief-system, saying that "they had no religion except animism".²⁵⁸ They associate their traditional culture with primal religion, which echoes the

²⁵⁰ Let's Be Budded.

²⁵¹ Wei, interview by the author, Yangon, 12 April 2010.

²⁵² Chao, interview by the author, Yangon, 16 April 2010.

²⁵³ Yu, interview by the author, Yangon, 30 April 2010.

²⁵⁴ Wei, interview by the author, Yangon, 12 April 2010.

²⁵⁵ Chao, interview by the author, Yangon, 16 April 2010.

²⁵⁶ Yong, interview by the author, Yangon, 18 April 2010.

²⁵⁷ Yong, interview by the author, Yangon, 30 April 2010.

²⁵⁸ Chao, interview by the author, Yangon, 16 April 2010.

pioneer Chin Christians who strongly opposed traditional culture.²⁵⁹ Many still rationalise that it was “justifiable” to abandon cultural practices like “worshipping spirits, head-hunting and drinking alcohol”²⁶⁰ because of the inconsistency of these practices with Christianity.²⁶¹ Interviewees all agreed that practices associated with Chin religion are incompatible with Christianity.²⁶² However, they simultaneously describe the similarities between Christianity and primal religion, alluded to in chapter one.

2.2.2.4. The Chin’s Christian Identity

Just as primal religion had been integrated into Chin culture, so too Christianity has now been assimilated into their cultural identity. However, as they adopted more of Christianity, they also adopted several aspects of western culture,²⁶³ including aspects of their worship²⁶⁴ which they assumed were associated with Christianity. My deductions, from the Chin interviewees, was that the Chin perceived their Christian identity as the most important aspect of their identity. As I will discuss later, the Chin claim their own distinct spirituality of eager worship and sensitivity to the Holy Spirit.

2.2.2.5. The Chin’s Pentecostal Identity

Another aspect of Chin Pentecostal identity includes how they perceive other Pentecostals worldwide, and they express their desire to align with them spiritually.²⁶⁵ Pentecostalism is a worldwide community who are receptive to spiritual experiences and to hearing from the Holy Spirit, and this influences their interpretation of the Bible.²⁶⁶ Likewise the Chin have a strong focus on the Holy Spirit and value their own spiritual experiences very highly. The

²⁵⁹ Ming, interview by the author, Yangon, 9 April 2010..

²⁶⁰ Yu, interview by the author, Yangon, 30 April 2010.

²⁶¹ Li, interview by the author, Kalaymyomyo, 25 April 2010.

²⁶² Yong, interview by the author, Yangon, 30 April 2010.

²⁶³ Ming, interview by the author, Yangon, 9 April 2010.

²⁶⁴ Yan, interview by the author, Kalaymyomyo, 26 April 2010.

²⁶⁵ Wei, interview by the author, Yangon, 12 April 2010.

²⁶⁶ Kenneth J. Archer, “Hermeneutics”, *Handbook of Pentecostal*, 115.

expression of Pentecostalism varies depending on human experience and unique interpretations, in addition to working out theology cognitively, which is often done by the leadership, who may have theological qualifications.²⁶⁷

There is no one definitive Pentecostal identity, but a vast multiplicity of Pentecostals and theologies internationally,²⁶⁸ as Pentecostals practice “continuity and rupture” with local cultures,²⁶⁹ Pentecostalism is well described as a “portable identity”.²⁷⁰ This flexibility has allowed Chin Pentecostals to develop their own unique identity.

For my interviewees, the most prominent aspect of their identity appeared to be their Pentecostal identity. This refers us back to Cox’s hypothesis that those from a primal religious background relate easily to Pentecostalism. This research examines the Chin’s process of establishing their own identity as part of the mosaic of worldwide Pentecostalism, and how they take ownership of their form of Pentecostalism.

In the formation of Chin theology, the dialogue partners in this case-study are five-fold: the local Chin AG church; the national AG of Myanmar; the international AG; Chin state and the nation of Myanmar, with special attention given to the Chin AG leaders. Based on how complex the dynamics in these relationships are, I have only highlighted some of the key aspects, rather than given comprehensive treatment of Chin identity.

2.2.3. The Process of Developing Contextual Theology

From the standpoint of the Chin’s concepts of their own identity, the Chin have undergone and are still going through a process of developing their own theology. In order to examine the process of the Chin’s development of theology, I will firstly examine Bevans’ definition

²⁶⁷ André Droogers, “The Cultural Dimension of Pentecostalism” in *The Cambridge Companion to Pentecostalism*, ed. Cecil M. Robeck and Amos Yong, Cambridge Companions to Religion (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 202.

²⁶⁸ Kärkkäinen, “Pneumatologies,” 223.

²⁶⁹ Droogers, “The Cultural Dimension,” 195.

²⁷⁰ David Martin, *Pentecostalism: The World Their Parish* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 24.

and description of contextual theology. Bevans' definition of contextual theology explains the process as:

a way of doing theology in which one takes into account: the spirit and the 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-roots struggle for equality, justice, and liberation.²⁷¹

In my research, the "spirit" and "message" of the "gospel" are not elaborated on, presuming a broad, general understanding of Christianity. I examine how the Chin grappled with issues, as they try to live out the "spirit" of the message. My emphasis, however, is on how the Chin theologised the version of the Christian message which they had received. The Chin's Christian tradition is short, but is nevertheless considered, in conjunction with the influence of popular religious practices. The Chin's socio-political and cultural context is also considered. The combination of westernization, associated with colonization and the introduction of Christianity, as well as local people's efforts to overcome oppression and poverty are also reflected on.

Bevans describes contextual theology as being worked out through peoples' real experiences, considering how they respond to everyday life's issues and questions, as they search for resolutions.²⁷² This describes well how the Chin have grappled with applying Christianity, which has been perceived as a foreign religion, to the gritty reality of their socio-economic hardship and political turmoil, as well as how they address the questions raised from their former belief system. This naturally raises the question of syncretism.

2.2.4. Syncretism Issues

Some scholars assume that syncretism occurs as the Christian message passes from one culture to another and are not surprised by its occurrence.²⁷³ Schreiter claims that while

²⁷¹ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 1.

²⁷² Stephen Bevans, Seminar November 21st 2009 "What Does Contextual Theology have to offer the Church of the 21st Century" at Newmans College University, Birmingham.

²⁷³ Shorter, *Evangelization*, 38.

similarities between different belief systems are conducive to contextualization, similarities are liable to lead to syncretism also.²⁷⁴ If this is so, then Pentecostalism's susceptibility to mixing with other belief systems, as argued by Cox, is because of similarities between them. Due to its connection with native cultures, Pentecostalism is sometimes described as a "folk religion", in the same way that Catholicism is sometimes associated with similar cultures, especially in the global South.²⁷⁵ Pentecostal identity is thought to vary considerably, and Mark Cartledge explains that Pentecostals refine their understanding of their theological identity by deciding which traditions they want to adopt.²⁷⁶ Pentecostals are advised to understand their own identity relative to similar churches. One example is that of the AICs who define their identity more clearly by comparing their practices with those of charismatic churches.²⁷⁷

This research looks at the way that the AICs have addressed syncretistic issues, as a comparison for how the Chin AG deal with similar issues. Pentecostals are also advised to consider how they relate to other religions for missiological purposes.²⁷⁸ This research focuses on the Chin's inter-relationship with their former primal religious background, but has also given some consideration to their relationship with neighbouring Buddhists.

The Chin associated their former Chin culture with primal religion, and the two were so integrated that they struggled to separate their culture from religious practices. This is the reason why, after conversion to Christianity, many cultural practices were prohibited for fear of syncretism. Now they are sifting through former practices to see which they can redeem, given that there are some aspects which they consider to be similar between their former beliefs in the spiritual realm and Christianity.

²⁷⁴ Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theology*, 152.

²⁷⁵ Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, "Pentecostal Mission and Encounter with Religions" in *The Cambridge Companion*, 306.

²⁷⁶ Mark Cartledge, "Pentecostal Theology" in *The Cambridge Companion*, 266.

²⁷⁷ Kärkkäinen, "Pentecostal Mission", 306.

²⁷⁸ Kärkkäinen, "Pentecostal Mission", 306.

Whilst some Chin have ongoing beliefs in spirits, some Chin leaders are concerned that these are incongruous with Christianity. Beliefs about the existence of spirits, inherited from their former religion, call into question their trust in the power of the Holy Spirit to deliver and protect them from the power of said spirits. Western missionaries condemned spirit beliefs but because the Bible is largely silent on issues of ancestral spirits and on what happens to the spirit of a person after death, the theological gap is most easily filled with detail from their primal religion. Their dilemma is their awareness that retaining beliefs in spirits syncretises with primal religion, which they believe to be wrong. Some interviewees spoke honestly about their beliefs in spirits, but it is possible that some may have felt reluctant to discuss their beliefs with me as a western researcher, for fear that I may disapprove of this thinking.

2.3. Research Design

This section explains how the research was conducted, by describing the methods I used to gather the data. Contextualization theory, especially relating to theology, forms the theoretical framework of this research. Theological contributions from theologians, Christian historians, missiologists and Pentecostal scholars are included.

This research is theological, and so the findings of the case-studies are analysed theologically. As Chin Pentecostals' practices are analysed using theological themes relating to contextualization, this research is a practical theology. Practical theology best describes this field of research because of its involvement with real peoples' beliefs and practices in everyday life, thus serving a specific function.²⁷⁹ The pastoral cycle starts with experience, followed by exploration to analyse the situation and contemplate a response. This in turn is followed by reflection on values and deciding on an action.²⁸⁰ Practical theology incorporates

²⁷⁹ Paul Ballard and John Pritchard, *Practical Theology in Action: Christian Thinking in the Service of Church and Society* (London: SPCK, 1996), 5.

²⁸⁰ Ballard and Pritchard, *Practical Theology*, 77-8.

changes in society and social sciences, so it can include contextualizing theology, which is pertinent to this research. Practical theology examines orthopraxy, considering that theological reflection takes place within a community.²⁸¹ This structure is appropriate for examining the Chin's practices and how they have reflected on the Christian forms which they received from the missionaries.

Theological documentary sources published about the Chin AG are sparse because the Chin are a relatively small people group and as discussed earlier, publication of Chin theological material was restricted within Myanmar because of economic limitations and political censorship. However, because this is a practical theology, rather than a theoretical one, the research methods primarily required fieldwork. However, some available documentary sources were accessed, including research by Chin AG students who studied abroad in the Philippines and America, cultural anthropological studies of the Chin, and the archives of newsletters from AG missionaries to Burma.²⁸² Also books about Chin church history, primal religion and a book of worship song lyrics were accessed during the fieldwork. Alternative media sources included Chin worship DVDs and YouTube and church Facebook pages and websites. However, the information provided on social media was also scarce, as the Chin do not feel free to publicise information about themselves too widely due to their status as a Christian minority within Myanmar.

2.3.1. Use of Ethnographic Methods

As well as interviewing Chin Pentecostals about their beliefs, I also examine their practices, and from these I identify some pertinent theological themes. To observe Chin practices, fieldwork using ethnographic methods was selected as the most appropriate method. The necessity for using ethnographic methods was compounded by the shortage of documentary

²⁸¹ Ballard and Pritchard, *Practical Theology*, 3-4.

²⁸² Clippings of the missionaries' missionary magazine are stored in the archives in APTS in the Philippines.

sources. Instead of being a setback, primary research provided an opportunity to make an original contribution and was an appropriate way to examine the practices of a living theology. Participant observation of church services and interviews are appropriate to examine Chin theology in oral form. As well as their liturgy forming part of their oral theology, people telling their salvation stories and experiences are also a narrative form of theology.²⁸³ Just as all culture evolves within community, so too does contextual theology. Based on these observations and the interviews, I have assessed which issues are important to the Chin, for further analysis.

2.3.2. Pilot Research and Initial Contacts

Prior to conducting the official fieldwork, I undertook pilot research to obtain background information and to assess the feasibility of the research. At the outset, I interviewed a Chin Baptist who lived in Birmingham and a Burmese AG pastor via skype and email. My initial questions and discussion concerned the level of influence the missionaries had had on Chin culture and the possibility that aspects of primal religion had mixed with church practices. I concluded that the wealth of information and the variety of perspectives available would provide adequate research material, and so I proceeded with the research.

In order to learn how to analyse song lyrics and understand more about traditional music, I undertook an ethnomusicology course with the missionary organisation WEC²⁸⁴ and I visited Japan for follow-up fieldwork. I recorded some traditional Japanese music and interviewed a traditional musician about it. I visited some rituals in Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines to learn about Japanese culture. Shintoism is a Japanese traditional ancestral religion, which honours ancestral spirits, so it had some commonality with Chin primal religion.

²⁸³ William A. Dyrness, *Invitation to Cross-Cultural Theology: Case Studies in Vernacular Theologies*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992, 9.

²⁸⁴ WEC = Worldwide Evangelisation Crusade, whose original founder was C. T. Studd.

I conducted participant observation of a Japanese evangelical church to practice observing which aspects of the liturgy were authentic to their culture and which were borrowed. Unfortunately, they only used translated western hymns, as they had not composed their own songs, so I did not analyse their worship songs. However, I interviewed Japanese church leaders regarding their perspectives of how they had contextualized their theology in their churches. Following this exercise, I adapted the interview questions to use less theoretical jargon and I learnt that I needed to ask about contextualization more indirectly. Interviewees did not understand what I meant when I asked specifically about contextualization, because of the terminology used. Common themes arising from these discussions were their attitudes to foreign missionaries, leadership conflicts and generational differences, and these implicitly supplied useful information regarding contextualization. I used this information to inform and set up more effective interview questions, which I subsequently used for the fieldwork in Myanmar.

I conducted the fieldwork in Myanmar for four weeks, and I arrived in Yangon in April 2010. I had contacts amongst the Chin from my time studying theology in the Philippines. These contacts assisted me in finding appropriate sources, gaining access to churches, and assisting me with interpretation and translation. I composed a list of Chin leaders to interview. I firstly visited the AG headquarters in Yangon to introduce myself to the leaders of the Myanmar AG and to explain to them about my intended research. I requested permission from the Myanmar AG leaders to conduct research in Chin AG churches, which they readily granted. They informed me of the background of the Myanmar AG and its growth. I asked about the American AG statement of faith, which had originally been given to the Myanmar AG by the missionaries. I inquired specifically about speaking in tongues being understood as the initial evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the belief that healing is included in the

atonement,²⁸⁵ which I had come across in my preliminary reading, and I felt this would be relevant to my research. The AG leaders reported that they had not changed the original statement of faith, and still adhered to it. I also raised the issue of the likelihood of syncretism with former spirit beliefs in AG churches, which they acknowledged as a possibility.

I obtained permission from the leaders to interview students at Evangel AG college, who incidentally were all Chin. I distributed a questionnaire in the class to obtain some information about their use of spiritual gifts and beliefs concerning spirits.²⁸⁶ The students claimed to be using spiritual gifts publicly at every church service, but I subsequently discovered this to be inaccurate during my own observations of services that I attended. I therefore considered the findings from the questionnaire to be an exaggeration, which seemed to demonstrate a bias to present themselves, to a foreign researcher, as frequent users of charismatic gifts.²⁸⁷ This alerted me to the complex dynamics of my position as a foreign researcher. However, the students confirmed to me that beliefs and practices relating to spirits were still prevalent, and so I tailored my interview questions to investigate this subject more deeply. They also relayed to me some interesting background about their indigenous worship songs.

2.3.3. The Criteria Used for (1) Selecting the Churches to Observe and (2) Gaining Access to these Churches

Yangon and Kalaymyo were the two cities selected for this research. Yangon is a multi-ethnic city as the former capital of Myanmar and it remains the largest city. Yangon is significant because so many Chin have migrated there for socio-economic reasons, and as a minority there, the Chin live amongst a variety of people groups. Kalaymyo, on the other

²⁸⁵ “Memorandum and Constitution of the Assemblies of God of Burma,” Oct. 13, 1955. This statement of faith was composed by the American AG missionaries.

²⁸⁶ This was a closed-ended quantitative survey which was an adaptation of William Kay’s questionnaires which have been used in various contexts. William Kay: “Pentecostal and Charismatic Ministry Survey” in William Kay, *Pentecostals in Britain* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2000) and in “Apostolic Networks and Charismatic Ministry Survey” in William Kay, *Apostolic Networks in Britain* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2007).

²⁸⁷ Wei, interview by the author, Yangon, 12 April 2010.

hand, is composed of approximately 50% Chin, and it is the closest town to Chin state that foreigners were permitted to visit at the time of this research.²⁸⁸ Its population is approximately 400,000. I expected the churches in Kalaymyo to be more likely to include more indigenous Chin practices because of the high Chin population and their proximity to Chin state. I spent only one week in Kalaymyo, as it was a smaller town and a more restricted area, with no other foreign visitors at the time. I spent three weeks in Yangon, which had many tourists, as it is a main city. As Kalaymyo is close to the Chin homeland, it offered a point of contrast to congregations in Yangon. I stayed in tourist hotels, adhering to the law that foreigners are required to stay in hotels. In total, I visited six Chin Pentecostal churches in Myanmar, but four were selected for observation, two in Yangon and two in Kalaymyo.

The translator in Yangon suggested two AG churches to observe, based on his knowledge of AG churches in Yangon. The criteria used to select the churches were that they were Pentecostal churches, composed of predominantly Chin congregants, and fairly easily accessible, as transportation was a factor to consider for the sample selection.

In Kalaymyo, the superintendent of the Chin district organised my schedule to visit four AG churches. I questioned his selection of those four churches, and he disclosed that his reasoning was to select churches which were growing. Access to the churches in Kalaymyo were limited by the gatekeeper because the government monitored foreigners' activity; so I was dependent on my host's introductions. The churches in Kalaymyo were in close proximity, within a few miles from one another, because of a high percentage of Chin AG members in the area.

²⁸⁸ Kalaymyo is located in Sagaing division approximately eighty three miles from the Indian border. Since 2012 there is reportedly more leniency for foreign visitors to Chin state, but when permission was requested in 2010, it was declined.

The churches are given pseudonyms for the purpose of anonymity for this research. The two churches in Yangon are called “Red” and “Blue” and the two in Kalaymyo are called “Green” and “Yellow”. The churches are all AG, except “Red”. “Red” was included because it was formerly AG, and it was highly recommended because it maintains traditional Chin Pentecostal characteristics, and it is a large influential church with 38 associate churches. It was established in 1987 and about 500 attend the main service in Yangon.²⁸⁹ Leadership conflict within the AG resulted in division and it became independent, resulting in diversity within Chin Pentecostalism. “Blue”, the other church which was observed in Yangon was established in 1984, and there are approximately 100 regular attendants. Despite being Chin, it uses a mixture of Burmese and English in an attempt to communicate with other people groups, and especially to relate to Buddhists.²⁹⁰ In Kalaymyo, “Green” was established in 1983, having about 200 attend services regularly. Some older church members performed a traditional indigenous song using the Chin drum, which is rarely used in worship services nowadays. Also in Kalaymyo, “Yellow” was established in 1985 and the congregation consists of over 500. Thus, the Chin Pentecostal services which I attended all had large, vibrant congregations.

After locating the churches on a map, the translators accompanied me to the church services. Before the services began, the translator introduced me to the church pastors, who acted as gatekeepers. I explained my research openly to them, I welcomed any questions that they had about my research, and I discussed any issues that they were interested in. I received informed consent to observe and record the services and to interview the church leaders. (See

²⁸⁹ This church also has planted daughter churches in Singapore, Malaysia and America. There are 34 churches in Myanmar and 4 abroad. They have a total of 76 ministers and 9 on probation.

²⁹⁰ In that church they remove their shoes before entering, which practiced by Buddhists before entering the temples and other Asians remove shoes before entering a house.

Appendix One). All the pastors were cooperative in granting permission and stated that they were pleased that an overseas researcher was studying their culture.

I spent three weeks in Yangon and attended morning and evening services each Sunday, amounting to six services. The translator translated the Chin sermons for me and explained what songs they were singing during the worship. He also answered any follow up questions afterwards. Most of the pastors in Yangon spoke fluent English and so they did not require a translator in order to be interviewed. However, during the week I interviewed some older pastors, who required translation.

2.3.4. My Role as Participant Observer

As I am accustomed to Pentecostal worship, it was easy to participate as well as to observe the congregants during the worship services. The dynamics in the churches in Yangon and Kalaymyo differed; the churches in Yangon appeared to be familiar with foreigner visitors and they did not pay much attention to me, and so I felt more inconspicuous and free to mingle. In Kalaymyo, on the other hand, I felt more visible as an outsider, and the pastors introduced me publicly so that the congregants would know who I was and my purpose for visiting. I was interested to observe, at the beginning of one service in Kalaymyo, that the church leaders were introduced formally by their titles and educational status. I found these introductions very unusual, but assumed they were done on my behalf. This demonstrated to me the emphasis placed on educational as well as leadership status in Chin culture.

All in all, the congregations appeared to worship unperturbed by my presence, as I was seated among the congregation. In my efforts to be discreet, I took notes of my observations in a small notebook and I recorded the services using a small recorder, having obtained permission to do this. I subsequently transcribed my notes and the recordings onto a Word document on my computer.

2.3.5. Criteria and Role of the Translators

The criteria for the translators was to have fluent English and to be familiar with Chin AG churches. I selected the translator in Yangon based on the fact that in addition to the above criteria, he was very interested in contextualization issues, and knew the background of the local churches and leaders as his father and brothers were also leaders and had studied theology. His brother, who was a student from the Evangel class which I attended, introduced me to him. In Kalaymyo, I contacted a former classmate from A.P.T.S.²⁹¹ in the Philippines to be my translator, because he had a similar theological background to that which I had received, and because I already knew him well, which facilitated working together.

The translators assisted in translation, suggested churches to research and introduced me to church leaders. They also answered any questions which arose during participant observation. Additionally, they translated the sermons and some of the songs for me. They were also available to answer my questions and comment on my observations. The translators also organised a schedule for interviewing church leaders during the week. The translators were paid what was considered a fair hourly rate by Myanmar standards, and we both signed a contract as an agreement of the terms. (See Appendix Two).

2.3.6. Selection of the Interview Samples and Consent of the Interviewees

A sample of eighteen semi-structured interviews of church leaders were conducted until a “saturation point” was reached.²⁹² Interviewees’ names, ages and contact details were recorded in case follow up information was needed. Some interviews were conducted after church services, usually in the church office; some church leaders preferred to be interviewed during weekdays, and so separate appointments were also made.

²⁹¹ A.P.T.S. = Asia Pacific Theological Seminary in Baguio, Philippines.

²⁹² Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (London: Aldine Transaction, 1967), 61.

Based on the recommendations by the translators, the key leaders, whom I wanted to interview were identified. I approached these leaders to request interviews. In the course of interviewing them, they sometimes suggested other leaders, who were knowledgeable about certain aspects of Chin history, culture or worship music. A snowballing method was therefore used to select interview candidates. No academic qualification was necessary as a criterion to be interviewed, because technical language had been removed as much as possible from the interview scripts.

In the most prominent AG church in Kalaymyo, the pastor announced publicly that the congregation could volunteer to be interviewed by me. However, all those who responded were males who held leadership roles and had theological education, except one female worship leader. So, the interviews are not entirely representative or generalizable to the Chin population, but demonstrate the perceived superior status of leaders, especially males, who were confident to volunteer to be interviewed.

In addition to the structured interviews with Chin AG leaders, I also conducted unstructured interviews with other leaders based on their specialist knowledge in order to obtain information on their area of expertise. One such interviewee was a pioneering pastor of the AG who remembered primal religion, the Baptist missionaries in Chin state, and the early stages of the AG. He provided useful information about how the AG was introduced to the Chin and the process they went through in abandoning primal religion, the dynamics between the missionaries and the Chin, and the Baptists and the AG. Another interviewee was a retired Chin AG pastor, who was an expert on Chin traditional singing and he permitted his singing to be recorded. Another Chin AG pastor was a musician and worship leader, who provided information regarding Chin worship music and composers.

I also interviewed four Chin Baptist leaders because of their expertise on Chin culture, and their memories of the American missionaries in Chin state. They also discussed the Baptists'

views of the early Pentecostals, as well as their perspectives on the current AG, which provided useful insights. One Chin Baptist who had written about contextualization theology for the Chin was interviewed at the beginning of the fieldwork. I also conducted a follow-up interview with him to discuss my observations at the end of my fieldwork, because of his expertise.

As already mentioned, I had obtained permission from the senior pastors to perform interviews, respecting their authority as gatekeepers. I explained the interview process and the purpose of the research to the interview candidates and asked them to sign their consent to participate, and I informed them that they could retract their agreement to be interviewed without any repercussions (See Appendix One). They were assured that their anonymity would be preserved, even though all except one reported that they were satisfied with using their real names, as they expressed an interest in participating in the research. They were informed that they would not receive payment for being interviewed. During the interviews, I took notes and the interviews were recorded. On completion, I assured them that the findings of the research would be available to the participants via email on request and the data would be stored securely and kept for ten years after completion of the research, and then deleted. I only used a translator for the interviews if the interviewees' level of English was not of a reasonable standard, in which case they requested that the interviews were conducted using Chin.

2.3.6.1. The Implications for the Demographics of the Interviewees

The interviewees in this research are predominantly male leaders, who were therefore educated and of a higher status in Chin society and churches. Those of leadership status were the decision makers and had experience in trying to balance and present both relevant and orthodox theology, whilst tackling the challenges of syncretism. They were also predominantly “the older generation”, being over forty. It is acknowledged that they have a

particular perspective of educated “experts”. The lay people were not equally represented in the interviews, and I acknowledge that they may have added a useful contribution in presenting Chin traditional culture more positively.

Only one woman responded to my invitation to be interviewed, demonstrating the women’s lack of confidence in a patriarchal society, and I did not challenge this cultural trait by specifically requesting female interviewees; but this leaves a gap for further research. The women were, in fact, the most interactive and responsive participants during services, more prone to perform acts in healing rituals. The patriarchal nature of Chin society which oppressed women caused women in particular to identify with uplifting worship songs. My emphasis on older interviewees was because of their valued experience with both primal religion and with the western missionaries, and I was made aware that the memorisation of Chin stories and myths were dying out with the older generation. I am conscious that the younger generation were not experienced in primal religion, but some did show an interest in the preservation of their culture, while simultaneously enjoying contemporary western music. However, the youth are the future of Chin culture in a changing context.

As the interviewees were educated, many of them could converse in English and understood theological terms. Their exposure to western thinking increased their desire to comply with western theology. Less educated interviewees may represent aspects of primal religion as they are not as aware of, or as concerned about, issues surrounding syncretism. However, they most likely did not understand the relevance of my research or feel confident enough to volunteer to be interviewed. As this research is predominantly about contextualization, using the Chin people as a case study, and this research is preliminary in discovering the relevant issues, it was not possible to represent all of the Chin equally at this point. As my focus was to discern how they dealt with theological issues as a church, I focused on the leadership, because I was able to discuss with them their processes for decision making.

The song text analysis required a more specific methodology, as mentioned above, and will be explained in the next section.

2.3.7. Song Text Analysis

Following the fieldwork, I conducted the worship song-text analysis. As a pilot study, the translator with whom I worked in Kalaymyo translated a sample of four popular Chin AG worship songs into English. I subsequently examined those four translated songs for theological issues and Chin distinctives. On first appearances, the songs resembled western Pentecostal themes and imagery, which was disappointing, as they appeared to be western imitations. However, on closer examination, unique Chin themes became apparent. I ascertained that the songs represented some Chin theological and cultural issues, and thus were useful for analysing contextualization issues.

However, one of the four translated songs was based on a biblical Psalm, which did not reveal any Chin theological or cultural insights, but only indicated that the Chin found that Psalm meaningful. Based on this finding, I asked the translator to exclude any songs which are directly quoted from the Bible, as they would reveal nothing unique about Chin theology. It became clear that the Chin worship songs contained enough material to warrant analysing the lyrics, and that they represented an additional form of theology which would compliment my observation of the liturgy.

I selected thirty songs, because I considered that to be a sufficient number in order to produce a pattern of theological themes, whilst being a manageable quantity to analyse intensively. The criteria for the songs selected was that the songs be popular praise and worship songs, written indigenously by the Chin and currently sung regularly by the Chin in AG churches in Myanmar. I was aiming for songs which would be representative of Chin AG songs, even though the choice of the songs has an element of subjectivity.

The translator in Yangon translated the remainder of the worship songs, because he is interested in worship music and responded rapidly to emails and was therefore accessible. The payment was agreed, which was considered fair based on Myanmar standards and he signed a translation contract (See Appendix Three). Payment was given following the completion of the translation to prevent any possible bias which advance payment may have caused.

I explained the criteria for the song selection to the translator, who then selected the sample of thirty popular worship songs. He sometimes used songs which were published in a song book for ease of access to the lyrics. This was permissible because the songs which were published were more likely to be in popular usage also. Where possible, the key in which the song was written, the genre of the song, and the name of the composer were noted, however this information was not always available in its entirety. Specific features unique to Chin poetry or song-writing were identified,²⁹³ such as any traditional language or specific vocabulary used for song-writing, if not used in regular speech. The translator was also asked to contact the composers where possible, to determine their background and their motivation for composing the song. Many of the composers were difficult to contact because they were living deep in Chin state, without any internet access. However, he did interview one composer's wife, because the composer himself had already died.

I categorised the words used in the song texts, using four quantitative charts (See Appendices Five to Eight). The first chart quantifies the word counts of the pronouns used for members of the Trinity and for themselves to establish how they identify themselves or refer to each other. The second chart quantifies the names assigned to the members of the Trinity. The third chart includes a list of the specific addressors and addressees used in the songs, and the

²⁹³ SIL Arts Consultant video: Understanding Local Arts, 2007, <http://www.sil.org/arts/ArtsConsultantVideo.htm>, accessed on November 13, 2009.

descriptive terms or names given for the members of the Trinity. The fourth chart specifies the main and secondary theological themes, genres and cultural themes used in the songs.

In calculating the word counts, the title is excluded as the title is not sung and the chorus is only analysed once, as it appears in the text, because choruses are sung a variable amount of times. These charts were subsequently used to analyse the Chin's predominant concepts of God and how this may reflect on Chin theology and culture. The genres of the songs and the main and secondary theological themes were examined for any dominant themes the Chin use in worship songs. Additionally, the musical style, composers and poetic forms are collated and analysed for relevant findings.

Ethnomusicologists recommend following up song-text analysis with an interview to reveal the meaning behind the songs.²⁹⁴ Any imagery or phrases which appeared unique to the Chin were followed up by an interview with a Chin AG member to analyse their cultural or theological meanings. Following translation, the translator was interviewed via email regarding the interpretation of certain phrases, which were not clear to me, because they used Chin terminology and imagery. I also sent the translator follow-up emails to inquire about the translation of the various names of members of the Trinity, because I subsequently discovered that they had deeper theological implications, which were relevant to the research. After this, each song was examined individually for Chin cultural and theological characteristics, and whether or not these had biblical support. I used theological analysis to collate these observations (See chapter five).

²⁹⁴ SIL Arts Consultant video.

2.3.8. Triangulation

As a variety of research methods were used, participant observation, interviews, song-text analysis and documentary sources, the findings were verified using triangulation. When inconsistencies or conflicts arose, I emailed Chin scholars and the translators for clarification.

2.4. Rationale for the Selection of Liturgy, Songs and Theology as a Case-Study of

Contextualization of the Chin AG

Having gathered the data, three theological aspects were selected to measure Chin contextualization: liturgy, songs and Pneumatology, based on Hayward's measurements of contextualization, as discussed in chapter one. Hayward's measurements were designed to be practical in the real world, rather than overly theoretical, and therefore suited this practical theology. Liturgy, songs and Pneumatology were selected, based on their relevance to Chin Pentecostal congregations, as similar issues had also emerged from the interviews. Another practical consideration was that data regarding Chin beliefs and practices and the songs could be obtained using the methods already outlined.

2.4.1. Liturgy

Chin liturgy was examined because the Chin have a strong oral tradition; therefore, practical theology through worship expressions made more sense to them, rather than merely theoretical theology. Pentecostalism is also known for its oral liturgy and so the common oral forms mean that there is potential to be well contextualized. The Chin themselves regularly mentioned the importance of worship to them and they lacked a written Chin theology. An examination of liturgy includes issues surrounding the abolition of their traditional instruments which were associated with primal religion, thus relating to contextualization and syncretism.

2.4.2. Songs

Chin worship songs were selected because songs are an oral practice which express the emotion and creativity of a culture. Considering the importance of songs for Chin culture and for Pentecostal oral theology, the songs were considered an important source of contemporary oral theology. Chin interviewees regularly pointed to their indigenous worship song lyrics as proof that Chin churches were well contextualized. As they use their own expression, thus they are a form of indigenous Chin theology, which can be examined theologically for how contextualized they are. Moreover, the Chin's abandonment of their traditional songs and the importation of western translated songs are also relevant considerations in the contextualization debate.

2.4.3. Pneumatology

Pneumatological issues were examined due to their relevance to Chin Pentecostals. Their emphasis on spirits in their former primal religion raises questions about how they deal with their former beliefs and practices, now that they are Christians, and also regarding their relationship with the Holy Spirit. This includes issues of discernment and consideration of Chin Pentecostal healing and deliverance practices. Some of their Pentecostal practices seemed to resemble those previously practiced in primal religion.

2.5. Conclusion

Firstly, contextualization theory has been introduced in order to construct a theoretical framework, by examining scholars' contributions to the contextualization debates, acknowledging the association with syncretism. In the second section, specific issues pertaining to Chin contextualization have been examined. In the third section, ethnographical methods from the social sciences have been described and these help in the observation of Chin beliefs and practices, and include participant observation, interviews, and the collection and translation of song texts. Fieldwork was considered an appropriate method of data

collection, especially due to the lack of documentary sources of Chin theology. The fourth section briefly outlined how Chin contextualization will be measured using the theological themes of liturgy, songs and Pneumatology, which will constitute three individual chapters.

CHAPTER 3

THE INTRODUCTION TO AND DEVELOPMENT OF CHRISTIANITY AMONG THE CHIN

3. Introduction

The history of the introduction to and development of Christianity among the Chin is examined in this chapter, with special emphasis on Chin Pentecostalism. This is not intended to be a complete history as the purpose of this chapter is to understand the historical context of the Chin pertinent to cultural and contextualization issues. As mentioned earlier, the Chin came from a primal religious context before their almost complete conversion to Christianity, and they live in a predominantly Buddhist country, where Christianity is a minority religion. The history of the introduction of Christianity to Burma is examined firstly to create a wider context.

3.1. The Introduction of Christianity to Burma

In the 19th century, Burma was targeted for Christian mission. This coincided with invasion by the British army, and the period was marked by three wars between the British and the Burmese; the British subsequently invaded Shan and Chin states.²⁹⁵ Notably, the areas which resisted Christianity and maintained their Buddhist beliefs coincided with those who had resisted British rule.²⁹⁶ The British colonizers were perceived to be ethnocentric with little regard for indigenous policies.²⁹⁷ The monarchy was abolished by British rule, which denigrated the power which the Buddhist hierarchy had held, but also overthrew Buddhism as

²⁹⁵ Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity: The Great Century in Northern Africa and Asia A.D. 1800-A.D. 1914*, Volume VI (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode Limited, n.d.), 225.

²⁹⁶ Latourette, *A History of the Expansion*, vol. VI, 232.

²⁹⁷ Robert H. Taylor, "British Policy towards Myanmar and the Creation of the 'Burma Problem' in *Myanmar: State, Society and Ethnicity*, eds. N. Ganesan and Kyaw Yin Hlaing (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2007), 78-9.

the national religion of the state. By the time the Konbaung dynasty was abolished in 1886, Buddhism had no longer any authority in the country. The new secular education system set aside their Buddhist education, but was only available to a privileged few.²⁹⁸

Following in the steps of the British colonizers came the Christian missionaries, who were particularly successful among the primal religious believers in the north.²⁹⁹ The British government tried to gain support for ruling the country; one obvious target was the Kayin (Karen) people who had previously benefited from education from the missionaries in the South under British authority.³⁰⁰ The British army also utilized the pastors in the northern hill areas and some of the people living in the frontier regions were recruited to join the British Indian army.³⁰¹ World War II re-ignited “tribal” conflicts, in which the Karen and Kachin fought with the British while the Burmese sided with the Japanese.³⁰² British colonialism ended with the arrival of the Japanese army who expelled the British from Myanmar as World War II began. There was a mixed response from the Karen and Indian people who had enjoyed the privileges of British rule.³⁰³ However, by 1921 Christians represented less than 2% of the population.³⁰⁴

3.1.1. Nestorians

The Nestorian missionaries from China may have been the first to introduce Christianity to Burma, and Christians were known to be living in what was known as *Pegu* as early as the

²⁹⁸ Taylor, “British Policy, 79.

²⁹⁹ Taylor, “British Policy, 75.

³⁰⁰ Taylor, “British Policy, 74-5.

³⁰¹ Taylor, “British Policy, 75.

³⁰² Bertil Linter, “Myanmar/Burma” in *Ethnicity in Asia*, ed. Colin Mackerras, (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 181.

³⁰³ Rachel M. Safman, “Minorities and State-building in Mainland Southeast Asia,” in *Myanmar: State, Society and Ethnicity*, eds. N. Ganesan and Kyaw Yin Hlaing (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2007), 56.

³⁰⁴ Latourette, *A History of the Expansion*, VI, 226.

sixth century.³⁰⁵ The Nestorian influence was noteworthy because they were an Eastern cultural influence, contrasting with the later European missionaries.

3.1.2. Roman Catholicism

Roman Catholicism was the first western Christian denomination represented in Burma. There are sporadic records of Catholic missionary priests visiting throughout the centuries, with the first visit recorded in 1287, in what was then known as the kingdom of *Pagan*. In 1510, Portuguese soldiers and merchants arrived with missionaries as their chaplains and visited what was then known as *Pegu*.³⁰⁶ The association of Christian missionaries with soldiers was mirrored later when the British army were contemporary with the Baptist missionaries. The colonizers also benefited commercially like the merchants, and so foreign rule and commerce were associated with Christianity. In 1720, Joseph Vittoni and Sigismond Calchi, two Italian priests came as missionaries and continued the work. Roman Catholicism is the second largest denomination in Myanmar today,³⁰⁷ representing approximately 1% of the population, including some Chin.

The first Roman Catholic missionaries to Burma were two Franciscans who arrived in *Pegu* in the 1550s; meanwhile Jesuits worked in *Bassein* (now known as Patheingyi, a city located west of Yangon). Therefore, by the end of the 16th century, Jesuits, Dominicans and Franciscans had managed to build a few churches as they had arrived with Portuguese soldiers. In the early 1700s Franciscans worked in *Syriam* where the Portuguese were trading, at the same time as the Jesuits; and the Dominicans were also working in *Pegu*.³⁰⁸ In 1722,

³⁰⁵ T. V. Philip, *East of the Euphrates: Early Christianity in Asia* (Tiruvalla: Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge and Christian Sahitya Samithy, 1998) chapter eight, viewed on religion-online.org., accessed on June 10, 2012.

³⁰⁶ Myanmar Catholic Diocese posted June 13, 2007 catholicmissionmm.blogspot.com/.../history-of-myanmar-catholic-church. Accessed on June 10, 2012 and Helen G. Trager, *Burma Through Alien Eyes* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, 1966), 9.

³⁰⁷ David Barret, George T. Kurian, and Todd M. Johnson, "Myanmar" in *World Christian Encyclopedia: A Comparative Survey of Churches and religions in the Modern World*, 2nd ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 519.

³⁰⁸ Latourette, *A History of the Expansion*, III, 293.

Calchi, a Barnabite priest, began a mission work in *Pegu, Ava* and *Martaban* which lasted for several years, and his mission compiled dictionaries and catechisms, and translated many books of the Bible. From 1559 to 1800, thirty-eight Barnabite missionaries had worked in the Burmese mission. The Barnabites did not appear to have successfully gained converts among the Burmese Buddhists, which subsequent missionaries also found difficulty converting, as missionaries were more successful in gaining converts among the “animistic” minorities,³⁰⁹ including the Karens, Chins, Kachins, Lahus and Was.^{310 311} By the 19th century, Burma had only a handful of Roman Catholic converts.³¹² Having that said, Burma had more Christians then than in previous eras, as schools and hospitals were more successful than the mere numbers in churches demonstrated.³¹³

3.1.3. Anglicans

Church of England chaplains had arrived with the British army as early as 1825, and their missionary work thrived especially among the Karen. The Anglicans also worked among the Chin, as well as other nationalities living in Burma.³¹⁴ Church of England schools were established to educate the children of the British. Even though the official British policy was “religious neutrality” privileges were given to the Church of England in an effort to promote Christianity. However, the Church of England focused more on Europeans, and as a result only 7% of Christians in Myanmar belonged to the Church of England.³¹⁵ The colonisers’ goal to Christianise the Burmese using the Anglican church failed, as the ethnic Burmese identified strongly with Buddhism.³¹⁶

³⁰⁹ Latourette, *A History of the Expansion*, III, 294.

³¹⁰ Latourette, *A History of the Expansion*, VI, 225.

³¹¹ Latourette, *A History of the Expansion*, I, xx.

³¹² Latourette, *A History of the Expansion*, IV, 1.

³¹³ Latourette, *A History of the Expansion*, IV, 3.

³¹⁴ Latourette, *A History of the Expansion*, VI, 233-4.

³¹⁵ Taylor, “British Policy”, 91.

³¹⁶ This strategy was similarly used with attempts to establish the Church of Ireland as the national church in Ireland, which were also unsuccessful, due to the close association of Anglicanism with British rule, while the Irish identified with Roman Catholicism.

3.1.4. Baptists

In the 19th century Protestant missionaries arrived in Burma and Protestantism grew more rapidly than Catholicism.³¹⁷ In 1807, the Baptist Missionary Society in England sent its first two missionaries Marten and Chater to Yangon³¹⁸ and in 1808 Felix Carey, William Carey's son went to Burma and worked on translation.³¹⁹ The missionaries translated the Gospel of Matthew into Burmese. However, it is believed that their mission was unproductive in terms of making converts.³²⁰

American Baptists arrived and worked alongside the advancing British rule, mostly among the Karen, but also among other nationals residing in Burma at the time. The most well-known Baptist missionary, Adoniram Judson marked the beginning of the American Baptist's work, arriving in Yangon in 1813.³²¹ The Baptists subsequently became the largest denomination in Burma.³²² By 1834, Judson had translated the Burmese Bible, composed a Burmese-English dictionary and written books about the life of Christ and liturgy as attempts to make Christianity understandable to Buddhists.³²³ Judson's literary accomplishments contributed to the whole society.

Judson's theological contribution included his development of a Burmese liturgy in 1829 with rules for baptism, worship, the Lord's Supper, appointing leaders, and carrying out discipline. He also wrote a creed and Christian guidelines to equip indigenous leaders, which had a similar structure and layout to Buddhist rituals.³²⁴ These are still used today by

³¹⁷ Latourette, *A History of the Expansion*, VI, 226.

³¹⁸ Kawl Thang Vuta, "A Brief History of the Planting and Growth of the Church in Burma" (D. Miss. Diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1983), 40 in Mung Lian Sian, *Assemblies of God Mission History in Myanmar* (Baguio: Asia Pacific Theological Seminary, unpublished Th. M paper in partial fulfilment of Pentecostal History, 2005), 8.

³¹⁹ Felix was William Carey's son, the well-known Baptist missionary to India.

³²⁰ Thang Vuta, "A Brief History", 40 in Sian, *Assemblies of God*, 8.

³²¹ Edward Judson, *The Life of Adoniram Judson* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1883), 48. Judson is mistakenly remembered as the first Baptist missionary but rather he was the first Protestant missionary from America.

³²² Latourette, *A History of the Expansion*, VI, 228.

³²³ Latourette, *A History of the Expansion*, VI, 229.

³²⁴ Than, "Burma: Theologizing", 55.

Baptists, as well as “The Golden Balance” and “The Threefold Cord” dealing with apologetics and ethics, with an emphasis on prayer, self-denial and good works, which used contextualized Buddhist ideals.³²⁵ Judson’s strategy was to learn Buddhist doctrine, and rather than criticising Buddhism he drew parallels with Christianity. He developed a liturgy, focusing on Christian rituals and leadership training to accompany his pioneering work. Judson recognised that the Buddhists equated their religion with their national identity, and perceived Christianity as a foreign religion and resisted it.³²⁶ When war broke out with Britain and Myanmar was colonized, Judson and all missionaries were suspected of working as British spies.³²⁷ (Several years later, in 1966, the government expelled all foreign missionaries again because of this association between Christianity and western colonisation.³²⁸

Another American Baptist, George Dana Boardman worked in Burma from 1801-1831 mostly among the Karen, and he trained a local evangelist.³²⁹ By 1914 there were less than 4,000 Karen Baptists.³³⁰ In 1870, the Baptists targeted the Kachin (including the Lisu, who are a neighbouring people group to the Chin). There were 700 Kachin Baptists by 1914, where they worked on Bible translations as well as schools. In 1860 a Baptist missionary targeted the Shan and by 1914 there were 11,000 Shan Baptists.³³¹

Baptist missionaries Arthur and Laura Carson arrived in Hakha in Chin State on 15 March 1899; they were the first missionaries to the Chin. The British and the Chin fought in the Anglo-Chin war from 1917-1919, in which the British defeated the Chin but reinstated the Chin chiefs who had formerly been over-ruled.³³² The Carsons worked alongside a Karen co-

³²⁵ Than, “Burma: Theologizing”, 56.

³²⁶ Sakhong, *In Search of Chin*, 114.

³²⁷ Safman, “Minorities and State-building,” 64.

³²⁸ Sian, *Assemblies of God*, 5.

³²⁹ Latourette, *A History of the Expansion*, VI, 230.

³³⁰ Latourette, *A History of the Expansion*, VI, 232.

³³¹ Latourette, *A History of the Expansion*, VI, 232.

³³² Sakhong, *In Search of Chin*, 170.

worker; together they created a written script for the Chin, and by 1914 there were 1,200 Chin Baptists.³³³

3.1.5. Pentecostals

Pentecostal movements in Burma include the United Pentecostal Church,³³⁴ the Foursquare Church³³⁵, along with a small number of “charismatic” believers.³³⁶ Finnish and Swedish missionaries from the “Go Ye Fellowship” and the Open Bible Standard Church ministered before the war, but did not return afterwards.³³⁷ British Pentecostal Missionary Union (PMU) missionaries worked in south-west China in 1910, and from 1921 ministered across the border to the Lisu, Karen and Rawang people.³³⁸ However, the most populous Pentecostal group were the AG. The first resident American AG missionaries dated back to the 1920s, Hector and Sigrid McLean.³³⁹ In 1955 the AG was established in Burma and because of their prevalence, the AG’s strategies, developments and contextualization are the focus of this research.

3.1.6. Other Denominations

Foreign missionaries arrived from several denominations. The American Methodists came to Burma via India in 1879 and worked in Rangoon.³⁴⁰ English Methodists came in 1886 and targeted the Burmese in Mandalay, and by 1914 there were several hundred Methodist converts. In 1892 Churches of Christ from Great Britain worked in Burma and by 1914 there

³³³ Latourette, *A History of the Expansion*, VI, 232.

³³⁴ J. Ral Buai started the United Pentecostal Church in 1973, but their theology is not acceptable to other Pentecostal organizations. Khai, “Pentecostalism in Myanmar”, 52.

³³⁵ Philip Ahone was a former Assemblies of God minister and evangelist in the early movement, he started the Full Gospel Foursquare Church in 1973 with some daughter churches in Khai, “Pentecostalism in Myanmar”, 52.

³³⁶ The charismatic movement in Myanmar is limited to individual believers rather than being a broad scale movement, it is seen in local churches and parachurch organizations, cited in Khai, “Pentecostalism in Myanmar”, 52.

³³⁷ Glenn D. Stafford, “A Brief Story of the Assemblies of God in Myanmar,” (A class paper for The Overseas Church and Missions, Central Bible College, Springfield, MO, 1977), 3.

³³⁸ Anderson, *An Introduction*, 129.

³³⁹ Hector McLean, “A Thousand Family [sic] Turn to the Lord,” *The Pentecostal Evangel* (March 20, 1926), 6 in Khai, “Pentecostalism in Myanmar.”

³⁴⁰ Latourette, *A History of the Expansion*, VI, 234.

were some Seventh Day Adventists as well, but they were not very successful.³⁴¹ There were an estimated four million Christians in Myanmar in 2001.³⁴²

3.1.7. The Introduction of Christianity to the Chin

There are roughly four phases of Chin Christian history. The Baptist missionaries had the most impact on the Chin, (whilst acknowledging the earlier work of the Catholic missionaries) and so the first historical phase examines the Baptist missionaries' work from 1899 onwards. The second historical phase examines the work of the AG missionaries. Despite having never reached Chin state itself, their work in other regions of Burma was foundational to the AG, so their work is examined from the 1930s. The third historical phase examines the period following the expulsion of all missionaries in 1966, when local leaders took over the AG work from the missionaries. This transition period also includes the introduction of Pentecostalism to the Chin via other people groups. The fourth historical phase examines a period of revival in Chin state which ensued in the 1970s, which began among the Baptists, many of whom converted to Pentecostalism subsequently. The revival, sometimes referred to as a renewal, is examined for its influence on Chin Pentecostalism, even up to the present time.

The next section examines the first historical phase of the Baptist missionaries' introduction of Christianity to the Chin.

3.2. The Baptist Missionaries' Work among the Chin from 1899

As the AG missionaries did not go directly to the Chin, it was the Baptist missionaries primarily who converted the Chin from primal religion to Christianity, and so the dynamics in this cultural-religious interchange are examined. The first recorded Baptist missionaries to the Chin were Americans, Arthur and Laura Carson, who arrived in Hakha in Chin State in

³⁴¹ Latourette, *A History of the Expansion*, VI, 235.

³⁴² Barret, "Myanmar", 519.

1899, although other Baptist missionaries had reached different areas of Burma prior to this.³⁴³ Notably, as the Baptist missionaries' arrival was in short succession of British colonisation of the Chin in 1896, the Chin reasoned that Christianity and western colonization were interrelated, especially because missionaries and colonisers were both westerners.³⁴⁴ Considering that both held authoritative positions and worked in cooperation with one another, it is conceivable from the outset that Christianity was portrayed as an imperialistic, foreign religion.

The similarities of primal religion and Christianity were mentioned earlier, which may have given the impression of a smooth introduction of Christianity. However, the Chin's response was resistance to Christianity, and so this time is referred to as the "period of confrontation".³⁴⁵ The many similarities between primal religion and Christianity, as discussed in the introduction chapter, arguably made Christianity easier to understand, but also raises the question: what were the motivations for conversion to Christianity?

3.2.1. The Baptist Missionaries' Approach to Chin Primal Religion

The Baptist missionaries' approach was to challenge primal religion and to discard aspects of traditional Chin culture. Initial church growth was slow among the Chin for several reasons. New Chin Christian converts remained sick and poor, which was not impressive to observers. This indicates that the Chin considered this new religion of Christianity in terms of how it might provide health and material benefits, in which it appeared to fall short. Moreover, the Chin had a close connection with their household "gods",³⁴⁶ and they perceived that if they converted to Christianity they would be separated from family members after death.³⁴⁷ Thus

³⁴³ Robert G. Johnson, "The First Chin Baptist Churches" in *Thinking about Christianity and the Chins in Myanmar* ed. Cung Lian Hup (Yangon: Published by the editor, 1999), 1.

³⁴⁴ Ming, interview by the author, Yangon, 9 April 2010.

³⁴⁵ This is described as a "period of confrontation" as Christianity confronted the Chin religion. Pau Khan En, "The Impact of the Gospel," 28.

³⁴⁶ H. Kam Pum, "Identity of the Chins in Myanmar" in *Thinking about Christianity*, 43.

³⁴⁷ Kap, *Chin Church History*, 348-9.

their former belief system and concept of group identity conflicted with how they perceived Christianity. The Chin's primal beliefs and practices, associated with identifying with ancestor spirits, were perceived as not being addressed adequately by Christianity.

The Chin were allegedly reluctant to attend the missionary hospital because of their beliefs that the spirits caused illnesses, rather than being caused by biological reasons.³⁴⁸

Furthermore, the Chin used to sacrifice to their family god, who they believed would look after them and would provide a special place in the after-life, if they died at home.³⁴⁹ Thus the Baptists' hospital ministry was not as successful as they had hoped, because it did not correlate with the Chin worldview of the source or cure for sickness. In hindsight, the Chin themselves recognise the failure of the Baptist medical missions, and they point out that the former beliefs in the spiritual causation of illness had not been challenged sufficiently.³⁵⁰

Ironically, for the Chin to transition from appeasing spirits to taking western medicine would have required a secularization of their Chin worldview, despite this shift being associated with Christianity.³⁵¹ The Baptists' medical approach to healing will be contrasted with the subsequent Pentecostal approach.

Concerning inculturation, Pieris recommends that a metacosmic religion supplements a cosmic religion's soteriology, incorporating both present and future aspects.³⁵² Regarding the Chin, an example would be their concern for spirits reaching the soul's resting place, and so they offered animal sacrifices at funerals to ensure the spirits' safe arrival.³⁵³ Indeed, it was Christianity's presentation of certainty regarding the after-life which appealed to the Chin, as they relay that it was Christianity's concepts of forgiveness and assurance of salvation which

³⁴⁸ Robert Johnson, "The Chin in the Chin Hills" in *Thinking about Christianity*, 28.

³⁴⁹ Sakhong, *In Search of Chin*, 148-9.

³⁵⁰ Sakhong, *In Search of Chin*, 151.

³⁵¹ Sakhong, *In Search of Chin*, 151.

³⁵² Pieris, *An Asian Theology*, 55.

³⁵³ Wei, interview by the author, Yangon, 12 April 2010.

were its overarching appeal.³⁵⁴ This makes sense as the after-life was important in Chin religion and yet was deemed to be lacking certainty, a gap which Christianity filled. The Chin also understood Christianity's concept of sacrifice in the Old Testament and Jesus' salvific death, because of their own sacrificial system.

In order for the Chin to replace their primal beliefs with Christianity, it was necessary to both undermine beliefs in the spirits' power, and to convince the Chin of Christianity's superior power. This process was aided by the Chin's experiences of oppression and marginalisation as a minority group during the Second World War. The British army camped on their sacred ground, but yet were unharmed. This undermined the Chin's confidence in primal religion,³⁵⁵ whilst perceiving the British as being more powerful. They associated the British with Christianity. War caused them insecurity, and conversion to Christianity provided protection.³⁵⁶ Similarly, a tree which they had feared was cut down without anyone being harmed. They interpreted this event as being due to Jesus' protection, and a whole village was converted as a result of this power display.³⁵⁷ Therefore, aside from missionaries' efforts, the Chin observed Christianity through their own worldview of spiritual power, and they were convinced.

3.2.2. The Appeal of Christianity to the Chin

The Chin reported that primal religion's requirement of animal sacrifices caused a financial burden, and Christianity allegedly grew, partly, due to the people's economic struggles. Sacrifices had been perceived as a means to obtain healing, perform funeral rites and contact deceased relatives.³⁵⁸ The introduction of Christianity led them suspect that there were flaws

³⁵⁴ Qin, interview by the author, Birmingham, 15 December 2009.

³⁵⁵ Ngur Za Tuah, "Towards an Understanding of Christian Mission from a Chin Perspective" (Masters thesis, University of Birmingham, 1993), 71-2.

³⁵⁶ Za Tuah, "Towards an Understanding," 71-2.

³⁵⁷ Yong, interview by the author, 30 April 2010.

³⁵⁸ Sakhong, *In Search of Chin*, 151.

in their sacrificial system; subsequently, such dissatisfaction produced more conversions.³⁵⁹ The missionaries' teachings undermined the sacrificial system further. As a result, the Chin questioned their personal benefits from these costly sacrifices.³⁶⁰ In contrast, Christianity was perceived to be a "cheaper religion" because it did not require sacrifices.³⁶¹ Rather than offer sacrifices for healing, the Baptist missionaries including Dr East and his wife Emily³⁶² introduced western medicine and promoted hygiene.³⁶³ However, as discussed earlier, there was initially resistance to western clinics.

The appeal of Christianity was increased by the missionaries' introduction of new agricultural methods and education, which provided the Chin opportunities to advance economically. One of the most successful strategies of the Baptist missionaries was providing a western education, which included creating a Romanised script for the Chin. In the early 1900s the Baptist missionaries Arthur and Laura Carson,³⁶⁴ Dr Joseph and Elizabeth Cope,³⁶⁵ and Chester and Florence Strait³⁶⁶ transcribed a written text for three Chin dialects and translated the New Testament and hymnbooks.³⁶⁷ The Chin welcomed the written script because they perceived that it increased their status to that comparable to other people groups. However, this literary emphasis of the Baptists contrasts with the Chin's traditional oral culture; this will be examined later, in conjunction with the Pentecostal oral liturgy.

³⁵⁹ Vumson, *Zo History* (Mizoram, published by the author, 1986), 144.

³⁶⁰ H.N.C. Stevenson, *The Economics of the Central Chin Tribes* (Bombay: The Times of India Press, 1943), 161-3.

³⁶¹ Vumson, *Zo*, 144.

³⁶² Kip Thian Pau, "Chin People in the World: The First Converts in Chin Hills" at <https://sialki.wordpress.com/the-stories-of-zomi/the-first-converts-in-chin-hills/> accessed 22 May, 2018.

³⁶³ Vumson, *Zo*, 143.

³⁶⁴ Johnson, "The Chin," 28.

³⁶⁵ Chum Awi, "Thinking about the Unity of the Chin: Historical and Christian Mission Points of View" in *Thinking about Christianity*, 20. Sakhong, *In Search of Chin*, 170.

³⁶⁶ Robert Johnson, "The Chin," 30.

³⁶⁷ Za Tuah, *Towards an Understanding*, 52.

The Baptist missionaries provided education in Chin state, and so Christianity and education were inextricably linked.³⁶⁸ British officials ordered that the chiefs had to be educated, and so the chiefs' sons had to attend school in order to maintain their political power. In contrast, Chin chiefs' political power had traditionally been passed down through the generations. As it was missionaries who taught in the schools, many of the chiefs' sons were converted to Christianity, so as the Chin became more educated, churches grew accordingly.³⁶⁹ The missionaries, in conjunction with British colonial powers, took advantage of the Chin traditional leadership structure by targeting Chin leaders, which was an effective strategy for conversions. Naturally, the primal chiefs were angered by this challenge to their culture and religious beliefs. One Chin scholar now criticises the missionaries' motives as not being concerned enough about their general welfare to educate the locals, but rather being primarily focused on evangelising them.³⁷⁰ As well as the missionaries' overall strategies lacking consideration for the local culture, their lack of adaptation to local culture was evident in smaller details, such as their construction of western style school buildings, rather than adapting to the local building style.³⁷¹

3.2.3. The Baptist Missionaries' Approach to Socio-Cultural Issues

At first the missionaries were not successful in gaining many Chin converts, but large numbers of Chin converted simultaneously as Baptists in the early 1900s. This was partially attributed to how decisions are made as a group in Chin social structures.³⁷² If one parent

³⁶⁸ Cung Lian Hup, "Formal Education and Christianity in the Chin Hills" in *Christianity and the Chins*, 63.

³⁶⁹ Sakhong, *In Search of Chin*, 154-5.

³⁷⁰ Vumson, *Zo*, 147.

³⁷¹ En Pau Khan, (Enno, S.P.K.), "Nat worship: a paradigm for doing contextual theology for Myanmar." Ph.D. diss., University of Birmingham, 1995), 22.

³⁷² Several Chin interviewees describe themselves as having a "group culture", whereby the leaders made decisions as a group. They explain how Chin leaders decided to convert on behalf of the group and the majority of the Chin followed their decision. This decision process had some cultural relevance for the Chin as it paralleled how all major decisions were made. Hao, interview by the author via email, 6 January 2009.

converted, the whole family followed suit,³⁷³ thus whole villages converted.³⁷⁴ Christianity began to replace primal beliefs, as the sacrifices and festivals were abolished. Social aspects, such as polygamy, were also affected. The Chin adopted “new ritual systems” associated with Christianity, including singing, observing the Sabbath and reading the Bible.³⁷⁵ The transformation among the Chin included a replacement of rituals, which was so extreme that some villages became entirely Christian and they did not permit any non-Christian to live there.³⁷⁶ So as well as successfully gaining converts, the Baptist missionaries’ were also instrumental in changing Chin culture.

As well as the missionaries prohibiting Chin feasts, they also prohibited rice beer or wine, known as *zu*.³⁷⁷ New converts had difficulty in abstaining from drinking alcohol, which had been customary for them. A Chin scholar criticised the missionaries for being “puritanical”, and stressed the cultural importance of alcohol in Chin festivals.³⁷⁸ One Baptist interviewee in this research expressed that moderate alcohol consumption should have been permitted, which is similar to the Chin Roman Catholics’ view, and which he also based on alcohol’s cultural and nutritional value.³⁷⁹ However, the AG interviewees in this research expressed appreciation for the abolition of alcohol because its excess had caused fighting and lack of efficiency in work; they preferred the development which the missionaries introduced.³⁸⁰ The subsequent American AG missionaries would similarly have prohibited alcohol,³⁸¹ despite

³⁷³ Qi, interview by the author, Yangon, 3 May 2010.

³⁷⁴ Wei, interview by the author, Yangon, 12 April 2010. This interviewee expressed that their conversion was compliance despite a lack of personal conviction. He gives the example of a whole family following the example of the oldest son’s conversion.

³⁷⁵ Sakhong, *In Search of Chin*, 229.

³⁷⁶ Vumson, *Zo*, 143.

³⁷⁷ Ding, interview by the author, Yangon, 8 April 2010.

³⁷⁸ Vumson, *Zo*, 146.

³⁷⁹ Chao, interview by the author, Yangon, 16 April 2010.

³⁸⁰ Wei, interview by the author, Yangon, 12 April 2010.

³⁸¹ The American AG paper on the abstinence from alcohol composed by the General Presbytery of the AOG, Springfield, Missouri, 6 August, 1985; available from http://ag.org/top/Beliefs/Position_Papers/; accessed on 6 June 2012.

this lacking biblical substantiation. However, the Chin were reluctant to criticise the missionaries, due to their appreciation of their overall contribution.

The Chin perceive that the missionaries mistakenly confused some of Chin culture, particularly their traditional music, with their primal beliefs, and that this was the reason why they abolished it. An interviewee admitted that even though their traditional music was sometimes used in the course of their primal ritual celebrations, it predominantly conjures up nostalgic memories of their culture for them now, rather than evoking spirit practices.³⁸² A Chin scholar questions whether the missionaries' abolition of Chin traditional music was necessary, arguing that in missionaries' home countries their cultural music, singing, dancing and stories have been preserved. The interviewees claim that their traditional music could have been adopted within Christianity instead.³⁸³ Likewise, their traditional singing, dancing and stories could have been adopted and these indigenous forms used to present Christianity, which would have depicted Christianity as being more congruent with Chin culture.

The missionaries' choice of language as a medium of instruction in education was also controversial. Initially the missionaries attempted to use Burmese to teach the Chin, even though the Chin only understood the Chin dialects.³⁸⁴ The missionaries' alleged rationales were because there were no words for Christian concepts in the Chin dialect, and their assumption that the Burmese language would overtake the Chin dialect. Using the Burmese language caused opposition and conflicts amongst the Chin,³⁸⁵ resulting in division, which hindered their growth.³⁸⁶ After the British defeated the Chin, they permitted Chin languages

³⁸² Chao, interview by the author, Yangon, 16 April 2010.

³⁸³ Vumson, *Zo*, 147.

³⁸⁴ Sakhong, *In Search of Chin*, 126.

³⁸⁵ Sakhong, *In Search of Chin*, 139.

³⁸⁶ Sakhong, *In Search of Chin*, 126.

in the schools,³⁸⁷ which promoted Christianity's success. The use of a vernacular language is now recognised as an essential aspect of contextualizing Christianity.

Ironically, the issue of the cost of sacrifices arose again following conversion, when the Chin were supposedly relieved of the financial burdens of providing feasts. New Christians continued to slaughter animals, with the intended purpose of extending hospitality and to express unity with other clans. The missionaries criticised the "extravagance" and expense of their feasts, which meant that this money could not be contributed towards building a theological college.³⁸⁸ The missionaries prohibited the butchering of animals because of their concerns regarding the expense, as well as to prevent syncretism with primal religious festivals. The Chin's persistence in providing feasts illustrates their cultural roles. A missiological suggestion would be to use the Chin's custom of providing feasts as an opportunity to convey unity and hospitality, which are also Christian values.

Identity is sometimes described in negative terms, of what it is not. The Chin interviewees also expressed Christianity in terms of being distinct from Chin religion, and they explicitly undermine their ancestors' belief system as inferior; one commented that "they had no religion except animism".³⁸⁹ They perceive Christianity to be a superior religion to primal religion, notwithstanding the theological similarities, which have been outlined. The Chin criticised their ancestors' culture as "primitive", including practices of "worshipping spirits", "head-hunting" and "alcoholism".³⁹⁰ Notably, "head-hunting" is a derogatory term which the Chin apparently learnt from English speakers, bearing in mind that English is not the Chin's primary language.

³⁸⁷ Sakhong, *In Search of Chin*, 154-5.

³⁸⁸ Erville Sowards, "Report on Trip to the Chin Hills Mission Field: February 10-March 23, 1952" in *Thinking about Christianity*, 79.

³⁸⁹ Chao, interview by the author, Yangon, 16 April 2010.

³⁹⁰ Chao, interview by the author, Yangon, 16 April 2010; Jie, interview by author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 22 April 2010.

The missionaries forbade primal practices in Chin culture based on the understanding that worshipping anything other than God has been prohibited in the Bible. As discussed, drinking alcohol was forbidden +by American missionaries, despite the Bible only prohibiting drunkenness, and not forbidding alcohol entirely. The prohibition of fighting and killing was introduced for theological and moral reasons, and these activities were also prohibited by the British powers. The Chin interviewees' response was unanimous that the vast majority of primal religion is incompatible with Christianity, and they associated aspects of their traditional culture with primal religion also. However, this acceptance of the abolishment of much of their traditional culture may derive from the associations which the missionaries had made, and to which the Chin have now grown accustomed. The Baptist missionaries' contribution in Chin state is recognised as a theological foundation which still influenced those who converted to Pentecostalism subsequently.

3.3. The AG Missionaries' Work in Burma from the 1930s to 1966

As already mentioned, the American AG missionaries did not reach Chin state, which is understandable because Chin state is rural with an undeveloped infrastructure, and thus it was difficult to access. Furthermore, there were only a few AG missionaries working in the whole country of Burma. The missionaries had focused primarily on Yangon, as it was the capital at the time, and on Kachin state, as the Morrisons had been ministering across the border in China. Local AG leaders introduced Pentecostalism to the Chin, and this development is examined in the next section.

