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RECLAIMING THE ZAYAT MINISTRY: WITNESS TO THE GOSPEL
AMONG BURMESE BUDDHISTS IN MYANMAR

by

Lazarus Fish

A dissertation submitted in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree,

Doctor of Missiology

E. Stanley Jones School of World Mission and Evangelism

Asbury Theological Seminary

July 2002

DISSERTATION APPROVAL SHEET

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Requirements for the degree of
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Abstract

Adoniram Judson, the first American Protestant overseas missionary, brought the gospel to Burmese people in 1813. He preached the gospel to them for five years (1813-1818), but no Burmese people were converted to Christianity. During this period, he discovered the importance of the zayat ministry and began to utilize it as a means for communicating the gospel to the Burmese people. The zayat is a small building constructed at the roadside as a resting place for travelers. Sometimes Buddhist monks would deliver messages at the zayat. Judson built his own zayat and utilized it as a point of contact. He also dialogued with the Burmese and held worship service at the zayat. No Burmese was intimidated in coming to worship there. As a result, hundreds of Burmese were won to Christ during Judson's lifetime. After Judson, however, the number of Burmese converts dramatically decreased.

In this dissertation, the writer explores why Judson's missionary work with the Burmese was more successful than that of the missionaries who followed after him. Analysis of Judson's zayat ministry indicates two reasons for the success of his mission work with the Burmese people: (1) adaptation of the gospel to the Burmese Buddhist worldview, and (2) utilization of Burmese local cultural forms for communication of the gospel. These two aspects of the zayat ministry enabled him to win Burmese to Christ.

This study discusses an application of Judson's zayat ministry approach in Christian witness to the gospel among Burmese Buddhists today. In developing this study, the writer explores the historical

background, the culture, and the worldview of the Burmese people in order to discover what challenges they make to Christian witness among them.

Data for research were obtained from library research and interviews among Burmese Christians and Buddhists. Critical contextual models were used to form the theoretical framework for communication of the gospel to Burmese Buddhists without compromising the truth of the gospel.

In this study, two major aspects of the Burmese worldview are explored: (1) the notion of life, and (2) the notion of liberation. In relation to these, the writer investigates how the gospel has been unintentionally miscommunicated, due to a lack of understanding of the Buddhist worldview. The writer also explores ways to adapt the message of the gospel to the Burmese Buddhist worldview in order to relate the teachings of Theravada Buddhism to biblical teachings.

This study also discusses the expression of Christianity in forms which are familiar to the Burmese people, and how this is to be done by living a Christian life connected to the Burmese culture and by forms of worship which are relevant to the Burmese culture. The purpose of this study is to be able to facilitate the establishing of a Burmese church where the Burmese people can feel at home while embracing Christianity.

Several missiological implications can be applied beyond the Burmese context where other societies, similar to the Burmese, face a similar problem of contextualization. This study should generate further investigation in this and related areas with the view of contextualizing the gospel in Myanmar.

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Acknowledgments

God has done many good things for me. I am greatly thankful to him for enabling me to complete this dissertation. I am also deeply grateful to many people and churches who have made this research possible. I give my special thanks to Dr. Darrell Whiteman, my mentor, who spent much time and energy reading successive drafts of the dissertation and leading me in the right direction. He provided me with insights and gave clear suggestions in my struggles with the research and the writing. Without his help, this dissertation would have been impossible. Also, my special thanks to Dr. Terry Muck. As he is familiar with Theravada Buddhism, he gave me valuable insights and guidance in the writing of this dissertation. I am also grateful to Dr. Eunice Irwin for her constructive feedback and evaluation. Also, my special thanks to Dr. Dale Walker for his time and energy in reading and correcting my English. Because of his contribution, this dissertation has become more readable. I also want to express my deep gratitude to all the faculty of the E.S.J. School of World Mission and Evangelism for constructive feedback concerning this dissertation.

I also want to express my deep appreciation to the churches in the United States which have been supporting us, not only financially, but also psychologically, emotionally and spiritually. Without their great contribution, this dissertation would have been impossible. I am also thankful to Roger and Sandy Bossingham, our Forwarding Agent for their faithfulness in the service of the Lord, representing us with the churches. They received the funds from the churches and paid our bills at the school.

Finally, I want to thank the Lord for my wonderful wife and children. My wife not only sacrificed much but also inspired me to persist in my

research and writing. Also, a special thanks to my mother who always gave words of encouragement and prayed for me from Myanmar.

Without all of these wonderful people, this dissertation could not have been completed. I am heavily indebted to the Lord and to all these people who have substantially contributed to this cause.

CHAPTER ONE

The Beginnings of a Burmese Church

Introduction

Adoniram Judson, the first American Protestant overseas missionary, brought the gospel to the Burmese people in 1813. During the first five years (1813-1818), no Burmese was won to Christ. After these five years, however, Judson learned the importance of the zayat in the daily life of the Burmese people and began to utilize this as a means to communicate the gospel to the Burmese people. The zayat is a small building constructed at the roadside as a place of rest for travelers. Sometimes Buddhist monks would deliver messages at the zayat. Judson held worship services at the zayat, and Burmese people were not intimidated in coming to worship there. Judson also learned Buddhism and became well versed in the Buddhist scriptures (Pearn 1962:25). He also adapted the Christian message to the Buddhist worldview (C. Anderson 1956:185-188). As a result of this contextual approach through the zayat ministry, and adaptation of the gospel to the Buddhist worldview, hundreds of Burmese were won to Christ.

Over the years, mission workers have tried many methods to reach Buddhists. For example, Ubolwan Mejudhon (a Thai woman converted from Theravada Buddhism) in her dissertation “The Way of Meekness:

Being Christian and Thai in the Thai Way,” (1997) talks about meekness as a means of communicating the gospel to the Thai people. She says that the Thai way of meekness influences life-modeling as a powerful religious tool. The Thai people analyze the messengers before they consider their message. Thus, the way the messenger lives and behaves affects the message. For the Thai, the messenger proves his or her honesty and sincerity through his or her humble attitudes and gentle manners. The Thai people test the excellency of any religion through the lives of its believers. U. Mejudhon (1997:343-345) also says that the Thai people do not care whether the message is rational, logical, or true, but what is most important is that the messengers are trustworthy and the message meets their present needs.

J.T. Seamands, former missionary in India provides another example. He wrote, Tell it Well: Communicating the Gospel across Cultures. In chapter eleven (1981:167-183), he discusses communicating the gospel to Buddhists. His point is that if communication of the gospel is to be effective, it must be adapted to the worldview of Buddhists. He suggests learning Buddhism by comparing and contrasting the worldviews of Christianity and Buddhism. By doing this, we will find points of contact by which we may relate the message of the gospel to the teaching of Buddhism. He also suggests such points of contact as “the fact of impermanence,” “a

high standard of ethics,” “meditation and self-discipline,” “elimination of all desire,” “belief in heaven and hell,” “vicarious suffering,” etc. He points out that the best way to approach the Buddhist is through the gospel of “The Four Noble Truths” and “The Eightfold Path.” He suggests that by discussing “The Four Noble Truths,” we can tell the Buddhists that suffering is a fact of life, the cause of suffering is sin, the cure for sin is the suffering of Christ, and the way of deliverance is through faith in Christ. Seamands’ evangelistic approach to the Buddhists is through adaptation of the gospel to the Buddhist worldview.

Of these three approaches to the Buddhists suggested above, I will utilize Judson’s zayat ministry approach to the Buddhists. His zayat ministry approach involves both adaptation of the gospel to the Buddhist worldview and contextualization of Christianity in the Buddhist cultural context. For Christian witness to the gospel among the Burmese Buddhists, both the preaching of the gospel and living out the value of the gospel are imperative.

A contemporary Burmese evangelist, Nyan Lin, follows Judson’s example. In search of the truth, he was converted through the Christian witness of Rev. Aung Tan. At the very beginning, Nyan Lin discovered that Christianity was heavily influenced by Western culture and that this could

hinder Burmese people from becoming believers in Christ. He learned the importance of contextualization of the gospel and Christian lifestyles and utilized this in his ministry to the Burmese Buddhists. Today, he is the most successful Burmese evangelist and church planter among the Burmese Buddhists.

This dissertation is an attempt to reclaim the zayat ministry, following the examples of Judson and Nyan Lin's contextual approach. By doing this, the writer expects to help Myanmar Christians communicate the gospel meaningfully to the Burmese people and facilitate establishing a Burmese church where the Burmese people can feel at home while embracing Christianity.

Buddhism, the Dominant Religion of Myanmar

The exotic Southeast Asian nation of Myanmar (Burma) covers a total area of 261,228 square miles, about the size of Texas, and has a population of more than 49 million. Theravada Buddhism is the dominant religion of the country. Approximately eighty-nine percent of the country's population is Buddhist, six percent is Christian and five percent are Hindu, Muslim and animist. There are 135 different ethnic groups in Myanmar. The Burmese are one of these groups; they make up sixty-five percent of the country's population and almost one hundred percent of them are Buddhists (data

obtained from the Myanmar Baptist Literature Production Center, May 2001).

Theravada Buddhism, the state religion of Myanmar, dominates the culture and the lives of the Burmese people. The national identity of the Burmese and their culture are deeply rooted in this form of Buddhism. Buddhism has molded the thinking of the Burmese, channeling their ideas and affecting their attitude toward life and the material world. It has influenced their perspectives on ethical values, moral virtues, and philosophical thinking about life. Daily life, manners, ideas, aspirations and nationality have been firmly shaped in Theravada Buddhism. Donald Smith (1965:82) records, “The Burmese people cannot think of nationality apart from their religion, for it is Buddhism which has welded the Burmese together. Therefore, the idea of nationhood owes its inception to Buddhism.” For a Burmese, therefore, the possibility of choosing another religion instead of Buddhism is not just a religious question; it is a question of national identity. Smith (1965:83) continues, “To be a Burman is to be a Buddhist. Therefore, to discard Buddhism is to reject the Buddhist society or the Burmese society.” The Burmese people think that to be a true Burmese or citizen of Myanmar, one has to be a Buddhist. Myanmar people who are not Buddhists are viewed as non-Myanmar. Buddhism is the religion of the

Myanmar people (Dal 1999:19).

Roman Catholic Missionary Efforts in Myanmar

The first group of Christian officials arrived in Myanmar in the sixteenth century. They were Portuguese Roman Catholic chaplains, from the Jesuit order, who came to Myanmar to serve the Portuguese people living there. They ignored any other groups of people except their own (Trager 1966:13).

The second group, who arrived in Myanmar in the eighteenth century, were Italian Dominican Roman Catholic missionaries. Unlike the Portuguese chaplains, they studied the Burmese language and tried to convert the Burmese to Christianity (1966:13).

In July 1783, Italian missionaries, Father Sangermano and Joseph Amato, arrived at Rangoon. Sangermano stayed in Rangoon, Lower Myanmar, and all the other Italian missionaries went to the Upper Myanmar mission located in Ava, then the capital city of Myanmar (1966:19). Lower and Upper Myanmar were divided according to two strategic cities: Yangon the Lower, and Mandalay the Upper. This indicates that the Italian Catholic missionaries have evangelized in both Lower and Upper Myanmar since the 18th century. According to a statement of Father Sangermano about Christians in Myanmar, by the last quarter of the eighteenth century,

the number of Christians scattered over the entire country numbered approximately 2,000 (Trager 1966:10). No Burmese convert, however, was mentioned in the official historical record of the Roman Catholic mission in Myanmar. Therefore, the 2,000 Christians scattered over the country might have been foreigners or people of non-Burmese indigenous groups. These Roman Catholic missions lasted about two centuries before the arrival of Protestant missionaries in Myanmar. During these two centuries, no particular resistance to Christianity by the Burmese Buddhists was mentioned. Instead, the Burmese kings granted religious freedom to the Roman Catholic missionaries, at least to a certain extent. As previously noted, however, no Burmese convert was mentioned in their official historical record.

Judson's Zayat Ministry

Adoniram Judson, the first American Protestant overseas missionary to come to Myanmar, arrived in 1813. Both Bailey (1955:45-46) and Pearn (1962:24) describe that at the very beginning, Judson learned the Burmese language and literature. After he had learned the language, he began to preach the gospel to the Burmese Buddhists. His purpose was “to introduce the religion of Jesus to the empire of Burmans” (Fletcher 1854:112) and then bring them to his isolated mission station. Pearn

(1962:17) describes that Adoniram and Ann Judson lived in a British mission house which was built on a site about half a mile beyond the town. Courtney Anderson (1956:203) also tells us that Judson's mission station was located in an isolated area when he writes, "Adoniram was more dissatisfied than discouraged. He felt that the mission house was too isolated from the rest of Rangoon."

Judson worked for five years (1813-1818) in preaching and teaching the Burmese people. During these five years, however, he won no Burmese to Christ. I believe his mission work during this period was not successful due to a lack of expressing Christianity within the Burmese community, and because his mission station was isolated and located outside the community.

Learning lessons from these first five years of experience, however, he changed his approach to the Burmese Buddhists. He had learned the importance of the Burmese zayat in people's daily life and began to utilize this as a means for communicating the gospel to the Burmese people. In the zayat, Judson did not preach a sermon; instead, he listened to the people and engaged in one-on-one discussion with individuals, first about the weather, crop conditions, and other matters of mutual interest, and then about religion in general, and then about Christianity (interview with Nyan Lin, March 2001). He also invited those passing by to enter and engage in discussion

with him, trying to gain their interest with his tracts and translations, and reading the Scriptures to them (Pearn 1962:34).

Edward Judson, son of Adoniram Judson, wrote about the Burmese Buddhist zayat,

A zayat is a structure built beside the road to offer travelers a place for rest and shade from the burning tropical sun. It is a building with no walls but with only a roof above. It has a raised platform on which travelers can sit or take a nap or have their meals. Often there are two or three drinking water pots for the travelers to quench their thirst. Many good Buddhists erect zayats to offer rest and refreshment to the travelers and thereby gain merit for themselves. (Judson 1883:231)

Let us look at the results of Judson's zayat ministry briefly. He started his zayat ministry in April 1818 (Mathieson n.d.:89), and the very next year (1819), he baptized the first Burmese convert, a man named Maung Nau. Maung Nau visited Judson's zayat many times before he became a Christian (Wayland 1853:221). That same year (1819), on November 7, two other Burmese converts, Maung Tha Hla and Maung Byay were baptized (C. Anderson 1956:237). The next year (1820), the number of new Burmese Christians increased from three to ten persons (1956:167). After two more years, in 1822, the number of Burmese Christians increased to nineteen (Howard 1931:8). In 1836, after twenty-three years of missionary service, there was a total of 207 Burmese Christians (Wa 1963:129).

