

THE UNTOLD STORY:
THE IMPACT OF REVIVAL
AMONG THE CHIN PEOPLE IN MYANMAR (BURMA)¹

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Today in many parts of the world, the prophecy of Joel has been fulfilled. “And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions” (Joel 2:28). God, by his Spirit is moving mightily around the world even in some most remote places through simple willing servants who consecrated themselves to the Lord of the harvest. However, there are many unsung heroes and undocumented miracles of God among different people groups. There were no photographers, no news reporters, no missionaries and no scholar to investigate and report to the larger body of Christ regarding what the Lord had done.

Most secular reporters investigate and report the news of their particular area of political or economical interest. If five people were killed in one part of the world the whole world will know about it within a matter of hours, and the event might be put on the front page of major news papers around the world. However, even if one hundred people were killed at the same time in another part of the world, the incident might not be noticed beyond their own community.

Myanmar (Burma) is one of the poorest, isolated and backward countries of the world. Only in recent days Myanmar gets the world’s attention for reasons that were not very pleasant. I want to

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report to the people of God that, while the spiritual strongholds over Myanmar is still strong, the Spirit of the Lord is also at work in transforming not only individual lives, but the whole Chin society in Myanmar.²

Understanding the background of the Chin people in Myanmar before Christianity will help us appreciate the impact of the gospel which transforms the whole society, resulted in Pentecostal revival since early 1970s. The population of the Chin (hill tribe) people is estimated to be one million. However, the focus of this paper is on the northern Chin people where Pentecostal revival permeated the whole society today. The population of northern Chin State is half a million.

1. The Chin People and Their Belief before Christianity Came

The first missionary Arthur Carson in recounting his first visit to the Chin people described what he saw, “they are very drunken, exceedingly savage-looking, being head hunters....”³ The Chin people were known as headhunters. Like some other tribal groups the Chins were animist and extremely superstitious. According to their tradition, at death a person passed over to the other world, assuming one’s proper rank and acquiring fresh power over others, which the spirit might exercise well or ill in accordance with the character during the worldly life.⁴

Khup Za Go described the ancient times of the Chins as “spending most of their time in fighting and hunting. They vied with one another to excel in these activities. There was constant fighting between tribes and villages. Revenge was so common that the ethic of those days did not condemn it. It was considered a praiseworthy duty.”⁵

In the Chin life, religion plays an important role being closely intertwined with everything—from planting of the crops to births,

² The military government in Burma changed the name of the country to Myanmar in 1988. In this paper, Burma and Myanmar are used as interchangeable due to some writings before the change of its name.

³ Robert G. Johnson, *History of American Baptist Chin Mission* (Valley Forge, PA: Robert G. Johnson, 1988), I, p. 48.

⁴ Sing Khaw Khai, *Zo People and Their Culture* (Churachanpur, India: Kham Pu Hatzaw, 1995), p. 131.

⁵ Khup Za Go, *Christianity in Chinland* (Guwahati, India: Christian Literature Centre, 1985), p. 14.

marriages, deaths and festivals. Their traditional religion was animism worshipping evil spirits. Their belief in many deities and spirits resulted in numerous animal sacrifices.

Every Chin village has a priest who presides over various functions relating to the spirit-worshipping ceremonies and feasts. He is called the priest. Sick persons consult him as to what the spirits require. After feeling the pulse of the sick person, the priest pronounces the name of the animal to be killed to appease the spirits. Their beliefs were guided by omens, divination and dreams

In Chin tradition, an individual is believed to be transmuted to another form of life at the moment of one's death; one keeps on hungry if he or she dies hungry; one puts on in the next life the clothes which he or she wears at the moment of death. So this belief involves that if one is slain, the individual becomes the slave of the victor and remains slave until the death is avenged. Hence spiritual emancipation of the slain by means of revenge seems to have come into practice as a duty bound.