This section examines the AG missionaries who went to various regions in Burma, with the first recorded AG missionaries arriving in Burma in the 1920s, followed by a more sustained work from the 1930s until 1966. Hector and Sigrid McLean arrived in Burma in the 1920s

and worked among the Melee and Loheh people groups,³⁹¹ but little is recorded about them. Leonard and Olive Bolton, who were from England, went to the Lisu in Kachin state in northern Myanmar in 1933,³⁹² joined subsequently by Clifford and Lavada Morrison in 1947.³⁹³ Subsequent AG missionaries included Glenn and Kathleen Stafford,³⁹⁴ Walter and Lucille Erola, and Ray and Bethany Trask, who ministered in various areas of Burma, including Yangon. Consequently, the AG grew and in October 1955 the General Council of the AG of Burma was established and received governmental recognition.³⁹⁵

3.3.1. The AG Missionaries' Strategy

To understand the legacy of the AG missionaries, the strategy which they used in their work in Burma is examined. A prominent AG missionary strategy was to provide theological training, thus equipping local leaders to plant churches. Morrison opened two short-term Bible schools in Burma from 1948 to 1954,³⁹⁶ and Evangel Bible Institute in Myitkyina in Kachin state was established in 1963.³⁹⁷ Even though AG scholars retrospectively praise the missionaries' foresight in emphasising training, the missionaries perceived their options to be limited to training locals.³⁹⁸ This reflects a sense of necessity because of a shortage of

³⁹¹ Hector McLean, "A Thousand Family [sic] Turn to the Lord," *The Pentecostal Evangel* (20 March, 1926): 6 in Khai, "Pentecostalism in Myanmar," 52. Khai considers them to probably be the first AG missionaries to reside in Burma. They may have been itinerating from China initially, as they had formerly been working in Yunnan, see Anderson, *Spreading Fires*, 128.

³⁹² Saw Tint Sann Oo, "The Indispensable Mission: The History of the Assemblies of God Theological Education in Myanmar" (Th.M Thesis, APTS, 2003), 19. Khai, "Pentecostalism in Myanmar," 56. Khai states that the Boltons arrived in 1924. The Kachin people group is made up of the Lisu and the Rawang people groups.

³⁹³ Walter Erola, "The Cross Above the Pagoda," *The Pentecostal Evangel* (December 4, 1955): 8, 9.

³⁹⁴ Glenn Stafford, "A Brief History of the Assemblies of God in Burma" (Unpublished paper for The Overseas Church and Missions Course at the Assemblies Of God Graduate School, December 1977), 7.

³⁹⁵ Minutes of the First General Council of the Assemblies of God of Myanmar, October 1955 in Sann Oo, "The Indispensable," 31.

³⁹⁶ Morrison himself taught in the schools, along with his daughter Geraldine, and Esther, Yang Paul's wife. Morrison, *The Missionary Challenge* (June 1952): n.p.

³⁹⁷ Sann Oo, "The Indispensable Mission," 110.

³⁹⁸ M.L. Ketcham, "A New Day Dawns In Missions: The Church in Burma Has Been Turned Over Fully to the National Believers" (17 July 1966): n.p. ; Khai, *The Cross Among the Pagodas*, 112 and also Morrison, "Developing the Indigenous": n.p.

personnel, rather than a planned preferred strategy, but it was an effective strategy nonetheless.

As well as using an American theological curriculum, the AG missionaries used the English language in their new churches and theological schools. Granted, English was widely used because Burma had been under British rule for approximately a hundred years,³⁹⁹ but this reinforced the link between Christianity and colonialism and lacked contextualization to the local culture.

Even though records about the first missionaries are limited, the McLeans allegedly converted the whole Melee people group from “idol worship”.⁴⁰⁰ There is also an account that “revival” broke out among the Loheh people, and sixty received the baptism of the Holy Spirit as a result of their ministry.⁴⁰¹ These accounts appear exaggerated, as it seems unlikely that one couple experienced such extensive conversions in two different people groups. Their emphasis on revival and the baptism of the Holy Spirit are characteristic of Pentecostalism. Their alluding to “idol worship” in reference to primal religion is also typical of their era, but may be considered politically incorrect nowadays.

Referring to Cox’s hypothesis, it appears that aspects of Pentecostal spirituality were naturally contextualized to those who formerly followed a primal religion. The characteristic initiating experience of Pentecostalism was the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which equipped believers to access other spiritual gifts including speaking in tongues and healing.⁴⁰² The AG missionaries held revival meetings which were an imported American strategy, but their

³⁹⁹ Sann Oo, “The Indispensable Mission,” 29.

⁴⁰⁰ Hector McLean, “A Thousand Family [sic] Turn to the Lord,” *The Pentecostal Evangel* (20 March, 1926): 6 in Khai, “Pentecostalism in Myanmar,” 52.

⁴⁰¹ H. McLean, “Pentecostal Revival in Burma,” *The Pentecostal Evangel* (11 September, 1926): 11 in Khai, “Pentecostalism in Myanmar,” 52.

⁴⁰² Donald E. Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007), 188-189. Chapter seven examines lay leadership “Organizing the Saints: Giving the Ministry to the People”.

prayer for the baptism of the Holy Spirit was appropriate for the spiritual worldview of those people groups who followed a primal religion.⁴⁰³ Miraculous healing appeals to the spirituality, felt needs and expectation of those from a primal religion and healing testimonies resulted in many conversions among the Lisu.⁴⁰⁴ Conversions during AG revival meetings were dramatic, involving spontaneous confession of sin and associated physical manifestations including healings, which attracted large numbers, resulting in church growth.⁴⁰⁵ However, the archives reveal that many who converted to Pentecostalism were already converts of other denominations,⁴⁰⁶ which is known to have caused conflict with the Baptists particularly, who had a more cerebral approach to faith.

The missionaries also prayed with new leaders to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit, prior to sending them out to pioneer churches.⁴⁰⁷ New local leaders were taught how to pray for healing. The missionaries' attributed the growth of new churches to the locals' "simple faith", which resulted in healings.⁴⁰⁸ It is noteworthy that it is the spiritual attributes of the locals which were highlighted as being influential, more than any particular strategy, including even theological education.

The AG missionaries' theological presuppositions and evangelism strategies are not explicitly stated in the records, but from an analysis of what they wrote, it appears that the AG

⁴⁰³ Myo Chit, "That Crazy Church" *Pentecostal Evangel* (26 July 1987): 18 and Myo Chit, "Even the Buddhist Monks are Listening," *Pentecostal Evangel* (10 February 1980): 18. Chit was formerly anti-Pentecostal but when he was baptised with the Holy Spirit he became Pentecostal and subsequently he became the pastor of Evangel church and the superintendent of the AG for several years.

⁴⁰⁴ Testimonies have been reported in Clifford Morrison, "Speaking in Known Tongues," *The Pentecostal Evangel* (3 April 1948): 7 in Khai, "Pentecostalism in Myanmar" 55.

⁴⁰⁵ An old Indian Lutheran temple was bought by Evangel Church in 1964. Chit, "That Crazy Church," 18. Myo Chit, "Preaching in the Shadow of Pagodas" *Pentecostal Evangel* (27 April 1975): 16. Even though Yangon was the capital and far from Chin state, the AG church in Yangon is relevant because many Chin moved to Yangon to find work and attend church there. Some AG churches are composed predominantly of Chin members, but other people groups may be represented as well.

⁴⁰⁶ Glenn Stafford, "Convention Time in Burma," *The Pentecostal Evangel* (23 July 1961): 11.

⁴⁰⁷ Stafford, "A Brief History," 7. Sann Oo, "The Indispensable," 29. Pentecostals were criticised for targeting those from other Christian denominations and not non-Christians.

⁴⁰⁸ Lavada R. Morrison, "In the Wilds of Burma" *Missionary Challenge* (October 1954): 1.

⁴⁰⁹ Morrison, "Developing the Indigenous," and Morrison, "God's Work", n.p.

missionaries' approaches were also confrontational and insensitive to local cultures. In one account of the Morrison ministering to an ill woman, they firstly challenged the woman's family to convert to Christianity and burn their artefacts, which were associated with "devil worship", then they expelled demons and prayed for her healing.⁴⁰⁹ This suggests that the missionaries perceived that conversion to Christianity was a necessary pre-requisite for healing; they associated her illness to a "demonic" influence because of her allegiance to primal religion, which they termed "devil worship". The sequence included first converting the family, destroying the family's primal artefacts and then performing deliverance from the spirits, and only then did they pray for healing. This represented theological assumptions about primal religion, as the missionaries felt that they needed to eradicate it before they could pray for healing. These assumptions are not unusual for Pentecostals; however, they actually reinforce primal worldviews that spirits caused sickness which can be healed by a stronger spiritual power. There is no evidence of theological dialogue, but only opposition to primal beliefs. The way in which Chin Pentecostals subsequently dealt with spirit beliefs is examined in the theology chapter.

As the AG missionaries planted new churches among the Lisu, they also introduced Christian Pentecostal liturgy. The missionaries' archives reveal that the missionaries' approach was to introduce western worship music without any evidence of using indigenous tunes or instruments. This conveyed their assumption that their western music styles were inseparably linked to Christianity and were therefore superior. Conversely, Lisu indigenous tunes were perceived as being too closely associated with primal religion and they were therefore dismissed as inappropriate for Christian worship. Morrison relates how they taught the Lisu

⁴⁰⁹ J. Clifford and Lavada Morrison, *Salwin Irrawaddy Gleanings*: 20.

to sing in the English language, and accompanied by the western instrument of an organ, which was unfamiliar to them:

Setting up the little folding organ we began teaching them how to sing the Gospel songs. Our efforts at first seemed hopeless as well as ludicrous, they had no idea of tune, time, or to keep in unison, but their brave attempts gave us courage to go on. It was a happy day when the little company could sing in perfect harmony and unison “Yes Jesus Loves Me,” and they sang it with all their hearts.⁴¹⁰

This demonstrates that Morrison’s perception of their success was in westernised terms. The lack of integration of the Lisu’s indigenous instruments could be considered an ignorant lack of insight into the possibilities of contextualizing Lisu music, however his description of the Lisu’s struggle to assimilate another culture’s norms has a disparaging tone.

Similarly, Stafford reports the “progression” from the locals initially not having any instruments to subsequently making their own guitars.⁴¹¹ His statement about their lack of musical instruments is questionable because the Lisu today report that it was that their traditional instruments were forbidden by the missionaries. They associated worship music with a western guitar, and so they made their own. Even though the missionaries introduced translated worship songs, the Lisu later developed their own indigenous songs.⁴¹² Similarly, Chin traditional instruments were forbidden by the Baptist missionaries, and the Chin also composed indigenous songs, which will be examined later.

Morrison also reports teaching the Lisu to read the “Catechism” and hymnbook, indicating that the AG missionaries formulated basic written doctrines for the Lisu. The Lisu language was already transcribed using a Romanised script,⁴¹³ created by the Baptist missionaries. This is surprising as written doctrine such as a “catechism” is not typically Pentecostal, who usually use an oral liturgy, which would also have been a more familiar form to these

⁴¹⁰ Morrisons, *Salwin Irrawaddy Gleanings*: 7.

⁴¹¹ Stafford, “A Brief History,” n.p.

⁴¹² Stafford, “A Brief History,” n.p.

⁴¹³ Morrisons, *Salwin Irrawaddy Gleanings*: 7.

minority groups who also had an oral tradition. However, the missionaries chose written forms for their pioneer work. The local Lisu received an imported western Pentecostal liturgy and imported songs, and subsequently they introduced Pentecostalism to the Chin. The Chin liturgy will be examined further in chapter four.

A typical strategy for AG missionaries was training local leaders so that they could plant indigenous churches,⁴¹⁴ so the strategy the missionaries used in Burma was a typical example. The training of local ministers involved practical ministry, including evangelism,⁴¹⁵ thus making them “self-propagating”. Morrison is recorded as visiting the new churches which the graduates had planted, and he established structure and appointed leaders,⁴¹⁶ so that the churches could become “self-governing”. At times AG churches were being planted so rapidly that they could not keep up with the demand for theologically trained leaders, and so some leaders lacked training. New believers were taught to tithe, and by giving a tenth of their income, they were able to support their own pastors and were recognised by the American AG as “self-supporting people”.⁴¹⁷ They could quickly and reasonably build their own church buildings using bamboo,⁴¹⁸ which looked like local buildings, and because they had provided the labour, they felt ownership for their churches.⁴¹⁹ It appeared that the AG missionaries’ well-planned strategy of indigenous church planting was instrumental in developing an independent local church, which grew. Bearing in mind the missionaries’ own lack of personnel, the time-consuming task of training local leaders could have been

⁴¹⁴ Hodges, *The Indigenous Church*.

⁴¹⁵ Khai, *The Cross Among the Pagodas*, 77-90.

⁴¹⁶ The missionaries taught tithing, prayer for the sick and church leadership was appointed. Khai, *The Cross Among the Pagodas*, 77-90.

⁴¹⁷ A letter from Ketcham to thank for an offering, July 8, 1959. Also Khai, “Pentecostalism in Myanmar,” 54.

⁴¹⁸ Lavada R. Morrison, “Developing the Indigenous Lisu Churches” *The Missionary Challenge* (March, 1949): n.p.

⁴¹⁹ Stafford, “A Brief Story,” 3.

postponed, and Myanmar AG scholars commend the American missionaries' strategy, particularly as they were not aware of how limited their time in Burma would be.⁴²⁰

As seen above, the Lisu churches became predominantly indigenous, as self-propagating, self-governing and self-supporting churches. This was observed particularly when the AG missionaries returned to Burma following their departure during the Second World War; on their return, they discovered that the Lisu churches had continued to grow in their absence.⁴²¹ As a result, the missionaries acknowledged the locals' independence and that Pentecostalism was spreading among the "tribal" people indigenously.⁴²²

Despite the churches being indigenous, in the sense of being largely independent of foreign assistance, the Lisu did not appear to contextualize their liturgy or theology in their churches to their own culture; they imitated the American missionaries' strategies of western style preaching, holding revivals and using literature for evangelism. Lisu leaders continued to teach theology using the same western curricula, with no evidence of integrating their own cultural forms to contextualize theology. This tendency to preserve the perceived authenticity of the message in the original forms in which it was received is typical among first generation Christians as they lack the objectivity to discern which aspects are cultural.

3.3.2. A Comparison of the Baptist and AG Missionaries' Strategies

Considering that there were only ever a handful of AG missionaries, and that their service was intercepted by the war, visa restraints and taking furloughs, it is remarkable that they established an independent movement within this time frame. Some Chin attribute the AG's success predominantly to the theological training received by locals from the AG

⁴²⁰ Saw Tint Sann Oo, ongoing email conversations with the author, 2011-2012.

⁴²¹ Stafford, "A Brief Story," 3. The missionaries' departure is also true in Chinram and from 1942-1946 there were not any foreign missionaries living in Chinram. Sakhong, *In Search of Chin*, 197.

⁴²² Lavada Morrison, *Missionary Challenge* (April 1949): 13 in Chin Khua Khai, "Pentecostalism in Myanmar," 55.

missionaries.⁴²³ One scholar perceives that the lack of missionaries throughout the years was in fact fortuitous in increasing the locals' independence in church planting.⁴²⁴ During the missionaries' time in Burma, the locals had already been participating in evangelism and church planting, and so the locals were not overly dependent on the missionaries..

Before examining Baptist missionaries to the Chin, it is noteworthy that Judson's contextualised theological materials were written as early as 1829, as well as translating the Burmese Bible.⁴²⁵ The Baptist missionaries to the Chin did create a text and translate the Bible. However, they were not known for contextualizing to accommodate primal religion theologically, either in written or oral forms.

As Baptist missionaries had arrived in Burma first, they encountered and confronted more of the original primal religion and traditional culture, which set a foundation before the AG missionaries arrived. For example, the Baptist missionaries had forbidden traditional dancing used in primal ceremonies, warning the Chin that they could not go to heaven if they danced;⁴²⁶ however Pentecostals subsequently permitted a form of spontaneous dancing during worship, which permitted a degree of freedom.

The Baptists were encouraged socio-economic development through education, clinics and agricultural training. As western methods were employed, and the missionaries worked in conjunction with the British powers, the Baptist missionaries had a significant westernising influence. Despite the cultural changes imposed by the missionaries on the Chin, the Chin interviewees still expressed gratitude for the missionaries' introduction of Christianity, to the extent of even conveying disdain for their own former traditional culture.⁴²⁷ Many Chin

⁴²³ Lian Sian, *Assemblies of God Mission*, 21.

⁴²⁴ Sann Oo, "The Indispensable Mission," 33.

⁴²⁵ U. Kyaw Than, "Burma: Theologizing for Selfhood and Service" in Gerald H. Anderson, *Asian Voices in Christian Theology*, ed. Gerald H. Anderson (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1978), 55-6.

⁴²⁶ Hua, interview by the author, Yangon, 18 April 2010.

⁴²⁷ Wei, interview by the author, Yangon, 12 April 2010.

interviewees appreciated the Baptist missionaries' development work, which produced economic advancements by composing the Chin written language, translation work and the development of agriculture and education.⁴²⁸ These Chin perceive that the Baptist missionaries' contribution to education was foundational to the Chin's social development, thus transforming Chin society.⁴²⁹ Western education and development was perceived as bringing freedom from Burmese, Buddhist oppression, and was a very effective strategy for improving the Chin socio-economic status.⁴³⁰

However, some Chin criticise the missionaries for westernising Chin culture,⁴³¹ objecting that aspects of their culture were prohibited unnecessarily.⁴³² They discern that cultural changes were not essentially Christian, but were based on the missionaries' own western ideals. Westernisation had the impact of leading the Chin to view their traditional culture as a hindrance to their socio-economic progress.⁴³³ They perceived their former culture as backward because they had endured more poverty prior to western development. Conversely, some Chin complain that the missionaries emphasised evangelism to the detriment of assisting the Chin to develop even further. Some Chin felt that the missionaries did not portray Christianity as relevant to their poor socio-economic context: "heaven is forced to stay aloof from earth, spirit from body, pulpit from family, spiritual from social".⁴³⁴ The western worldview separates material and spiritual aspects, which does not contextualize Christianity for the Chin.

⁴²⁸ Ming, interview by the author, Yangon, 9 April 2010.

⁴²⁹ Lian Hup, "Formal Education," 63.

⁴³⁰ Anthony Thawng Hlei, "Christian Mission in the Chin Hills" in Zomi Theological College, *Chin Church History* (Falam, Chin State: Zomi Theological College, 2007), 41; Lian Hup, "Formal Education," 68. Sakhong, *In Search of Chin*, 154-5, 170.

⁴³¹ Ming, interview by the author, Yangon, 9 April 2010.

⁴³² Tao, interview by the author, Kalaymyo, 22 April 2010.

⁴³³ Hua, interview by the author, Yangon, 30 April 2010.

⁴³⁴ Do Sian Thang, *Chin Church History* (Falam: Zomi Theological College, 2007), Preface v.

Despite the missionaries' unfamiliarity with Chin culture, they held enough authority to strip the Chin of many cultural norms. Some Chin now argue that the reason why the early missionaries were so influential was that the Chin did not have their own Bible, so the Chin literally accepted and obeyed whatever the missionaries said.⁴³⁵ Despite the Chin's traditional oral culture and initial struggle to adopt literary forms, this statement indicates the Chin's subsequent eagerness to have the Bible in their own language, and their confidence in interpreting the Bible for themselves.

Some commend the AG missionaries' work as resembling the apostle Paul, which was particularly admirable as they were not aware that they would be expelled and that their time was limited. However, some Chin critique the American missionaries' strategies, especially that the literary materials for discipleship were translated directly from America.⁴³⁶ Evangel Bible College in Yangon used the ICI (International Correspondence Institute) curriculum, which was designed in America,⁴³⁷ and which was translated without contextualization, and so the course was not designed specifically for Burma. Chin interviewees expressed a need for theological materials in their own language, both translated and written specifically for their native context.

An interviewee posed the question of whether it is feasible for Chin pastors, who have been trained using American theological frameworks and mission strategies, to proceed to plant indigenous churches, and develop their own indigenous theology.⁴³⁸ Based on the missionaries' model, the requirements for leadership shifted from being inherited by the chiefs' sons to those who had obtained a theological education, and so theological education is highly sought after because status is revered in Chin culture. Despite more Chin receiving

⁴³⁵ Ding, interview by the author, Yangon, 8 April 2010.

⁴³⁶ Hao, interview with the author via email, 6 January 2009.

⁴³⁷ "Evangel Bible College: From Camp to Campus," *Pentecostal Evangel* (July 26, 1987). ICC is now known as Global University.

⁴³⁸ Hao, interview with the author via email, 6 January 2009.

theological education, their difficulty in developing contextualized theology is because of being educated in western systematic theology, and secular education systems are also westernised. If theology is taught in English, they struggle to communicate equivalent theological concepts in their own language.⁴³⁹ This hinders the development of local theology in other contexts too, not just in Asia; the problem was also observed in Europe when theological teaching was conducted in English, rather than the students' native languages.

Apart from establishing theological training schools, the AG were not as involved in secular education as the Baptists. Even though the AG missionaries started a clinic, they put more emphasis on supernatural healing, which reinforced the spiritual causation of illness as understood in primal religion. Other factors contributing to the AG missionaries' success were supernatural manifestations, which are characteristic of Pentecostalism. Signs and wonders signified overcoming spiritual powers,⁴⁴⁰ which were understood in terms of a superior spiritual power in their primal worldview. Theologically, the AG missionaries' emphasis on the Holy Spirit was more contextualised to primal beliefs than the Baptists' more cerebral domination and literary liturgy. The Pentecostals' practical responses of using spiritual power were also acknowledged, by a Chin Baptist interviewee, as being more relevant to the Chin worldview.⁴⁴¹ However, just to clarify, Pentecostal spirituality had elements which were naturally contextualized to Chin culture at the level of practices, but there was little evidence of Pentecostals contextualizing at the level of beliefs or consciously working out a theology which would be contextualized to their culture.

As the Chin re-evaluate the missionaries' western theological contribution, they are still exploring what Christianity looks like in Chin culture. The missionaries set a precedent for forbidding cultural practices, and many contemporary Chin Christians are now ignorant of

⁴³⁹ Classmates in APTS, during my study in the Philippines, 8 April 2010.

⁴⁴⁰ Lou, interview by the author via email, 19 October 2009.

⁴⁴¹ Hua, interview by the author, Yangon, 30 April 2010.

traditional folklore and songs, which a Chin scholar described as a deprivation of their “natural heritage”.⁴⁴² Singing folk songs and attending traditional ceremonies were considered non-Christian, so there was a move away from their oral culture, which meant less circulation of stories and myths.

Wherever there were perceived omissions in theologising, some Chin interviewees reason that it was impossible for the missionaries to give guidance on all aspects of the Chin’s cultural practices.⁴⁴³ This shows their consideration of the missionaries and awareness that there were theological gaps which they had to consider for themselves. Considering the lack of missionaries, and their lack of knowledge about Chin culture, it is not surprising that they did not address every cultural issue. The missionaries subsequently apologised for “destroying the culture”⁴⁴⁴, as they subsequently re-evaluated how they dealt with Chin culture. The missionaries’ approaches were typical of their era, but missiological practices have changed in recent years, as local cultures are more valued and as Christianity is being distinguished from western culture. However, globalizing influences have also changed the cultures of formerly isolated people groups.

This critique of missionaries leads into their own discovery of their identity, as a minority group in Myanmar. The Chin have varied responses to the missionaries’ contribution, ranging from adopting the missionaries’ forms unquestioningly, thus fully owning the received forms, redeeming lost cultural aspects in an attempt to make Christianity more relevant to their culture, interpreting Christianity in different ways to adapt to Chin culture, and reversion to traditional culture in objection to the missionaries’ destruction. This range varies organically depending on peoples’ experiences and perceptions regarding their cultural and religious

⁴⁴² Vumson, *Zo*, 146.

⁴⁴³ Ding, interview by the author, Yangon, 8 April 2010.

⁴⁴⁴ Hua, interview by the author, Yangon, 30 April 2010.

identities. The Chin who revered the missionaries' changes would be reluctant to consciously contextualize theology to Chin culture.

3.3.3. The Success of Pentecostalism among those from Primal Religious Backgrounds

Pentecostal missionaries' success in Burma among those from primal religious backgrounds may substantiate Cox's hypothesis outlined in chapter one. An AG missionary commented as follows regarding the work among the Lisu people who formerly adhered to a primal religion: "Had we sufficient help, thousands more could and would be added to the church as the hearts of the people are very open and receptive to the message of salvation."⁴⁴⁵ Pentecostal missionaries reported this distinction between the openness of those from "animist and spirit worship" backgrounds, compared with the Buddhists in Burma.⁴⁴⁶ Stafford proposes that the reason why Buddhists did not readily convert to Christianity was because Buddhism already had an established philosophy and literature and was associated with Burmese national identity.⁴⁴⁷ Concurrently Christianity was associated with colonialism, so their political identity deterred conversions.

3.3.4. The American AG Missionaries' Approach to Contextualization

There was predominantly a lack of contextualization evident from an analysis of the AG missionary archives. However, the AG missionary Bolton demonstrated an awareness of the need to preserve Lisu culture, and he perceived that his efforts to do this was successful. "We taught them God's Word but did not try to change their customs if they did not conflict with scripture. In their culture, they are still Lisu."⁴⁴⁸ However his desire to change certain Lisu customs which he understood to be in conflict with the Bible could be challenged, as he may be referring predominantly to the examples previously discussed, such as music and alcohol.

⁴⁴⁵ Morrison, "Developing the Indigenous", n.p.

⁴⁴⁶ Christine Carmichael, "Burma," *Pentecostal Evangel* 21 (25 September 1960): 22.

⁴⁴⁷ Kathleen Stafford, interview by the author, via Skype, 22 October 2009.

⁴⁴⁸ Leonard Bolton, *China Call* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1984), 156.

Bolton's conclusion that "they are still Lisu" in their culture, actually contradicts how the Lisu perceived themselves, as they felt that they had lost important aspects.

The Morrisons appeared pleased to report changes among the Lisu, including their tendency to now keep cleaner houses,⁴⁴⁹ suggesting an association between hygiene and Christianity. The American field director reported that tobacco or betel was no longer used by Christians, demonstrating his appreciation of lifestyle changes post-conversion.⁴⁵⁰ It is debatable whether the prohibition of smoking and alcoholism are Christian standards or imposed cultural norms. Morrison also noted how the Lisu treated each other better as Christians, suggesting moral and social improvement. Their exchange in "spiritual objects" was attributed to the gospel's power, as artefacts used for "devil worship" such as feathers, shells and branches were replaced with a hymn book and portions of the New Testament.⁴⁵¹ This contrasts the concrete symbols of primal religion with the literary symbols of Christianity.

Chin state was Christianised, as church buildings were built in the middle of villages and they sang and read the Bible in their homes.⁴⁵² The significance of church buildings replaced that of altars, which they had formerly used for sacrifices. Whole villages became Christian, and they even excommunicated people from the village until they repented.⁴⁵³ This behaviour represented their concept of identity, creating borders around their village, and reflected the Chin's group consciousness and shame culture. This kind of excommunication may have been inspired by Paul's recommendation to "expel the immoral brother" in his letter to the Corinthians.⁴⁵⁴ The Chin applied biblical principles to their own community; but this decision would be considered extreme in other contexts.

⁴⁴⁹ Lavada Morrison, "Remarkable Progress in New Territory," *Pentecostal Evangel* (22 October 1938): 6.

⁴⁵⁰ Maynard L. Ketcham, "Indigenous District—Burma," *World Challenge* (August, 1959): n.p.

⁴⁵¹ Lavada Morrison, "Remarkable Progress in New Territory," *Pentecostal Evangel* (22 October 1938): 6. Morrison, *Salwin Irrawaddy Gleanings*: 7.

⁴⁵² Maynard L. Ketcham, "Indigenous District—Burma," *World Challenge* (August, 1959): n.p.

⁴⁵³ Maynard L. Ketcham, "Indigenous District—Burma," *World Challenge* (August, 1959): n.p.

⁴⁵⁴ 1 Corinthians 5: 13 "Expel the immoral brother."

Kathleen Stafford, who was still alive and contactable via skype, was interviewed regarding the AG missionaries' attempts at contextualization to the local culture. She related that they tried to adapt to Burmese culture with gestures such as removing their shoes before preaching and wearing the Burmese *longgyi*, but that they struggled with learning the Burmese language.⁴⁵⁵ Removing shoes is a gesture of respect used in Asia especially before entering Buddhist temples, and was adopted by Burmese Christians. Apart from these gestures, Stafford regretted that the American AG missionaries were not sufficiently knowledgeable of the Burmese language or culture, which they felt guilty about.⁴⁵⁶ The findings from this interview were not surprising considering the missionaries' reports that I had read, and it was not uncommon at the time for Pentecostal missionaries to be culturally unprepared.

3.3.4.1.A Lisu's Perception of the Missionaries' Approach to Culture

To obtain a recipient's perspective of the missionaries, a contemporary Lisu AG leader was interviewed. He reflects on the missionaries' lack of cultural awareness and his subsequent disappointment with their loss in culture. I quote from his email directly:

...regarding contextualizing of mission among our people, it is sometime hard to say, because of American mission, our people heard the gospel of Jesus Christ and we could hand over this pentecostal experiences to other tribe of people in Myanmar. Yeah! they could also stay in our Lisu culture. They ate and wear the same like our people in some time. But genative sense, some of our valuable culture were abolished, still we do not use our traditional musical instrument, instead of we use guitar and so on. even we do not use our traditional song tune. they brought to us not only gospel but also western culture [sic].⁴⁵⁷

As related by Stafford, the missionaries' gestures of eating local food and wearing local clothes are acknowledged as efforts to identify with Lisu culture, but this respondent misses the deeper aspects of culture, which are now lost. Notwithstanding his gratitude to the missionaries for bringing Christianity, which they felt privileged to be equipped to pass on to other people groups, there is tension in his lament for the loss of Lisu music and culture.

⁴⁵⁵ Kathleen Stafford, interview by the author, via Skype, 22 October 2009.

⁴⁵⁶ Kathleen Stafford, interview by the author, via Skype, 22 October 2009.

⁴⁵⁷ Rin, interview by the author via email, 20 October 2009.

Since the missionaries left, they have not been able to recover these and so the changes have been irreversible. The reasons for not recovering their culture were not specified, but their loyalty to the missionaries and a complete change in culture have contributed'; hence the questions throughout this research regarding how the Chin contextualize their theology.

3.3.5. The Contribution of Local Leaders

Missionaries' newsletters have been analysed in this research, while bearing in mind that their original purpose was to report about their ministry to gain financial and prayer support, and naturally they write about their own contribution. Although the local leaders' contribution is usually omitted in the newsletters, the locals' contribution has been particularly significant in the growth of the AG in Myanmar.⁴⁵⁸ "Paul Yang" was a Chinese Lisu evangelist who is mentioned in the missionaries' archives; he had been ministering among the Lisu in southwest China along with the Morrisons.⁴⁵⁹ When "tribesmen" from a similar people group in Burma invited the Morrisons to minister in 1931, they sent Paul Yang to Burma instead.⁴⁶⁰ This may be delegating someone perceived as inferior, but it meant that Yang introduced Pentecostalism with a local face, clothing and language, as an insider of their Lisu culture.⁴⁶¹ However, it is likely that Yang would have brought with him influences gleaned from the missionaries, as they had renamed him with an anglicised biblical name.⁴⁶² This was a common practice among missionaries, but often resulted in locals' true identity being unknown, regardless of how valuable their contribution.⁴⁶³

⁴⁵⁸ See Allan Anderson, "The Origins of Pentecostalism and its Global Spread in the Early Twentieth Century," *Transformation* 22, no.3 (July 2005): 177-8.

⁴⁵⁹ Khai, "Pentecostalism in Myanmar, 55. Also see Khai, *The Cross Among the Pagodas*, 77-90.

⁴⁶⁰ Khai, *The Cross Among the Pagodas*, 77-90.

⁴⁶¹ Lavada R. Morrison, "Developing the Indigenous Lisu Churches," *The Missionary Challenge* (March 1949): n.p.

⁴⁶² His name appears in many documents written by missionaries and Burmese and it is usually spelt "Yang Paul" but sometimes appears as "Yan Paul". This was a biblical name assigned by the missionaries.

⁴⁶³ Anderson, *An Introduction*, 183.

The missionary archives report that Yang initially preached in the villages without success until an alleged miraculous healing was reported, following which the whole village converted to Christianity.⁴⁶⁴ This appears to be a bold claim, however their medical facilities were poor and the Lisu had believed in a primal religion similar to the Chin, which maintained that the spirits caused sickness. Therefore, a Pentecostal supernatural manifestation of spiritual power would have been persuasive. Also, their social structure resulted in group decisions, similar to the group conversions which were previously seen in how the Chin had converted to the Baptist faith. As the AG missionaries' strategy was to train local leaders to be active in church planting, it is fair to assume that there were many other leaders who contributed to the growth of the AG, but whose names are unknown. Incidentally, Pentecostalism's typical strategy of early leadership selection and training are recognised as significant contributing factors for church growth.⁴⁶⁵

34. The Takeover of the AG by National Leadership 1966-1975

This brief section examines the period following the missionaries' expulsion from Burma in 1966, when the local Myanmar AG leaders were challenged to step into national leadership positions previously held by missionaries. This includes an examination of the spread of Pentecostalism to other regions of Burma, including Chin state.

On 4th January 1948 Burma obtained its independence and attempted to establish a parliamentary democracy. However, a socialist system succeeded as General Ne Win took the lead. The Burmese responded to British colonialism with a greater sense of nationalism, and reacted against Christianity as the religion of the western ruling power.⁴⁶⁶ The association between colonialism and Christian missionaries is common. In Burma the government

⁴⁶⁴ Lavada R. Morrison, "God's work Among the Lisu," *Pentecostal Evangel* (24 August 1946): 3.

⁴⁶⁵ C. Peter Wagner, "A Church Growth Perspective on Pentecostal Missions," in *Called and Empowered: Global Mission in Pentecostal Perspective*, ed. Murray A. Kempster, Byron D. Klaus and Douglas Peterson (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 277.

⁴⁶⁶ Taylor, "British Policy," 75.

closely associated the colonialists and the foreign missionaries because they were contemporaries, and they were both western; the colonialists protected and employed some of the missionaries, and so they cooperated with each other. Erola had worked as a liaison officer,⁴⁶⁷ and Stafford served under General Stilwell in 1944-45.⁴⁶⁸ As colonialism implied western superiority and the subjugation of nationals, such an association was not conducive to winning favour for Christianity among Burmese Buddhists who were striving for independence.

Amidst mounting opposition towards foreign missionaries, the government refused to renew missionary visas in 1966 and foreign missionaries were expelled from Burma, mainly because of their perceived associations with the former colonial rule.⁴⁶⁹ Subsequently, the private schools, universities and hospitals which had been built by the missionaries became government property.⁴⁷⁰ Burma became disconnected from the rest of the world following the missionaries' departure because foreigners were denied access, and there was no internet and less media at that time.

The superintendent of the American AG in Asia, Maynard Ketcham flew into Yangon to attend the official handover. The AG missionaries had to amend the AG constitution to permit national leaders to take over the positions within the General Council.⁴⁷¹ Formerly, the only national leader represented on the General Council was Moses Fish,⁴⁷² indicating the missionaries' intention to maintain their own leadership roles. Such an early conferral on locals is not the norm for American AG as missionaries usually work alongside local churches for several years. However, Ketcham reported that the takeover was an opportunity

⁴⁶⁷ Erola, "The Cross Above the Pagoda": 8, 9.

⁴⁶⁸ Stafford, "A Brief History," 7.

⁴⁶⁹ Than, "Burma," 57.

⁴⁷⁰ Khua, *The Cross Among Pagodas*, 13.

⁴⁷¹ Glenn Stafford, a report to Maynard Ketcham, Field Director for the Far East (6 June 1964), 1-4 in Sann Oo, "The Indispensable Mission," 33.

⁴⁷² Fish's real name is "Ngwa" meaning "Fish" in English, this English version along with the biblical name "Moses" was given to him by the missionaries.

for the locals to take charge and develop their own AG movement in their own direction.⁴⁷³

While appearing to recognise the local leaders' potential for independence, this was not actually a planned strategy, but it was a necessity because of the government. The subsequent independence of the Myanmar AG, where the locals were left to theologise without missionary input makes them a somewhat unique context in which to examine how the locals contextualized their theology to their own culture.

At the official handover ceremony of AG Burma from the missionaries to the locals, Samuel Fish was elected as the first national superintendent to initiate this new era of independence. His response to his commissioning expresses gratitude for the missionaries' contribution in establishing the AG, but he conveyed determination not to just lament their loss, but rather to seize the opportunity to derive fresh empowerment for their new leadership challenges from their own dependence on the Holy Spirit.⁴⁷⁴ "Pastor Ketcham, we are going to miss you, your missionaries, your material and spiritual benefits—but you are not going to take the **Holy Spirit** out of Burma, are you?"⁴⁷⁵ Similarly, the AG missionary Bolton expressed that the government's restrictions on the church could not expel the Holy Spirit, who would continue to reside in Burma.⁴⁷⁶ This suggests that Fish had inherited this emphasis on the Holy Spirit from the American missionaries, which is characteristic of Pentecostals. However, an emphasised Pneumatology is also relevant for those from primal religion, who related easily to the spiritual realm. The way that Chin Pentecostals contextualize their Pneumatology will be examined subsequently.

Considering that they were facing opposition from the government, their pragmatic spirituality of dependence on the Holy Spirit may appear an overly spiritual approach.

⁴⁷³ Ketcham, "A New Day Dawns," and also Khai, *The Cross Among the Pagodas*, 112.

Khai, "Pentecostalism in Myanmar," 58.

⁴⁷⁴ Like Moses Fish, Samuel was also assigned English and biblical names by the missionaries.

⁴⁷⁵ Interview with Maynard Ketcham, Springfield Missouri, June 1982 in Bolton, *China Call*, 215. Moses, John and Samuel Fish are mentioned.

⁴⁷⁶ Bolton, *China Call*, 216.

However, in addition to this claim to rely on the Holy Spirit, locals had already been planting churches indigenously, and so they had achieved a level of independence already. Following this dependence on the Holy Spirit at the takeover, Myanmar AG subsequently developed greater appreciation for the Bible and other forms of theology.

Despite these confident public statements, the missionaries were quite concerned that the AG in Burma might be wiped out in 1966, along with their own expulsion, because of the government's hostility,⁴⁷⁷ and pessimism about the resilience of their protégés.⁴⁷⁸ Their concerns were well founded, because in the initial stages following the missionaries' departure, the AG church struggled under the government's opposition. Evangel church in Yangon dwindled to ten or fifteen members and fell into debt. As the political crisis subsided somewhat, people resumed their attendance at Evangel church and invested their resources, thus acquiring a sense of ownership of their church again. Evangel church recovered, which Myo Chit, the pastor at that time, attributed to miraculous answers to prayer, and finances became available to pay off their debt.⁴⁷⁹ Subsequently, Chit held revival meetings, in which the church experienced such an outpouring of the Holy Spirit that crowds were attracted and the church grew to greater numbers of 400 to 500 congregants.⁴⁸⁰ The combination of miraculous provision and the Holy Spirit's manifestations provided evidence of their stated reliance on the Holy Spirit.

Meanwhile in Northern Burma, the General Council had encouraged church planting endeavours.⁴⁸¹ As several new churches were established, and church membership increased, they soon realised their lack of qualified leaders to lead the churches, and that it was necessary to also train more church leaders. Formerly, it had been the missionaries who had

⁴⁷⁷ Sann Oo, "The Indispensable Mission," 33.

⁴⁷⁸ Chit, "That Crazy Church," 17; Khai, "Pentecostalism in Myanmar," 58.

⁴⁷⁹ Chit, "Even the Buddhist," 18. Also in Bolton, *China Call*, 216.

⁴⁸⁰ Chit, "That Crazy Church," 17 and Khai, "Pentecostalism in Myanmar," 58.

⁴⁸¹ Sann Oo, "The Indispensable Mission," 34. Chit, "That Crazy Church": 20.

trained leaders theologically, while the local leaders had concentrated on church planting. These newly independent local leaders now realised that they needed to expand their role to provide theological education, and that this required more than their simplistic dependence on the Holy Spirit, which they had at first declared.

3.4.1. Pentecostalism's Spread to Other Regions of Burma including Chin State

During this time, Pentecostalism spread among people groups in additional regions, including the Chin. There are varied accounts of how Pentecostalism was introduced to the Chin, and it is likely that there were several contributors with various influences. Following the Morrisons' ministry among the Lisu in Kachin state, Lisu converts introduced Pentecostalism to the neighbouring Chin,⁴⁸² but so too did the nearby Rawang and Lhao-vo people groups.⁴⁸³ Others trace how the Lakher (Mara) Pentecostals, who were a similar people group to the Chin in Mizoram, India, experienced revival, and how this had influenced the Chin.⁴⁸⁴ Another influence was Chit, the former pastor of Evangel church, who subsequently became the superintendent of Myanmar AG. Chit was a Burmese himself, but he introduced a Chin Baptist, Hau Lian Kham to Pentecostalism, during Kham's visit to Yangon. Chit visited Chin state in 1972 and preached in "crusades", in which Kham translated for him, and Pentecostalism grew rapidly from these meetings.⁴⁸⁵ Regardless of the exact entry point, Pentecostalism was presented to the Chin by Myanmar people groups, and thus appeared less foreign. However, it is recognised that the local leaders had been influenced by training received from western missionaries.

⁴⁸² "Field Focus: Burma." *Assemblies of God, Division of Foreign Mission*. Geography, history, religion, people of Burma, N.D.

⁴⁸³ Khai, "Pentecostalism in Myanmar, 55. Also Khai, *The Cross Among the Pagodas*, 77-90.

⁴⁸⁴ Khai, *The Cross Among the Pagodas*, 108.

⁴⁸⁵ Sann Oo, "The Indispensable Mission," 37.

Kham himself began preaching a message to be “born again” in Chin state from 1971, which caused conflict with the Baptists,⁴⁸⁶ despite the “born again” message being a biblical evangelistic message, usually supported by Baptists. Allegedly, the Baptists were only preaching “good works” at the time,⁴⁸⁷ and they expelled Kham from the Baptist church in 1973.⁴⁸⁸ Kham switched his allegiance to the AG and encouraged other evangelical churches to join him.⁴⁸⁹ He started the first AG church in Chin state in his father-in-law’s house in 1977.⁴⁹⁰ Pentecostalism’s “transfer growth”⁴⁹¹ from other denominations, rather than from among “unbelievers”, naturally upset the Baptists.⁴⁹² However, Chin Pentecostals argue that converts were also won from those who still followed primal religion.⁴⁹³

3.4.2. Pentecostalism’s Contextualization to the Chin

From the very outset, some typically Pentecostal characteristics were considered to be well contextualized to Chin culture. Pentecostalism offered an encounter with the power of God, an avenue for emotional expression, and offered all members the opportunity to exercise spiritual gifts.⁴⁹⁴ As everyone was now believed to have direct access to the Holy Spirit, rather than reliance on a specialised priest acting as a mediator of spiritual power as was the case in in primal religion, Pentecostalism empowered the Chin even more as, in a sense, they were the “priesthood of believers”.⁴⁹⁵ This gave them a sense of independence and of owning their beliefs. Miracles were impressive to the Chin because their worldview incorporated

⁴⁸⁶ Sann Oo, *The Indispensable Mission*, 36-37. Hau Lian Kham met Myo Chit’s brother at Baptist seminary and through this connection he attended Evangel church in Yangon and had met Myo Chit.

⁴⁸⁷ Sann Oo, *The Indispensable Mission*, 127-9. For more details, see Chin Khaw Khai, “Dynamics of Renewal: A Historical Movement Among the Zomi (Chin) in Myanmar.” (Ph.D. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1999).

⁴⁸⁸ Chin Khua Khai, “Legacy of Hau Lian Kham (1944-1995): A Revivalist, Equipper and Transformer for the Zomi-Chin People of Myanmar,” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 4/1 (2001): 99-107.

⁴⁸⁹ Khai, “Dynamics of Renewal,” 269-275.

⁴⁹⁰ Khai, “Legacy of Hau Lian Kham”: 99-107.

⁴⁹¹ The term “transfer growth” refers to church members changing from one church to another, so a church may grow by other Christians joining them, but may not include making new converts.

⁴⁹² Ding, interview by the author, Yangon, 8 April 2010.

⁴⁹³ Khai, “Pentecostalism in Myanmar”: 60.

⁴⁹⁴ Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 27.

⁴⁹⁵ 1 Peter 2:9.

interaction with the spirit realm. In this way, the Pentecostals were effective because of their “power encounters”, which were readily contextualized to the Chin’s spiritual needs.

A Chin scholar stated that Pentecostal ministry, accompanied by the working of the Holy Spirit is a “great challenge to the Buddhist and Animistic practices”⁴⁹⁶ demonstrating his ongoing acknowledgment of the leadership and power of the Holy Spirit, especially in relation to evangelising those from other belief systems. However, even though many converted from primal religion, not so many were converted from Buddhist backgrounds.

Pentecostal spirituality, including manifestations of the Holy Spirit, particularly appealed to the Chin.⁴⁹⁷ On the other hand, the overall structure and strategies of preaching, church planting and revival meetings were replicated from the West and were not specifically contextualized to those from primal religious backgrounds. Local AG leaders imitated the missionaries’ model of holding “crusades” or “revival meetings”, which involved worship, preaching, prayer for healing, and the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, some of the prior meetings which had been arranged by the missionaries in Yangon included similar manifestations of the Holy Spirit and lasted for several hours. At any rate, as will be discussed later, the Chin could identify with Pentecostal spirituality and so Pentecostal churches grew rapidly. Church growth is not always indicative of evangelistic strategies or of church structures being well contextualized to the culture.

3.5. Spiritual Renewal among the Chin in the 1970s until the Present

The next period marked a time of revival in Chin state which transformed Chin society in the 1970s. To clarify what is meant here by “revival”, it is not just an organised “revival meeting”, which does not necessarily comprise revival. By “revival” I mean multiple

⁴⁹⁶ Khai, “Pentecostalism in Myanmar”: 70-71.

⁴⁹⁷ Khai, “Dynamics of Renewal,” 263, 267, 270.

conversions, manifestations of the Holy Spirit and spiritual fervour, which spreads and results in church growth.

Prior to the revival in Chin state, Kham had felt disturbed by the prevalent apathy and “liberal” teaching among his fellow Baptists. He organised prayer meetings in the Baptist church to intercede for spiritual renewal in Tedim, and subsequently he organised a “crusade” in 1973, which incited evangelistic zeal. During this time, AG leaders introduced Pentecostalism and held meetings, which extended into a renewal lasting from 1970s-1990s.⁴⁹⁸ Kham is revered in the AG because thousands of Chin converted to Christianity through his ministry.⁴⁹⁹ The Chin themselves describe how their faith was renewed,⁵⁰⁰ as they sought “true faith”.⁵⁰¹

Lay people were being converted and baptized with the Holy Spirit, and they went to local villages evangelising.⁵⁰² Wherever the revival spread, churches opened up soon after.⁵⁰³ The Chin’s understanding of the baptism with the Holy Spirit was typically Pentecostal, as a second spiritual experience evidenced by the ability to speak in tongues.⁵⁰⁴ The Chin also experienced other manifestations, which were attributed to the Holy Spirit,⁵⁰⁵ including deliverance, being “slain in the Spirit”, and crying, and laughter “in the Spirit”.⁵⁰⁶ These spiritual manifestations are not unique to the Chin, as they are also common in other contexts where revival is experienced,⁵⁰⁷ but they were well received by the Chin.

⁴⁹⁸ Khai, “Dynamics of Renewal,” 263, 267, 270.

⁴⁹⁹ Khai, *The Cross Among Pagodas*, 134.

⁵⁰⁰ Yu, interview by the author, Yangon, 30 April 2010.

⁵⁰¹ Tao, interview by the author, Kalaymyo, 22 April 2010.

⁵⁰² Kam Cin Hau, “The Pentecostal Distinctive in Chin State” (B.Min Thesis, Bethel Bible College, Tedim, Myanmar, n.d.), 18. In Khai, “Renewal Among the Zomi,” 274.

⁵⁰³ Khai, *The Cross Among Pagodas*, 134.

⁵⁰⁴ Khai, “Pentecostalism in Myanmar”: 63.

⁵⁰⁵ Tao, interview by the author, Kalaymyo, 22 April 2010.

⁵⁰⁶ Khai, “Pentecostalism in Myanmar”: 60.

⁵⁰⁷ Revival meetings are a series of services usually with worship music and a sermon to inspire spiritual fervency in those who are already Christian. These were organised as a series of meetings usually over a specified period of time, held in a church building or a tent. However, these revival meetings should not be confused with actual revival, which is not just a meeting but there is a state of spiritual renewal and conversions take place.

Pentecostalism spread rapidly among the minority people groups, as whole people groups converted to Christianity simultaneously, who in turn converted another entire people group. Similarly, in Chin state, whole villages converted to Pentecostalism simultaneously and allegedly “heathen” practices fell away.⁵⁰⁸ As the village was the central point of their community, spreading from village to village followed their social structure. However, the simplicity implied in the statement that “heathen” practices disappeared is questionable, as primal religion had been so pervasive among the Chin that some co-existing practices and syncretism were likely.

3.5.1. Baptist Conversions Disputed

It is important to point out/clarify that the Chin renewal was initiated among the Baptists, as Kham had been a Baptist minister. The Baptists also experienced a charismatic renewal at this time,⁵⁰⁹ alongside the growth experienced by the AG. The Chin’s group decision to convert was challenged in the sermons as not being valid, and they were encouraged to be “born again”; many Chin made individual decisions to convert at that time.⁵¹⁰

However, Chin Pentecostals proselytised some Baptists in the 1970s, which understandably caused conflict with the Baptists. Some Baptists were third-generation post their group conversion at that time, and Pentecostals criticised them as being spiritually apathetic,⁵¹¹ which the Baptists refuted.⁵¹² Their clash involved different perceptions of conversion.

Pentecostals only recognised individual conversions and not group decisions.⁵¹³ The Baptists’ initial group conversions were suspected of not being authentic but of expressing passive

⁵⁰⁸ Khai’s attitude toward the primal beliefs is demonstrated in the choice of the word “heathen”. Khai, “Pentecostalism in Myanmar,” 55. Ketcham also reports a similar pattern, The Lisu evangelists won Lisu converts who reached the neighbouring Rawang people group, who later took the gospel to the Marus. Maynard L. Ketcham, “A History of the Assemblies of God of Burma: From the Lisu to the Rawangs to...” *Pentecostal Evangel* (26 July 1987), 16.

⁵⁰⁹ Khai, “Pentecostalism in Myanmar”: 60.

⁵¹⁰ Khai, “Legacy of Hau Lian Kham”: 99-107 .

⁵¹¹ Khai, “Pentecostalism in Myanmar”: 59.

⁵¹² Hua, interview by the author, Yangon, 30 April 2010.

⁵¹³ Hua, interview by the author, Yangon, 30 April 2010.

conformity with their leaders. This inferred that they had merely adopted western Christian forms, rather than personally appropriating their faith.⁵¹⁴ However, the Baptists maintain that they converted as individuals, as well as in groups.⁵¹⁵

Even though the Pentecostals criticise Baptist people group conversions, it appears that Pentecostalism also spread in groups, as whole villages converted simultaneously.

Pentecostal conversions can be distinguished as multi-individualized decisions to convert, rather than complying with the leaders. On the other hand, Baptists complained that Pentecostals only accepted dramatic conversions, with clear, specific decisions to commit, whereas the Baptists also acknowledged gradual conversions.⁵¹⁶

Individual conversions seemingly demonstrate each person's awareness of their own Christian identity. Ironically, the Pentecostals' focus on individual sin, which had been prevalent during the renewal was retrospectively criticised by Pentecostals themselves as the result of a western individualistic influence, rather than appropriating the Chin's own group dynamic.⁵¹⁷ Aside from theological arguments about the definition of conversion, making decisions as a group was more contextualized to the Chin's social structure.

3.5.2. The Reputation of Pentecostals

Prior to his expulsion, there is a record of a Presbyterian missionary attempting to protect the Chin from Pentecostals in the nearby Lushai Hills. The Pentecostals there were considered "unstable" and susceptible to emotionalism.⁵¹⁸ One missionary, Erville Sowards lamented that the Chin did not have a full Bible translation, and that their lack in biblical knowledge left them vulnerable to Pentecostalism, and "other schisms". He considered those particular

⁵¹⁴ This may even suggest that they retained their primal beliefs, onto which they added Christianity. Paul Hiebert refers to this as "critical" and uncritical contextualization." Paul Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994, 75-92.

⁵¹⁵ Ding, interview by the author, Yangon, 8 April 2010.

⁵¹⁶ Ding, interview by the author, Yangon, 8 April 2010.

⁵¹⁷ Khai, "Pentecostalism in Myanmar", 69.

⁵¹⁸ Erville Sowards, "Report on Trip," 71.

Pentecostals to not have a sufficient theological education and to be hyper-emotional.⁵¹⁹ This Presbyterian missionary's emphasis on the Bible contrasted with the AG missionaries' expression of the importance of dependence on the Holy Spirit. This differentiation is often associated with Pentecostalism's emotionalism, and his concern suggests that he perceived the Bible as an antidote to emotionalism. However, passages in the New Testament book of Acts about the baptism of the Holy Spirit arguably support some Pentecostal manifestations at least as much as the Presbyterians' more cerebral expression of Christianity.

While recognising the contribution of lay people in church planting, their lack of theological education was acknowledged as an impingement on their evangelistic efforts.⁵²⁰ However, some Chin shied away from theological education, for fear that education would hinder the Holy Spirit.⁵²¹ Some dispute that they rejected theological education, but rather that the emphasis was on the Holy Spirit's experiences, because the Chin had a particular affinity to the Holy Spirit.⁵²² However, the fact that some Pentecostals subsequently drifted into doctrinal "errors" has been attributed to this lack of theological training.⁵²³ While supernatural gifts and manifestations suited the Chin's worldview, some Chin esteemed contemporary prophecy more highly than the Bible, leading to a prophetic movement with numerous "extreme" prophetic acts,⁵²⁴ which simultaneously undermined the Bible's authority.

Some Chin embraced emotionalism in extreme fringe movements, which were confused with Pentecostal renewal. One such movement, which was considered extreme, was the "Hlimsang movement". Like the AG, they similarly practiced healing and prophecy, but in addition their

⁵¹⁹ Erville Sowards, "Report on Trip," 82.

⁵²⁰ Khai, "Pentecostalism in Myanmar": 70-71.

⁵²¹ Sann Oo, "The Indispensable Mission," 138.

⁵²² Khai, "Pentecostalism in Myanmar": 64.

⁵²³ Lian Sian, *Assemblies of God*, 30.

⁵²⁴ Khai, "Pentecostalism in Myanmar", 69.

manifestations were considered strange, although they claimed that the Holy Spirit had instructed them.⁵²⁵ Their more extreme manifestations included continuously repeating songs with their eyes closed and speaking in tongues, emotive dancing, beating drums consistently, and staggering as if they were drunk. Their intensity was deemed excessive by the Chin AG, but this caused confusion regarding spiritual gifts. This resulted in division in the churches,⁵²⁶ thus marring the reputation of Chin Pentecostals. Similarly, in neighbouring Indian contexts, revivalism was denounced for reigniting dormant aspects of primal religion, and thus being syncretistic:

revivalism, which may have been inherent in pre-Christian religion, fitted the very form of Christianity which they were offered...the local population discovered that it was possible to embrace Western religion without necessarily abandoning indigenous belief.”⁵²⁷

This similarity to primal religion explains in part why Pentecostal renewal was eagerly embraced by the Chin, and also why it caused opposition from other denominations.

Pentecostalism’s growth subsided at the same time as the revival, demonstrating a correlation between the intensity of the Holy Spirit’s manifestations and AG growth. The possibility that Chin Pentecostals are syncretistic with primal religion will be examined in more detail, especially in chapter six.

3.5.3. The Significance of the Revival in Spreading Pentecostalism

The Chin renewal is perceived as a watershed in Chin Pentecostal history because half of the membership of the AG were added at this time, thus increasing the profile of Pentecostals in Myanmar. The renewal was a catalyst for the composition of numerous indigenous worship songs, which potentially increased the contextualization of their liturgy, which will be also examined subsequently. Another outcome was other Pentecostal denominations working

⁵²⁵ S. Hrang Kap Hnin, “The Rise of Revivalism” in Zomi Theological College, *Chin Church History*, 158.

⁵²⁶ B. Luai Hre, “Denominationalism” in Zomi Theological College, *Chin Church History*, 190.

⁵²⁷ Satya N. Ratha, Georg Pfeffer and Deepak Kumar Behera, ed., *Contemporary Society: Structure and Process*, vol. 1 (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 1997), 89.

among the Chin, even though they were not as prevalent as the AG.⁵²⁸ The renewal has been influential in shaping Chin Pentecostal spirituality, as the older generation reflect on those times and use them as a comparison with the condition of the churches today.

3.6. Conclusion

In conclusion, Berry's four approaches to acculturation: integration; assimilation; separation/segregation and marginalization⁵²⁹ can be observed at various stages of the history of Chin Christianity. At the outset, Christianity was opposed by the Chin, especially by the chiefs, so Christians were segregated. As Christianity was gradually accepted, the Chin integrated some western forms, while simultaneously maintaining their own cultural forms, such as traditional singing and instruments. However, over time total assimilation of western forms took place to the point that Chin Pentecostals claim country and western tunes as their own indigenous music. The Chin who did not convert to Christianity or accept western forms but chose to maintain their primal culture have been marginalised, and Chin Christians have also been marginalised by Burmese Buddhists.

This chapter has examined the background of the introduction of Christianity to Myanmar, with particular focus on the Chin. The contribution of the Baptist missionaries was examined in particular because of their influence on Chin culture, the large numbers of Chin Baptists and their relationship with Chin Pentecostalism. The introduction of the AG to Myanmar examined American AG missionary strategy and the beginnings of the AG movement, despite the missionaries themselves not reaching the Chin. Subsequently, the way in which Myanmar AG grew following the departure of the American missionaries demonstrated the indigenous characteristics of the movement, and Pentecostalism was also introduced to the Chin by local leaders. The final section examines the influence of the renewal, as it

⁵²⁸ Other denominations include the United Pentecostal Church and the Four Square Church. Khai, "Pentecostalism in Myanmar": 58-9.

⁵²⁹ J. W. Berry, "Immigration, Acculturation and Adaptation" *Applied Psychology: An International Review* 1997, vol. 46 (issue 1): 9-10. Published online 22 January 2008, accessed on 15 October 2013.

establishes the background of the spirituality of Chin Pentecostals. The following chapters are a case-study of Chin AG churches to examine the contextualization of Chin theology. The case-study examines three areas, which are deemed relevant to Chin Pentecostalism: liturgy, indigenous worship songs and Pneumatology.

CHAPTER 4

A CASE-STUDY IN CHIN CONTEXTUALIZATION: LITURGY

This chapter is an adaptation of a previous article: See Denise Ross, “Hybridity Among the Chin of Myanmar,” in *Scripting Pentecost: A Study of Pentecostals, Worship and Liturgy*, eds. Mark J. Cartledge and A. J. Swoboda (London: Routledge, 2016): 167-185.

4. Introduction

This chapter begins the case-study of the Chin Pentecostals with an analysis of their liturgy.

In chapter five, the next aspect of this case-study, thirty worship songs are analysed theologically. Chapter six examines Chin theology in more detail, particularly Pneumatology, relating to contextualization and syncretism issues, bringing the Chin into dialogue with well-known scholars.

In this examination of Pentecostal liturgy, entire church services are examined. It is recognised that Pentecostals often equate “worship” with the section within the liturgy which involves singing worship songs consecutively, portraying their emphasis on singing. However Pentecostal worship can also be a synonym for the entire church service or denote devotion expressed throughout daily life.⁵³⁰

As seen in the introduction, the main thesis of this research examines Cox’s claim that Pentecostal “primal spirituality” releases repressed religious elements through “ecstatic worship”.⁵³¹ This “primal spirituality” resonates with the core of human spirituality, so a key to Pentecostalism’s growth is its ability to retrieve “spiritual treasures below the religious crust”.⁵³² Furthermore, Pentecostals subconsciously integrate other religious practices,⁵³³ uniquely enabling indigenous religions to restore essential cultural components, previously

⁵³⁰ Daniel Albrecht, “An Anatomy of Worship: A Pentecostal Analysis” in *The Spirit and Spirituality: Essays in Honour of Russell P. Spittler*, ed. Wonsuk Ma and Robert P. Menzies (London: T&T Clark International, 2004), 71. Also noted in Mark J. Cartledge, *Testimony in the Spirit: Rescripting Ordinary Pentecostal Theology* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2010), 40.

⁵³¹ Cox, *Fire From Heaven*, 81 and 101.

⁵³² Cox, *Fire From Heaven*, 262.

⁵³³ Cox, “Some Pentecostal Reflections,” 31.

jeopardised by modern development.⁵³⁴ This leads to Pentecostalism's mosaic of a "bewildering pluralism",⁵³⁵ despite Pentecostal attempts to disassociate from allegations of syncretism.⁵³⁶

The significance of exploring primal spirituality is that it contributes to the discussion about why Pentecostalism has connected with people, and subsequently grown, where other denominations have declined. Other denominations have often had a more cognitive approach to faith, repressing the emotional expressions, which converts had practised in previous primal religions, and when Pentecostalism permitted spiritual manifestations, this spirituality was reintroduced. As has been seen, this was the Chin's experience.

Cox points to the unique spirituality in Pentecostalism, the "spirit to Spirit" worship, which strikes a chord with those who have been familiar with the spiritual realm. Cox uses mystical language in his attempt to express the spirituality which has been repressed, which Pentecostals connect with.⁵³⁷ On experiencing Pentecostal worship, new converts soon recognise that they have tapped into an unusual flow, the pure raw energy of primal experience, which is valued as treasure.⁵³⁸ They had an innate sense that something spiritual existed, and then feel like they have found the reality that they had been searching for; it is their connection to the Divine Source. The Chin certainly express an intensity in worship with manifestations of the Holy Spirit, resembling what Cox describes as "ecstatic worship".⁵³⁹ This is the intensity that I observed in their worship.

⁵³⁴ Cox, *Fire From Heaven*, 228. Ironically the AG missionaries to Myanmar would themselves have catalysed modernization by education and healthcare, thus improving living standards. Arguably Pentecostalism's supernatural worldview is more acquiescent to primal cultures than the missionaries' own western culture.

⁵³⁵ Hollenweger, "An Introduction," 125.

⁵³⁶ Cox exhorts Pentecostals to preserve their distinctive spirituality, which may appear at first as a contradiction, in light of their aforementioned tendency to mix with others. However, he values the unique characteristics of Pentecostal spirituality, which he would not want to see compromised by assimilating with surrounding religious and cultural contexts.

⁵³⁷ Cox, *Fire From Heaven*, 81 and 101.

⁵³⁸ Cox, *Fire From Heaven*, 262.

⁵³⁹ Cox, *Fire From Heaven*, 81, 101.

The characteristic “primal” aspect of Pentecostal worship is an expectation to meet God in a theology of “encounter”.⁵⁴⁰ Experiencing God’s, or the Holy Spirit’s, presence is believed to be heightened by the use of spiritual gifts,⁵⁴¹ which are characteristic of Pentecostal practice. A change in atmosphere comes about because of God’s presence, rather than being the result of the worship leaders’ technical skill in transitioning from praise songs to meditative worship songs. Pentecostal worship is expressive and demonstrates a deep spirituality, resulting in spiritual renewal. This spirituality and its associated impact on worship and daily life are considered particularly congruent with non-western cultures, leading to the growth of Pentecostalism in the majority world.⁵⁴²

The ways in which primal spirituality influenced Chin Pentecostal worship will be analysed briefly here. A Chin AG pioneer reports that Chin Pentecostal worship is “very local”, and was introduced by locals from the outset,⁵⁴³ which suggests less external influence and more contextualization with their own culture. He explained how the nearby Lushai (Mizo) Pentecostals worshipped emotively, using the traditional drum and dancing during a time of revival.⁵⁴⁴ A foreign Baptist missionary associated Lushai worship with their primal rituals, and he prohibited their visit to the Chin in 1953.⁵⁴⁵ However, the Chin who subsequently converted to Pentecostalism similarly played the Chin drum and danced, like the Lushai. The Chin themselves reason that because they were formerly a “worshipping people” in primal religion, Pentecostal singing and dancing appealed to them.⁵⁴⁶ Some Chin argue that they did not worship God in Chin religion, but rather appeased the spirits by rituals involving

⁵⁴⁰ Mark Cartledge, *Encountering the Spirit: The Charismatic Tradition* (Mary Knoll: Orbis Books, 2006), 19-20.

⁵⁴¹ Cartledge, *Testimony in the Spirit*, 45.

⁵⁴² Anderson, *To the Ends*, 3, 9.

⁵⁴³ Dian, interview by author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 26 April, 2010.

⁵⁴⁴ The Lushai were from the Khasi hills in India and were involved with a Pentecostal movement which the Chin AG still refer to as being over-emotional and there are accounts of the Chin AG not tolerating extreme emotionalism.

⁵⁴⁵ Dian, interview by author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 26 April, 2010.

⁵⁴⁶ Dian, interview by author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 26 April, 2010.

sacrifices,⁵⁴⁷ so both the object of their worship and their activity changed because Pentecostal worship differed greatly. However, other Chin associate their primal spirituality with Pentecostalism. This association resembles Cox's observation of how Pentecostalism facilitates the core primal spirituality. At the same time, it can also be argued that aspects of Pentecostalism were easily accepted by the Chin due to the perceived similarity in primal religion's rituals. Using Cox's hypothesis, this research analyses Chin Pentecostal liturgy, examining their primal influences which increase contextualization with their former spirituality. However, the strong western influences through foreign missionaries are also considered.

4.1. Contextualization in Chin Pentecostal Liturgy

The issue of "primal" spirituality is examined below in terms of "spiritual encounter". There are other experiential components of Pentecostalism which also increase the translatability into other cultures, such as "communal worship" and "orality" which will also be examined.