These figures may seem small to someone who is not aware of the Theravada Buddhist context in which Judson was working. But we can compare the results of Judson's work with the early mission work of the Roman Catholic mission in Myanmar and with those in the neighboring country of Thailand, which is also a Theravada Buddhist country. As previously mentioned, the Roman Catholic missionaries arrived in Myanmar in the 16th century and worked almost two centuries with no Burmese converts mentioned in their official historical record. Concerning Thailand, Saad Chaiwan, President of McGilvary Theological Seminary, has this to say about the first missionary efforts there:

Twenty-two American Board missionaries who had labored for eighteen years, 1831-1849, could not make a single Thai convert. In thirty years 1833-1863, the American Baptists made only forty-five converts, chiefly among the Chinese. The French Catholic missionaries rarely mentioned conversion in their reports simply because there were none or very few. (quoted in Davis 1993: 15)

Compared to the Christian mission work in Thailand, the number of Burmese Buddhists won to Christ by Judson was quite an achievement. When we compare the number of Burmese Buddhist converts during Judson's lifetime with those after his era, we find that Judson's number of converts was significantly greater. It could even be said that the Judson era was the most productive period in the history of missions to the Burmese

Buddhists.

Wayland describes Judson's zayat ministry further when he writes,

The zayat has three sections: first a verandah thatched with *dani* leaves and open to the road, a place where the preacher would sit and receive all occasional visitors and inquirers; second, or middle section was a large airy room with whitewashed board walls to be used on Sundays for preaching and on weekdays for adult literacy classes, and the last section was a mere entry opening into the garden adjoining the mission house which was some 200 yards distant. The people, as they came in, seated themselves on the mats, the men on one side of the house, and the women on the other. (Wayland 1853:220)

Judson's intent in utilizing the zayat ministry was to be able to worship God at the zayat building and thus establish a Burmese indigenous church where the Burmese people could feel at home. No Burmese was intimidated by worshipping at the zayat.

Judson also studied Buddhism thoroughly and was well versed in the Buddhist scriptures (Pearn 1962:25). As a matter of fact, he was able to give good answers to questions raised by the Burmese and also adapted the gospel to the Burmese Buddhist worldview. Courtney Anderson (1956:185-188) describes Judson's dialogue with U Aung Min, his Burmese teacher. He explained the concept of sin to the Buddhist by adapting it to the Buddhist notion of suffering. He also explained to U Aung Min the existence of an eternal being by relating this to the Buddhist concept of nibbana. These examples show us that Judson was adapting his message to

the Buddhist worldview.

Missionary Work After Judson's Era

As previously noted, in 1836, after twenty-three years of Judson's missionary service, there was a total of 207 Burmese believers. By that time there were already 729 Karen Christians. The Karen people were the second ethnic group who were reached by the American missionaries in Myanmar. According to my knowledge, today the majority of Karens are Christians. We see that in 1836, the ratio between the Burmese Christians and the Karen Christians was approximately 1:3; every four converts involved one Burmese and three Karens.

After Judson, however, during as well as after British colonial rule, the ratio between the Burmese and Karen Christians became wider. For example, statistics from the Myanmar Baptist Churches Union in June 1997 show that there were 16,018 Burmese Church members from all denominations. Contemporary statistics from the Karen Baptist Convention show the number of Karen Christians as 206,90, a ratio of approximately 1:13. These figures, though, are misleading. The number 16,018 indicates the number of members of the Burmese Church, not Burmese Christians. The two terms are not the same. The number of members of the Burmese Church includes all the people who had joined the Burmese Church. They

might be of other ethnic groups, such as Karen, Chin, Kachin, etc., but for one reason or another they had become members in the Burmese Church. If we count only the Burmese Christians, the ratio would not be 1:13 but far wider. The total Christian population in Myanmar in 1997 was approximately 3.4 million (Barrett et al 2001:518). If the number of Burmese Christians was 16,018 in 1997, the ratio between the Burmese Christians and the non-Burmese Christians would have been approximately 1:212; in every two hundred twelve Christians in Myanmar, there is only one Burmese Christian. As we noted earlier, the Burmese are only one of the 135 ethnic groups living in Myanmar, but they make up sixty percent of the country's population.

By looking at the above-mentioned ratio from 1997 data, we can see that missionary work among the Burmese Buddhists is still bearing little fruit. The growth of the Burmese church remains stagnant, and the reception of the gospel among the Burmese is insignificant. Considering this situation, I have begun asking the following questions: Why was Judson's missionary work with the Burmese more successful than that of the missionaries before and after him? Why is Nyan Lin's ministry to the Burmese Buddhists successful? Why has the number of Burmese Christians remained stagnant over one hundred eighty years? Why are the Burmese

people not willing to become Christian? Are there barriers between the Christian and Buddhist communities? What forms of witness could the church of Myanmar use to evangelize and disciple Burmese Buddhists? My personal experience in the setting of Myanmar causes me to ponder these questions and has motivated my research of this topic.

There are two primary reasons for the success of Judson's missionary work with the Burmese people: (1) He had an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the Myanmar Buddhist worldview. As result, he was able to adapt the gospel message to their worldview and present the gospel meaningfully to the people, and (2) he utilized a contextual approach through the zayat ministry in reaching out to the Burmese people, and planted a church within the Burmese cultural context. This dissertation is an attempt to reclaim the zayat ministry in Myanmar.

Statement of the Problem

During British colonization (1885-1964), Christianity was brought to Myanmar encased in Western culture. No attempt was made to unpack the gospel from Western culture and repack it in the Burmese context.

Therefore, the Burmese people see Christianity, wrapped in Western culture, as Western religion, which has nothing to do with them. Unless Christianity can be expressed within the Burmese cultural context, the conversion of

Burmese people is nearly impossible. It is obvious that Judson's mission to the Burmese people was relatively successful because of his contextual approach through the zayat ministry.

This shows the importance of utilizing local forms and contextual approaches in communicating the Christian message to the people in a given cultural context. As previously described, Judson's success in reaching the Burmese Buddhists depended heavily on his communication of the message through local forms which were familiar to the Burmese people.

By contextualization of the gospel in Burmese cultural and religious contexts, the Myanmar Christians can begin to bridge the gap between the Burmese Christians and Burmese Buddhists and make a church home for the Burmese people. This research will investigate how Christianity can be unpacked from Western culture and worldview and repacked in the Burmese worldview and cultural context, so that Burmese people can see Christianity as their own religion. The problem of this project will be divided into five subproblems.

1. The first subproblem examines how Burmese culture challenges the Christian mission and erects barriers to the communication of the gospel.
2. The second subproblem seeks to understand how Burmese Theravada Buddhism challenges the Christian mission and erects barriers to the

communication of the gospel.

3. The third subproblem investigates how the gospel was unintentionally miscommunicated in the past due to a lack of contextualization. We will also examine what contextual approaches in both the past and present have been effective in communicating the gospel to the Burmese Buddhists (e.g. Judson's zayat ministry). This study will help us avoid further miscommunication.

4. The fourth subproblem finds ways to adapt the message of the gospel in the Burmese Buddhist worldview and to relate the teachings of Theravada Buddhism to biblical teachings.

5. The fifth subproblem examines the contextualization of Myanmar Christians lifestyles and Christian worship in the Burmese cultural context. The focus attempts to discover Burmese cultural forms which are relevant to communicate the meaning of the gospel to the Burmese people.

Data Needed

1. In order to answer the first subproblem, to understand how the Burmese people are a challenge to Christian mission, I needed to research their historical background and their cultural practices.

2. The second subproblem required an understanding of how Theravada Buddhism is a religious challenge to Christian mission. I needed to

investigate the two foundational ideas of Theravada Buddhism: the notion of life and the notion of liberation (salvation in Christian terms), along with other distinctive beliefs and worldviews.

3. Regarding the third problem, investigating how the gospel was unintentionally miscommunicated in the past due to a lack of contextualization, I needed to know how missionaries tried to communicate the gospel and how Burmese interpreted what they heard. In other words, I needed to investigate the linguistic terms, words, and expressions which miscommunicate the message of the gospel.

4. In order to solve the fourth subproblem, and to find ways to contextualize the message of the gospel, I needed to collect the following data: (a) What aspects of the Burmese Buddhist worldview correspond to the Christian worldview? (b) How can these corresponding aspects of the worldviews be used as common ground on which to build a meaningful dialogue with Burmese Buddhists? (c) How can Myanmar Christians adopt aspects of the Burmese Buddhist worldview in adapting and communicating the Christian message?

5. In order to solve the fifth subproblem, to find ways to contextualize Burmese Christian lifestyles and Christian worship in Burmese cultural context, I needed to know the following data: (a) What lifestyle choices of

Myanmar Christians could show the Burmese Buddhists that it is possible to be simultaneously good Burmese people and true patriots while at the same time embracing Christianity? (b) What forms of Christian worship may be relevant to the Burmese people?

Methodology

In order to carry out the research, three methods of data collection were employed: library research, participant-observation, and interviews.

Library Research

I collected information on Christian contextual data, on historical understanding of the Burmese people and on Burmese Theravada Buddhism through library research in the United States. While in Myanmar, I also collected more information on evangelization of the Burmese people through research at the library of Myanmar Institute of Theology (MIT), the largest Christian library in Myanmar. I also used sources at the Myanmar National Library for gathering more data on Burmese Theravada Buddhism and an historical understanding of the Burmese people and their culture. The Myanmar National Library is the largest library in Myanmar, and its collection is predominantly in the Burmese language. Numerous books on Theravada Buddhism are available. I did research at these two libraries in Myanmar from February to June, 2001.

Participant-observation

During the field research trip to Myanmar, I observed the Burmese Thingyan water festival (Burmese Buddhist New Year celebration) in Yangon in order to understand the significance, practice, and symbols of Theravada Buddhism. Burmese Buddhists celebrate the annual Thingyan water festival from April 12th to 15th. The symbolic meanings of the Thingyan water festival are newness, cleansing, purification, and reconciliation. These are redemptive terminologies that can be utilized in communication of the gospel to the Burmese Buddhists. Ma Ma Thay, a Buddhist girl at the hotel where I stayed, helped arrange my participation in the Thinyan festival, which was celebrated at Shwedagon Pagoda (the most famous pagoda in Southeast Asia) in Yangon. I observed such ceremonies as the hair-washing, the banana leaf boat drifting, the freeing of captured animals, and the spraying of water during the celebration.

I observed practices of Burmese churches in the city of Yangon to see if there are indigenous patterns that demonstrate some connection in form with contemporary Burmese lifestyles. Such things might be in the worship styles of prayer, singing, the wearing of particular clothes, the use of musical instruments, the decoration of the church, the participation of the people, etc.

In reflecting on the strength of the indigenous church patterns in the

Burmese Christian churches, some new strategies for contextualization of the gospel could be discerned. I collected data by taking notes and making recordings while participating. Listed below are Burmese Christian churches selected for this collection of data. I selected these three churches because: (1) they have a successful outreach ministry to the Burmese Buddhists, (2) members of these churches are predominantly Burmese people converted from Buddhism, and (3) the churches have many years of experience in reaching the Burmese Buddhists with the gospel.

1. Myauk Ouk Kalabak Burmese Christian Church, located in the northern part of the city of Yangon. About ninety percent of its members are Burmese who were converted from Buddhism. The church is located in the Buddhist community. U Hla Tun (a Burmese) is the pastor of the church. I know him personally and he welcomed me to his church during my trip.

2. Lyaing Tha Ya Christian Church, located in Lyaing Tha Ya township, in the Western part of Yangon. S. Pung Ram ministers to the church. He is a Rawang, not a Burmese, but his church members are mainly Burmese people converted from Buddhism. Pung Ram has many years of experience in evangelizing the Burmese Buddhists in the city of Yangon.

3. The last church I selected is the San Chaung Assembly of God Church. This church (about 1,000 members) is the largest Burmese church in

the city of Yangon. The church is pastored by U Myu Chit, an outstanding and well-known Burmese preacher. He is the current president of the Assemblies of God in Myanmar.

I collected information from these three churches based on the following questions: (1) What problems do they have in communicating the gospel to the Burmese people? (2) How do they solve these problems? (3) What forms of worship do they use? (4) How do they disciple new Burmese converts? (5) What methods do they use to evangelize the Burmese Buddhists?

Interviews

The need to understand responses of Christians and non-Christians to possible contextual approaches to Burmese people required conducting interviews. These interviews focused on the contextualization of Christianity in Myanmar. I gathered information on such topics as (1) Christian lifestyles, (2) Christian worship, (3) church life, and (4) personal data of recent converts.

In order to get wider responses to the four contextual topics described above, I also interviewed Burmese Buddhist monks and laypeople, Christian pastors, leaders and lay Christians. My priority was in interviewing Christians who were converted from Buddhism. The following groups were

interviewed in Yangon, during my research (March-June) 2001. (1) 10 Burmese Buddhist monks, (2) 10 lay Burmese Buddhists, (3) 10 pastors both Burmese and non-Burmese, (4) 10 recently converted Burmese Christians, and (5) 10 other lay Burmese Christians.

Interviews with Burmese Buddhists were limited to those who lived in the Yangon areas. I interviewed five monks and five lay Burmese Buddhists from a rural area and another five monks and five lay Burmese Buddhists from the city of Yangon. U Myu Khin, a Burmese Buddhist, and a close friend of mine, helped me find these ten monks and ten lay Burmese Buddhists for interviews. During the interviews, I collected their responses about Buddhism and Christianity by taking notes and making recordings. These methods were also used while interviewing groups 3 through 5.

Groups 3 through 5 were selected from Burmese Christian churches and from non-Burmese Christian churches in the city of Yangon. “Non-Burmese churches” refers to churches led by pastors from such ethnic groups as Chin, Lisu, Karen, Kachin, etc., where different ethnic groups, including Burmese people, worship together, and the Burmese language is utilized as the medium.

E. Pung Ram, a minister of Lyaing Tha Ya Christian church, and U Manaseth, a professor at the Eastern Bible Institute, helped me schedule

these interviews. Pung Ram helped me find 5 people of groups 3 through 5 from non-Burmese Christian churches who were willing to be interviewed. U Manaseth found another 5 people of groups 3 through 5 from Burmese Christian churches. This involved ten pastors, ten lay Burmese Christians who recently became Christian, and ten lay Burmese Christians who have been Christian for more than 3 years. The interview questions for the Christians and for the non-Christians appear in Appendix A, B and C.

In this chapter, we have seen the need and importance of contextualization in communication of the gospel. The next chapter will study theories of contextualization that will help us in our efforts to communicate the gospel to the people and to express Christianity within a local cultural context.

CHAPTER TWO

Theoretical Framework to Interpret the Data

In this dissertation, the data was interpreted based in four stages. I: Understanding Burmese people and their culture; II: Understanding Theravada Buddhism; III: Evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of past cross-cultural communication to the Burmese people; IV: Developing new strategies for communication of the gospel to the Burmese people. This fourth stage involves two factors. The first is the contextualization of the message. This contextual approach involves relating the message of the gospel to the teaching of Buddhism concerning notions of life and liberation. The purpose of this study is to establish as much common ground as possible for building a meaningful dialogue that would lead the Burmese Buddhists to conviction and conversion by the power of the Holy Spirit. The second factor is the contextualization of the lifestyles of Myanmar Christians and Christian worship in the Burmese cultural context. The purpose of this study was to explore how Christianity could be expressed in Burmese cultural forms. This will enable us to create a Christian atmosphere where the Burmese people can feel at home while embracing Christianity. This will be discussed in detail in chapter seven.