The motive for the head-hunting was both religious and social. It was to gain better social status rather than stemming primarily from a religious motive. It was difficult for a headless young man to win a fair maiden, therefore often times young men took vows to deprive themselves of certain pleasure until they had brought home the coveted prize.⁶

Their belief in the existence of the demonic beings or spirits was at the core of Chin religious practices. Famine, epidemics, disease and similar misfortunes were common. All these were believed to be caused by evil spirits. These spirits were believed to inhabit different parts of human dwellings, springs, treks, rocks, rivers, mountains and so on. If any misfortune such as illness, ominous dreams, etc. occurred, the affected person offered to the appropriate spirits sacrifices of animals ranging from a chicken to a mithun or a buffalo. The Chin people had lived in extreme fear of the spirits. If sacrifice made to a particular spirit proved to be ineffective then one spirit after another was tried until the whole series of sixty-eight spirits had been offered sacrifice to. In this way a sick person often became impoverished for life.

While the people had lived such a hard and hazardous life filled with fear of war and evil spirits, there came to Chin land at the turn of twentieth century the gospel of Jesus Christ, the message of freedom from death, sin and fear. Though it was short-lived the

⁶ M. C. Smith, *The Ao Naga Tribes of Assam* (London: n.p., 1925), 72.

door was opened in Chin hill for missionary works. The impact of the gospel on the Chin society has been nothing short of a miracle. It was brought “not by might, nor by power but by God’s Spirit.”

2. The Era of Christianity

2.1 The Arrival of Protestant Christianity in Myanmar

When we trace the history of Christianity to the Chin people, we cannot ignore the heroic attempts of dedicated men and women of God. Many of them gave their lives and the memorial stones of their lives still speak to us today. The earliest attempt of Protestant missionary work in Myanmar was in Rangoon, where Chater and Mardon of the Baptist Missionary Society of England opened a mission in 1807. Felix Carey, son of William Carey, came soon after Chater and Mardon and remained until 1814. The London Missionary Society sent two missionaries to Rangoon in 1808, but within a year one died and the other left.⁷

Adoniram Judson and his wife, who originally came in order to work in India, were not permitted by the East India Company. They sailed to Rangoon at the suggestion of William Carey and arrived there on July 13 1813.⁸ Judson was an outstanding Protestant missionary to Burma.

2.2 The First Missionary Couple to the Chin People

Arthur E. Carson reached Rangoon on December 13 1886 and was married to Laura L. Hardin just five days later. They were the first American Baptist missionary couple assigned to work among the Chins. On February 2 1899 they left Thayetmyo, their mission station and headquarters for eight years, for Chin hills where no mission work had ever been done. They arrived at Haka the capitol of Chin State on March 15 1899.⁹

On the night Arthur and Laura Carson arrived at Haka, Laura Carson wept bitterly, “not more because of my disappointment in the place and the people than for my own inability to meet the

⁷ Tracy Reuben Warberton, “Burma,” *The New Schaff Herge of Encyclopedia* (London: 1908), II, p. 310.

⁸ Maung Shwe Wa, *Burma Baptist Chronicle* (Rangoon: Burma Baptist Convention, 1963), p. 4.

⁹ Johnson, *History of American Baptist Chin Mission*, p. 11.

situation bravely.”¹⁰ “Arthur, I can’t do it! I simply can’t do it! How can I possibly stay here for a lifetime?” she tearfully asked. Arthur told her, “Don’t talk that way. Things will look brighter in the morning.”¹¹ Then Laura remembered their motto: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthened me” (Phil 4:13). With that motto, they went to bed and rose the next morning determined to give their lives for Christ to win the wild tribes.

2.3 More Missionaries Added

Although the Carsons were the first to come to the Chin hills and truly laid the foundation to run the missionary enterprise, the Chin people were badly in need of medical missionaries. In answer to this need, E. H. East, appointed as a medical missionary by the American Baptist Union on June 3 1901, arrived on March 21 1902 and made an extensive tour throughout the length and breadth of Chin hills.

East’s evangelistic tours to the Tedim, Falam and Haka (the major towns) were enhanced by his medical skill and treatment of the villagers. According to Robert Johnson, he treated 2,903 new patients and personally gave 4,000 treatments in 1906.¹² However, because of his ill health, East’s tenure was cut short. He reluctantly left Chin hills on October 3 1910.¹³ Arthur Carson died on April 1 1908 and East buried him beneath the pine trees at Haka.