4.1.1. Spiritual Encounter

Pentecostal worship endeavours to experience and encounter the power of God; it can be described as having "a theophanic quality".⁵⁴⁸ Using spiritual gifts is believed to increase the tangibility of God's presence.⁵⁴⁹ The Chin believed that the spiritual gifts are available to everyone who receives the baptism of the Holy Spirit,⁵⁵⁰ which had been taught by the AG missionaries, as it is a typical AG doctrine. Pentecostals expect to meet God through their worship. Expressive worship and deep spirituality, characteristic of Pentecostals globally, lead to spiritual renewal.

⁵⁴⁷ For examples of ritual sacrifices for various purposes, see Za Kham, *Glimpses of Zomi*, 22-23. The interviewees also described how their ancestors appeased the spirits to obtain blessing. Na, interview by author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 26 April 2010.

⁵⁴⁸ Cartledge, *Testimony in the Spirit*, 45.

⁵⁴⁹ Cartledge, *Testimony in the Spirit*, 45.

⁵⁵⁰ Tao, interview by author, Kalaymyo, 22 April 2010.

Those from primal backgrounds are already familiar with engaging and confronting the spiritual realm.⁵⁵¹ This familiarity with the spiritual realm leads to a propensity for interacting more with the Holy Spirit,⁵⁵² which often leads to spiritual warfare and deliverance practices, facilitated in Pentecostal praxis.⁵⁵³ This is associated with a vulnerability to syncretise with their former spirit beliefs and practices, which will be examined more in chapter six.

The enthusiasm that the Chin expressed for worship was similarly expressed by the Mizos who said that church services in which they did not dance, pray and sing new songs “had no meaning at all”.⁵⁵⁴ Chin Pentecostals describe Baptist worship as traditional and “very dry”, without freedom to worship because allegedly the Spirit was not moving.⁵⁵⁵ In contrast, Chin Pentecostals experienced the “awakening” and “move” of the Holy Spirit,⁵⁵⁶ and they felt free to raise their hands, shout and speak in tongues. Therefore, a major factor was the difference in worship in Pentecostalism, which was mostly attributed to the presence and power of the Holy Spirit; the congregants’ part was to tune in sensitively to the Holy Spirit’s interactions and respond accordingly. Conversely, the Baptists criticised some Pentecostals for beating drums and seeing images, which they assumed were hallucinations. The Baptists’ argument was that, if the Pentecostals were being influenced by the Holy Spirit as they claimed, then why weren’t they helping their neighbours rather than engaging in emotive worship and dancing.⁵⁵⁷ The Baptists’ more sober approach was accompanied by a desire to see a practical outworking to their faith, contrasting with Pentecostalism’s experiential spirituality.

⁵⁵¹ Allan Anderson, “Towards a Pentecostal Missiology for the Majority World” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 8:1 (2005), 44.

⁵⁵² Albrecht, “An Anatomy of Worship,” 76.

⁵⁵³ Some Pentecostals and charismatics state that Christians can be demonized, e.g. Charles Kraft, Derek Prince and Neil Anderson. The Chin did not explicitly refer to these aforementioned western theological sources, however some interviewees demonstrated that they perceived that westerners also perform spiritual warfare.

⁵⁵⁴ T. Nongsiej, “Revival Movement in Khasi-Jaintia Hills” in *Churches of Indigenous Origins in Northeast India*, ed. O.L. Snaitang, (Delhi: Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (ISPCK), 2000), 29.

⁵⁵⁵ Tao, interview by author, Kalaymyo, 22 April 2010.

⁵⁵⁶ Na, interview by author, Kalaymyo, trans. Xiu, 26 April 2010.

⁵⁵⁷ Hua, interview by author, Yangon, 27 April 2010.

However, in subsequent years, the Chin Baptists have attributed the growth in Pentecostalism to their liturgy involving singing, dancing, playing the drum, prayer and the experience of healing. I was interested to observe an informal Baptist gathering, where they also played the drum and danced around the room, as they had relaxed their rules and followed the example of the Pentecostals. I would argue that it is the spirituality which caused the growth, not just the activities of dancing and playing the drum.

4.1.2. Communal Worship as a Group

Practising worship rituals as a group increases the appeal of Pentecostalism to a community.⁵⁵⁸ Gathering to practise rituals is described as uniting a group as a community,⁵⁵⁹ as a “bond” forms in “meeting” to perform the “duty”.⁵⁶⁰ In fact, a Chin AG pioneer recounts how from the outset of Pentecostalism in Myanmar, congregants gathered to worship, write songs and have fellowship, and this unity was what drew in more converts.⁵⁶¹ The Chin historically have identified themselves as a group culture with a characteristic emphasis on community. Because the Chin had formerly gathered to practise communal primal rituals, assembling for Pentecostal worship was an easy transition. Admittedly, communal worship is not unique to Pentecostalism or to the Chin; nevertheless, the increased participation strengthens their connection, solidifying their sense of group identity and increasing their appropriation of Pentecostalism.

⁵⁵⁸ Albrecht, “An Anatomy of Worship,” 73, 77.

⁵⁵⁹ Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, trans. J. W. Swain (New York: The Free Press, 1915, 1965), 133.

⁵⁶⁰ David Martin, foreword to Roger Grainger, *The Language of the Rite* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1974), vii.

⁵⁶¹ Dian, interview by author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 26 April, 2010.

4.13. Oral Liturgy

Pentecostals are renowned for a prominent oral component in their liturgy.⁵⁶² This is spontaneous, and the liturgy is described as “dynamically emerging”.⁵⁶³ In itself this resembles “a dramatic ‘conversation’, a responsive interaction, a communion”.⁵⁶⁴ The freedom of Pentecostal liturgy to be creative and spontaneous permits everyone to contribute;⁵⁶⁵ this is helpful for the growth of Pentecostalism, especially in oral cultures because of parallel forms.⁵⁶⁶ Contrary to common assumptions, preference for an oral form does not necessarily imply illiteracy, as the charismatic movement with its strong orality was also successful among educated middle classes in developed, literate contexts.⁵⁶⁷ However, the experiential oral characteristic translates easily and the content varies each time, adapting to each culture, increasing the contextualization of Pentecostal liturgy, especially in the majority world.⁵⁶⁸ As the Chin formerly had an oral tradition, it was not surprising that they embraced Pentecostal liturgy easily, even after becoming more educated.

The value of the content of an oral liturgy in an analysis of contextualization is that it is a real-life dialogue, unrehearsed and free, vulnerable and intimate, even though expressed in public. Pentecostal liturgy does not require literacy, but welcomes verbal contributions; thus the liturgy is a local expression of peoples’ theology and real issues. My observations of Chin liturgy are a snapshot of the Chin group’s “pneumatological play”,⁵⁶⁹ incorporating their spiritual encounters, communal worship and oral spontaneity.

⁵⁶² Walter J. Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: Origins and Developments Worldwide* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 270.

⁵⁶³ Albrecht, “An Anatomy of Worship,” 75-6.

⁵⁶⁴ Albrecht, “An Anatomy of Worship,” 71.

⁵⁶⁵ Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 212-3.

⁵⁶⁶ Cartledge, *Testimony in the Spirit*, 44.

⁵⁶⁷ Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: Origins*, 270.

⁵⁶⁸ Anderson, “Towards a Pentecostal,” 41, 43.

⁵⁶⁹ Wolfgang Vondey, *Beyond Pentecostalism: The Crisis of Global Christianity and the Renewal of the Theological Agenda* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2010), 136. Previously, “play” was used to describe Pentecostal liturgy by Jean-Jacques Suurmond, “The Church At Play: The Pentecostal/Charismatic Renewal of the Liturgy as Renewal of the World,” in *Pentecost, Mission, and*

4.1.4. Chin Liturgy in its Context within Asian Pentecostalism

As the Chin's wider cultural context is Asian, it is fitting to look at common issues pertaining to Asian Pentecostals' backgrounds which impact liturgy. This is significant as some issues which arise in relation to the Chin actually have a wider application to Asian and other Pentecostals. It is therefore useful to briefly consider a wider context, rather than assuming that these issues are particular to the Chin.

There is a diversity of religions in Asia, so Pentecostals in Asia are often converts from other religions,⁵⁷⁰ just as the Chin formerly followed a primal religion. Some examples of influences from former religions are beliefs in blessings and curses, the power of the spoken word to change reality, and a perception of God's immanence.⁵⁷¹

The Chin had a concept of blessing and cursing, and the concept of blessing has transferred into Chin Pentecostal theology. Pentecostals generally tend to employ and personalise the concept of blessing, more than other denominations, even though blessing is also a general Judeo-Christian concept. Many Pentecostals have a dynamic belief in the power of verbalising, through declaring and claiming, concepts therefore easily understood in Asian contexts.

A perception of God's immanence facilitates Pentecostals' reliance on the Holy Spirit's leading, provoking spontaneous responses such as "singing in the Spirit",⁵⁷² or singing in tongues. Singing in tongues is described as engaging "the deep primal emotions at the hidden

Ecumenism: Essays on Intercultural Theology; Festschrift in Honour of Professor Walter Hollenweger, ed. Jan A. B. Jongeneel et al, *Studien zur Interkulturellen Geschichte des Christentums* 75 (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1992), 251-2. Also, Jean-Jacques Suurmond, *Word and Spirit at Play: Towards a Charismatic Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1994 first publication in English; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995).

⁵⁷⁰ Wonsuk Ma and Julie Ma, *Mission in the Spirit, Towards a Pentecostal/Charismatic Missiology* (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2010), 227-8. Also in Wonsuk Ma and Julie Ma, "Pentecostal Worship in Asia: Its Theological Implications and Contributions," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 10, no. 1 (2007): 136-152.

⁵⁷¹ Ma, *Mission in the Spirit*, 232.

⁵⁷² Ma, *Mission in the Spirit*, 235.

centre of our being”,⁵⁷³ which illustrates Cox’s claim that Pentecostalism taps into primal spirituality. Despite “singing in the Spirit” being practiced by other Pentecostals,⁵⁷⁴ the Chin explicitly describe the process as particular to their own experience. Although the Chin formerly believed that the supreme being was transcendent, their perception of the prevalence of the spirits helped them to understand the immanence of the spirit realm. Their former affinity with the spirits is how they explain their sensitivity to the Holy Spirit.

Some Chin AG are allegedly unable to read or understand the Bible and the pastors were concerned that they are particularly likely to revert to primal religious practices.⁵⁷⁵ This suggests that Pentecostals’ predisposition to mix with other religions increases where there is a familiarity with other practices and a lack of biblical knowledge. Despite Pentecostals being known for their esteem of their Bibles, they typically prefer a lively sermon and emotive response to an exegetical sermon,⁵⁷⁶ as Pentecostals are known for the experiential aspects of their faith.⁵⁷⁷

In Asia, persecution and poverty are common socio-political backgrounds for Christian converts,⁵⁷⁸ which naturally impacts their liturgy. Pentecostal worship can serve as an emotional expression of their struggle,⁵⁷⁹ yet also challenges believers to approach persecution positively, in what can be perceived as an “anti-cultural” and “restorationist” tendency.⁵⁸⁰ The Chin argue that the “expression of emotion” in Pentecostal worship

⁵⁷³ T. Smail, A. Walker, N. Wright, *Charismatic Renewal: The Search for a Theology* (London: SPCK, London, 1993), 110 in Neil Hudson, “Singing a New Song in a Strange Land” in *Pentecostal Perspectives*, ed. Keith Warrington (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster Press, 1998), 190.

⁵⁷⁴ Ma, *Mission in the Spirit*, 235. Hudson, “Singing a New Song,” 190. The biblical reference given is 1 Cor. 14:15.

⁵⁷⁵ Li, interview by author, Kalaymyo, 25 April 2010.

⁵⁷⁶ William Vaughan Jenkins and Heather Kavan, “Sermon Responses and Preferences in Pentecostal and Mainline Churches,” in *Journal of Empirical Theology* 22 (2009): 146.

⁵⁷⁷ Daniel E. Albrecht and Evan B. Howard, “Pentecostal Spirituality” in *The Cambridge Companion*, 235.

⁵⁷⁸ Wonsuk Ma and Julie C. Ma, “Jesus Christ in Asia: Our Journey with Him as Pentecostal Believers,” *International Review of Mission* 94, no. 375 (Oct. 2005): 493-506.

⁵⁷⁹ Edmond Tang describes the emotional outlet in Pentecostal worship in China. Tang, “‘Yellers’ and Healers,” 478.

⁵⁸⁰ Ma and Ma, *Mission in the Spirit*, 232.

appealed to their traditional Chin culture;⁵⁸¹ worship expresses their struggles, facilitating an emotional release and catharsis.

Western missionaries often merely translated western liturgy to Asia, disregarding cultural music, because they associated it with non-Christian religion.⁵⁸² Moreover, contemporary western Pentecostal music has reached global popularity, and is easily accessible via the internet. Therefore, preserving indigenous music has proved challenging for Asian Pentecostals, along with maintaining a sense of their own identity.

4.15. Chin Liturgy as an Indicator of Contextualization

Worship is perceived both as distinctive and integral to Pentecostal identity, and the theology of the liturgy reveals the “authentic” Christian identity in inter-cultural contexts. An analysis of liturgy is selected as it indicates how theology is established and contextualized to the culture at local levels. Hayward measures contextualization in worship because he maintains that worship enacts how a church relates to God.⁵⁸³

Thus a congregation’s worship practically demonstrates their concept of God, so the Chin’s worship is a real life enactment of how the Chin relate to God. Chin liturgy is a gauge of how Chin theology and culture are presented in church services. As the significance of the liturgy on a congregation’s theology increases proportionately with a lack of theological education,⁵⁸⁴ the fact that many Chin lacked theological education increased the theological importance of the liturgy for many Chin.

The association between worship and contextualization is pointed out by Albrecht who states that Pentecostal worship “contextualizes their [Pentecostal] understanding of doctrine, liturgy

⁵⁸¹ Yong, interview by author, Yangon, 16 April 2010.

⁵⁸² Swee Hong Lim, “Asian Christian Forms of Worship and Music” in *The Oxford Handbook of Christianity in Asia*, ed. Felix Wilfred (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 534.

⁵⁸³ Hayward, *Measuring Contextualization*, 135.

⁵⁸⁴ Joseph J. Blomjous, “Mission and Liturgy” in *Liturgy and the Missions*, ed. Johannes Hofinger S.J. (London: Burns & Oates, 1960), 42-3.

and morality”. Worship is “contextualized” by a group as the rites develop,⁵⁸⁵ which indicates that the rituals express a congregation’s theology and worldview. Liturgical rituals have a role in expressing a congregation’s worldview and theological position.⁵⁸⁶

As Pentecostalism has a strong oral culture, the narrative is important, including music and dancing in the liturgy.⁵⁸⁷ The orality of Pentecostalism is well suited to oral cultures,⁵⁸⁸ such as the Chin. One oral aspect is testimony, which is a distinctly Pentecostal characteristic, including individual, congregational and denominational testimonies. The spontaneity of Pentecostal worship has the potential to reveal doctrine, along with more considered theological elements in the song lyrics and sermons. In addition to theological insights, worship also is a cultural expression and portrays art forms which can be expressed freely through music, songs, the sacraments, prayer and preaching. Thus, they can indicate the levels of contextualization to the local culture. Four Chin AG churches were used in this research, and the church layout and demographics are outlined in the next section.

4.2. Method Used to Measure the Contextualization of Chin Liturgy

Hayward’s model asks whether worship music is imported or local, which is an indicator of how contextualized worship is to the local culture. Using local music in worship indicates that Christianity has connected with the local culture, as music reflects cultural identity. Using imported foreign music indicates that Christianity is still associated with another culture, and not yet appropriated by a local culture. Music, dancing and singing were important in Chin tradition, so an examination of Chin liturgy determines whether these cultural norms were transferred. Hayward’s model is designed to examine cultures in the majority world which have hosted western missionaries, and would be less applicable in a

⁵⁸⁵ Albrecht, “An Anatomy of Worship,” 71.

⁵⁸⁶ Jerome R. Boone, “Community and Worship: Key Components of Pentecostal Christian Formation,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 8 (1996): 136.

⁵⁸⁷ Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: Origins*, 270.

⁵⁸⁸ Cartledge, *Testimony in the Spirit*, 44.

western context, where western music tends to dominate. Hayward also considers styles of communication, by asking whether or not western styles of preaching have been adopted.⁵⁸⁹ He considers the various communication styles which may be used in cultures to discuss, transmit information or relay news.

As Pentecostal liturgies are generally spontaneous, they are unpredictable, which means each service is potentially quite different, so Pentecostal liturgies are difficult to categorise systematically. Martin Stringer expressed the challenge in coding the sequence of a Pentecostal-charismatic church in his ethnographic observation of their worship.⁵⁹⁰ While recognising this fluidity, Albrecht distinguishes rituals within Pentecostal liturgy in an attempt to systematise the study of Pentecostal worship. Albrecht categorises three main rites: praise and worship, preaching and the altar call. These three are connected by elements collectively named “transitions” and with communion.⁵⁹¹ Albrecht has developed a ritual-model,⁵⁹² while acknowledging that rituals are “not indigenous” to Pentecostals,⁵⁹³ because of their emphasis on allowing the Holy Spirit to move freely, rather than regimenting a set order.⁵⁹⁴

Rather than classifying rituals, Wolfgang Vondey sees Pentecostal liturgy as fervent, unrestricted “activities of pneumatological play”, which incorporates their life holistically.⁵⁹⁵ This unrehearsed nature means that Pentecostal worship services are live, dynamic performances, demonstrating a real, living and practical theology. Considering this

⁵⁸⁹ Hayward, *Measuring Contextualization*, 137.

⁵⁹⁰ Martin D. Stringer, *On the Perception of Worship: The Ethnography of Worship in Four Christian Congregations in Manchester* (Birmingham: The University of Birmingham University Press, 1999), 141, 143. In comparison mainline denominations usually follow a written liturgy, which is more predictable.

⁵⁹¹ Daniel E. Albrecht, *Rites in the Spirit: A Ritual Approach to Pentecostal/Charismatic Spirituality* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 153. Also, Albrecht, “An Anatomy of Worship,” 78.

⁵⁹² He conducts three congregational studies using his model of analysing ritual, including one American AG church. Daniel E. Albrecht, “Pentecostal Spirituality: Ecumenical Potential and Challenge”, *Cyberjournal for Pentecostal-Charismatic Research* (1997): 2. See also, Albrecht, *Rites in the Spirit*.

⁵⁹³ Albrecht, *Rites in the Spirit*, Preface, 9.

⁵⁹⁴ Albrecht, *Rites in the Spirit*, 21.

⁵⁹⁵ Vondey, *Beyond Pentecostalism*, 136.

variability, this research is a snapshot observation of Chin liturgy, and not a complete ethnographic study. The Chin's own description of their "free", "deeply spiritual worship"⁵⁹⁶ defies empirical qualification, so Albrecht's model has been useful, while also recognising its limitations in capturing the spontaneity of Pentecostal worship. The attribute of "play" refers to Pentecostals' orality, spiritual encounters and community, contributing to the conduciveness of Pentecostal liturgy to contextualization.

Another aspect related to preaching is that cultures have their own repertoire of stories, which may be used as illustrations in sermons. Also, the organisation and time allotted to each element in the liturgy indicates the cultural aspects which are considered important and how they are interpreted theologically.

4.3. An Analysis of Chin AG Liturgy

The following section describes and analyses Chin AG liturgy, bearing in mind that there are three main influences: Chin indigenous religion, westernization and distinct Chin characteristics. Church services were mainly conducted in Chin language, other than one church in Yangon, which used a mixture of Burmese and English in order to be accessible to other people groups. The leader of this church expressed that their aim was to be relevant to the surrounding Buddhists.⁵⁹⁷ The sequence of events varied in each church and in different services of the same church, so there is no one typical sequence. Two examples of service sequences demonstrate how variable services may be (See Table in Section 4.3.2.). So, my analysis is of examples of what occurs in the Chin AG worship services I observed, rather than suggesting that these are "typical" services.

⁵⁹⁶ Yan, interview by author, Kalaymyo, 26 April 2010; Dian, interview by author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 26 April, 2010.

⁵⁹⁷ Ying, interview by author, Yangon, 13 April 2010.

4.3.1. AG Church Layout and Congregation Demographics

Most Chin AG churches resembled typical traditional western church buildings, with rows of pews or plastic chairs. The platform at the front had ornate chairs reserved for the leaders, showing their respect for leadership status. The musical instruments included keyboards, drum kits and electric guitars and they used either PowerPoint or song sheets for the lyrics of the songs. The congregation consisted of between one hundred and several hundred people, with a female majority and a reasonably equal distribution of age representations. However, the church leaders were predominantly male, which is typical of Pentecostalism globally, and corresponds with Chin patriarchal culture which predisposes the men to be more likely to be educated and to lead.

4.3.2. Sequence of Events in Two Church Services

Blue Church, Yangon, 11th April 2010	Yellow Church, Kalaymyo, 25th April 2010
Introduction	Introduction and declaration
5 Worship Songs	Song (pastor leads)
Prayer	Prayer
Declaration: "God is good..."	Song
Corporate reading alternate verses of a Psalm	Prayer
Declaration	Song
Corporate prayer in tongues	Prayer
Greeting: shake hands	Announcement
Introduction of preacher and Sermon	Song
Choir sing (following an introduction)	Altar call
Communion	Declaration
Solo song	Song
Offering	Announcement
Proclamation of a Bible verse	Baby Dedication
Prayer	Welcome new members
Special Offering	Song (duet-special number)
Solo song	Prayer
Testimony of outreach training	Offering
Group song	Song and spontaneous singing
Prayer for the sponsors of the refreshments	Declaration
Announcement of camp	Sermon
Song	Song
Corporate prayer in tongues	Prayer
Closing prayer	Song
	"Benediction" or Closing prayer

4.3.2.1. Song Worship

The service usually starts with the worship leaders leading the congregation to sing approximately five worship songs.⁵⁹⁸ During worship their posture is to remain standing for long periods with their eyes closed and arms raised and sometimes clapping, demonstrating reverence and participation.⁵⁹⁹ Sometimes blocks of several songs were sung consecutively, but at other times songs were “sandwiched” between transitions, which resembled mainline denominations’ liturgies rather than Pentecostal liturgies. Many original forms have been maintained from the missionaries, which may be due to their loyalty or their inherent appeal to Chin culture. Even the physical artefacts such as velvet offering bags, wooden or Perspex pulpits and musical instruments were western imports.

There were two categories of worship songs: translated and indigenous, as also categorised by Hayward and Swee Hong Lim.⁶⁰⁰ The translated songs were contemporary western songs, notably from “Hillsong” in Australia.⁶⁰¹ The indigenous worship songs consisted of lyrics composed by the Chin and set to country and western style tunes, a type of music introduced by the American missionaries,⁶⁰² and which the Chin refer to as “country” music and which many assume to be indigenously Chin tunes.⁶⁰³ The older generation criticise the younger generation for “slavishly” imitating western Hillsong music,⁶⁰⁴ but despite composing their own lyrics, the country music is also of western origin. Admittedly, different dynamics were

⁵⁹⁸ The Chin lyrics projected on the screen were legible to the author, because the Chin dialects are pronounced phonetically using the Roman alphabet.

⁵⁹⁹ Chin congregations tend to stand for longer periods than westerners, which feels more formal, which reflects Chin’s respectful culture.

⁶⁰⁰ Swee Hong Lim, “Asian Christian Forms of Worship and Music” in *The Oxford Handbook of Christianity in Asia*, ed. Felix Wilfred, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 524-538.

⁶⁰¹ The Chin refer to “country” music which resembles country and western music. “Hillsong” is an Australian Pentecostal megachurch located in Sydney, affiliated with Australian Christian Churches, which is the equivalent of the Australian AG. Their worship music is also popular in western Pentecostal churches.

⁶⁰² Tao, interview by author, Kalaymyo, 22 April 2010.

⁶⁰³ Qi, interview by author, Yangon, 3 May 2010.

⁶⁰⁴ Xiu, interview by author, Kalaymyo, 23 April, 2010.

The “older generation” include anyone who would remember the renewals in the 1970s, but may not necessarily be old as those 40 or older would have even childhood memories of the renewal in Chin state.

at play in the westernisation process. Hillsong music was freely adopted by the Chin, whereas the Baptist missionaries had imposed country music.⁶⁰⁵ The Chin have adapted country music to their own style, so the country songs can now be considered a western and Asian hybrid.

A third category of indigenous lyrics and local folk music was absent⁶⁰⁶ in the services which I observed. As already mentioned, the missionaries had abolished traditional Chin music as they associated it with primal religion.⁶⁰⁷ Although traditional Chin music was formerly used to mark events, traditional music was generally not played in church. The Chin now adopted country music as their own, and some explain that musicians can “express their skill” using modern instruments.⁶⁰⁸ They express their concern that because their traditional music is so unique, its use in worship would separate them from Pentecostals globally.⁶⁰⁹ This concern to identify with Pentecostals internationally is an interesting insight into their concept of identity, considering the fact that the government of Myanmar had, for a period of time, isolated them from the outside world.

As well as congregational singing, choirs, solo or duet singers performed up to five “special numbers”, particularly following the sermon. The concept of “special numbers” was introduced by American missionaries, and this appealed to the Chin who continue to use them frequently.⁶¹⁰ The amount of “ritual time” allotted to singing demonstrated that the Chin

⁶⁰⁵ The literature merely refers to “Baptist missionaries” without stating their background. For more information on the Baptist missionaries, see: Van Biak Thang, “Arrival of First Baptist Missionaries to Chin Hills Remembered” *Chinland Guardian.com*; available from <http://chinlandguardian.com/index.php/news/item/931-arrival-of-first-baptist-missionaries-to-chin-hills-remembered>; accessed 16 March 2011. See also, “The First Converts in Chin Hills” available from <https://nikonghong.wordpress.com/2013/05/17/converts/> Extracted from *D. Kip Thian Pau, “Trials and Triumphs of The Chin Pioneers” (MBC Yangon: Literature and Publication Department, N.D.)*; accessed 14 September 2015.

⁶⁰⁶ Lim, “Asian Christian Forms,” 534. As described earlier Douglas Hayward also observed this trend in music, but Lim is more explicit about the resultant hybridity. Similarly, the controversial contextualization model C1 –C6 assess the use of “insider” language and forms, written using a pseudonym: John Travis, “The C1 to C6 Spectrum: A Practical Tool for Defining Six Types of ‘Christ-centered Communities’ (‘C’) Found in the Muslim Context,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 34:4 (October 1998): 407-8.

⁶⁰⁷ Khan En, “The Impact of the Gospel,” 1-28.

⁶⁰⁸ Ying, interview by author, Yangon, 13 April 2010 and Wei, interview by author, Yangon, 12 April 2010.

⁶⁰⁹ Wei, interview by author, Yangon, 12 April 2010.

⁶¹⁰ One pastor relates that he receives more requests from the congregation to perform songs in the service than time permits. Yu, interview by author, Yangon, 30 April 2010. Prior to undertaking this research, an American

have retained their cultural importance of singing,⁶¹¹ despite their traditional singing having been forbidden.

During observation, it was notable how the worship intensified when they sang their indigenous songs, which they refer to as “revival songs”.⁶¹² Their own description of worship reminds us of Cox’s assertion that Pentecostals tap into primal spirituality. Their rationale for enjoying their indigenous songs is not just because the lyrics express their own narrative, but also because the tunes remind them of the renewal. The rhythm and flow of the music “envelops their spirits” with the Holy Spirit,⁶¹³ thus describing worship in terms of their spirit connecting with the Holy Spirit. They explain that they progress from singing indigenous songs to singing in tongues, and then “singing in psalms”, by which mean spontaneous, corporate singing.⁶¹⁴ At this point they have reached a depth of worship “in the Holy Spirit”, which they describe as the “spirit of genuine worship”, which they describe as deeply satisfying.⁶¹⁵ Simultaneously, the tempo of the music increases, the singing becomes more “powerful”, and many go to the altar crying.⁶¹⁶ Their spiritual encounter is described with deep intensity. The intense worship that I observed was evident by their enthusiasm and emotional response, which they considered to be unique to them, but spiritual intensity is obviously not quantifiable even by visible manifestations.

acquaintance commented on the extent of special numbers he had observed during his visit to Myanmar AG church services.

⁶¹¹ The concept of “ritual time” is used by Albrecht. See Albrecht, *Rites in the Spirit*, 124-126. A congregation’s priorities are evident in by the length of time allotted to elements during the liturgy.

⁶¹² Ping, interview by author, Kalaymyo, 23 April, 2010.

⁶¹³ Qi, interview by author, Yangon, 3 May 2010.

⁶¹⁴ Tao, interview by author, Kalaymyo, 22 April 2010.

⁶¹⁵ Tao, interview by author, Kalaymyo, 22 April 2010.

⁶¹⁶ Ping, interview by author, Kalaymyo, 23 April, 2010.

Not surprisingly, most Chin concurred that worship was the most important aspect of the church service,⁶¹⁷ a transforming influence which is vital to the Chin AG,⁶¹⁸ and “the greatest responsibility of a human”.⁶¹⁹ This is congruent with Pentecostals globally who expect worship to be “affective, transformative, informed by biblical teaching, spontaneous and well lead [sic.]”,⁶²⁰ and having a special spirituality.⁶²¹

The Chin interviewees regretted that not all the congregation can reach this spiritual intensity, because not everyone speaks in tongues.⁶²² Other people groups in Myanmar allegedly “cannot tolerate” Chin worship, as the worship “gets faster” and more “powerful”.⁶²³ Granted, Chin worship is intense, but their assumption regarding its uniqueness is debatable. However, as seen earlier, other Pentecostals, including the British and other Asian Pentecostals also “sing in the Spirit”.⁶²⁴

There was a division in the Chin’s musical preferences according to their ages; the older generation prefer the traditional drum and gong or country music, whereas the younger generation prefer contemporary songs, especially Hillsong music. The older ones claim that the depth of their worship experiences have declined as they complain that Hillsong music is not spiritually edifying.⁶²⁵ They allege that the youth must not even be baptised with the Holy Spirit if they are satisfied with Hillsong. A young interviewee also described intense worship

⁶¹⁷ Two prioritised “preaching the Word”, because of its neglect due to the overall preference for worship. Interviewee Na expressed that above all he enjoyed the worship and secondly preaching. Na, interview by author, 26 April 2010. Interviewee En expressed that a service without the preaching of the word of God is “meaningless” but there is such an emphasis on the worship among the Chin. En, interview by author, 26 April 2010.

⁶¹⁸ Khai, “Pentecostalism in Myanmar”, 64.

⁶¹⁹ Yu, interview by author, Yangon, 30 April 2010.

⁶²⁰ Cartledge, *Testimony in the Spirit*, 54.

⁶²¹ McGee, “Power From on High”: 317, 324.

⁶²² Tao, interview by author, Kalaymyo, 22 April 2010.

⁶²³ Ping, interview by author, Kalaymyo, 23 April, 2010.

⁶²⁴ Ma, *Mission in the Spirit*, 235. Hudson, “Singing a New Song,” 190. The biblical reference given is 1 Cor. 14:15.

⁶²⁵ Tao, interview by author, Kalaymyo, 22 April 2010. The AG church in Hillsongs, Sydney Australia has become world renowned for their worship music and they have released numerous CDs and run worship training courses. Their style of music has been imitated worldwide, especially in Pentecostal churches.

and being touched by the Holy Spirit, but the songs which most affect her spiritually are Hillsong music.⁶²⁶ This suggests that their encounter with the Holy Spirit is not dependent on a particular style of music, or on their age.

4.3.2.2. *Dancing*

During one of the worship services observed, two older women danced in the altar area, stepping from side to side, circling while waving a fan or a Bible. Their dancing appeared to be a peripheral activity, involving simple swaying movements, unlike traditional dances, which had been forbidden by Baptist missionaries because of its association with primal rituals. Yet the significance of dancing and clapping in worship conveyed that a form resembling their tradition had been restored, thus representing Chin culture within church services. Older interviewees claimed that “clapping and jumping” during worship are also partly the reason why Pentecostal worship is appropriate for them, as they had also danced and sung during primal rituals.⁶²⁷ Dancing had served a celebratory social role during indigenous rituals and served as an emotional outlet, which was considered permissible in Pentecostal worship, despite general Chin culture not normally being emotionally expressive.⁶²⁸ Dancing had been revived during the Chin Pentecostal renewal, resembling dancing practiced in Pentecostalism globally, as a non-literary expression in an oral liturgy.

4.3.2.3. *Preaching*

The senior pastors usually preached the sermon and dressed smartly in western clothing, imitating the formality of the missionaries, but sometimes this principle was adapted by wearing smart Burmese clothing. Leaders often removed their shoes before preaching, which is a cultural mark of respect, demonstrating humble respect for preaching from the Bible, in the way that Buddhists also show honour in their temples. This marked out a “sacred

⁶²⁶ Jun, interview by author, Kalaymyo, 22 April 2010.

⁶²⁷ Ping, interview by author, Kalaymyo, 23 April, 2010.

⁶²⁸ Chao, interview by author, Yangon, 16 April 2010.

space”,⁶²⁹ which is not only common in Burmese and Asian culture, but also reflects biblical accounts of people removing their shoes on “holy ground”.⁶³⁰

The sermons lasted approximately fifty minutes, and this considerable amount of ritual time within the Chin liturgy demonstrates the significance of preaching for the Chin. The sermon form of lecture-like monologues reflects the leaders’ western training in homiletics and the missionaries’ influence. The pastors explained that the congregation preferred Chin preachers, rather than foreign preachers who had “too many points”, which were boring for them.⁶³¹ This reflects their preference for their own Chin style.⁶³²

The preaching was often delivered impromptu without notes or visual aids such as Power Point, which are commonly used in the west. The sermons were mostly topical, beginning with a biblical text, followed by exhortation, jokes and stories of their memories of Chin state. Their ability to tell stories using expressive tones reflects their traditional oral culture, but the congregation could also easily relate to the testimonies of hardship and sacrificial living in their socio-economic context. One preacher in particular was animated, using elaborate bodily gestures, throwing his arms in the air, walking back and forth and jumping. He used emotive language and concrete imagery applicable to the Myanmar context: “Even if I die like a snake on the road”.⁶³³ What I found most surprising was that preachers boasted of

⁶²⁹ Albrecht, *Rites in the Spirit*, 134-5.

⁶³⁰ See biblical reference: Exodus 3:5.

⁶³¹ Yu, interview by author, Yangon, 30 April, 2010.

⁶³² Sermons increase their impact and response by the congregation if they can relate to the personal experiences is a common phenomenon across cultures and is not unique to the Chin. See J. L. Eckstein, “Conversion Conundrums: Listener Perceptions of Affective Influence Attempts as Mediated by Personality and Individual Differences.” *Communication Quarterly* 53, no. 3 (2005): 401-419. Also K.I. Pargament and W.H. Silverman, “Exploring some Correlates of Sermon Impact on Catholic Parishioners,” *Review of Religious Research* 24, no.1 (1982): 33-39. Jenkins and Kavan, “Sermon Responses”: 144.

⁶³³ Yu, interview by author, Yangon, 30 April 2010. Sermons are perceived to more memorable if they are lively and dramatic, so this is not a unique feature of a Chin audience but reflects this pastor’s ability as an effective orator, congruent with oral culture.

their achievements and assumed status, which seemed more culturally acceptable than it would be in most western contexts.⁶³⁴

Exegetical sermons with three main points and a concluding application were sometimes used, and these were less expressive and impromptu. However, some of the ladies who had danced during the worship slept during the exegetical sermon, demonstrating their preference for participation.

Preachers compensated for an alleged lack of Bible knowledge in the congregants by telling Chin stories in the sermons; however, as an oral culture, the Chin would also have understood Bible stories. Traditionally, the Chin “shouted news” and told stories around the fire,⁶³⁵ but there was no formal equivalent to preaching in primal religion. However, there was a concept that a sorcerer’s words were “full of power and energy”,⁶³⁶ which is not unlike the concept of anointing in Pentecostalism, conveying a sense of God’s influence on human speech.

The two most prominent preaching themes that I observed were encouragement to give financially, having faith that God would bless them, and overcoming victoriously.⁶³⁷

Ironically, the Chin formerly offered sacrifices to the spirits to obtain blessing. The concept of blessing is transferred into Pentecostalism which is associated with encouragement to give financially with an expectation of receiving God’s blessing as a reward. These topics were relevant to, but also challenging in, their socio-economic context. The concept of curse also existed in primal religion, but was not mentioned in the sermons that I heard, even though some Pentecostals do believe in curses, and curses are mentioned in the Old Testament.⁶³⁸

⁶³⁴ Ma and Ma, *Mission in the Spirit*, 234.

⁶³⁵ Za Tuah, “Towards an Understanding,” 106.

⁶³⁶ Khai, *Zo People*, 182.

⁶³⁷ The preaching themes of overcoming poverty and having a positive self-esteem were also noted by Chin Khua Khai, *The Cross amid Pagodas* (Baguio, Philippines, APTS Press, forthcoming at the time of his writing), n.p. in Khai, “Pentecostalism in Myanmar,” 63-4.

⁶³⁸ The Ma’s outline how former concepts of blessing and curses may influence Pentecostalism. See Ma, *Mission in the Spirit*, 232.

4.3.2.4. Transitions

After sermons, the activities were variable. The term “transitional rites” are used for shorter elements which connect the main rites of the liturgy.⁶³⁹ In the Chin’s case, readings, recitations, declarations, announcements, baby dedications and testimonies are grouped collectively as transitions, which were not always present, but were sometimes inserted randomly, thus varying the sequence.

4.3.2.5. Prayer

Even though prayer is highly revered in Pentecostal spirituality, it typically did not take as much ritual time as expected. Interspersed between worship songs, Chin church leaders did lead the congregation in fervent prayer, in which tongues speech featured strongly. This is not surprising considering their belief that using tongues increased the Holy Spirit’s presence.⁶⁴⁰ Particular prayer topics included healing, blessing for new church members, or special events. Prayer was used particularly to introduce a transition, such as corporate prayer before preaching, prayer for the offering, or communion. Formally recognising and praying for those who had supplied the communion elements or refreshments was particularly unusual for me. These are usually provided by general church funds in the West, but the fact that they were supplied by individuals in these churches reflects the socio-economic context. The end of the service was also marked by a closing prayer.

4.3.2.6. Declarations

In order to transition to the sermon the leaders sometimes led corporate declarations. The most common declaration used was, “God is good for me, God is good for my job, God is good for my family, God is good for my church and God is good for my country”. This declaration was composed by a Chin pastor and was designed to remind congregants of how

⁶³⁹ These grouped rites served in the role of a transition to the next element of the service. They did not receive enough ritual time to warrant being treated separately. Albrecht, *Rites in the Spirit*, 153.

⁶⁴⁰ Tao, interview by author, Kalaymyo, 22 April, 2010.

God helps them. This is typical of their positive “victorious theology”, which briefly sums up Chin theology, but may have been influenced by American Pentecostalism. This declaration demonstrates an awareness of God’s goodness in their multiple roles. Their identities are expressed as existing within a centrifugal social structure, working outward from the individual to family, church and nation, incorporating their faith even into their national identity.

4.3.2.7. Communion

Chin churches usually shared communion monthly. Before communion, the leader read relevant Bible passages aloud,⁶⁴¹ and prayed over the bread and grape juice. Servers distributed the communion in special small cups, and the congregation prayed corporately and sang relevant songs, such as “Nothing but the blood of Jesus”. On one occasion, a picture of Jesus on the cross was projected onto the front screen.

Communion is a concrete ritual; however, there seems to be little adaptation or ownership of the communion ritual in Chin services, despite the Chin’s claim that Jesus’ sacrifice was particularly meaningful to their ancestors because of their former animal sacrifices.⁶⁴² I had therefore expected communion to be a higher priority than was evident, but I understand that current generations no longer remember the former sacrifices. The ceremony closely resembles western practices, except that western AG churches often share a sermonette as a devotional, which I did not observe the Chin using. The short ritual time allotted to communion along with a lack of Chin interpretation suggest that the Chin do not assign much weight to communion. Recently, communion is also less emphasised in western Pentecostalism,⁶⁴³ which may have also influenced the Chin.

⁶⁴¹ For example, 1 Corinthians 11: 23-26

⁶⁴² Qin, interview by author, Birmingham, 26 January, 2009.

⁶⁴³ David Allen, *The Neglected Feast: Rescuing the Breaking of Bread* (Nottingham, Expression Publications, 2007). Communion may only be taken monthly rather than weekly perhaps due to an emphasis of other aspects of the liturgy, such as the worship. This decline corresponds with my observation in British Pentecostalism. Pentecostalism is criticized by converts from mainline denominations as communion is not emphasized. In

4.3.2.8. Offering

The offering was often collected during a special number, preceded by a prayer to bless the offering. Again, traditional western forms were maintained, by collecting and returning the offering from and to the front of the church, and using the classic velvet offering bags.

4.3.2.9. Bible Recitations and Readings

In Chin churches some congregants recited memory Bible verses at the front of the church and all the congregants read alternate lines of a biblical passage during the service. By contrast in western Pentecostal churches, reciting memorised Bible verses aloud is usually only practised in Sunday School by children. Reading alternate Bible verses is usually only practiced in mainline denominations in the West. Both practices were introduced by missionaries and are oral practices. Recitation is contextualized to traditional Chin oral culture as the priests in primal religion also recited verses and genealogies. Corporate reading may be a method of improving their Bible knowledge, which leaders were concerned about. Leaders expressed concern that the congregation lacked biblical knowledge due to illiteracy,⁶⁴⁴ however this also reflects a gap between the leaders who were theologically educated and the laity.

4.3.2.10. Announcements

Some examples of announcements included ministry and training opportunities and mid-week cell groups. Their custom of detailing statistics of attendees, converts, healings and recipients of the baptism of the Holy Spirit reflect Chin traditional oral culture of memorising

comparison, in 1976 Tom Walker a British Elim leader describes communion as the “climax” of the service, and was taken weekly which contributed even more to its appreciation. Tom. W. Walker, “The Recovery of Worship,” in *Pentecostal Doctrine*, rev. ed., ed. P.S. Brewster (Dorking: Greenhurst Press, private publication by P.S. Brewster, 1976), 43. In comparison, the altar call is now often perceived as the “climax” of a Pentecostal service.

⁶⁴⁴ En, interview by author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 26 April, 2010. Uneducated church members relate more easily to the Holy Spirit whereas leaders received theological education, which examines the Trinity based on western systematic theology.

and recording facts. Their method of publicly acknowledging individuals was also unusual for me, and included specifying leaders' educational qualifications, which reflects how the Chin value status and education.⁶⁴⁵ There were fewer announcements of special events than in western churches generally, which may be because they would be expensive to host.

4.3.2.11. Testimonies

Testimonies were sporadic and only allotted to some services, they informed me that testimonies are too time-consuming and so they gave less time to testimonies than they formerly had done. Participants are requested to be brief.⁶⁴⁶ Restricting the ritual time allotted to testimonies suggests that they perceived other elements to be more important. Sharing testimonies would have been a practice introduced by the missionaries, but also resonates with Chin oral tradition. Testimonies are a characteristic of Pentecostalism, expecting God to intervene in everyday activities, and are a reflection of real everyday life spirituality. Boone describes testimonies as confessing and narrating personal stories,⁶⁴⁷ which allows participation and increases a sense of belonging in a community.

4.3.2.12. Altar Call

Either during worship or after the sermon, preachers challenged the congregation to commit their lives to God or to receive personal prayer ministry, inviting them to respond. Preachers invited respondents to come to the front area in what is known as an "altar call".⁶⁴⁸ The elders were requested to pray for respondents, and worship music was often played in the background. During one altar call that I observed, approximately thirty people responded,

⁶⁴⁵ In traditional Chin rituals, the sacrificed meat was distributed according to their status. Khai, *Zo People*, 179.

⁶⁴⁶ Yi, email conversation with the author, May 15, 2010.

⁶⁴⁷ Boone, "Community and Worship," 140. Cartledge uses testimony as a theme for his research on a Pentecostal congregation, see Cartledge, *Testimony in the Spirit*.

⁶⁴⁸ Altar calls are most common in evangelical and Pentecostal traditions, while still being used to respond to evangelistic sermons, they are also used in Pentecostalism to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit, to receive a blessing to submit or dedicate lives or in response to a specific word or issue addressed in the sermon. The practice of altar calls associates Pentecostal preaching with real-life application and offers an opportunity for an immediate response, rather than merely listening to a sermon. Chairs at the front may be removed to make room for respondents.

mostly women. Interestingly the elders who prayed for the respondents were mostly male, as the majority of leaders were male, but I had expected gender-specific ministry, which often occurs in the West. As the Chin have established decorum for cross-gender contact and Chin women are involved in prayer ministry, it was surprising that women did not pray for female respondents. Respondents received prayer passively, worshipping quietly or sometimes crying. Boone refers to this type of prayer as verbally releasing burdens;⁶⁴⁹ such prayer also functioned as an emotional outlet to express their struggles.

I saw some interesting physical dynamics and postures used during altar calls. The elders poured oil on their hands, and then placed their hands on the respondents' heads or shoulders as a point of contact. Altar calls require active responses from individuals to walk to the front, but their stance was more passive when receiving prayer. The rest of the congregation raised their hands towards the respondents at the altar and prayed for them corporately in tongues, in a communal ritual which involved the participation of the community, reflecting Asian values. It is a concrete ritual, involving a mixture of senses: the texture of the oil, the sound of the background music and the touch of the ministers' hands. Touch through "laying on of hands" is a form of "communication" and "sharing",⁶⁵⁰ as the ministers are positioned as "a conduit for healing power",⁶⁵¹ representative of leadership status in Chin culture. There is an associated higher expectation that leaders' prayers are more effective, because they are assumed to be more spiritual.

In the case where there were numerous respondents, the preacher prayed from the front, assuring them that the Holy Spirit was present everywhere and would minister to them, and

⁶⁴⁹ Boone, "Community and Worship," 140.

⁶⁵⁰ Francis A. Sullivan, S.J. "The Laying on of Hands in Christian Tradition" in *Spirit and Renewal: Essays in Honor of J. Rodman Williams*, ed. Mark W. Wilson, Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series 5, general editors John Christopher Thomas, Rick D. Moore and Steven J. Land (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 43-44. The biblical support is Num. 27:18,20 and Deut. 34:9. Mk. 6:5; 10:14 and Lk. 4:40; 6:19.

⁶⁵¹ Albrecht, "An Anatomy of Worship", 81.

nobody laid hands on them physically. This assurance was based on God being omnipresent, contrasting with their former beliefs that the spirits were not.

Altar calls are practised by Pentecostals globally and would have been introduced to the Chin by the missionaries and may be described as the “climax” of the service.⁶⁵² The regular use of altar calls and the substantial numbers who responded suggest that the Chin have adopted this ritual, even though no obviously unique Chin elements were added. Chin altar calls resembled western practice, and more women than men responded, which is to be expected because of their larger representation in the church, but also because women may be more emotionally responsive. Generally, the leadership-laity divide is less pronounced in the West, but there may still be an expectation that leaders’ prayers are special,⁶⁵³ which is reinforced by the altar call model.

Even though primal religious ceremonies did not include literal altar calls, there are some interesting parallels. Healing and blessing are common appeals for altar calls and ironically, the Chin also sacrificed animals on altars to receive healing and blessing. Thus, receiving healing and blessing from a spiritual source resonates with Chin spirituality, which is also characteristic of Pentecostal theology. Incidentally, church buildings replaced the religious and social role of altars in primal religion. Jesus’ cross is a type of altar, on which humans are invited to offer their lives sacrificially,⁶⁵⁴ and Albrecht sometimes refers to “sacrifices of prayer” during altar calls⁶⁵⁵ as re-dedication or intercession, resonating loosely with the Chin sacrificial system. The term “altar” is generally associated with re-enacting Jesus’ sacrifice particularly in Roman Catholicism, whereas the area between the platform and congregation

⁶⁵² Albrecht, *Rites in the Spirit*, 168.

⁶⁵³ Cartledge also expressed “a tension” between leaders in laity in an AG church in Birmingham, UK. Cartledge, *Testimony in the Spirit*, 52.

⁶⁵⁴ Daniel Tomberlin, *Pentecostal Sacraments: Encountering God at the Altar* (Cleveland, TN: Center for Pentecostal Leadership and Care, 2010), 3. The biblical support is: Romans 12:1 and Galatians 2:20.

⁶⁵⁵ Albrecht, *Rites in the Spirit*, 165-9.

in Pentecostal churches is a designated “altar” for prayer. The term “altar” used here merely refers to a set location and available time where an encounter with God can take place.⁶⁵⁶

People walk around freely in this space before and after the altar call, without revering it as particularly sacred. For Pentecostals the personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit undermines the sanctity of a particular location of an altar.

In this analysis of the liturgy, it appears that the songs and the preaching were the most contextualized aspects, which is not surprising, considering that these were the two elements composed by the Chin themselves.

4.4. An Analysis of the Theological Discourse of the Liturgy

In this section, the theological discourse of Chin Pentecostal liturgy is analysed, using a three-tiered framework: relationship; primal influence, and practice, which will also be used to examine the theology of the indigenous songs in the next chapter. The “**theology of relationship**” examines the relationship of the Chin with the Trinity. A culture’s relationship with God is not just an essential aspect of any living theology, but also gives insight into how the concept of God has been contextualized. Secondly, the “**theology of primal influence**” examines whether there are any remaining influences from their primal religion within their current beliefs and practices, which is particularly useful, considering that syncretism is a contentious issue. Thirdly, the “**theology of practice**” includes issues regarding holiness, worship, church life, evangelism and missions, as an umbrella term borrowed from William Kay.⁶⁵⁷ These issues are important as they relate to the practical experience of Chin Pentecostals.

⁶⁵⁶ Tomberlin, *Pentecostal Sacraments*, 3.

⁶⁵⁷ William Kay and Anne Dyer, eds. “Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies: A Reader” (London: SCM, 2004).

4.4.1. Theology of Relationship

This section examines how Chin liturgy portrays the Chin relationship with members of the Trinity, and how well this relationship is contextualized, considering their former familiarity with spirits and their western influences. Despite the AG being Trinitarian, Pentecostals are sometimes criticised for a lack of development in their Trinitarian theology.⁶⁵⁸ The Chin's concept of relating to the Trinity will be examined in even more detail in their worship songs in the next chapter, but this section examines what other aspects of the liturgy reveal.

In the liturgy, Father God features strongly and was the member of the Trinity most frequently mentioned in the sermons. It was interesting to see how they relate to God and it was apparent that they perceive God's role especially in expecting provision of blessing. Similarly, the declarations, "God is good..." demonstrate an expectation of personal practical benefits. These expectations to receive blessing are characteristic of their dynamic faith within Pentecostalism, which are relevant to their poor socio-economic context. Their positive affirmations assert that God's character is "good", contrasting with the malevolent spirits of their former religion.

Jesus was mentioned second most frequently in the sermons. In three different sermons the account of Jesus encouraging Peter's faith was mentioned,⁶⁵⁹ despite preachers choosing the biblical texts independently. This portrays Jesus as an encouraging friend, exhorting them to follow Jesus' example as a role model.⁶⁶⁰ Jesus' relatability as a human and ongoing role as an intercessor⁶⁶¹ points to the help that Jesus offers. During communion, Jesus' death is commemorated, however briefly, as Jesus is revered for His sacrificial death. References to evangelism alluded to Jesus' soteriological role, even if not explicitly mentioning Jesus by

⁶⁵⁸ Frank Macchia, "Pentecostal Theology: A Time of Ferment", *Pneuma* 31, no. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2009): 1-2.

⁶⁵⁹ Sermon in Churches Blue, 11 April, 2010; Red, 11 April 2010 and Yellow, 25 April 2010.

⁶⁶⁰ Sermon in Church Red, 11 April, 2010.

⁶⁶¹ Sermon in Church Green, 21 April, 2010.

name. However, Chin Pentecostals interact with Jesus less than western Pentecostals seem to do; the latter relate to Jesus in intimate terms as a friend or a brother, whilst this level of familiarity has not been adopted by the Chin. The Chin are more comfortable relating to God and the Holy Spirit. Jesus was a new concept for them, not present in their primal religion, whilst they already had a concept of a supreme being and were already familiar with spirits. It was surprising that the Holy Spirit was not mentioned much in the sermons, despite the Chin's claims that they emphasise the Holy Spirit more than the other members of the Trinity.⁶⁶² However, this may be because the leaders were concerned that the congregation, especially the "illiterate" members, interact more with the Holy Spirit,⁶⁶³ praying directly to "Holy Spirit" not "God",⁶⁶⁴ so their sermons focused on teaching about God and Jesus as an attempt to counteract this tendency. The Chin leaders perceive this over emphasis on the Holy Spirit as theological ignorance within Myanmar AG. Granted, the Holy Spirit is emphasised in Pentecostalism generally; the Chin emphasis of even praying to the Holy Spirit is particular, but not necessarily exclusive, to the Chin AG.

Moreover, despite not being explicitly mentioned frequently in the liturgy, the Holy Spirit's presence would have been implicit during worship. The Chin acknowledge and enjoy "God's presence",⁶⁶⁵ and God is the object of their worship, yet they describe their encounter as being "touched" by the Holy Spirit, whom they "experience".⁶⁶⁶ A distinct Pentecostal-charismatic experience is the baptism of the Holy Spirit,⁶⁶⁷ which was occasionally mentioned in the liturgy, in addition to speaking in tongues and praying for healing, which

⁶⁶² Na, interview by author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 26 April, 2010.

⁶⁶³ Li, interview by author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 25 April 2010. Also highlighted by Ping, interview by author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 23 April 2010 and Na, interview by author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 26 April 2010.

⁶⁶⁴ Ping, interview by author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 23 April 2010.

⁶⁶⁵ Jun, interview by author, Kalaymyo, 22 April, 2010 and Yu, interview by author, Yangon, 30 April, 2010.

⁶⁶⁶ Qi, interview by author, Yangon, 3 May, 2010.

⁶⁶⁷ Kärkkäinen, "Pneumatologies," 227.

were also attributed to the Holy Spirit.⁶⁶⁸ Even though the baptism is attributed solely to the Holy Spirit, theologians recognise that other members of the Trinity are also involved.⁶⁶⁹

Some Chin claim that their primary focus is on the Holy Spirit, whom they pray directly to, attributing miracles, deliverances, conversion and life transformation to the “free work of the Holy Spirit”.⁶⁷⁰ Pentecostals in other contexts would address and attribute such interventions to God and Jesus.⁶⁷¹ Interviewees expressed that they enjoy the Holy Spirit to such an extent that they forget their problems, as they “experience joy”,⁶⁷² describing their interactions in intimate terms. They sense that the Holy Spirit moves more “strongly” when they speak in tongues,⁶⁷³ and they prefer exercising spiritual gifts rather than reading their Bibles, having a more relational than doctrine-based spirituality.

It can be seen that the Chin have developed their own concept of the Trinity, receiving salvation via their relationship with Jesus, then blessing and provision from Father God, whilst interacting daily with their beloved Holy Spirit.

4.4.2. Theology of Primal Influence

It is evident that Chin Pentecostals transferred the primal spirits’ role in blessing and protecting them onto God, not only believing that God has power but, in contrast, that God was good and that He loved and cared for them. The theme of “power” is evident in the exercise of their faith for provision and overcoming struggles. This was more common in Chin liturgies than it is in western ones. As early converts, this was particularly relevant as

⁶⁶⁸ The interpreter present during the church services was also questioned regarding any prophetic utterances which may have missed due to the language barrier, but there were not any prophecies in those services.

⁶⁶⁹ Frank Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit: A Global Pentecostal Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 117.

⁶⁷⁰ Yan, interview by author, Kalaymyo, 26 April 2010.

⁶⁷¹ Albrecht and Howard, “Pentecostal Spirituality”: 237, 235-253.

⁶⁷² Fan, interview by author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 25 April, 2010.

⁶⁷³ Tao, interview by author, Kalaymyo, 22 April, 2010.

they sought spiritual power to overcome the spirits' perceived power and replacing their role for blessings and healing.

During the Pentecostal liturgy, the Chin were directly seeking God's presence because they enjoyed it, in contrast to their primal rituals to appease spirits in certain locations where they feared that a spirit was present. An interviewee's statement that the AG taught them how to please God, who has sanctified them, indicates that some perceive their relationship with God in terms of pleasing God. Initially, after conversion, the Chin offered animal sacrifices to appease God also,⁶⁷⁴ but these practices have effectively ceased. They still retain a desire to please God, which resembles appeasement to a small degree. However, God was holy, unlike the malevolent spirits of primal religion.

The Chin's familiarity with the spirits transferred to an ease when interacting with the Holy Spirit, which is facilitated more in Pentecostal liturgies than in other denominations. While Pentecostals worldwide may be known for emphasising the Holy Spirit, the spiritual intensity observed during Chin worship was distinctive. Chin Pentecostalism emphasised Pneumatology and "flowing with the Holy Spirit".⁶⁷⁵ The terms which the Chin used in relation to the Holy Spirit as "higher", "superior",⁶⁷⁶ "clean" Spirit are indicative of their concept of the nature of the Holy Spirit. They related to the Holy Spirit in terms of His characteristics of power and cleanliness, which contrasts with what they understood of the spirits.⁶⁷⁷

The issue which resembled primal religion the most was the Chin's perception that when the Holy Spirit moved powerfully, deliverance from other spirits simultaneously occurred in the

⁶⁷⁴ He relates that because the first converts did not die so other people followed Christianity as well. Ping, interview by author, Kalaymyo, 23 April, 2010. This demonstrates a display of superior spiritual power in Christianity as the spirits no longer were able to harm them.

⁶⁷⁵ Tao, interview by author, Kalaymyo, 22 April 2010.

⁶⁷⁶ Na, interview by author, Kalaymyo, trans. Xiu, 26 April, 2010.

⁶⁷⁷ Ping, interview by author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 23 April 2010.

congregation.⁶⁷⁸ Interestingly, in the gospel accounts, the exorcism of demons was attributed to the power of Jesus, and later his disciples also exorcised demons, using Jesus' authority. Yet, the Chin mostly attributed their exorcisms of spirits to the power of the Holy Spirit, rather than to Jesus. This makes sense in their understanding of the spiritual realm of a more powerful spirit expelling a less powerful spirit. Ongoing deliverance practices imply their belief in the continuing existence of the spirits among them. Pastors reported their struggle with deliverance practices, but they found the discernment of spirits challenging, and so they permitted practices to continue as they did not want to risk hindering the Holy Spirit's work.⁶⁷⁹ This demonstrates the great value which they placed on the Holy Spirit's work. Their beliefs varied as to whether the spirits equated with the biblical concept of demons; but believers' spiritual practices and their responses to what they perceive as possession, oppression, or spirit influence resembled biblical accounts of demonic deliverances. The Chin distinctive is obvious as such deliverance practices would not regularly occur during western Pentecostal services and the American AG have explicitly stated that Christians cannot be demon possessed.⁶⁸⁰ Similar practices, however, are permissible in other cultural contexts. Thus, the Chin Pentecostal liturgy fulfilled similar roles to primal religion, and included worship, singing, dancing, giving financial gifts and receiving blessing and deliverance, despite the differences in the liturgical rituals. This resembles how African Pentecostals have similarly Christianised some of their former spiritual practices. Therefore, the Chin have developed their own praxis in their form of Pentecostalism, with influences from their primal religious experiences.

⁶⁷⁸ They specify that they cry and roll on the ground when experiencing deliverance. Tao, interview by author, Kalaymyo, 22 April 2010.

⁶⁷⁹ En, interview by author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 26 April, 2010.

⁶⁸⁰ The approved official statement on the question of whether Christians can be demon possessed: "Can a Born-Again Believer Be Demon Possessed?"; available from http://ag.org/top/Beliefs/position_papers/pp_downloads/pp_4176_possestted.pdf; accessed 30 April 2015.

4.4.3. Theology of Practice

In the theology of practice, Pentecostal gifts, discipleship, and the “specific and concrete issues” of everyday life, including their theological response to the poor socio-economic condition as well as eschatological views, are examined.

Many sermon themes which I heard encouraged faith to believe for provision and having a positive self-image. An overall theme of “victorious living” related to their socio-economic hardship. However, one Chin Baptist leader criticised Chin church leaders for appealing for finances, whilst enjoying a higher standard of living than their members. He criticised this practice as presenting a “colonial Christ”, and as insensitive to people’s hardship.⁶⁸¹ The preachers I heard were transparent about their own financial struggles, but testified that they gave sacrificially and that God blessed them, thus challenging congregants to have faith to keep giving. This echoes the biblical teaching to give, in order to receive,⁶⁸² but it is contrary to the natural order, and it is a spiritual approach to their practical struggles. Pentecostals typically present the church as “spiritually empowered”,⁶⁸³ which is also reflected in the Chin’s belief in supernatural healing. Pentecostals have been criticised for neglecting social concerns whilst emphasising spiritual conversion,⁶⁸⁴ but the Chin do address their living conditions, albeit in a spiritual way. An even more relevant approach would be to help people find employment or manage their finances.

Encouraging the congregation to trust in God for basic provision did not refer to the accrual of excessive wealth. The association between giving and the expectation of material benefit

⁶⁸¹ Yong, interview by author, Yangon, 16 April 2010.

⁶⁸² Luke 6:38 “Give, and it will be given to you.”

⁶⁸³ Jenkins and Kavan, “Sermon Responses”, 145. In this research they examined general presuppositions of preaching preferences and efficacy in two Anglican and two Elim churches in Hawkes Bay, New Zealand. David Martin also points to the lack of references in Pentecostalism to the economic context based on his research in Latin America, David Martin, *Tongues of Fire: The Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 205.

⁶⁸⁴ Anderson, *An Introduction*, 276.

may be traced to an American influence.⁶⁸⁵ However, when forms of the “prosperity gospel” are preached in Asian and African contexts, it is understood differently in contexts where people need basic provision for their daily sustenance.⁶⁸⁶ However, in the Chin context, looking to God for provision in this way has replaced reliance on the role of the spirits, who they perceived to provide blessing.

Receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit and using spiritual gifts were important issues for the Chin, relating to their Pentecostal identity. There was an underlying generational conflict as the older generation criticise the younger generation for not being baptised in the Holy Spirit,⁶⁸⁷ especially because they did not experience the renewal in the 1970s; so the older generation critique that the younger generation only learn about worship, without experiencing it.⁶⁸⁸ They maintain that because singing in tongues increases the movement of the Holy Spirit, the youth cannot lead worship to a deeper level. This emphasis on the spiritual gift of tongues and a belief that the use of tongues increases the presence of the Holy Spirit, resembles their primal spirituality, which was sensitive to the presence of the spirits, which is distinct to the Chin. The American AG teach that tongues are the initial evidence of Holy Spirit baptism, and this may also have influenced the Chin.⁶⁸⁹ However, the Chin young people that I interviewed claimed that they could speak in tongues, and there were reports of young people being baptised with the Holy Spirit at a youth camp.⁶⁹⁰ Incidentally there is also

⁶⁸⁵ Hunt, “Sociology of Religion,” 194.

⁶⁸⁶ Philip Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 90, 97.

⁶⁸⁷ Tao, interview by author, Kalaymyo, 22 April 2010.

⁶⁸⁸ Tao, interview by author, Kalaymyo, 22 April 2010. In the generational difference, it appears the older generation are 45 and over as that age group would remember the revivals, but those younger would not remember them.

⁶⁸⁹ Wei, interview by author, Yangon, 12 April 2010.

The leaders in the AG headquarters in Yangon denied that Myanmar AG had their own statement of faith. Theological education was initiated by American AG missionaries and so similar teachings are expected. See Sann Oo, “The Indispensable Mission.”

⁶⁹⁰ Church C, observed during April and May 2010. Furthermore, special Chin worship gatherings and youth renewal meetings are regularly reported on social media, such as Facebook. Admittedly, they are not as intense or continuous as the renewals during the 1970s, but it demonstrates a continued interest in renewal experiences among the Chin, even the youth.

a decline in the West of “Pentecostals” who are baptised in the Holy Spirit and practicing public spiritual gifts in church services.⁶⁹¹

4.5. Hybridity, Syncretism and Contextualization

The main influences on Chin Pentecostal liturgy are western influences, indigenous religion and Chin culture, which are examined in the next sections of hybridity, syncretism and contextualization to the culture.

4.5.1. Hybridity with Western Pentecostalism within Chin AG Liturgy

The western elements highlighted in the liturgy could be described as “hybrid”, a term used to describe practices which display characteristics of two or more sources. It may be argued that adopted forms not understood or interpreted correctly could either be a type of syncretism, or a lack of contextualization. As these terms overlap, their distinctions are examined in more detail, especially in chapter six.

The most prominent influence on Chin liturgy is western Pentecostalism, sometimes adopted unquestioningly, because of the Chin’s loyalty to the form of Christianity which had been initially received via western missionaries. Their concept of western idealism caused the Chin to sacrifice aspects of their own culture which was costly for them because expensive western technology was used rather than their indigenous instruments. Chin traditional music is almost extinct now, and is appreciated by only an estimated 1% of the Chin, mostly older people, who play it in order to preserve it.⁶⁹² I only heard the traditional singing and

⁶⁹¹ In the British AG, David Allen reports the former common occurrence of speaking in tongues, interpretation and prophetic messages to which the congregation respond. David Allen, “Signs and Wonders: The Origins, Growth, Development and Significance of Assemblies of God in Great Britain and Ireland 1900-1980” (PhD Thesis, University of London, 1990), 126-7. In British Pentecostal churches, the use of spiritual gifts varies, prophecies and interpretation of tongues sometimes occurs, but appears to have declined, which correlates with William Kay’s findings. Kay, *Pentecostals in Britain*, 76-77. This book reports on a postal survey of 930 Pentecostal ministers who responded out of 1,600 who were invited to participate. The research was conducted from 1996-7 of the four main Pentecostal denominations in Britain, Elim, AG, Church of God and the Apostolic church. His findings similarly suggest a decline in the use of spiritual gifts.

⁶⁹² Tao, interview by author, Kalaymyo, 22 April 2010.

instruments in one service, played by older people as a special number apparently for my benefit. During the performance, the youth looked embarrassed. Interviewees explained that traditional music is now considered basic and old-fashioned and is not appreciated by the youth because they have not experienced their traditional culture.

Maintaining indigenous music for worship would be considered a further step in contextualization,⁶⁹³ but the new Chin converts adopted western music forms for their worship. Perhaps the younger people may appreciate indigenous music more, had it had been regularly used. However, it is arguable now that even though traditional Chin music is indigenous to the Chin, it is no longer so contextual, in the sense of not being representative of the majority of contemporary Chin. Contextualization is a dynamic process, and as culture changes, so does its contextual forms.⁶⁹⁴ Rather than seeing the value in their unique indigenous music, they argue that its distinctiveness would not permit others to unite with them. An interviewee commented that, “unity is needed as we are part of one body as an international community, if we worship according to our own culture, then we will not be able to join with them”.⁶⁹⁵ Resembling other Pentecostals was an important issue for the Chin, because they derived an aspect of their identity from their association with international Pentecostals. They valued connection highly, bearing in mind that the Chin were isolated from the outside world for decades due to the government’s restrictions. Apart from travel, the influences of globalization through media, including television and the internet have connected the Chin with Pentecostals worldwide. The older generation are not surprisingly more resistant to changes.