The above-mentioned four stages will be covered in chapters three through seven. The data of these five chapters are interpreted in the light of a theoretical framework involving a study of culture, worldview, contextualization, along with theological and biblical discernment.

Worldview

Different cultures have different worldviews. The Navajo Indians believe that events in history are not really past. These events can be brought back to the present by proper rituals. A Christian worldview maintains that what is past is past and cannot be brought back to the present because for Christians, time is linear. It begins with God's creation and ends with the second coming of Jesus Christ. The Hindu worldview, on the other hand, holds that the universe remains essentially the same and human beings move through it a life at a time (Downs 1971:128-29). The Hindus also see perfection as a state of resignation. For them it is better to withdraw from the world than attack its evils. Christians also maintain that God has called them out of the world, but that they are sent back into the world to proclaim God's word to the people (John 15:19; Matthew 24:19-20). Members of animistic cultures see fate, or the spirits, as all-powerful. Thai peasants are seen as being "destined to poverty." Secularism sees man as little more than a complex machine, just one more component of the physical universe

(Miller n.d.:31-32).

Yishey Latt (2001:197-198) states that according to the general American worldview, individualism, equality of persons, personal freedom, competition, measuring human values in terms of money/material things, change, time orientation, a human-centered universe, etc., are seen as good whereas according to traditional worldview, group orientation, different value according to status, security orientation, cooperation and not competition, a God-centered or spirit-centered universe, measuring human value in terms of family relationships, personal/family prestige, event orientation, non-change, etc., are seen as good. Christians should realize that there are numerous competing worldviews and that adherents of other religions do not view the world as we do.

Definition of Worldview

Norman Geisler (1978:241) compares the various worldviews of people to colored glasses through which they see themselves and the universe around them. The particular “worldview glasses” that the person happens to be wearing gives the “tint” or “hue” to the worldview of that person. One cannot see things other people see unless he or she lays aside his or her glasses temporarily, and looks at them through another pair of glasses. Therefore, for effective communication of the gospel, when

missionaries reach out to a people group of another culture, they need to understand thoroughly the worldview of that particular target group.

Darrell Whiteman (1983:478) describes worldview as the central set of concepts and presuppositions that provides people with their basic assumptions about reality. He maintains that people in different cultures have very different worldviews or views of the natural and supernatural worlds. Kraft (1979a:53) sees worldview as “the central systematization of conceptions of reality to which the members of the culture assent and from which stems their value system. The worldview lies at the very heart of culture, touching, interacting with, and strongly influencing every other aspect of the culture.” Merrill R. Abbey (1960:540) also said that the way people see reality can be termed their worldview. In Latin, Greek, Sanskrit, English and certain other languages, one meaning of the word “see” is “know.” A worldview is the way people see or perceive the world, the way they “know” it to be. What people see is in part what is there. It is partly what we are. Michael Kearney (1960:100) writes, “The worldview of a people is their way of looking at reality. It consists of basic assumptions and images that provide a more or less coherent though not necessarily accurate way of thinking about the world.”

Adapting the Message to the Burmese Worldview

When missionaries reach a people group of another culture, their first step should be to analyze the worldview of that particular target group. Only when they know the worldview of the respondent cultures, will they be able to adapt their message and make it understandable to those within that culture (Hesselgrave 1991:145).

Hesselgrave (1991:209-210) also states that only three ways are logically possible for adapting the message in our respondent cultures. First, missionaries can invite non-Christian respondents to lay aside their own worldview and temporarily adopt the Christian worldview in order to understand the message. For example, according to the Buddhist worldview, there is no constant being. The universe, planets, physical entities, gods, men, and animals are subject to impermanence. Unless Buddhists accept the Christian worldview that there is a permanent and unchanging entity, they cannot believe in the existence of the eternal God. This approach is theoretically possible, but it is highly impractical because people are not willing to change their glasses. Second, missionaries can temporarily adopt the worldview of their non-Christian respondents. In the light of the respondent worldview, missionaries can adapt their message so that it will become meaningful to the respondent. This approach is not easy, but it is

both possible and practical if missionaries take the initiative. Third, missionaries can invite their respondents to meet them half-way, and each side try to look at the other worldview halfway. This has been a rather popular approach. The problem with this approach is that one is liable to have a distorted view of the other religion if one looks at only a part of it and not the whole.

Among Hesselgrave's three approaches, approach number two is the most valid missionary approach to the Burmese Buddhists. In this approach, with God's end in view, missionaries begin with the respondents' starting point. What the respondents believe about the existence and nature of reality, the world around them, and human relationships to the world, is of the essence. Adaptation to those beliefs is one of the first requirements of missionary communication.

Culture

Culture is another important factor focused in this study. Religious ideas and philosophies are conveyed from place to place by means of culture. Culture is a conduit by which the Christian message is conveyed from nation to nation. Christians need to know the culture of people in order to communicate the gospel effectively.

Definition of Culture

Anthropologists give differing definitions of culture. E. Adamson Hoebel (1972:48) defines culture as “the integrated system of learned behavior patterns which are characteristic of the members of a society and which are not the result of biological inheritance.” Aram I defines culture as,

The self-expression of a group of people in time and space. It is an expression of life, a mode of becoming oneself, a way of relating to one another and to culture. Culture thus embraces the wholeness of language, tradition, belief, institutions and customs that hold a community together. Culture is a complex reality that includes spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features. The ethos, the self-identity of people, is manifested through culture. (Aram 1999:30)

Aylward Shorter (1999:55) said that “culture is acquired or learned by individuals as members of a human society. Culture controls our perception of reality. It offers us a system of meanings embodied in images and symbols. It shapes our understanding, feelings and behavior. It gives us a group identity. Cultures are coherent systems.” Darrell Whiteman, a Christian anthropologist, sees culture as,

. . .the complex array of ideas that people carry in their head, which are expressed in the form of material artifacts and observable behavior. . . . [A] society is composed of a group of individuals who in living and working together hold certain cultural elements in common, which enables them to organize and define themselves as a social unit. (1983:27)

Charles Kraft (1979b:48) writes that “through culture our life is

organized. Our physical and mental behaviors are pervasively influenced by our culture. It shapes both our acting and our thinking. It provides the models of reality that govern our perception.”

Incarnation of the Gospel in Cultures

Aram I (1999:32) states that when God’s self-revelation took place in Judaic culture, God’s impartial action in all cultures was manifested at Pentecost. Since Pentecost, the gospel has taken root in several cultures. He continues by saying that the gospel must be reincarnated from one culture to the other and be fully re-owned by people in and through their own cultural forms, patterns, norms and values. Mission must proclaim the gospel through the receiving culture. A culture cannot accept any cultural patterns and norms pertaining to the gospel that are not compatible with its own.

At the same time, Aram I (1999:33-37) also reminds us that the gospel transcends every culture. It is trans-cultural. The gospel is affirmed through culture, not in cultures. Culture is only an instrument, and context to embody and articulate the gospel. Cultures are deeply affected by human sin and generate exploitation, domination and violence. The gospel should become incarnate in a given culture so that it liberates those who are captives of culture.

Adapting Christian Terms and Expressions in the Local Cultural Context

The Christian message is universal. Some, therefore, assume that all we need to do is to deliver it to all people. Hesselgrave (1991:149-158) says that communication of the message of the gospel in particular contexts requires a contextual process which includes definition, selection, adaptation, and application.

Definition

Hesselgrave (1991:150-151) shows that one of the disasters of human sin is that humankind distorted God in its knowledge so that human understanding has been perverted in areas of divine revelation. The true God is excluded, but false gods abound. Humankind distinguishes between evil and good, but not in accordance with the biblical view. Most religions believe in immortality in some sense of the term, but the form of immortality varies greatly with worldviews. Missionaries must define the terms they use. Their definitions must be dictated “by the distance between biblical truth and cultural error. Their definitional process must proceed by comparison and contrast” (1991:151).

Selection

Missionaries must always give a partial message in any particular situation. When Christ commanded us to teach human beings to observe all

his teachings, he did not intend that Christians teach everything in one sitting (Hesselgrave 1991:152). Selection is always necessary, and in each case great care should be taken to select culturally appropriate expressions of God's message to humankind. Bevans (1992:13) says that contextual theology is an attempt to understand Christian faith in terms of a particular context because it takes account of culture, history, and contemporary thought forms along with scripture and tradition, as valid sources for theological expression.

Adaptation

Sensitive missionaries carry on a closely related and continual process of adaptation. They note special concerns in the particular worldview, such as liberation/salvation from suffering, ways of entering into heaven, hell, the spirit world, etc., and adjust to those concerns. Adaptation also requires explanation of certain aspects of our religion which appear objectionable to non-Christians. Missionaries should also be alert to watch for special entry points into these non-Christian systems. For example, Lao-tze said that "he who bears the sins of the world is fit to rule the world" (quoted in Hesselgrave 1991:155).

Application

Missionaries perform no compelling communication if they deliver

only a general message. The missionary message must speak to needs. We are not speaking to worldviews, but to human beings with flesh and blood, minds and hearts. The message of Christ must compel others to accept him as their Savior and Lord (Hesselgrave 1991:157).

Principles of Communication Model

Charles Kraft (1979a:148-155) gives several principles of communication. Two of these provide insights for analyzing our past cross-cultural communication. One proposes that the message is dependent on how the receptor perceives it, and how the communicator presents it. Another principle demonstrates that when communicating the gospel, the communicator transmits only the message not the meanings, because the meanings are in people. Therefore, the receptor always misses something intended by the communicator, and adds something not intended. These two principles serve as criteria by which the writer can examine past models of cross-cultural communication to the Burmese Buddhists. For example, according to my observation I learned that when Myanmar Christians preach about “eternal life” to the Burmese Buddhists, the Buddhists interpret it as “eternal suffering.” According to the Burmese Buddhist worldview, “eternal” means “an endless cycle of rebirth,” called “samsara,” and rebirth brings about “life” and “life” brings our “suffering.” Therefore, when

Myanmar Christians preach about “eternal life,” the Buddhists understand it as “eternal suffering.”

The belief systems of Buddhism and Christianity are not the same. The worldviews, thought forms, and cosmologies of these two religions vary greatly. These contrasting beliefs generate considerable problems in communication. The same word used by one religion may have a vastly different meaning for the other. Religious names, expressions and terms may appear similar, but each religion attaches different connotations to that name or term.

Therefore, when the Buddhists hear the Christian message, they interpret those statements according to the Buddhist worldview and belief system. The Buddhists add something that the Myanmar missionaries do not intend. This creates micommunication of the gospel to the Buddhists.

For solving this problem, Kraft (1979a:149-151) describes two approaches: (1) the identificational approach, in which the communicator presents the message within the receptor’s linguistic and experiential frames of references in order to communicate the gospel meaningfully; and (2) the universal approach, in which both the communicator and the receptor must be in a position to attach similar meanings to the symbols employed. This means that they must be operating within a common context or frame of

reference.

The sharing of a frame of reference involves a common understanding of linguistic categories and religious worldview. Kraft (1979a:151) also called this model a “receptor-oriented model of communication.” In these two approaches communicators fit their message to the categories of the receptor’s frame of reference as well as to that of their own frame of reference.

Both principles can be applicable in the Myanmar context. In light of these two principles, in chapter five, the writer examines the use of linguistic terms, words, and messages, which may miscommunicate the gospel in our cross-cultural ministry to the Burmese Buddhists. In order to discover better terms, words, and mission strategies, the writer analyzes both weaknesses and strengths which affect Myanmar Christians’ ability to communicate the gospel to the Burmese Buddhists meaningfully.

Developing New Models (a Contextual Approach) for Communication of the Gospel

Lesslie Newbigin (1989:141) underscored the need to contextualize the gospel, saying that the gospel is addressed to human beings, to their hearts and minds and consciences. The gospel also calls for their response. Newbigin said that human beings exist only as members of communities,

sharing a common language and customs, as well as economic and social life. They also share common ways of understanding and coping with their world. If the gospel is to be understood, it has to be communicated in the language of those to whom it is addressed. The gospel comes to people not as a disembodied message, but as the message of the community which claims to live by it and which invites others to adhere to it. The community life of those who proclaim the gospel must be so ordered that it “makes sense” to those who are so invited. It must come alive for those to whom it is address. They must be able to say, “Yes, I see. This is true for me and for my situation.”

Definition of Contextualization

Theologians and anthropologists define contextualization with numerous opinions and biases. Whiteman states,

Contextualization is an attempt to communicate the gospel in word and deed and to establish the church in ways that make sense to people within their local cultural context, presenting Christianity in such a way that it meets people’s deepest needs and penetrates their worldview, thus allowing them to follow Christ and remain within their own culture. (1999:43-44)

Hesselgrave (1989:401) states, “Basically, contextualization is a dynamic concept which is open to change from inside of the system and which is future-oriented.”

Hesselgrave (1991:135-136) states that contextualization for liberal theologians is a new approach to theologizing which does not wrestle so much with the text of Scripture to determine its meanings, but which enters into the struggles of humanity at any historical moment with a view to discovering what God is doing and saying in that context. It also means communicating the gospel not so much of what God in Christ has done in past history to save humanity, but more in terms of living out the values of the gospel in our contemporary historical moment.

For evangelicals, however, “contextualization” has a different meaning. Evangelicals do not reject the liberals’ basic concept of contextualization (expression of Christianity in terms of a local culture), but they have infused it with a different meaning. Bruce J. Nicholls (1975:647) defines contextualization as “the translation of the unchanging content of the gospel of the kingdom into verbal forms meaningful to the people in their separate cultures and within their particular existential situations.” George W. Peters (1977:169) says, “Contextualization properly applied means to discover the legitimate implications of the gospel in a given situation. It goes deeper than application. Implication is demanded by a proper exegesis of the text.” Harvie Conn (1978:42) writes that contextualization is “the process of conscientization of the whole people of God to the hermeneutical claims of

the gospel.” Hesselgrave and Rommen define contextualization as follows:

. . . contextualization can be thought of as the attempt to communicate the message of the person, works, Word, and will of God in a way that is faithful to God’s revelation, especially as it is put forth in the teachings of Holy Scripture, and that is meaningful to respondents in their respective cultural and existential contexts. Contextualization is both verbal and nonverbal and has to do with theologizing; Bible translation, interpretation, and application; incarnational lifestyle; evangelism; Christian instruction; church planting and growth; church organization; worship style -- indeed with all of those activities involved in carrying out the Great Commission. (1989:200)

Rejection of the Old

Hiebert (1985:184) says that many missionaries in the past tended to reject most of the old customs as “pagan.” The old customs were thought to be directly or indirectly related to traditional religions, hence unacceptable for Christians. Often the missionaries mistook their own culture for the gospel and consequently judged other cultures as bad. Missionaries found that in many societies religion was the core of the culture and permeated all of life. Since these cultures had religious connotations, missionaries rejected them indiscriminately.