Laura Carson stayed at Haka after her husband died to look after the mission station and to teach the Bible class she had organized. Then J. H. Cope and his wife arrived in Haka on December 21 1908. Their goal was to establish a mission center at Tedim, but the untimely death of Carson held them back at Haka for two full years. Before they opened a new mission station at Tedim, Cope learned the Haka (Lai) dialect very well, and this helped him greatly in the publication of literature for schools and churches in the Chin hills. On September 29 1910, the Copes started moving to Tedim.¹⁴

¹⁰ Laura Hardin Carson, *Pioneer Trails, Trails and Triumphs* (New York: Baptist Board, 1927), p. 163.

¹¹ Carson, *Pioneer Trails, Trails and Triumphs*, p. 163.

¹² Johnson, *History of American Baptist Chin Mission*, p. 138.

¹³ G. K. Nang, “Evidences of Growth Among Zomi Baptist Churches in Indo-Burma” (Th.M. thesis, Rueschlikon, Switzerland: Baptist Theological Seminary, 1990), p. 29.

¹⁴ J. M. Ngul Khan Pau, “When the World of Zomi Changed”

In addition to learning the three major dialects of the Chins, i.e., Haka, Falam, and Tedim, Cope's touring among the villages was regarded as remarkable since no transportation was available at that time, and the steep and rough paths made the trips even more exhausting to him. Johnson reports, "Besides continual touring he managed to translate and publish the New Testament and the hymnal in the language of Tedim in 1936."¹⁵ He wrote no fewer than 35 small text books in several dialects for the schools.

Chester Strait arrived at Haka on April 5 1926 with their two children, Betty and Dabid. In addition to his tours and evangelistic work, Strait was deeply concerned for the living standard of the Chins. He introduced new ideas about raising sheep, making soap and growing tea and coffee in the Chin hills. Strait opened a Bible school at Haka on May 1 1928 with 13 students. All these students graduated from the school in 1932. He prepared a number of Sunday school lessons and finished translating the New Testament in Haka (Lai) dialect, which was published by the Mission Press in Rangoon in 1940.¹⁶

Franklin O. Nelson arrived at their destination at Tedim, Chin hills on December 2 1939. Nelson and S. T. Hau Go, a Chin graduate from the United States with an M.R.E. degree, started a Bible school at Tedim in 1947. He made many evangelistic tours and helped in forming leaders among the established churches. His outstanding contribution was the Tedim Bible School. They left Tedim because of the sickness of Phileda on February 23 1951 and could not return because their re-entry visa was turned down by the government.

The last couple serving among the Chins in Chin hills were Robert and Elizabeth Johnson. They were appointed as missionaries to Burma on April 21 1941 by the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society. After the Nelsons left for the States, the Johnsons were the only American Baptist missionaries to the Chin hills until 1966, when the socialist government expelled all the foreign missionaries from Burma. Apart from his teaching in the Bible school at Haka, Johnson was involved in the translation work of the Haka Bible and hymnals in "tonic solfa" notation. Though

(D.Miss. diss., Portland, OR: Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, 1995), p. 122.

¹⁵ Johnson, *History of American Baptist Chin Mission*, p. 390.

¹⁶ Pau, "When the World of Zomi Changed," p. 123.

they were unable to stay among the Chin people, the Johnsons' unstinting love and devotion have been remembered.¹⁷

2.4 The Period of Trials and Testings

With his intensive travelling from one village to another for ten years, East underwent tremendous strain that weakened his health. He developed a heart condition that was unbearable in a high altitude like the Chin hills. In one of his journals he penned his situation and the constraining love for the Chins. If he did not go back to the United States for medical care, he would not last long, and yet he felt the need of his presence there. So he wrote:

Today I can see Jesus sitting on the Mount of Olives, weeping over the city. In the spirit I am one with Him, for I am weeping over Haka. If I stay to die here, no good will come out of that, but if I go to live, I can help from afar, and so I am choosing to seek life, rather than to die here and be silent.¹⁸

He went home to the States. A remarkable episode of leaving Chin hills was included in his letter to his wife Emily, which reads:

I thought I would be glad to leave as I was going home, but when I saw the big crowd that had gathered to see me off, and when I saw Christians weep like little children, it almost broke my heart.... They all followed me to the golf links. Then I prayed for them and oh dear, it was awful! When I told them I will not see them again, they cried and I cried. I had no idea that the Chins had any real emotion, but I know now how Paul the Apostle felt when he said, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart?" And when he told them that "they would see his face no more."¹⁹

The Lord gave Herbert J. Cope a longer span of life to achieve tremendous works as a missionary from 1908 to 1938. He died on June 11 1938 at Haka, Chin hill, suffering from diarrhea and was buried beside Carson.