⁶⁹³ Lim, “Asian Christian Forms”, 534.

⁶⁹⁴ Allan Anderson, “Contextualization in Pentecostalism: A Multi-cultural Perspective,” *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 41, no.1 (January 2017), 33.

⁶⁹⁵ Lei, interview by author, Yangon, 20 April 2010.

One older interviewee criticised the youth for their modern musical style, replacing the Chin drum with the guitar and keyboard and even wearing western clothing, while he considered himself to be concerned with preserving “authenticity” in worship. He feared that the youth had fallen “victim” to westernisation because of their education. His use of the term “victim” is interesting in view of how westernisation had been imposed on the older generation, whilst the younger generation freely chose western songs. The irony is that the country songs preferred by the older generation are also western music, but because they are from a previous generation, their source has been forgotten over time.

In a British AG church described by Cartledge, incidentally, there are many similarities between the Chin AG and British AG liturgies. The “predictability in the sequence” in Birmingham,⁶⁹⁶ resembles the same likelihood of a similar arrangement, which is remarkable, considering their vast cultural differences. This pattern has emerged despite Pentecostals’ aversion to establishing tradition; there are many similarities among the oral liturgy among Pentecostals globally. The similarities may be surprising considering the liturgical orders are unwritten, but the chronology and elements of the liturgy are essentially memorised and imported. Spontaneity permits flexibility wherever necessary in the order.⁶⁹⁷ The Chin have imitated and maintained a western imported liturgy, conforming to a service pattern initially introduced by missionaries, despite vast cultural differences, religious backgrounds, spirituality and the varying needs of westerners and Chin. However, some differences between British and Chin liturgies were that the Chin emphasise the worship time more, as well as the additional feature of special numbers, whereas the British emphasise the sermons more, which are more exegetical than the Chin’s narrative style. These emphases reflect their cultural values.

⁶⁹⁶ Cartledge conducted ethnographic research in “Hockley Pentecostal Church” (HPC) in Birmingham in 2007 and 2008. Cartledge, *Testimony in the Spirit*, 32.

⁶⁹⁷ Cartledge, *Testimony in the Spirit*, 44.

Understanding why the Chin adopted a western liturgy may be due to esteem for the west and because such a liturgy meets their needs. The loyalty to the missionaries is probably most seen in the formality of practices which are now outdated in the West, such as the leaders entering after the worship has already begun. The real question is why they did not adapt their liturgy to forms which are familiar to Chin culture. Perhaps they lack confidence and the necessary tools to know how to adapt the liturgy due to their western theological education. The forms still serve their original intended functions, and they may not be aware of more recent western modernisation, and so they perceive no need to change them. These indicate dynamics which are applicable to other cultures, and not just limited to the Chin. Moreover, the West is no longer taking the lead in global Christianity, and local theologies are being developed and recognised.⁶⁹⁸

4.5.2. How Contextualized is Chin Liturgy?

The Chin perceive Pentecostal worship to be a vital aspect of their spirituality, describing themselves as “great worshippers, all heart, minds and strength, singing worship in the spirit”.⁶⁹⁹ This phrase, “in the spirit” indicates the Chin’s consciousness of their own spirits, and is used often by the Chin. They claim that their propensity for worship was part of their identity formerly as primal worshipers. However, it was surprising that, on initial observation, Chin liturgy did not appear well contextualized, but very similar to western church services and vastly different from Chin traditional culture.

The moral and social impacts of a lack of contextualization has been well described by a Chin scholar who laments that western individualistic preaching was ineffective in addressing sin

⁶⁹⁸ Satyavrata “Mission “Made to Travel,” 189.

⁶⁹⁹ Yu, interview by author, Yangon, 30 April 2010.

or effecting social change because it did not speak to the Chin's group identity. He even goes to the extent of relating that it has demolished the Chin sense of "group above self".⁷⁰⁰

Pentecostalism is conducive to contextualization for various reasons, and "primal spirituality" has already been addressed earlier. One interviewee claimed that Pentecostal worship is "true to their culture", resonating with aspects of their culture and even their former religion. The orality of Pentecostal theology is contextualized to Chin tradition, considering especially spiritual gifts, characteristically exercised by Pentecostals verbally. Permission for spontaneous expressions within the liturgy increases the likelihood of uniquely Chin aspects. Pentecostals perceive that the Holy Spirit speaks into their particular context, with prophecy about their current situation and the reading of relevant Bible verses. This freedom for creativity has the potential to interpret and express worship uniquely, thus allowing distinctive Chin aspects to emerge. This differs from their primal religion, in which there was an established ritual. This potential for relevance does not occur as much in set prescribed liturgies, which do not permit participation.

Parables, stories, songs and dance are contextualized forms,⁷⁰¹ which may be adapted to liturgies. However, one interviewee felt that there is room for the Chin to use more of their own poetry, history, dance and drama in order to further contextualize the liturgy.⁷⁰²

Nevertheless, the Chin have taken ownership of their form of Pentecostal liturgy through the nuanced adaptations and emphases mentioned above. Such decisions may not have been made formally at a leaders' meeting, but they have felt free to adapt the liturgy intuitively over time.

⁷⁰⁰ Khai, "Pentecostalism in Myanmar," 69.

⁷⁰¹ Louis J. Luzbetak, S.V.D., *The Church and Cultures: New Perspectives in Missiological Anthropology* (Maryknoll, New York, 1988), 83.

⁷⁰² Hua, interview by author, Yangon, 27 April 2010.

4.5.3. The Question of Syncretism with Primal Religion in Chin AG Liturgy

Due to the ease with which many Chin relate to aspects of their primal religion, there has been much concern about the potential for syncretism. For instance, playing the traditional drum was described as being “socially relevant and sustainable” along with singing indigenous songs and dancing,⁷⁰³ which many Chin related to because of their traditional culture. When they played the drum in worship some sensed that the Holy Spirit “dwelt among us”,⁷⁰⁴ suggesting that the drum was helpful in encountering the Holy Spirit’s presence, and they were inspired to dance as they had done formerly. However, in their primal rituals, they had used the drum to evoke or “honour” evil spirits.⁷⁰⁵ That association caused some to reject the drum as unredeemable for Christian worship,⁷⁰⁶ whereas others perceived it as an effective instrument for worship. Interestingly, Myo Chit, the former superintendent of the AG had forbidden playing the Chin drum in Yangon because of it being “too noisy”.⁷⁰⁷ However, as modern drum-kits and amplification are still used, this decision was more likely to have been associated with the controversy regarding syncretism rather than with volume levels.

Meanwhile, others merely remember the drum nostalgically as part of their traditional culture,⁷⁰⁸ and no longer associate it with primal religion, merely recalling its cultural value.

One interviewee’s reason for choosing the drum to accompany worship was only because of

⁷⁰³ P.C. Muanthanga, “Indigenous Mission of Baptist Church of Mizoram” in *Churches of Indigenous Origins*, 161.

⁷⁰⁴ Jun, interview by author, Kalaymyo, 22 April, 2010.

⁷⁰⁵ Ping, interview by author, Kalaymyo, 23 April, 2010.

⁷⁰⁶ Wei, interview by author, Yangon, 12 April 2010. Khai explains the drum is not “smooth” so it is not compatible for worship. This reflects a change in musical style.

⁷⁰⁷ Myo Chit, former superintendent of Myanmar AG, interview by author, 11 April, 2010. He was Burmese himself and not a Chin, so even though he was very influential in promoting the AG in Chin state, yet he did not know the Chin dialect or the culture first-hand.

⁷⁰⁸ Chao, interview by author, Yangon, 16 April 2010.

not having a guitar.⁷⁰⁹ He more naturally associated a western guitar with Christian worship, whilst he associated the drum more with primal religion.

Their Chin ancestors danced to celebrate killing their enemies and in other primal rituals.⁷¹⁰ This raises the question of whether Chin dancing in church really is “in the Spirit”,⁷¹¹ a phrase the Chin used to describe experiences associated with the Holy Spirit. Some defended dancing in church on the basis that they now have “humbleness in their spirit”,⁷¹² compared with the pride felt for having killed an enemy in pre-Christian times. Furthermore, dancing is no longer associated with killing and their style of dance in church does differ from traditional dances. Actually, “dancing in the Spirit” and “flowing” in worship are also described in other contexts, including British Pentecostalism and also as expressions of freedom associated with renewal. Dancing in British Pentecostalism is similarly described as having a simple form, like “hopping”.⁷¹³ Dancing is an aspect of Pentecostal liturgy in general, and its association with primal rituals may only be incidental.

As seen, the anticipation for encounters with God during worship is universal within Pentecostalism. However, the expectation for intense worship to precede deliverance is non-western and is characteristically, but not uniquely, Chin. This perceived necessity for deliverance is associated with belief that the spirits still linger. Chin leaders are concerned wherever they suspect that primal religion may be mixed with Pentecostalism. Deciphering precise spiritual sources is challenging because of their invisible and subjective nature.

⁷⁰⁹ Tao, interview by author, Kalaymyo, 22 April 2010.

⁷¹⁰ Fan, interview by author, Kalaymyo, 25 April 2010.

⁷¹¹ Ying, interview by author, Yangon, 13 April 2010.

⁷¹² Yan, interview by author, Kalaymyo, 26 April 2010.

⁷¹³ Hudson, “Singing a New Song,” 189.

4.6. Conclusion

It is evident from examining Chin liturgy that the Chin's former affinity and engagement with the spirits has transferred to an ease in encountering God's presence in worship, and heightened their awareness of the Holy Spirit, fitting with Pentecostal Pneumatology. It can be argued that the Chin's anticipation of God's blessing and power are derived from their concept of blessing previously sought by appeasing the spirits. It can also be argued that Pentecostalism's theology of blessing and belief in God's ability to heal and intervene dynamically in their lives also facilitates Chin spirituality. Additionally, Pentecostalism's freedom in worship and expectation to hear from God are also easily adapted by the Chin. Chin liturgy is a hybrid of western Pentecostalism and varying degrees of contextualization to Chin culture, with some evidence of syncretism with primal religion.

Applying Cox's hypothesis to the Chin AG, it appears that some aspects of a "primal spirituality" have been incorporated. Some Chin openly claim that their "deep Zomi worship" was transferred from Chin religion onto AG worship. They assume that their intensity in worship is distinct to them. These Chin seem comfortable with the association that "ecstatic worship" releases repressed spirituality, finding its expression through Pentecostalism.⁷¹⁴ Cox's hypothesis of "primal spirituality" implies that there is an in-built spirituality in humanity, which the Holy Spirit fills. This is significant for contextualization as it steers the discussion away from the conventional focus of adapting practices and missionaries' cultural knowledge in order to contextualize. It also contributes to the reasons why Pentecostalism grows organically.

⁷¹⁴ Cox, *Fire From Heaven*, 81 and 101.

CHAPTER 5

A CASE-STUDY IN CHIN CONTEXTUALIZATION: WORSHIP SONGS

5. Introduction

As mentioned in the previous chapter, oral forms are well utilised by Pentecostals; this is a familiar medium for the Chin who already have their own traditional oral culture, thus oral forms carry weight for Chin Pentecostals. As previously argued, oral forms potentially disclose valuable insights into contextualization; it is therefore apt to examine Chin oral theology in more detail. The Chin's indigenous song lyrics were selected for analysis because Chin Pentecostals claim that they are well contextualized since they have composed over 500 indigenous worship songs. This has led to them perceiving themselves as "more contextualized than most tribes".⁷¹⁵

Composing songs was part of Chin culture traditionally, which they continued post-conversion as an expression of worship and a narrative of their context. In contrast, other aspects of the oral liturgy were not as suitable for the purpose of examining contextualization. Preaching represents established, rational theology, aiming for orthodoxy, and was delivered by those who often had received a westernised theological education. While dance was a practice used in the liturgy, it was a non-verbal expression which occurred variably, and so was not as conducive to in-depth analysis. The prayer elements were also brief and variable, and often spontaneous simultaneous tongues were uttered, which defy translation and analysis. Thus, the songs composed by the Chin are unique, displaying the Chin's creativity and primary theological insights, which is why they have received privileged attention in this separate chapter.

⁷¹⁵ Tor, email conversation with the author, 19 October 2009. Chin interviewees do not state a precise figure of the songs, as not all songs are published in song books, but are transmitted orally and only known locally. Therefore these figures are only estimates.

5.1. The Importance of Worship Songs for Pentecostalism and the Chin

Worship songs are considered inspired by the Holy Spirit for a particular context and time, and in this way could be described as contextualized, albeit in a “prophetic” sense.⁷¹⁶

Likewise, many Chin composers were inspired to write songs at the time of their indigenous renewal, which is a common phenomenon following renewals,⁷¹⁷ and increases their sense of edification from the songs. Similarly, the Chin have a deep sense of ownership of the songs as narratives are set within their context, “in their own language and style”.⁷¹⁸ They value how the songs uniquely express Chin cultural themes,⁷¹⁹ unlike songs imported from another culture. Furthermore, the Chin’s songs are translated into Burmese for other people groups to sing, thereby promoting the Chin’s reputation among Myanmar Christians.

Worship songs are significant as a concise form which captures the core elements of the Pentecostal movement and as a channel of oral theological expression to a wide audience, thereby being a means of edifying the church.⁷²⁰ The Chin acknowledge that the songs have been instrumental in their theological development,⁷²¹ but there are specific aspects of the Chin context, which strengthen the songs’ theological role. Chin pastors were concerned that many congregants cannot read or understand the Bible for themselves,⁷²² as some Chin are illiterate and there is a general lack of theological education.⁷²³ Therefore, worship songs

⁷¹⁶ Anne E. Dyer, “Some Theological Trends Reflected in the Songs used by the British Charismatic Churches of 1970s-early 2000s.” *JEPTA* 26.1 (2006):38.

⁷¹⁷ Similarly, in the Welsh revival and more recently in the Pentecostal revivals in Brownsville, Pensacola and the Toronto Blessing, songs emerged, which were influential for Pentecostalism globally and were considered to encapsulate the tone of what they were experiencing in the revival.

⁷¹⁸ Tor, email conversation with the author, 19 October 2009.

⁷¹⁹ Qi, interview by author, Yangon, 3 May 2010.

⁷²⁰ Dyer, “Some Theological Trends,” 38.

⁷²¹ Khai, “Pentecostalism in Myanmar”, 64.

⁷²² Li, interview by author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 25 April 2010.

⁷²³ There are discrepancies in the literacy rates for Myanmar as the reliability of the data gathering and the accuracy of the statistics are questioned. The UNESCO estimate for literacy in Myanmar in 2000 was 84.7%. “National Literacy Policies Myanmar” UNESCO Institute for Statistics, July 2002. UNESCO and the Asia/Pacific Culture Centre for UNESCO, 1997 at <http://www.accu.or.jp/litdbase/policy/mmr/index.htm>, accessed on March 23, 2010. There are indications that Chin state has some of the higher levels of illiteracy in Myanmar, because of their poverty and its rural state.

serve as doctrinal tools, whereby they sing theological statements, despite their educational limitations. Furthermore, as the songs were mostly in oral form and unrecorded, the theology contained in the songs has remained uncensored, whilst their written theology was subject to censorship by the Burmese government at the time of this research.⁷²⁴

Similarly, the Chin consider the songs to be a means of spiritual edification, as they relate that the songs enrich their worship experiences.⁷²⁵ Pentecostals perceive that during the singing element of worship, they may engage with the Holy Spirit in a “narrative of encounter”.⁷²⁶ Such connection with the Holy Spirit is how Chin Pentecostals distinguish their worship, in contrast to the Baptists.⁷²⁷ The Chin express the depth of their relationship with God through songs,⁷²⁸ and so the songs reveal insights into their spirituality, which they claim to be intense and unique.

5.1.1. The Historical Context of Chin Songs

The Chin’s traditional songs were composed of only two lines and played with just a few notes, which they disparagingly describe as having a “flat” tune, compared with the range of notes used in contemporary songs.⁷²⁹ They were sung to the accompaniment of the Chin drum, gongs and dancing around the campfire.⁷³⁰ Whilst traditional songs had allegedly not been composed specifically for the spirits, they had nevertheless been associated with honouring the spirits,⁷³¹ and thus they had been prohibited. Some new converts had in fact composed worship songs using this traditional style but these songs were not known to have

⁷²⁴ Hua, interview by author, Yangon, 30 April, 2010. The fact that songs are oral and often uncensored is one of the reasons why historically slaves used songs not only to uplift themselves in their struggle, but sometimes to secretly pass on codes to slaves who tried to escape. These slave songs are known in America as, “Songs of the Underground Railroad.”

⁷²⁵ Khai, “Pentecostalism in Myanmar”, 64.

⁷²⁶ Pete Ward, *Selling Worship: How What We Sing Has Changed the Church* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005), 202-204.

⁷²⁷ Tao, interview by author, Kalaymyo, 22 April, 2010.

⁷²⁸ Khai, “Pentecostalism in Myanmar”, 64.

⁷²⁹ Ming, interview by author, Yangon, 9 April, 2010.

⁷³⁰ Min, interview by author, trans. Yi, Yangon, 14 April, 2010.

⁷³¹ Ping, interview by author, Kalaymyo, 23 April, 2010.

ever been sung publicly in church services.⁷³² One interviewee related how he found unused worship songs composed in a traditional style which had been written by his deceased father.

Conversely, the Baptist missionaries introduced translated hymns and choruses set to a “country and western” tune, which the Chin retained.⁷³³ These western tunes differentiated Chin songs as “Christian”,⁷³⁴ denoting their separation from primal religion and further associating Christianity with westernization. Other host cultures have similarly retained country and western songs, as also seen in the Philippines, although they are typically no longer sung in American churches where they originated. The Chin AG leaders were still translating western songs up until the beginning of the Chin renewal.⁷³⁵

During the course of the renewal, the Chin relate that the second generation started composing “original words”, but still using country and western tunes.⁷³⁶ Due to this origin, the numerous songs which were produced are still referred to as “revival songs”. The Chin claim that they have a “Chin way of singing”, “our own tune” with “special timing” on the drum,⁷³⁷ referring to the way they have adapted the tunes to their own particular style.

However, some Chin also trace some influence on the songs from nearby Mizoram in India.⁷³⁸ The Chin’s perception of their songs’ uniqueness is questionable as some do not realise that the tunes originated with the western missionaries,⁷³⁹ and the style and structure also resembles western songs. However, the Chin do compose their own lyrics, and have indeed adapted the tunes to their own musical style, and so the songs are a hybrid of cultural influences.

⁷³² Ying, interview by author, Yangon, 13 April 2010.

⁷³³ Tao, interview by author, Kalaymyo, 22 April 2010.

⁷³⁴ Ping, interview by author, Kalaymyo, 23 April, 2010.

⁷³⁵ Qi, interview by author, Yangon, 3 May 2010.

⁷³⁶ Ping, interview by author, Kalaymyo, 23 April, 2010.

⁷³⁷ Yu, interview by author, Yangon, 30 April 2010.

⁷³⁸ Wei, interview by author, Yangon, 12 April 2010.

⁷³⁹ Xiu, interview by author, Kalaymyo, 23 April, 2010.

Despite these mixed influences, it is the Chin's perception of ownership which enriches the songs as a source of contextualized theology. Their songs uniquely express Chin theology in their own words with confidence suggesting deep ownership of their faith, not requiring western approval. Therefore, the songs' significance is that they have been composed, owned and valued by the Chin, and represent Chin theology. This concurs with Hayward's observation that indigenous songs have more affinity to local cultures.⁷⁴⁰

5.1.2. The Chin's Usage of Indigenous Songs

Based on the Chin's pride in their songs, I was surprised to find that only 5% of their own indigenous songs were sung during worship.⁷⁴¹ The younger generation reasoned that indigenous songs were sung less during church services because of the Chin's preference for western music and their lack of composers.⁷⁴² The younger generation preferred the contemporary western songs, but paradoxically they did not realise that country and western music is also western, and not authentically Chin. Cultural borrowing caused the true sources to be forgotten over time. Another pastor reasoned that the Chin lacked song composers due to their low socio-economic condition.⁷⁴³ However, there are hundreds of indigenous songs already composed, which are available to them. Despite some congregations not singing many indigenous songs, the Chin's songs are still considered significant because of their local composition. Notwithstanding the predominance of contemporary western translated songs, these are not included in this song text analysis because they do not specifically represent Chin theology.

⁷⁴⁰ Hayward, "Measuring Contextualization," 136.

⁷⁴¹ Chen, interview by author, Yangon, 8 April 2010.

⁷⁴² Ding, interview by author, Yangon, 8 April 2010.

⁷⁴³ Qi, interview by author, Yangon, 3 May 2010.

5.1.3. The Problem with Translated Songs

The demise of indigenous music is common in Asian Christianity, either because missionaries annihilated traditional music or because globalization trends popularise contemporary music. In an attempt to counteract this trend, ethnomusicologists and ethnodoxologists are now training locals to compose their own songs using their own music styles. Hayward recommends the composition of new worship songs due to their relevance to the local culture, compared with imported lyrics which do not express their religious sentiments using indigenous cultural symbols.⁷⁴⁴

Sometimes the Chin also report their lack of connection and gaps in the meanings conveyed in western translated songs, as they bring their own cultural connotations too. The example which the Chin give is the well-known song, “This is my story, this is my song”,⁷⁴⁵ which may be rousing in its English original, but the Chin reported that this song is “meaningless” to them,⁷⁴⁶ as they know it is written in a western context. Ironically though, the Chin use the exact same terms ‘story’ and ‘song’ in their own indigenously composed songs, but in this case they are consciously referring to their own ‘story of their salvation.’ Thus these terms acquire a new significance because of their ownership and knowledge that it is written within their own context.⁷⁴⁷ Therefore, while ‘story’ in western lyrics connotes a foreign experience, relating to somebody else’s salvation, yet ‘story’ in the Chin lyrics is an account of their own conversion experiences, which they relate to. The Chin’s own salvation experiences, as expressed in their indigenous songs will be analysed theologically in this research.

While the Chin’s songs are influenced by the West, the older generation argue that their songs have unique characteristics, which set them apart, claiming that, “Chin songs are not

⁷⁴⁴ Hayward, “Measuring Contextualization”, 136-7.

⁷⁴⁵ This line is from the well-known hymn, “Blessed Assurance”, written by Fanny Crosby in 1873.

⁷⁴⁶ Li, interview by author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 25 April 2010.

⁷⁴⁷ “O! What A Great and Wonderful Love!” and “I’ve Become God’s Child”.

the same as English peoples”.⁷⁴⁸ They engage with the indigenous songs and experience intense spiritual encounters, which they highly value, whereas they do not feel the same connection with the translated English songs, objecting to the contemporary “Hillsongs” especially, which they criticise, as “dictating”.⁷⁴⁹

5.2. Method Used for Song-Text Analysis

5.2.1. Measuring the Contextualization of the Songs

Hayward questions how contextualized worship songs are by merely asking if they are either imported music using translated lyrics or songs composed by locals to indigenous tunes.⁷⁵⁰

However, I perceive that measuring contextualization is much more complex than this binary differentiation. Only indigenous lyrics contain theological insights of a culture, as translated lyrics borrow another culture’s theology; therefore, composing indigenous songs is a significant transition for a culture’s own theological expression.

Other research conducted on contextualization in Asian songs is informative. Despite not always finding distinctly Asian concepts of God in the songs, more subtle nuances are present. Use of informal terminology “friend” and “healer” for God demonstrate their appropriation of God’s roles in their lives.⁷⁵¹ Similarly, the use of agricultural themes is perceived to bridge the gap between earthly and spiritual issues, and this associates God with

⁷⁴⁸ Fan, interview by author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 25 April, 2010. (This reference to “English people” was to western, English speakers within this context, rather than English people from Britain per se.)

⁷⁴⁹ Fan, interview by author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 25 April, 2010.

Conversely, the younger interviewees expressed that they did feel a connection with Hillsongs, often more than these indigenous songs composed to the country and western tunes, which are examined in this research. At the time of research, there were some young people who had begun to compose their own lyrics to contemporary tunes, but they were not yet as popular or as well established.

⁷⁵⁰ Hayward, “Measuring Contextualization”, 136.

⁷⁵¹ I-to Loh, “Ways of Contextualizing Church Music: Some Asian Examples” in *Worship and Mission for the Global Church: An Ethnodoxology Handbook*, ed. James R. Krabill (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2013), 31.

real life, indicating both a loving and sovereign God.⁷⁵² I will analyse how terminology in the Chin songs convey their concept of God.

Furthermore, merely stating whether the tunes are imported or local is an over-simplification, as identifying local music styles is complex since various and hybrid song genres co-exist simultaneously within a culture. The Chin's traditional music is no longer appreciated by most of the younger generation, and its re-introduction now would be "paternalistic" and considered irrelevant.

5.2.2. Song-Text Analysis

This chapter analyses the song texts theologically as described below. As the Chin made their own word selections, so the usage of pronouns, addressees, addressors, descriptors and names for God, theological themes, genres and cultural themes are enumerated in word counts.⁷⁵³

Recurring themes are analysed for unique cultural characteristics. Additionally, I observed the congregations' behaviour while singing, which reflects their level of participation.

Moreover, church leaders were interviewed to establish how the Chin feel about the songs and how representative they are.

a. Pronouns

Pronouns are enumerated and categorised according to who they refer to: I; we (believers); we (humans); You (God); you (others); I (God); He (God) and they (See Appendix Five). The significance of the pronouns is that their language choice indicates theological insights in how they relate to God and perceptions of their own identity, including cultural norms. For example, addressing God directly as "you" implies confidence, and a personal relationship

⁷⁵² Loh, "Ways of Contextualizing," 31.

⁷⁵³ This method of song-text analysis was taught by Ian Collinge an ethnomusicologist/ethnodoxologist at Resonance Cross-Cultural Music Training, Springhead Park House, Rothwell, January 18-31, 2010. <http://www.resonancearts.net/> See Ian Collinge, "Moving from Monocultural to Multicultural Worship," in *Worship and Mission*, ed. Krabill, 438-442.

with God, whereas use of the indirect “He” is a more impersonal reference to God. Whereas using “I” for God reflects the composer speaking on behalf of God.

Using “I” to refer to themselves demonstrates a personal and individualistic concept of identity, whereas “we” demonstrates a communal, group identity. The use of “we” is subdivided, sometimes referring exclusively to Christians, or sometimes encompassing all Chin or Myanmar nationals collectively. The use of “you” was a direct reference to those listening to the song, often Chin believers. An indirect “they” refers to people, sometimes including unbelievers. Their perception of themselves as portrayed in the songs augments the former discussion of identity.

b. Names for God

Likewise, the usage of names for God denotes how they perceive and relate to members of the Trinity (See Appendix Six). The frequency of the usage of terms indicate whether they emphasise or neglect some. The names assigned to God are significant because it influences how a culture perceives and contextualizes their concept of God as both local and foreign names convey meanings.

c. Addressors, Addressees and Descriptors of the Trinity

The addressors were the Chin Pentecostals, referring to themselves as individuals or as a group (similar to the pronoun usage) or God communicating to them directly through the lyrics (See Appendix Seven). The addressees could be directed either to a member of the Trinity or other believers. Their reference to members of the Trinity disclose the type of relationship they have with the various members. The descriptors used to depict the Deity portray their concepts of the Trinity. Their word selection also portray cultural traits, including possible primal influences.

d. Main and Secondary Theological Themes, Genres and Cultural Themes

The theological themes of the Chin songs are analysed for issues which are pertinent for the Chin (See Appendix Eight). The main theological themes are categorised using: God/Father; Jesus; Holy Spirit; the believer; Church (ecclesiology); the world, the “lost” or “unbelievers” (soteriology); Satan or demons (demonology, including if the spirits are equated with demons) and end times (eschatology).⁷⁵⁴ Secondary theological themes varied greatly, with some songs having several themes, and so they are not analysed separately.

The songs are divided into genres, correlating with the theological themes. The genres indicate the varieties of worship songs, namely: Confession; Praise; Worship; Adoration and proclamation of God’s qualities; Doctrinal; Asking favour; Reminding God of His promises; Thanksgiving and Exhortation to oneself or one another. Chin cultural themes or distinctive aspects including references to nature, culture, land, socio-economic or political context, history, traditions or primal religion are enumerated. The significance of these is their insights into the Chin’s concept of identity, the importance of their culture or remnants of primal religion.

5.2.3. Theological Analysis

The songs are analysed theologically, using three categories: 1. Theology of Relationship; 2. Theology of Primal Experience and 3. Theology of Practice. The way that the Chin relate to God and have contextualized their concept of God from their former religious understanding examined in “**A Theology of Relationship**”. As the Chin related that they were influenced by primal religion, the songs analyse possible theological influences in “**A Theology of Primal**

⁷⁵⁴ Dyer, “Some Theological Trends”, 36-48. The themes she uses for analysis are: 1. Jesus-life/birth/ministry; 2. Jesus’ death; 3. Resurrection; 4. Ascension/ Exaltation-triumph; 5. Love from Jesus; 6. Love for Jesus/intimacy/surrender; 7. Commitment; 8. Holy Spirit request for; 9. Blessings/testimony; 10. Testimony; 11. Doctrinal; 12. Hymn types; 13. Church as community; 14. Church coming out of other churches; 15. Church reaching out; 16. Church in victory (war songs/ revival requests); 17. Kingdom come NOW; 18. Last days, 2nd coming and 19. General praise ones.

Experience". Their salvation story is reconstructed using their symbolism, which expresses their living experiences in a confident and personal way in "**A Theology of Practice**". Thus, the song analysis uncovers a practical living theology dealing with relationships, practices and experiences through their own narrative.

5.2.4. Observed Behaviour while Singing Indigenous Songs

As discussed in chapter 4, the congregation's behaviour and activities were observed during singing, which included dancing, raising their hands and clapping, which were considered significant particularly because they were unrehearsed responses. The most distinct observation was that the older generation's worship intensifies when singing their indigenous songs. They rationalise that this is because they feel "involved" with their indigenous songs,⁷⁵⁵ which takes them "deeply into Spirit worship",⁷⁵⁶ wherein they experience "more presence of God".⁷⁵⁷

Correspondingly, they described a specific progression from singing the indigenous songs, proceeding to singing in tongues, and then spontaneous singing in Chin, which they refer to as "singing in psalms".⁷⁵⁸ These encounters resonate with their memories of the renewals, in which they experienced intense spiritual manifestations. The older generation respond with these deep spiritual encounters only with their own indigenous songs; so, even though they may only sing 5% indigenous songs in some services, yet it is these songs with which they have an emotional connection.

⁷⁵⁵ Fan, interview by author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 25 April, 2010.

⁷⁵⁶ Tao, interview by author, Kalaymyo, 22 April, 2010.

⁷⁵⁷ Yu, interview by author, Yangon, 30 April 2010.

⁷⁵⁸ Tao, interview by author, Kalaymyo, 22 April, 2010. Singing in psalms has already been mentioned in chapter four.

5.2.5. Insights from the Song Composers' Contexts

Despite only ten composers having written the majority of the aforementioned songs, it proved challenging to interview the composers because many live deep in Chin state, without internet connection. Many composers are unspecified, and there appears to be a casual informality with record-keeping, related to their oral transmission and lack of copyright. Notably, Thawng Za Kim was the most prominent composer, having composed an estimated 400 songs,⁷⁵⁹ nine of which are analysed in this research, based on their popular usage. As Kim died in 2004, his wife who lives in Yangon was interviewed instead.

Generally, composers had experienced radical conversions from alcoholism and drug addiction, and some were formerly thieves and gang members. Their songs expressed gratitude to God for their dramatic transformations, following conversion. Kim similarly had endured severe suffering in his life, which inspired his recurrent theme of victory over hardship.⁷⁶⁰ Such triumphalism in the songs encourages the older Chin women especially, considering their own poor socio-economic context.

Some composers reported that God speaks to them especially during sermons and prayer times. Kim's wife related that he was inspired to write most of his songs while praying in tongues in church at 4am when the lyrics and melody "appeared in his mind", and these he subsequently transcribed.⁷⁶¹ Indeed his songs are considered spiritually edifying, evoking enthusiastic responses during worship, and are described as "revival songs".⁷⁶² Spiritual encounters, especially tongues speech, resonate with the Chin, as this is practised regularly by Chin Pentecostals. Their expectation for God to speak to them denotes a prophetic dynamic,

⁷⁵⁹ Yi, email conversation with the author May 15, 2010.

⁷⁶⁰ Yi, email conversation with the author May 15, 2010.

⁷⁶¹ Yi, email conversation with the author May 15, 2010.

⁷⁶² Yi, email conversation with the author May 15, 2010.

which is characteristically Pentecostal, lending credence within the community to the claim that the songs are divinely inspired.

5.2.6. Thirty Popular Chin AG Worship Songs

Thirty contemporary indigenous Chin worship songs were selected based on their popular usage, which were translated from Chin into English (See Appendix Four). Most of the songs are available in the songbook, *Gal Hiam*, and online at <https://galhiam.wordpress.com/>. *Gal Hiam* is a Chin military term, suggesting the songs are perceived as weapons for spiritual warfare.⁷⁶³ The form of the songs is usually three or four verses consisting of four lines each and a chorus. Where the information is available, the composer, key, and timing of the songs are included. The songs are played mostly in the keys of E and G,⁷⁶⁴ and the most common beat is 4/4 timing, and this is typical for country and western songs.

5.3. Theology of Relationship

This section examines the Chin's relationship with the Trinity and with each other, and how these relationships are contextualized to their culture, based particularly on the word counts and descriptors (See the charts in Appendices Five to Eight).

5.3.1. Who is God to the Chin and how they Relate to God

The most common name used for the Deity is "Lord",⁷⁶⁵ which is taken to refer to God, because the Chin word *Sianmang* which is translated "Lord" contains the prefix *Sian*, which means God in Chin. Lord is often used to mean God in the West too, however, it is acknowledged that "Lord" may sometimes refer to Jesus,⁷⁶⁶ which is evidence of their belief

⁷⁶³ The subtitle "Phatna Labu" means praise songbook. It was compiled by Pastor Mung of Full Gospel Assembly church, Yangon. Ming, interview by author, Yangon, 9 April, 2010.

⁷⁶⁴ In total 16 songs are written in E and 11 in the key of G, 1 in the key of D and 2 are not specified.

⁷⁶⁵ See Appendix Six.

⁷⁶⁶ *Sianmang Zeisu* means "Lord Jesus".

in Jesus' divinity.⁷⁶⁷ Yet, it is not always possible to distinguish whether they mean God or Jesus. "Lord" infers reigning, suggesting that they relate to God as an authoritative figure, and is reminiscent of how they traditionally submitted to chiefs who ruled the clans. Yet they relate to the Lord in intimate terms of love, their "best friend", "desire", and "dream in the night".⁷⁶⁸ Such terms resemble love songs, rather than a religious, doctrinal language. Even though the Chin may also have had dreams about the primal spirits, they feared them, rather than loved them, perceiving them more as enemies than friends. While this is not unique because many western worship songs use similar language, it demonstrates their sense of familiarity with God.

The second most common name mentioned is "God", using the original Chin name *Pasian*. Using pre-Christian names for the Christian God is highly contested, as it may enhance the contextualization of people's concept of God, confirming that God was present prior to the missionaries,⁷⁶⁹ but of course may also risk syncretism with other religions. The most common theological theme of the songs is praise of God's characteristics, such as "good",⁷⁷⁰ "loving",⁷⁷¹ and "powerful".⁷⁷² Equally there is very common usage of verbs indicating God's help: He "guides",⁷⁷³ "provides",⁷⁷⁴ "protects",⁷⁷⁵ "strengthens",⁷⁷⁶ provides "rest",⁷⁷⁷

⁷⁶⁷ Clark H. Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 28.

⁷⁶⁸ My Soul Rejoices Wherever You Are

⁷⁶⁹ Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity?: The Gospel Beyond the West* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 32.

⁷⁷⁰ Lord, I Rejoice; The Lord's Power Doesn't Decline

⁷⁷¹ The Lord Is Our Victory

⁷⁷² The Lord's Power Doesn't Decline; Only By My Spiritual Power; If We Dip Together in the Spirit. See Appendix Eight.

⁷⁷³ Full Salvation

⁷⁷⁴ Full Salvation; Good Time, Pleasing Time

⁷⁷⁵ I Trust in You, O Lord

⁷⁷⁶ Lord, I Rejoice

⁷⁷⁷ I Trust in You, O Lord

“saves”,⁷⁷⁸ “heals”,⁷⁷⁹ “gives”,⁷⁸⁰ and “calls”.⁷⁸¹ This recognises God’s help in overcoming difficulties, and this is highly relevant to their context of poverty and hardship.

The Chin address God as “You” more frequently than “He”, denoting a direct, confident, personal relationship, despite their respectful culture. However, whilst the use of “I” generally typifies a prophetic Pentecostal style of speaking on behalf of God, the pronoun “I” was rarely used for God in the songs.

The English word “Jehovah” is used in three of the songs which were analysed. As “Jehovah” is merely transcribed from English and not translated into Chin, it shows how it was adopted from older English translations, such as the King James version of the Bible. Using “Jehovah” is particular to the Chin but is no longer commonly used in the West.⁷⁸² Its usage is characteristic of the Chin’s affiliation with the Old Testament, because of some common stories and their previous sacrificial system.⁷⁸³ Moreover the Chin relate to the aligned “helping terms”, (e.g. *Jehovah Jireh*) describing how they perceive God’s role as their provider,⁷⁸⁴ which they again appreciate in their context of poverty. Sometimes they lack basic necessities, but rather than blaming God, the lyrics still proclaim their trust in God’s provision, and so the songs are uplifting, and encourage them in their struggles. Whilst in everyday life they may in fact question God, this is not conveyed in the songs.

“Father” *Pa* indicates a personalization and familial concept of God, but it is only used twice in the songs,⁷⁸⁵ which is surprising, considering the Chin’s patriarchal culture. However, the

⁷⁷⁸ Full Salvation; Feast of the Lamb; Only By My Spiritual Power

⁷⁷⁹ Turn Your Way Back; Full Salvation; I Am Flying to You; It Is Joyful to walk With God; Good Time, Pleasing Time.

⁷⁸⁰ Jehovah Shalom Is My Peace; Full Salvation

⁷⁸¹ Voice of Compassion

⁷⁸² The refrain of Robin Mark’s song, “These are the Days of Elijah” repeats “there’s no God like Jehovah”. Incidentally, some churches omit this refrain to avoid confusion with Jehovah Witnesses for newcomers by the use of the term “Jehovah.”

⁷⁸³ Khai, *Zo People*, 161, 163. Also in an interview: Ding, interview by author, Yangon, 8 April, 2010.

⁷⁸⁴ Full Salvation, Jehovah God and Jehovah Shalom is my Peace

⁷⁸⁵ Enjoy Sweet Communion and Let’s Be Budded

physical imagery, such as “His hand is holding me”,⁷⁸⁶ suggests a supportive father-like relationship, and they perceive God as loving, immanent and intervening in their lives. This contrasts with their former concept of a transcendent, uninvolved supreme being. The infrequent usage of “Father” contrasts with how western songs, which personalize God to the extent of using names like “daddy”, denote a more casual relationship than that expressed in Chin songs.

A contrasting perspective in the songs is that of a master-like concept of God, whom they serve in a subservient role, and is reminiscent of a colonial mentality, such as “work for the Lord”⁷⁸⁷; “I have very few workers”⁷⁸⁸. Many of the Chin songs express a perception that work needs to be done to remain in favour with God, such as evangelising.⁷⁸⁹ This indicates a loss of perspective on grace and their familial relationship with God. However, the symbiotic aspect of their relationship with God may reflect somewhat on how they each had a role to play in their former primal sacrificial rites.

5.32. Who is Jesus to the Chin and how they Relate to Jesus

The third most common name for the deity is Jesus, *Zeisu*, formerly translated *Zesuh*, adopted as a Chin word, despite being introduced with Christianity. Jesus is mentioned less frequently than God, particularly in the worship context. As already mentioned, using “Lord” for Jesus reflects their belief in Jesus’ divinity, and references to the “Son of God” affirm their belief in the Trinity. Jesus is also recognised as royalty, referred to as “King”, and shepherd symbolism is reminiscent of Jesus’ role as the Good Shepherd, “you carry me on your shoulder”.⁷⁹⁰ They even recognise that Jesus is foundational to their faith as is evident in the

⁷⁸⁶ The Lord is Our Victory

⁷⁸⁷ On Mount Carmel

⁷⁸⁸ My Soul Rejoices Wherever You Are.

⁷⁸⁹ My Soul Rejoices Wherever You Are.

⁷⁹⁰ With Your Right Hand

names, “Root” and “Author and Finisher of our faith”.⁷⁹¹ He is both the Source and One who rewards and completes their faith, as the “fountain of my life”,⁷⁹² to whom they owe everything. Furthermore, they not only admire Jesus’ attributes, but adopt them for themselves, “Every day I am adorned with the goodness of Jesus”.⁷⁹³

“Saviour”⁷⁹⁴ and “Lamb”⁷⁹⁵ are theological descriptors of Jesus’ function, with particular emphasis on Jesus’ soteriological role, through His substitutionary death. They are clear that Jesus’ work is the foundation of their redemption and therefore the core of their Christian identity. They iterate clearly that their salvation was achieved by Jesus’ sacrifice, “With his precious blood, he redeemed and lifted me high”.⁷⁹⁶ Emphasising Jesus’ soteriological role is interesting in light of their ancestors relating to Jesus’ sacrifice because of their own sacrificial system, which mirrors the somewhat “raw” details of Jesus’ blood and death. Granted, these roles and imagery are biblical, but in comparison are more sterile in western songs.

The songs acknowledge their tendency to disregard Jesus, “We tend to forget Jesus often”.⁷⁹⁷ This phrase may imply remorse for neglecting their Christian faith in general, but it is Jesus who is specifically mentioned. This relative indifference for Jesus contrasts with intimate references to God and their enjoyment of the Holy Spirit, who influence their daily lives. Jesus was introduced with Christianity, and there were no clear parallel saviour concepts in Chin religion. They were much more conversant with concepts of spirits and were aware of a supreme being and it is likely that this preference is being reflected in their songs. However,

⁷⁹¹ Jehovah Shalom Is My Peace

⁷⁹² Jehovah Shalom Is My Peace

⁷⁹³ O! What A Great and Wonderful Love!

⁷⁹⁴ The Heavenly Wealth is Mine; Feast of the Lamb

⁷⁹⁵ Feast of the Lamb

⁷⁹⁶ O! What A Great and Wonderful Love!

⁷⁹⁷ Jehovah Shalom is My Peace

they also express their desire to amend this neglect in their relationship to Jesus, “I no longer can leave Jesus alone”.⁷⁹⁸ They relate to Jesus in terms of their need to trust Him.⁷⁹⁹

They appear to limit Jesus to His soteriological roles, as the One who obtained their initial salvation for them but who has less involvement or interaction in their everyday lives. Some songs refer to the life of Christ, drawing on gospel accounts, thereby relating to him as a historical figure, “While Jesus walked in the land of Galilee”.⁸⁰⁰ However, even though God is usually portrayed as the One who protects them, the song, “I Am Flying To You” relates how they perceive Jesus as their source of refuge.

Human imagery in the songs portrays the humanity of Christ: the phrase “Jesus ran to me” describes Him pursuing them in intimate terms, yet the songs give the impression that they do not cherish the relationship with Jesus as much as their relationship with God or the Holy Spirit. This lack of Christological emphasis is a Chin distinctive, which is not typical for Pentecostals globally.

5.3.3. Who is the Holy Spirit to the Chin and how they Relate to the Holy Spirit

The name “Holy Spirit” *Kha Siangtho* appears fourth in frequency in the songs; this was a surprising finding, considering the emphasis on the Holy Spirit, not just for Pentecostals, but for the Chin especially. The literal translation “clean spirit” contrasts the cleanliness of the Holy Spirit with the evil spirits. The usage of the same word “kha” for (Holy) Spirit as they used in primal religion for spirits eased the transition of their concepts of spirit, but it risked them assuming there were similarities in their natures.

One explanation for this lack of references to the Holy Spirit is that their relationship to the Holy Spirit entailed more encounter and manifestation as they experienced the “indwelling”

⁷⁹⁸ Jehovah Shalom Is My Peace

⁷⁹⁹ Turn Your Way Back; I Trust in You, O Lord (Lord may refer to Jesus or God in this song)

⁸⁰⁰ The Lord’s Power Doesn’t Decline

of the Holy Spirit,⁸⁰¹ rather than singing to or about the Holy Spirit. Another possibility is that the composers may have consciously steered the Chin away from emphasising the Holy Spirit as some pastors were concerned about this. As there were only a few Chin composers, they may not be representative of the strong focus on the Holy Spirit mentioned earlier. The Holy Spirit has less references in the Bible also, especially in the Old Testament. This precludes imagery such as wind, breath, oil and a dove to refer to the Holy Spirit. While such imagery was not noted to describe the person of the Holy Spirit in this selection of songs, I examine other imagery which the Chin used in how they relate to Him.

Some songs use an unusual feature of retelling biblical stories, but set in a Chin context; the song “Dip Into the Lake of Bethesda” (based on John 5:1-16) replaces the detail of the angel stirring up the water with the Holy Spirit’s wind, which becomes the element of the story which brings healing. This demonstrates how the Holy Spirit is more prominent than angels in their spirituality. Attributing the role of healing to the Holy Spirit, as opposed to God or Jesus is particular to the Chin, as seen also in their prayer mentioned briefly in chapter 4. Similarly, in the song “Pentecost” they personalise the biblical account of the Holy Spirit’s descent on the Day of Pentecost to empower the disciples, and they ask the Holy Spirit to “Lead us with power”, thus applying the story to themselves. This concurs with the Chin’s close identification with Pentecostalism and how they emphasise spiritual power. Likewise, they relate that the Holy Spirit “comes down to waken the land of Myanmar”.⁸⁰² These references denote the external descent of the Holy Spirit from above, in conjunction with their belief in a personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Despite the lack in quantity of references to the Holy Spirit, the lyrics convey the intimacy of their relationship with the Holy Spirit. The lyrics express their enjoyment in relating to the

⁸⁰¹ Enjoy Sweet Communion

⁸⁰² If We Dip Together In the Spirit

Holy Spirit, using joyful emotions, “Enjoying sweet communion”,⁸⁰³ and “full of happiness only”.⁸⁰⁴ This interaction was conveyed in one song as a group activity, “they dip together in the Spirit” and the “children start dancing”. “Dip” the Chin term *bual* is an interesting concept, connoting a form of play, like children splashing in water, or young people celebrating at a party, signifying the casualness of Pentecostal worship.⁸⁰⁵ This recreational image resembles how scholars also describe Pentecostal worship as “play”.⁸⁰⁶ This is reminiscent of imagery used in the Bible to describe the Holy Spirit, and even though not explicitly stated, it connotes that the Holy Spirit is like a river, in which they splash around in, suggesting immersion in the Holy Spirit. Thus, the lyrics provide deeper insights into how closely Chin Pentecostals relate to the Holy Spirit, which confirm and augment the interviewees’ accounts of their affinity with the Holy Spirit, as discussed throughout this research.

5.3.4. How the Chin Perceive and Relate to the Members of the Trinity

The songs are each divided into main theological themes, which represent the Chin’s emphases. The persons of the Trinity appear as the three most common theological themes of the songs; God is the main theological theme in 13 of the selected 30 popular songs, whilst Jesus and the Holy Spirit are the main theological themes in 4 songs each.⁸⁰⁷ This is not a surprising finding, given that the song genre is one of praise and worship, and the Deity is the object of their worship.

As discussed above, the Chin perceive that the persons of the Trinity have differing roles, and they relate to them accordingly, almost in terms of the help that they offer them. God is

⁸⁰³ Enjoy Sweet Communion

⁸⁰⁴ If We Dip Together in the Spirit

⁸⁰⁵ If We Dip Together in the Spirit. Examples given are negative, for example hanging around with bad company, using drugs and with no ambition for life.

⁸⁰⁶ See also the reference to pneumatological play in chapter four.

⁸⁰⁷ See Appendix Eight. Father = 13; Jesus = 4; Holy Spirit = 4; Believers = 3; Ecclesiology, the church = 0; Soteriology-the world, the lost, unbelievers = 4; Satan, demons or evil forces = 0 and Eschatology = 2.

described more in terms of provider, care-giver and protector, an immanent Father, who is powerful and loving and helps them by blessing, leading and strengthening them. Jesus is recognised for His soteriological role through His death, and less frequently His resurrection, through the use of terms like “Saviour” and “Lamb”. A sense of aloofness in their relationship with Jesus is portrayed in their reference to Jesus as “King”, whilst referring nevertheless to “God’s kingdom”. The Holy Spirit is portrayed in the songs as the One who “comes from above”, yet lives in them and empowers them for life, and with whom they have fun. The Trinity’s roles concur with the findings observed in chapter 4.

There are some overlapping concepts of God; a song entitled “Jehovah” is predominantly about Jesus, and not about God as one would have expected. Similarly, the phrase “Spirit of Jesus” conveys their perception that the Holy Spirit is in fact Jesus’ Spirit; this association bridges the gap between their affinity with the Holy Spirit and the lack of familiarity with Jesus. The songs convey that the Trinity also have overlapping roles. Salvation incorporates the work of all persons of the Trinity; the salvific work of Jesus made salvation possible, the associated intimacy with God, and the subsequent residing Holy Spirit. Likewise, all persons of the Trinity are involved in helping them live their Christian life, healing and giving them blessings. This confirms that the Chin perceive that the Godhead shares equality. Thus the Chin are clearly Trinitarian in their theology.

Most of the concepts of the Deity in the songs are biblical derivatives. However, the roles of healing and deliverance are attributed by the Chin to the Holy Spirit, whilst these roles are more generally attributed by most Christians (and Pentecostals) primarily to God⁸⁰⁸ or

⁸⁰⁸ Cartledge, *Testimony in the Spirit*, 107.

Jesus,⁸⁰⁹ and acknowledging the Holy Spirit's manifestations and the gift of healing.⁸¹⁰ This highlights a distinctive of Chin Pneumatology, which may be influenced by the way that they experience manifestations, which they attribute to the Holy Spirit.

5.3.5. How the Chin Perceive Themselves

As well as outlining the Chin's relationship with the Trinity, the songs potentially reveal insights on how the Chin perceive their own identity. The song's pronoun usage chart reveals that the most common pronoun used in the songs is "I",⁸¹¹ despite being worship songs, where one would expect more references to God, than to themselves. This individualistic trait contrasts with the Chin's claims of having a group identity, because "we" and "us" are used less frequently than "I". This was the same finding in the chart of the addressors, which demonstrates that the songs represent them as individuals most often.⁸¹² This emphasis on themselves suggests a confident, intimate personalization of their faith, which may be an influence from westernisation. Narrating their own experiences thus form part of their worship songs.

The pronoun "you" was also used regularly because the songs often give advice, a challenge or an encouragement. The addressees are more often other believers, rather than persons of the Trinity.⁸¹³ The pronoun "they" is used in exhortations to believe, or in testifying to the benefits of trusting God. There is a minimal usage of "they" and "we", referring to humans in

⁸⁰⁹ In the "full gospel", one of Jesus' recognised roles was as Healer, which was provided in the atonement. Early Pentecostals perceived Jesus as "Savior, Healer, Baptizer and Soon Coming King", but also added Jesus role as "Baptizer in the Holy Spirit" so that they would be empowered for witness, thus in a sense combining Christology and Pneumatology. See Allan Anderson, "Pentecostal Approaches to Faith and Healing," *International Review of Mission*, Volume 91, Issue 363 (October 2002) 524, 526, accessed at <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1758-6631.2002.tb00365.x>.

⁸¹⁰ Max Turner, *The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts: In the New Testament Church and Today*, Studies in Pentecostal and Charismatic Issues (Milton Keynes: Authentic Media, 1996)

⁸¹¹ See Appendix Five. The order of usage starting with the largest: I; You (God); He (God); you (others); we; I (God); they and we (humans).

⁸¹² See Appendix Seven. The order of usage starting with the largest: I; mixed addressors; us; God and none. In only one song God is the addressor, and in two songs there is no addressor.

⁸¹³ See Appendix Seven. The order of usage starting with the largest: other believers; mixed addressees; everyone and God and Lord are addressed equally common.

general, demonstrating a very small element of inclusion of non-Christians in the songs. This sits alongside songs of testimony and encouraging other Christians in their faith. As these songs are solely Christian, they represent their perception of their identity as an exclusive community of Chin Christians.

The narrative in the songs reveal that the Chin perceive themselves as downtrodden, “weak and poor”,⁸¹⁴ “ignorant”⁸¹⁵ and “hopeless”,⁸¹⁶ with apparently little to contribute to God. This sense of inferiority contrasts with their awe of God’s majestic power, and belief in His love,⁸¹⁷ and goodness.⁸¹⁸ In turn, their response to Him is self-surrender, “Use me as much as you want”,⁸¹⁹ which implies a servitude attitude. There is nevertheless some concept of mutual benefit present in their relationship with God, as they perceive that their own development and growth, “my understanding too keeps growing”, would glorify God in turn, “May the name of God be more glorified”.⁸²⁰ This sentiment is also seen in asking God to promote them “for your name’s sake”.⁸²¹ Their perception of how God perceives them is portrayed in the song: “I Will Answer When He Calls Me”, borrowing concepts from Psalm 91: God rewards their love with longevity; gives them counsel; sends angels to protect them and stands between them and harm.

While the overarching sense in the songs is their devotion to God, the song “Voice of Compassion” also portrays their indebtedness to God. This is conveyed especially in their duty to evangelise, which implies that God needs them to reach the lost, seen in the line “Whom Shall I Send?” This is associated with a suggestion of possible punishment, as God

⁸¹⁴ If We Dip Together in the Spirit

⁸¹⁵ I am Flying to You

⁸¹⁶ I am Flying to You

⁸¹⁷ Good Time, Pleasing Time; I Will Answer When He Calls Me; O! What A Great and Wonderful Love!; If We Dip Together in the Spirit; The Lord’s Power Doesn’t Decline; It Is Joyful to Walk with God; I Am Flying to You; The Unceasing Grace and With Your Right Hand.

⁸¹⁸ The Unceasing Grace; Lord, I Rejoice; The Lord’s Power Doesn’t Decline

⁸¹⁹ Voice of Compassion

⁸²⁰ O! What a Great and Wonderful Love!

⁸²¹ Let’s Be Budded and I am Flying to You

has the power to retract His blessings, “And can take them back without exception”. This suggests that God’s blessings were given as a type of payment for their good works of good behaviour or their service. It is noticeable that the wording conveys the idea of a tough employer, whilst being especially reminiscent of the capricious evil spirits, who sometimes blessed them, but could also change their minds.

5.3.6. The Difference in Relating to God Compared with Primal Religion

God’s characteristics are outlined in the chart “Descriptors of God”, which is analysed for how the Chin’s view of God compares with, or is perhaps influenced by, their former beliefs in spirits. For instance, God is described as the “Highest God”,⁸²² which relates to the Chin’s concept of spiritual power and the spirits who were perceived to have the most power were appeased, because they were the most likely to harm them. God’s sovereignty could protect them from hardship and from the spirits, which is seen in the recurring theme of “victory” (11 references) in the songs. Whilst the Chin formerly appeased the primal spirits in return for protection from sickness and tragedy,⁸²³ this need for protection is now conveyed in their Christian songs, using words which describe God as their “shield”,⁸²⁴ “rest”,⁸²⁵ and “rock”.⁸²⁶ The songs’ descriptions of God demonstrate how they view Him as superior to the spirits, both in power and in character, as the latter were considered malevolent. Thus, Christianity is perceived as being relevant to their needs for protection, which has always been a concern for the Chin.

Unlike their former concept of God being transcendent, they perceive God now as immanent.⁸²⁷ God is portrayed as a personal, imminent provider, on whom they depend,⁸²⁸

⁸²² On Mount Carmel

⁸²³ Za Kham, *Glimpses of Zomi*, 5; Khai, *Zo People*, 159.

⁸²⁴ The Lord Is Our Victory; I Trust in You O Lord

⁸²⁵ I am Flying to You; I Trust in You O Lord

⁸²⁶ I Trust in You O Lord

⁸²⁷ I Will Answer When He Calls Me

⁸²⁸ Good Time Pleasing Time; Jehovah God

contrasting with the concept of their former transcendent perception of a Supreme Creator God, whom they ignored because He did not harm them. Their plea that the Holy Spirit would “dwell in me always”,⁸²⁹ communicates a permanent and committed relationship.

In the song, “With Your Right Hand”, God is portrayed as trustworthy, good, unchanging, loving and caring, which contrasts with how they perceived the spirits as evil. They refer to God’s constructive plans for their lives, which are “good and nothing bad”.⁸³⁰ They praise God’s immutability, “You never, ever change”,⁸³¹ conveying trust in God’s consistency, because they can rely on Him, in contrast to their distrust of the spirits. They iterate that God is omnipresent, “You infiltrate everywhere”,⁸³² which resembles how the spirits lived in the streams, forests or mountains, but were territorial, and thus limited to one place.

Throughout the songs, the Chin express love and gratitude directly to God, contrasting with their fear of the spirits. They relate to God as kind and dependable: God’s grace is “without fail”,⁸³³ and “He neither fails us nor mistreats us”.⁸³⁴ However, the Chin’s desire for blessing may derive from a spiritual concept transferred from primal religion. Rather than the ongoing need to sacrifice animals in primal religion to appease the spirits, they are now secure in their redemption through Jesus’ blood.⁸³⁵ As discussed already, the Holy Spirit is perceived as coming from “above”,⁸³⁶ rather than below, and they enjoy their interaction and intimacy with Him, as opposed to living in fear of the spirits.

⁸²⁹ Enjoy Sweet Communion

⁸³⁰ With Your Right Hand

⁸³¹ With Your Right Hand

⁸³² How Great Is the Lord

⁸³³ The Unceasing Grace

⁸³⁴ I Trust in You, O Lord

⁸³⁵ Good Time, Pleasing Time

⁸³⁶ Only By My Spiritual Power

5.4. Theology of Primal Experience

As these are explicitly Christian songs, it is the nuanced, subconscious influences of their former primal religion which I am examining, reminiscent of Cox's hypothesis on primal spirituality, rather than expecting overt references to primal religion. The Chin advised me that even though their songs may seem westernised at first appearance, this was a misperception. One interviewee explained that this was because their songs represented their own Chin culture, and the songs contained an understanding of "animism".⁸³⁷ This claim to uniqueness related to their primal religious background, which westerners were assumed not to understand. Similarly, another warned that, despite the western exterior to their songs, delving deeper into the Chin songs reveals that they have their own "concept of spirit" which they had "maintained" from "animistic times". He portrayed that this was why it was easy for them to be "moved by the Spirit" during Pentecostal worship,⁸³⁸ thus implying that their sensitivity to the Holy Spirit was derived from their experience of primal religion. Admittedly, this is an older generation's perspective that familiarity with primal religion remains essential to Chin songs. However, this correlation with primal religion and their songs was surprising, considering their usual attempts to convey the avoidance of syncretism. Their songs have therefore inspired them to acknowledge and reflect on their journey from primal religious experience to Christianity. The following song-text analysis will include an examination of primal influences in the lyrics.

In the song, "I am Flying to You", their ancestors' pre-Christian condition is overtly described as "knowing not how to write", "knowing not how to read", "the ones who knew not how to wear...how to eat", and being "enemies and warlike". This concurs with the interviewees' description of their ancestors being "illiterate", "naked" and fighting with other

⁸³⁷ Shen, interview by author, Kalaymyo, 27 April, 2010.

⁸³⁸ En, interview by author, Kalaymyo, 26 April, 2010.

clans.⁸³⁹ This is an honest reflection, reminiscing on their past, which keeps them rooted in their Chin heritage.

Ngong examines the primal influences on Pentecostal Pneumatology in an African context. This examines how the spiritualisation of their worldview through their belief in the spirit-world translates onto an emphasis in Pneumatology, as Pentecostals. I believe his work provides a useful framework, which I have applied to the Chin.⁸⁴⁰ The points he considers are firstly, the overlap in physical and spiritual realms, demonstrated by spiritual awareness and beliefs of spiritual causation.⁸⁴¹ This will be examined in their consciousness of spiritual activity and their associated responsiveness, in addition to their attribution of events to the spiritual realm, rather than to natural causes. Secondly, Ngong has observed that another primal influence on Pentecostal Pneumatology is a notable association between Pneumatology and Christology. This is based on the premise that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus, and so the presence of the Holy Spirit is associated with Christology.⁸⁴² Furthermore, as Jesus is perceived as a superior Spirit, He is believed to repel the evil spirits. Thirdly, there is also an association between Pneumatology and soteriology, as they perceive that the indwelling Spirit enables them to go to heaven, following their death. In fact, the Spirit's activity within a believer involves providing, "protection, healing, transformation, and empowerment", but these benefits are not just limited to the church, but include a holistic benefit to the whole land.⁸⁴³

⁸³⁹ Wei, interview by author, Yangon, 12 April 2010. Fan, interview by author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 25 April, 2010; Hua, interview by author, Yangon, 30 April, 2010. Yu, interview by author, Yangon, 30 April 2010.

⁸⁴⁰ David Ngong, "African Pentecostal Pneumatology" in *Pentecostal Theology in Africa*, African Christian Studies Series, ed. Clifton R. Clarke, no. 6 (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2014), 79.

⁸⁴¹ Ngong, "African Pentecostal Pneumatology", 79.

⁸⁴² Ngong, "African Pentecostal Pneumatology", 82-3.

⁸⁴³ Ngong, "African Pentecostal Pneumatology", 81-2.

5.4.1. The Overlap of Physical and Spiritual Elements

An overlap of physical and spiritual elements is typical of a primal background with a holistic worldview, having an awareness of both the existence and influence of the spiritual realm.

Physical imagery is used to convey the understanding that God is physically intangible, but yet spiritually perceptible, “Though hands cannot touch you; I know and feel your touching hand”.⁸⁴⁴ Such imagery may be overlooked as poetic license, but it does demonstrate their awareness of God’s presence and the effect it has on them.

5.4.1.1. Spiritual Awareness

The Chin themselves acknowledge that their former affinity with the spiritual realm has heightened their spiritual awareness, creating greater spiritual sensitivity and discernment. A recurring theme in the songs is feeling the Lord’s presence. In the song, “It is Joyful to Walk with God”, they describe immersing themselves into the Holy Spirit, which results in the Lord’s manifestation: “If one plunges into the Spirit with Him; He makes the Lord’s presence obvious”. Other manifestations included in this song are “healing” and “the restricted ones by freeing”, which may be a reference to deliverance from spirits, as practised by Chin Pentecostals (discussed more in section 5.5.4.). This indicates that the Lord’s presence reveals the activity of other spirits, which is also what they stated in the interviews.⁸⁴⁵

The songs do not explicitly mention other primal spirits, however, in the song “Jehovah Shalom Is My Peace”, there is evidence of a belief that other spiritual entities have power. The reference to “(an)other lord who can bless”, is an honest admission of their belief in other sources of blessing. Reference to “lord” here either refers to the gods/spirits of primal religion, or is possibly a reference to Buddhism. As already discussed, the Chin associated blessing with the spirits, and so perceiving God in terms of the One who blesses them

⁸⁴⁴ It is Joyful to Walk with God

⁸⁴⁵ Tao, interview by author, Kalaymyo, 22 April, 2010.

portrays Christianity's relevance for the Chin. However, they clearly acknowledge the supremacy of Christianity: "Only Jesus arose from the dead; Because of him, I am set free".⁸⁴⁶

Incidentally, the roles that the Chin assign to the Holy Spirit in the songs, notably those of protection, healing, transformation, power and blessing, are also the roles which they perceived that the primal spirits fulfilled. Arguably, they transferred their concept of the spirits onto the Holy Spirit, although admittedly there is biblical substantiation for these concepts. However, in contrast with primal religion, the Spirit included moral transformation, and was associated with them experiencing love, joy and peace, as their burdens "lightened".⁸⁴⁷ Moreover, in contrast with the mere association with primal spirits, the Chin experience intimacy with the Holy Spirit, and they elevate His fellowship and intervention to another level.

5.4.1.2. Spiritual Causation

Spiritual causation is the belief that the spiritual realm influences the physical realm, which is a predominant aspect of the worldview of primal religion.

5.4.1.2.1. Protection

The songs regularly refer to how they perceive God now as their protector, as seen in the song "I Trust in You, O Lord", where the imagery from the Psalms is deployed. Psalm 91 in particular is referred to, to describe God's protective role and themselves in relation to God "under your wings". God also releases them from "the fear of death and sickness",⁸⁴⁸ which is pertinent to the Chin as they had always feared that the spirits would impose sickness or misfortune on them, bearing in mind that the assurance of healing and spiritual safety played a role in the Chin's initial conversion to Christianity. Incidentally, the Psalms are particularly

⁸⁴⁶ Jehovah Shalom Is My Peace

⁸⁴⁷ O! What A Great and Wonderful Love!

⁸⁴⁸ Full Salvation

important to the Chin and they read them in family devotions and before embarking on a journey. This is reminiscent of their former beliefs of omens relating to travel, such as a rat crossing the road.⁸⁴⁹ They expect God's protection, both from physical danger "spears and swords",⁸⁵⁰ as well as spiritual protection in terms of victory over other belief systems.⁸⁵¹

5.4.1.2.2. Healing

As already discussed, a Chin characteristic is attributing healing to the Holy Spirit, for the one who "plunges into the Spirit with him",⁸⁵² but there are also references to the other persons of the Trinity having roles in healing. God also heals, as seen in the term "Jehovah Rapha".⁸⁵³ References to Jesus' healing are predominantly associated with the historical accounts in the gospels, albeit acknowledging that the "Lord's power" has not "declined".⁸⁵⁴ The songs also display evidence that believers are expected to be empowered with the "ability to heal the sick",⁸⁵⁵ whilst attributing the source of the healing power to the Holy Spirit.

The songs reveal that the Chin expect healing to be provided alongside salvation since healings "signify the Lord's presence with us".⁸⁵⁶ The songs use inclusive words like "all". The line "All my sicknesses have been made whole",⁸⁵⁷ may be enthusiasm expressed through poetic license; however, it does reflect some Pentecostal theology which expects that all sicknesses can be healed as an additional benefit of the atonement.⁸⁵⁸

⁸⁴⁹ Jie, interview by author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 22 April 2010.