Hiebert (1994:76-81) gives three more reasons why Western missionaries rejected non-Western cultures: These were (1) the theory of cultural evolution, (2) the rise of colonialism and (3) the triumph of science. The theory of cultural evolution taught that non-Western cultures were

“primitive” and “uncivilized.” Colonialism convinced them of the superiority of their own Western culture. They were in the early stages of development while Western culture ruled as the civilized culture. With the triumph of science, scientific knowledge was seen as objective, cumulative, and true in the ultimate sense.

In contrast to this, the knowledge of other cultures was thought to be subjective, piecemeal, and false. Hiebert (1994:76) said that the time frame roughly from 1850 to 1950 was known as “the Era of Noncontextualization” in India. In that period, most Protestant missionaries in India rejected the “pagan” beliefs and practices of the people they served. Hiebert quoted John Pobe,

. . . all the historical churches by and large implemented the doctrine of the tabula rasa, i.e., the missionary doctrine that there is nothing in the non-Christian culture on which the Christian missionary can build, and, therefore, every aspect of the traditional non-Christian culture had to be destroyed before Christianity could be built up. (quoted in 1994:76)

It is no wonder that the period from 1850-1950 was known as the period of noncontextualization. Hiebert (1985:184-185) sees that rejection of old cultures created many problems. First, it left a cultural vacuum that needed to be filled. In most cases the missionaries blundered by importing their own customs to fill up the vacuum. Second, when the missionaries suppressed the old cultural ways, these old practices merely went

underground. Eventually these pagan practices performed in secret combined with public Christian teachings to form Christian paganism. Third, this wholesale rejection of traditional cultures not only turned missionaries and church leaders into police, but it also stunted the growth of converts by denying them the right to make their own decisions.

Acceptance of the Old, or Uncritical Contextualization

The second response to old cultural ways is to accept them uncritically into the church. Traditional practices are seen as basically good and few if any changes are needed when the people become Christians. Those who hold this view have a deep respect for other humans and their cultures.

They recognize that other people place a high value on their own cultural heritage. They also know that the “foreignness” of the gospel has been one of the major barriers to its acceptance by many people groups in the world. They therefore minimize change in the life of the converts and favor the uncritical approach to the contextualization of the gospel (Hiebert 1985: 185).

John Davis (1993:119) pointed out that after the withdrawal of colonial political power from Africa, six thousand “New Emerging Religious Movements” appeared on that continent. Most of these

movements reflect the heart-cry of the Africans to express Christianity within their own cultural forms. The fact that many of these movements are syncretistic reveals their lack of effort to contextualize the gospel.

Such uncritical contextualization forced the Western missionaries to change their perspective and acknowledge the defects of Western cultures. Western missionaries began thinking about seeing things from the insiders' perspective of their target groups rather than imposing their own perspective from the outside. Kenneth Pike (1954:10-11), a missionary linguist, developed in linguistic terms the "emic" versus "etic" perspectives. Using the suffixes from two linguistic definitions "phonEMIC" and "phonETIC," he describes "etic" as outsider's perspective and "emic" as the insider's perspective.

John R. Davis (1993) favors using the word "syncretism" when he discusses the issue of "uncritical contextualization." He writes,

In dealing with contextualization one must foresee the potential dangers of uncritical syncretism. Wherever the gospel finds itself there will inevitably be some "give and take" as it both molds and is molded by its environment. (1993:21)

Hiebert (1994:186-187) says that this uncritical approach has serious weaknesses, and he points out two. First, it overlooks the fact that there are corporate and cultural sins as well as personal transgression. The gospel calls for change from the evil ways both in individuals and in societies.

Contextualization is the means of communicating the gospel in the manner the people can understand so that they can change their evil ways. Second, uncritical contextualization opens the door to syncretism of all kinds. If the new converts to Christianity continue in all their cultural practices, both good and evil, this will result in all forms of neo-paganism. New Christians need to examine their cultural practices in the light of biblical truths, keep those that are acceptable with the norm of the Scriptures, and reject the others.

Critical Contextualization

In the last stage, developing models of contextualization will be examined in terms of Paul Hiebert's model of critical contextualization.

Hiebert's model can be summarized as follows (Hiebert et al 1999:21-29):

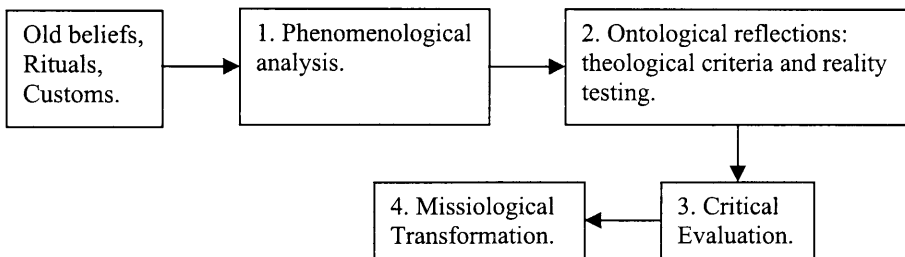


Figure 1. Critical Contextualization

In phenomenological analysis, Hiebert asserts that church leaders and missionaries must lead the congregation in gathering information about the traditional customs, rites, and beliefs of a culture, and then analyze and

discuss their meanings and functions. The ontological reflections involves the test of Scripture and reality testing. In the test of Scripture, the pastors or missionaries are to lead the church members in a Bible study related to the issue under consideration. A study of the Bible involves an analysis of the categories, logic, and truths revealed in Scripture itself in order to develop a biblical worldview and a biblical understanding of reality. In reality testing, people examine both their own and others' understanding of reality. This enables people to develop metacultural grids that will enable them to understand different cultures, compare, and test the truth claims of different cultures. In critical evaluation, churches are to analyze critically their existing beliefs and the traditional customs in the light of their new biblical understandings and to make the final decision on the basis of the newfound truth regarding their use. Finally, in the missiological transformation, the people may create a new contextualized Christian practice to communicate Christian beliefs in forms that are indigenous to their culture. In this critical contextualization model, old beliefs, rituals, and customs are neither rejected nor accepted without examination.

In Myanmar, some liberal thinkers try to accept Buddhism as one way to heaven. Others attack it vehemently from the pulpit, and in public sharing of the gospel. They argue that Buddhism is “a collection of superstitious

beliefs,” “idol worship,” or worse yet, “worship of Satan.” Van Willigen (1993:52) echoes Paul Hiebert’s view regarding uncritical and critical contextualization, by suggesting two extremes when dealing with people around us: (1) we may reject all aspects of local culture or (2) we may accept all rituals, customs and all aspects of local people’s culture as being meaningful and significant (Willigen 1993:52). These two methods are extreme approaches which can lead Christianity either to syncretism or alienation, as previously noted. Hiebert’s model of critical contextualization balances or avoids these two extreme.

Here Darrell Whiteman’s (1983:417) concept of conversion and indigenization will help us understand contextualization. He explains it in terms of form and meaning. Saying, “indigenous Christianity. . . [involves] employing traditional forms to express the new meaning found in Christianity.” The following figure will help explain the form and meaning analysis:

		MEANING	
		Christian	Pagan
FORM	Foreign	Foreign Christianity	Syncretism
	Indigenous	Indigenous Christianity	Traditional Religion

Figure 2. Form and meaning in Indigenous Christianity

The above figure shows the relationships between form/meaning and culture. If one has both the foreign form and the foreign meaning, it is called “cultural conversion.” If one rejects both the foreign form and meaning, it remains “traditional.” Syncretism occurs where the forms are changed to those advocated by the new culture while retaining traditional ideological principles and meaning. However, indigenization occurs where local indigenous forms are used to express the new foreign ideas (Burnett 1990:133-135). This form and meaning analysis can be helpful in examining the contextualization of the lifestyles of Burmese Christians and their Christian worship in Burmese cultural context. By doing so, we can avoid the pitfall of syncretism.

In order to solve the problems presented in this dissertation, the writer followed Hiebert’s model of critical contextualization. In the light of Hiebert’s model, Burmese Buddhist belief, worldview, customs and cultural practices were critically analyzed in order to understand them. This step is done in chapters three and four. After understanding the Burmese Buddhist worldviews and beliefs, in chapter five, the writer examines linguistic terms which might miscommunicate the gospel due to differences between the Christian and Buddhist worldviews. For example, for Christians, “eternal life” means a life that will be spent eternally in heaven. John describes how

believers will spend eternal life in heaven when he writes, “And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away” (Revelation 24:4). However, according to the Buddhist worldview, “eternal life” is understood as a life which will be spent in an endless circle of rebirths called samsara, characterized by impermanence and suffering. In chapters six and seven, the writer examines the Buddhist worldview, beliefs and cultural practices in the light of biblical understandings in order to find out how the biblical teachings can be related to the dominant cultural context of Burmese people and the teaching of Theravada Buddhism, without minimizing the uniqueness of Christ and Christianity, thus avoiding falling into syncretism or relativism. In other words, these final two chapters deal with contextualizing the message (utilizing correspondent aspects of Burmese Buddhist worldview for communication of the gospel), the lifestyles of Myanmar Christians, and their Christian worship in the Burmese cultural context. As previously mentioned, the purpose of this study is to discover contextual models by which Myanmar Christians can express Christianity to the Burmese people in forms that are indigenous to their culture. From a missiological

perspective, this dissertation also includes theological and biblical discernment of the contextual approach to mission.

Theological Discernment of the Contextual Approach to Mission

Jose M. de Mesa (1999:120-121) writes about “doing theology” (a theology which meets the needs of the people in a given culture), demonstrating a profound missiological perspective for contextualization of the gospel. He said that theology is born from the interaction of the Judaeo-Christian Tradition (gospel) and the culture by mutually respectful and critical interaction between the two. The pole of the Judaeo-Christian tradition and that of the culture affect one another. The interaction is mutually respectful because each pole has something positive to contribute towards the well-being of people, and each ultimately derives its roots from the same source, God. Each pole serves as an interpretive and critical guide to the other. The pole of culture makes it possible to meaningfully interpret the Judaeo-Christian tradition as well as critically assess the present cultural expressions of the tradition. The pole of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, on the other hand, enables us to understand the culture in the light of our faith, and to reassess its value vis-à-vis our Christian vocation. In this way, both

poles serve reciprocal hermeneutic and critical functions which provoke further understanding.

De Mesa (1999:122) goes on to give two primary reasons for focusing on the human situation: (1) we live in a world of crisis in which any message of salvation is questioned by the suffering of people. Attention to the concerns and felt-needs of the people will enable us to answer the right question. (2) Theology is developed in a concrete setting, culture and history, addressing the contemporary situation and utilizing contemporary theological terms and language relevant to a given people. Theological language, to be meaningful to the people, must have reference to the lived-experience of a given people (1999:122).

The book of Acts is an indispensable narrative for studying ways in which the gospel interacted with a variety of ethnic and religious situations from Antioch to Rome. Both Acts and the Pauline Epistles illustrate how the apostolic church constantly searched for language that best suited the questions raised in each place. Paul found expressions that conveyed truth with the highest degree of local impact. For example, Paul used the expression, “Unknown God” to tell Athenians about God, the Creator (Acts 17:23). He had no quarrel with Jewish terms when he was addressing issues that related to Jews, and he did not arbitrarily reject the language of the

Torah, for he was always a Jew. But this loyalty to traditional expression was never the final guide. What determined Paul's terminology was the particularity of the context (Gilliland 1989:55). "Human experience in a given situation—the issues, questions, language and concerns of people in a specific socio-cultural context—is the only place where a faith-understanding has a chance of becoming meaningful" (de Mesa 1999:123). This is probably the reason why Kosuke Koyama (1974:3) states, "Third World Theology begins by raising issues, not by digesting Augustine, Barth and Rahner." De Mesa (1999:129) said that by using the relevant cultural aspects as interpretive elements, we are able to discern and discover the riches and strengths of the Judaeo-Christian tradition in relation to our context. The relevant cultural aspects refer to cultural practices which are common to both communicators and receptors. By utilizing this cultural commonality as a starting point, Myanmar Christians can communicate the gospel to the Burmese people meaningfully. This discovery of cultural resources leads to a second discovery of the relevance of the faith tradition in the here and now.

He notes (1999:129) that Christian tradition (gospel) must be appropriated culturally when it is used as a source to interpret the relevant

cultural elements. This continued interaction with the culture enables us to discern and discover the riches and the strengths of the culture.

Hesselgrave (1991:195-196) has a similar view when he tells us that we need to know about people in culture. In the first place, people who live together in large cultural groupings tend to share certain commonalities in defining the reality around them. In the second place, people are born and reared into culture. The anthropologist would use the term “enculturation” to describe this process. In this process culture is made uniquely their own, the cultural reality becomes the people’s reality. In the third place, knowing that the people take the culturally determined view seriously, the missionary must also take it with the utmost seriousness.

De Mesa’s (1999:121) point is that since a theology is developed from mutually respectful and critical interaction between the gospel and culture, it is possible to begin doing theology from either pole. The reason for this is that one cannot do theology with just one pole without considering the other. I believe the present situation in Myanmar indicates that correlation should start with culture (the contemporary human experiences within the culture) which calls for a Christian interpretation.

De Mesa’s doing theology in the context of a given people would broaden the way Myanmar churches view contemporary Burmese Theravada

Buddhism, its culture, and those who are influenced by it. This concept of mutually respectful and critical interaction of the gospel and culture may open the minds of Myanmar Christians to realize that to preach the gospel in Myanmar is to make the message and life of Christ incarnate in the minds and lives of the people. They may adapt and transform Burmese cultural practices in the light of the Bible in order to strengthen the indigenous Christian religious patterns.

Biblical Discernment of the Contextual Approach to Mission

When we look at the New Testament church, we see that it began in Jerusalem as a body of Jews who carefully maintained their Jewish tradition and observed the customs of their fathers (Acts 15:1). However, the church in Macedonia, Achaia, Syria and other provinces consisted almost entirely of Gentiles ignorant of that Jewish tradition. Consequently, if a Christian from Macedonia went up to Judea, he must have found himself in a strange atmosphere, in a community unlike that to which he was accustomed. Circumcision was practiced (Act 15:5), Sabbaths were kept (Acts 13:14; 16:13), certain meats were avoided as unclean (Acts 10:14), and the Law was the practical rule of every-day life (Romans 2:25). Thus, Christianity in Jerusalem must have appeared to a Christian from other provinces as a thing of rules, hardly distinguishable from pure Judaism. Melvin L. Hodges

(1957:15) writes, “In the meetings of the Church, the prayers were modeled on Jewish patterns and expressed Jewish thought in Jewish speech with which Gentiles were not familiar.” The same was true when a Christian from Jerusalem went to Corinth; he or she would see that uncircumcised Christians attended the meetings of the church. Preaching and prayers were built on a strange system of thought with a freedom of conduct. Yet these Gentile converts, such as Greeks, Syrians, etc., though without Jewish background, felt themselves in every sense of the word to be the people of God, and they were anxious to remain in fellowship with the Jerusalem church (Acts 11:29f). All these situations indicate the fact that the early Christians expressed their belief in Christ in their own respective cultures, so that the church made sense to them. Lamin Sanneh records:

God’s redemptive power had broken through to the Gentile world, thus radically shifting the stage of God’s continuous dealings with the nations. The center of Christianity, Paul perceived, was in the heart and life of the believer without the presumption of conformity to one cultural ideal. The temple, we might say, was not the exclusive building centered in Jerusalem but the believers themselves whose body is the temple of God. (1989:25)

Sanneh’s statement is noteworthy when he writes, “Paul desired above all to safeguard the cultural particularity of Jew as Jew and Gentile as Gentile, though challenging both Jews and Gentiles to find in Jesus Christ their true affirmation” (1989:47).