Since the inception of the missionary work in Chin hills, the Karen (another ethnic group in Myanmar) workers shared the

¹⁷ Pau, "When the World of Zomi Changed," p. 124.

¹⁸ E. H. East, "Burma Manuscripts" (unpublished Material, Ft. Wayne, IN: Neil and Sowards Personal Library, n.d.), p. 146.

¹⁹ East, "Burma Manuscripts," p. 146.

burden of reaching the Chins. The Karens were hill people like the Chins, and they had better access and adaptability than the western missionaries had, and they were very effective in ministering to the Chin people.

2.5 The First Chin Converts and Their Witnesses

In 1904, after laboring for five years, the missionaries in Chin hills saw the first converts to Christ. The first church was born on February 17 1906 at Khuasak village. East wrote about the first grand celebration of the Lord's Supper in that very church,

In getting things ready my heart was deeply touched as I seemed to be very near the Cross of Jesus. The emblem of his body and blood were there. I imagined myself at His burial. I wept for joy and deep emotions. I was all alone with Christ far away from those I love and now to commemorate His death for the first time with Christians from out among the wild Chins. Eleven of them gathered in Jesus name. Oh, ye heavens record this sight. It seemed to me neither I nor the linen were good enough. Then I cried: Lord, it is the best I have, but it is not what I would like to do in Thy honor.²⁰

Alexander was right to describe the enthusiasm of some of the first converts working as evangelists: "The keenness of the evangelist(s) is seen as he wanders from village to village, humbling himself and becometh the disciple of the Master. Having no fixed itinerary, but staying or going as opportunity arises"²¹ J. M. Pau described it well by saying, "this rapid growth was greatly due to the full participation of laymen very ordinary men and women. Every new convert felt the impelling necessity to speak about their new found religion to his friends and relatives."²²

The Christians showed love and concern especially to their fellow believers. They shouldered together any event, be it a sad or joyous occasion. One of the early pastors, Thang Ngin of Dolluang village, describes his ministry: "In 1924 when there was the construction of main road, I worked there earning Rs. 12. I met a good number of persons, fellowshiping and witnessing to them.

²⁰ East, "Burma Manuscripts," p. 31.

²¹ Leish McAlexander, *Christian Progress in Burma* (London: World Dominion, 1929), p. 70.

²² Pau, "When the World of Zomi Changed," p. 132.

When I recalled, I know that I've witnessed to more than a thousand non-Christians."²³

The Christians abstained from participating in the festivals which had alcoholic drinks as the prime importance. They were no longer afraid of the evil spirits which once held them in captivity. They stopped telling lies, stealing, cursing and swearing. They faithfully observe the Lord's day by coming together and encouraging one another. They were eager to share their faith with their families, relatives and clan members. As the people were illiterate, the most effective way to present the gospel was through personal contact. The first evangelists went from house to house and from village to village. They gathered people in the streets and presented the good news to them by all possible means.²⁴ In 1927, the membership had increased to 1,241 and there were three ordained preachers. By 1937, the membership reached 4,000 with ten ordained and fifteen unordained preachers.

2.6 Opposition and Persecution of the Early Christians

The Chin culture is collectivist and almost everything and anything has to be done together. Thus, while an individual may find the Christian message very good and attractive, for one to become a Christian on one's own was risking his or her life. The strong fraternity and social fabric conditioned them to remain faithful to their clan or villagers until the whole group was willing to accept Christianity. Therefore, opposition and persecution were a daily fare to the converts. Tsong Kham, who suffered under the crushing hand of the village chief, said:

I believe the Christian religion is true. I am a Christian and shall always be one. For sometime the chief continued trying to bribe, offering more and more, but when he found it was useless he became angry and said, "I have never in my life humiliated myself as I have in dealing with you today. You will either take what I have offered and give up the worship of this foreign God or you will take the worst beating any man ever had." "Then I will take the beating," Tsong Kham replied. "Bare your back," the chief commanded. Tsong Kham threw off his blanket. "Put

²³ Gin Za Tuang, *Zomi Innkuan Laibu* (Teditim, Burma: Self Publication, 1973), p. 116.