⁸⁵⁰ Good Time, Pleasing Time

⁸⁵¹ On Mount Carmel

⁸⁵² It is Joyful to Walk with God

⁸⁵³ Jehovah God

⁸⁵⁴ The Lord's Power Doesn't Decline

⁸⁵⁵ Only By My Spiritual Power

⁸⁵⁶ It is Joyful to Walk with God

⁸⁵⁷ The Lord is Our Victory

⁸⁵⁸ This teaching originated with the Holiness movement, based on the scripture verses Isaiah 53:4-5 and Matthew 8:16-17. See Anderson, "Pentecostal Approaches," 526. See also, Steven J. Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom* (Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 18; Keith Warrington, "Healing and Exorcism: The Path to Wholeness", in Warrington, ed., *Pentecostal Perspectives*, 149 and William

In addition to human health, they refer to healing of their land in the context of forgiveness of sin,⁸⁵⁹ reflecting the words of 2 Chronicles 7:14.⁸⁶⁰ This phrase is also used in songs in the West; however, Ngong perceives that the healing of the land is of relevance in African Pentecostal songs, which he argues is also traced back to their primal background.⁸⁶¹ It contains the notion that a spiritual causation effects the physical land.

5.4.1.2.3. Blessings

Blessing(s) is/are a prominent theme, with nine references in the selected songs to “bless” or “blessing”. The songs repeatedly narrate that God’s care has provided for their socio-economic needs. They acknowledge that Christianity has transformed their lives, suggesting that their spiritual awakening has assisted them with their struggles in the physical realm. They have indeed developed economically since their conversion, but this will have been due, at least in part, to receiving western education at the time of British colonialism, which improved their general educational status and employability.

However, the songs not only refer to economic blessings, but also to spiritual blessings, as the song “The Lord’s People, the Lord’s Possession” exhorts them to “give thanks” and “be benevolent”, in order that they might obtain spiritual blessings, in return.⁸⁶² This song, in particular, encourages them to attend to spiritual disciplines which will be rewarded by spiritual growth.

In the song “Full Salvation”, the last line mentions Jesus’ suffering on the cross, but in that same verse, the accompanied benefits of financial provision are included, “If the Lord says

W. Menzies & Robert Menzies, *Spirit and Power: Foundations of Pentecostal Experience* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2000), 159-168.

⁸⁵⁹ Turn Your Way Back

⁸⁶⁰ “If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”

⁸⁶¹ Ngong, “African Pentecostal Pneumatology”, 81-2.

⁸⁶² The Lord’s People, The Lord’s Possession

you are rich, then you are”.⁸⁶³ This inclusion of provision is reminiscent of “full gospel” teaching, relating to some Pentecostal teaching that prosperity is a believers’ right, and incidentally healing is also included. This type of “victorious” theology in the Chin song is inspired from biblical texts,⁸⁶⁴ and resembles a line in a few different contemporary versions, e.g. from Hillsong, “Let the poor say “I am rich””. Therefore, the correlation between physical and spiritual realms also exists in western Pentecostalism, and may not necessarily be linked to primal religion. In the Chin’s case, their belief in God for provision is relevant to their socio-economic needs.

5.4.2. Association between Pneumatology and Christology

The association between Pneumatology and Christology as Pentecostals is traced to an emphasis on the spirits in primal religion. As discussed, the songs refer to Jesus’ Spirit, by which they mean the Holy Spirit, “O! Jesus, His Spirit comes down, Jesus”.⁸⁶⁵ There are also biblical references to the “Spirit of Jesus”, “His Spirit” and “the Spirit of Christ” supporting the association between Pneumatology and Christology.⁸⁶⁶ In fact, in the song “Pentecost” which predicts that the Holy Spirit will come down, the song refers to God coming down on the last day.⁸⁶⁷ The biblical inter-relationship between Jesus and the Holy Spirit has been examined,⁸⁶⁸ the neglect of “Spirit Christology” in western theology has been criticised by

⁸⁶³ Full Salvation

⁸⁶⁴ Joel 3:10 “Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears. Let the weakling say, “I am strong!”” and 2 Cor. 12:10 “That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

⁸⁶⁵ If We Dip Together in the Spirit

⁸⁶⁶ Acts 16:7; Rom. 8:11; Rom. 8:9.

⁸⁶⁷ Pentecost

⁸⁶⁸ Robert P. Menzies, *Empowered for Witness: The Spirit in Luke-Acts*, Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series, eds. John Christopher Thomas, Rick D. Moore and Steven J. Land, no. 6 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991,1994), 157-172, chapter nine. Eugene Rogers contentiously asks the rhetorical question, “Is There Nothing the Spirit Can Do That the Son Can’t Do Better?” in Eugene F. Rogers Jr., *After the Spirit: A Constructive Pneumatology from Resources Outside the Modern West* (London: SCM Press, 2006), 19-32, chapters one and two. See also, James D. G. Dunn, “Towards the Spirit of Christ: The Emergence of the Distinctive Features of Christian Pneumatology,” in *The Work of the Spirit: Pneumatology and Pentecostalism*, ed. Michael Welker (Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans, 2006), 25.

some scholars, arguing from the biblical evidence of the unified work of Jesus and the Holy Spirit.⁸⁶⁹

5.4.3. Association between Pneumatology and Soteriology

There is also evidence in the songs that the Chin associate a soteriological role with the Holy Spirit (Pneumatology). As the Holy Spirit “comes down” the children who had been “lost” are now in the church,⁸⁷⁰ thus associating their conversion with the descent of the Holy Spirit. Another similar reference is the Holy Spirit “comes down to waken the land of Myanmar”,⁸⁷¹ alluding to a renewal in the nation. Subsequent to conversion, the songs refer to the Holy Spirit living in them.⁸⁷² Recent Asian Pentecostal research examines the “missiology of the Spirit” in an Indian context.⁸⁷³ Western scholarship has been known to neglect this link between Pneumatology and soteriology, even though conviction of sin is an accepted role of the Holy Spirit.⁸⁷⁴

The songs demonstrate their consciousness and desire for the Holy Spirit to live in them continuously, consistent with their distinctly Pentecostal belief in a post-conversion experience of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. One song about the intimate relationship with the Holy Spirit simultaneously invites the Holy Spirit to live in them.⁸⁷⁵ It is interesting that their reference to the descent of the Holy Spirit, “from heaven comes down”, resembles that

⁸⁶⁹ Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, 80-2; Frank Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit: A Global Pentecostal Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 118.

⁸⁷⁰ If We Dip Together in the Spirit

⁸⁷¹ If We Dip Together in the Spirit

⁸⁷² Enjoy Sweet Communion; If We Dip Together in the Spirit.

⁸⁷³ Wessly Lukose, *Contextual Missiology of the Spirit: Pentecostalism in Rajasthan, India*, Regnum Studies in Mission, (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2013), 208.

⁸⁷⁴ Much work has been produced through the years to emphasise the biblical support for the impetus of the Holy Spirit in mission. Gary Tyra, *The Holy Spirit in Mission: Prophetic Speech and Action in Christian Witness* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2011), 21, 34; Arthur F. Glasser, *Announcing the Kingdom: The Story of God's Mission in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003); Paul A. Pommerville, *The Third Force in Missions* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1985); Melvin L. Hodges, *A Theology of the Church and Its Mission: A Pentecostal Perspective* (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, 1977). Steven M. Studebaker, ‘Pentecostal Soteriology and Pneumatology,’ *Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 11:2 (2003): 266. See Frank D. Macchia, ‘Justification and the Spirit: A Pentecostal Reflection on the Doctrine by Which the Church Stands or Falls’ *Pneuma* 22 (2000): 7-15.

⁸⁷⁵ Enjoy Sweet Communion

of the Day of Pentecost, but personally invites the Holy Spirit to remain within them as individuals: “dwell in me always”.⁸⁷⁶ However, they also refer to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as a communal experience, when the Spirit “indwells a family”.⁸⁷⁷ As a result of the Holy Spirit’s intervention, they describe the family’s spiritual and emotional transformation using hyperbole, as they sing, dance, and even become “more beautiful”; they no longer argue, as all their problems are resolved, “no longer any problem”.⁸⁷⁸

Their spiritual transformation is perceived to have restored their dignity, “You raise us up from the dust” and “You turn my life back with honour and fame”.⁸⁷⁹ They relate that walking with God has caused their lives to improve, compared with how poor and wretched their pre-Christian status had been, examined in chapter three.

Power, especially spiritual power is a prominent theological theme in the songs, with eighteen references to power. The almighty power of God is significant to them in light of how they used to fear the most powerful spirits. They refer to God’s power as “beyond description”.⁸⁸⁰ Similarly, the phrase from Zechariah 4:6, “Not by might, not by power, but by my Spirit” is paraphrased in the Chin song: “Only By My Spiritual Power”. This phrase specifies even more clearly, that it is spiritual power which is necessary for the specific purpose of progressing, overcoming obstacles and prospering.⁸⁸¹ They perceive that they themselves can receive “spiritual strength” and “power”,⁸⁸² to enable them to serve God. Examples given by interviewees include God empowering them to pioneer churches without

⁸⁷⁶ Enjoy Sweet Communion

⁸⁷⁷ If We Dip Together in the Spirit

⁸⁷⁸ If We Dip Together in the Spirit

⁸⁷⁹ The Unceasing Grace

⁸⁸⁰ With Your Right Hand

⁸⁸¹ Only By My Spiritual Power

⁸⁸² Good Time, Pleasing Time

adequate funding.⁸⁸³ A concept of God involving power is not uncommon, which also impacts human relationships.⁸⁸⁴

5.4.4. Other Theological Issues Derived from the Chin Primal Background

There is only one reference to “sacrifice” in the selected songs. This reference is to “a sacrifice of thanksgiving”,⁸⁸⁵ to express thanks to God, alluding to a voluntary peace offering in the Levitical sacrificial system, mentioned in Leviticus and the Psalms.⁸⁸⁶ The Chin have merely adopted this biblical phrase, and are not offering a literal sacrifice as previously performed in primal religion.

The Chin overtly refer to their own spirits in the songs, exhorting themselves to praise God, “by your spirit”,⁸⁸⁷ reflecting Jesus’ endorsement to worship God “in spirit and in truth” to the Samaritan woman.⁸⁸⁸ Their songs also refer to “pray(ing) for your spirit”,⁸⁸⁹ and they pray/sing explicitly that God would “provide for my spirit”,⁸⁹⁰ as opposed to praying for themselves holistically. Another song details that their body as well as their spirits will be resurrected, “He saves not only my spirit but also my physical body”,⁸⁹¹ in the context of their expectation of the future resurrection of believers. Stipulating this distinction of their spirits indicates the Chin’s awareness of their own spirits as a definite entity. This specificity is interesting as it is not as clearly distinguished in western songs or liturgy. However, the Bible also regularly refers to “my spirit”, which may be as much an influence as their

⁸⁸³ Yi, email conversation with the author May 15, 2010.

⁸⁸⁴ Martyn Percy, *Words, Wonders and Power: Understanding Contemporary Christian Fundamentalism and Revivalism* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1996) 25. His book addresses fundamentalism in the context of revival, with particular critique of Wimber’s ministry and attitude to power.

⁸⁸⁵ Lord, I Rejoice

⁸⁸⁶ Leviticus 22:29; Psalm 107:22 and Psalm 116:17.

⁸⁸⁷ Only By My Spiritual Power

⁸⁸⁸ John 4:24

⁸⁸⁹ The Lord’s People, the Lord’s Possession

⁸⁹⁰ Good Time, Pleasing Time

⁸⁹¹ Feast of the Lamb

awareness of their spirits as derived from primal religion. Nevertheless, an awareness of their individual spirits is a distinctive of Chin theology.

Similarly, songs also refer specifically to individual souls, which is used in two different contexts, either as a Christian soul rejoicing, as in the song “My Soul Rejoices Wherever You Are”, or in reference to unbelievers, described as “lost” souls.⁸⁹² There are different Chin terms for soul and spirit, *nuntakna* means “soul” and while *kha* means “spirit” or even “ghost”, it is occasionally used to mean soul also. When questioned, the Chin cannot easily differentiate souls and spirits, but these terms are challenging to define biblically and many western Christians would also struggle to distinguish these terms. Western songs also refer to one’s soul: “Then sings my soul my Saviour God to Thee”.⁸⁹³ So, although referring to their own spirits or souls is a Chin distinctive, it is not that remarkable, but needed to be addressed. However, there is an ambiguous phrase, “I become one of the heavenly beings”, referring to a future spiritual state in heaven.⁸⁹⁴ This infers that they will change into a different spiritual state, and that they will be “shining as a star”, and becoming “God’s son”.⁸⁹⁵ Heaven is a common theme in the songs, which is interesting in light of their beliefs regarding the after-life in primal religion. It is understandable that they remind themselves of their future hope and reward in heaven, as they suffer hardship in this life.

I did not expect that deliverance would be mentioned in the songs as these practices are controversial because of their transfer from primal religion, and are therefore sometimes practised in secret.⁸⁹⁶ There is only one overt reference to demonic deliverance, “Driving out

⁸⁹² Voice of Compassion

⁸⁹³ The western hymn, “How Great Thou Art” is one of the most well-known examples of a worship song using “soul” which was translated from a Swedish poem originally written in 1885; a more contemporary example is: “My Soul Longs for You,” released in 2010 by Jesus Culture.

⁸⁹⁴ The Heavenly Wealth is Mine

⁸⁹⁵ The Heavenly Wealth is Mine

⁸⁹⁶ Fan, interview by author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 25 April, 2010.

demons”, and healing the sick is also mentioned: both are done by the Spirit’s “power”.⁸⁹⁷ They specify that the Spirit comes “from above”,⁸⁹⁸ originating from heaven, thereby distinguishing the Holy Spirit from the primal spirits who resided on the earth. The Holy Spirit’s “power” thus exceeded that of the evil spirits’ power; such supremacy in spiritual power was important coming from their spiritual worldview. This reference specifies the deliverance of demons, which has biblical support, both in Jesus’ and the apostles’ ministry. However, when the Chin practise deliverance, they refer to the spirits associated with primal religion. This is interesting considering that most interviewees did not consider the spirits to be demonic. This will be addressed in the subsequent chapter.

There is a reference to freedom of the “restricted ones”,⁸⁹⁹ which possibly refers to deliverance, but may also refer to general spiritual liberty in the biblical sense of “setting the captives free”.⁹⁰⁰ The word “Satan” is merely transcribed from English in the Chin songs,⁹⁰¹ since the figure of Satan was introduced with Christianity and was not a previously existing concept in Chin thought; Chin cosmology by contrast had emphasised evil spirits. In the West there is still theological debate surrounding deliverance, but many argue that Christians cannot be possessed/oppresed by demons.

5.5. Theology of Practice

As many songs are written as a testimonial account, the word “I” in the songs is the most commonly used pronoun. The Chin’s story of salvation and practical living experiences regarding how their lives changed following conversion are narrated. The use of the pronoun

⁸⁹⁷ Only By My Spiritual Power

⁸⁹⁸ Only By My Spiritual Power

⁸⁹⁹ It is Joyful to Walk with God

⁹⁰⁰ Isaiah 61:1 and Luke 4:18.

⁹⁰¹ I’ve Become God’s Child

“you” is also pertinent here,⁹⁰² as the songs advise and encourage others directly how to live the Christian life.

5.5.1. Salvation Story

The indigenous songs will now be examined to see how the Chin relate their own “story”. As seen previously, the Chin considered that translated western songs did not relate adequately to the Chin’s particular salvation story. So, what is unique in the Chin’s story? As it is their narrative, they not only own it, but deeply value it. They describe their salvation story as “sweet”, “victorious” and “joyous”.⁹⁰³

Many of the terms they use are adopted straight from the Bible, e.g. “sins”,⁹⁰⁴ “cross”,⁹⁰⁵ and “redemption”,⁹⁰⁶ demonstrating their aim to use orthodox theology. Moreover, the songs narrate doctrinal statements about salvation in almost credal style, “While, I was a sinner, while I was an enemy; With his precious blood, he redeemed and lifted me high”.⁹⁰⁷ Their salvation is described loftily, using legal terms for how they acquired their Christian identity, “I get the right to be God’s child...Because of what the Lord Jesus suffered in my stead”.⁹⁰⁸ These judicial terms resemble western Protestant “justification by faith” theology, influenced by the Reformation and derived from the book of Romans especially. The confidence that they display may seem unusual, considering that the Chin have often been denied their human rights, and are oppressed as a minority group in Myanmar, especially because of their Christian identity.

⁹⁰² See Appendix Five.

⁹⁰³ It is Joyful to Walk with God; O! What A Great and Wonderful Love!

⁹⁰⁴ Turn Your Way Back; I’ve Become God’s Child; The Lord Is Our Victory; O! What A Great and Wonderful Love!; He Reformed My Life.

⁹⁰⁵ I’ve Become God’s Child; The Lord’s People, the Lord’s Possessions.

⁹⁰⁶ I’ve Become God’s Child

⁹⁰⁷ O! What A Great and Wonderful Love!

⁹⁰⁸ I’ve Become God’s Child

Relating to their salvation story, soteriology is the main theological theme of four of the selected indigenous songs.⁹⁰⁹ Not surprisingly, these songs outline Jesus' role in His substitutionary death and propitiation for sin. There is a rawness in how the Chin describe Jesus' blood and sacrifice, and even though such graphic imagery is biblical, it also resonates with the Chin's previous primal sacrifices. They explicitly state that only Jesus rose from the dead, which sets Christianity apart as unique, and attributes the work of salvation to Christ alone, rather than to their own achievements.⁹¹⁰ As a theological clarification, one line affirms that angels are not able to sing about Jesus' blood,⁹¹¹ because only humans experience salvation.

The songs express a clear dichotomy between their pre-Christian state as "sinner" and "enemy"⁹¹² of God and their subsequent conversion state. They do not hesitate to use extreme language about their previous condition, referring to themselves as "Satan's children",⁹¹³ describing themselves as being "far away", and "strangers",⁹¹⁴ and this contrasts with the belief that they are now "God's children".⁹¹⁵ This imagery describes salvation in terms of adoption. They describe themselves as God's "possessions" as a reward for Jesus' suffering, expressing thus their understanding of the ransom theory of the atonement.⁹¹⁶

They describe themselves as "chosen before the creation of the world",⁹¹⁷ appropriating a phrase from the biblical letter to the Ephesians, which is often used to support special selection in Calvinist doctrine. However, I found no other evidence of Calvinist tendencies in the Chin songs or practices.

⁹⁰⁹ See Appendix Eight.

⁹¹⁰ Jehovah Shalom Is My Peace

⁹¹¹ I've Become God's Child

⁹¹² O! What A Great and Wonderful Love!

⁹¹³ I've Become God's Child

⁹¹⁴ The Lord's People, the Lord's Possessions

⁹¹⁵ I've Become God's Child

⁹¹⁶ See Alister E. McGrath ed., *The Christian Theology Reader* 5th ed. (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2017), 285.

⁹¹⁷ The Lord's People, the Lord's Possessions

Their reference to their own spirits has already been noted, and they specify that their “physical body” and their “spirit” are both saved by Jesus.⁹¹⁸ In the contextualized song of the healing at Bethesda,⁹¹⁹ they describe their combined healing and salvation, by dipping in the lake for being “healed, getting whole” and to feel “safe and secure in your spirit”.

Merging physical and spiritual healing is consistent with their holistic worldview. Their sense of urgency, “Even the very young can meet their demise”, is a direct warning of possible imminent death, which reflects the Chin’s perception of the fragility of their lives. Salvation theology is more detailed than in many western songs, which suggests that the songs fulfil a creed-like function. The level of detail present in their worship songs reflects the role of their traditional pre-Christian songs which were used to record and remind them of events and to mark special occasions.

5.5.2. Evangelism and Missions

Included in this soteriological theme is the Chin’s burden for evangelism. The songs suggest that they perceive their evangelistic work in terms of working for God, like a boss-employee relationship, but even though evangelists are mentioned as being scarce, yet God has provided everything for them.⁹²⁰ The songs portray God as relying on them to evangelise for Him. Their response is to make themselves available to Him, “Use me as much as You want”,⁹²¹ as they acknowledge that they also need God to strengthen them,⁹²² in order that they might be “productive”.⁹²³ This denotes a type of symbiotic relationship between God and themselves. Other motivations include increasing God’s kingdom “grow bigger”, which resembles military language, as they acknowledge that new converts will make God “more

⁹¹⁸ Feast of the Lamb

⁹¹⁹ Dip Into the Lake of Bethesda

⁹²⁰ Good Time, Pleasing Time

⁹²¹ Pentecost

⁹²² The Lord’s People, the Lord’s Possessions

⁹²³ Pentecost

glorified”.⁹²⁴ There is a sense of stirring themselves to become more vigilant and revived, “Wake up, land of Zomi, be strengthened”,⁹²⁵ which is due to the urgency that time is short, “The end day is close”.⁹²⁶

There is an interesting sociological background to the song “If We Dip Together in the Spirit”. The song is a celebration of spiritual breakthrough. As the revival in Tedim in the 1970’s dwindled, numerous Chin youth resumed the drinking of alcohol, which had formerly been forbidden by the missionaries.⁹²⁷ As their parents spent time communing with and enjoying the presence of the Holy Spirit in their services, they found that their children “who were lost some time before” began returning to worship in church. This song is a Chin narrative of their cultural context of family values and close community, and their concern to pass on the Christian faith to their children.

The songs also use stark biblical imagery of people going to hell, such as “agonizing cries” and “lost souls”, whom they are asked to evangelise, by metaphorically leading them out of the dark.⁹²⁸ It is particular to the Chin to relay such urgency so frankly in their songs. The phrase “people of the world”,⁹²⁹ either refers to those who still practise primal religion or Buddhists, who “do not know”⁹³⁰ either cognitive or experiential knowledge of salvation. This portrays adherents of other religions as ignorant and disadvantaged, despite the Chin’s own socio-economic struggles, compared with other people groups. This demonstrates how the Chin separate themselves as Christians who have had this special salvation experience, which gives them “peace and assurance”,⁹³¹ compared with the uncertainty that others live

⁹²⁴ O! What A Great and Wonderful Love!

⁹²⁵ Let’s Be Budded. “Land of Zomi” refers to Chin state.

⁹²⁶ Pentecost

⁹²⁷ Yi, email conversation with the author May 15, 2010.

⁹²⁸ Voice of Compassion

⁹²⁹ I’ve Become God’s Child

⁹³⁰ I’ve Become God’s Child; The Heavenly Wealth Is Mine

⁹³¹ Jehovah Shalom Is My Peace

with. As converts to Christianity themselves, and having such clarity in their concepts of heaven and hell, they want everyone to experience the “peace of heaven”,⁹³² which they have received.

Another aspect is the expectation for a power encounter with the Holy Spirit, as seen in the song “Pentecost”, where they appropriate the account of Pentecost in the book of Acts to their own empowerment, “Lead us with power”. The song “On Mount Carmel” expresses their desire to convince others of God’s supreme power, so they sing/pray for the Holy Spirit to work miracles, as they appropriate the story of Elijah’s victory over the prophets of Baal.⁹³³

They refer to the “victory of the Highest God”, resembling the Chin’s own conquest of lesser gods, which may refer to the spirits of primal religion, or even allude to Buddhism. Elijah on “Mount Carmel” symbolises spiritual victory in missions, which is a story also frequently adopted in African Christianity,⁹³⁴ where similar primal religions are practised. They regard the story of Elijah as a parallel to their own Chin context.

5.5.3. Christian Experiences: Holiness and Spiritual Disciplines

Just as the liturgy contained encouragement to perform spiritual disciplines, this also appears in the songs: exhortation is, in fact, the most common theological genre of the selected songs, whilst praising God is the second most common.⁹³⁵ In the songs, they exhort one another to trust God,⁹³⁶ serve Him,⁹³⁷ and be fruitful,⁹³⁸ which could be summarised as encouragement to grow into spiritual maturity. They even explicitly mention songs and Bible reading as a

⁹³² O! What A Great and Wonderful Love!

⁹³³ 1 Kings 18.

⁹³⁴ Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity*, 51, 102.

⁹³⁵ Confession = 0; Praise, worship, adoration, proclamation of God’s qualities = 13; Doctrinal = 1; Asking favour, reminding God of His promises = 1; Thanksgiving = 0 and Exhortation or Encouragement either of oneself/one another = 15. Songs may be categorised in more than one genre, but only the main genres are enumerated.

⁹³⁶ “Turn Your Way Back”; The Lord’s Power Doesn’t Decline; I Trust in You, O Lord; Enjoy Sweet Communion

⁹³⁷ The Lord’s People, the Lord’s Possessions; Voice of Compassion

⁹³⁸ Let’s Be Budded

way to nurture their spirits, “entertaining me with the Word and with songs”.⁹³⁹ Reference within the songs to the songs themselves seemed rather unusual, especially as “entertainment”, but this does reflect their enjoyment of the songs.

Methods mentioned in the songs for increasing their “spiritual power” are prayer, reading the Bible and serving God.⁹⁴⁰ As a result of renewing themselves in this way, their “spiritual strength” is refilled, so that they can endure life’s difficulties.⁹⁴¹ The lyrics contain overt instructions to develop through spiritual disciplines. Similarly, they testify about their own spiritual growth, as they sing that they are increasingly becoming “more filled up”,⁹⁴² which seems to imply the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, as well as developing their “understanding”.⁹⁴³

The songs portray a conditional, causal relationship of being thankful and kind, in order that they may receive “spiritual blessings”.⁹⁴⁴ What is more unusual, is the statement that jumping and dancing would release “spiritual freedom”, which is compared with “medicine that heals”.⁹⁴⁵ Physical demonstrations such as emotional expressions are not unusual in Chin Pentecostal churches,⁹⁴⁶ and the Chin perceive these as being therapeutic.

Furthermore, they describe their exchange during worship, replacing “sorrowful” tears with “joyful” tears, as their families sing and dance together.⁹⁴⁷ Ironically, Chin interviewees related that whilst they may not express their emotions in everyday life, they do feel able to

⁹³⁹ Good Time, Pleasing Time

⁹⁴⁰ The Lord’s People, the Lord’s Possessions

⁹⁴¹ Good Time, Pleasing Time

⁹⁴² O! What A Great and Wonderful Love!

⁹⁴³ O! What A Great and Wonderful Love!

⁹⁴⁴ The Lord’s People, the Lord’s Possessions

⁹⁴⁵ It’s Joyful to Walk With God; Lord, I Rejoice

⁹⁴⁶ Ping, interview by author, Kalaymyo, 23 April, 2010; I observed dancing in church services in the participatory observation conducted in April-May 2010.

⁹⁴⁷ If We Dip Together in the Spirit

express emotions freely in church.⁹⁴⁸ Such emotional expression is distinctive of Pentecostal or charismatic worship.⁹⁴⁹

Another comparison in the songs is the juxtaposition of worldly and godly lifestyles. As the songs endorse living a “holy life”, vices are even detailed, “smoking, drinking and eating”, which they are advised to curtail.⁹⁵⁰ These restrictions were introduced initially by the missionaries, and contrasted with their customs in primal religion. The songs show how the Chin have maintained these concepts of worldliness. Interviewees related that the Chin experienced an increase in addictions such as gambling as the effects of the renewal wore off. Crime levels also increased in the community at this point.⁹⁵¹ Detailing such lists and advice in Christian songs is particular to the Chin.

5.54. The Chin’s Experience of Life: The Chin’s Socio-Economic Story

As seen so far, the song genre is not always worship, as many songs are an instructive narrative, revealing how they relate to God in their life experiences. A common thread in the songs is encouragement to have faith in the midst of socio-economic hardship. God’s provision is perceived by the Chin as a key theme of the songs, and they trace this to their desire for blessing.⁹⁵² God’s provision and blessing was also a main theme of the sermons discussed in chapter four. Songs detail very specific issues which relate particularly to the Chin, e.g. “rising commodity prices”.⁹⁵³ Despite their poverty, “no food to eat”,⁹⁵⁴ their songs portray their perception that God is their source of provision, and so they retain a positive attitude, remembering “God’s goodness”.⁹⁵⁵ It seems contradictory that they detail such hardship, while simultaneously referring to God’s constant power, goodness and love. Unlike

⁹⁴⁸ If We Dip Together in the Spirit. Yi, email conversation with the author May 15, 2010.

⁹⁴⁹ This emotional outlet is described in a Chinese context, see Tang, “‘Yellers’ and Healers,” 478.

⁹⁵⁰ Only By My Spiritual Power

⁹⁵¹ Yi, email conversation with the author May 15, 2010.

⁹⁵² Qi, interview by author, Yangon, 3 May 2010.

⁹⁵³ Turn Your Way Back

⁹⁵⁴ Lord, I Rejoice

⁹⁵⁵ Lord, I Rejoice; The Lord’s Power Doesn’t Decline; O! What A Great and Wonderful Love!

the tendency in the prosperity gospel movement, the Chin songs express their lack, weakness and utter dependence on God for their basic necessities, rather than certainty of their entitlements for excessive wealth. This demonstrates how their songs address their socio-economic context and are thus perceived as relevant.

The songs mix both their physical and spiritual needs holistically, acknowledging their specific physical needs, “clothes, trousers, food and drinks”, as well as spiritual enrichment, “provide for my spirit”.⁹⁵⁶ Likewise, both physical and spiritual provision are described as “blessings”. They perceive a correlation between partaking in “God’s spiritual food” and receiving Jesus’ victory over their economic crises.⁹⁵⁷ Their responsibility is trusting God and living holy lives, so that He will provide for them. This is portrayed almost as an equation between their level of trust in God and the level of blessing that they will receive. There is a sense in which they perceive that their financial blessing is dependent on God’s favour, “if the Lord says you are rich, then you are”.⁹⁵⁸ Rather than accruing wealth, they are encouraged to give and share with others.⁹⁵⁹ Again, prospering depends on God’s power, “You’ll prosper only by my spiritual power”.⁹⁶⁰ This song recalls biblical verses about seeking first God’s kingdom and having one’s needs supplied.⁹⁶¹ Such exhortation to trust in God for blessing explains their triumphant expression noted during participant observation.

5.5.5. The Chin’s Eschatological Story

Their desire for physical provision translates into their eschatological hope of receiving wealth in heaven, contrasting with their current earthly struggles. They express more certainty and security regarding future provision, “The heavenly wealth is mine”,⁹⁶² than for

⁹⁵⁶ Good Time, Pleasing Time

⁹⁵⁷ Turn Your Way Back

⁹⁵⁸ Full Salvation

⁹⁵⁹ Turn Your Way Back; Voice of Compassion.

⁹⁶⁰ Only By My Spiritual Power

⁹⁶¹ Matthew 6:33; This is also a popular western hymn composed in 1971, “Seek Ye First the Kingdom of God.”

⁹⁶² The Heavenly Wealth is Mine

provision for their current needs on earth. It is conveyed as a consolation or compensation for their current struggles. There is a confident expectation of living in a mansion,⁹⁶³ which may be inspired by seeing the rich peoples' houses, but contrasts to the poor living conditions that many of them live in currently.⁹⁶⁴ Even though it is expected to be fulfilled in the future, it is expressed as if it is already obtained, "I have reached my eternal abode".⁹⁶⁵ It was noticeable, during my fieldwork, that sermons were more concrete and immediate than the heavenly themes of these songs. Eschatology was not referred to in any of the sermons observed, and interviewees revealed that ten years previously, there had been more preaching on their reward in heaven. There has therefore been a shift towards preaching about trusting for provision within their current contexts. This reflects Pentecostalism's dynamic faith, expecting God to move in the present, but is also brave, as such prayers and faith can be tested both concretely and immediately. This demonstrates greater relevance of their theology to their current context.

There is evidence in the songs that the Chin adhere to pre-tribulation theology, including the rapture of the church; the line "On the day I fly from the earth up to heaven"⁹⁶⁶ is typical of the AG movement and reflects the missionaries' teaching. The songs demonstrate a consciousness of future predictions of "troubles" and "war",⁹⁶⁷ resembling biblical prophecy regarding end times.⁹⁶⁸

Their eschatological beliefs include their concepts of salvation and heavenly reward,⁹⁶⁹ and their urgency to evangelise is derived from their perception of the imminence of the end

⁹⁶³ Feast of the Lamb

⁹⁶⁴ Yi, email conversation with the author May 15, 2010.

⁹⁶⁵ I've Become God's Child

⁹⁶⁶ Feast of the Lamb, Yi, email conversation with the author May 15, 2010.

⁹⁶⁷ Voice of Compassion

⁹⁶⁸ 2 Tim. 3:1-5; Matt.24:6-7; Luke 21:11.

⁹⁶⁹ Voice of Compassion; The Heavenly Wealth Is Mine.

times: “Do (act) while you have time, because it will get dark”.⁹⁷⁰ Eschatology is not always a prevalent theme in worship songs, but is more common where people are enduring suffering in oppressed contexts, as they look forward to their future reward, or interpret their hardship as indicative of the end times. Eschatological themes also impact on how they relate to God, who has the ability to either punish or reward, and this is interestingly also how they perceived the role of the spirits in their primal religion.

5.6. Conclusion

As the analysis of Chin songs has provided insights into how Chin Pentecostal theology is contextualized, I concur with scholars that indigenous worship songs are “special examples of contextualization”, and a valuable source of local theology.⁹⁷¹ Many of the selected songs express theology which is specific to the Chin context, including everyday concepts familiar to the Chin, e.g. “dip in the Spirit”, which expresses their Christian faith dynamically, thus contextualising their theology.⁹⁷² Additionally, poetic vocabulary which had been used in the traditional pre-Christian songs has been maintained in the worship songs;⁹⁷³ this reminds the older generation of the traditional language used in their pre-Christian songs. Furthermore, the act of singing in worship is resonant with their oral tradition. The narrative style of the worship songs reflects the narrative role which their indigenous songs had traditionally served.

However, there was much evidence of western influences also in the theological themes and the tunes. The form of the songs had been westernised and varied considerably from their

⁹⁷⁰ Voice of Compassion

⁹⁷¹ Günther Renck, *Contextualization of Christianity and Christianization of Language: A Case-Study from the Highlands of Papua New Guinea* (Erlangen: Erlanger Monographien aus Mission und Ökumene Band 5, 1990), 117.

⁹⁷² Renck, *Contextualization*, 130-1.

⁹⁷³ Examples in “I am Flying to You”: Lungmawl= naïve; Zalna= abode; Sianmang=Lord (normally “Pasian”); Khuava = dove (normally “Vakhu”); Laikawi= writing (Knowledge of writing); Mangbangte= hopeless; Luainau= a baby in a cradle; Suih lungdawn= God’s merciful heart and Maimit= eyes (normally “mit”). Examples in “If We Dip Together in the Spirit”: Liangvai= weak and poor. Thangvan lau= heavenly (“van” is normally used). Yi, email conversation with the author May 15, 2010.

traditional songs, including verse structures with increased length of the verses and the inclusion of a chorus. Thus, the songs portray some particularities of Chin theology, whilst also being a hybrid of indigenous culture, primal religion and western influences.

CHAPTER 6

TOWARDS AN INTEGRATED DISCUSSION OF CHIN THEOLOGICAL PROCESSES

6. Introduction

The previous two chapters have examined theological themes using the categories of relationship, experience and primal influence. Although this chapter focuses particularly on the primal aspect of the Chin's theological framework, it does not purport to be a complete theology. In Pentecostal churches outside the West, a central issue is how they understand, interiorise and critically evaluate a theology of the (Holy) Spirit introduced from outside their culture, as well as their own cultural understanding of "spirits". This third and final aspect of the case-study of Chin Pentecostals examines how former spirit beliefs influence their everyday life, including deliverance practices, as these are the most contentious issues pertaining to syncretism.

As discussed in chapter four, Chin Pentecostal worship has revealed aspects of Chin Pneumatology. Following the renewal especially, the Chin experienced spiritual manifestations during worship, and they sensed the Holy Spirit's presence, which they described as being "in the Spirit".⁹⁷⁴ They associated their familiarity with the spirits in primal religion with their sensitivity to the Holy Spirit, as Pentecostals.

Traditional primal religious beliefs have already been outlined in this research; this section examines their ongoing beliefs and practices relating to the spirits now as Pentecostal converts. In the following section, five scholars with various intercultural and theological backgrounds are selected, based on their contributions to the syncretistic debate. At the end of this section, these scholars' contributions are integrated to provide a theological framework,

⁹⁷⁴ Tao, interview by author, Kalaymyo, 22 April 2010; Na, interview by author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 26 April 2010.

with which to examine Chin theology. As syncretism is known for its pejorative connotations, it is challenging to move beyond a simplistic traditional view of syncretism of “Christian” versus “pagan” and “East” versus “West” dichotomy to reach a creative synthesis. So, alternative terminology is explored, in the subsequent section, which is less contentious for the syncretism debate. Finally, this discussion is reapplied to how the Chin have contextualized their theology.

6.1. The Chin’s Theology of the Spirits

This section analyses the Chin’s processes in dealing with the spirits, as it has evolved in a living theology. As the term “processes” suggests, they performed a series of actions to achieve a specific result. They are interiorising a theology of the Spirit in an attempt to reconcile Christianity, (which they received from outside their culture), with their former beliefs. The Chins’ ongoing discussion and nostalgia about the spirits demonstrates that these beliefs are still meaningful for their cultural and religious identities. These beliefs represent their sense of loss of their cultural heritage, because the spirits were at the crux of what the missionaries tried to purge from their culture.

Their belief in the spirits conflicts with their new Christian identity, and these beliefs provoke theological dilemmas. Some Chin have maintained their sense of what happens to deceased spirits, and they are unsure how they should respond now, as Christians.⁹⁷⁵ The impression given by interviewees was of a subconscious attempt to integrate their former spirit beliefs with their Pentecostal faith, thus satisfying their Chin worldview, while also accommodating what they perceived western Christian forms required.

⁹⁷⁵ Interviewees commented on the disruptive activity of the spirits, such as a wife disturbing a surviving widower, causing an accident on the bus, and their response was to talk calmly to the spirits and ask them not to cause disruptions. They perceived that these instructions calmed down the spirits and they obeyed.

6.1.1. My Perception of the Spirits as a Researcher

I will reflect on how I approached Chin spirit beliefs as a researcher. The Chin themselves disagree about how spirit beliefs fit within Christian theology. They express their own indecision and even confusion regarding what was appropriate.⁹⁷⁶ My expectation was that they would attempt to present their theology as “acceptable” to a western researcher, as they would have been aware that such beliefs are not generally accepted in western contexts. However, their beliefs did not shock me because I have visited similar Pentecostal churches in India and the Philippines, and so my experiences are wider than what westerners are exposed to typically.⁹⁷⁷ The impact that the spirits have on Chin theology was an interesting revelation for me.

My initial assumption was that the spirits equated with the biblical concept of demons,⁹⁷⁸ because they were invisible and they mostly referred to them as evil spirits. This is a common supposition made by western Pentecostals,⁹⁷⁹ but this view is not always compatible with the local people’s beliefs. Some Chin do indeed identify spirits with demons,⁹⁸⁰ and thus, in a sense, accommodate Christian theology by integrating their primal beliefs with biblical terminology.⁹⁸¹ Most Chin, however, distinguish between the natures of spirits and demons,⁹⁸² which on reflection is logical. The spirits are perceived to be those of deceased

⁹⁷⁶ En, interview by author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 26 April 2010. This pastor who I interviewed, asked for my advice on how to approach strange spiritual manifestations, as he felt challenged about how to deal with this in his congregation, as it may remain from primal religion.

⁹⁷⁷ As mentioned previously, I am familiar with “superstitious” beliefs of the spirit realm growing up in Ireland. Also, I converted to Pentecostalism at a time of heightened awareness of the demonic, including deliverance and spiritual warfare practices.

⁹⁷⁸ Meyer, *Translating the Devil*, 83. This is a presumption which missionaries also made among the Ewe in Ghana.

⁹⁷⁹ Droogers, “The Cultural Dimension of Pentecostalism”, 205.

⁹⁸⁰ Tao, interview by author, Kalaymyo, 22 April 2010; Min, interview by author, Yangon, 14 April 2010.

⁹⁸¹ Meyer, *Translating the Devil*, 84.

⁹⁸² Ying, interview by author, trans. Yi, Yangon, 13 April 2010. Examples he gives are spiritual warfare of the prince of Persia in Daniel 10 and Paul’s reference to idols in 1 Corinthians 10.

human ancestors, considered to be local spirits, thus having a different nature from that of fallen angels.

I was surprised by the variety of Chin beliefs about spirits. I noted that their perspectives depended on factors such as their age, and thus their experiences of primal religion. This was compounded by having no standard, established dogma on the subject, and so diverse interpretations were inevitable. The Chin's different opinions are cited below, as generalisations would not accurately represent their range of views. I will examine what they may have meant by what they expressed in interviews. Sometimes the Chin experienced tension in relation to correlating their primal beliefs and Pentecostalism, whereas at other times, they expressed that Pentecostal spirituality suited them well because of their former religion.

My own view is that Chin beliefs that their deceased ancestors' spirits are present and active before entering their final resting place could co-exist with their Christian faith. I base this view on the lack of detail in the biblical accounts on the issue,⁹⁸³ and I think that this belief does not contradict Christianity. However, their dread of the spirits' evil power is problematic because it causes them to live not only conscious of the spirits' presence, but also in fear. Some even resort to performing rituals to appease the spirits, thus keeping them in spiritual bondage. An ambiguous theological area is the dispute regarding ongoing deliverance practices, which are examined later.

⁹⁸³ One reference to deceased spirits is thought to be the "cloud of witnesses", see Hebrews 12:1; another reference to deceased souls, which is sometimes used interchangeably with spirits is "souls of those who had been slain", see Revelation 6:9 and 20:4. The "spirits of the dead" are mentioned, but they do not give details of any activity, see Proverbs 2:18; Isaiah 14:9, 19:3, 26:14.

6.1.2. The Chin's Beliefs about Spirits

The Chin's interchangeable vocabulary for the spirits demonstrates their varied beliefs. References to the spirits as "devils",⁹⁸⁴ or "gods",⁹⁸⁵ appear contradictory, as the term "devils" portrays an evil nature, whereas "gods" may convey goodness. Use of the word "gods" conveys belief in the spirits' power and is associated with how they sometimes refer to worship, rather than appeasement. One man even referred to a spirit as an "elf",⁹⁸⁶ which is surprising, considering that this term is borrowed from pre-Christian Celtic folklore. These terms are considered in light of English not being the Chin's first language, and some of the leaders having received a western theological education, so they would have borrowed these terms. Spirits are mostly mentioned in the plural form by the Chin, and their concept of evil was connected primarily with these spirits. There was less reference to the more biblical concepts of demons or "Satan" in relation to evil. However, when they referred to "possession", they spoke of "spirits"⁹⁸⁷ and "demons"⁹⁸⁸ interchangeably, or to the generic, "evil power",⁹⁸⁹ suggesting that these concepts were more mixed than they were aware.

The most obvious discrepancy of spirit beliefs was between the older and younger generation. The older generation were more aware of the spirits' presence in everyday life, which is understandable because primal religious practices are in their living memory.⁹⁹⁰ As the younger generation are sometimes third or fourth generation Christians, they are more removed from primal practices, and they generally say that they do not believe in the

⁹⁸⁴ Chao, interview by author, Yangon, 16 April 2010; Ping, interview by author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 23 April 2010.

⁹⁸⁵ Jie, interview by author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 22 April 2010; Fan, interview by author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 25 April 2010; En, interview by author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 26 April 2010. Dian, interview by author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 26 April 2010.

⁹⁸⁶ Fan, interview by author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 25 April 2010.

⁹⁸⁷ Tao, interview by author, Kalaymyo, 22 April 2010; Na, interview by author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 26 April 2010.

⁹⁸⁸ Yu, interview by author, Yangon, 30 April 2010; Ping, interview by the author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 23 April 2010 and Li, interview by author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 22 April 2010.

⁹⁸⁹ Na, interview by author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 26 April 2010.

⁹⁹⁰ Min, interview by author, Yangon, 14 April 2010.

spirits.⁹⁹¹ This is easier for the younger people as they experience fewer theological dilemmas; however, the older generation criticise them for not being as spiritual as them, because they did not experience the renewal. However, the older generation attribute their own intensity in worship, special sensitivity to the Holy Spirit, including the use of spiritual gifts and discernment to their former familiarity with the spirits.⁹⁹² The older generation perceive that they have a spiritual advantage because of their experiences with the spirits. However, when discussing the death of relatives, even the younger generation were conscious of the presence and activity of the spirits of the deceased, resembling the western concept of being haunted by a ghost. As the younger generation are more westernised and have less exposure to spirit practices, spirit beliefs may diminish, causing a forthcoming decline in this cultural and religious distinctive.

The Chin's lingering awareness of the spirits was a point of contention between their enculturated Chin worldview and their acculturated Christian faith. The tension is caused by their assumption that the two belief systems are contradictory to each other, and that Christianity needs to be "rooted deeply in peoples' consciences".⁹⁹³ Some were indifferent about the spirits, and wanted to ignore the past, moving beyond spirit beliefs. However, others felt that they needed to override their beliefs in spirits, which they perceived as a challenge for their faith. Some Chin describe themselves as being "in a process of overcoming the spirit beliefs".⁹⁹⁴ This is not a linear process, but they are making a conscious effort to address these beliefs.

⁹⁹¹ Ping, interview by the author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 23 April 2010. Interviewee, Ping maintains that most Chin do not believe in spirits, except for the Catholics. Roman Catholics were perceived as being more lenient in spirit beliefs because of being theologically liberal, but ironically some Chin AG also believe in spirits.

⁹⁹² Ping, interview by the author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 23 April 2010.

⁹⁹³ Ying, interview by author, trans. Yi, Yangon, 13 April 2010.

⁹⁹⁴ Hua, interview by author, Yangon, 27 April 2010.

These beliefs did not just affect the laity: a prominent church leader admitted his own struggle to persuade himself that the spirits do not exist.⁹⁹⁵ Displacing these childhood beliefs was challenging, as spirit beliefs had formed the Chin worldview, until they had been taught to reject them. Those Chin who now oppose beliefs in the spirits question the Christian identity of those who maintain the beliefs, as “not being truly born again”.⁹⁹⁶ This severity resembles the Baptist missionaries’ warnings that those who danced would not go to heaven.⁹⁹⁷ The Chin Christians who maintain their beliefs in spirits are thereby assenting to aspects of primal religion being true, causing some Chin to feel guilty of syncretism.

However, some Chin rationalise that because spirit beliefs were so pervasive in primal religion, “the main root of their faith”,⁹⁹⁸ it seems reasonable that there would be a continuation of their beliefs in spirits. However, this acceptance raises multiple theological questions for them as Christians. How aware of the spirits are they permitted to be? Should they interact with the spirits, and still perform their former practices? If the spirits have power to harm them, how can they protect themselves? Do spirits linger on earth, following death? Are there some beliefs about the primal religion’s after-life which are compatible with Christianity? To summarise: Is it possible that their spirit beliefs could form part of a framework within which to develop a local Christian theology?

However, resolving these questions is challenging, because any spirit activity is invisible and unprovable, and is subjective. In addition, the Bible lacks the level of detail regarding deceased human spirits’ behaviours, acts and whereabouts, which concerned the Chin.

Western Protestant theology would not be a satisfactory resource to answer their particular

⁹⁹⁵ Lei, interview by author, Yangon, 20 April 2010.

⁹⁹⁶ Yu, interview by author, Yangon, 30 April 2010.

⁹⁹⁷ Hua, interview by author, Yangon, 27 April 2010.

⁹⁹⁸ Min, interview by author, Yangon, 14 April 2010. An example he gives, is when they killed animals, such as elephants, they perceived that the spirit rode on the elephant, and the spirit would be slaves to the enemy that they would kill.

questions sufficiently either, as these questions are not significant concerns for westerners. The general assumption in western Protestant theology is that deceased spirits go directly to heaven or hell, or await judgment, but do not roam the earth freely, interfering with the living. This simplification may not settle the issue for the Chin, because if the spirits do linger on earth, they potentially can influence the living.

Some Chin resigned themselves to the fact that the same large quantity of spirits still exist, but it is the spirits' power, which they dispute. Their beliefs ranged from stating that the spirits no longer have any power,⁹⁹⁹ to still being fearful of the spirits' power to do harm.¹⁰⁰⁰ Some concede that even if the spirits do have power over humans, they have no power over Jesus.¹⁰⁰¹ Even though some believe in the spirits' evil power, yet, they believe they are protected, as they are "more powerful",¹⁰⁰² having "a sense of stronger power",¹⁰⁰³ and so, they are not afraid. One described himself as being "possessed", by which, he seemed to allude to his baptism in the Holy Spirit.¹⁰⁰⁴ Apart from his choice of terminology demonstrating his perception of the infilling of the Holy Spirit, it shows how he perceived the Holy Spirit's power and influence in similar terms, but superior to the other spirits. For those Chin who believe that the spirits do exist, yet have no power, they pay no attention to them.

Spiritual power is an important concept for the Chin, and they are especially concerned about power to inflict harm on them. This is why, despite the Chin's pre-Christian belief in God's existence, they ignored Him because they believed that God would not harm them. Yet, they appeased the spirits to avert their evil intent towards them. There are changes however, in

⁹⁹⁹ Min, interview by author, Yangon, 14 April 2010.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Dian, interview by author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 26 April 2010; Hua, interview by author, Yangon, 27 April 2010.

¹⁰⁰¹ Min, interview by author, Yangon, 14 April 2010; Ding, interview by author, Yangon, 8 April 2010.

¹⁰⁰² Na, interview by author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 26 April 2010.

¹⁰⁰³ Dian, interview by author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 26 April 2010.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Na, interview by author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 26 April 2010.

how the Chin address spiritual power, as some now believe that they can combat the spirits, as their “enemy”.¹⁰⁰⁵ Those who are confident to disassociate themselves from the spirits do so because of their trust in Jesus’ power to protect them. Thus, they have transferred their concept of spiritual power, and the spirits’ role of protection, onto Jesus. They appraise their Christian faith in terms of their empowerment to conquer their fear of the spirits. This characteristic is particular to the Chin, as it would be irrelevant in most other contexts, and therefore comprises part of their localised Chin theology.

As already discussed, the Chin’s relationships with the members of the Trinity has been influenced by their former primal religion. Jesus is perceived as the Supreme Spirit with superior power; God is perceived as their protector and their source of blessing; and the Holy Spirit is perceived as their deliverer and healer. Although these concepts of the Trinity are biblical, these roles have, to some extent, been translated from the perceived functions of the spirits, including the roles of some spirits to protect them from other spirits. As the Chin interpret religion in terms of spiritual power, their conversion to Christianity could be construed as their decision to follow and obey the strongest Spirit. However, a persistent fear of spirits could be contrived as doubt in God’s superior power to provide blessing and protect them from misfortune. Common Chin practices of deliverance and spiritual warfare arguably incorporate both primal religion and Pentecostalism. These practices are a means of attacking evil spiritual forces, and are facilitated within Pentecostalism,¹⁰⁰⁶ more than other Christian denominations. These practices are perceived as a power encounter, portraying a type of dualism between good and evil.¹⁰⁰⁷

¹⁰⁰⁵ Yu, interview by author, Yangon, 30 April, 2010.

¹⁰⁰⁶ This is sometimes known as “popular Pentecostalism.” Droogers, “The Cultural Dimension of Pentecostalism”, 202.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Droogers, “The Cultural Dimension of Pentecostalism”, 202.

Another contentious issue is Chin Pentecostals' claim of their giftedness in discerning between the good and bad spirits. They expressed pride in having the gift of discernment because spiritual sensitivity was rated highly in Chin spirituality, and because not everyone had this gift. The most concerning issue was their persistence in claiming that the "good" spirits can still bless them.¹⁰⁰⁸ They distinguish the "good" and "bad" spirits by their perceived behaviour of either blessing or harming them. Others condemned all of the spirits as evil, regardless of their perceived behaviour.¹⁰⁰⁹ These Chin criticised the so-called "good blessing" as not being truly good, as distinct from God's blessing, which was perceived as always being good.¹⁰¹⁰

Some older people believe that the "good" spirits are "very powerful", and that they visit them to "give light", referring to health and finances.¹⁰¹¹ The connotations of blessing and light, in addition to the spirits' biblical names, such as "Abraham" and "Moses",¹⁰¹² suggest a type of syncretism with Christianity. At times they described feeling ashamed for still receiving blessings from the spirits, and so they tried to expel them, but they reported that the spirits often returned again, and refused to leave.¹⁰¹³ This portrays the strength of their beliefs, and suggests that they may still want the spirits' blessings. Having weighed up the perceived benefits, some Pentecostals still welcomed the "good" spirits in order to obtain financial blessing, but thus inadvertently, they release the spirits' influence in their lives. If the spirits could still bless them, it also meant that the spirits retained power, and therefore could also curse them, thus confining them to a cycle of fear of the spirits.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Xiu, interview by author, Kalaymyo, 23 April 2010.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Yu, interview by author, Yangon, 30 April, 2010.

¹⁰¹⁰ Wei, interview by the author, Yangon, 30 April 2010.

¹⁰¹¹ Wei, interview by the author, Yangon, 30 April 2010.

¹⁰¹² Wei, interview by the author, Yangon, 30 April 2010.

¹⁰¹³ Wei, interview by the author, Yangon, 30 April 2010.

Some Chin maintain that their former knowledge about spirits provided useful insights for them as Pentecostals, equipping them for discerning demonic activity, but also helping them to be more spiritually sensitive.¹⁰¹⁴ A pastor related that those who had been “demon possessed” during the time of primal religion were now “easy to be acquainted with the spiritual realm”, as they could hear from God easily, and they were more receptive to spiritual gifts than those who had not been exposed to the former spirits.¹⁰¹⁵ However, maintaining that spiritual sensitivity is transferrable raises the issues of syncretism and subjectivity, as it is not possible to establish beyond doubt whether people were hearing from God or from other spirits. Furthermore, the assumption that former beliefs increased their spiritual sensitivity may encourage them to retain their beliefs in the spirits.

6.13. The Chin’s Practices Relating to Spirits

During times of crisis, the Chin are more inclined to fear the spirits, which leads them to resort to primal practices; one interviewee describes this as an indication that the beliefs are “still in their hearts”.¹⁰¹⁶ This makes sense as their primal religious worldview informed them that the spirits could induce misfortunes that required appeasement to resolve. Some Chin struggled when their animal sacrifices were prohibited, because they no longer had the means to appease the spirits, whom they feared. It took time for them to accept the Christian belief that Jesus is “the once for all sacrifice”.¹⁰¹⁷

In the process of developing their local theology, the Chin Christian leaders forbade certain practices concerning the deceased spirits, because of their incompatibility with Christianity. Such practices included commanding the spirits to leave them during funerals, as if the spirit

¹⁰¹⁴ Jie, interview by author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 22 April 2010.

¹⁰¹⁵ Yu, interview by the author, Yangon, 30 April 2010.

¹⁰¹⁶ Yong, interview by author, Yangon, 16 April 2010.

¹⁰¹⁷ Jesus’ once for all sacrifice, see Hebrews 10:1-18.

of a person lingers around the dead body, and bringing food to the spirits at gravesites, which the leaders condemned as being a form of “worship”.¹⁰¹⁸

One point of contention was slaughtering animals for feasts, despite its resemblance to their former sacrifices, and the fact that this is an expensive practice. Some defended this practice by differentiating that in Christianity the meat was for the living people, instead of for the dead person, as they had believed that the spirit would eat the meat.¹⁰¹⁹ Their willingness to accept this expense indicates the cultural importance of such celebrations, especially for funerals. Some Chin leaders no longer permit animals to be killed at funerals.¹⁰²⁰ However, others argue that the slaughtered meat is used to feed the mourners who attend the funeral, and that hospitality is an important cultural value for them still. They argue that the food can also be given to the poor, thus christianising the practice and distancing it from their former practices. The argument for maintaining this practice is that while the form resembles their former practice, yet the meaning has now changed to become a communal meal. For some, this change in purpose is not sufficient, as they “still bring (the same) concept”.¹⁰²¹ This tension regarding perceptions of syncretism has also been noted in African churches. Whilst the ceremony itself was not distinctly syncretistic, yet there was a distinction made between the possibility of the participants’ interpretation of the ceremony, which may have been syncretistic.¹⁰²² As this process is invisible, it is unknown whether the meanings of the ceremony were misinterpreted using former belief systems.

The Chin interviewees expressed their attempts at finding alternative practices to demonstrate their respect for the dead, using culturally appropriate, and religiously acceptable, terms.

¹⁰¹⁸ Jie, interview by author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 22 April 2010.

¹⁰¹⁹ Jie, interview by author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 22 April 2010.

¹⁰²⁰ Shen, interview by author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 27 April 2010.

¹⁰²¹ Na, interview by author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 26 April 2010.

¹⁰²² M.L. Daneel, *Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches*, vol. 2, *Church Growth—Causative Factors and Recruitment Techniques* (The Hague, Paris: Mouton, 1974), 324.

They replaced the practice of bringing food to the graves¹⁰²³ by applying ointment on the skulls, which they argued was not an “animistic practice”,¹⁰²⁴ and which they perceived to be a reasonable alternative expression of their love.

The teaching which the Myanmar AG had initially received from American AG missionaries refuted the belief that Christians can be possessed by demons.¹⁰²⁵ They Chin who practise deliverance substantiate their deliverance practices by mentioning biblical references about demonic deliverance, despite the insistence of many that spirits are not demons. They alluded to deliverance practices resembling those of primal religion.¹⁰²⁶ Their rationale that they would not expel a “good” spirit, but would only expel the “bad” spirits indicates that they would allow a Christian to continue to be possessed by what they referred to as “good spirits”.¹⁰²⁷ They did not elaborate how they could distinguish between the touch of a “good” spirit and that of the Holy Spirit, but maintain that they have a gift of discernment.

House-cleansing (*inn-thianh*) is a Chin ritual which is still commonly practiced by Pentecostals to remove the influence of spirits from houses, especially where they had previously made offerings to spirits.¹⁰²⁸ They similarly cleanse a person or a whole village. Cleansing rituals involve expelling spirits and sacrificing an animal, but also include prayer, worship and re-dedication.¹⁰²⁹ Theologically, they find biblical support for cleansing, based on texts of Paul or the Israelites destroying or cleansing the paraphernalia which had been

¹⁰²³ Tao, interview by author, Kalaymyo, 22 April 2010.

¹⁰²⁴ Jie, interview by author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 22 April 2010.

¹⁰²⁵ As stated in chapter one, the Myanmar AG leaders informed me that they have preserved the American AG statement of faith as their own.

¹⁰²⁶ Tao, interview by author, Kalaymyo, 22 April 2010; Li, interview by author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 22 April 2010; Na, interview by author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 26 April 2010. The Baptists criticised the Pentecostals for deliverance practices whereby they used to shake, which was perceived to be demon possession, but reminded them of their former primal practices. Also, in primal religion, they reported that they used to have an “animistic house” which was known to be possessed by evil spirits, the animistic ministers used to draw out the spirits by banging on a drum, knocking a chair. This is similar to how deliverance is practiced by some in the cleansing rituals as they beat things, including people.

¹⁰²⁷ Xiu, interview by author, Kalaymyo, 23 April 2010.

¹⁰²⁸ Chen, interview by author, Yangon, 8 April 2010.

¹⁰²⁹ Jie, interview by author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 22 April 2010.

used in idol-worship.¹⁰³⁰ Based on the account of the Israelites circling Jericho, Chin Pentecostals still circled round houses or villages to perform cleansing.¹⁰³¹ Some Chin object to cleansing, arguing that it is only practiced by those who do not understand their Bibles.¹⁰³² Even though deliverance and animal sacrifices are reminiscent of primal religion, it is argued that these cleansing rituals are christianised versions, because they are accompanied by prayer, worship and justified by biblical references.

Deliverance is a controversial theological issue as it propagates belief in spirits and/or demons. Deliverance rituals are perceived to simultaneously attempt to break from the past influence of spirits,¹⁰³³ whilst also perpetuating ongoing beliefs in the need to eradicate the spirits.¹⁰³⁴ Chin Pentecostals' deliverance practices could therefore be interpreted as addressing primal religion, but could also be perceived as integrating Christian and primal practices. Their perceived ongoing need for deliverance practices consistently reinforces their belief in the existence of spirits. Despite years of practising deliverance, they perceive that the spirits still remain among them. This poses questions regarding the practitioners' effectiveness in casting out the spirits, or the spirits' very existence, in the first instance.

Chin healing practices also entailed deliverance, highlighting their beliefs in spiritual causation. Some of these practices were hidden from the pastor because they feared his disapproval,¹⁰³⁵ because they were underground,¹⁰³⁶ indicated that these were folk practices. Some hidden practices were obviously syncretistic, such as sacrificing a chicken,¹⁰³⁷ whilst others were literal physical acts derived from the Bible. Some Christian women lie back-to-

¹⁰³⁰ Jie, interview by author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 22 April 2010.

¹⁰³¹ En, interview by author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 26 April 2010.

¹⁰³² Ming, interview by author, Yangon, 9 April 2010.

¹⁰³³ Meyer, *Translating the Devil*, 101, 216.

¹⁰³⁴ Meyer, *Translating the Devil*, 211-2.

¹⁰³⁵ Fan, interview by author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 25 April 2010.

¹⁰³⁶ Hiebert refers to "Denial of the Old: Rejection of Contextualization." Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1985), 184.

¹⁰³⁷ Li, interview by author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 22 April 2010.

back on sick people for a week, or month, in an attempt to “expel evil spirits”.¹⁰³⁸ They apply literally the account of Elisha healing the youth.¹⁰³⁹ These healing practices are also popular in similar African contexts.¹⁰⁴⁰

Despite early Christian beliefs in demons being similar to that of the majority world, westerners portray that such beliefs should be “outgrown”,¹⁰⁴¹ despite there being demonic activity in the west also.¹⁰⁴² Pentecostalism’s growth in Africa has even been attributed to the willingness to permit such rituals,¹⁰⁴³ because the rituals were perceived to be meeting a relevant need. The clash between good and evil is a popular theme in Pentecostalism, as past traditions of host cultures are targeted, and this perceived relevance causes the local people to be more amenable to evangelism.¹⁰⁴⁴ These parallels in practices also encouraged the Chin to convert. Pentecostalism’s willingness to interact with primal beliefs and practices supports Cox’s hypothesis. The exact process of how the Chin developed their own praxis is uncertain, but came about through a combination of the missionaries’ and other people groups’ influences,¹⁰⁴⁵ in addition to their own interpretation of the Bible. The similarities between Chin traditional culture and the Old Testament led to their reading of the Old Testament as being supportive of their own practices.

Some Chin admit that former practices still linger in the church, especially amongst older people who enjoy “older things” and who “mix up” former practices.¹⁰⁴⁶ Younger people, however, argue that Chin “culture” (for the Chin, the word “culture” refers to primal religion)

¹⁰³⁸ Fan, interview by author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 25 April 2010.

¹⁰³⁹ See, 2 Kings 4:32-4. Elisha laid on a youth’s body and he rose from the dead. Even though they mention Elisha, their concrete re-enactments appear to be inspired by Jeremiah’s prophetic acts.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity*, 116.

¹⁰⁴¹ Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity*, 122.

¹⁰⁴² Keith Warrington, “Exorcism”, *Handbook of Pentecostal Christianity*, 84.

¹⁰⁴³ Meyer, *Translating the Devil*, 101, 216.

¹⁰⁴⁴ Droogers, “The Cultural Dimension of Pentecostalism”, 202.

¹⁰⁴⁵ The Lisu people introduced Pentecostalism to the Chin, who were also influenced by local Pentecostals across the border in India.

¹⁰⁴⁶ Shen, interview by author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 27 April 2010.

does not influence the church, which they claim is because they are third generation Christian, and they now use a western style of worship.¹⁰⁴⁷ However, the time-lapse and westernization does not necessarily eliminate a primal overhang, as mixed influences can co-exist.

6.2. Theological Framework on Non-Western Theology and Syncretism

Given this background of Chin spirit beliefs and the negative connotations of syncretism, the next section examines five key scholars' perspectives on syncretism. These scholars are from varied backgrounds: Hollenweger is a Pentecostal scholar; Walls is a Protestant Christian historian; Schreiter is a Catholic theologian and sociologist; Yung is an Asian Methodist missiologist and Pieris is an Asian Catholic theologian.

Most of these scholars refer to the African Independent Churches (AICs) in their discussion of syncretism; this is pertinent because the AICs' background of African traditional religion resembles Chin primal religion in many respects. Cox, whose hypothesis is examined in this research also uses the AICs in reference to primal spirituality,¹⁰⁴⁸ and they are also relevant because they face similar theological issues, including the amalgamation of their residual spiritual worldview and their oral culture with Pentecostalism. Moreover, a "theology of inculturation" is well developed within African Pentecostalism.¹⁰⁴⁹ African beliefs regarding witchcraft and spirits also vary, ranging between being naïve superstition, evil, or that God was working through these beliefs to prepare them for conversion.¹⁰⁵⁰ The AICs are well

¹⁰⁴⁷ En, interview by author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 26 April 2010.

¹⁰⁴⁸ Cox, *Fire From Heaven*, 245-6. Anderson refers to Cox in Allan Anderson, "Intercultural Theology, Walter J. Hollenweger and African Pentecostalism" in *Intercultural Theology*, 133.

¹⁰⁴⁹ Vondey, *Beyond Pentecostalism*, 160. Vondey refers to Allan H. Anderson, *African Reformation: African Initiated Christianity in the 20th Century* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World, 2001), 167-90.

¹⁰⁵⁰ See for example, Martin Lindhardt, "Introduction: Presence and Impact of Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity in Africa" in *Pentecostalism in Africa: Presence and Impact of Pneumatic Christianity in Postcolonial Societies*, Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies, ed. Martin Lindhardt, vol., 15 (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2015), 12.

known for synthesising primal religion with Christianity.¹⁰⁵¹ Therefore their approach to similar phenomena is pertinent to this research on Chin contextualization.

6.2.1. Walter J. Hollenweger

Hollenweger has pioneered Pentecostal studies, thus gaining recognition for Pentecostalism as an intercultural theology within world Christianity. In addition, he was an advocate of ecumenism within Pentecostalism in his role as the first Secretary for Evangelism in the World Council of Churches. Another distinctive was that he was a scholar of Pentecostalism as well as a former Pentecostal pastor, so he contemplated the theological implications for his observations and was not typically as conservative as many contemporary Pentecostal scholars have been. For these reasons, his scholarship is significant to this research of Chin Pentecostalism in a cross-cultural mission context.