In his ministry, Jesus' preaching was universal, saying that God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in him will have eternal life (John 3:16). Jesus' Great Commission "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation" (Mark 16:15) is universal. Jesus' nature is divine and human; his ministry was to people in different cultures. He crossed borders and preached the good news in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria.

In his mission, Jesus practiced different methods of preaching the good news in different contexts. He taught a rich young man to sell his possessions and give to the poor, and to follow him (Matthew 19:21); he taught Nicodemus to be born of water and the Spirit (John 3:1-15); and he taught a Samaritan woman to give him a cup of water (John 4:7). Jesus used different methods depending on the contexts and the needs of the people, so that his preaching might be meaningful to his hearers.

In the first century, Gentiles were considered "unclean" by the Jews. Thus a pious Jew could not enter a Gentile house or eat with Gentiles without defiling himself or herself and becoming ceremonially "unclean" (Acts 10:9-23). Peter was one of those who regarded Gentiles as unclean. However, Peter was shown in a vision that God had declared Gentiles clean (vv. 9-16). Peter understood the message from God (vv. 17-23) and went to

the house of Cornelius. There Cornelius and his household believed and the Holy Spirit made his presence known by enabling them to speak in tongues (vv. 24-46). The evidence was unmistakable, and Peter signaled the acceptance of Gentiles into the church by baptizing them with water (vv. 47-48). However, when Peter returned to Jerusalem, Jews criticized him for going into Gentiles' houses. But when he told them what happened there (receiving the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues) the Jewish Christians offered praise (11:1-18). At Cornelius' house, he realized that God did not show favoritism but accepted people from every nation who fear and do what is right (Acts 10:34-35).

The Jewish Christians accepted the conversion of Cornelius, but did not consider the implications. Acts 15 says that some believers from Jerusalem traveled to Gentile churches teaching that it was necessary to become a Jew in order to be a true Christian and be saved (15:1). Paul and Barnabas disputed this teaching and soon headed a delegation to Jerusalem to "see the apostles and elders about this question" (vv. 2-5). There the church held its first general council. After much discussion and prayer, a consensus was reached. Scripture had foretold a day when Gentiles as Jews would bear God's name (vv. 14-18). They should be free then to turn to God as Gentiles, without unnecessary hindrances (vv. 19-21). The Gentiles

were not expected to be circumcised and obey the Law of Moses. They discontinued this practice, which was not essential to the Christian faith. This conclusion was made official in a letter circulated to Gentile churches, where it was received with joy (vv. 22-35).

Saul, who was loyal to the Law of Moses and persecuted Christians, became the first missionary to the Gentiles, now named Paul. As Paul had knowledge of Greek philosophy, he used the Hellenistic ideas and thought forms to present God to people in Athens. As previously noted, he used the starting point equating the Unknown God worshipped by the people of Athens and the One God who made the world and everything in it (Acts 17:23-24). To the Jews he became like a Jew, to win the Jews to Christ. To those not having the law, he became like one not having the law, so as to win those not having the law. To the weak he became weak, to win the weak to Christ. He became all things to all people so that by all possible means he might save some (I Corinthians 9:19-23).

The Gentiles did not need to be circumcised and made to follow the Jewish laws when they became Christians. According to Paul, the law was written in their hearts and consciences, and God would judge them by this law (Romans 2:12-15). In his mind there was “no Greek or Jew,

circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian or Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all” (Colossians. 3:11).

Through the whole process of God’s mission revealed in the Bible, hearing the good news of Jesus Christ in different languages and cultures has been God’s will and glory. Contextualization has been God’s way of revelation to humankind. It was the way of Jesus in presenting the good news of salvation to people of surrounding cultures. It was the way of the apostles in bringing the good news to all nations.

In sum, Jose M. de Mesa’s doing theology through mutually respectful and critical interaction of the Christian gospel and culture can provide a missiological bridge helping us recognize what is of value in contemporary Burmese Theravada Buddhist religious patterns. Through discernment of the beliefs and practices of Burmese Theravada Buddhism by comparing these with the pattern of biblical Christianity, following the incarnated models of Jesus, Peter, and Paul, we acknowledge that there are some positive aspects in Buddhism which we can utilize in our communication of the gospel to the Burmese people. For example, by studying the life of the Buddha, Myanmar Christians can discern how Buddha emptied himself in order to discover the way of freedom from dukkha. Through the discernment of emptiness of the Buddha, the Burmese

Buddhists can discern the emptiness of Christ who came to save the world from eternal suffering.

In this chapter, we have discussed theories which may help us understand the Burmese people, their culture and religion, and the contextualization of the gospel in Burmese cultural contexts. The next chapter studies the Burmese people, their history, their civilization and culture. In our effort of contextualization we need to know Burmese people and their culture; then will we be able to contextualize the gospel in their cultural context.

CHAPTER THREE

The Challenge of the Burmese People and their Culture

Evangelism of the Burmese Buddhists has not been very successful due to the many challenges that confront the church in Myanmar. This dissertation addresses two major challenges: (1) the challenge of the Burmese people and their culture, and (2) the challenge of Theravada Buddhism. This chapter focuses on the Burmese people and their culture. By studying the Burmese civilization, history, culture, customs, tradition, and religion, the self-identity of the Burmese people can be discovered. This initial study also examines the self-concept and attitudes of the Burmese people towards other nations as well as those of other nations towards the Burmese people.

A People with an Ancient Civilization

Burmese history began in the eleventh century A.D. with the first Burmese empire, founded by King Anawratha (1044-1077). This was known as the Bagan empire (Bunge 1983:5).

The Pre-Bagan Era (Periods before 1044 A.D.)

According to D.G.E. Hall (1950:11-13), the home of the Burmese seems to have been somewhere in the northwest of China, between the Gobi

Desert and northeastern Tibet, probably around Kansu. The Chinese called the Burmese people Ch'iang. Later, Chinese hostility forced them to take refuge in northeastern Tibet, and later, farther south. It is believed that the major Burmese migration to Myanmar occurred between the middle of the ninth and the middle of the eleventh century A.D. Smaller groups of Burmese people may have entered much earlier. Chinese writers of the third century A.D. refer to a Burmese kingdom of Lin-yang in central Myanmar.

The religion of the Burmese people in the pre-Bagan period was nat, or spirit worship. The Burmese believed that there were both good and evil spirits. Among the good spirits were guardian spirits. There was a belief in thirty-six national nat. Many big trees had guardian spirits (Griggs 1906:211-237). The Burmese believed that every individual had a guardian spirit to guard that person. A guardian spirit of the house guarded each home and village. It was not uncommon therefore to find a spirit-shrine in every home and a spirit-shrine in every village (Spiro 1967:91-97). There were also harvest spirits, spirits of the winds, spirits of the rain and countless other spirits. The people in Myanmar accorded great respect and esteem to these spirits. They appeased and honored the spirits with offerings of flowers, money and food, placed on special altars (J. Anderson 1985:94).

Mahayana Buddhism and Tantric Buddhism prior to the Bagan era had made their way into Myanmar in the sixth century A.D. These forms of Buddhism mingled with spirit worship, the native cults of magic and sorcery. All these different cults were assimilated into an artificial unity by the Ari monks, a sect of heretical Buddhist monks, who won royal support during the reign of King Thaitaing, A.D. 516-523 (Aung 1981:1). They dominated the religion of Myanmar until the reign of King Anawratha (1044-1077) (1981:126).

The Bagan Era (1044-1287 A.D)

Anawratha (1044-1077) founded the first Burmese kingdom, with its capital in Bagan, by unifying Lower and Upper Burma (Bunge 1983:5). He conquered Yunnan in the north, the Arakan lands in the west, and the Shan mountains in the east (Woodman 1962:15). In 1057 he captured Thaton in the south and gained control over Lower Burma. He brought the Mon king of Thaton and some 30,000 captives back to Bagan (Bunge 1983:5).

Anawratha led Burmese people to conquer much land and established a vast Burmese empire, known as Bagan empire.

After his conquests, Anawratha set out to purify the existing religion of his nation (both nat worship and Tantric Buddhism) and make Theravada Buddhism the national religion of the country. The king had received

Theravada Buddhism from the Mons in Lower Myanmar. In 1054 the king ordered his people to destroy the shrines of nats and all images of the lords (spirits). The Ari monks, however, opposed the king. Anawratha invited Shin Araham, a famous Theravada Buddhist teacher from Lower Myanmar, to come and teach Theravada Buddhism in Anawratha's kingdom, but he was not successful due to the lack of the sacred books of Buddhism. The Mons in the south possessed the Buddhist scriptures during that era. King Anawratha applied for one of them, but his request was rejected with insults. This enraged Anawratha, and he made another great campaign to the Mons and conquered the kingdom of Thaton. Anawratha then brought back to Bagan the Tripitaka, the sacred scriptures of the Buddhist religion, and all the Theravada Buddhist monks, along with 30,000 captives (Smith 1965:13).

This move led to many drastic changes in the Burmese empire. The religion of the Ari monks was abolished by royal decree in the eleventh century A.D. Under the leadership of Shin Araham, the Mon monks spread the doctrines of Theravada Buddhism far and wide. Pali, the language of the Tripitaka, became the sacred language of the Burmese. The Mon alphabet was adopted, and for the first time, Burmese became a written language. From Anawratha's reign onward, Theravada Buddhism became the dominant religion of the Burmese people (Hall 1950:15-16).

Synthesis of the Pre-Bagan and Bagan Eras

After King Anawratha had introduced Theravada Buddhism to Myanmar and this became the national religion of Myanmar, he tried to abolish the traditional religion of nat (spirit) worship. Despite drastic measures, worship of thirty-six of the countless spirits managed to survive in people's daily lives. Anawratha had no choice but to compromise, by incorporating these spirits into the Buddhist religion. He also introduced a thirty-seventh spirit known as Thagyamin, making him king over the thirty-six spirits. Anawratha also established the belief that these spirits were also followers of the Buddha's teachings (Hall 1950:15-16). So what really happened after the introduction of Theravada Buddhism to Myanmar was that the traditional religion of spirit worship was not totally abolished; it continued to exist along with Buddhism. But Buddhism was placed above the traditional spirit worship (Spiro 1967:264). Thus, the Burmese religion became a mixture of Buddhist and animistic elements. Burmese Theravada Buddhism in many ways developed through accommodation of traditional beliefs and practices. In other words, it has been contextualized with many beliefs and practices drawn from traditional Burmese animism. Such contextualization is one reason why Theravada Buddhism has been so influential over the daily lives of the Burmese people.

It is historically true that Buddhism came to Myanmar from India, although the time of its arrival is not exactly known. The Mons received it first and then brought it to the Burmese people after Anawratha conquered the Mon state in the south. When Theravada Buddhism came to Myanmar, it was encased in Indian, predominately Hindu culture. This Indian cultural package was never unpacked; Theravada Buddhism encased in the Indian culture was thus injected into the people. For centuries, the people of Myanmar had lived with Tibeto-Burmese culture, which they had brought with them from northeast Tibet. When the Indian-Hindu culture came with Theravada Buddhism, the Burmese people embraced it. The Indian-Hindu culture works with Burmese people because of its association with Buddhism. So what existed in Myanmar after the Bagan dynasty was an emerging Burmese culture, which blended Indian and Tibeto-Burmese cultures, and a synthesis of traditional religion with Theravada Buddhism. In this saturated situation, the Burmese people do not see any need to assimilate more religions or cultures. They do not think Westerners and Christianity have anything more to offer them than what they already have. Their state of religious and cultural saturation is a challenge to Christian missions.

The Three Great Burmese Dynasties

There have been three great dynasties in Burmese history. These are the Bagan Dynasty, the Toungoo Dynasty and the Konbaung Dynasty.

The Bagan Dynasty (1044-1287 A.D.)

We have already seen that the first dynasty was the Bagan Dynasty founded by King Anawratha. This was the first unification of the whole country of Myanmar. Bagan was a great city, whose area covered an Irrawady riverfront of twenty miles, to a depth of five miles inland. Originally there were said to have been no fewer than 13,000 Buddhist shrines and monasteries in and around Bagan. Today there remain no fewer than 5,000 temples and pagodas (Buddhist shrines). Bagan is one of the richest archaeological sites in the Indo-Chinese peninsula (Hall 1950:14). With Buddhist culture, it succeeded in developing the crafts, which helped create an advanced irrigation-agricultural economy. The Bagan dynasty also erected architectural and sculptural monuments and hundreds of pagodas. But towards the middle of the thirteenth century, Mongolian armies invaded Myanmar and the Bagan dynasty was destroyed in 1287 A.D (Maring 1973:7-8).

The Toungoo Dynasty (1531-1752 A.D.)

The second dynasty was the Toungoo Dynasty, established by King Tabinshwehti (1512-1550). Under his rule, the nation was once again unified. Tabinshwehti captured Pegu in 1539, and extended his control as far as Tavoy in the south. He also captured Prome from Shan, the conqueror of Ava, and in 1546 he had himself consecrated king of Burma, making Pegu his capital. He invaded Siam (Thailand) but this expedition ended in failure (Bunge 1983:8). Soon he was murdered by the Mon Prince rival, in 1550 (Cady 1966:43).

After the death of Tabinshwehti, Bayinnaung, his brother-in-law, assumed the crown in 1551. He captured Ava in 1555, and then conquered Toungoo, Prome and finally the Mon, thus uniting the Upper and Lower Burma once again. He then moved eastward and conquered the Shan chiefs and even chieftains in the Yunnan province swore allegiance to him. In 1569, he captured the Siamese capital of Ayuthaya, located near the modern Thai capital of Bangkok. The Raja of Manipur, on the Indian border, also sent tribute to the Burmese king (Bunge 1983:8). Bayinnaung allegedly had four thousand mature elephants, trained for war. He is reported to have had an army of 1,500,000 men at his command, the largest army Southeast Asia had ever seen. Twenty-six crowned kings served as his vassals, and his

wealth exceeded the wealth of the great Turks (Lach n.d.: 548). Cady (1966:43) also writes, “Bayinnaung twice rebuilt the Pegu capital, which waxed immensely wealthy and impressive. European visitors during the 1570s were much impressed with the city.” Bayinnaung’s reign marked the peak of the Toungoo dynasty, but after his death the empire crumbled.