²⁴ Robert Thawng Hlei, "The Baptist Mission and Church Growth in Myanmar" (M.A. thesis, Seoul: Asian Center for Theological Studies, 1990), p. 96.

your hands on your knees” was the next order, and down went his hands to his knees. The chief called up three brutal men armed with bamboos and told them to give fifteen strokes each. The first man finished his fiendish task and the second began when Tsong Kham fell on the earth. Raising his hand, he said, “Wait a moment,” and lifting his eyes to heaven, he prayed. He asked for strength to bear the torture.... He said, resuming his position with his hands on his knees, “Come on, I am ready now. There is one to beat me still.”²⁵

East, who knew the hostile reaction of the non-Christian society when a person became a Christian, was concerned about the future safety of three baptismal candidates. He wrote about the courageous response from the candidates:

Before leaving the field I baptized a brother of the chief and a son of a free man and also a young man, son of a slave. These young men placed their hands upon their hearts and said, “They may take all we have and drive us into the jungle and they may kill us, but Jesus we will never deny or forsake.”²⁶

In one of his earlier writings, East recorded one incident where the young convert was about to be baptized when the enemies of the gospel murdered him. The name of the unknown young convert does not appear in the history of Chin Christianity, yet heaven has his name in the Book of Life.

Johnson, the last missionary to Chin hills, wrote about the sufferings and persecutions of the Christians in his article “The Church in the Chin Hills”:

During this period, when Christianity was but a tender reed in strength, many of the young Christians had to meet and overcome persecution... the chiefs and the upper classes of Chin society were almost universally opposed to the Christian message, perhaps sensing correctly that it meant a revolution in human relationship.²⁷

Vial Nang writes about the form of punishment given to him for becoming a Christian. It was not just expelling him from the village; the punishment given to him was to dwell in a place where the non-Christians were sure that the evil spirits would kill him:

²⁵ Carson, *Pioneer Trails, Trails and Triumphs*, pp. 187-88.

²⁶ East, “Burma Manuscripts,” p. 53.

²⁷ Johnson, *History of American Baptist Chin Mission*, p. 388.

Since Tonzang [his village] is firmly rooted in the traditional Animistic belief and customs, the village elders didn't allow me to reside there anymore. But they have allotted me a place called *Kadang Cik* (low swampy place) assuming that the *Dawite* (evil spirits) of that place will kill me. But I cultivated the land, built a house and planned a garden, till now by God's grace I am alive.²⁸

2.7 The Renewal Movement among the Chins

After a few decades of rapid growth in the Baptist churches in Chin hills, many church leaders and members were confined in the "foreign missionary syndrome." Whatever the missionary said or practiced was considered the only way. Church by-laws and regulations became more important than the teachings of the Bible. The church went through the sickness of nominalism. Because of the strong Baptist tradition introduced in local churches, the Baptist way was perceived to be the only way. Church leaders were opposed to the message of salvation by faith through grace. However, the Lord raised young people within the Baptist churches to ignite the fire of revival which caused much headache for the leadership.

3. Pentecostal Ministry

3.1 Pentecostal Missionaries to Myanmar

A few Pentecostal missionaries from the Assemblies of God of USA such as the Leonard Bolton family, the Clifford Morrison family and the Glen Stafford family had been sent to the Myanmar mission field. Besides them were some Pentecostal missionaries from Sweden, Finland and the "Go Ye Fellowship" who came and labored in Myanmar prior to World War II. The Open Bible Standard Church started a mission for a short time just before the country's independence from British colony.²⁹ But no Pentecostal missionary went to the Chin hills.

The missionaries had always struggled for their entrance as well as their resident visa since independence in 1948. In March 1966, the Socialist government declared that all foreign

²⁸ Tuang, *Zomi Innkuan Laibu*, p. 50.