He wrote on so-called “extremes” within Pentecostalism, most notably within the AICs. He was more accepting of these tendencies, which had been labelled as “syncretistic” by mainline theologians.¹⁰⁵² Thus his acknowledgement of the varied roots of Pentecostal theologies,¹⁰⁵³ provided a platform for non-western voices, such as the Chin. As well as opening the door for varied forms of Pentecostalism, he also broadened concepts of theology.¹⁰⁵⁴ He is known for acknowledging oral theology as an authentic form of Pentecostal theology, whilst pointing out the limitations of formal written theology.¹⁰⁵⁵ This corresponds with Chin Pentecostal liturgical rituals, oral songs and pneumatological

¹⁰⁵¹ Cephas N. Omenyo, in 2002a, ‘Charismatic Churches in Ghana and Contextualization’ *Exchange* XXXI/3, 260, 231-48 in Cephas N. Omenyo, “Pentecostal-Type Renewal and Disharmony in Ghanaian Christianity” in *Global Pentecostalism: Encounters with Other Religious Traditions*, ed. David Westerlund (London/New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 58.

¹⁰⁵² Anderson, “Intercultural Theology,” 130.

¹⁰⁵³ David Bundy, “Pentecostalism as a Global Phenomenon,” A Review Essay of *Pentecostalism: Origins and Developments Worldwide*, by Walter Hollenweger, *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 21, no. 2 (Fall 1999): 298.

¹⁰⁵⁴ Bundy, “Pentecostalism as a Global Phenomenon,” 303.

¹⁰⁵⁵ Anderson, “Intercultural Theology,” 131.

practices, which forms their living theology. Therefore, his theological openness to cultural differences provides useful insights for evaluating Chin practices.

6.2.1.1. A Non-Western-Centric Approach to World Christianity

Hollenweger's assertion was that western philosophers and theologians have influenced western theology based on western culture, rather than on purely Christian ideologies. Thus he maintains that westerners' criticism of ancestral and patriotic influences on other theologies is actually ethnocentric.¹⁰⁵⁶ Rather, he claimed that many non-western theological frameworks were closer to the biblical worldviews than western ideals.¹⁰⁵⁷ This undermines the superiority of western "orthodoxy". Instead, he recognised that Pentecostalism originates in varied locations with varied expressions, thus welcoming diversity and syncretisms.¹⁰⁵⁸ This suggests that he would not judge Chin beliefs and practices using a western theological framework, which has received prominence heretofore, due to Christianity's former stronghold in the western world, and fortified by its wealth in scholarship. His suggestion that non-western cultures reflect biblical views more than western cultures is a controversial perspective if applied to the Chin's concept of spirits, as discussed in the first section.

6.2.1.2. Perception of the African Independent Churches

Hollenweger was among the first to recognise the AICs as "independent African Pentecostal churches", which were formerly dismissed as syncretistic.¹⁰⁵⁹ Other theological scholars such as Cox built on this concept, despite his failure to acknowledge Hollenweger's prior contribution.¹⁰⁶⁰ As a caveat, Anderson disputes Hollenweger's insinuation that the AICs are "representative" because he does not consider them archetypal, but rather "an important

¹⁰⁵⁶ Hollenweger, "The Pentecostal Elites," 212.

¹⁰⁵⁷ Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: Origins*, 302, 308-9.

¹⁰⁵⁸ Hollenweger, "The Pentecostal Elites," 212.

¹⁰⁵⁹ Anderson, "Intercultural Theology", 131; Walter J. Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals* (Norwich: SCM Press, Ltd., 1972), 149, 166.

¹⁰⁶⁰ Anderson, "Intercultural Theology", 133. Anderson points out Cox's lack of acknowledgement of Hollenweger.

expression” of African Pentecostalism.¹⁰⁶¹ The significance of accepting such diversity is that a large number of non-western churches with similar syncretistic issues (including the Chinese churches) have been formally validated as Pentecostal.

Similarly, Hollenweger’s acknowledgement of a shamanistic influence on Korean Pentecostalism opens Pentecostalism to a variety of theological syncretisms. Incidentally, Anderson explains that Korean Pentecostals refuted this association as they perceived it as a derogatory accusation, which was an unintentional generalisation due to his lack of familiarity with the Korean context.¹⁰⁶² Hollenweger’s acceptance of non-Christian, not just non-western, influences within Pentecostalism serves to diminish the taboo associated with syncretism.

6.2.1.3. General Views on Syncretism

Contrary to Pentecostals’ typical circumspection about syncretism, Hollenweger accepts that the Bible is syncretistic,¹⁰⁶³ thus he acknowledged the various biblical interpretations resulting from readings through cross-cultural lenses.¹⁰⁶⁴ However, Hollenweger not only assumes that syncretism has occurred throughout Christian history, but especially includes

¹⁰⁶¹ Anderson, “Intercultural Theology”, 134.

¹⁰⁶² Anderson defends Korean Pentecostals and claims that when they interact with shamanism they are a “culturally indigenous form of Korean Christianity” and not shamanistic, as he contends that the parallels with the ancient religious practices and cultures are compatible with the gospel in the biblical record, as Pentecostals relate to the Bible rather than traditional religions when describing their own practices as cultural adaptations. Allan Anderson, interview by author, Birmingham, 4 October 2016; Also, see Anderson, “The Contextual Pentecostal Theology of David Yonggi Cho”, *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 7:1 (2004): 101-123. Allan Anderson, “The Pentecostal Gospel and Third World Cultures,” (a paper read at the 28th Annual Meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies, Evangel University, Springfield, Missouri, March 16, 1999; database on-line, available at http://www.artsweb.bham.ac.uk/aanderson/Publications/Pentecostal_gospel_.htm, September 6, 2005), 6, accessed on 7 February 2013. For more detail on both sides of the debate, see, Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out*, 51; Cox, *Fire From Heaven*, 226-8; Yoo, Boo, Woong “Response to Korean Shamanism by the Pentecostal Church,” *International Review of Mission* 297 (1985): 73-74. See also, the Rick Ross Institute’s website, available from <http://www.rickross.com/reference/yoidoyonggi/yoido9.html>, Jeremy Reynalds “Is Cho a Pentecostal Shaman?” Spring 2000, accessed on 7 February 2013.

¹⁰⁶³ Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: Origins*, 308. Also John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews and Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 2000), s.v. “Proverbs”: 560.

¹⁰⁶⁴ Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: Origins*, 308-9. Walter J. Hollenweger, foreword to *African Initiatives in Christianity: The Growth, Gifts and Diversities of Indigenous African Churches: A Challenge to the Ecumenical Movement*, Risk Book Series, eds. John S. Pobee and Gabriel Ositelu II, no. 83 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1998), xii.

Pentecostalism.¹⁰⁶⁵ While this may seem surprising, he is not the only Pentecostal scholar to make such assertions; Yong similarly believes that Christianity has adopted surrounding religious concepts since biblical times.¹⁰⁶⁶ Thus, Hollenweger would not only be unperturbed by syncretism in local Chin theology, but expects and willingly accepts it, as syncretism has been formative within the Christian heritage.

As Hollenweger assumes that syncretism takes place, rather than deliberating as to whether or not syncretism has occurred, he would merely categorise the types of syncretism,¹⁰⁶⁷ classifying them either as “theologically responsible” or as “irresponsible”.¹⁰⁶⁸ His designation of “responsible” is allocated to those who are conscious of the rationale for syncretisms. He supports his thinking by using the example of the biblical writers’ thought processes when selecting the appropriate cultural aspects.¹⁰⁶⁹ Another reason why he commends theological accountability,¹⁰⁷⁰ is because different syncretisms speak in peoples’ different languages.¹⁰⁷¹ Not surprisingly, he endorses Pentecostals’ interaction with their surrounding cultures.¹⁰⁷²

As the Chin have wrestled with some of the spirit practices theologically, trying to find biblical support, this would suggest that they have, to some degree, taken responsibility for their syncretism. In some cases, Chin leaders have demonstrated an awareness of the issues

¹⁰⁶⁵ Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: Origins*, 132; See also Hollenweger, “Critical Issues for Pentecostals” in *Pentecostals After a Century*, 85-86.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Amos Yong “Syncretism,” *Dictionary of Mission Theology: Evangelical Foundations*, IVP, ed. John Corrie, consulting eds: J. Samuel Escobar, Wilbert R. Shenk (Nottingham: Inter Varsity Press, 2007), 375. El’s attributes as universal father and king. Also concepts such as logos and kyrios were captured and transformed theologically. Yong questions the legitimacy of syncretism based on whether it is Christianity which “subordinates” external concepts for its own use, or whether it is Christ who is being subordinated, using the example of Gnosticism.

¹⁰⁶⁷ Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: Origins*, 132.

¹⁰⁶⁸ Hollenweger, “The Pentecostal Elites,” 212.

¹⁰⁶⁹ Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: Origins*, 308-9.

¹⁰⁷⁰ See, Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: Origins*, 132, chapter eleven.

¹⁰⁷¹ Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: Origins*, 137.

¹⁰⁷² Walter J. Hollenweger, “Theology and the Future of the Church” in *Companion Encyclopedia of Theology*, ed. Peter Byrne and Leslie Houlden (London: Routledge, 1995): 1028-1029 in Lynne Price, *Theology Out of Place: A Theological Biography of Walter J. Hollenweger* (London: Sheffield Academic Press: 2002), 92.

and they consider how they fit biblically, and they have maintained predominantly the aspects which they have deemed fitting. Christianity does not resolve the question of what happens to deceased spirits or where they go, so it is not unreasonable to integrate the Chin primal and Christian perspectives of the after-life, heaven and hell and the concept of receiving blessing. However, in other cases, where the Chin have denied and tried to hide syncretism, Hollenweger's principles would require a deliberate but selective syncretism from Chin culture and primal religion, which would be honest and real. This would make Christianity more relevant to Chin culture than its former indiscriminate adoption of western forms, which although foreign, were automatically assumed to be Christian.

His model is challenging because it questions whether there are, in fact, aspects of Chin Pentecostalism which are more biblical than western Pentecostalism. Western Christianity has become less spiritually orientated and is very much influenced by western philosophies, so the emphasis on the spiritual realm demonstrated by the Chin could very well be a more biblical worldview than western Pentecostalism, which sometimes underplays the spiritual realm.

6.2.2. Andrew Walls

Like Hollenweger, Andrew Walls was also a chair of mission studies, having taught in Sierra Leone and Nigeria as a missionary, and having held posts in Aberdeen and Edinburgh universities. Although Walls is not a Pentecostal specialist, he is a Christian historian, who highlights relevant theological and cultural issues. Notably, Walls portrays Christianity's historical global spread as serial growth,¹⁰⁷³ as Christianity has gained prominence in various geographical areas at different times. He traces the spread of Christianity from Europe to

¹⁰⁷³ Andrew Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll: N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1996), 22 and 145.

Africa, Asia and Latin America, in contrast to one linear expansion, like Islam.¹⁰⁷⁴

Christianity's ability to grow in this serial pattern is attributed to Christianity's "translatability",¹⁰⁷⁵ as it infiltrates cultures because it does not have a specific language, geographical area or religious culture, unlike Islam or Hinduism.¹⁰⁷⁶ As argued in this research, Pentecostals are particularly adaptable to different cultural contexts because, in addition to Christian translatability, they do not have uniform theological statements of faith as other denominations do; Pentecostals are more flexible with interpretation and autonomy. Currently, in the "Great Reverse Migration" people from various nations are bringing their diverse theological expressions back to the west.¹⁰⁷⁷ This diversity is because the Bible has now been translated into various languages and cultures, and Christ has been interpreted differently, depending on the themes which impacted them most.¹⁰⁷⁸ These migrations produce different "mutations" of Christianity as it crosses cultures. This is significant for theology, because it denotes that there is no one universal form of Christianity, but each expression is a "local form".¹⁰⁷⁹ Thus, western theology is not the gold standard by which to judge Chin theology; a local theology like the Chin's could be considered valid, as all theology is contextual.¹⁰⁸⁰

¹⁰⁷⁴ Andrew F. Walls, afterword to *Mission in the Twenty-First Century: Exploring the Five Marks of Global Mission*, eds. Andrew Walls and Cathy Ross (London: Darton, Longman and Todd and Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2008), 194-5.

¹⁰⁷⁵ Walls, afterword to *Mission in the Twenty-First Century*, 22 and 145.

¹⁰⁷⁶ Walls, *Mission in the Twenty-First Century*, 22, 173. He discusses this in relation to Christian art.

¹⁰⁷⁷ Walls, "Mission and Migration: The Diaspora Factor in Christian History" in *Global Diasporas and Mission*, eds. Chandler H. Ims and Amos Yong, Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series 23 (Oxford: Regnum Books, 2014): 34, 36, 19-37. (This chapter is edited from a previously published chapter: Walls, "Mission and Migration: The Diaspora Factor in Christian History," *Journal of African Christian Thought* 5, no.2 (2002): 3-11.

¹⁰⁷⁸ Walls, *The Missionary Movement*, 23.

¹⁰⁷⁹ Walls, *The Missionary Movement*, 235.

¹⁰⁸⁰ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 423.

6.2.2.1. A Non-Western-Centric Approach to World Christianity

Walls criticises missionaries' colonial mentality in imposing western "civilisation",¹⁰⁸¹ because this concept of Christian orthodoxy and its associated judgement of other cultures derives from Hellenistic-Roman Christianity.¹⁰⁸² However, as the majority of Christians now originate from the two-thirds world, the assumption of the supremacy of western theology is now considered ethnocentric. The Chin still lack confidence in their ability to theologise because of their esteem of western theology as authentic. Ironically, Walls maintains that western Christians are more susceptible to syncretism than their African and Asian counterparts, who have been advised against syncretism, mostly by westerners.¹⁰⁸³ Likewise, the Chin have been warned against syncretism with their own traditional culture, but most do not fathom western forms as syncretistic, as it was the form of Christianity which they received.

Walls encourages western Christians to imitate majority world Christians' adeptness in inter-religious dialogue, in view of the pluralism in the contemporary world.¹⁰⁸⁴ However, the Chin appear stunted in inter-religious dialogue because of their western evangelical approach to the neighbouring Buddhists, inherited from the missionaries. The cross-cultural symbiotic relationships between Christians which Walls envisages could be a conduit for sharing and developing theology, thus comparing and analysing syncretism.¹⁰⁸⁵ However, the relationship between Chin and western theology is far from being symbiotic, as belief in western superiority persists.

¹⁰⁸¹ Walls, *The Missionary Movement*, 105.

¹⁰⁸² Walls, *The Missionary Movement*, 20.

¹⁰⁸³ Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process*, 69. See Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: the Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 1-3. Newbigin describes western theologians' omission to examine their own context, but have concentrated on other cultures.

¹⁰⁸⁴ *The Missionary Movement*, 147.

¹⁰⁸⁵ Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process*, 69.

6.2.2.2. *Perception of the African Independent Churches*

Walls' perception is that African Christianity is a continuation¹⁰⁸⁶ of "primal" religion,¹⁰⁸⁷ as both a new development for African religion, as well as a new mode of expression of Christianity.¹⁰⁸⁸ This thinking would not only unquestioningly accept new forms or expressions within Chin Pentecostalism, but even consider them a legitimate continuation of primal religion, and accept Chin Pentecostalism as a new form of Chin religion. However, continuity from traditional religion was resisted by missionaries to Africa, as evidenced by their struggle to redeem traditional concepts of God into Christianity.¹⁰⁸⁹ The Chin's traditional concept of Supreme Creator was considered inadequate, and so the missionaries retained the name, but fortified their concept of God with information regarding God's power, transcendence, love and goodness relevant to the Chin's context. In contexts where Christians demonised former African deities, the consequence was actually to reinforce Africans' fear of evil powers and dualism between good and evil forces.¹⁰⁹⁰ Arguably, this could also be the situation of the Chin, as seen in their ongoing awareness of spirits, as discussed in the first section. Conversely, western Christianity tends to shy away from considering evil forces, which demonstrates its own inconsistency with biblical concepts. However, Walls does not simply classify Christianity as a continuation of African traditional religion, because Christianity has also introduced changes.¹⁰⁹¹ Neither does a simple description of continuation account for the overlaps between African traditional rules and Levitical laws.¹⁰⁹² It is too simplistic to merely identify which former practices are continued in Christianity, but this does not account for the fact that some practices have firstly been

¹⁰⁸⁶ Allan Anderson uses the term "continuation" in Anderson, *Spirit-Filled World: Religious Dis/Continuity in African Pentecostalism*.

¹⁰⁸⁷ Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process*, 116.

¹⁰⁸⁸ Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process*, 116.

¹⁰⁸⁹ Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process*, 120-1. He refers to Acts 14:17 "left not himself without witness."

¹⁰⁹⁰ Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process*, 131-2.

¹⁰⁹¹ Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process*, 123.

¹⁰⁹² Walls, *The Missionary Movement*, 118.

adapted before they were accepted in a culture, and does not establish the reasons why some practices have been maintained, while others have been abandoned. In some ways the AICs are similar to the Chin churches, as some continuation can be seen, such as the understanding of the spirit realm.

6.2.2.3. General Views on Syncretism

The global transmission of Christianity involves mixing cultures and a lack of uniformity, which Walls concludes causes Christianity to probably be “the most syncretistic” of the main religions.¹⁰⁹³ He goes to the extent of claiming that the differences are so vast that Christians from different contexts are barely identifiable to one another.¹⁰⁹⁴ Walls’ approach to Chin Pentecostalism would be an anticipation of syncretism, relating to its cross-cultural influences.

As regards serial growth, Christianity’s beginnings were in Israel, and yet Christianity went from the West to the Chin in Burma in Asia, which is (geographically) closer to Israel, than the West. Thus, Christianity had been translated by different cultures, before it was reinterpreted into a Chin form of Christianity, which is another mutation and a local form of Christianity. Despite the Chin considering how they fit in with other Pentecostals worldwide, there is no single universal standard of Pentecostalism.

On the other hand, Walls establishes elements within Christianity which he purports are common across the board, namely: Christ, the Bible, sacraments, community and Jewish ancestry, which he believes connote a sense of continuity.¹⁰⁹⁵ However, these core elements are interpreted by the Chin in a unique way. Their perception of Christ is influenced by their former relationship to the spirits; their oral tradition, with high illiteracy rates, and their own

¹⁰⁹³ Walls, *The Missionary Movement*, 173. He discusses this in relation to Christian art.

¹⁰⁹⁴ Walls, *The Missionary Movement*, 3-6.

¹⁰⁹⁵ Walls, *The Missionary Movement*, 6-7.

biblical interpretations influence their perception of the Bible; their familiarity with sacrifices informs their concept of the Christian sacrament of communion; the Chin are a close community, being a group culture, and the Chin identify strongly with Jewish culture, especially as described in the Old Testament. So, while these aspects are in common with all Christians, the Chin's interpretation is unique.

6.23. Robert Schreiter

Robert Schreiter is a Roman Catholic priest, who belonged to the Missionaries of the Precious Blood. Schreiter is a systematic theologian who served as presidents of both the American Society of Missiology and the Catholic Theological Society of America, and has lectured in Germany, Netherlands and North America. As well as being a theologian, he also engages with the social sciences, examining the dynamics between culture and theology, especially inculturation in missions.

As mentioned in chapter two, Schreiter's starting point is to examine a culture, and from that standpoint he examines faith, because culture is the context from which theology develops.¹⁰⁹⁶ This approach makes sense because culture is the variable, and he understands its importance, following which, theology may be interpreted accordingly. If this approach was used in the Chin's case, they may not still be re-evaluating their culture for aspects which they can redeem or reverting to cultural forms and meanings which they miss.

Schreiter focused on local theologies, including an interest in popular religion, especially in his earlier writings.¹⁰⁹⁷ His later work evolved to include globalization, seeing local theologies in dialogue with each other and with the global context, rather than in isolation.¹⁰⁹⁸

¹⁰⁹⁶ Schreiter, "Culture, Society and Contextual Theologies," *Missiology* 12, no. 3 (1984): 261.

¹⁰⁹⁷ Schreiter, "Popular Religion and Official Religion," in *Constructing Local Theologies*, 122-143 (chapter six).

¹⁰⁹⁸ Schreiter, "Theology, Culture, and Dialogue in a New Millennium," *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 13 (2003), 32.

If this principle was applied to the Chin, their contribution to their own local theology would be respected in its own right for contributing to global theology as an integral part of a bigger mosaic. In turn, it would include honestly acknowledging how globalisation factors have influenced Chin theology, as they have interacted with other people groups and western missionaries and have gained access to travel and social media. This would address their concern about being so unique that they cannot relate to other Pentecostals universally; their desire is rather to fit in.¹⁰⁹⁹

6.2.3.1. A Non-Western-Centric Approach to World Christianity

Schreiter's interest in developing local theologies and "global theology" accepts various theologies in local forms, which naturally question western supremacy. He wrestled to respond appropriately to situations where traditional theological practices would contradict cultural norms, such as drinking alcohol (for communion) being prohibited in certain cultural contexts. He has criticised situations where churches have merely imposed their own traditional practices.¹¹⁰⁰ By and in itself, Schreiter's respect for local theologies deflects from the former superiority attributed to western theology, and instead he refers to "global theology", which includes, but does not equate to western theology alone.

Schreiter's non-western approach is clear from his reference to white domination as colonial, racist and sexist.¹¹⁰¹ He refers here to the kind of colonial mentality during the era when Christianity was introduced to the Chin. He also criticises the western imposition of culture as if it were integral to the Christian message, and believed it to be a disruption to other

¹⁰⁹⁹ Lei, interview by author, Yangon, 20 April 2010. (The Chin's concern about unity has been mentioned previously)

¹¹⁰⁰ Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, 2-3.

¹¹⁰¹ Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, 2-3.

cultures.¹¹⁰² His criticisms would apply to the western missionaries to the Chin who had such a westernising influence.

He considered how the church should relate to non-Christian religions and to theological shifts such as liberation theology. His response was to endorse new Christian identities comprehensible in their local cultural contexts.¹¹⁰³ In application to the Chin, this may mean that their Christian identity would represent more of their local culture. This concurs with his preference for contextual models.¹¹⁰⁴

He recognises that because foreign missionaries often do not understand cultures thoroughly, their translation models of contextualization do not translate meanings accurately, leading to theological problems. This phenomenon has also disrupted cultures, presented Christianity as foreign, and distorted peoples' sense of identity. For this reason, he objected to translation models of contextualization.¹¹⁰⁵

Schreiter's reaction to insensitivity to culture, and his encouragement to develop local theological identities, are easily applicable to the Chin context. Schreiter would assess the cultural and social changes as the criteria for examining the effectiveness of inculturation.¹¹⁰⁶ In the case of the Chin, changes were certainly "effective" as the culture was thoroughly Christianised, but it was at the same time heavily westernised. Much of Chin cultural change would fall short of Schreiter's criterion of enriching cultural identity as the Chin have grieved their loss of cultural practices, and their core concept of cultural identity has been undermined, despite Pentecostalism's claim to uniquely contextualize.

¹¹⁰² Schreiter, *The New Catholicity*, 53.

¹¹⁰³ Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, 2-3.

¹¹⁰⁴ Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theology*, 13,16.

¹¹⁰⁵ Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theology*, 8.

¹¹⁰⁶ Schreiter, "A Framework for a Discussion of Inculturation," in *Mission in Dialogue: The Sedos Research Seminar on the Future of Mission*, eds. Mary Mott and Joseph Lang, New York: Orbis Books, 1982, 548.

Schreiter's advice is that cultural changes be made gradually in order to maintain the community's "consistency and continuity".¹¹⁰⁷ The Chin, however, were Christianised and simultaneously westernised in a matter of years, transforming them within a generation. This resulted in Christianity influencing the more superficial levels of a culture to the detriment of their cultural identity, for which Schreiter, on the other hand, has a positive regard. He bases this positivity on his theological understanding of the goodness of God's creation and the fact that even Jesus became incarnate within an earthly culture.¹¹⁰⁸ The missionaries' view of culture was very different and they associated Chin culture and primal religion with pagan idolatry, which led them to indiscriminately prohibit traditional practices.

Another criterion which Schreiter presents is closely related as he locates social change,¹¹⁰⁹ and his theological basis for it is modelled on how Jesus overcame death through his resurrection from the dead. He considers whether or not the deeper substantial needs of a community are met, or whether it is just the superficial, immediate concerns which are addressed.¹¹¹⁰ The missionaries looked at more external issues, such as the Chin's need for education, civilisation, agricultural methods, health and hygiene, and imposed western forms of Christianity to meet these needs. They neglected to examine the Chin's core spiritual needs relating to their spiritual worldview, such as healing and deliverance from the fear of the spirits, and instead, they just abolished the rituals which had been meaningful to the Chin.

The quality of the social change may be examined by comparing a culture's former and contemporary understanding of itself, but as some Chin look back, they are nostalgic about

¹¹⁰⁷ Schreiter, "A Framework for a Discussion," 548-9.

¹¹⁰⁸ Schreiter, "A Framework for a Discussion," 548.

¹¹⁰⁹ Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, 2-3.

¹¹⁰⁹ Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theology*, 13,16.

¹¹⁰⁹ Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theology*, 8.

¹¹⁰⁹ Schreiter, "A Framework for a Discussion", 549.

¹¹¹⁰ Schreiter, "A Framework for a Discussion," 550.

cultural loss.¹¹¹¹ The older generation criticise what the younger generation are becoming, and interestingly, they consider the youth to have missed out on traditional culture and to be less spiritual.¹¹¹² This suggests that some of the older generation would consider exposure to their traditions as being formative in their spiritual development and sensitivity to the Holy Spirit. However, many of the changes among the Chin youth are influenced by globalization and the advancement of technology.

6.2.3.2. Perception of the African Independent Churches

Schreiter's analysis of the AIC may also be applied to the Chin. He perceives that the categorisation of aspects such as healing and witchcraft as purely "religious" led to an artificial separation of religion and culture in African contexts.¹¹¹³ He considers that these aspects are also part of African culture. Incidentally, his perception that the AICs revived African "primal spirituality" through their healing practices, "ecstatic prayer" and their focus on the spirit realm,¹¹¹⁴ closely resembles Cox's hypothesis of Pentecostalism. Similarly, he would most likely consider Chin singing, dancing, exorcism, "ecstasy", visions and alternative biblical interpretations as borrowed from Chin primal religion, as Schreiter considered these same liturgical practices within the AICs to be loaned from African religion.¹¹¹⁵ He neglects to mention how these practices overlap more in Pentecostalism than other denominations, which are facilitated partly due to their emphasised Pneumatology.

He describes the phenomena in the AICs in three ways: complete inculturation, thorough contextualization, or deviation.¹¹¹⁶ He also describes the AICs as a second type of syncretism,

¹¹¹¹ Chao, interview by author, Yangon, 16 April 2010.

¹¹¹² Tao, interview by author, Kalaymyo, 22 April 2010; Na, interview by author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 26 April 2010.

¹¹¹³ Schreiter, "A Framework for a Discussion," 552.

¹¹¹⁴ Schreiter, "Introduction" in *Faces of Jesus in Africa*, ed. Robert J. Schreiter, New York: Orbis Books, 1991; London: SCM Press, 1992. viii.

¹¹¹⁵ Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theology*, 147.

¹¹¹⁶ Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theology*, 145.

whereby Christian and non-Christian forms are mixed, but use a Christian structure.¹¹¹⁷ One may expect him to describe the beliefs in the spirits and practices of exorcism in the AICs as syncretistic, but he also describes them as “hybrid”.¹¹¹⁸ Chin practices may similarly prove challenging to differentiate as complete inculturation, contextualization, or deviation.

6.2.3.3. General Views on Syncretism

Schreiter defends his ongoing use of the term “syncretism” despite its negative connotations, based on how the word “syncretism” pre-existed those derogatory associations.¹¹¹⁹ He points out that syncretism’s negative connotations are limited to theological circles, compared with its more impartial usage in cultural anthropology.¹¹²⁰ Merely focusing on the negative theological implications of syncretism has the effect of obscuring how cultural identity is formed, thus hindering further discourse.

He maintains that Christianity’s claim to be unique compared with other religions breeds negativity.¹¹²¹ Pentecostals often claim to have unique access to the Holy Spirit and the spiritual gifts. Christian denominations are often not accepting of each other’s differences, and so many Christians are exclusivist regarding their faith. An issue raised by such exclusivity is an associated superiority, which distances other religions rather than building trust as dialogue partners.

Syncretism is perceived by the social sciences as the development of new cultural identities. Schreiter advises Christians to adopt this more positive approach to syncretism.¹¹²² This shift would require “conversation”,¹¹²³ but Pentecostals have been known for dismissing inter-religious dialogue as “liberal”, despite their alleged propensity for syncretism in practice.

¹¹¹⁷ Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theology*, 147.

¹¹¹⁸ Schreiter, “Cosmopolitanism, Hybrid Identities, and Religion,” *Exchange* 40, no. 1 (2011): 30.

¹¹¹⁹ Schreiter, *The New Catholicity*, 64.

¹¹²⁰ Schreiter, “Cosmopolitanism,” 31.

¹¹²¹ Schreiter, *The New Catholicity*, 63; Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theology*, 145.

¹¹²² Schreiter, *The New Catholicity*, chapter four.

¹¹²³ Schreiter, *The New Catholicity*, 63; Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theology*, 145.

However, Kärkkäinen states that some Pentecostals are beginning to see the need to address syncretism because of Pentecostalism's global roots and spread, and suggests that this requires developing a theology of religions.¹¹²⁴ As mentioned previously, Schreiter recognises that there is no such thing as a "pure culture", as most cultures are mixed already, due to ongoing changes.¹¹²⁵ Some Chin look back at their traditional culture, as if there were former aspects of their culture which were pure. However, if much of their traditional culture had not forbidden by the missionaries at that time, it is possible that they would have been infiltrated by other western or globalising influences nevertheless.

His acceptance of syncretism in Christianity is evident in his recognition of its diversity, despite having a common biblical text. He accepts syncretism, as a natural result of being an "incarnate" religion.¹¹²⁶ He attributes Christianity's careful observation of its boundaries and identities to the way that Christianity initially broke away from Judaism as a "reform movement" and to its initial sense of being threatened by new doctrines.¹¹²⁷ He is accepting of syncretism as a reality in a world in flux, which struggles with unclear boundaries.¹¹²⁸

He accepts that there are core elements of Christianity which need to be preserved,¹¹²⁹ but which syncretism may disrupt.¹¹³⁰ Syncretism could lead to the formation of new religious identities, involving mixing and a loss of form and identity.¹¹³¹ This may cause concern for a perceived loss of orthodoxy in faith,¹¹³² as syncretism can challenge Christianity's authenticity.¹¹³³ This brings to mind the issues of syncretism which the Chin themselves discuss, mostly involving spirit beliefs and deliverance practices, which are mixed with

¹¹²⁴ Kärkkäinen, "Pneumatologies," 235.

¹¹²⁵ Schreiter, *The New Catholicity*, 71.

¹¹²⁶ Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theology*, 151; Schreiter, *The New Catholicity*, 66.

¹¹²⁷ Schreiter, *The New Catholicity*, 65.

¹¹²⁸ Schreiter, *The New Catholicity*, 72.

¹¹²⁹ Schreiter, *The New Catholicity*, 62.

¹¹³⁰ Schreiter, *The New Catholicity*, 53.

¹¹³¹ Schreiter, *The New Catholicity*, 53.

¹¹³² Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theology*, 144.

¹¹³³ Schreiter, *The New Catholicity*, 69.

elements of primal religion. I do not think these particular issues jeopardise the core Christian beliefs such as the Trinity or salvation issues. However, in other contexts syncretism may impinge on orthodoxy in a more concerning way.

Another important aspect that Schreiter considers is how perspectives change over time, as former practices tend to overlap initially, thus appearing syncretistic, but subsequently resolve.¹¹³⁴ Rambo's model, mentioned in chapter two, describes a similar process of leaving behind former practices. After conversion the Chin initially continued to sacrifice animals to the spirits, but these more obvious conflicts have mostly been resolved as time has elapsed. This demonstrates how conversion occurs over a period of time and adjustment is not instantaneous.¹¹³⁵ This is a consideration for the Chin as almost the entire people group converted and so they were learning and adjusting their new beliefs over time as Chin society was transformed. Schreiter claims that practices which were tolerated during initial conversion periods may not be accepted as easily anymore.¹¹³⁶ In the Chin's case, there was a period of adjustment during the initial conversion period, and the persistent primal practices would be identified as syncretistic by the Chin now.

Schreiter highlights the subjective nature of syncretism and thus the challenges involved in identifying the boundaries between contextualization and syncretism, and the point at which Christianity loses its identity?¹¹³⁷ For the most part, Chin Pentecostal church services imitated western styles closely, so its Christian origins could easily be identified. However, it would be more difficult to distinguish healing, cleansing and deliverance rituals from primal practices.

¹¹³⁴ Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theology*, 158.

¹¹³⁵ Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theology*, 158.

¹¹³⁶ Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theology*, 158. Inversely, issues which are considered normal nowadays, may have formerly been considered syncretistic. However, this was less evident in the Chin's case.

¹¹³⁷ Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theology*, 145-6.

Schreiter recognises that syncretism commonly occurs at popular levels,¹¹³⁸ but is allowed to continue as it is perceived to be meeting the people's needs,¹¹³⁹ especially those living in poor socio-economic conditions and among those who have felt needs for spiritual power.¹¹⁴⁰

His model for identifying the probability of syncretism is also useful to adapt to the Chin's context. Similar beliefs between primal religion and Christianity, such as deliverance and cleansing lead to blurred lines.¹¹⁴¹ On the other hand, the theological gaps that exist in belief systems are also vulnerable to syncretism.¹¹⁴² Many Chin, for example, have maintained their beliefs from primal religion regarding the activity of spirits after death, which were not replaced in Christianity, and therefore not contradicted. The arrival and also the departure of dominant structures, such as colonial powers is, according to Schreiter, another factor in the likelihood of syncretism.¹¹⁴³ In the Chin's case they had to think for themselves following the departure of the British army and the foreign missionaries.

At popular levels, where people have felt needs of access to spiritual power, combined with their poor socio-economic condition;¹¹⁴⁴ similarly, at these points the Chin were vulnerable to resort to syncretistic practices as they were deemed to meet their felt needs,¹¹⁴⁵ where Christianity could not. Syncretism involves the level of practices, and not just beliefs,¹¹⁴⁶ but Schreiter categorises "proper" and "improper" syncretism, which is controversial because as some would judge the same phenomenon as either acceptable contextualization or criticise it as a type of "dangerous syncretism".¹¹⁴⁷ This tension was obvious with regard to the Chin's cleansing rituals, which some defended using biblical references, whilst others rejected them

¹¹³⁸ Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theology*, 131.

¹¹³⁹ Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theology*, 134.

¹¹⁴⁰ Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theology*, 139-140.

¹¹⁴¹ Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theology*, 152.

¹¹⁴² Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theology*, 153.

¹¹⁴³ Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theology*, 154-155.

¹¹⁴⁴ Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theology*, 139-140.

¹¹⁴⁵ Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theology*, 134.

¹¹⁴⁶ Schreiter, "Cosmopolitanism," 32.

¹¹⁴⁷ Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theology*, 151, 158.

due to their resemblance to exorcism practices in primal religion. Schreiter recommends using the Bible to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate cultural and religious practices.¹¹⁴⁸ However, differing interpretations of the Bible sometimes leads to more uncertainty.

In addition to examining such phenomena, syncretism also involves an analysis of truth claims, to determine what is orthodox.¹¹⁴⁹ This leads to the question of who decides what is “proper”?¹¹⁵⁰ In the Chin’s case, one response may be the Chin church leaders who received a theological education. However, Chin laity also do their own theology, which can be seen through their own beliefs and practices, which does not always comply with Chin leaders. The Chin fit with Schreiter’s observations, because of the extent of their cultural changes,¹¹⁵¹ and the “inconsistency” and “conflicting” beliefs and practices¹¹⁵² between Christianity and Chin culture which they have had to navigate.

The most insightful description of syncretism for theological purposes is of an “incomplete existential (deep-level) encounter”.¹¹⁵³ Certainly, the Chin’s spirit beliefs, which were so meaningful to them, were not addressed or met sufficiently by the Christian message that they received. Schreiter redefines and clarifies syncretism,¹¹⁵⁴ in a way which considers changes in culture and the development of new Christian identities.¹¹⁵⁵ Syncretism is, therefore, an ongoing issue for discussion, associated with attempts to contextualize Christianity. I agree with Schreiter’s prediction of more contextualized theologies in the

¹¹⁴⁸ Schreiter, *The New Catholicity*, 83.

¹¹⁴⁹ Schreiter, “Defining Syncretism: An Interim Report,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 17, no.2 (1 April 1993): 52.

¹¹⁵⁰ Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theology*, 151.

¹¹⁵¹ Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theology*, 152.

¹¹⁵² Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theology*, 151.

¹¹⁵³ Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theology*, 151.

¹¹⁵⁴ Schreiter, “Defining Syncretism,” 50.

¹¹⁵⁵ Schreiter, “Defining Syncretism,” 51 and Schreiter, *The New Catholicity*, chapter four.

future.¹¹⁵⁶ In the section below, I also discuss new approaches to the term “syncretism” in an attempt to overcome its negative connotations.

6.2.4. Hwa Yung

Hwa Yung is a retired Methodist minister and the Bishop Emeritus of the Methodist Church in Malaysia. He was the principal of Malaysia Theological Seminary and the founding Director of the Centre for the Study of Christianity in Asia of Trinity Theological College in Singapore. He has served as the Chairman of the Board of the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, the Lausanne Movement Board of Directors, and the honorary president of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students. His specialist research areas include missions and Asian Christianity.

6.2.4.1. A Non-Western-Centric Approach to World Christianity

As an Asian theologian, Yung’s emphasis is on developing “authentic” Asian theology. He is critical of how western Christian theology does not fit Asian needs, since westerners do not understand Asians’ theological concerns due to different cultural and historical backgrounds.¹¹⁵⁷ If Yung were to approach the Chin, I believe that he would be impressing upon them their need to develop their own sense of identity and to seek for ways in which Christianity could be inculturated, as some Chin Christians fail to question their religious status quo. He limits western theology to academic purposes,¹¹⁵⁸ and indeed, the Chin who were educated in western theology find it challenging to develop their own indigenous theologies. The specific Asian theological issues which he adopts from Kosuke Koyama are: 1. Christ relating to innovative social change; 2. Poverty; 3. Minorities; 4. Culture, both

¹¹⁵⁶ Schreiter, *The New Catholicity*, chapters five and six.

¹¹⁵⁷ Hwa Yung, *Mangoes or Bananas?*, 1-3.

¹¹⁵⁸ Yung, *Mangoes or Bananas?*, 8-9.

positive and negative; 5. Religious pluralism and 6. Church divisions.¹¹⁵⁹ These issues are also relevant to the Chin as they struggle with poverty and as a minority group in a pluralistic context. Applying these issues to the Chin, Yung would examine both positive and negative aspects of Chin culture, while portraying Christ as an innovator of change in Chin society.

6.2.4.2. Perception of the African Independent Churches

Yung identifies that non-western Pentecostal churches, such as the AICs, believe in the supernatural realm, including the spirits of the deceased, whilst westerners typically oppose these beliefs, despite biblical support for the supernatural.¹¹⁶⁰ These differences have not only been a main source of conflict, but more significantly are the main cause of a lack of indigenization of Christianity. Furthermore the rapid growth of non-western churches in the 20th century is attributed to their supernatural orientation, including their practices of healing, exorcisms, dreams, visions and prophecy.¹¹⁶¹ Thus, Yung would argue that the form of Christianity which westerners introduced to the Chin was not indigenous because of westerners' disregard for supernatural beliefs, including the spirit beliefs.¹¹⁶² Yung himself would accept spirit beliefs (in the AICs, or similarly amongst the Chin) influenced by his own exposure to practices involving spirits in Malaysia, and his persuasion also that the Bible substantiates the existence of such spirits.¹¹⁶³ His references to "gods", "demonic power" and "miracles",¹¹⁶⁴ indicate that he perceives the spirits as evil spiritual power.

¹¹⁵⁹ Kosuke Koyama, "Asian Theology," in *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century*, vol. 2, ed. David Ford (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 217 in Yung, *Mangoes or Bananas?*, 2.

¹¹⁶⁰ Hwa Yung, "A Systematic Theology that Recognises the Demonic" in *Deliver Us From Evil: An Uneasy Frontier in Christian Mission*, eds. A.S. Moreau et al (Monrovia, California: MARC, World Vision International, 2002), 5. Also, Yung, *Mangoes or Bananas?*, 3-4.

¹¹⁶¹ Peter Jenkins in Yung.

¹¹⁶² Yung, *Mangoes or Bananas?*, 3.

¹¹⁶³ Hwa Yung, "A 21st Century Reformation: Recover the Supernatural" September 2, 2010, *Christianity Today* 54, no.9, accessed at <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2010/september/yung.html>, accessed on 12 June 2018.

¹¹⁶⁴ Yung, "A 21st Century Reformation"

The form of Chin theology that Yung would endorse would openly permit spirit-beliefs and practices¹¹⁶⁵ and not try to suppress them, whilst currently the Chin are ashamed of their spirit beliefs and practices, for fear of syncretism.

6.2.4.3. General Views on Syncretism

A key area Yung addresses is the question of how holistic Asian cultures, such as the Chin, are spiritually. The western Baptist missionaries did not provide Christian answers to the Chin's pertinent questions regarding the spiritual realm, and Yung refers to what Hiebert described as the "flaw of the excluded middle".¹¹⁶⁶ In line with Yung's predictions, this neglect has led to some Chin reverting to primal religion for these answers, thus becoming syncretistic. Yung would identify the western forms of Christianity as not indigenous to Chin culture, resulting in a "split-level" Christianity reaching only rational, and not subconscious, levels.¹¹⁶⁷ This is because the West has been influenced by Greek dualism, which separates the natural and spiritual realms and omits the relevant spiritual issues.¹¹⁶⁸ Despite this gap, the Chin did convert to Christianity, suggesting there were other appeals, but Yung cites this as a reason why some non-westerners do not convert to Christianity.¹¹⁶⁹ Yung's understanding would be interesting to apply to the Chin as he would no doubt endorse a Chin supernatural worldview,¹¹⁷⁰ including beliefs in the existence of evil spirits based on biblical data, both Jewish and Gentile.¹¹⁷¹

¹¹⁶⁵ Bishop Hwa Yung's Background in Lily's Room (Oct 2010) <http://d.hatena.ne.jp/itunalily2/20101023> accessed on 12 June 2018.

¹¹⁶⁶ This refers to how westerners usually perceive the world as having two tiers: 1. The physical earth which is visible and 2. The invisible spiritual realm, belonging to the "other world". However, the "excluded middle" which non-westerners refer to is the invisible aspects of this world, including beings, such as angels and demons. See, Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections*, 189-291 in Yung, "A Systematic Theology," 8.

¹¹⁶⁷ Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections*, 228 in Yung, "A Systematic Theology," 8.

¹¹⁶⁸ Yung, "A Systematic Theology", 5.

¹¹⁶⁹ Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections*, 189-291 in Yung, "A Systematic Theology", 8.

¹¹⁷⁰ Hwa Yung, "The Denominational Church in Malaysia"

<https://www.lausanne.org/content/the-denominational-church-in-malaysia-lausanne-global-leadership-forum> a presentation given at the Lausanne Global Leadership Forum in Bangalore, India, 17-21 June, 2013, accessed on 12 June 2018.

¹¹⁷¹ Clinton E. Arnold, *Powers of Darkness: Principalities and Powers in Paul's Letters* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 171 in Yung, "A Systematic Theology", 12.

However, despite Yung claiming biblical support for his reasoning, the Chin would need to be diligent to keep their worldview Christian, acknowledging their vulnerability to revert to primal beliefs.¹¹⁷² What Yung describes is true of some Chin, who continue to believe in spirits, but use a Christian interpretation. In line with Cox's hypothesis, Yung identifies that Pentecostalism has served to bridge this gap between the natural and spiritual realms, and has therefore excelled¹¹⁷³ in the case of the Chin.

6.2.5. Aloysius Pieris

Pieris is a Jesuit priest and Asian scholar from Sri Lanka. He is the director of the Tulana Research Centre for Encounter and Dialogue in Sri Lanka, which is known especially for dialogue between Christians and Buddhists.¹¹⁷⁴ However he has also lectured and chaired in both Catholic and Protestant universities in Europe and America.

6.2.5.1. A Non-Western-Centric Approach to World Christianity

As an Asian, Pieris certainly has a non-western approach, as he advocates inculturated Asian theology, including liberation theology. Pieris refers to different faiths as “languages of the Spirit”, referring either to the human spirit or the Holy Spirit.¹¹⁷⁵ He perceives that one language is not superior to another, despite a culture perhaps being more conversant in one language than another. Languages should not absorb each other, and so he condemns dominance and the associated proselytization of religion. Neither should the rules of one language be enforced on another language, but each should use their own rules, because each language is different.¹¹⁷⁶

¹¹⁷² Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections*, 228 in Hwa Yung, “A Systematic Theology”, 8.

¹¹⁷³ Hwa Yung, “A Systematic Theology”, 3.

¹¹⁷⁴ Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, 73.

¹¹⁷⁵ Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, 100.

¹¹⁷⁶ Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, 101.

Using Pieris' model to study the Chin would be interesting. He would lament the fact that the Chin have received merely a transplanted western theology and would perceive that the Chin have largely just imitated western theological concepts. The concept of transplantation is even more foreign than the translation model, as there is no effort to be rooted in Chin soil. However, based on the young interviewees who are already so westernised, Pieris' prediction may be true that it is too late to incorporate an Asian theology now.

He would perceive that the missionaries imposed grammatical rules belonging to Christianity onto Chin religion, ironically including emphasising the English language, also associated with colonialism. It is hard to know how Pieris would have approached "evangelism" to the Chin, if he had gone to Burma instead of the Baptist missionaries; he would perhaps have accepted their primal "language" as an aspect of the diversity of religions, rather than introducing Christianity as superior and therefore perceiving a need to win them over. A pluralist approach would encourage the different primal religions in Burma to co-exist alongside Buddhism. Pieris' rationale for pluralism is to relate to wider society, rather than being restricted within one's own group, thus preventing communalism. He advocates ecumenism instead, which seeks to understand other "languages", including other religions' "originating experience".¹¹⁷⁷ This suggests he would have learnt about Chin primal religion as a distinct "language" in its own right, and he would not have hindered their spirit practices, clan structures and other religious rituals.

Given that the Chin have converted to Christianity, he would endorse them the development of their own Chin theology, and, considering their oppressive socio-political context, he might envisage a form of Chin liberation theology. As he presented Christianity as being similar to Buddhism, he recognises the spiritual attributes of humility and poverty.

¹¹⁷⁷ Aloysius Pieris, S.J., *Fire and Water: Basic Issues in Asian Buddhism and Christianity*, Faith Meets Faith Series, general editor Paul F. Knitter (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1996), 102.

Pieris would introduce more understanding and unity with the Buddhists, as he would respect the Buddhist belief system. Many Chin externally comply with Buddhism by giving alms to the Buddhist monks who beg, and make attempts to contextualize by using similar greetings, clothing, removing their shoes and speaking Burmese. Pieris himself eats, discusses, prays, washes feet and shares communion with Buddhists as well as being a Buddhist expert. He may challenge the Chin's prosperity and blessing mentality, as a way of connecting with the Buddhists' esteem for poverty. However, the Chin's fear of Buddhists because of political associations is another complicating factor in Myanmar.

Most Chin Christians would feel challenged by Pieris' acceptance of religious plurality and would perceive him as dangerously "liberal". They received a western evangelical view of other belief systems, including Buddhism, and they endeavour to evangelise Buddhists. They would struggle with Pieris' openness to non-Christian soteriological perspectives,¹¹⁷⁸ as it undermines their belief in Jesus' unique role. This would be a "stumbling block" which would prohibit dialogue between the Chin and Pieris. Other issues such as ethics, morals, lifestyle, and practices can be more easily adjusted to find some common ground.

6.2.5.2. General Views on Syncretism

Pieris himself prefers the concept of symbiosis to that of syncretism. This is because of his perception that syncretism is merely a collection of components that are disconnected from each other. He uses the language metaphor to explain his objection to the concept of syncretism, as "languages" should not mix. Symbiosis, he takes to mean inculturation with a mutual interchange.¹¹⁷⁹ To apply this perspective to the Chin post-conversion, this would mean that Christianity and primal religion should not mix randomly, but rather Pieris envisages a much more intentional mutual sharing.

¹¹⁷⁸ Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, 74.

¹¹⁷⁹ Pieris, *Fire and Water*, 101.

Historically, western missionaries typically entered cultures as the foreign experts, rather than being willing to also learn from the host culture and religious beliefs. This contrasts with Pieris' concept of mutual interchange between religions and cultures. However, an onlooker observing Pieris' level of engagement with Buddhists, may perceive his practices as being syncretistic.¹¹⁸⁰ Pieris discusses a Buddhist concept of Christ, and comfortably shares the Christian sacrament of communion with Buddhists; Pieris would regard this interchange as an example of symbiosis.¹¹⁸¹ This demonstrates that the choice of terminology is subjective. It is acknowledged however that Pieris' own people are predominantly Buddhist, and so this impacts his view of the local Buddhists; however, the Chin are now mostly Christian, and the surrounding Buddhists belong to other people groups, so they feel a disparity between them. Therefore, for the Chin to have mutual interchange with the Buddhists of this nature, there would be more barriers to overcome.

Pieris views primal religion as a form of "cosmic religion", which is a common foundation in all religions, and so he objects to the term "animism", which has been derogatively used by westerners. Therefore, religions deal with their common, "cosmic" primal base, which he would not regard as syncretism, but dealing with underlying commonalities. He, therefore perceives, that Buddhism and Christianity have aspects of cosmic religion, and he refers to Buddhism and Christianity as examples of "metacosmic religions".¹¹⁸² As cosmic and metacosmic "complement" and fulfil one another, he does not see that one is exchanged for another.¹¹⁸³

¹¹⁸⁰ Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, 73.

¹¹⁸¹ Pieris., *Fire and Water*, 101.

¹¹⁸² Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, 71-2.

¹¹⁸³ Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, 54.

An established anthropological view is that all religions include cosmology, relating both to “the divine” and to social aspects.¹¹⁸⁴ Furthermore, most “tribes” believe in spiritual beings,¹¹⁸⁵ and beliefs regarding the human soul are also common denominators among people groups.¹¹⁸⁶ However, it is widely accepted that primal religion (cosmic religion) no longer exists in its pure form, as it has mutated over the years in various contexts.¹¹⁸⁷

Pieris’ perspective would alter how Chin primal religion would be perceived, as Pieris would advocate being open to the Chin’s primal base, which was all-encompassing in Chin culture. As Pieris acknowledges the primal base within Christianity also, I would expect Pieris to dialogue with Chin primal religion, offering an addition of Christian principles and practices on top of a shared primal base.

Cox acknowledges that Christianity often took a cerebral approach of emphasising truth formulae.¹¹⁸⁸ The Baptist missionaries emphasised the cerebral aspect of Christianity in their work amongst the Chin, and yet the Chin’s inclination was towards the spirits. From Pieris’ point of view, this neglect of the primal base disassociated Christianity from its spiritual and emotional foundation. Thus, when the opportunity arose, the Chin willingly embraced the spirituality of Pentecostalism. For Cox, this dynamic would affirm that Pentecostalism facilitates the reconnection with “primal” spirituality.

This primal base is often a source of embarrassment to the main (metacosmic) world religions. Many Muslims, for example, believe in *jinn* (evil and good spirit beings), which is not always widely acknowledged, and the associated practices take place more commonly in

¹¹⁸⁴ Durkheim, “The Elementary Forms of Religious Life” (abridged version) in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans., ed. Karen Fields (New York: The Free Press, 1912, reprint 1995), 1-13, 35-44, 419-23, in *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion*, ed. Michael Lambek, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA, Oxford and Carlton: Blackwell Publishing, 2002, reprint, 2008), 38.

¹¹⁸⁵ Edward Burnett Tylor, “Religion in Primitive Culture” (abridged version) in *Primitive Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1871; reprint, 1958), 8-19, 80-6, 444-7, in *A Reader in the Anthropology*, 25.

¹¹⁸⁶ Tylor, “Religion in Primitive Culture,” 27.

¹¹⁸⁷ Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, 72.

¹¹⁸⁸ Cox, *Fire From Heaven*, 299, 300.

areas which permit a mix of folk practices.¹¹⁸⁹ The Buddhists in Myanmar also believe in the spirit world, known as *nats*, and this fact is also not well known. publicised. Christianity of course has numerous examples of contentious folk practices, including praying to saints at shrines, remembrance of the dead, and how to include the spirits in their belief system. Pieris would perceive that these metacosmic religions have a common primal base, but conservative Christians would struggle with this assumption.

6.3. Comparison of the Scholars' Methodological Approaches to the Chin Context

These five scholars have different disciplines and therefore different starting points. As a missiologist, Hollenweger values contextualization, examining varieties and emergences of forms of Pentecostalism and mission theology, and dealing with syncretism through a problem-solving approach. Walls' approach is from a historian's perspective, examining Christian history as a serial development, now moving away from a western focus, but including theological insights and implications. Schreiter is a systematic Roman Catholic theologian and social scientist; his interest is therefore in broader theological themes such as Christology, concepts of God, and especially African culture. The similarities of the first three scholars are that they all move the theological emphasis away from the West and that they all deal with the AICs, which offers a helpful point of comparison. Their understandings of syncretism are similar, moving beyond simple theological questions.

The Asian scholars, Yung and Pieris differ in their perspectives from the first three (European and American) scholars. Yung is a Methodist bishop specialising in missions from an Asian Christian perspective. Pieris, like Schreiter, is a Roman Catholic priest, but Pieris is both a Jesuit and a respected Buddhist scholar, who values the unique religious attributes of both Christianity and Buddhism. Pieris has conferred with many Buddhists regarding their concept

¹¹⁸⁹ Paul G. Hiebert, Daniel Shaw and Tite Tiénou, *Understanding Folk Religion: A Christian Response to Popular Beliefs and Practices* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1999), 55.

of Christ, and this in some respects resembles Schreiter's work in describing the African faces of Christ.¹¹⁹⁰

Compared with Hollenweger and Walls, Schreiter's approach is more technical, using social science tools to examine the construction of local theologies. Schreiter writes about contextualization in more depth, compared with Hollenweger and Walls, who write in more general terms. However, a deficiency of Schreiter's work is his omission of the historical contexts of various cultures. Instead he takes a cross-section of the interaction between Christianity and culture, analysing culture initially and theology subsequently. Conversely, Hollenweger and Walls perform historical analyses, which provide contexts for the cultures, giving insights into the cultural and religious dynamics. Yung's focus is the inculturation of theology for an Asian context.

Schreiter's approach is more theological than Hollenweger, Walls and Yung, whereas Pieris is concerned with the common bases, particularly in Asian religion. Schreiter is more interested in cultural practices, whereas Pieris focuses on religion itself. This lack of examination of the cultural context is a shortcoming of Pieris' book "An Asian Theology of Liberation". Pieris examines what he calls "higher" and "lower" religion, and perceives Christianity as a more developed (higher) religion, compared with "primitive" African (lower) religions or indigenous folk religions.¹¹⁹¹ Schreiter uses the categorisation of "popular" and "official" religion.¹¹⁹²

The scholars all have a non-western centric approach, but Pieris goes beyond the approach of the other four scholars through his inclusive dialogue with Buddhism. Yung and Pieris refer much less to African religion than the other scholars, as their context is Asian. Schreiter

¹¹⁹⁰ Pieris, *An Asian Theology*, 60; Schreiter, "Introduction" in *Faces of Jesus*, vii.

¹¹⁹¹ Pieris, *An Asian Theology*, 73.

¹¹⁹² Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theology*, 122.

examines globalization influences on Christianity, and his work has a wide span, ranging from a broad, global context to narrow, local concerns. He examines the tension between the global and local contexts, particularly the challenge to resolve the “fragmentation” caused by globalization.¹¹⁹³ Even though Pieris does mention other contexts, his main focus is on Asia’s relationship with the West. Pieris recognises that the many churches in Asia are external implants from the West, which is why they are still perceived as foreign, and which he considers to be a failure of mission.¹¹⁹⁴ He maintains that Christianity will never be a main religion in Asia,¹¹⁹⁵ which the other scholars do not rule out, or even address.

Returning to the central point of this research, these five scholars’ approaches to syncretism are being used as an analytical tool to examine contextualization, particularly with reference to the Chin. This framework is used to evaluate the Chin’s issues and how they process them. These scholars’ work is applied below, to envisage how they would have liked Christianity to be introduced to the Chin, including how primal religious beliefs and practices would have been treated, how the scholars would have treated Chin culture, as well as their preferences for the Chin’s relationship to the Buddhists.

6.3.1. Introduction of Christianity to the Chin

If these scholars had introduced Christianity to the Chin, their approach would have been different from the western missionaries who went to the Chin, whose work resulted in the westernisation of Chin culture. From the outset, these scholars would have objected to the enforcement of western culture on the Chin as they are all advocates of diversity.

Hollenweger would evangelise creatively by using non-Christian script writers and actors to write and perform plays,¹¹⁹⁶ as he has done in other contexts. Pieris recognises that rituals,

¹¹⁹³ Schreiter, *The New Catholicity*, 129, 133.

¹¹⁹⁴ Pieris, *Theology of Liberation*, 36.

¹¹⁹⁵ Pieris, *Theology of Liberation*, 74.

¹¹⁹⁶ See Walter J. Hollenweger, “Evangelism: a Non-Colonial Model”, *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 3, no.7 (Jan 1995): 107-128.

songs, dance, poems and myths were important expressions of human struggle in oral cultures,¹¹⁹⁷ which is also true of Chin culture. Pieris would object to contextualizing with the goal of evangelisation,¹¹⁹⁸ as he perceives that western models of inculturation are outdated and do not fit well in Asian culture. He would interact and engage deeply with Chin culture, despite not evangelising overtly. Pieris challenges what he considers are superficial efforts by foreign missionaries to contextualize, namely, the use of symbolism and worship practices,¹¹⁹⁹ including indigenous worship songs. In the case of the Chin, as we have seen, the foreign missionaries who went to the Chin did not contextualize worship practices, but the Chin themselves subsequently composed their own indigenous songs. Yung's overarching concern would be that any strategies used should be appropriate to Asian culture.

The choice of language in missions is pertinent to contextualization as it is loaded with meaning; this is why Hollenweger advised the use of names for God that are relevant to the culture, as opposed to using western names or concepts, which are actually of pagan Greek, Latin and German origins.¹²⁰⁰ The Chin used a local name for God, providing "continuity"¹²⁰¹ with similar attributes from their concept of a supreme being from primal religion.¹²⁰² Some Baptist missionaries to the Chin formerly used Burmese as a theological language, causing offence with its political connotations as the Chin were a minority group oppressed by the Burmese. Others used English, which reinforced the colonial connotations of Christianity.

Walls' concept of symbiosis involves mutual exchange between western and local theologians, but he does not include different religions in this exchange, unlike Pieris. This is

¹¹⁹⁷ Pieris, *An Asian Theology*, 70-71.

¹¹⁹⁸ The scholars use terms such as "inculturation", but contextualization continues to be the choice of term for this research, despite slightly different nuances of various terms. Differences between contextualization and inculturation.

¹¹⁹⁹ Pieris, *An Asian Theology*, 53.

¹²⁰⁰ Hollenweger, "Evangelism," 108.

¹²⁰¹ The term "continuity" is commonly used by scholars, such as Walls and Schreier to describe the continuation of practices in inculturation. Anderson also uses the term to describe continuing African spirit practices.

¹²⁰² Hua, interview by author, Yangon, 27 April 2010.

a worthy goal, but Chin leaders lack confidence that their contribution would be equal to western scholars, and so mutual dialogue sometimes proves challenging.

6.3.2. Dealing with Chin Primal Religion

Walls would perceive that Chin Christians' collaboration with primal religion is one of the most imperative issues of inter-religious dialogue, as primal religion is so pervasive, but is often neglected.¹²⁰³ Pieris, in particular, would respect the validity of Chin primal religion. Pieris perceives that a form of primal religion is the basis of every religion, including metacosmic religions,¹²⁰⁴ whilst recognising, as stated above, that primal religion has mutated over the years in various contexts. The prevalence of primal religion is also evident in the way that even Buddhists appease spirits.¹²⁰⁵ Pieris would have perceived Christianity as a continuation of primal religion. Whether or not this is the case, the Chin AG also has similarities to Pentecostal churches globally, as it has a layer of western forms.

The Chin people, as new converts to Christianity, might have welcomed Pieris' encouragements to maintain their "spiritual language" from primal religion. However, Chin Christians, under instructions from foreign missionaries, initially moved away from this "language" and tried to rid their Christianity of all traces of it. The Chin were taught that inclusiveness with their former religion would be "liberal". Yet, they have embraced foreign western forms which the missionaries introduced along with the Christian message, which could be considered to be just as liberal and syncretistic.

¹²⁰³ Walls, *The Missionary Movement*, 147.

¹²⁰⁴ Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, 71-2.

¹²⁰⁵ Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, 71-2. They use different terminology to describe these beings in various Buddhist cultures.

6.3.2.1. Primal Beliefs

Hollenweger's recognition of similarities between Pentecostalism and Catholic popular religion¹²⁰⁶ is also applicable to Chin Roman Catholics who similarly retain spirit beliefs. Chin Pentecostals criticise these Catholic beliefs as being liberal,¹²⁰⁷ whilst ironically overlooking their own spirit beliefs. Hollenweger respected peoples' beliefs regarding the demonic in the AIC context, based on the sincerity of these beliefs.¹²⁰⁸ He may well have shown a similar tolerance for the Chin's beliefs about spirits. If the Chin examine their spirit beliefs "responsibly", according to Hollenweger's thinking, they could potentially maintain the beliefs regarding the spirits' activities after death and their transition to the after-life in ways which can be tolerated by the biblical text. Similarly, they could continue to expel bad spirits as they perceive the need arises, acknowledging their historical context of primal religion, which has created a heightened consciousness of the spirit world. Other aspects of primal religion which fit with Christianity, and particularly Pentecostalism, are experiencing blessings, healing and deliverance.

6.3.2.2. Primal Practices

On the other hand, Schreiter warns about the need to preserve orthodoxy in Christianity, by providing theological safeguards, which prevents a free-for-all. Hollenweger's classification of responsible and irresponsible syncretism poses the question as to what rationale do the Chin use in borrowing beliefs and practices. Hollenweger calls for "responsible syncretism, advising cultures to challenge and address issues openly and honestly, rather than ignoring or hiding them. Hollenweger perceives that interactions with other faiths can actually increase Christianity's clarity about aspects of their faith, which he maintains was the also case with

¹²⁰⁶ Hollenweger, "An Introduction," 128.

¹²⁰⁷ Ping, interview by author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 23 April 2010.

¹²⁰⁸ Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals*, 379.

the Jews' interaction with other belief systems.¹²⁰⁹ As the Chin's theological issues have been raised and addressed, particularly the challenges of beliefs and practices pertaining to the spirits, this discussion has enabled them to gain a clearer understanding of these issues, in their effort to obtain a satisfactory level of orthodoxy. They are still in a process of clarifying their own belief system.

The boundaries of syncretism¹²¹⁰ are subjective and even though the Chin object to "relearning animistic practices",¹²¹¹ sometimes it occurs subconsciously. Schreiter may categorise some fringe practices as "dual religious systems", referring to Christianity combined with other selected religious forms.¹²¹² Schreiter understands that the local congregation are covering all bases and are content to live with the apparent contradiction of two different systems existing simultaneously.¹²¹³ Hollenweger argues for confining intercultural theologising to Christianity plus the appropriate cultural (but not religious) influences.¹²¹⁴ However, it is difficult to separate cultural and religious influences.

As we have seen, some very common examples used to discuss syncretism are derived from the AICs, in particular from their spirit phenomenon. Hollenweger understood that a "rainmaking" ritual in the AICs could be translated as portraying the power of the Christian God.¹²¹⁵ Similarly, the Chin replaced their former festivals to appease the spirits with prayer to the Christian God for rain and thanksgiving for the harvest. A Chin interviewee expressed that this contextualization of God's provision would deter them from reverting to primal religion because of otherwise unmet needs.¹²¹⁶ However, Hollenweger criticised Pentecostals'

¹²⁰⁹ Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: Origins*, 133.

¹²¹⁰ Schreiter, *The New Catholicity*, 62; Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theology*, 145.

¹²¹¹ Ying, interview by the author, trans. Yi, Yangon, 13 April 2010.

¹²¹² Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theology*, 144-5.

¹²¹³ Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theology*, 148.

¹²¹⁴ Werner Ustorf "The Cultural Origins of 'Intercultural' Theology" in *Intercultural Theology*, 22. Ustorf acknowledges that Hollenweger later addresses other religions in 1988. Also David Cheetham, "Intercultural Theology and Interreligious Studies," in *Intercultural Theology*, 51.

¹²¹⁵ Daneel, *Old and New*, 314.

¹²¹⁶ Na, interview by author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 26 April 2010.

continual quest for power,¹²¹⁷ which is an emphasis especially in non-western cultures. This criticism was also pertinent to Chin Pentecostals, who converted to Christianity because God was conveyed as more powerful than the spirits. Hollenweger acknowledges the pagan roots of Christmas and Easter, which westerners have adopted,¹²¹⁸ suggesting that it would be hypocritical of a westerner to unequivocally condemn Chin primal rituals. If such pagan festivals can be Christianised in the West, the Chin can similarly Christianise some of their rituals for both Christian and cultural edification. Aligned with his non-western orientation, Hollenweger recognises that western funerals also have pagan origins.¹²¹⁹ Thus while acknowledging the roots in primal religion of some Chin funeral practices, he would not seek to impose western religious funerals on the Chin, because they are not essentially Christian either.

Hollenweger described the “pre-Christian rites” in the AIC’s pneumatological practices as syncretistic, which he did not judge derogatively, but as a “responsible” acknowledgement of the primal influence.¹²²⁰ One would expect that he would similarly categorise Chin deliverance practices as syncretistic, but also not pejoratively, considering that they have some biblical substantiation too. Yung accepts primal beliefs and practices on practical levels in even more explicit terms, and he discusses them in relation to his own experiences. Yung has pointed out that these practices from primal religion have more biblical support than western materialistic and humanistic culture which have inadvertently influenced western

¹²¹⁷ Walter J. Hollenweger, “Biblically 'Justified' Abuse,” review of *Ungodly Fear: Fundamentalist Christianity and the Abuse of Power*, by Stephen Parsons, *Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 10, no. 2 (2002): 131.

¹²¹⁸ Hollenweger, foreword to *African Initiatives in Christianity: The Growth, Gifts and Diversities of Indigenous African Churches: A Challenge to the Ecumenical Movement*, by John S. Pobee and Gabriel Ositelu II (Geneva: WCC Publications, Risk Book Series no. 83, 1998), xii.

¹²¹⁹ Hollenweger in *African Initiatives*, xii foreword.

¹²²⁰ Hollenweger, “An Introduction,” 126.

theology.¹²²¹ The Chin would be upset to be described as shamanistic, as Korean churches have been, despite many Chin still interacting with the spirits.