The Konbaung Dynasty (1753-1889 A.D.)

After the death of king Bayinnaung, there was no strong king to arrest the decline of Burma for one hundred fifty years. In 1740, the Mons successfully established themselves and captured the last king of the Toungoo Dynasty in 1752 (Tragers 1966:6). Then a new leader appeared in Upper Myanmar by the name of Alaungpaya (1753-1760). He was the third of Myanmar’s great unifiers, after Anawratha of Pagan and Bayinnaung, and he founded the Konbaung Dynasty, which ruled the country until the late nineteenth century. In 1755 Alaungpaya (regarded as an incarnation of the Buddha) brought his forces down the Irrawaddy River in a large flotilla and occupied Dagon, the site of the greatly revered Shwedagon Pagoda. There he established a new town, naming it Yangon (the British later called it Rangoon), which means “The End of Strife/War” (Bunge 1983:11). Later he conquered Syriam, a chief city of the Mons in the south, and then Pegu, where the king of the Mons reigned. After subduing the Mons, Alaungpaya

marched north and conquered Manipur, a country bordering India, and then he returned to his capital. In 1759 he invaded Siam (Thailand). He was not able to conquer Ayuthia, then the capital of Siam, but was stricken by mortal disease and died on the way back to Myanmar (Phayre 1969:149-170).

Alaungpaya was succeeded by his son, Hsinbyushin (1763-1776). Hsinbyushin continued the attempt to conquer Siam and captured Ayuthia in April 1767. The city was completely destroyed, and the Siamese king was killed. Thousands of prisoners and vast amounts of booty were taken. In the words of a Siamese historian, Bayinnaung had “waged war like a monarch,” but Hsinbyushin conducted himself “like a robber” (quoted in Bunge 1983:11). During the reign of Hsinbyushin, Myanmar also became involved in a dispute with China, and war erupted between the two countries. In 1767, the Chinese mounted three major invasions into Myanmar, but the Burmese army defeated the Chinese in all three battles. The Chinese launched their fourth invasion in 1769, and the Burmese army again defeated them. This led the Chinese to call for a peace treaty, which was signed on December 13, 1769 (Daw Mya Sein 1973).

The Challenge of the Historical Heritage of the Burmese People

The history of the three great Burmese Dynasties shows how the Burmese people developed into a ruling nation. They subdued the tribes and

nations that were within the boundaries of Myanmar and ruled over them for centuries. They were also a regional power. The Burmese kings attacked and conquered neighboring countries such as Manipur and Thailand. During Bayinnaung's reign, Burma had the largest army in Southeast Asia. King Sinbyushin was victorious over the invading Chinese army. Their noteworthy historical past gave the Burmese a distinctive national pride. This naturally makes the Burmese feel superior to other nations, including the Westerners. The Burmese, therefore, see no reason why they should listen to Westerners preaching about their religion. Thus the historical heritage of the Burmese is a challenge to the Christian gospel.

What the Burmese Think of Themselves

According to The Glass Palace Chronicle of the Kings of Burma – a 19th century history-mythology of the country – Burma's kings were descendants of the Buddha's family. They had immigrated from India to Myanmar and called their people Brahma. In Buddhist belief Brahmas were the first inhabitants of the world. The word has taken many forms in the past centuries – Maramma, Bamma, Mien, Myanma (as the nation now calls itself) – but always with the same meaning (J. Anderson 1985:41, quoting Tin and Luce).

Like other nations, the Burmese in Myanmar have legends and traditions of their first kings. The Maha Rajaweng, or history of the Burmese kings, describes a small state called Kapilavastu of Sakya Raja in Northern India. Prince Siddhartha, destined to become the Buddha, was the son of the king of one of those states. Long before his birth, due to wars between the Sakya clans, a king named Abhi Raja left India and came to Myanmar. This king built the city of Tagaung in central Myanmar, the ruins of which still exist today. From this king descended the Burmese kings who ruled Myanmar for centuries (Phayre 1969:13).

Historically it is difficult to prove that the Burmese king descended from the Sakya clan, the clan to which Gautama Buddha belonged. Historians do agree, however, that some Indian king or Indian immigrants migrated through east Bengal and Manipur to Myanmar and settled in Tagaung (1969:15).

It is not important whether it is legend or true history that the Burmese people were the first inhabitants of the world. The important thing is what the Burmese people believe about their ancestry and how the Burmese people think of themselves. The Burmese think they are descendents of Buddha's clan (The Burmese descended from China, but they considered themselves as descendents of Buddha, because they believed their kings

were descendents of Buddha) and were the first inhabitants of the world. Thus, the Burmese feel that they know more about life and religion than any other ethnic group in the world.

Bomferrus, a Dominican missionary, had a first-hand encounter with this Burmese attitude. Bomferrus went to Myanmar in 1554 and spent three years learning the Burmese language and Burmese “mysteries,” by which he probably meant the Burmese religion. At the end of three years he gave up and returned to India, saying, “The Burmese could not endure to hear any better knowledge than they had” (Yules 1968:210). When Western missionaries preached Christianity, the Burmese felt insulted. The Burmese believed that the Westerners had arrived on this earth later than they did. Thus the Burmese assumed that they knew more about life and religion than the Westerners. This self-pride of the Burmese is a challenge to the church.

What Others Have Said about the Burmese

Since the 6th century A.D., foreigners and visitors to Myanmar have been recording their observations about Myanmar in journals and books. Among the first people to write about Myanmar were the chroniclers of ancient China’s T’ang dynasty, 681-905 A.D. A Pyu king had sent a music troupe to the T’ang Court. The Emperor and the Chinese court were so

impressed that a poet Po-Chu composed a poem about the Burmese music (Woodman 1962:14-15).

C. H. Parker, who has searched the Chinese records for mention of the Burmese kingdom in the ninth century, gives us the following passage out of the T'ang history:

The King of the Burmese has several hundred female attendants. The circular wall of his city is built of greenish glazed tiles, and is 160 li (over 50 miles) in circuit. It has twelve gates, and there are pagodas at each of the four corners. They know how to make astronomical calculations, and are devotees of Buddhism. They have a hundred monasteries, with bricks of vitreous ware, embellished with gold and silver, vermilion, gay colors, and red kino. The floor is painted and covered with gay carpets. The King's residence is in like style. (quoted in Trotman 1917:63-64)

Marco Polo, the famed Venetian merchant, wrote about the people he knew as "Mien." He marveled at the treasures of Bagan and the Buddhist pagodas he called towers. Marco Polo's account of Burma is as follows:

The towers are built of fine stone; and then one of them has been covered with gold a good finger in thickness, so that the tower looks as if it were all of solid gold; and the other is covered with silver in like manner so that it seems to be all of solid silver. . . . The King caused these towers to be erected to commemorate his magnificence and for the good of his soul; and really they do form one of the finest sights in the world; so exquisitely finished are they, so splendid and costly. And when they are lighted up by the sun they shine most brilliantly and are visible from a vast distance. (quoted in J. Anderson 1985:24)

Ralph Fitch, the first Englishman who traveled to Burma, in 1587, described the city of Pegu as follows:

Great, strong and very fair city, the streets were the fairest that ever I saw as straight as a line. . . so broad that ten or twenty men may ride affront through them. The shade trees are at everyman's door and make a very commodious shadow so that a man may walk in the shade all day. The houses are made of wood and covered with tiles. (Trager 1966:6, quoting from "The Voyage of Mr. Ralph Fitch," 1811, London)

In 1795, the Governor-General of India sent an English emissary, Michael Symes, to the Burmese kingdom of Ava. Here is what he wrote about the Burmese:

The Burmese. . . are certainly rising fast in the scale of Oriental nations. . . . They have an undeniable claim to the character of a civilized and well instructed people. Their laws are wise and pregnant with sound morality; their police is better regulated than in most European countries; their natural disposition is hospitable to strangers. (quoted in J. Anderson 1985:25)

The last palace was built by King Mindon in Mandalay. While the king was still building the palace, a missionary arrived from America. The king regretted that the visitors would not be able to see the palace in all its splendor. His Majesty's officials, however, showed the unfinished palace. Emile Charles Victor Foucar, a British writer, described for us the grandeur of the Burmese palace even though in an unfinished state:

The Americans must have been impressed with the contrast between the utilitarian architecture of their own land and the extravagant buildings about them. Great columns of teak, lacquered and gilded, supported the sharp-angled roofs that rose one above the other upon every pavilion. The great Hall of audience had no less than seven such superimposed roofs beneath its tapering golden spire. Waves and beams were intricately

carved in designs of flowers and birds and strange animals. Within, also, were fine carving and golden screens and bright vermilion lacquer. There was mosaic work carried out with tiny pieces of mirror and multicolored glass. (Foucar 1946:16-17)

Here we have a sample of what different people from different countries in the world wrote about the Burmese people. These accounts by foreigners render credibility to the claims of the Burmese people about themselves. At the same time these accounts reinforce one fact: the Burmese people are heirs of a great historical past and a great civilization. This heritage produced a mentality of superiority in the Burmese people, which became a challenge to the missionary task of the church.

What the Burmese Think of Westerners

The Burmese people do not have high opinions about Westerners, and their notions of the Westerners are a challenge to the missionary endeavor in Myanmar. The following are some of their attitudes toward Westerners.

Kala Phyu (the White Indian). The earliest Western record of the Burmese people was given by Marco Polo. Historians cannot definitely affirm, however, that Marco Polo actually set foot on Burmese soil. Nicolo Di Conti came to Myanmar in 1435 and called the country Machin, the term applied in India to all the lands east of the Ganges

river (Hall 1950:49). When Westerners came to Myanmar in those early days the Burmese called them Kala Phyu, simply meaning White Indians. Before the Westerners came, the only people the Burmese knew from the West were Indians. So the White men were conveniently called Kala Phyu. Kala is the colloquial name for Indians, used when a Burmese is not in a respectful mood towards them. Kala would correspond to the names some non-white Americans are called in America. A respectful Burmese name for Indians can be transliterated as Endriya Lumyo. The Burmese people from the days of their kings called all the Westerners Kala Phyus. The way the Burmese named the Westerners indicated that the Burmese did not have much respect for them. The Burmese people's lack of respect for Westerners becomes a challenge to the spreading of the Christian gospel to the Burmese. Lack of respect certainly means lack of attention to what the Western Christian missionaries preached to them. The question in Myanmar would not be, "Why did the Burmese not accept the message when they heard the gospel?" Rather, the question should be, "Did the Burmese even pay attention to what the Christians preached?" This lack of respect for the Westerners, especially after the colonization in Myanmar, is one of the reasons why throughout history so

few Burmese people have become Christian. Many Burmese have not even begun to listen to what the Christians preached.

Barbarians. The attitude of King Thibaw, the last Burmese king, clearly illustrates an attitude of the Burmese people toward the Westerners. King Thibaw issued this proclamation just before the outbreak of the Third Anglo-Burmese War in 1824.

Those heretics, the English barbarians, having most harshly made demands likely to impair and destroy our religion, violate our national customs and degrade our race, are making a display and preparation as if about to wage war against our state. . . if these heretic barbarians should come and attempt to molest or disturb the state in any way, His Majesty the King, watchful that the interest of religion and the state shall not suffer but will himself march forth and with the might of his army will efface these heretic barbarians and conquer and annex their country. (quoted in Smith 1965:94)

For King Thibaw, the British were barbarians, and he reflected the attitude of the Burmese nation toward the English people and all Westerners. The Burmese people, of course, were not the only ethnic group in the world which has regarded other national groups as barbarians. The Greeks and the Chinese call the people of other nations barbarians. Many other peoples in the world may not use the word barbarian, but in their minds they also regard other ethnic peoples as barbarians.

This attitude of the Burmese toward Westerners becomes a challenge to the spread of the gospel. The Burmese as a superior people do not expect

to learn anything from barbarians. Thus, superior Burmese Buddhists do not expect to learn anything from barbarian Christian missionaries.

Animals. Another opinion about the British is revealed to us by the writer Shway Yoe (1963:19), though unintentionally. In his book about the Burmese people, Shway Yoe was writing not about the attitude of the Burmese towards the British, but on the importance and necessity of every Burmese male to join the monkhood. He related that a Burmese male should serve as a monk at least once in his life, for without admission to the monkhood no man can count his present existence as other than an animal's. It would be better for that person to have been born an animal or an Englishman. Thus the Burmese place the British on the same level as the animals.

In 1882 Shway Yoe also wrote, "The best thing a Burman can wish for a good Englishman is that in some future existence, as a reward of good work, he may be born a Buddhist and if possible a Burman" (1963:ix). This wish of the Burmese implies that the Englishman is in a very low state of existence now, and that the Burmese Buddhist is in the highest state of existence. Certainly this attitude is a challenge to the Christian gospel. What can the people from a low state of existence offer to the people who are on the highest level? The answer of course is, "Nothing." So the

Burmese do not expect any contribution from Westerners to improve the condition of their lives.

The Burmese Experience of Colonialism

Many times in the history of the world we find that mission and colonialism have been interdependent. David Bosch (1991:227) writes, “Colonialism and mission, as a matter of course, were interdependent; the right to have colonies carried with it the duty to Christianize and colonize.” We know that the Portuguese sailed to the East not only to trade but also to spread the Catholic religion and crusade against Islam. Accordingly, in 1554, the first Catholic priests arrived in Myanmar. They were two Dominican friars, Gaspar de Cruz and Bomferrus, who came as chaplains to the Portuguese seaport. Later, in 1600, two Jesuit priests, Pimenta and Boves, arrived at Syriam to be chaplains to the Portuguese under de Brito’s command (Hall 1950:50). Throughout the whole of the sixteenth century, European traders and Portuguese missionaries and adventurers haunted the coasts of Myanmar. There are many varied accounts of the Myanmar of the sixteenth century by the Portuguese (Min 1948:20). The British colonized Lower Myanmar in 1855; then they conquered Upper Myanmar in 1885. In 1877, soon after the British conquest of Lower Myanmar, the Church of England created the See of Rangoon (Yangon). The Bishop of Rangoon was

appointed by the church; he was paid half by the English government and the other half by the Church of England. The Anglican clergymen in the diocese of Rangoon also received grants-in-aid from the English government. These clergymen not only ministered to the British civil and military personnel; they also engaged in missionary activities. So the Bishop of Rangoon and the Anglican clergymen, partly supported by the British government, were involved in propagating Christianity among the Buddhists of Myanmar (Smith 1965:78-79).