²⁹ Forthcoming Chin Khua Khai, *The Cross amidst Pagodas* (Baguio, Philippines: APTS Press).

missionaries had to leave the country within a month. Ketcham cited a phrase from the *Guardian* newspaper about the government order, saying, "By April 30th 1966, all Christian missionaries must leave Burma."³⁰ Therefore, all the missionaries left the country in April.

The only Pentecostal work well established in Myanmar at the time of the missionaries' departure was the Assemblies of God. In spite of war and the absence of the missionaries, the church showed progress under the leadership of indigenous workers. The progress was enabled by the Holy Spirit through the church that had been firmly established to be self-propagating, self-supporting, and self-governing from the very beginning.

Under the leadership of the Assemblies of God missionaries from the United States, native Pentecostal believers took the challenge of evangelizing their own communities. As they witness the gospel of Christ with Pentecostal experience, signs and wonders confirmed the preaching of God's word. However, Pentecostal message did not get to the Chin hills. All Pentecostal missionaries were engaged in ministry among different people groups in the capital city Rangoon and the Kachin tribe in the northern part of the country.

On March 25 1966, on behalf of the General Council of Assemblies of God, Foreign Mission Department, U.S.A., Maynard Ketcham, the field Director of Far East Asia, came to Yangon to wind things up in order to hand over authority and responsibility and transfer all mission property and equipment to the national church leaders.

Ketcham declared that the church government was officially handed over to the nationals. Bolton quoted the words of Ketcham:

It was an emotion-packed hour; it was the end of mission era. I went with a commemorative plaque in my brief case and a burning message on my lips. Making a manful effort to hold back the tears, I presented my plaque to Rev. John Fish [Samuel Fish] the Lisu general superintendent of the Assemblies of God in Burma, with these words, "Into your hands we give the torch. Hold it high."³¹

³⁰ Maynard Ketcham, "Burma," *Pentecostal Evangel*, January 23, 1967.

³¹ Leonard Bolton, *China Call* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1984), p. 215.

The reply from the national leader to Ketchem went as follows: "Choked with emotion, brother Fish replied, 'Brother Ketcham, we will hold it high. We will show the world how rapidly a national church can grow, depending only on the Spirit of God.'"³² The Spirit of God moved upon the people and never left the church alone. Lives were changed, the sick were healed in answer to prayer. The people filled with the Spirit of God. Local churches soon became a center for evangelism and outreach.

In 1966, Myo Chit, a national leader, was left alone in full charge of the Evangel Church (Assemblies of God) in Rangoon. Under his leadership many street preachers were trained. The short-term Bible training school started by missionaries continue. The work of the Assemblies of God moved forward in the capitol city and among the Kachin people in northern part of Myanmar. But Pentecostal message still did not get to Chin hills.

3.2 Revival among the Chins

The revival among the Chins has brought tremendous growth since the 1970s. It began with individual renewal among the Baptists but resulted in numerical growth in Pentecostal churches especially the Assemblies of God as believers experienced the power of the Holy Spirit. The revival that began at Tedim in early 1972 has spread continuously throughout the Chin hills until this day.

Many Chins were converted to Christ through the labor of the American Baptist missionaries as well as other pioneers. However, the second- and third-generation Christians became so nominal that a local church service looked like nothing more than a social gathering. There was no teaching about salvation by faith through grace. To make matters worse, liberalism has slowly influenced the teachings in Bible schools in Myanmar so that the ministries of trained pastors have become more like social gospel than evangelistic.

About 1970, God raised up a young man, Hau Lian Kham who would bring forth God's message to the people for such a time. In 1971, he graduated with a B.R.E. degree from Myanmar (Burma) Institute of Theology in Rangoon and became an ordained pastor of the J. H. Cope Baptist Church at Tedim. Assuming his pastoral position, he soon started teaching the word of God systematically,

³² Maynard Ketcham, "Rawang Christians Hold Silver Jubilee," *Pentecostal Evangel*, April 12, 1966.

especially the Bible doctrines on salvation, the church and the second coming of Christ. People in the church had never heard such teachings before, so they were amazed and their interest was engaged. Church attendance grew from 400 to 1000 within a few months.