Controversy regarding biblical interpretations arises with cultural and theological diversity. Hollenweger was a scholar who recognised the validity of varying biblical interpretations.¹²²² Yung would be more concerned that any interpretation of the Bible addresses specifically Asian questions. However, the acceptance of various interpretations is controversial. The Chin interpret biblical passages about demonic deliverance to defend their own deliverance practices regarding ancestral spirits; these practices resemble primal religious practices. They also support their house-cleansing practices based on biblical accounts of destroying paraphernalia used in idol worship, and of circling around a village in spiritual warfare, based on the account of the fall of the walls of Jericho.¹²²³

Walls admits that the AICs' similarities with their traditional religion caused the AICs to be vulnerable to accusations of syncretism.¹²²⁴ The AICs' prophecies, for example, were accused of resembling traditional "mediumistic trances", because of how the "revelations" were "uttered in ecstasy". However, Walls argues that the Old Testament prophets also performed similar practices.¹²²⁵ He defends the AICs' willingness to address contentious issues, such as Christians' ongoing consultation of traditional diviners.¹²²⁶ Moreover, he argues that the AICs esteem the Bible and practise the sacraments, just like other denominations.¹²²⁷ Similarly, Chin Pentecostals were accused of syncretism because of a former prophetic movement, in

¹²²¹ Yung, *Mangoes or Bananas?*, 3-4.

¹²²² Hollenweger, "Biblically 'Justified'," 133.

¹²²³ The Chin's emphasis on the Old Testament due to the similarities in their patriarchal and sacrificial system and their reinterpretation of the Holy Spirit as a friendly spirit. The Chin's theology of provision and blessing is understandable considering their socio-economic condition. Hollenweger may accept the Chin's application of the account of Joshua circling Jericho to circling their church for deliverance and Paul's example of burning paraphernalia for idol worship as support for house-cleansing. En, interview by author, trans. Xiu, Kalaymyo, 26 April 2010.

¹²²⁴ Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theology*, 111.

¹²²⁵ Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theology*, 116.

¹²²⁶ Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theology*, 117.

¹²²⁷ Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theology*, 115-6.

which there was an emphasis on prophecies. The issue with the delivery of the prophecies, included shouting prayers for healing, with an expectation to be paid for their ministry. The accuracy of the prophecies was also questioned, as prophecies were not fulfilled, such as the second coming of Christ, which the Chin built a runway to prepare for. The Chin addressed this emphasis on prophecies and also the consultation of diviners. Like the AICs, the Chin uphold the authority of the Bible and observe the sacraments, which would satisfy Walls' concerns.

6.3.3. Cultural Relevance for the Chin

Pieris' description of the Asian churches not having their own theology, despite their surrounding culture being replete with theology,¹²²⁸ is also true of Chin churches. As already seen, the Chin have lost aspects of their Asian-ness in order to adopt Christianity, just as other Asian cultures, such as the Filipinos, have done.¹²²⁹ In considering Chin theology in its global context, it is recognised that there is not a "pure" Chin theology, as it was influenced by the West and neighbouring cultures; moreover, even the Bible was from a Middle Eastern culture. As the Chin theologise now, they are unavoidably influenced by their western and non-western legacy, and their own interaction with the Bible. Globalization influences sometimes serve to increase a people's appreciation for their own cultural traditions; but more often, younger people in particular seek to identify more with global forms of Christianity, thus diminishing their own cultural uniqueness.

All of the scholars accept the right of different cultures to express theology in culturally relevant ways, whilst expecting syncretism to occur. They all attribute the successful global spread of Christianity to its flexibility and its ability to contextualize. These scholars all seek to liberate cultures in contextualizing Christianity to their own unique contexts. In the Chin's

¹²²⁸ Pieris, *An Asian Theology*, 81.

¹²²⁹ Pieris, *An Asian Theology*, 74.

case, this would serve to alleviate the Chin's shame regarding their former beliefs and practices. Schreiter would value deep cultural awareness of the Chin, as he affirms local cultural identity and seeks to engage with the culture's strengths. The "central values" of a culture would be celebrated,¹²³⁰ which in the Chin's case include loyalty, kindness, respect, hospitality and a sense of community. While expecting cultural change post conversion, Schreiter would also want to preserve a community's identity. He would want to preserve more of the culture, whilst changing a host culture's primary allegiance at a deeper level, rather than merely making superficial, external changes. Schreiter's thinking would challenge the Chin church to interact with their surrounding community, rather than avoid their wider social context.¹²³¹

6.3.4. The Chin's Relationship to the Buddhists in Myanmar

As Pieris has recognised a trend throughout Asia of metacosmic religions not being amenable to conversion to Christianity, he would not be surprised that Myanmar Buddhists have largely not been converted to Christianity.¹²³² Pieris' strongest objection is to the use of non-Christian religion as an apologetic to serve Christianity's purposes, as this separates the non-Christian religion from its associated philosophy and original context.¹²³³ He describes this process as being "theological vandalism".¹²³⁴

Pieris reflects on the linguistic diversity within Asia in the context of inter-religious dialogue.¹²³⁵ As mentioned, the varied languages in Myanmar have theological significance. Some Chin churches choose to use the Burmese language in an effort to be relevant, especially in Yangon (an area which has an ethnic Burmese majority). Some older Chin

¹²³⁰ Schreiter, "A Framework," 548.

¹²³¹ Schreiter, "A Framework," 549-550.

¹²³² Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, 72.

¹²³³ Pieris, *An Asian Theology*, 85.

¹²³⁴ Pieris, *An Asian Theology*, 84-5.

¹²³⁵ Pieris, *An Asian Theology*, 70.

associate the younger peoples' preference for Burmese with their loss of Chin identity.

However, language, dress and gestures appear to be the extent to which the Chin will go in contextualizing to the Buddhists in Myanmar.

Schreiter has recognised that conservative Christians are traditionally exclusivist regarding other religions, which would include the Buddhists in Myanmar. Yet Buddhism can accommodate Christianity, and so he considers whether there is a Buddhist way of being a Christian,¹²³⁶ which would accommodate Buddhist ways. However, this inclusivist approach would be too liberal for most Chin Christians, who have an exclusivist and evangelistic approach to their neighbouring Buddhists.

Pieris recommends that Christians live faithfully to the gospel in what he perceives as genuine “evangelism” through love and poverty, which would produce a natural contextualization.¹²³⁷ The issues which overlap with Buddhism contribute to Christian theology, such as poverty and self-emptying,¹²³⁸ which are otherwise often neglected within Christianity. Expressing love to the Buddhists without a covert purpose to convert them is an important consideration,¹²³⁹ as Chin Christians currently fear the Buddhists or approach them with an attitude that Christianity is superior.

Pieris criticises the love of “mammon”, dependence on western development, and individual prosperity.¹²⁴⁰ As poverty is already a common issue throughout Myanmar, the Chin do not need to adopt poverty additionally. However, embracing poverty purposefully contrasts with how Chin Pentecostals embraced economic development and look to their Christian faith to overcome their struggles victoriously, and the emphasis on God's role as their provider.

¹²³⁶ Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theology*, 157.

¹²³⁷ Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, 20, 75.

¹²³⁸ Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, 8-9.

¹²³⁹ Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom: A Christian Experience of Buddhism* (New York: Orbis Books, 1988; reprint 1990).

¹²⁴⁰ Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, 75.

While being empathetic with the Chin's struggles because of their poverty, Pieris would not approve of their tendency to ask foreign churches for financial assistance. Pieris would endorse the Chin sharing with one another and with the Buddhists to demonstrate love, which contrasts how they are currently distanced from them. Pieris' viewpoints challenge them to change their approach to their own context, rather than inventing new strategies.

Schreiter refers to Burmese Buddhism as a "double belonging" dual system, in which their culture and religion are indivisibly linked.¹²⁴¹ He acknowledges that Buddhism is integral to the Burmese's national identity, and that Christianity is perceived as being inadequate for ancestor veneration, which is an important practice for Burmese Buddhists.¹²⁴² Pieris' concept of "symbiosis" would be reflected if various faiths would converge naturally and mutually benefit each other, sharing a common sense of national identity and a concern for social issues. There are socio-political dynamics in the Chin's relationship with the Buddhists which need to be considered. The Buddhists are the majority group in Myanmar, to which the government is mainly affiliated, and Chin Christians are an oppressed minority group. It would require a large shift in their thinking for the Burmese to perceive Christianity as being more than a foreign religion. Equally, the Chin Church would also need a change in their perspective to engage constructively with Buddhists.

6.3.5. A Combined Approach to Contextualization

Schreiter's three transformation principles of inclusion, judgment and service would be a more systematic approach to contextualization.¹²⁴³ His principle of inclusion would incorporate everyone's input in formulating a Chin theology, so he would not marginalize the older people because of their tendency to retain the former practices. Similarly, Schreiter may revisit how their traditional lifestyle was judged, including clan fighting, excessive alcohol

¹²⁴¹ Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theology*, 148.

¹²⁴² Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theology*, 156.

¹²⁴³ Schreiter, "A Framework," 546.

consumption and animal sacrifices, bearing in mind that he opposes the oppressive relationships of colonialism and the missionaries' domination. Finally, he would re-focus their service in the community, helping the poor, transforming the culture organically with a practical application.¹²⁴⁴

Schreiter's and Pieris' approaches combined would produce a culturally sensitive approach to evangelization. Schreiter's systematic and deliberate approach by developing criteria for true contextualization would be complemented by Pieris' prerequisite for a true representation of Christianity. Both scholars advocate a respectful approach to other cultures, but Pieris includes other religions, as a step further, which many Pentecostals including the Chin would question.

6.4. Examining the Chin's Contextualization Using Other Terminology

The scholars above deal with theological issues surrounding syncretism, which is involved in the contextualization process. This section re-examines the process of contextualization, which is the central theme of this research, analysing whether it is intentional or effective. Contextualization among the Chin (such as it exists) has happened over a long period, as a series of piecemeal changes, rather than as a systematic, intellectual exercise. Even though the need for further contextualization is felt, the Chin are often hindered by imported concepts of theological orthodoxy.

As already discussed, syncretism has a derogatory connotation as the term is now value-laden, especially in theological contexts. Even Hollenweger's attempt to use "creative syncretism", whilst being a step in the right direction, does not go far enough in disassociating this negative connotation. Pieris has moved beyond "inculturation" to dialogue due to his persuasion that the West has missed its opportunity to contextualize, particularly in

¹²⁴⁴ Schreiter, "A Framework," 547-8.

Asia. As syncretism can be a misleading concept, due to its theological baggage and cultural bias, different neutral terms are examined below to change the ambiance and context of the debate.

Moving away from the antagonism of the syncretism debate, the result of contextualization can be described using various newer terms. “Hybridity” may be used for theology searching for a new identity, as seen previously in Chin liturgy. “Creolisation” is a relatively new concept to apply to theology, as it originally described an organic mixing of African and European languages and cultures, resulting in the creation of a new language and identity. “Fusion”, another new term in this debate, was originally used for new cultural expressions in fashion, art and cookery, and so is not associated with the negative connotations of a minority ethnicity or a colonial culture. Even though these three terms are similar, in hybridity, the various components remain identifiable, as opposed to “homogenizing fusion”.¹²⁴⁵ Lessons for Chin contextualization can be derived from these new terms, progressing from the stale and divisive theological categories formerly used. Furthermore, it is possible to use these terms in a more fluid way, and the choice of term is less important than avoiding the contentious syncretism debate.

6.4.1. Hybridity

Hybridity is a term describing the process whereby various influences result in a cross between two or more sources, such as mixed plant varieties like clementines. The term “hybridity” is borrowed by the social sciences to describe mixed cultural practices and theologies.¹²⁴⁶ Sociologists describe the process of developing “hybrid” cultural identities as

¹²⁴⁵ Harald Zapf, “The Theoretical Discourse of Hybridity and the Postcolonial Time-Space of the Americas,” ZAA (Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik) 47, no.4 (Dec. 1999): 302, 302-310 in Josef Raab and Martin Butler, “Introduction: Cultural Hybridity in the Americas”; available from http://www.uni-bielefeld.de/%28de%29/ZIF/FG/2008Pluribus/publications/raab-Butler_intro-hybrid.pdf; accessed 27 August 2015.

¹²⁴⁶ Archie C.C. Lee, “Returning to China: Biblical Interpretation in Postcolonial Hong Kong” in 286.

incorporating varied and even incompatible sources, by “constant translation, negotiation, and reconstruction of identities”.¹²⁴⁷ In reference to theology, Schreiter refers to hybridity as a type of religious identity formation,¹²⁴⁸ with the deletion and recreation of religious boundaries, which were formerly described as syncretistic.¹²⁴⁹ As differing belief systems collide, dialogue and arbitration may occur across the boundaries and hybrid theology develops in a fluid, dynamic and ongoing process. In the Chin’s case, they have experienced contradictory influences of primal religion, western theology and Buddhist ideology. As the Chin incorporated various elements, they claimed ownership of diverse identities and thus Chin theology developed.

The particular elements included in a hybrid theology may be consciously selected, like a horticulturist choosing plants’ characteristics, or may develop randomly as in natural breeding.¹²⁵⁰ Similarly, theologically trained Chin leaders make conscious decisions about theology and practices, especially when conflicts arise. However, there is also a natural process whereby the congregation veer towards practices which were familiar to them in primal religion, and now they may argue is the Holy Spirit’s inspiration.

Hybridity involves new external influences which disrupt and challenge traditional norms, potentially causing conflict. A resolution is found which is appropriate for the context, but the boundaries remain flexible.¹²⁵¹ This dynamic is also seen in the AICs as they tend to emphasise the Holy Spirit,¹²⁵² and practice exorcism using symbolic rituals during church services.¹²⁵³ This combination of Pentecostalism with traditional African spirituality is

¹²⁴⁷ James Fulcher and John Scott, *Sociology*, fourth edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 200.

¹²⁴⁸ Schreiter, *The New Catholicity*, 73.

¹²⁴⁹ Schreiter, *The New Catholicity*, 74-5.

¹²⁵⁰ Barry Smart, “Postmodern Social Theory” in *The Blackwell Companion to Social Theory*, 2d ed., ed. Bryan S. Turner (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1996, reprint 2000), 469.

¹²⁵¹ Ian M. Clothier, *Created Identities: Hybrid Cultures and the Internet*, available at <http://www.hz-journal.org/n11/clothier.html>, accessed on 27 August 2015. Originally published in *Convergence* Volume 11 Number 4 London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: Sage Publications, 44-59.

¹²⁵² Inus. *Quest for Belonging*, 258.

¹²⁵³ Inus. *Quest for Belonging*, 273.

perceived as an “Africanised Christian liturgy”.¹²⁵⁴ The resultant “dynamic African Pneumatology” which emphasises the Holy Spirits’ power is perceived to release oppression and meet the peoples’ needs more than the western “colonial” types of Christianity, or indeed their traditional religion.¹²⁵⁵ Anderson describes the AICs as indigenous, authentically Christian, but dissimilar from the European missionary churches.¹²⁵⁶ Returning to the botany analogy, the AICs differ from their European parents.

In the Chin’s case, spiritual gifts and manifestations, including healing which had been introduced by Pentecostals, interacted organically with primal religious practices. The Chin’s emphasised Pneumatology is deemed appropriate to Chin spirituality, and the resultant theology is hybrid. The perceived contradictory beliefs and practices upsets the Chin Baptists’ more traditional sense of orthodoxy. However, others would argue that Chin Pentecostals still resemble their American parents too closely. Despite the conflict that diversity causes, Schreiter welcomes a more positive view of popular religion and indigenous religious practices and maintains that hybridity has become a part of reality in a globalized world.¹²⁵⁷

6.4.2. Creolization

A neologism “creolization” was created to describe Creole cultures where various ethnicities mixed on colonial plantations, particularly in the Caribbean.¹²⁵⁸ Schreiter uses the term “creolization” to describe a form of hybridization, in reference to a mixture of African slave

¹²⁵⁴ Allan Anderson, *Zion and Pentecost: The Spirituality and Experience of Pentecostal and Zionist/Apostolic Churches in South Africa* (Pretoria: University of South Africa Press, 2000), 307.

¹²⁵⁵ Allan Anderson, *Moya: The Holy Spirit in an African Context* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1991), 125.

¹²⁵⁶ Anderson, *Zion and Pentecost*, 307.

¹²⁵⁷ Schreiter, *The New Catholicity*, 76-7.

¹²⁵⁸ See Nigel O. Bolland, “Creolisation and Creole Societies: A Cultural Nationalist View of Caribbean Social History,” *Caribbean Quarterly* 44, no. 1/2, KONVERSATIONS in KREOLE, *The Creole Society Model Revisited: Essays in Honour of Kamau Brathwaite* (University of the West Indies and Caribbean Quarterly: March-June, 1998), 1-32.

culture and European culture.¹²⁵⁹ Not only cultural aspects such as food, music and language mixed, but the traditional African religious belief systems and Christianity also mixed. This term is coined for the Caribbean context and although the Chin have been very westernised, the cultural influences would not be to the extent of creolization. However, as many Chin emigrate, this concept may be useful to describe how they integrate with host cultures and religious beliefs, resulting in further cultural and theological combinations.

6.4.3. Fusion

Fusion is another term selected because of its positive connotation as it is used in the arts and literature and especially cuisine, inferring openness to other cultural influences, denoting a new creation. Hong Kong, for example, is described as a “cultural fusion” of mixed Asian and British culture.¹²⁶⁰ “Fusion cuisine” combines recipes from different cultures using a variety of ingredients and cooking methods to develop new recipes which no longer belong in any specific category. Such fusion is popularised due to travel and serves to multiply the variety of flavours and dishes on the menu. An example is tikka masala, an Indian curry adapted for western taste, which differs from both traditional Indian curry and western dishes.

In applying the analogy of fusion cuisine to theology, creative innovations using various sources are used to arrive at organic solutions for unresolved theological questions.

Ingredients denote a combination of beliefs, whilst cooking methods represent various practices. Such theological innovation resembles Shorter’s encouragement to create indigenous forms, rather than merely insert indigenous cultural aspects into western patterns.¹²⁶¹ Fusion illustrates the randomness involved in Walls’ “serial” model of the development of Christianity, resulting in various forms of Christianity. Distinguishing hybridity and fusion is subjective, but the difference is that fusion involves blending the

¹²⁵⁹ Schreiter, *The New Catholicity*, 74.

¹²⁶⁰ Lee, “Returning to China,” 286.

¹²⁶¹ Shorter, *Toward a Theology*, 266.

component parts to such an extent that they are not easily separated or distinguishable, which is not the case in hybridity.

Some Chin theology could be described as naturally occurring, whereas the creation of new forms is challenging for those who have a derogatory view of their indigenous culture and a deep commitment to western forms. Some of the Chin's novel practices are attributed to the leading of the Holy Spirit; however, these are often single, spontaneous occurrences rather than established, repeated practices. The understanding involved in "fusion" embraces the inventiveness of new theological formations and avoids being side-tracked by controversy regarding syncretism. Fusion in worship would incorporate various worship and music styles seamlessly, resulting in new forms. As these categorisations are subjective, what is considered syncretistic or contextualized could also be categorised as fusion. Pieris' example of embracing poverty and self-emptying are examples of theological fusion with Buddhism which may be considered acceptable by the Chin. This step would simultaneously enrich Christianity and address Buddhist values at a deeper level, rather than merely adopting Burmese language and dress. Another example of fusion would be the Chin's changes which they have made to country and western music, as they have adapted it to their own worship style.

6.5. Conclusion

This chapter has examined the spirit beliefs of the Chin, and while acknowledging syncretism's derogatory connotation, it examines well-known scholars' concepts of syncretism. Their theological framework has been reapplied to the Chin context, which also has application for other contexts. This leads to the necessity of considering new terminology: hybridity, creolisation and fusion, which moves the syncretism debate in a new direction, and thus would be more palatable to Pentecostals, who are often conservative.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

7. Introduction

The argument in this research has centred around Cox's hypothesis that Pentecostals have unique characteristics for contextualization, using the Chin as a case-study with particular interest in their primal religious background. The Chin are not exemplified as a people group who have succeeded with contextualization issues where many other cultural groups have failed; rather, my purpose has been to examine the processes and the theological categories involved, in order to draw wider conclusions applicable to other contexts from a unique case-study.

On the basis of the previous work, I will re-examine how contextualized Chin liturgy, songs and Pneumatology are. I will consider the implications of my research for the research questions and theological framework, considering its limitations and making suggestions for further research. Finally, I will reflect on what I have learnt and how my own theology has developed during the course of this research.

7.1. How Contextualized are Chin Pentecostals?

My study of the theological processes in the liturgy, songs and Pneumatology served as an appropriate framework with which to observe Chin Pentecostal practical and oral theology. These processes permitted an examination of Chin Pentecostal beliefs and practices and subsequent reflection on the key issues surrounding westernization and primal religious influences. The ethnographic methods employed, including participant observation, interviews and song text analysis were apt to express the voice of Chin Pentecostalism.

7.1.1. How Contextualized is Chin Liturgy?

The Chin's ownership of their liturgy was evident in their intensity of worship, which exemplifies Cox's observation of Pentecostalism's "rapturous worship" contributing to Pentecostalism's rapid spread.¹²⁶² The process of examining their liturgy was complex as they imitate western Pentecostal liturgy but appear to interpret it through the lens of their primal background, evidenced by their behaviour and emotional responses during services. The participatory aspects of Pentecostal liturgy increased the level of ownership for the Chin, and elements such as dancing and clapping were familiar to them from their former pre-Christian celebrations.

Furthermore, the autonomy of Pentecostal worship permitted individualised content, whereby they had the freedom to pray, compose songs and preach sermons using local imagery. They addressed relevant issues concerning their socio-economic context by encouraging financial giving to receive blessing. So, even though preaching was a foreign imported form, the content of the sermons was appropriate to their local context. The Chin's oral tradition also lent itself to adapt to enjoying the medium of singing, recitation, preaching and testimony. However, despite their independence now in making decisions, there were also ongoing repercussions deriving from the missionaries' decisions. Attempting to re-introduce the traditional music, forbidden by the missionaries, would not be acceptable to most Chin now; it is considered outdated by the youth and reminds some of the older generation of primal religion. I have deduced that there is a time limit for redeeming such indigenous forms. The Chin themselves perceived that their former spirituality was transferred into Pentecostalism, as they considered their ancestors to be "worshipping people". Their appreciation for spiritual power within Pentecostalism was seen in their emphasis on speaking in tongues. Their former familiarity with the spirits influenced their relationship

¹²⁶² Cox, *Fire From Heaven*, 101.

with the Trinity, most notably with an emphasis on the Holy Spirit, and with a concept of Father God helping and protecting them. Thus, the Chin's Pentecostal liturgy was a hybrid of both western and primal influences.

7.1.2. How Contextualized are Chin Worship Songs?

The Chin's autonomy and independence at the time of composing their songs is understood by considering that the foreign missionaries had left several years previously, that they were secluded from the outside world by the government and that Chin state is remote from major cities. My presupposition was that the songs would be so uniquely contextualized to Chin culture that they would have little meaning to me as a westerner, but what I discovered was more nuanced.

I discovered that there are external influences evident in the songs, even though some Chin dispute this. However, others express their satisfaction with a combination of eastern and western influences. This "cross-pollination" of globalizing influences, especially westernisation, were so assimilated that the Chin now claim complete ownership, and they themselves could no longer identify the original sources of influence on the songs.

Their songs are an oral medium, offering free expression, on which they have a high level of dependence, because of their lack of written materials. Observation of their behaviour while singing their indigenous songs demonstrated their strong emotional connection and involvement with the worship songs.

The lyrics expressed their devotion to God in an honest testimonial style, with some local references and imagery. The theological themes in the indigenous songs referred, in particular, to their socio-economic challenges. So, whilst the concept of God's blessings and the raw emotional expressions of love for God in their context of hardship would not be

incomprehensible to a Pentecostal in another context, these would nevertheless not be as meaningful as they are for Chin Pentecostals.

7.1.3. How Contextualized are Chin Theological Processes?

Initially as new Christians, the Chin covered all bases, overlapping with primal practices for fear of neglecting the spirits. More of these primal practices were abandoned over time, as they were warned against syncretism by the missionaries. Some practices demonstrate that they have subsequently modified forms and meanings, as seen in their cultural practice of killing animals to offer hospitality at funerals, rather than their former purpose of killing animals as a sacrifice to the spirits.

Some beliefs that spirits still exist result in deliverance and healing practices operating underground, because of their sense of shame in continuing these practices. Christianity did not answer all of their questions regarding the spirits, and so they continued to be informed on these matters by their primal religion. However, Pentecostalism has some tolerance of deliverance practices, based on varying theological beliefs regarding the possibility of demonic oppression or possession. The Chin adapted Pentecostal deliverance practices to their former concept of expelling spirits, which they perceived was still a need. Arguably, this contributed to the growth of Pentecostalism among the Chin.

Interestingly, deliverance demonstrates an attempt to break free from the past influence of spirits,¹²⁶³ but simultaneously these practices perpetuate the need to continuously eradicate spirits.¹²⁶⁴ Some of these practices may be considered syncretistic, and the Chin struggle with the disparaging connotation of syncretism. The Chin are still processing how to make their theology relevant to their socio-economic context, but most are reluctant to contextualize

¹²⁶³ Meyer, *Translating the Devil*, 101, 216.

¹²⁶⁴ Meyer, *Translating the Devil*, 211-2.

their message to the neighbouring Buddhists, because they are afraid of compromising their Christian orthodoxy.

7.2. Implications of this Research

7.2.1. Implications of these Findings for the Research Questions

The Chin claim that since conversion to Christianity, the government has attempted to ostracize¹²⁶⁵ and persecute them, whilst promoting Buddhism by building pagodas¹²⁶⁶ as their political strategy.¹²⁶⁷ Building or repairing churches was forbidden, and the government was monitoring the churches' activities at the time of this research.¹²⁶⁸ The Chin admit that prior to becoming Christians they revered outsiders.¹²⁶⁹ This was due to the Chin's perceived inferiority, because of their awareness of their educational and economic underdevelopment. This deference for outsiders had increased the level of influence of the former missionaries. Since becoming more educated and developed, the Chin have developed more respect for themselves nowadays.¹²⁷⁰

This has raised questions about how they view themselves as a Christian minority, and simultaneously as Myanmar nationals. The identification of Chin identity with Christianity was strengthened by the fact that they were surrounded by different people groups with their own distinct religion, especially Buddhism, but also Islam and Hinduism.¹²⁷¹ Christianity had provided education which increased their status, whereas formerly they were considered

¹²⁶⁵ David I. Steinberg, "'Legitimacy' in Burma/Myanmar: Concepts and Implications," *Myanmar: State, Society and Ethnicity*, ed. N. Ganesan and Kyaw Yin Hlaing (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2007), 124.

¹²⁶⁶ Pagodas are towers built near temples for Buddhist worship, often constructed with gold.

¹²⁶⁷ Steinberg, "'Legitimacy'", 125.

¹²⁶⁸ "The International Religious Freedom Report 2005 of the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor of the United States Department of State"; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2005/51506.htm>; accessed on 15 December 2008. (This report monitored religious freedom for Muslims, Christians and other minority groups living in Myanmar.)

¹²⁶⁹ Chao, interview by author, Yangon, 16 April 2010.

¹²⁷⁰ Kap, *Chin Church History*, 348-9.

¹²⁷¹ Sakhong, *In Search of Chin*, 244.

inferior due to their primal belief system.¹²⁷² The Chin shared more in common from a religious perspective with Christianity, than with Buddhism. The Chin identified themselves politically as Christians, in contrast to the majority Burmese Buddhists.¹²⁷³ In an effort to distinguish themselves from Buddhists, the dominant people group, they wholeheartedly adopted Christianity as their identity. Ironically Christianity was the religion of the colonizers, who were perceived as the foreign oppressors, with a different culture from the inhabitants of Myanmar. Bearing in mind the Chin's oppression by the Buddhists, the Chin have chosen the religion of one oppressor over another. The Chin have adopted a separate religious identity, which differentiates them even more from the majority Buddhists. Since the fieldwork was conducted, Myanmar has entered a changing political scene, as it is now a democracy, for which Myanmar citizens have voted. Even though many of the former government ministers were re-elected, Myanmar has seen many political changes, and is in an ongoing state of flux at the time of writing. So, it is difficult to gauge how these changes will affect Chin Christians in the future.

Pentecostalism was introduced to the Chin by neighbouring people groups and they experienced an indigenous renewal. In light of this form of introduction and growth, questions remain regarding the Chin's responses to the form of Pentecostalism which they have inherited, and how they have proceeded subsequently. Only recently, after up to four generations of Christianity, some Chin are experiencing a dilemma, questioning whether the form of Christianity they now have is authentically Chin. This is a type of theological identity crisis. This leaves some gaps when interpreting Chin cultural practices theologically, which the Chin could assess independently, if they find it necessary.

¹²⁷² F. K. Lehman, ed., *Military Rule in Burma Since 1962* (Singapore: Maruzer Asia: 1981), 5 in Sakhong, *In Search of Chin*, 245.

¹²⁷³ Lehman, ed., *Military Rule*, 5.

Cox's hypothesis that Pentecostals are more successful in gaining converts than other denominations is held in tension with Pieris' recognition that all Christian denominations have been more successful in gaining converts from "cosmic" religions than they have from "metacosmic" religions. Other Christian denominations also won more Christian converts from primal believers in northern Burma.¹²⁷⁴ This suggests an integral openness to Christianity among those from primal religions. The openness of primal religions to all Christian denominations challenges Cox's hypothesis regarding Pentecostalism somewhat. There is room for further analysis of the specific aspects of Pentecostalism which contextualize easily to primal religion and the reasons why.

My research has concurred with other scholarship that spiritual power encounters, often associated with Pentecostalism, conveyed to people from primal religions that Pentecostals have access to spiritual power and authority. Many Chin transferred to Pentecostalism, convinced by Pentecostalism's demonstration of spiritual power through spiritual gifts and manifestations, especially speaking in tongues, but also its power to meet their practical needs of protection, healing and provision. The aspects which were considered important to them in primal religion transferred into Pentecostalism, so the Chin's framework for understanding Pentecostalism included blessings, healing, protection and even survival.

Thus, Pentecostalism addressed their relevant needs, which they had experienced in their indigenous primal religion. In order for the Chin to convert, they had to be convinced that Christian spiritual power, mostly understood as the Holy Spirit, was superior to that of the spirits. The Chin's criteria for dealing with primal religion evolved through their needs in crises and conflicts. One such conflict was a lingering belief that the spirits were present, but conviction that as Christians, they should no longer believe in the existence of spirits. When

¹²⁷⁴ Taylor, "British Policy," 75.

their theological beliefs intersected, these issues required addressing, which involved a process of consideration and discussion.

Their criteria for dealing with issues was formed out of their concept of their own identity, as discussed in chapter two. Their identity shaped what they considered important, and therefore what practices they accepted or rejected. Their criteria was shaped by their primal religious background, so they tended towards maintaining concepts with which they were familiar, including their interaction with the spiritual realm and their desire for spiritual power. These concepts have been translated into Pentecostalism, evidenced by their high regard for the Holy Spirit. This influences how they deal with practices during services and prayer meetings. They tolerate unusual manifestations, which they themselves describe as “strange behaviour”, as they welcome spiritual freedom and sensitivity to the Holy Spirit; they are hesitant to censor the manifestations and demonstrations of the congregation as they fear they might hinder the work of the Holy Spirit.

Along with the similarities between their previous and current belief systems comes the controversial issue of addressing syncretism. Undoubtedly some beliefs from primal religion have lingered, where they have filled in the gaps which remain in Christian theology, including the activity and whereabouts of deceased spirits. They trust their spiritual discernment in differentiating between primal spirits and the Holy Spirit, which they describe as their ability to discern what activity was “in the Spirit”, and what was not.¹²⁷⁵ The Chin also use the Bible as a standard to measure various beliefs and practices, using their own interpretation.

Westerners have often criticised practices relating to the spirits, notwithstanding that westerners have inadvertently filled in theological gaps from their own cultures too.

¹²⁷⁵ Tao, interview by author, Kalaymyo, 22 April 2010.

Moreover, if the Bible is silent and does not contradict certain beliefs and practices, then the basis for criticism may merely be different cultural norms or claims of discernment, which are subjective.

The Chin have an emphasised Pneumatology, resulting in an emphasis on the Holy Spirit, but they hold to an orthodox view of the Trinity as divine, and God is not perceived as one of their ancestral spirits. Just as Roman Catholics typically emphasise God the Father, and Protestant evangelicals emphasise Jesus, God the Son, so, many Pentecostals also relate more personally with the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Trinity. Therefore, the Chin's familiarity with the Holy Spirit is hardly grounds for objection.

Deliverance rituals from primal religion have been amalgamated into Pentecostalism, which are controversial due to their emphasis on the former spirits. These practices have been rationalised based on the accounts of deliverance from demons recorded in the New Testament and Pentecostals' claims to assent to and even replicate biblical supernatural displays. The AICs have been forerunners in obtaining acceptance for these types of practices; however, they have also endured criticism for syncretism, especially the implication that the spirits still have power and so continue to require appeasement.

7.2.2. The Significance and Application for Pentecostals

The significance of this research is that it contributes towards the area of Pentecostal contextualization, where there is currently a dearth of research, especially examining a primal religious background. Pentecostal spirituality is perceived as being more relevant to the poor and oppressed and was more compliant with primal cultures than other denominations are perceived to be.¹²⁷⁶ This fits with my findings in this research.

¹²⁷⁶ Au, "Asian Pentecostalism", *Handbook of Pentecostal*, 32.

Chin Pentecostalism tends to have a victorious mentality in the way that it addresses life's problems. This is a common phenomenon in host cultures, despite Pentecostal missionaries often being accused of lacking social concern.¹²⁷⁷

Nevertheless, I am cautious about presenting Pentecostalism as more successful than other denominations as rapid growth is not the only indicator of success. Some of Pentecostalism's ability to contextualize has not been intentional. Moreover, there are not enough comparative studies of denominations to make accurate judgments.

Furthermore, not much Chin local theology has been analysed by outsiders. Locals have processed the forms of Pentecostalism which they have received by establishing ownership of their own theological beliefs and practices. From these, general principles of how local theology develops can be deduced. In observing a congregation's contextualization, the forms and meanings need to be distinguished. External forms may be deceiving, as they may be imported and may not in fact reflect a culture's meanings at any deep level. However, some forms have been adapted by a culture, and therefore do connect more with a culture's own reality. Oral forms which they have created themselves, such as sermons or indigenous songs are more likely to express meaning at a deeper level.

A practical application of this research is identifying the importance of understanding a culture's identity and religious background. Study of the Chin's pre-Christian religious identity, including their perception of similarities and differences between different belief systems, has been of paramount importance to understanding their approach to contextualization.

¹²⁷⁷ Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 276; For a discussion of this issue, see also, Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, "Are Pentecostals Oblivious to Social Justice? Theological and Ecumenical Perspectives," *Missiology* 29, no. 4, (Oct 2001): 417-431.

Another consideration for Asian Pentecostals in the future is intentionally dealing with the westernization influences, which is the cultural wrapping in which many of them have received Christianity. Once they have acknowledged and addressed westernisation, they are more prepared then to examine their own cultural and religious contexts more authentically. They are also more equipped to proceed with dialogue with other religions. The Chin are still trying to differentiate western culture and western theology from the Christian message, which they have received. The difficulty in making this distinction is their common perception that there are associated benefits with their identification with the West.

There are varied beliefs and opinions within one people group, so there is not usually going to be a consensus. Variables such as age and life experience are important factors which influence their responses. Even though the Chin describe themselves as having a group culture, each person's own experience influences their perspective. As the older Chin remember the aspects which the Baptist missionaries have introduced, they are generally more aware of imported western forms. The younger generation more easily assumes that imported aspects were actually native Chin forms, because they did not encounter the missionaries. The original sources of cultural forms are no longer acknowledged because they are forgotten over time, which is often the case with this cross-pollination of ideas.

The Chin not only had the freedom to develop their own theology, but they had to make theological decisions independently once the missionaries had left. The Chin were equipped with knowledge of their own culture and a translation of the Bible, and a minority had a basic theological education. The missionaries' theological education was another westernising influence, however. If they had been encouraged to develop indigenous theology instead, their current theology would presumably be more contextualized. While education may give people confidence and the tools to evaluate their own theology, another consideration is that

if education is based too closely on any culture, in this instance a western model, it will be more difficult for people to then develop their own indigenous theology.

Contextualization is subjective, with no single right answer. Missionaries have often assumed that cultural forms were always related to primal religion, whereas locals may interpret the same forms differently as merely being cultural. Thus, even though the Bible is widely accepted as a measuring tool for the orthodoxy of practices, the theological decisions depend on how the Bible is interpreted.

Each culture emphasises the aspects which are meaningful for them, thus developing their unique form of theology. Practices may be compared more fairly between peoples from similar backgrounds; but western and Asian contexts differ greatly in their religious and cultural backgrounds. In the past, the west led the “globalizing” standard of theology.

However, the common unifying features across Christianity are also recognised; as one Chin expresses it, “there is only one Father”.¹²⁷⁸

As well as the end result, the Chin’s theologising process is important. A culture’s ownership of Christian forms is an important consideration in establishing how a culture has contextualized. The Chin appropriated certain concepts which appealed to them, such as to “dip in the Spirit”, as they learnt from the renewal that they could enjoy and experience the Holy Spirit’s manifestations. They did not have to seek the missionaries’ approval for this decision. Time is a significant factor to consider when measuring contextualization, as people raise issues when they get a chance to process cultural changes and take ownership of what is important to them.

¹²⁷⁸ Wei, interview by the author, Yangon, 30 April 2010.

7.2.3. Implications for Theological and Contextualization Models and Theories

The contextualization models and scholarly theological contributions which formed the theoretical structure of this research are re-examined here. Hayward's model provided the framework of liturgy, songs and theology. However, I found his model basic and therefore it was supplemented with further analysis. Hayward's model aptly pointed to the need to distinguish between imported forms and the local characteristics of the host culture. Another of his considerations is the way that Christianity influences its surrounding society.¹²⁷⁹

Hayward considers how the Christian God relates to other gods or spirits in other belief systems.¹²⁸⁰ Chin primal religion provided the lens for how the Chin perceived Christianity, resulting in the adjustment of former concepts to line up more accurately with the Christian concept of God.

Hayward's differentiation of local or imported forms was applied to Chin liturgy. However, I discovered that this question has become more nuanced for the Chin over time, as western aspects have been adopted and as the Chin have subsequently taken ownership of their own theological forms. Hayward stated that music and preaching reflect a culture's identity. I examined these further to ascertain how the styles of music reflected generational preferences and how the sermon themes and the nature of their sermon delivery represent Chin preferences. Albrecht's ritual analysis and Cartledge's similar study were useful models for examining why the liturgy used different components, examining the time spent on each aspect. An observation of the Chin's behaviour during the liturgy also provided useful information demonstrating the meaningfulness and their degree of ownership. Theological analysis was necessary to understand how they relate to members of the Trinity as well as the possible influence of primal religion and spiritual practices and experiences.

¹²⁷⁹ Hayward, "Measuring Contextualization," 138.

¹²⁸⁰ Hayward, "Measuring Contextualization," 136.

Hayward's statement that new songs relay a dynamic aspect of faith suggests the importance of writing new songs as an active approach to express their own worship which is relevant to their community. This assertion is accepted by other scholars. Yung concurs that song composition helps a culture's formation of their Christian identity, considering their Asian identity in particular.¹²⁸¹ The Chin's songs did reveal a dynamic in their faith, but Hayward's measurement lacks detail again, by simply stating that the composition of songs indicates a culture's indigenous expression of worship.¹²⁸² The concept of indigenoussness is more nuanced, because most cultures absorb aspects from other cultures. In the Chin's case western forms are absorbed as part of their own identity, to the extent that they claim them as their own.

Rather than merely accepting that the songs are indigenous expressions, I explored this assertion by analysing the lyrics theologically, using thorough song-text analysis. To obtain additional information about their level of involvement with the songs, I observed the Chin's behaviour during singing. The theology in the songs was analysed by examining, firstly, their relationship to members of the Trinity, secondly, their expression of their spiritual experiences and, thirdly, any primal influences.

Hayward's model was appropriate in its consideration of opposition to Christianity and the use of various aspects from the host culture, such as ethics and morals. Hayward's analysis of how the Christian God relates to other gods or spirits in other belief systems¹²⁸³ is also appropriate for the Chin. Their primal religious background provided the lens for how the Chin understood Christianity. Their beliefs and practices as well as their criteria and processes for developing theology have been examined.

¹²⁸¹ Yung, *Mangoes*, 233.

¹²⁸² Hayward, *Measuring Contextualization*, 135-6.

¹²⁸³ Hayward, *Measuring Contextualization*, 136-7.

Bevans' models of contextualization was outlined, but they were considered too theoretical for the purpose of this research, and were therefore not the main tools used to conduct the Chin case-study. In chapter two, Moon's criticism is that Bevans' models are too systematically categorised and artificially disconnected from the cultural contexts in which they are situated.¹²⁸⁴ However, a brief synopsis of the models is given here.

The **translation model** is simplistic and literal and characterises foreign conservative missionaries who presented a rigid Christian message, without a deep understanding of the complexity of the recipient culture. The foreign Pentecostal missionaries implemented aspects of the translation model, as they were focused on protecting the authenticity of the gospel message, without much knowledge or effort to accommodate the cultural context of Myanmar. This reveals a worldview that their own western culture was superior, and indeed they imposed westernisation on the AG movement in Myanmar. They forbade aspects of the culture which they had assumed were linked to spirit worship, without a deeper understanding of its cultural meaning. Such ethnocentrism was common before the study of cultural anthropology had become an established field; this then revealed how so-called "primitive" cultures are actually very complex. Pentecostal missionaries may still use the translation model because of their desire to maintain biblical orthodoxy, but nowadays they would be more informed about cultural differences.

The **anthropology model** may be applied to those Chin who highly esteemed the uniqueness of Chin culture, and therefore would be more inclined to adapt the Christian message to fit around Chin culture. Conservative Pentecostals would probably view the anthropological model as being too lenient to cultural values in its assumption of the goodness of humanity. Whilst Pentecostal missionaries may consider that God may be present in cultures prior to

¹²⁸⁴ Moon, Review of "Models," 395.

Christianity, they are conscious of the sinfulness of humanity and what they would consider false teaching in other religions. In the Chin's case, their prior beliefs in a supreme being and similar accounts of creation may be interpreted as God's work. These similar concepts were maintained, and the concept of the supreme being was built upon with the introduction of Christianity. These concepts contrast with practices the Chin had, which were considered contrary to Christianity, even though the Chin expressed that they helped them to understand Christianity more easily. These other beliefs and practices included the Chin's awareness of the spirit realm, awareness of the resting place of the spirits, and their animal sacrifices, which the missionaries challenged and eradicated wherever possible.

Those who have developed their own liberation theology in oppressive socio-economic contexts are examples of use of the **praxis model**. However, most Chin appear to have a more conservative view of the Bible and the Christian message than is implied in this model, since Chin Pentecostal leaders perceive that liberation theology is liberal. Whilst they recognise their struggles within their social system, I was unaware of them developing a theology by engaging specifically on these issues. The Chin's way of addressing their struggle was characteristic of Pentecostalism, by exhortative preaching to be victorious overcomers, and "positive self-talk" to build self-esteem. Notwithstanding the methods which the missionaries used, the introduction of Christianity has brought about such economic development that the Chin's social condition has been transformed.

The **synthetic model** sounds idealistic, whereby the orthodoxy of Christianity is maintained as well as respect for the culture, counteracting any negative aspects through this mixed model. However, obtaining the optimum solution is subjective in the real world. One challenging example in the Chin's case would be their attempts at developing a theology which both acknowledges their belief in spirits and adapts it in ways which are accepted in Pentecostalism but without syncretism.

The **transcendental model** would offer some insights for the Chin context, as it focuses on individual, subjective spirituality which suits Pentecostalism's characteristically experiential spirituality. However, its individualism is also a limitation, because Asian, and indeed Chin, culture are more community-orientated. Furthermore, Pentecostals would generally be reluctant to use this model because of its lack of use of biblical precepts. Nevertheless, if testimonies of individual experiences could be gathered as a whole, they would help the Chin to contextualize their theology.

The five scholars Walls, Hollenweger, Schreiter, Pieris and Yung were useful to interact with, as their work encourages the development of non-western theology. The discussion on syncretism was enhanced by a comparison with the AICs, as they contend with similar practices and so they have wrestled with similar issues. Based on this discussion, I considered how creative approaches and fresh use of language might redirect the current rather binary discussion regarding syncretism, which hinders further dialogue.

7.2.4. Limitations of this Research

As an outsider to Chin culture, my personal limitations regarding culture and language are acknowledged. I also had limited access to the Chin, due to the cost, distance and the restrictions imposed on foreigners traveling to Chin state at the time of research. The limitations of requiring translation are also noted, as language itself involves contextualization, and some nuances may be lost through translation. Even when the interpreter and some of the interviewees did speak in English, I was aware that English was not their first language, and some of their intended meaning may have been lost as they may not always have expressed themselves as clearly as they would in their own Chin language. Language is "a dynamic cultural resource, reflecting the spirit of the people and illuminating

their sense of values.”¹²⁸⁵ The importance of language in a missions context is seen in the way that missionaries consider the pre-Christian terms and names used for God and what concept of God it conveys, before deciding on the best name to convey the characteristics of the Christian God.¹²⁸⁶

7.2.5. Suggestions for Further Research

My research has highlighted some areas which have not yet been researched in depth. There is room for more scholarly work on the correlation between primal spirituality and Pentecostalism. The dynamics of why those from primal religion are more open to conversion, whilst those from other world religions resist Christianity, could also be explored further. More work could be done on Chin liturgy, particularly on the theological themes in their prayer and sermons. The way that Pentecostals from primal backgrounds address local practices could also be examined in more detail. There are different areas of Chin ecclesiology, which could be researched further, church polity being one example. The Chin’s traditional leadership concepts appeared to be translated into their emphasis on leadership status. This in turn impacted Pentecostal leadership styles.

The Chin’s perception of their identity was that their culture was interrelated with primal religion. They replaced this religious correlation with Christianity, as following conversion, they identified strongly with Christianity. Their perceptions of their identity duly determined how they approached their former culture and how they perceived themselves to be different from other people groups, especially the Buddhists. However, there has not been the scope to analyse these overlapping perspectives in depth, which could be researched further in the future. There is room for more theological research regarding how cultures such as the Chin

¹²⁸⁵ Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Books, 1989, fourteenth printing 2004), 165.

¹²⁸⁶ Sanneh, *Translating the Message*, 158.

interpret the Bible. Their interpretation of the biblical text would indicate their theological perspectives based on the influence of their cultural worldview.

There is still an outstanding need to examine the discrepancy between western systematic theology, which is generally taught in training institutions, and actual local beliefs and practices, and how this incongruity hinders the development of local theology.

Pentecostal missionaries have been advised to learn from former belief systems which are inevitably formative in peoples' thinking, rather than just demonise former religions, and thus hinder contextualization.¹²⁸⁷ However, Pentecostals tend to avoid dialogue with other religions, and so more research may serve the purpose of inter-religious dialogue.¹²⁸⁸ Yung also strongly recommends that Asian Christians dialogue with those from other Asian religions.¹²⁸⁹ The Chin themselves are reluctant to contextualize the Christian message for the Buddhists, due to their fear that contextualization is too liberal.

Anderson examines traditional beliefs within Pentecostalism, through continuity and discontinuity paradigms,¹²⁹⁰ which could also be applied to the Chin. Anderson's work is an important contribution, but there is room for more investigation into the background of traditional beliefs and practices, and for more nuances on the overlaps with primal religion, rather than a binary categorisation. In the Chin's case, I found this type of investigation was difficult because I did not have the opportunity to observe their former practices. There are few adherents to primal religion as it was virtually extinct. Another issue for further research is related to the criteria and the processes that newly converted communities use to decide which practices to preserve, and why some practices become extinct.

¹²⁸⁷ Anderson, "Towards a Pentecostal," 38.

¹²⁸⁸ For a discussion of Pentecostals' reluctance to accept that the Holy Spirit may be working among other religions, see Kärkkäinen, "Identity and Plurality: A Pentecostal-Charismatic Perspective," *International Review of Mission* 91:363 (October 2002), 500-504.

¹²⁸⁹ Yung, *Mangoes or Bananas?*, 235-6.

¹²⁹⁰ Anderson, *Spirit-Filled World*, 175

Another important question regards whether or not the Holy Spirit is involved with other religions, and if so, in what ways. Kärkkäinen asks how syncretism in Christianity contributes to this question.¹²⁹¹ Yong has made notable contributions to this debate within Pentecostal circles,¹²⁹² but it is difficult for most Pentecostals to accept that the Holy Spirit is working within other religions.

7.3. My Theology: How I understand Chin Theology and its Significance

In agreement with Cox's hypothesis, my impression is that Pentecostalism matched some concepts of Chin spirituality which they had inherited from their background in primal religion. As already mentioned, the Chin perceived that their primal belief-system had been entwined with Chin culture. Their spiritual awareness allowed a sense of familiarity with Pentecostal spirituality, which led them to adopt Pentecostalism. Arguably, the Chin interpreted relevant aspects of Pentecostal Christianity using the grid of their former worldview: blessing, healing, protection and survival. The AG missionaries' lack of contextualization with cultures in Myanmar meant that Pentecostalism was presented along with western forms. Aside from these western styles, the core Pentecostal spirituality felt organic to Chin spirituality, which was conducive to the growth of Chin Pentecostalism.

As the Chin's exposure to outside influences had been restricted, it is possible that this was factor in some Chin Christians occasionally reverting to traditional practices. However, interviewees reported that following conversion the Chin Christian community had gone through stages in a process of detaching from their primal practices. Some were third or fourth generation Christian at the time of research, so most of the former practices had been

¹²⁹¹ Veli-Matti Karkkainen, "How to Speak of the Spirit among Religions: Trinitarian Prolegomena for a Pneumatological Theology of Religions" in *The Work of the Spirit: Pneumatology and Pentecostalism*, ed. Michael Welker (Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans, 2006), 69.

¹²⁹² See Amos Yong, *Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003).

left behind. They implied that more primal rituals would be practiced in Chin state itself, compared with Yangon and Kalaymyo, where I conducted my fieldwork.

As the Chin are now familiar with western forms of Christianity, some fear it is too late to reintroduce more aspects of their own culture at this late stage.¹²⁹³ However, they informed me that they have been redeeming some aspects relating to household roles, which they deemed to not necessarily relate to primal religion. However, as Chin culture has been so transformed and many years have passed since the introduction of Christianity, their opportunity to re-integrate cultural traditions is now limited.

Shorter considers that inculturation also involves a process of “desyncretization”, giving the example of the first Christians removing Jewish elements from their faith.¹²⁹⁴ Chin leaders openly discussed with me their concerns about concepts of deliverance and healing that remain, so it was evident that they have been re-examining their practices. It is worth noting that a “desyncretization” process would also entail the Chin examining imported western forms, which were adopted but not fully understood. Up to now, the Chin have not seemed too concerned about western forms as they have accepted them as being inherent aspects of Christianity, often without being challenged. I think it would be a complex process to distinguish western cultural aspects from their local theology, with a view to replacing Chin cultural forms. The future trends of Chin theology are unpredictable, especially considering the fluctuating political context and globalization.

7.3.1. A Personal Approach to Aspects of Chin Theology

In this section, I will clarify what I have learnt through this research by revisiting theological issues which are important to the Chin.

¹²⁹³ Yong, interview by the author, Yangon, 16 April 2010.

¹²⁹⁴ Shorter, *Evangelization and Culture*, 33.

a. **The spirits**

It is evident from this research that prohibiting the appeasement of the spirits can cause a people group to feel vulnerable, if they still believe that the spirits are powerful and therefore likely to harm them. If spirit beliefs are not openly addressed and resolved in a satisfactory manner, the premature prohibition of practices may force practices underground. There can also be a discrepancy between what is taught publicly and what is practised; the Chin's cleansing or healing rituals certainly take place,¹²⁹⁵ even though they are not always publicly acknowledged. This covertness meant that it was challenging to obtain detailed information about these practices. The increased receptivity of scholars to the AICs demonstrate a decreasing concern about syncretism with spirit beliefs.

At the outset of this research, I expected straightforward answers regarding the nature of the Chin spirits, and I had initially assumed that they were demonic beings. However, I realised that discerning their nature was subjective, and due to the lack of information in the Bible on the topic, I concluded that this issue was open to different interpretations.

Some denominations dismiss the belief in the spirits, but this lack of acknowledgement of their worldview led the Chin to question how well the Baptists, for example, understood them. Some denominations' view of the supernatural in general may lead them to disregard the spiritual realm, which has theological repercussions for them. A Chin Baptist acknowledged to me that Pentecostals' willingness to engage with the supernatural realm was more fitting with the Chin worldview.¹²⁹⁶ However, Pentecostal beliefs regarding spirits range widely, so the Chin's belief in the spirits' existence would not be representative.

¹²⁹⁵ By Chin healing rituals, I refer to some Chin underground practices. Some interviewees informed me that especially as new converts, the Chin still sacrificed chickens for healing, and that ladies lie on top of each other when one is sick, imitating Elisha's healing of the youth. I also observed ladies falling on the ground, rolling around during the service, which I was informed was to expel spirits.

¹²⁹⁶ Hua, interview by author, Yangon, 27 April 2010.

Roman Catholic artefacts such as rosary beads and the child of Prague statue¹²⁹⁷ often represent deeper spiritual meanings that some would interpret as superstition. My upbringing in Ireland is conducive to my acceptance of others' spiritual beliefs, as Ireland is predominantly Roman Catholic, and has a heritage of legends about spirit beings, such as leprechauns, banshees, elves and fairies.

b. Holy Spirit

Pentecostals' relationship to the invisible Holy Spirit is always subjective and varied. During this research, I have learnt that the Chin's association with the ancestral spirits caused them to view the Holy Spirit in similar terms, having spiritual power and similar roles of blessing and protection. As the Holy Spirit manifests differently in various contexts, there is a sense in which the Holy Spirit is understood to contextualize to the perceptions and felt needs of each people and culture.

However, the Chin's familiarity with the spirits produced familiarity with the Holy Spirit, and this resulted in intense depth in their relationship with the Holy Spirit. I am aware that western Christianity has also had external influences on its perceptions of the Holy Spirit, previously referred to as the "Holy Ghost", which has the connotation of a disembodied, departed spirit. The Chin leaders' reluctance to prohibit strange manifestations during the service in order that they might not hinder the Holy Spirit appears wise to me, even if they are unsure whether the manifestations are influenced by primal religion. The Chin pastors did not want to disrupt the possible benefits, as they believed that the Holy Spirit was moving. If congregants were corrected too readily, they might feel inhibited from participating further. There was evidence that the Holy Spirit was encountering and interacting with Chin

¹²⁹⁷ In Irish Catholicism the child of Prague is a statue that people commonly place outside their homes before a wedding, and which is believed to prevent rain on their special day.

congregations. Because of their openness, the Holy Spirit was welcome, and the Holy Spirit did not miss this opportunity.

c. **The Problem of Syncretism**

I have learnt to be less concerned about syncretism where it arises and I have become more aware of syncretism in western contexts also. As in Jesus' parable of the wheat and tares,¹²⁹⁸ I now think that the most appropriate response is to permit a degree of syncretism in the church service. Subsequently, the fruit makes itself evident.¹²⁹⁹ My own theology has changed in the process of this research: at the outset I considered syncretism to be very negative and the violation of the appropriate boundaries of a "proper" contextualization. I realise that the concept of "appropriate boundaries" is more complex and subjective. I have learnt that I no longer have a right or a responsibility to impose my own perspective of what is appropriate on other cultures. I now regard contextualization and syncretism as related concepts which appear along the same continuum, with multiple opinions regarding what is appropriate.

Ma researched the Kankana-ey people group in the Philippines who had a similar primal background to that of the Chin; she concluded that the AG's access to God's power prevented the risk of syncretism among the Kankana-ey AG, and she considered this to be satisfactory contextualization.¹³⁰⁰ My findings from this research of the Chin are different: I believe that the understanding and spiritual power in their primal religion influenced the Chin's concept of, and access to, spiritual power in Pentecostalism. This was because they sought and discerned spiritual power and converted to Pentecostalism based on their background understanding of power.

¹²⁹⁸ See Matthew 13:24-30.

¹²⁹⁹ See Matthew 7:16-20.

¹³⁰⁰ Julie Ma, *When the Spirit*, 239.

d. **Conversion**

The Chin's concept of group conversion has been challenged, as each individual within the group needs to have a clear understanding and conviction of the religion that they have converted to. I have learnt to appreciate the process that conversion takes, often taking time to develop and mature. Conversion involves a transformation of identity.

e. **Discernment**

This research has made me wary of the subjectivity of discernment, as the Chin claimed that the Holy Spirit instructed them to do strange acts, or to discern between good and bad spirits. I learnt how much power the laity has during services. They often manifest in what is considered to be a strange way, and attribute this to the Holy Spirit. Church leaders have a predicament to discern whether or not it is really the Holy Spirit at work in these situations.

The Bible is often used as a standard for Christianity, and indeed many Chin perceive that having the Bible in their own language enables them to evaluate and challenge excesses in beliefs and practices. However, I realised the degree of subjectivity inherent in biblical interpretation, as the Bible is used to support many different perspectives, including literal re-enactments of biblical accounts. Although education is often perceived separately from spirituality, I am now aware of the impact that education has. Chin leaders reported that some of the illiterate Chin would not understand the Bible, even if they could read it, and were more prone than others to taking the Bible extremely literally.

f. **Healing**

Chin Pentecostals appeared confident in their various interpretations of healing practices, as they performed unusual rituals, such as lying on a sick person (for extended periods) as they prayed for healing. I would expect that cultures which formerly had a primal religion would believe in spiritual causation for illness and healing. Pentecostal practices of prayer for

healing and anointing with oil appear well contextualized for cultures such as the Chin.

Judging unusual healing practices as syncretistic is controversial, as there were concrete acts performed in the Bible, such as Jesus spitting on the clay to heal a blind man.

7.4. Conclusion

My understanding of contextualization has developed and I am no longer aiming for a single clear-cut answer of how a culture should be contextualized. I now realise that theologising is a process, which can meander as it deals with many variables. Having conducted this research, I can now distinguish contextualization and indigenisation more clearly. Even though Myanmar AG were independent from an early stage in their existence, and therefore could be described as indigenous, they were not yet contextualizing their theology to their culture.

Another important finding for me, is that Christianity has always been syncretistic. My conclusion that the Chin's familiarity with the spiritual realm led to sensitivity to the Holy Spirit is therefore not intended judgmentally. In fact, Pentecostalism's growth is attributed to its ability to adapt uniquely to each context, thus speaking "a unique message of religious liberation" to each culture.¹³⁰¹ In conclusion, writing a local contextual theology is a subjective task. However, in order to be relevant, it needs to start in ordinary peoples' culture, addressing current issues including oppression, and adapting biblical and theological material to local thought patterns.¹³⁰²

¹³⁰¹ James R. Goff Jr, *Fields White unto Harvest: Charles F. Parham and the Missionary Origins of Pentecostalism*, (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 1988), 6.

¹³⁰² Bevans, *Models*, Introduction, xx.

Appendix One

Participant Information Sheet

The purpose of this research is to examine how Chin theology developed and so it will explore how your faith relates to your culture and how it is relevant to your everyday life. The research findings will be compiled in a PhD thesis.

The interviews will be recorded and translated into English if applicable. No payment will be given for being interviewed.

If you change your mind about being interviewed, you are free to withdraw your permission with no repercussions. You may be asked for your opinion of the findings before the research is finally submitted and you are free to make comments. You may have access to the final document, if you wish.

Your name will be kept anonymous and what you say will be confidential, unless you do not mind or would specifically like your name to be mentioned. Please let me know your preference:

- Anonymous
- Name specifically mentioned.

Contact information:

Researcher: Denise Ross DXR897@bham.ac.uk

Supervisor: Dr. Andrew Davies a.davies.4@bham.ac.uk

Consent

I, the undersigned give my permission for to be interviewed.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix Two

Denise Ross

27th April 2010

Contract for Interpretation of Interviews

The purpose of this research is to examine how Chin AG have contextualized their theology and so it will explore how faith relates to culture and how it is relevant to everyday life. The goal is to examine the concept of “spirit” primarily and will use songs to examine this. The research findings will be compiled in a PhD thesis. I am a student of Birmingham University, UK.

Criteria for Interpreters

Good writing/speaking ability in Tedim Chin and English
Preferably Tedim/Zomi Chin AG background

Instructions for Interpretation

Please translate my questions from English into Chin and the answers from Chin into English as accurately as possible. Please do not add to or change the answers of the interviewee. Don't try to change or improve the findings. Don't worry about being offensive about westerners or any other issue. Above all, I am aiming for accuracy!

If the questions are unclear or misunderstood, please let me know and I can explain or reword as appropriate. If you would like to contribute any phrases or examples which would clarify the questions, please discuss your suggestions with me before translating into Chin.

The findings from the interviewees are confidential, and need to be anonymous, so it is imperative that you do not discuss the answers with others outside the context of the research.

Contract

Payment will be given on completion of the interviews, at a rate of \$4 per interview. Once the contract is agreed and the interviews begin, it would be favourable to continue until completion of the interviews. If you change your mind or if for any other reason you are no longer able to continue the interpretation, you are free to withdraw, but please inform me promptly. That being the case, I would appreciate your assistance in finding another interpreter to continue the work, and you would be paid for the completed interpretation.

Feel free to email me at any time at DXR897@bham.ac.uk.

Date:

Signed:

Signed: Denise Ross

Appendix Three

Denise Ross, 27th April 2010

Contracts for Translators

The purpose of this research is to examine how Chin AG have contextualized their theology and so it will explore how faith relates to culture and how it is relevant to everyday life. The goal is to examine the concept of “spirit” primarily and will use songs to partially examine this. The research findings will be compiled in a PhD thesis in Birmingham University, UK.

Criteria for Translators

Good writing/speaking ability in Tedim Chin and English
Preferably Tedim/Zomi Chin AG background

Instructions for Translation

Please translate as accurately as possible to the original, because the songs will be analysed theologically. Therefore the wording is essential and the structure of the verse is secondary as the translations will not be reproduced as songs. It is acceptable if some songs are not clearly understood in a western context because the purpose is to understand theology from a Chin context. Translate the songs verse by verse Chin and English underneath, as the thought of the sentences may not be complete, and may disrupt the meaning. The grammar needs to be adequate for me to understand the meaning of the song, but don't disrupt the true meaning for the sake of achieving more accurate grammar.

Sample: Criteria for Song Selection:

- Translate 20 contemporary songs, written by Tedim Chin AG in the Tedim Chin dialect, preferably used in the context of worship in AOG churches currently.
- Songs that are contextualized (relevant to the culture)—use imagery or typical Chin words or mention any aspect of Chin culture are preferable.
- Not songs that are taken directly from scripture.
- The sample needs to represent what is popular in AG churches at the present time. If there are some composers who regularly appear, then more of these songs can be used. However, if there are several different composers, please take a representative sample from each composer.

Further Information:

- Give an indication of how many contemporary songs (90's to present) are written by Tedim Chin.
- Is the song anonymous or accredited to someone? If possible, write the composer's name.
- If possible ascertain what inspired the song?
- Write the date/year that the song was composed.
- Where was the song written (in churches or districts)? Be as specific as possible.
- Note what tune the song uses, e.g. country and western, contemporary pop etc.
- Note any specific musical features used, e.g. what key?
- What is the format of the songs (how many verses? Is there a chorus)?
- Is repetition used?
- What instruments would be used to play this song?
- Please indicate if any special lyrical words are used that are untypical for everyday use, and footnote this if it is impossible to translate into English.

Copyright

- If the composers are alive, please contact him/her and request written permission to translate the songs, please retain the permission for my records. If the composer has already deceased, likewise please contact the closest relatives to request the necessary permission.
- If the song is published in a songbook, please get the consent from the publisher, written if possible
- Please check any copyright laws of songs within the AG movement.
- Do not proceed with translation without the relevant permission

From my part, I will not reproduce the songs or use them in any other way apart from theological analysis purposes, the songs will be kept on file until the research is completed and will be stored securely for 20 years after the work is completed for reference purposes.

Signed:

Denise Ross

Contract for Translation of Songs

Payment will be given on completion of the work, at a rate of \$6 per song.

Once the contract is agreed and work is started, it is important that it is completed. If you change your mind or if for any other reason you are no longer able to continue the translation, you are free to withdraw but please inform me promptly. That being the case, I would appreciate your assistance in finding another translator to continue the work, and you would be paid for the completed work sent to me by email. Please send in Chin and in English.

Please aim to have the 20 songs translated by July 15th, but if you encounter a problem with completion by this deadline, please inform me and the time can be extended. I leave Myanmar on May 3rd 2010, so any I would like to contact you weekly by email to check on the progress of the translation. Feel free to email me at any time at DXR897@bham.ac.uk.

Date:

Signed:

Signed:

Denise Ross

Appendix Four

Translation of Thirty Popular Chin AG Songs

1. With Your Right Hand Na Ziatlam Khuttawh

KEY-E; Composer undisclosed; No. 281 in Galhiam Song Book

Verse 1

His beauty and power beyond description
A hoihna A vangliatna gen zawh hilo,
The most trustworthy Lord
A muanhuai bel Topa
Though time is changing and disintegrating
Hunte kikhelin a kisiat hang,
You never, ever change
Cikmah hun na kikhel ngei kei

Verse 2

Though I may preoccupy with the world, and ignore him
Leitung maingat in Amah thudon kei zong
Still his love is firm
Hong itna kip lai zen
Your care for me is so great
Nau bangin nong kepna lianlua e,
In joy I praise you
Lungdam in Topa kong phat hi.

Chorus

With your right hand
Na ziatlam khut tawh
You guide me beyond the river bank
Kei mah hong makaih a,gun galkhat ah,
Beyond the valley of trouble
Haksatna guampi galkhat dongah
With your staff you lead me in my way
Na ciangkhut in keimah lam ong lah manin,
With unceasing love, you love me
A bei theilo athak itna tawh kei nong it a,
I praise you for your grace so great and so un-wearable
A tul theilo na hehpihna lian kongphat hi.

Verse 3

From the time my life began until now
Na sung ka nuntak a kipan tuaciang dong
You stoop down and feed me
Awn sukin an nong pia,
That I may be bold and un-frightened
Lungsim kha laulo in ka han na 'ng

You carry me on your shoulder
Nong pua hi na liangko tungah

Verse 4

Things I desire from the deepest of my heart
Ka lungsim tawng ka ngaihsut khempeuhte
You give me all without exception
Siit loin nong pia a
Everything you plan for my future
Ka mailam ding nong gelsak khempeuhte
Is good and nothing bad
A sia omlo hoihna bek hi.