American Baptist missionaries did not have any official relationship with the colonial British government in Myanmar. The Burmese people, however, identified the American missionaries as part of the British colonial establishment. The reason is rather apparent. Since the days of Adoniram Judson, the British government and the American Baptist missionaries had had very cordial relationships. Judson was a valuable asset to the British rule, thus he was given ample freedom to travel, to preach, and to engage in other missionary activities. This reciprocally supportive relationship continued between later missionaries and British authorities and eventually became the norm. The friendly affinity between the colonial lords and the missionaries, however, became an impediment to the Christian witness of

the missionaries. The Burmese people began to place the missionaries in the same category as the colonial masters (Trager 1966:x).

Looking at the European incursion on Burmese soil, Burmese historians have noticed that three types of people were involved in the colonial process. From their observations, they formulated the “3M” theory of colonialism in Myanmar. The first Europeans to reach Myanmar were the *merchants*. Then *missionaries* arrived as chaplains to care for the souls of the merchants. Last, the *military* came to protect the merchants and the missionaries. These “3Ms together took over Myanmar and made it a colony of Britain in 1885” (data obtained from an interview with Saya U Nyan Lin, a Burmese Pastor, on May 23, 2001).

British colonial rule in Myanmar appeared on the surface to be an asset to missionary work in Myanmar. The missionaries were allowed to be engaged in all kinds of missionary activity which might not have been possible under a Burmese king or government. Colonial rule in reality, however, distanced the missionaries from the Burmese people. The missionaries were seen as partners of the colonial masters. The hatred, hostility, and animosity the Burmese had toward the British rulers were directed towards the American missionaries. Since the Burmese identified the American missionaries with the British, there developed a great gulf

between the Burmese people and the American missionaries. This gulf remains a challenge to this day for the evangelistic efforts of the church in Myanmar.

Burmese Nationalism

Nationalism is a common response in many ethnic groups of the world. In Myanmar, nationalism is linked with the Buddhist religion. For the missionary enterprise in Myanmar, this nationalism becomes a challenge. According to Donald Eugene Smith (1965:82-83), Burmese nationalism first developed with the reign of King Anawratha in Bagan. The king was revered as the chief promoter of the Buddhist faith, and indeed, as a future Buddha. Burmese architecture, language, educational system and social behavior were all influenced by Buddhism. Buddhism was undoubtedly the most integrative influence in Burmese society and culture. As previously noted, a saying frequently repeated in Burma is: "To be a Burmese is to be a Buddhist." The Burmese people cannot think of nationality apart from the religion that they hold, for it is Buddhism which has welded the Burmese together; the idea of nationhood owes its inception to Buddhism.

When the British conquered Myanmar, some might assume that Burmese nationalism would be crushed. On the contrary, British colonial rule fanned the flame of nationalism into a greater conflagration. Burmese

nationalism was expressed through many movements and groups. The Young Men's Buddhist Association (Y.M.B.A.) addressed political questions under the British rule (Cady 1966:189). There were strikes by university and high school students (1966:217-220). Buddhist monks under the leadership of U Ottama, agitated for home rule (1966:231-232). The Y.M.B.A. changed its name to the General Council of Burmese Associations (G.C.B.A.) and organized Wunthanu Athins (Wunthanu Association) which established political associations at the village level (1966:234-235). Saya San, a nationalist, led an armed rebellion against the British in Lower Myanmar in 1930, which, of course, was eventually suppressed (1966:309-317).

Burmese nationalism has been a challenge for the evangelistic undertaking of the Christian Church in Myanmar. As previously described, for a Burmese the question of opting for another religion instead of Buddhism is not just a religious question; it is a nationalistic question. To be Burmese is to be Buddhist. It is also a social question. To discard Buddhism is to reject the Burmese society as well as the Buddhist society. Society is a very important factor in Burmese life, and one can barely exist without being in the society. So the stronger the Burmese nationalism is, the harder it is for a Burmese to become a Christian.

A Life Entrenched in Religion

Burmese children are born into a society steeped in the religions of nat (spirit) worship and Theravada Buddhism. They are also born into a culture which is a synthesis of both Indian and Chinese cultures. From the cradle to the grave Burmese children are enveloped in the religion and culture of the Burmese society. The Burmese Theravada Buddhism dominates the culture and the lives of the Burmese people. It molds the thinking of the Burmese, channeling their ideas and affecting their attitudes toward life and the material world. It influences their perspectives on ethical values, moral virtues, and philosophical thinking about life. Theravada Buddhism firmly shapes their daily lives, manners, ideas, aspirations and nationality.

Birth, Marriage and Death

When a Buddhist child is born, a feast is usually given. Buddhist monks are invited to recite scriptures and to perform other religious rituals. Food is then offered to the monks and to others who attend the religious ceremony. A religious feast is given when there is a marriage, and also when someone dies. People believe that the religious feast organized by the deceased family helps the soul of the dead person on its way to another existence (J. Anderson 1985:296).

The Name-Giving Ceremony

This ceremony is usually conducted about a fortnight after the birth of the child. A feast as elaborate as the parents can afford is prepared for friends and neighbors (Yoe 1963:3). Offerings are made to the guardian nats (spirits) of the home, the village or town, and of the child. An astrologer is consulted in the choice of a name for the child. The day and the time when the baby was born will determine the name. For many Buddhists the horoscope of the child is cast right from the child's birth. This horoscope is believed to represent the map of the child's life (Zagorski 1972:15). By casting the horoscope, Buddhists assume that their life is prearranged. They do not need the help of gods or men for their future.

Schooling in the Village Monastery

As soon as a child (especially a boy) is able to attend school, he is sent to a Buddhist monastic school. In the days of the Burmese kings, there was a Buddhist monastery in every village. In the monastic school, the boy learns to read and write. All the textbooks are Buddhist scriptures. Thus the boy in learning to read and write also learns the rudiments of Buddhism (Furnivall 1848:13). So from a very early age the boy is infused with Buddhist faith. This early molding in Buddhism and Burmese tradition makes every Burmese a staunch believer in Buddhism and a strict observer

of Burmese culture. Shway Yoe (1963:20) assessed the impact of the monastery school on the Burmese youth: “Not till the monastic schools begin to be deserted will the Christian missionary find that his labors have had any effect on the vital energies of the ancient faith of the Buddha. That day is still far off.”

Becoming a Monk (novitiation)

It is very important for every Burmese male to enter the monastery to become a monk, even though it may be for only a short period. The Buddhists believe that before a Burmese male enters the monastery and becomes a monk, he is no better than an animal. It is by becoming a monk that he becomes a true human being. This is his entry into manhood. So the parents see to it that their sons join the monkhood early in their teens. The period of time a boy stays in the monastery may vary. Some may stay only twenty-four hours, some for a week, but many will stay as a novice during the whole season of Buddhist Lent, lasting roughly from June to October every year (J. Anderson 1985:280). The entry into the monastic order is regarded as the most important event in the life of a Burmese. Thus, almost every Burmese male has been a Buddhist monk at some time of his life. So on the whole, every Burmese (especially a man) knows the basic tenets of Buddhist faith and beliefs.

This practice of the Burmese people is a challenge to Christianity, because every Burmese male, having been a Buddhist monk, will not be an easy candidate for conversion to Christianity.

Na-Twin Mingala (Ear-Piercing)

Burmese girls are also required to undergo na-twin mingala, ear-piercing ceremony. The ceremony takes place at the age of twelve or thirteen, just when the girl has attained puberty. The na-twin mingala transforms the girl into a woman, just as much as admission to a monastery makes the boy a man. It is her baptism, and is the distinctive mark of her life. After the ear-piercing ceremony, the girl is looked upon by every male as a possible mate (Yoe 1963:48-49).

Buddhism in Everyday Life

Each morning when Buddhist children wake up they hear the voices of their grandparents praying and reciting the scriptures. They see their mothers cooking food to offer to the monks, and will view long lines of monks in their saffron robes making their daily rounds asking for alms (Walker n.d: 23).

In every home there is a shrine in the living room or upstairs, if the home has two stories. The shrine may be on a shelf, and there will be an image of the Buddha and photos of monks revered by the family. Every day

votive water, flowers, food and candles are offered. When one enters the shrine room footwear must be removed. One day in a week is a Sabbath day, called Uboke. On that day the pious Buddhists fast and go to Buddhist temples to meditate.

Buddhist Festivals

In addition to the daily religious activities, Buddhists in Myanmar have many religious festivals taking place in every month of the year. Some of these religious festivals are associated with specific Buddhist pagodas or religious structures, while other festivals are national in nature.

In January a number of pagoda festivals are held in various locations of Burma. A well-known example is the Ananda Temple Festival in Bagan. The entire town and many villages take part in this event. Many people from afar also come and join in this festival. These pagoda festivals are not entirely religious in nature. They are in many ways great celebrations of fun and festivities. There are Burmese plays, concerts, and other stage entertainments. Food stalls sell a wide variety of delicious food, and many kinds of goods and commodities are also on sale at this festival (Internet, <http://www.myanmar.com/gov/tourist/rel.html>).

The harvest festival is celebrated in the Burmese month of Tabodwe (January/February). In this month, the rice paddies (the main crop of

Myanmar) are harvested. The first harvest is offered to the monastery, and elaborate meals are prepared. Htamanei (a Burmese delicacy) is a favorite food in this celebration (J. Anderson 1985:284).

In February, there are more pagoda festivals. The three old but important Mon pagodas near Yangon hold their festivals during this period. The famous Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon also holds its festival in the Burmese month of Tabaung (February/March) (Yoe 1963:212).

April is the month of the Burmese New Year. Every New Year the king of the gods (Thagyamin) pays his annual visit to the earth, sojourning for three or four days. During the days of his sojourn, pious Buddhists keep the Eight Precepts or Ten Precepts and perform other meritorious deeds. Ceremonial hair washing is performed by some people; many others enjoy themselves by throwing water on one another (Aung 1981: 23-26).

Another water-related festival is celebrated during the full moon of Kason (May). It is the festival of watering the Bo-tree. To commemorate the Buddha's enlightenment while sitting under a Bo-tree, the devout Buddhist pours water on the Bo-tree to gain merit (internet, <http://asiatravel.com/myaninfo.html>).

The full moon day of Waso (June/July) is the beginning of the Buddhist Lenten season. In this period Buddhists celebrate the Buddha's

conception, and his renunciation of worldly goods. Most of the Shin-byus (initiation into the monkhood) are performed during this period. Ordination of those who wish to devote their lives to the Sangha takes place at this time (J. Anderson 1985:283).

During the Lenten season, at the full moon of Wagaung (July/August), the “Draw-a Lot” festival is observed. The names of the Buddhist monks are deposited in a basket, and a representative from each family will come and draw a lot. The family of that particular monk will give an elaborate feast the next day (1985:284).

A popular nat or spirit festival is held for five days in a place called Taungpyone near Mandalay in August, to honor two nat brothers who were unintentionally killed during king Anawratha’s reign (<http://asiatravel.Com/myaninfo.html>).

Another famous festival is the Phaung-Daw-Oo pagoda festival, held annually in September. The gold laden images of Buddha are placed on a splendidly constructed barge. This special barge is towed by boats, which are rowed by leg-rowers of Inle Lake. The inhabitants of Inle lake use a leg and a hand to row their boats (<http://asiatravel.Com/myaninfo.html>).

October is the month of the festival of lights, or Thadingyut, celebrating the end of the Buddhist Lent. This festival also commemorates

the return of the Buddha from the abode of the gods, where he had spent the previous Lent preaching to the gods. At this celebration there will be lights of various kinds; everywhere people go they are greeted with lights (Aung 1981:80).

In the month of November, Tazaungmone, the Weaving Festival is held. Young women compete in weaving new robes for the Buddhist monks during the night and their finished products are presented to the monks in the morning (<http://asiatravel.Com/myaninfo.html>).

Most of the of nat or spirit festivals takes place in December. During this month many villages dedicate a celebration to the spirit world.

The Challenge

Thus we see that the entrenched life of a Burmese in Buddhism is a challenge to the Christian gospel. Daily a Burmese is engaged in or exposed to several religious practices. Weekly many of them observe the Buddhist Sabbath or witness others observing the holy day. Monthly there is some kind of religious festival in which one participates or sees others participating. So the lives of the Burmese are encompassed and influenced by Buddhism. This makes it hard for them to become Christians.

We have examined the culture, history, religion and civilization of the Burmese people in this chapter and how they are challenges, to the Christian

mission in Myanmar. In the next chapter, we discuss the worldview of the Burmese people. The purpose of this study is to discover points of contact on which we can build a meaningful presentation of the gospel to the Burmese people.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Challenge of Theravada Buddhism

Norman Geisler (1978:241) says that the particular “worldview glasses” that the person happens to be wearing gives the “tint” or “hue” to the worldview of that person. Darrell Whiteman (1983:478) argues that worldview is the central set of concepts and presuppositions that provides people with their basic assumptions about reality. Merrill R. Abbey (1960:540) sees worldview as the way people see or perceive the world, the way they “know.”

In order to understand how Theravada Buddhism challenges the Christian mission work in Myanmar, we need to examine the worldview of Buddhism. In this chapter two basic notions of Theravada Buddhism will be examined in order to recognize Burmese Buddhists’ basic assumptions about reality. These two basic ideas are: (1) the notion of life and (2) the notion of liberation (salvation in Christian terminology). These two basic assumptions constitute the fundamental beliefs of Theravada Buddhism regarding human beings and their destination. By studying these two notions, we can discern the worldview of the Burmese Buddhists. We can also search for bridging points which can be used as points of contact for communication of the message of the gospel to the Burmese Buddhists.

Previously in chapter three (pages 63-64), we discussed that Theravada Buddhism is a mixture of traditional spirit worship and Buddhism. Spirit worship, however, is no longer a challenge, so far as Christian evangelism to the Burmese Buddhist is concerned. As I lived among the Buddhist community for more than fifteen years, I noticed that the majority of Burmese Buddhists no longer offer food and flowers to the spirits. Buddha has become a living reality for them and their daily offerings go to the Buddha. Every Burmese Buddhist house has an altar with the Buddha image, that is, a place where people daily offer water, food and flowers to the Buddha. From my observation, I learned that Burmese Buddhists do not like Theravada Buddhism to be called a combination of spirit worship and Buddhism. Spirits are remembered only when incurable and unknown diseases occur. In such cases, the Burmese go to shamans or traditional healers for healing.

Today, the word, nat, “spirit,” is mostly used to refer to gods in the heavens, not to the spirits who live in rocks and trees. U My Khin, a Buddhist friend, said that a spirit lives only in his memories, but Buddha is a living reality for him, and Buddha is the only one who offers a way to liberate him from suffering.

Today, Buddhism is the dominant religion for the Burmese people. The spiritual need of the Burmese Buddhists is liberation from suffering. Buddhism offers a means for this liberation. Since traditional spirit worship is no longer a challenge in terms of liberation (salvation) for the Burmese Buddhists, I will not discuss Burmese traditional folk religion in detail while developing contextual approaches for reaching the Burmese people. This study is concerned with normative Buddhism and with developing contextual strategies for communication of the gospel to the Burmese Buddhists.