Meanwhile a great burden for spiritual awakening came upon a group of people in the church. On January 27 1973, this small group started praying to the Lord to send a revival to the church. They spent hours on their knees, crying to God for days and nights. God answered their fervent prayers. Hau Lian Kham with his colleagues began conducting open-air crusades for the purpose of heralding the gospel. Opposition and resistance to this activity arose from the inner circle of the church itself.

As the evangelistic team under the leadership of Hau Lian Kham traveled from village to village, town to town, conducting open-air crusades in the nights, and Bible study and discussion during the day, thousands of people listened to the gospel message every day. As conviction and repentance toward the salvation of God penetrated, people came to Christ in tears confessing their sins and accepting Christ by the thousands. Gang members, thieves and drunkards were converted and they gave their testimonies openly. Eventually the crusade was the recognized launch pad of a revival movement among the Chins. As revival continued, people everywhere--in offices, in schools, in the market places, on the street--talked and discussed the issues of being born-again and salvation by faith alone. People were amazed at the new converts who formerly had been gang members, drunkards, thieves and so on, but who now showed a total turn-around in their lives.³³

God raised up individuals like Pum Za Thang Tombing, Phun Duma, Philip Ahone, Khai Khan Suan, and Dam Suan Mung along with Hau Lian Kham to spread revival throughout Chin hills. In some of their meetings, the conviction of the Holy Spirit was so intense that people were weeping and crying, dancing and laughing in the Holy Spirit.

3.3 Continuous Revival Resulted in Pentecostal Movement

The impact soon spread not only in the local area but also to the whole northwestern area of the country. Though strong opposition arose against the revival movement, the revivalists did not stop witnessing and preaching Christ. The revival fire was

³³ Khai, *The Cross amidst Pagodas*, p. 62.

burning and spreading over the countryside rapidly. The evangelists made gospel tours to villages far and near conducting open-air crusades everywhere. They packed their supplies, carried them on their backs and shoulders, and traveled many days on foot across the high mountains and the deep valleys. The gospel was preached at night in houses while visitation, discussion, counseling and teaching were conducted during the day.

Many nominal Christians received the experience of the new life in Christ and the baptism of the Holy Spirit throughout the revival. In many cases, they could not remain in their Baptist churches but joined the born-again churches, especially the Assemblies of God.

As the revival movement intensified, more and more people experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit without anyone praying for them. Many of them never heard about speaking in tongues until they experienced themselves first hand. All the revivalists were baptized in the Holy Spirit. Young boys and girls of twelve to fifteen years of age saw visions, older people saw dreams. As they shared with people in public gatherings, sinners were convicted of their sins and turn to Christ. Believers were spiritually hungry that whatever literature was available to them was like a spring in the desert. They could not stop as they read: they read them as they walked, sat and stood.

The revival fire spread over the whole western region and kept on burning. Growing toward maturity and witnessing for Christ, believers were hungry for the spiritual gifts and fruits mentioned in the Book of Acts and in the Epistles. As a result of receiving spiritual gifts many believers were excommunicated from their denominations so they joined the Assemblies of God.

In 1977, the revivalist Hau Lian Kham made a decision to join the Assemblies of God for a broader vision of evangelization and deeper spiritual life. Regarding his joining with the Assemblies of God, he once stated, "We must keep a large vision of the whole country, even the whole world for the evangelization while starting the work at the local area."³⁴

Revival led the born-again people to church planting across rural villages and towns. Hau Lian Kham, pastor and evangelist, extensively traveled to rural villages, preaching the gospel. Other pastor-evangelists such as Khai Khan Suan, and Philip Ahone were known for their evangelistic preaching across the country. Also lay

³⁴ Khai, *The Cross amidst Pagodas*, p. 66.

people and students were heavily involved in the spreading of revival.

The Assemblies of God has believed speaking in unknown tongues as the initial physical evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, as mentioned in Acts 2:4. Accordingly, believers were encouraged to seek and experience such phenomenal outpouring of the Holy Spirit. As they were baptized with the Holy Spirit, joy and boldness filled their lives. As a result, they shared the gospel with increasing effectiveness. Other gifts such as healing, miracles and true prophecy also built up the church. Many non-Pentecostals were added to the church as they too received the gifts of the Holy Spirit.³⁵

In recent years God has raised several younger Pentecostal preachers like Kam Hau and Lang Do Khup (who were called the “Benny Hinns of Chin Hills”) who organized and launched crusades at different locations. Sinners were converted, and believers were baptized in the Holy Spirit.