2. On Mount Carmel

Carmel Muah Ah

KEY-E; Beat-4/4; Composed by Dam Thawn Lian Kap; No. 56 in Galhiam Song Book

Verse 1

To see God's victory on Mount Carmel
Carmel muah ah Pasion gualzawhnate muding in,
May God bless those who come
Hongpai mite Topa'n thupha hongpia hen,
To see God's victory as Elijah saw
Elijah bang Pasion gualzawhnate muding in,
On Mount Carmel, may God bless those who come
Carmel mualah Topa'n thupha hongpia hen.

Chorus

Let's sing, sing- Hallelujah
Sa un, Hallelujah lasa un
Carmel where God's people get victory
Carmel Pasion mite gualzawhna,
If you're joyful for the victory of the Highest God
Sangpen Topa gualzawhna hangin na lungdam leh,
Rejoice, Hallelu, Hallelujah!
Nuam un Hallelu, Hallelujah!

Verse 2

Re-aflame the fire of revival, Lord
Kha khanlawh na mei bangin hong tawhkik in Topa
We welcome you in this place, Holy Spirit
Khasiangtho aw hihmun ah kongmuak uh hi,
Miracles and your sovereign power for us
Ko a dingin na lamdang leh na vangliatnate,
Let us see, we welcome you in this place
Hong musak in na thupha kongmuak uh hi.

Verse 3

Let's hold our hands together to work for the Lord
Topa ading khut kilen in na semkhawm ciatni,
May God bless you as you're able to do
Na septheih bang Topa'n thupha hongpia hen,
To see God's victory as Elijah saw
Elijah bang Pasion gualzawhnate mu ding in,
To extend the Lord's kingdom, let's partner together
Topa gam zai nading pangciat veni.

3. I've Become God's Child

Pasion Ta Ka Hizo

KEY-E; Beat4/4; Composed by No Pum; No. 8 in Galhiam Song Book

Verse 1

When I hold and believe on Jesus Christ, the Son of God
Pasion ta Zeisu Khazih kapom kaup ciangin,
I get the right to be God's child
Pasion ta cihna thu kangah,
I've become God's child from being child of Satan
Satan ta panin Pasion ta ka hizo,
Because of what the Lord Jesus had suffered in my stead
Kei tangin ka To Zeisu hong thuaksak hangin.

Chorus

I've become God's child, I'll always praise the Lord
Pasion ta ka hizo, Topa kaphat den ding,
Though people of the world may not know like us
Leitung mi'n hong theipih loh hangin,
Song about the precious blood-angels might be unable to sing with us
Vantungmi sak theiloh sisan manpha na la
I'll sing this song till I reach the golden heavenly city
Vantung kham khuam sungah zong hih la kasa ding hi.

Verse 2

If there's no salvation, I'll be the one to be crucified on the cross
Hot khatna omkei leh, sing tung'h thah ding ka hi,
The cross where sinners are crucified
Sing lamteh mimawh sih na'ng hi,
But Jesus died for my sins instead
Ahah hang Zeisu'n kei ma mawhna tangin,
On the mount of death, he was crucified on the cross
Sihna mual Sing lamteh tung'h kikhen khin zo ta.

Verse 3

Though many are my sins, when I believe in Jesus
Ka mawhna a tam hang, Zeisu ka up ciangin
His blood has wiped my sins away
A si in ka mawh sawpsiang zo,

I can't do anything but because of his grace
Kei septheih omlo, hong hehpihna hangin,
Because of his blood I, in spite of my sin, become righteous
Tua sisan hang mawhnei pa midik ka tang ta.

Verse 4

By grace through faith, I have received salvation
Hehpih na'n upna tawh gupna kangah khin zo
I have reached my eternal abode
Tawntung mun ding ka nei zota,
People of the world do not know that wonderful redemption story
Leitung mi'n theilo, A lam dang tatna thu
I have a beautiful song to praise the eternal Lord
A tawntung Topa minphat na'ng langaih ka neita.

4. How Great is the Lord

Topa Bang Zah Na Lian

KEY-E; Beat- 4/4; Composed by Rev. Thawng Za Kim; No. 28 in Galhiam Song Book

Verse 1

When I look up above, I see the big blue heaven
Tunglam ka ettoh leh van dumpi kamu a,
My eyes find the clouds on the mountain top as the bound of heaven
Mualdawn meeilum kaiite Vanmong bang kamu a,
But what I still don't find are so numerous and so unexplainable
A hih hang kamuh nailoh genzawhloh in tam a,
When I ponder these Lord, you are so great
Hih thu ka ngaihsut ciang Topa bangzah na lian,

Chorus

Thus, I praise you Lord
Tua hi a Topa aw kongphat hi,
I'll be praising you as you are
Na hihna bangin hongphat ning,
Everything is in your hand
Na khempuhte nakhut sung,
The beginning and the end
A pat na leh a tawpna,
The powerful hand holds
Vanglian khut in len,
When I ponder these Lord, you are so great!
Hih thu kangaih sut ciang Topa bangzah na lian.

Verse 2

You hang the world and put it on nothing
Hih leitung bangmah lo tungah na kaisak hi,
The sun during the day and the moon and stars shining at night
Sun-in ni zan-in kha aksi te tangsak hi,
In Season, they all turn around in orderly manner
A mau te a hun zui in ki hei diamdiam uh a,
When I ponder these Lord, you are so great!

Hih thu ka ngaihsut ciang Topa bangzah na lian.

Verse 3

Under the heaven you are present everywhere
Vantung vannuai mun khempeuh ah nang na om hi,
Even under the deep sea you infiltrate everywhere
Tui pi thuksung nangawn ah zong na ki zel hi,
Slowly, you let me see things that you put in your word
Na thusung nangawn ah zong na ki zel hi,
When I ponder these Lord, you are so great!
Hih thusung na koihsate dam dam nong musak hi.

5. The Lord's People, the Lord's Possessions

Topa Mite Topa Aa Te

KEY-E; Beat-4/4; Composed by Dam Thawn Lian Kap; No. 54 in Galhiam Song Book

Refrain

The Lord's people, the Lord's possessions
Topa mite, Topa ate, leipian mapek a kiteel sate,
Chosen before the creation of the earth x 2
Topa mite, Topa ate, leipian mapek a kiteel sate,

Verse 1

Once I was so far away though
Nidangin gamlapi ah ka omngei hangin,
Now I reach and been with God by the blood of Jesus
Tu'n Zeisu sisan hangin Pasion kiang tungzo,
By the cross of Jesus, I am no longer a stranger
Zeisu Singlam teh hangin khualmi zong hilo,
I've become a true member of God's family
Pasion innkuanpiah khat ka hizo.

Verse 2

Breathe in and always pray for your spirit
Na kha a ding huihdik in thungen tawntungin,
Read the Bible that is your spiritual food
Na kha a ding an ahi Lai Siangtho sim in,
Strengthen your spiritual power, serve the Lord
Na kha a ding thasan in Topa 'nasem in,
That is the Christian way of life
Tua in Christian nuntak na ai ve.

Verse 3

Give thanks, so as receive spiritual blessings
Kha thupha ngah nading in, hehpiah phatnate
Be benevolent so as spiritual blessings may flow
Kha thupha luan nading in, thupha bawlnate,
Jump and dance so as spiritual freedom may realize
Kha sung suahtak na dingin lamna diannate
These are like medicine that heal

Tua te 'n damna zatui bang ai ve.

6. Turn Your Way Back

Sul Hong Hei Vaw

KEY-E; 4/4; Composed by Rev Thawng Za Kim in 1992; No 60 in Galhiam Song Book

Verse 1

God's kingdom and his righteousness, God's word and his will
Pasian gamleh dikna Pasian thu leh deihna,
Let's think about it seriously
Thupitak ngaihsun dih ni,
Rather than worldly things, other things, and issues
Leitung nate sangin, thudang dangte sangin,
If you seek it first, he'll provide those things too
Zong masa zaw le cin, Tua nate tawh hongpia khawm ding hi.

Chorus

Turn your way back brethren
Sul honghei vaw sanggam aw,
Let us meet and share God's spiritual food together
Sianmang sinthu anbang kumkhawm in ah,
And seek his face
Amai zong dihni,
Our worries for the rising commodity prices
Van mantam a, ih lungkhamnate,
Will melt down by the victory brought by Jesus
Zesiu zawhna sungah hong tuisuak ding hi,
The heavenly dew will be flowing down
Van daitui te hongluang ding hi.

Verse 2

If we indulge in his word and in his Spirit
A thusung kibual leng, A kha sung kibual leng,
Contented in his word
A ma thu ah lungkim leng,
He knows what we desire, he has what we need
Ih lunggulhnate thei, ih tangsap nate nei,
He is more than willing to give what we think
Ih ngaihsut nasangin hongpia nuam zaw
If we trust in him
Amah muangpeuh leng.

Verse 3

When we face hardship, when troubles come
Haksat na hongtun ciang lungkhamna hongtun ciang,
When we feel hungry and thirsty
Gilkial dangtak ih thuak ciang,
Let's rather seek his face and his kind favor
Pasian mai zong zaw ni, Pasian mai en zaw ni,
Rather than trusting in man,

Miding te muan dingsang,
To trust in the King Jesus is much better
Zeisu Kumpi muah ding hoih zaw hi.

Verse 4

Let's turn back with humility from our wickedness
Ih gitlohna pan in ih lungsim niamkhiat in,
Let us approach our Lord
Ih Topa kiang zuan dih ni,
Let's open up our hearts and confess our sins
Ih lungsim sungkhia in, ih mawhna pulak ni,
Then he'll bless and heal our land
Tua hi leh i gamsung thupha hongpia'n hong damsak ding hi.

7. The Unceasing Grace

A Bei Theilo Hehpih Na

KEY-G; Composed by Rev. Thawng Za Kiim in 1988; No.14 in Galhiam Song Book

Verse 1

The unceasing grace and mercy continue forever
A bei thei lo hehpihna leh, itna in ki zom den a,
It's new like the sun rising in the morning without fail
Zing nisuak bangin thakzel a, ni a suah pelmawh bang hi,

Chorus

His firm mercy and grace is shed upon humankind
Itna kip leh hehpihna in, mihing tate tungah,
Because of your miracles, we praise you Lord
Nabawl lamdang nate hangin, Topa nang kongphat uh hi,
You raise us up from the dust, out of the dirt
Leivui pan in nong lamto a ninphual pan in nong domto hi,
You turn my life back with honor and fame
Pahtawina leh minthanna tawh ka nunna nong heisak hi.

Verse 2

You are good, you are good
Nang na hoih hi, nang na hoih hi,
Your love is firm always
Na itna kip tawntung hi,
You are worthy, you are worthy
Na kilawm hi, na kilawm hi,
You are worthy to be praised
Phat dingin na kilawm hi.

Verse 3

You are great, you are faithful
Nang na lian hi, Na thuman hi,
No one is like you
Nang tawh kibang omlo hi,

For the wonderful things you have shown
Nong lahsa thu lamdangte hang,
I cannot stay silent
Ka dai ommawk thei hi.

8. The Heavenly Wealth is Mine

Van Hauhna Kei Aa Hi Zo

KEY-G; Composer undisclosed; No. 96 in Galhiam Song Book

Verse 1

I have a home in heaven that is shining brighter than the sun
Vantungah innkhat nei-ing ni sangin taang zaw hiveh,
I'll get there some day
Khatvei ciang ka tungding,
Then my time of sojourn will end
Tua ciang bel ka khual zin hun beiding a,
And I'll take rest
TawInga ta ning,
O I'll receive my reward on that day
Aw tua niciang van ah thaman sang ning.

Chorus

The heavenly wealth is mine, do I still need to ask others?
Van hauhna kei a hizo, a dang bang kangen nawn diam?
I've become God's child, because of my Savior Jesus
Pasian ta tu'n ka hizo, ka honpa Zeisu hang,
Though I am nothing on the earth, though others do not know my wealth
Lei ah ka hih thilthial hang, mite'n ka hauh lam thei lo,
O! I am rich because of my Savior
Aw ka Honpa hang mi haupi ka hita.

Verse 2

On the day crowns are awarded, I'll no longer remember this world
Lukhu a kihawm niciang, hih leitung phawknawn kei ning
How much joy will that be
Bangzah a nuamzen diam,
My head will be dazzling and I'll no longer remember the earthly life
Ka lutung te zialzial ding, leinunna phawk nawnkei ning
O! my face will be dazzling on that day
Aw tua ni ciang kamai nibang tang ding.

Verse 3

I do wish everyone knows what my hope is,
Ka lametna mikim in hong theihpih leh ut singmaw,
That I become God's son
Pasian ta ka suahna,
I feel proud because of my Savior, I become one of the heavenly beings
Ka Honpa kisa thei ing, van mite khat ka hizo,
O! I will be shining as a star on that day
Aw tua niciang aksi bang ka tang ding.

9. Full Salvation

Gupna Bukim

KEY-E; 4/4; Composed by Rev. Thawng Za Kim in 1987. No.4 at Galhiam Song Book

Verse 1

Jehovah God who provides the full salvation

Gupna bukim hongpia Jehovah Pasian,

Jehovah Tsidkenu covers me with righteousness

Dikna tawh hongtuam Jehovah Tsidkenu,

Jehovah Shammah is with me always

Hong ompih tawntung Jehovah shamah

Jehovah Shalom is my peace

Lungnopa Jehovah Shalom

Chorus

He makes me rich,

Hong hausak hi,

Jehovah Jireh-- the one providing all my needs

kasapna teng hongsik Jehovah Jireh,

Jehovah Rapha—the one who heals

Hong damsak Pasian Jehovah Rapha,

Jehovah Ra-ah—who guides me into the way of truth for his name sake

Ama min ading thuman lampi ah hongkha Jehovah Ra-ah

Jehovah Nissi—who gives me victory

Gualzawhna hongpia ka Topa Jehovah Nissi.

Verse 2

If the Lord says who you are, then you are

Topa 'n hiteh hongcih leh hipah hiteh,

If the Lord says you get it, then you get it

Topa 'n neiteh hongcih leh a nei hiteh,

If the Lord says you can make it, then you can

Topa 'n bawlthei hong cih leh hipah hi,

All power has been given you

Vangliatna khempeuh hongpia zo.

Verse 3

If the Lord says you are healed, then you are

Topa 'n damteh hongcih leh a dam hiteh,

If the Lord says you are rich, then you are

Topa 'n hauteh hongcih leh a hau hi teh,

He saves you from the fear of death and sickness

Sihding natding launa pan honggum hi,

He has suffered on the cross for you

Singlamteh tung 'h hong thuaksak zo.

10. The Lord is Our Victory

Topa In Eite Zawhna

KEY:E; 4/4; Composed by Cinno; No. 152 in Galhiam Song Book

Verse 1

The Lord has been my shield and He's my safe fortress now

Topa ka kidalna lum leh, ka munkip muanhuai nahi ta
When I walk with him
Amah tawh ton leng
My road becomes better than ever
Ka lampi nuam semsem ta.
His hand is holding me
Ama khut in kei hong len a,
With full safety, he keeps me ever
Muanhuai takin kei hong kem ta
The Lord is our victory
Topa in eite zawhna ahi.

Chorus

As the bird which is set free from the fowler's snare
Thang siahte thangzak pan in aki khahkhia vasa bangin,
I am able to dance and jump, praising the Lord's name
Lamin diangin Topa min ka phat theita.
All my sins have been forgiven
Ka mawhna teng hong maisak,
All my sicknesses have been made whole
Ka natna teng zong hong dam sak,
I am now able to stay comfortably
Nuam hihial ka om thei ta,
In the sight of my loving Lord
Hong it Topa mai-ah.

Verse 2

Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death
Sihna lim guampi sung na ngawn,
I will fear no evil
Ka nawkhang ka lau kei dinghy,
You rod and your staff they assure me
Na molhtum leh na ciangkhut in hong lung muang sak.
In front of my enemies
Ka galte omna mai-ah
You lay the table and prepare my food
Sabuai phah in an hong luita
The Lord is our victory
Topa in eite zawhna ahi.

11. I am Flying to You

Hong Leeng In Ee

Key – G; 4/4; No. 181 in Galhiam Song Book

Verse 1

Lifted up from the dust
Leivui panin hong lamto
Taken out of the dirt
Niin phual panin hong domto
I am now in the higher plane

A sangna lam ka tungto
You lifted up my life, who's just a naïve one
Lungmawl kei ka nuntakna hong lamto
The weakest one like me
A zawnkhaal pen kei bang lel
A naïve one like me
A lungmawl pen kei bang lel
You lifted me up for your name's sake
Na min aa ding nong lamto
God, amidst my friend, I call your name.
Gual lai-ah Sian aw na minpha ka lo

Chorus

I'm flying to you Lord Jesus
Hong leenging e Sianmang Zeisu
In your bosom and abode, I love to rest
Na zalna leh na angliim ngai ing ee
Let me abide like a dove
Khuava bang hong khawl sak aw

Verse 2

Knowing not how to write
Laikawi khat zong thei lote
Knowing not how to read
Laipai khat zong nei lote
Ignorant, burdened, and hopeless we are
Lungmawl genthei mangbangte
You teach us, feed us like a baby in cradle
Luainau bang hong muamin hong pantah a
The ones who knew not how to eat
An zong nethei nai lote
The ones who knew not how to wear
Puan zong silh thei nai lote
Who were enemies and warlike
Gal leh sa bang melmate
God let the healing water of his love flow
Sianin hong itna damtui hong luan ta

Verse 3

Born as brothers and sisters from one mother
Tunsung khat pan laizomte
Being foe of love and ignorant
Itna melma lungmawlte
Shall we ever obtain God's merciful heart?
Suih lungdawn bang ih tuak diam?
The Bible we learn from, make us wise
Sin Lai Siangtho va bang pilding hongsiam
Come to us, fly to us (repitition)
Hong leeng aw, hong leeng aw
Lord Jesus, come to us

Sianmang Zeisu hong leeng aw
Except to you where shall I go?
Nang kiang lo koi ka pai diam?
Can I ever close my eyes without praising your name?
Na min phatlo maimit ka sing thei diam?

12. Lord, I Rejoice

Topa Aw Ka Lungdam Hi

Key-G; 4/4; No. 16 in Galhiam Song Book

Verse 1

God who created the heaven and the earth
Van le lei piangsak Pasian
God who created the sun and the moon
Ni leh kha piangsak Pasian
My God who created my life
Ka nunna a hong bawl ka Pasian
You give us sunshine and the rain
Ni taang le guahtui hong pia
And let us reap following the rainy season
Tuuk ciangin an hong lasak
My God, I praise your glory
Na vangliatna kongphat hi ka Pasian

Chorus

O Lord, I'm rejoicing
Topa aw ka lungdam hi
You make us glad each day
Nisim nong lungdam sak hi
I'll always praise your name as long as I live
Ka hin lai teng namin ka phat den ding
I'll praise you with musical instruments
Tumging tawh nang kong phat ding
I'll praise you by dancing
Lamna tawh nang kong phat ding
Hallelujah, may your name be glorified
Hallelujah, na min thang den ta hen

Today, I'm being given good and happy time
Tu ni-in kei a ding hunhoih hun nuam hong ki pia
I'll give thanks to the Lord
Topa 'tung 'h lungdamna kako ding,
I'll give a sacrifice of thanksgiving
Lungdamkoh biakna pia in
I'll adore the Lord
Topa ka pahtawi ding hi
I'll praise his name with all my strengths
Ka hatna teng tawh a min kaphat ding hi

Sometimes no food to eat

Khat veivei nek ding nei lo
Sometimes no clothes to wear
Khat veivei silhding nei lo
But I still remember God's goodness
A hi zong Topa hoihna ka phawk ding hi
Birds that fly in the sky and lilies that blossom in the valley
Van a leng vasate leh gamlak unok pakte in
Strengthen my life every day
Ka nunna nisim-in tha hong dim zel

13. It Is Joyful to Walk with God

Topa Tawh Tonkhawm Leng Nuamei
Key – E; 4/4; No. 176 in Galhiam Song Book

Verse 1

It's joyful to walk with God
Topa tawh ton khawm leng nuam ei
Problems are put underneath
Buaina ki nuaisiah ta
Problems have been overcome forever
Buaina tungah tawn tung ki gualzo hi
It's not that there is no difficulty
Haksatna omlo hilo a
Difficulties can be defeated
Haksatna kizo thei
As one is aware of the presence of the Lord
Topa hong ompihna kitel peuh leng

Chorus

Oh I'm rejoicing in my Lord
Aw nuamsing ka Topa sungah
I'll sing song of His grace
Hong hehpihna la saning
I'll always have assurance in His love
Hong itna sung tawntung ka lungmuang hi
It's joyful to walk with Him
Amah tawh tonkhawm leng nuamei
More joyous to converse with Him
Holim khawm leng nuam zaw lai
I'm rejoicing in the Lord every day
Topa sungah nisim-in nuam kasa

Verse 2

Lord, if I have conversation with you
Topa nang tawh holim khawm leng
I can hear your voice
Nong hona aw za ing
I read your Words and meditate them ever and ever
Na kammalte sim-in lung ngaingai leng
Though eyes cannot see you

Mit-tawh Na kimuh theiloh hang
Though hands cannot touch you
Na kilawn theihloh hang
I know and feel your touching hand
Kei nong lawn lam Nong sukkhak lam ka thei

Verse 3

Praising God by dancing and jumping
Laam-in diangin Topa phat in
If one plunges into the Spirit with him
Kha sung kibual khawmleng
He makes the Lord's presence obvious
Topa hong ompihna langsak hi
The restricted ones by freeing
Suakta lote suahtakna tawh
The sick ones by healing
Damlote damna tawh
These signify the Lord's presence with us
Topa hongom pihna hong lang sak hi

14. The Lord's Power Doesn't Decline

Topa' Vaangkiam Lo

Key-G; 4/4; No.196 in Galhiam Song Book

Verse 1

The earthly life, sometimes joyful
Leitung nuntakna khat vei leh nopna
Sometimes like being in a desert
Khatvei leh sehnel gam bang
Helpless and hopeless, sickly and weakling
Cimawh bei dongin damlo zawngkhal-in
Sometimes feel like having lost hope
Khat veivei lamet bei ki sa

Chorus

The Lord's power doesn't decline, and doesn't change
Topa vang kiamlo kikhel lo
His goodness doesn't lessen nor change
A hoihna kiamlo ki khel lo
His love's like the rising sun in the morning
Hong itna zing nisuak bang hi
The Lord's power isn't restricted
Topa hihtheina ki ciangtan lo

Verse 2

While Jesus walked in the land of Galilee
Galile gamah Zeisu hong vak lai
Many of the sick were healed
Damlo tampi damsak hi
The dead were raised, lepers were cleansed

Misi thosak hi, miphak damsak hi
All kinds of diseases were made whole
Natna nakimte damask hi

Verse 3

Joy is availed for the distressed
Lungim mi aa ding lungdamna om hi
What is troubling your heart?
Bangin hong lunggim sak hiam?
Look, there's a source of blessings before you!
En in, na mai-ah thupha naak om hi
It's yours as much as you dare to trust
Na up na muan ngam zah nang aa

15. If We Dip Together in the Spirit

Kha Sungah Bual Khawm Leng

Key- E; 4/4; No. 46 in Galhiam Song Book

Verse 1

O! It is so amazing for me, who is weak and poor
Lamdang lua aw lamdang lua sa'ng liangvai kei aa dingin
Sorrowful tears have been wiped away, filled only with happiness
Dahna khitui hong nulsiang ta nuamna vive dim ta
As one knows more about his love, joyful tears start to flow
Hong itna tel semsem leng nuamna khitui hong luang
I possess joy that is more precious than worldly wealth
Leitung hauhna sang manpha zaw nopna kei aa hi ta

Chorus

O! Jesus, his Spirit comes down, Jesus
Aw Zeisu a Khasiangtho hongleng Zeisu
When he indwells a family
Innkuan sung hongom ciang
Mum and dad sing together
Nu leh Pa'n zong lasakhawm ta
The children start dancing
Tate zong honglam ta
When our family sings together
Ih innkuan in lasa khawmleng
There is no longer any problem
Buaina lah om nawn lo

No more argument and conflict, full of happiness only

Kitot kiseelna om nawnlo, nuamna vive dimta

Things get better between the couple as they dip together in the Spirit

Nu Pa kalzong hongnuam semsem, Kha sungah bualkhawm leng

They are going to church together, leading their children and grand children

Tu leh tate masuan-in biakinn lam pa khawm ta

As the wedding anniversary grows, sweet heart's face gets more beautiful than ever

Kiteen kum lah hong tam semsem, ngaih meel lah hoih sem sem

The heavenly Holy Spirit comes down to waken the land of Myanmar
Thangvan lau Khasiang tho hong leng Kawlgam hong hong phong dingin
The hands which is full of power holds the young people with love
Vangliatna dim itna khut tawh tuailai teng hongman ta
Watch those young people, they are dancing now in the church!
Enven hialai khangnote biakinn-ah hong laam ta
They are our children, who were lost some time before
Hunkhat lai a a mangthangsa ih tate ai ve leh

16. My Soul Rejoices Wherever You Are
Nang Omna Peuh Ka Hha'n Nuamsa

Verse 1

Lord, wherever your presence is,
Topa nang om na peuh ah,
My soul rejoices in it
Kei ma kha in nuam a sa
There is no distress, no anxiety in me
Vul in kun kun, kha kun cih om lo hi
Like a fresh flower in the morning dew,
Zing dai nom paak palh bang in,
I have a delighted smile
Lung tai et lawm nuih mai in
My soul rejoices in everywhere you are
Nang om na peuh ka kha in nuam sa hi

Chorus

My soul rejoices in everywhere you are
Nang om na peuh ka kha in nuam sa hi
Throughout day and night
Sun leh zan a tawn tung in
For you are my refuge
Kei kha muan na nang na hi

Verse 2

Lord, wherever your presence is, you are my best friend
Topa nang om na peuh ah, Kei'an lawm hoih na hi hi
In you alone I have a shelter
Nang sung lo buang buk na ding om lo hi
You are my desire in the day, my dream in the night
Sun kim ka lung gulh pen nang, Zan ciang in zong ka zalmang
My soul rejoices in everywhere you are
Nang om na peuh ka kha in nuam sa hi.

Verse 3

Lord, wherever your presence is, there is tranquility in life
Topa nang om na peuh ah, om hi lungnop suahtak na
No hatred, no jealousy and no dispute

Huatna enna kitotna om lo hi
I get favor everywhere I go, satisfaction in every work
Hei na peuh ah mai tai na, sepna peuh ah lungkimna
My soul rejoices in everywhere you are
Nang om na peuh ka kha in nuam sa hi

17. I Trust in You, O Lord

Topa Aw Kong Muang Hi

Verse 1

I trust in you O Lord, I trust in you alone
Topa aw, kong muang hi, Nang mah bek kong muang hi
My life in the world has no security
Hih lei tungnuntak na lung muan om thei lo pi
There are lies and deceits enticing me
Up theih muan theih ding in lungsim hemlam tam si
I chose to trust in you alone while on earth
Hih leitung ka nun sung Topa bek kong muang hi

Chorus

Protect me and shield me
Kei hong sung in, kei hong liah in,
My Lord and my rock
Ka honpa aw, ka suangpi aw,
Secure and hide me under your wings
Bit tak in na kha liim hong seel aw
To the place of safety
Lungmuan na huang sung ah,
To the shadow of rest
Tawldam na liim sungah
Hold my hand and lead me
Hong len in, hong kha in
That I may take rest safely in your arms
Na ang sung ah, lung muang tak in, hong khawl sak aw,

Verse 2

Trusting the Lord is better than trusting human beings
Mite muan ding sang in, Topa muan hoih zaw hi
He makes straight the paths of those who trust in him
A muang mite' lampi Topan hu in kem hi
He neither leaves us nor forsakes us
Hong paisan ngei lo hi, hong nusia ngei lo hi
I chose to trust in you alone while on earth
Hih leitung ka nun sung, Topa bek kong muang hi

Verse 3

He neither misunderstands us nor misjudges us
Hong thei khial ngei lo hi, hong tel khial ngei lo hi
In him, there is answer to every question
A mah muan na sung ah, dotna khempueh veng hi

He neither fails us nor mistreats us
Hong en khial ngei lo hi, hongho khial ngei lo hi
I chose to trust in you alone while on earth
Hih leitung ka nun sung, Topa bek kong muang hi

18. O! What A Great and Wonderful Love!

Aw A Lamdang It Na Lian

Key D; 4/4; Composed by Thawng Za Kim; No.40 in Gal Hiam Song Book

Verse 1

Mi mawh ka hih laitak in, galte ka hih laitak in,
While I was a sinner, while I was an enemy,
A sipha tawh honglei in hongdom sang,
With his precious blood, he redeemed and lifted me high,
Ka vangik teng hongzang ka lungdam na hong kidang,
My burden lightened and I got a different joy,
Aw a lamdang itna lian kei sung ah.
O! What a great and wonderful love within me.

Chorus

Aw a lamdang itna lian, Aw a lamdang itna lian,
O! What a great and wonderful love x2
Calvary pan in hong luang Halelujah praise the Lord,
Flowing down from Calvary, Hallelujah, praise the Lord!
I lungdamna taangthu, ih gualzawhna sut dih ni,
Our joyous story, let's recite our victory,
Aw a lamdang itna lian kei sungah.
O! What a great and wonderful love within me.

Verse 2

Ka mawhna a tam hangin, ka khialh na a tam hang in,
Though my sins are numerous, my transgressions so great,
Tua te sangin hong hehpih na lian zaw lai,
His grace is bigger still than all of these,
Hih thu mah khumpen sang, hih thu mahmah ngaihpen sang,
I find this story the sweetest, this story itself the best one,
A khumpen pen khuai zu sangin khum zaw lai.
It's even sweeter than the sweetest honey.

Verse 3

Ka lamet na kip sem sem, ka lungmuanna kho sem sem,
My hope getting more firm, my assurances getting more stabilized,
Zeisu hoihna tawh nisim in kei hong zem,
Every day I am adorned with the goodness of Jesus,
Hih thu ka theih nungsang upna tawh kasan nungsang,
Ever since I've known this and accept it by faith,
Kei sungah hongdim sem sem ka tel sem sem.
I am getting more filled up and my understanding too keeps on growing.

Verse 4

Pasian minthang sem sem hen, Pasian gam zaisem sem hen,
May the name of God be more glorified, may his kingdom grow bigger
Vantung nopna mikim sungah hong tung hen,
May the peace of heaven fill everybody,
Tua a lamdang lungnopna, ih gual zawhna la ngaihpen,
That wonderful peace, that sweetest, victorious song of ours
Leitung mimal tungah hong kizeel ta hen.
May it overflow upon every people all over the world.

19. Dip Into the Lake of Bethesda

Bethsaida Bual Ah Kidiah In

Key-E; Composed by Do Khup; No.210 in Gal Hiam Song Book

Verse 1

Betsaida bual kilok lai,
While the lake of Bethesda is stirring,
Kha Siangtho huih a nun lai,
While the wind of the Holy Spirit is blowing,
A hunlap aa kidiah te 'n,
Those who dip in time,
Damna ngah damna ngah hi.
They are healed, getting whole.

Chorus

Lap lai teh, aw lap lai teh,
You still have time, O! There's still time
Betsaida bual kilok lai;
The lake of Bethesda is still stirring,
Ki diah in tun kidiah in,
Dip, you dip in now,
Paulap zongzong nawn ke 'n aw.
No longer seek any excuse.

Verse 2

Na nunna lungmuang ken aw,
Don't feel secure about your life,
Paal lunte zong tual kia thei,
Even the very young can meet their demise,
Na laukha lailung muang ding,
To feel safe and secure in your spirit,
Cii bang teel zekai ke 'n aw.
Don't procrastinate as if choosing seeds.

20. Enjoy Sweet Communion

Holim Nuam Ee

Key-E; Composed by Thawng Kim; No.208 in Gal Hiam Song

Verse 1

Kong piak vantung nopna, Na ngahsa suahtakna,

The heavenly peace I give, the freedom you've been enjoying,
Thei lo in tu ciang na puuk zeel maw,
You don't know it but still falling down often?
Pa' kiang kong thuum sak hi;
To the Father he pleads for you,
An ngawlin thu ka ngen zeel, Itna bek in leitung zawhna.
I fast and pray often, only love overcomes the world,

Chorus

Holim nuam ee, holim nuam ee,
Enjoying sweet communion, a sweet communion,
Van a Kha Siangtho nong kumsuk teh;
When the Spirit from heaven comes down,
Holim nuam ee, holim nuam ee,
Enjoying sweet communion, a sweet communion,
Kha Siangtho aw ka sung hong teeng den aw.
Holy Spirit, dwell in me always.

Verse 2

Hauhna kong piak sa hi, Zong un na mu ding hi;
I've given you my wealth, search and you'll find it,
Lungnopna pilna kong piak sa hi,
I've given you joy and wisdom,
Dawi in hong kheem zeel maw;
Does the devil tempt you some time?
Lau in lungkia maw, Na san sa upna tawh zo in.
Are you frightened and discouraged? Overcome it by the faith you've got.

Verse 3

Lungkia nawn kei ning, Lung kia nawn kei ning;
I'll no longer be discouraged, no longer be discouraged,
Suakta zo ka lungdamna khang semsem,
Being freed, my joy keeps on rising,
Um lah nawn kei ning
No longer dare to unbelieve,
Nung kik nawn lo ding, Upna leh itna in zawh na.
I'll not go back, but overcome it by trust and love.

21. Let's Be Budded

Hong Paalsak Aw

Key:E; Composed by Thawng Za Kim; No. 279 in Gal Hiam Song Book

Verse 1

Topa na gam le na min ading hong tawi in,
Lord, hold us up for the sake of your name and kingdom,
Namte tungah hong tawisang in,
Hold us high above the nations
Zogam le zomite hong laamto in,
Raise up the Zomis and their land

Na min ading hong laamto in.
Raise us high for your name's sake.

Chorus

Israel mite napi bangin
As you lead the Israelites,
Pa aw ka nuntakna hongpi aw,
Father, lead my life,
Sehnel gam Rose paak bang in,
Like the budding rose in the desert,
Ka nuntak lai ni,
As my days of life lasts,
Hong paalsak aw, hong paalsak aw
Make me bud, Oh, make me bud.

Verse 2

Zogam lei aw, khanglo in thanan in hat in,
Wake up, land of Zomi, be strengthened,
Kumthak nino hongsuak en in,
Behold! The New Year day is dawning,
Gamkeu gawtaak hong niim ding,
The dried and weary land will be dim,
Singcin hong paal ding
Every tree will be blooming,
Upna khuam bang khosak ta in.
Let your faith be as firm as a post.

Verse 3

Bah le gui a om khut te hong laamto in,
Let the tired and weary hands be lifted up,
Azaw khut te hong khauhsak in
Strengthen the weary hands,
Muvanlai tha hong guan in, na nasem dingin,
Make us strong like the eagle to serve you,
Kawlgam sung le leimong dong in.
In Myanmar and even to the end of the world.

22. I Will Answer When He Calls Me

Hongsap Ciang Ka Dawng Ding

Key-E; Composed by Thawng Za Kim; No.62 in Gal Hiam Song Book

Verse 1

Itna tawh kei hong beel a hih man in,
Since he draws near me with love,
A mah ka honkhia ding hi,
I will deliver him;
A mah in kamin thei a hih man in,
Since he knows my name,
Munsang na ah ka koih ding hi.

I will bring him to a high place.

Chorus

A man kei hong sap ciang ka dawng ding a,
I will answer him when he calls me,
Haksat na sungah nang kong ompih ding hi,
I will be with him when he is in trouble,
A mah honkhia in ka pahtawi ding a,
I will deliver him and honor him,
Nuntak sau tawh nang kong lungkimsak ding hi.
I will give him a long and contented life.

Verse 2

Nang tungah siatna na inn ah gimna,
Destruction to you and trouble to your family
Hong tungsak ngei lo ding hi,
I will never let them come,
Na mai ah tulkhat, na kiim ah tulsawm,
One thousand in front of you, ten thousand near you,
Hong puk hangin na lau kei ding hi.
They may fall down but you'll be unafraid.

Verse 3

Sun a thaltang leeng, zan a lauhuai na,
The flying arrows in at noon, terror at night,
Hongsu khasak loding hi,
Will not touch you,
Topa' liim sungah naling kei ding hi.
You'll be unshaken under the Lord's shade,
Vantung mi te'n nang hong cing ding hi.
The angels will protect you.

23. Feast of the Lamb

Tuuno Pawipi

Key-G; Composer undisclosed; No.10 in Gal Hiam Song Book

Verse 1

Katen nading innpinuam, upna tawh gal et in,
By faith I look at the mansion yonder, where I'll dwell,
Nunna guntui luang sial sial, huih dam zong nung hiau hiau,
River of life softly flowing, the wind gently breezing,
Vantung misiang tho te'n phatna lasa ziah ziah,
Heavenly saints joyously tune songs of praise,
Ka ten nading innpi nuam, in kei hong ngak gige.
The pleasing mansion I'm to dwell is waiting for me.

Chorus

Honpa'n tokhom tungpan ngak lah in hong en en,
The Savior sits on the throne, looking and waiting eagerly,

Hua gun gal pek pek ah, kham khuapi nuam sungah,
In that pleasing golden city, located so far away,
Phat na lasa khawm ding, Tuu no pawipi sungah.
We'll sing songs of praise at the Lambs' feast.

Verse 2

Ka kha bek hong gum hi lo, Ka pumpi zong hong gum,
He saves not only my spirit but also my physical body.
Hih leitung gimna lianpi hongthuaksak ngei lo ding,
He will not let us suffer the earth's great tribulation,
Van inn nuam ka ciah ciang hong hon Topa Zeisu'n
When I go to my heavenly home, my Savior and Lord Jesus,
A hong dawnding a maw, Lung dam khut ki len ding.
Is there waiting for me to greet and shake hands joyfully.

Verse 3

Hih leitung pan vantung ah ka lentoh ni ciangin,
On the day I fly from the earth up to heaven,
Hong honpa vangliat na tawh, mitphiat kal ka leng ding
By the power of the Saviour, I'll fly at the twinkling of the eye,
Leitung mangpha ciding, Aw nuam zen si'n the maw,
Bidding the earth farewell, O! it would be so joyous.
Hallelu, Hallelujah ci'n phat na la sa sa ding.
Shouting Hallelu, Hallelujah, and we'll sing songs of praise.

24. Good Time, Pleasing Time

Hunhoih Hun Nuam

Key-E; 4/4; Composed by Thawng Za Kim, No.12 in Gal Hiam Song Book

Verse 1

Hun hoih hun nuam hong musak, hun kilawm hong ngahsak,
Experiencing good time, pleasing time, and enjoying worthy time,
Hun manpha sung'h hong tonpih ka To,
The Lord walks with me during those precious times,
Zum leh hiam panin hong hem, lau huai na pan hong keem,
He removes spears and swords away from me, guarding me from
danger,
Cidam takin a minpha ka lo
I can in good health call forth his precious name.

Chorus

Lungdam si'ng hih hunpha sungah, ka Topa'n lam hong pi,
I am rejoicing in this precious time, my Lord leads me on the way,
Na sipha tawh hong naisak in,
By your blood draw me near,
Nang om napeuh lungnopna ka nun na'n vang nei,
There's joy where ever you are, my life gets power,
Nong itna keisungah, mei bangin lum den hen
May your love be always warm like a fire in me,

Hallelujah a minthang hen.
Hallelujah, his name be exalted.

Verse 2

Silh leh ten an leh tui, nisim hongsik hongvak,
Clothes and pants, food and drinks provided every day,
A bei theilo hehpihna thupha,
The never ceasing grace,
Ka kha ading zong hong lui, Thu leh la tawh hong vak
Also provide for my spirit, entertaining me with the Word and with songs,
Hi ci bangin hong luang a thupha.
His blessings flowing down like this.
Lono hing silsial bangin, unok paak palh bangin,
Like the green fresh grass, like the budding lilies,
Ka nuntak na hong nosuak sak zel,
My life has been renewed again,
Pahtawi dingin kilawm pen phat dingin zong hoihpen,
Most worthy to be adored, most beautiful to be praised,
Ka khatha hong dim zel, hong dim zel.
My spiritual strength is full now and then.

25. Jehovah God

Jehovah Pasion

Key-G; Composed by Dam Thawn Lian Kap (Kappu); No.58 in Gal Hiam Song Book

Verse 1

Jehovah Shalom nopna Pasion ka up kasan a kipan,
Ever since I believed and accepted Jehovah Shalom, the God of peace,
Telzawh loh lungnopna nei tang,
I got joy that's beyond comprehension,
Nisim hih leitung nunna sungah, nopna dahna kathuak zong,
Every day in this earthly life, whether coming through gladness or sadness,
Ka nopna Jehovah Shalom.
Jehovah Shalom is my peace.

Chorus

Aw nuam si'ng Topa tung ah x 2
Oh! I'm rejoicing in the Lord x 2
Lungdamna lathak Topa kongsak ding,
I'll sing to the Lord new songs of joy,
Jesu tawh kaki mu ta, A hoihna ka telsiang ta,
I've met now with Jesus, I've understood clearly his goodness,
Kei a ding ka bangkim Jehovah Pasion.
My all in all is Jehovah God.

Verse 2

Ka mawhna khempeuh hongmaisak Pa,
The One who forgives all of my sins,
Nat na teng hongdam sak Pa kamu zo Jehovah Rapha,

Healer of my every sickness, I've found Jehovah Rapha,
Hih leitung neekzon haksat na leh, nate hang lunghiang nawn keng,
I'll no longer be indecisive for the hardship of earthly food and other things,
Kazawhna Jehovah Nissi.
My victory is Jehovah Nissi.

Verse 3

Jehovah Jireh hongsik Pasion, Tuciang ciang hong huh Topa,
Jehovah Jireh is God my Provider,
Kei aa ding a mah hoihpen hi,
He is the best for me,
A ma vangliatna sung om hauh na, ka sapna teng hong cingsak,
Wealth that is in his glory, sufficient for all my needs,
Hong sikpa Jehovah Jireh.
My provider Jehovah Jireh.

26. Only By My Spiritual Power

Ka Khatha Bek Tawh

Key-G; 4/4; Composed by Kap Pu; No.111 at Gal Hiam Song Book

Verse 1

Pasion in kha a hih man, amah biakpiak nadingin,
Since God is Spirit, to worship him,
Na khatawh a mah bia in phat lecin,
Worship him and praise him by your spirit,
Hermon mualah daitui bang, van daituite hongkia in,
Like the dews from Mt. Hermon, heavenly dew will fall down,
Hopihna nang zong zathei niteh.
You'll be able to hear his voice.

Chorus

Ka khatha bek tawh ka khatha bek tawh,
Only by my spiritual power x2
Ka khatha bek in lawhcing thei niteh,
You'll prosper only by my spiritual power,
Thu haksapente 'n zong na ma hongkhak zo ke 'n teh,
Even the hardest hurdle would not hinder your progress,
Ka kha hang na ma natun zo ding hi.
By my Spirit you'll retain your progress.

Verse 2

Khris ading nuntakna ah, a siangtho nuntak nading,
To live for Christ, to live a holy life,
Teep leh muam neek leh dawn kizawh kul hi,
One needs to control smoking, drinking, and eating,
A siangtho gamtat kampau, Na khempeuh kidek zo lo,
Deeds and speech with holiness, you can't do anything,
Tuate zong ka kha bektawh Topa 'n ci.
They are possible only by my Spirit, said the Lord.

Verse 3

Gupngah lam hong kitel sak, dam ngah lam hong kitel sak,
He let us know that we're saved, that we're healed,
Hauh ngah lam hong kitelsak khat om hi,
There's one who let us know our wealth,
Vangliat natawh dawi hawlkhia, damlo te damsak theih na,
Driving out demons by power, the ability to heal the sick,
Tung lam pan a hong pai kha hang bek hi.
That's only from the Spirit who comes from above.

27. Jehovah Shalom Is My Peace

Ka Lung Muan Na Jehovah Shalom

Key-G; Composed by Kap Pu; No.227 in Gal Hiam Song Book

Verse 1

I teen na hih leitung tuihual bang kilok thei
The world we live in tends to shake like waves.
Khat vei vei Jesu ki mangngilh thei
We tend to forget Jesus often,
Up na a piang sakpa up na ki cing sakpa
The author and finisher of our faith,
Jesu tel tak ih et ding hi zaw.
We better look intently at Jesus.

Chorus

Mi zong piak ka sawm lo, mi aa zong ka eng lo,
I intend not to give others, not be envious of their possession,
Todang zong ka deih lo Jesu bek
I don't want other lord except Jesus
Ka tuanna tembaw a hoi zong in ka lau lo
I am not afraid though the ship deviates,
Ka lung muan na Jehovah Shalom.
My peace is Jehovah Shalom.

Verse 2

Ka teenna leitung in Jesu bang a ci zongin,
Though the world I live in might say whatever about Jesus,
Kei a'n Jesu bek mah manpha pen,
For me only Jesus is the most precious one,
Amah ka zungpi ka nuntakna naak hi aa,
He is my main root, the fountain of my life,
Ke'n nusia thei nawn lo Jesu.
I no longer can leave Jesus alone.

Verse 3

Thupha hong pia theiding Todang a om zong in,
Even if there might be other lord who can bless,
Sih na zo a thokik Jesu bek
Only Jesus arose from the dead,
Ama hangin tuin kei sihna pan ka suakta

Because of him I am set free from death,
Lung nopna kha muanna hong pia.
He gives me peace and assurance.

28. He Reformed My Life

Ka Nunna Hong Bawl Hoihsak
Key-E; 4/4; Composed by Thawng Za Kim; No.48 at Gal Hiam Song Book

Verse 1

Lamet bei ka om lai, lungmuanna hong tung a,
Amidst my hopeless situation, an assurance comes,
Ka mai ah meei vompi hong kai in ka lampi,
In front of me a thick black cloud hides my way,
Mial in a lauhuai hang khuavak ni hong tang ta,
Though darkened and fearsome, the brightened sun is shining now,
Kei a ding hong pai Zeisu Kumpi.
King Jesus comes for me.

Chorus

Kei tang ading hong sihlawh ka Topa 'n
My Lord who suffered death for my stead,
Tawntung nunna lampi hong tun zo,
Has led me to the way of everlasting life,
Kei tang aa ding hong suplawh ka Topa 'n,
My Lord who suffered loss for me,
Ka nuntakna hong bawl hoih sak zo.
He has reformed my life.

Verse 2

Pheiphung suan kha in bah, Mitguite kham in zeu,
My thighs and legs tired and worn, the eye sights getting sore,
Khat veivei leigawtak tui om lohna gamah,
Sometimes in the land where the soil harden for lack of water,
Singkung bang ka nunna huihkhidam seem in keu,
As a tree blown away by the breeze, my life was dried up,
Ka om laitak Zeisu 'n hong delh pah.
While I was like that, at once Jesus ran to me.

Verse 3

Kei tang dingin hong ding, kei tang ding hong kithawi,
For me he took his stand, for me he was prepared,
Keithuak ding teng hongthuak, kei septangin hong sem,
He suffered all that I would endure, he did all that I needed to do,
Kei aa ding hong thumsak keitangin mawhlawh tawi,
He interceded for me, he carried the load of sins for me,
Siattut nateng a ma 'n tual in lem.
He fixed anew what sins had wrecked.

29. Voice of Compassion

Lainat Na Aw

Key-G; Composed by Do Khup; No.9 in Gal Hiam Song Book

Verse 1

Ita sisan luangin ka tatsa mite.

Those I've redeemed with love through my blood,

Khuamial gimna sungah kahna aw ka za,

I heard the agonizing cries in the dark,

Lainatna in ka khi luang, kuasawl ding ka hiam?

My tears of compassion fall, whom shall I send?

A mangthang khate kua 'n pikhia ding hiam?

Who will lead the souls of the lost out?

Chorus

Topa 'n nang hongsam lainatna aw tawh,

God is calling you with voice of compassion

Ka nasem dingte a tawm lua e,

Saying that I have very few workers

Mangthang khate kiang itna thugen ding

To share message of love to lost souls

Nang hong sawl ning e, na hi zo diam ci.

"Would you do if I asked you" He said

Topa 'n nang hong sawl, haibang nang hongngak x3

God is calling you with voice of compassion, waiting for you.

Verse 2

Na neih nalam khempeuh kong piaksa hi a,

I am the one who gave all your prosperity and belongings

Khatzong siitlo in lakik theipa ka hi

And can take them back without exception

Hizong lakik keining naphal bang pia in,

But I won't do, just share as much as you want

Van ah nong ciah ciang na hawm thawh kha diam.

Would you dissatisfied the crown you will received when you come back to heaven?

Verse 3

Na tuai lai in sem in, tumbang nahuai ding,

Serve while you are young, if not you will get old easily

Na neih lai pia in beina hun hong tung ding,

Share (donate) while you have if not time will come to lose everything

Gal leh sa haksa in buaina 'n honglap ding,

Troubles and problems might reach you with war and difficulty

Sep theihlai semin khua hong mial ding hi.

Do (act) while you have time because it will get dark.

30. Pentecost

Pentecost

Key-G; Composer undisclosed; No.101 in Gal Hiam Song Book

Verse 1

Pasian kamciam na ngak un,
Wait unto God's promise
Khasiangtho hong kumsuk dong,
Holy Spirit will come down
Vangliatna nangah khit tak ciang un,
After you received power
Ka teci pangun leimong dongin.
Be my witness till the end of the world.

Chorus

Nitawpni naita, Topa hongkum ding,
The end day is close, God will come down
Vangliatna tawh hong makaih in aw,
Lead us with power
Huhpa Khasiangtho aw, pawlpi tha pia in,
Helper Holy Spirit, encourage the church
Pentecost vangliatna tawh.
With Pentecost power

Verse 2

Pitazuh'n thu a hilh lai,
While Peter preaching
Khasiangtho in ompih a,
The Holy Spirit was with him
Zeisu thawhkikna thu honggen lai,
While he was sharing the resurrection of Jesus
Mitampi'n suahtakna hong ngahta.
Many people got freedom

Verse 3

Topa keimah nong tatsa,
Lord, you redeemed me
Na deihna bang hong zang in,
Use me as much as you want
Nang tawh lo in kalawhcing thei kei,
Without you, I cannot be productive
Bangkim ah Topa hong makaih in.
Guide me in everything

Appendix Five

Word Count of Pronouns in the 30 Worship Songs

	I, me, mine believer	We, us, our, believers	We, us, our, humani ty	You, yours, God	You, yours, others	I, me, God	He, His, Him, God	They, them, theirs	People, beings
1.	16			15			3		World
2.		5		3	2				
3.	20	2					4		People
4.	11			14					
5.	4				3				
6.		15			2		14		
7.	2	3		14			1		Humanity
8.	24								Everyone 1 Others 2 Heavenly beings 1
9.	6				13		3		
10.	16	2		3			4		
11.	13	5	4	9			1		
12.	17	1	2	7			1		
13.	9	1		6			6		One 2 Restricted ones 1 Sick ones 1
14.					4		2		
15.	2	1						Family they 3	One 1 young people 2
16.	14			11					
17.	15	6		7			6	Those 1	Human beings 1
18.	16	3					4		People 1
19.					4			Those 1 their 1 they 1	
20.	5				9	4	1		
21.	4	4	Zomis	4	1			Their 1	
22.		He/him =believer 10			2 You = believer 6	10		Them 1 They 1	
23.	12	3					2		
24.	14			3			4		
25.	16						3		
26.		5			7	4	5		
27.	10	3	1				3	Their 1	Others 1

28.	20						7		
29.					15	9	1		
30.	4	1		3	1	1			Him= Peter 2

Total: 270 60 7 99 63 28 75 11

Average: 9 2 0.23 3.3 2.1 0.93 2.5 0.36

Appendix Six

Word Count of Names for Members of the Trinity

	God	Father	Jesus/ Christ	Lord	Son of God	Saviour	King	Jehovah	Holy Spirit	Others
1.				1						Symbolism of shepherd used
2.	8			3					1	
3.	3		4	3	1					
4.				5						
5.	2		2	3						
6.	3		2	1			1		1	
7.				1						
8.	2		1			3				
9.	1			5				8		
10.				5						
11.	3		2	2						
12.	5			3						
13.	2			6					1	
14.			1	2						
15.			2						3	
16.				3						Refuge 1 Friend 1 Desire 1 Dream 1
17.				3						Rock 1
18.	1		1	1						
19.									1	
20.		1							2	
21.		1		1						
22.				1						
23.			1	1		3				Lamb 1
24.				2						
25.	3		1	2				7		Healer 1
26.	1		1	1					4	
27.			7					1		Author and finisher, root, fountain of life
28.			2	2			1			
29.	2									
30.	2		1	1					3	Helper 1
Total:	38	2	28	58	1	6	2	16	16	
Avg:	1.26	0.06	0.93	1.93	0.03	0.2	0.06	0.53	0.53	

Appendix Seven

Addressors, Addressees and Descriptions of the Members of the Trinity

	Addressors	Addressees	Descriptions of the Members of the Trinity
1.	Me	God and believers	Beauty, power, love, care, trustworthy, unchanging. God guides, provides, protects, feeds, carries me and has good plans.
2.	Us believers	Lord and the Holy Spirit also other believers	Highest God, sovereign power, victory.
3.	Me	Other believers	Eternal Lord I become His child-father Grace-He suffered and saved me
4.	Me	Lord	Great, powerful, omnipresent, reveals His word
5.	Me	Other believers	Believers are His possessions, gives blessing.
6.	Us believers	Other believers	King Jesus gives victory, willing to give to us provision, blessing and victory. Indulge in the Spirit vs. trust in King Jesus.
7.	Us believers and me	God and other believers	Grace, mercy, great, faithful, love, good, worthy
8.	Me	Other believers	Saviour
9.	Me	Other believers	Saviour, righteousness, with me, peace, provider, healer, guides, gives victory
10.	Me	Other believers	Shield, safe fortress, loving, victory
11.	Me	God	Merciful, love, provides rest
12.	Me/us	God	Goodness, God strengthens my life
13.	One/me	Other believers	Grace and love, invisible yet imminent as His hand touches me. Enjoying the Holy Spirit
14.	Narrative, no person mentioned	Other believers	Unchanging power, goodness and love
15.	One/me narrative	Other believers	Heavenly Holy Spirit indwells families, power.
16.	Me	Lord	Shelter, refuge, best friend, my desire, brings tranquillity
17.	Me	God Other believers	Rest, rock, shield, protection, under God's wings, understands, judges well, answers questions. Does not fail, mistreat, leave or forsake them.
18.	Me/us	Other believers	Love, goodness, glory
19.	Narrative-advising, but no person Specified	Other believers	The Holy Spirit blows on the pool to heal and gives a better life.
20.	God/me a dialogue advising	Other believers	Gives love, joy, peace and freedom, sweet communion with the Holy Spirit, who lives in the believer.
21.	Us, me	Lord, land of Zomi (Chin)	Father leads and blesses. God strengthens to serve Him
22.	God	Me, other believers and Unbelievers	God describes himself as a shade-protects, answers and accompanies them, gives long life.

23.	Me/we	Believers	Lamb, Saviour on the throne has power, saves and heals.
24.	Me	Everyone, God	Love, joy, power, protection, blessing, grace and guidance.
25.	Me	Everyone, possibly believers	Peace, forgives, heals, provides, my banner, wealth in his glory, goodness.
26.	Me/God	Believers	Spirit from above; we can hear His voice; enables us to progress and live the Christian life
27.	Me/us believers	Everyone	Rose from the dead, author and finisher of the believers' faith, precious, root, fountain, peace.
28.	Me	Everyone	Jesus as King, suffered and died for believers
29.	God, me	Believers	Redemption by the blood of Jesus, motivated by love. God calls believers to evangelise. Gives provision but may take them back.
30.	Us believers	Believers	Power, helper, encourager, guide, gives freedom and productivity. Jesus' resurrection.

Appendix Eight

Main Theological Themes, Secondary Theological Themes, Genres and Cultural Themes

	Main Theological Theme	Secondary Theological Themes	Genres	Chin Cultural Themes or Chin Distinctive
1.	God	God's love Protection Provision Ps. 23	Adoration of God's qualities. Expresses gratitude.	Emigration, poor socio-economic conditions, few natural resources. Chin concept of worldliness.
2.	God	Victory and blessing, revival miracles power and unity in evangelism. Holy Spirit Mount Carmel	Exhortation of one another. Proclaiming God's qualities. Welcoming God.	Adopt Mount Carmel from the OT. Christian God supremacy over other gods
3.	Soteriology	Eschatology Justification Jesus	Praise God for salvation. Personal testimony	Emphasis on their songs
4.	God	Creation and sustaining power Omnipresence Ps. 139	Praise God	Mountain tops
5.	Soteriology	Spiritual growth and serving God. Predestination Blessing Healing Spiritual freedom	Exhortation of one another Testimony	Reference to their spirits-spiritual blessing God's family demonstrates importance of Chin community Jumping and dancing in worship demonstrates spiritual freedom
6.	Believers	Prioritise God's kingdom, God's word, trust, provision of blessing and healing. Matt. 6:33, 2 Chron. 7:14	Exhortation to turn back, commit and trust God.	Inflation, poor socio-economic conditions-hunger and thirst, "our land"
7.	God	God changes believers' lives	Praise God	Poverty "out of the dirt"
8.	Eschatology	Rest and reward in heaven Soteriology Hope	Exhortation of future in heaven	Struggles and poverty on earth in contrast to wealth in heaven.
9.	Soteriology	God. Victory for the believer through Jesus' death. O.T. names for God. Power, healing and provision. Fears of death and sickness	Exhortation for victory. Praise God	Fear of sickness and death, provision and healing

10.	God	Victory through salvation and healing. Forgiveness and healing in the atonement of Jesus' death. Ps.18,23,28,91.	Exhortation to experience God's victory.	Improved living conditions as Christians Dance and jump in worship
11.	God	Soteriology-victory and changed life, Jesus, Bible. Eternal life. John 6:68.	Praise God	Development-God improved their living condition as Christianity brought education, development and provision. Previously they were in the dust and dirt, illiterate, naked, hungry, enemies and warlike.
12.	God	Creation. Christian life. Sacrifice of thanksgiving. Psalm-like	Praise God. Thanksgiving	Reaping after rainy season, they relate to God in nature. Poverty-hunger and nakedness. Dancing in praise. Sacrifice of thanksgiving.
13.	God	Victory, God's word and hearing God's voice Relationship with God Healing Freeing the restricted ones may refer to deliverance Demonstrates unity of God and the Holy Spirit.	Exhortation	Dancing and jumping, overcoming difficulty plunging in the Spirit relates to the spiritual manifestations in the church
14.	Jesus (Lord)	Christian life—trust, healing The Lord's power is an available source Jesus' life on earth	Exhortation to trust and experience a victorious life.	Life is like a desert, sick and hopeless
15.	Holy Spirit	Christian life-joy better than wealth. Continue in Christianity as a family. Demonstrates unity of the Trinity	Exhortation a testimony of life with the Holy Spirit.	United as a family, narrative of young people attending church together, who were formerly lost. Poverty, resolved conflict. Reference to "Myanmar"
16.	God	Effect on Christian life Omnipresence, protection, friendship, rejoice, no fear Psalm-like	Praise God	Flower, dew, dreams in the night Problems in life, satisfaction in their work
17.	God	Choice to trust God, the benefits are protection,	Praise God. Exhortation to trust God.	No security in this life-lies and deceit

		rest and guidance, Ps. 118:8-9.		
18.	Jesus	Soteriology Victory in redemption “Filled” may refer to the Holy Spirit. Love, joy, forgiveness, grace, peace. God’s love for sinners brought transformation and victory. Glorify God by evangelism and expanding God’s kingdom.	Praise God. Exhortation to enjoy the Christian life.	Story and song (oral culture) Previously they were God’s enemies. Emphasis on forgiveness may reflect how their ancestors were attracted to forgiveness in Christianity.
19.	Holy Spirit	Healing in the lake of Bethesda by moving of the Holy Spirit Serve God while they have opportunity. The world is insecure but they have security in God’s salvation	Exhortation to receive healing	Choose seeds for different seasons Bethesda is used as a name for Chin churches
20.	Holy Spirit	Changed Christian life; God; Peace, freedom, joy, trust, love, wealth, communion with God. Indwelling Holy Spirit. Overcome fear and discouragement of the world and Satan’s temptation.	Exhortation to experience the Holy Spirit.	Freedom, fear, wealth
21.	Life as a believer	Fruitful Christian life, strengthened to serve God in mission. Expect miracles. Identification with Israelites.	Asking for favour. Exhortation to be strengthened	Reference to Zomis, their land and Myanmar. Asking to be held higher than other nations. Identification with the Israelites. New Year’s day. Dry and weary land-drought and poor harvest. Reference to roses, which were introduced by the missionaries. “As firm as a post” may refer to the posts in their traditional housing.
22.	God	Protection from Satan by God and the angels. High place. Ps. 91	Exhortation from God to the believer	High place, reference to the Israelites in the OT, troubles of life.

23.	Eschatology	Pre-millennialism-saved from the tribulation; the future hope of heaven 1 Cor. 15:52	Exhortation for future in heaven	Mansion in heaven in contrast to life on earth. References to nature- river, breeze. Greeting by shaking hands may have been introduced by missionaries. . Salvation of the spirit and the body.
24.	Life as a believer	Relationship with God, offers blessings of protection, provision, love, power, healing and spiritual strength. Jesus' blood draws them close. Matt. 6:28-30.	Praise God. Exhortation	Protection from danger-spears and swords. Fire, health. Clothes and pants were introduced by the missionaries. Mention of spirit and blessings. Nature-grass and lilies.
25.	God	Jesus, blessings of the Christian life demonstrated in Jehovah's names-forgiveness, provision, healing, victory and peace.	Praise God. Exhortation to me, as a testimony.	Singing new songs. Healer and provider of food and wealth relates to socio-economic condition. Hardship in the earthly life.
26.	God	God is Spirit, worship with their spirits, healing, holy life, power over demons, soteriology, Christian life. Demonstrates unity of the Trinity. Zech. 4:6, Matt. 19:26, Jn. 4:23-24	Exhortation to praise God	Emphasis on the spirit, wealth, healing and deliverance from demons. Holy living-controlling smoking, drinking and eating.
27.	Jesus	Christian life. Acknowledges other sources of blessing but emphasis on uniqueness of Jesus as root, fountain, author and finisher of their faith, resurrection overcomes death, gives peace and security. Heb. 12:2.	Praise God -a testimony of what Jesus done.	Insecurity of the world, not envious of others' possessions, other lords that can bless
28.	Jesus	Soteriology-Jesus' death gives forgiveness and Jesus intercedes for them. Sin ruins their life but Jesus overcomes hardship and transforms their Christian life. Rom. 8:34	Praise God, testimony of what Jesus has done.	Hopeless situation, sin had wrecked their life but God improved their lives. Nature-clouds, sun, struggling with drought. Struggling with weariness.

29.	Soteriology	Jesus, unbelievers are lost, few workers to send for evangelism. Hardship of life. Serve God while they have opportunity-transience of life. They will receive a future reward in heaven for obedience. God is source of their provision, encourages them to share-insecurity of life. Luke 10:2, Jn. 9:4, Isa. 6:8.	Exhortation to serve God	Provision of God but life is insecure. Problems in life, war and difficulty.
30.	Holy Spirit	Eschatology “end day is close” Ecclesiology “encourage the church” Second Pentecost Unity of the Trinity-the Holy Spirit is the promise of the Father, empowers them and is a helper and encourager. Acts 1:4,8, 2:14-41.	Pentecostal doctrine using Bible narration. Committing themselves to God’s service.	Possible reference to renewal, which the Chin formerly experienced.

The Frequency of the Main Theological Themes of the Songs:

Father = 13
 Jesus = 4
 Holy Spirit = 4
 Believers = 3
 Ecclesiology, the church = 0.
 Soteriology-the world, the lost, unbelievers = 4
 Satan, demons or evil forces = 0
 Eschatology = 2

The secondary theological themes are detailed in appendix 6, but not enumerated as many songs have several secondary themes, which vary considerably.

The Frequency of the Main Genres:

Confession = 0.
 Praise, worship, adoration, proclamation of God’s qualities = 13
 Doctrinal = 1.
 Asking favour, reminding God of His promises = 1.
 Thanksgiving = 0.
 Exhortation or Encouragement either of oneself/one another =15

Songs may be categorised in more than one genre, but only the main ones are enumerated.

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Fieldwork

Interviews (anonymised)

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- En. Interview by author. Translated by Xiu, 26 April 2010, Kalaymyo.

Fan. Interview by author. Translated by Xiu, 25 April 2010, Kalaymyo.
Hao. Interview by author, 8 April 2010, Yangon.
Hua. Interview by author, 27 April 2010, Yangon.
Jie. Interview by author. Translated by Xiu, 22 April 2010, Kalaymyo.
Jun. Interview by author. Translated by Xiu, 22 April 2010, Kalaymyo.
Lei. Interview by author, 20 April 2010, Yangon.
Li. Interview by author. Translated by Xiu, 25 April 2010, Kalaymyo.
Lou. Interview by author via email, 19 October 2009.
Min. Interview by author, 14 April 2010, Yangon.
Ming. Interview by author, 9 April 2010, Yangon.
Na. Interview by author. Translated by Xiu, 26 April 2010, Kalaymyo.
Ping. Interview by author, Translated by Xiu, 23 April 2010, Kalaymyo.
Qi. Interview by author, 3 May 2010, Yangon.
Qin. Interview by author, 15 December 2009, Birmingham.
Rin. Interview by author via email, 20 October 2009.
Shen. Interview by author. Translated by Xiu, 27 April 2010, Kalaymyo.
Tao. Interview by author, 22 April 2010, Kalaymyo.
Wei. Interview by author, 11 April, 2010, Yangon.
Xiu. Interview by author, 22 April 2010, Kalaymyo.
Yan. Interview by author. Translated by Xiu, 26 April 2010, Kalaymyo.
Ying. Interview by author. Translated by Yi, 13 April 2010, Yangon.
Yong. Interview by author, 16 April 2010, Yangon.
Yu. Interview by author, 30 April, 2010, Yangon.

(Not anonymised)

Anderson, Allan. Interview by author, Birmingham, 4 October 2016.
Chit, Myo (former superintendent of Myanmar AG). Interview by author, 11 April, 2010, Yangon.
Hayward, Douglas. Interview by author via email, 8 February 2013.
Saw Tint Sann Oo, ongoing email conversations with the author, 2011-2012.
Stafford, Kathleen. Interview by author via Skype, 22 October 2009.

Participant Observation

Services attended:

Sermon in Church Blue: 11 April 2010.
Sermon in Church Red: 11 April 2010.
2 Sermons in Church Red: 18 April 2010.
Sermon in Church Green: 21 April 2010.
Sermon in Church Yellow: 25 April 2010.
Sermon in Church Blue: 2 May 2010.