God gave the church many lay evangelists. They never received any pay. They carried the gospel to neighboring people and villages with the great burden of winning them to Christ. They often traveled far distances with their own supplies.

Many lay preachers and pastors are used by God with the gifts of healing and miracles. For instance, Tam Ki was a converted animist from the Mindat in Chin State. He often challenged the animists with the message that God is alive and more powerful than the local gods. One day, as he preached the gospel to the villagers, a group of people plotted to shoot and kill him. But the bullet did not leave the barrel of their weapon. The animistic villagers were so surprised that they all submitted to the preacher and his message. A dead man was brought back to life on another occasion. All the villagers turned to Christ. Many were saved during the nightly open-air crusade. Many were baptized with the Holy Spirit.³⁶

4. Conclusion

4.1 The Impact of Revival among the Chin People Today

For the last twenty-five years God has sent revival to the Chins in Myanmar, resulted in the growth of the Pentecostal movement

³⁵ Khai, *The Cross amidst Pagodas*, p. 54.

³⁶ Khai, *The Cross amidst Pagodas*, p. 55.

not only in Chin hills, but slowly spreading into other parts of Myanmar. Today, there are over 700 Pentecostal churches in Chin hills alone. Around 90% of the population who once worshipped evil spirit are Christians today.³⁷

In the Christian community they experienced a loving concern and care which they had not experienced before. They were free from the fear of evil spirits. They found the true liberation by the Holy Spirit. The worship of the living God replaced their traditional festivals. The altars and monoliths of their ancient animistic faith were replaced by local church buildings. The traditional dances and merry-making by drinking local alcohol on religious festival days were substituted by Christian festivals like Easter and Christmas.

The old war songs and secular love songs were replaced by gospel hymns and praise and worship songs. The people who once dance for spirits of rocks and rivers are dancing before the Lord. The gospel message of Jesus Christ enlightens their worldview and assured them of a bright hope for the future to be fellow citizens with saints and members of the household of God.

Today the Chin Christians, young and old, men and women alike, are witnessing the love of Christ by taking the gospel to everyone within their reach. There were more than 300 missionaries supported by Chin Christian churches sent out to different parts of Myanmar and. Presently there are more than 1000 young men and women preparing themselves in Bible schools in Myanmar and abroad, to take the challenge of taking the message of the cross to the end of the earth. Most Chin Christians give to missions generously and sacrificially.

Needless to say that the gospel is transforming the life and community of the Chin people. The greatest revival among the Chins took place after the missionaries had left. Upon the foundation laid by the missionaries, the Spirit of the Lord is raising up a new army of God by transforming evil spirit worshippers and human head-hunters, and make them his children and soldiers of the cross. We are partners in building God's kingdom. I am a fruit of the revival in Chin hills. Praise be the name of Jesus for the great things He has done.

³⁷ Khai Khan Suan, the District No. 4 Superintendent of the Assemblies of God of Myanmar. Interview by the author.

4.2 A Growing Need for Balanced Pentecostal Theology

While the churches in Chin hills of Myanmar and other parts of the world are enjoying the impact of revival, it also brought several issues and confusions in the church, especially in the area of spiritual warfare and personal prophecy. Often times one's strength becomes one's weakness without careful self-examination and biblical reflection.

There is a growing need for clear and balanced Pentecostal theology for the clergy and laity alike. As there is always a strong participation of laity in evangelism, praying for the sick and travelling from place to place to share the love of God among Pentecostals, it is also important to be aware of the possible pitfalls so that syncretism might not mislead us.

As individual Pentecostal believers experience the power of God in the Holy Spirit, their convictions and perceptions are strong. This can lead us into false pride. Thus theological educators and church leaders should prayerfully address current issues facing the Pentecostal churches today. True revival is the work of God in the context of human beings. To have Bible-based, Christ-centered, and Holy Spirit-led revival in our Bible schools and churches, to the glory of God and for the maturing and edification of the church, may the Lord continue to teach, lead and use this generation as an agents of God's supernatural transforming grace with the power of Pentecost.