The Notion of Life

In order to ascertain the notion of life, we examine three vital conceptions, which define human life and its destination. Buddha looked at existence and concluded that there are three signs of being. All forms of life have these three common characteristics: (1) dukkha (suffering), (2) anicca (impermanence) and (3) anatta (non-self, or non-soul). In short, life is suffering; it is impermanent, and it has no soul. In addition to these three notions, we shall also examine other important worldview dimensions of the Burmese Theravada Buddhists, which might provide insights for the study.

Dukkha

Dukkha is a Pali word meaning “suffering,” “pain,” “sorrow,” or “misery” (Rahula 1959:17). In his first sermon, delivered in the year 528 B.C., Gautama Buddha explains what he understands by suffering:

This, monks, is the Noble Truth of Suffering (dukkha): Birth is suffering, old age is suffering, illness is suffering, death is suffering; grief, lamentation, pain, affliction and despair are suffering; to be united with what is unloved, to be separated from what is loved is suffering; not to obtain what is longed for is suffering; in short Five Groups of Grasping are suffering. (quoted in Schumann 1973:39)

According to the first Noble Truth preached by Buddha, life is dukkha (suffering). According to this truth, all worldly existence is characterized by suffering (Spiro 1970:73). Life is suffering because it is impermanent. Buddha taught that everything is impermanent, and therefore, suffering is the inevitable consequence of all experiences, both pleasurable and non-pleasurable. Since everything is impermanent, one achieves a desired object only to lose it (1970:37). Everything one does is caught up in suffering because of its nature of impermanence. Eating is suffering, and not eating is suffering; sleeping is suffering, and not sleeping is suffering; standing is suffering; sitting is also suffering. Everything is suffering. According to the second Noble Truth, desire is the cause of suffering. As long as there is desire, there is life. As long as there is life, there is suffering (1970:38).

Rahula, in his book, What Buddha Taught, describes the concept of dukkha in three aspects: (1) dukkha as ordinary suffering, (2) dukkha as produced by change, (3) dukkha as conditioned state.

According to the first aspect, all forms of physical and mental suffering, such as birth, death, sickness, old age, desire, grief, despair, etc., are included in dukkha as ordinary suffering. In order to be freed from suffering, one must exterminate these physical and mental attributes.

According to the second aspect, all physical and mental happiness are included in dukkha because they are impermanent. However, the Buddha does not deny happiness in life. In the Anguttara-nikaya, one of the five original collections in Pali containing the Buddha's discourses, he enumerated a list of happiness (sukhana). There is a happiness of family life, a happiness of sense pleasures, a happiness of renunciation, a happiness of attachment, a happiness of detachment, and physical and mental happiness (Rahula 1959:18). But all these are included in Dukkha.

According to the third characteristic of dukkha, life is viewed as suffering because it is conditioned by five impermanent aggregates: (1) the aggregate of matter (2) the aggregate of sensation (3) the aggregate of perception (4) the aggregate of mental formation, and (5) the aggregate of consciousness (Rahula 1959:17-20). These Five Aggregates are

impermanent because their existence is inseparably connected with the phenomena of birth, illness, death, longing and antipathy, etc., which in themselves are already suffering (Schumann 1973:43).

Suffering covers all that we understand by pain and disease - physical and mental states including disharmony, discomfort, irritation, or friction (Humphreys 1959:81).

The concept of suffering is a challenge to Christianity. Since everything is suffering, the Burmese Buddhists do not see Jesus' suffering on the cross as something extraordinary. Since life is suffering, the suffering that occurred in Jesus' life was inevitable. Burmese Buddhists also see suffering as a consequence of one's bad kamma sown in the past. All beings have either to enjoy pleasure or suffer according to their good or bad actions done in the past. No one, even God, can change the results of kammatic actions. A kamma (karma) will produce its due result according to its law, "the law of kamma" (Nyunt Maung 1997:187). Therefore, when Christians tell the Burmese Buddhists of Jesus' suffering and death for all the people of the world, they cannot accept it because the law of kamma denies this teaching. Thus the Burmese Buddhists' notion of life as suffering degrades the significance of Jesus' suffering on the cross for humanity.

Anicca

Anicca is a Pali word. The prefix “a” means “not,” nicca means “lasting,” or “permanent.” The term anicca (aneiksa in Burmese) means “impermanent,” “nonlasting,” or “transient.” According to the outlook of anicca, nothing is permanent; everything which consists of four elements -- fire, wind, earth, and water -- and of the five aggregates, is impermanent. Melford Spiro (1970:89-90) describes two empirical bases for the Burmese conviction of the truth of the doctrine of impermanence. First, any mental state is always liable to change, and one can never be sure that one will think, feel, or believe tomorrow what one thinks, feels or believes today. Second, every friend is a potential enemy, and every enemy is a potential friend. Therefore, the Burmese never confide too much in a friend because of tomorrow; if a friend becomes an enemy, he will use their confidences against them.

The Buddha explained impermanence in this way: nothing is the same at this moment as it was some moments ago. Everything in the universe is a ceaseless becoming and a never-ending change. Human life is an ever-rolling wheel of birth, growth, decay, and death (Humphreys 1951:80). The whole universe is in a state of flux, in incessant change, things originating, changing, passing away and originating again. This never-ending cycle goes

on and on. There is no constant being, but only becoming (1951:81). The Universe, planets, physical entities, gods, men, animals, and even atoms are but flux-in-process. Existence is momentary. What exists, exists only in the moment of its appearance and then is gone. There is no past in existence nor future, only the present, but this will be different in another flash. In any case, existent entities are transient and in the process of continual change in every aspect (King 1964:17-18).

Buddhism places people in the stream of life, which is in a continual state of flux. Therefore, human life is understood as a becoming, which moves onward in an unresisting flow. One's whole being changes from moment to moment; nothing is static, nothing abides (Kretser 1954:46). Buddhists are taught this principle of impermanence from childhood. As they grow older their minds are more and more conditioned to this concept.

The concept of anicca is a challenge to Christian teaching about God. God does not change (Malachi 3:6; James 1:17). Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever (Hebrews 13:6). “. . . everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. . .” (Ecclesiastes 3:14). This Christian teaching about the unchanging nature of God sounds strange to the Burmese Buddhists. Thus the doctrine of anicca is a hindrance to believing God to be unchanging and eternal.

Anatta

The word anatta is a Pali word. Natta refers to the “soul,” “individuality,” or “entire body-soul unit.” It is also translated as “self.” The term anatta means “no-soul” or “no-self.” Winston King (1964:18) states anatta as the quality of insubstantiality, or of having no true self-nature, or of having no continuing identity. Nothing in existence has within it an imperishable entity which separates it from other forms of life (Spiro 1970:20-23). King (1964:18) states that the Buddhist doctrine of “dependent origination” centers around this negation, for every entity, physical or mental is a compounded entity, or a “confection.” This is to say, there are no identical substances or beings in another state, because beings in another state continue with new qualities added or in new states or conditions. These new qualities and states are the substance, or being, which is new and different from the previous condition. That which changes rapidly cannot in truth have a permanent or identical substance; and that which has no true identity of enduring self or substance must change.

The most persistent form of the statement of anatta doctrine is its application to the human self: a flat denial of any abiding personality, consciousness, self, or soul. At any one moment of life these supposed entities are in constant flux. There is continuity, but no continuing identity.

King (1964:19) says that the Buddhists see the delusion of being a permanent self or dealing with permanent things as the root cause of desire, and that therefore the denial of this self-belief is the central teaching of Buddhism (1964:19).

In Buddhism only that in which all life merges is endless, not individual souls. The soul and the ego are conceived not as a permanent identity, but as a function (Sarkisyanz 1965:37). Schumann (1973:83) offers additional proof of the non-selfness of the body, saying that Sutta 28 of the Majjhimanikaya analyses the body into Four Great Elements, that is, earth, water, fire and air, and declares that these are identical with the elements of nature. From this it follows that the body is but a part of the physical world, which is subject to change and consequently without selfhood.

Walpola Sri Rahula (1959:63) describes the idea of Conditioned Genesis in explaining the concept of anatta. The idea of Conditioned Genesis is given in four lines:

When this is, that is
This arising, that arises
When this is not, that is not
This ceasing, that ceases.

This conditionality, relativity and interdependence is further explained in twelve factors.

1. Through ignorance are conditioned volitional actions or kamma-formation.
2. Through volitional actions is conditioned consciousness.
3. Through consciousness are conditioned mental and physical phenomena.
4. Through mental and physical phenomena are conditioned the six faculties (i.e., five physical sense-organs and mind)
5. Through the six faculties is conditioned (sensorial and mental) contact.
6. Through (sensorial and mental) contact is conditioned sensation.
7. Through sensation is conditioned desire, “Thirst.”
8. Through desire (“thirst”) is conditioned clinging.
9. Through clinging is conditioned the process of becoming.
10. Through the process of becoming is conditioned birth.
11. Through birth is conditioned decay.
12. Through decay is conditioned death, lamentation, pain, etc. (Rahula 1959:53-54).

This is how life arises, exists and continues. If we take this formula in its reverse order, through the complete cessation of ignorance, volitional activities cease; through the cessation of volitional activities, consciousness ceases; through the cessation of birth, decay, death, sorrow, etc., cease. Here we can see that each of these factors is conditioned as well as

conditioning. Therefore they are all relative, interdependent and interconnected and nothing is absolute or independent; hence no first cause is accepted by Buddhism. Conditioned Genesis should be considered as a circle, not as a chain.

According to the doctrine of Conditioned Genesis, the idea of an abiding, immortal substance in man, whether it is called Atman, I, Soul, Self, or Ego is considered by the Buddhists to be a false belief, a mental projection. This is the Buddhist doctrine of anatta, No Soul or No Self.

Lynn de Silva, in his book, The Problem of The Self in Buddhism and Christianity (1975:36) describes the relation of anatta to anicca and dukkha. He mentions that a false notion of the self -- conceived as a permanent entity -- is the cause of dukkha (suffering). King (1964:18) also states that that which changes rapidly cannot have a permanent substance; and that which has no true identity of enduring self or substance must change. Only when one realizes that self is impermanent (anatta) and decay (anicca), one is led to freedom from dukkha (de Silva 1975:36).

Christianity believes in an immortal soul and permanent identity. Jesus teaches that the soul cannot be killed (Matthew 10:28) and that he came to save the souls from eternal hell (Romans 8:1). However for the Buddhists, since the souls are not permanent, the saving of souls is not

important. There is no soul to be saved. The concept of anatta abrogates the existence of an immortal soul or a permanent entity separate from other forms of life. This doctrine of anatta is a challenge to the Christian mission.

No Creator or Ruler of Worlds

Buddhism rejects the concept of a personal God as the absolute Creator of the Universe. Buddhism does not conceive of the Buddha as a god or a savior but as one who was subject to the law of impermanence.

Buddhism is a philosophy of becoming. There is no unconditioned substance or a first cause. Everything is conditioned and conditioning. Buddhism cannot accept the existence of an eternal, permanent and personal God who created the world and everything in it. Buddhism considers “God” merely as a product of speculative thinking (Glaser 1966:35-36). The main attack of Buddhist philosophers is directed against the teaching of creation by God. The Buddhists maintain that if God is the sole cause of all things, all would have come into existence simultaneously. But things in the world arise in succession, and also in dependence on each other. According to the law of kamma, each existence is the result of good or evil deeds in a previous existence. The inexorable consequence of this is that the world-cycle has no beginning. This Buddhist thinking reduces everything to the law of kamma (1966:38).

Thus, for Buddhists, the doctrine of creation by God is impossible, because the doctrine of kamma teaches that the beings in the present world are conditioned by their kamma in the past. They argue that God cannot be the original creator of the world because no point in time is imaginable at which God existed. According to the theory of causality, nothing can come about by one single cause, so that the cooperation of a multitude of causes is necessary to produce something (1966:41).

Buddhists maintain that if God created the world, he would not have created the existential suffering of his creatures subject to illness and the pain of hell, etc. The Buddhists raise such questions as this: "If God is almighty, then why has he made such a poor job of the world?" If God is the sole cause of all that happens, then the effort of man is vain. Whatever comes to humanity, happiness or suffering, all is caused by the will of creator. So then because of the will of the creator, human beings become murderers, thieves, unchaste, liars, slanderers, covetous, malicious and heretical. Since God is causing everything, human beings lack the freewill to do what is right and to refrain from what is wrong. Buddhists also argue that if God exists and is the creator of all things, why does he not make all men happy, and why does he not bring order into the world (1966:39-40).

Therefore, as previously described, Buddhists consider God merely as a product of speculative thinking.

In Theravada Buddhism, the question of the existence of a Creator God is unimportant. Creation came into being by itself; there is no teaching about a creator God. Christianity declares that there is a God, the creator of all things. But there is no concept of God the creator in Theravada Buddhism. The rejection of the existence of God is a challenge to Christianity. The Bible says, “In the beginning God created the heavens and earth. . .” (Genesis 1:1) The last book of the Bible says that “God is the beginning and the end” (Revelation 21:6; 22:13). For Christianity, God is the pivot on which everything revolves. In God we live, move and have our being. God is the center of our faith.

For Buddhists, God is on the periphery, the margin, and is irrelevant to human beings. Theravada Buddhists cannot accept the centrality of God in the universe, which Christianity affirms. It is not their mental or intellectual propensity to accommodate the existence of a God who creates all things and rules over all things. Unless the Holy Spirit reveals the Truth to them, they will not accept the Truth about God, the Creator and the ruler of the world. Thus, the Buddhist concept of no creator, no God, is a challenge to the Christian teaching on creation found in the book of Genesis.

The Notion of Liberation (Salvation)

In order to investigate the notion of liberation, we examine the doctrines of kamma (karma), metta-karuna, samsara, nibbana (nirvana), the Four Noble Truths, and dhamma (dharma). Examination of these five conceptions enables us to understand the Burmese Theravada Buddhists' notion of liberation and how to achieve it. We also consider other important worldviews regarding the concept of liberation.

Kamma

Kamma in Pali (kan, Burmese term) refers to all kinds of intentional actions, whether mental, verbal or physical, that is, all thoughts, words, and deeds (Chit 1995:55). It also means volitional action. The volitional action produces effect. The effect is the fruit of kamma. There are good and bad volitional actions. Good volitional action produces good kamma and bad volitional action produces bad kamma. Likewise, good kamma produces good results and bad kamma produces bad results (Rahula 1959:32). In other words, kamma is the effect of merit or demerit. Good or bad action produces merit or demerit, respectively; they in turn produce good and bad kamma. Merit produces good kamma and demerit produces bad kamma and kamma in turn produces the appropriate reward or punishment of the action (Spiro 1970:114-115).

Spiro (1970:116) describes the law of kamma as follows:



Figure 3. The Law of Kamma

According to the above figure, accumulated merit produces good kamma (ku thu kan), which in turn produces rewarding consequences; and accumulated demerit produces bad kamma (aku.thu kan), which produces painful consequences. Every act contributes to the store of merit or demerit for a person. Because of his or her bad kamma, a person is reborn as an animal, and because of his good kamma a person will be reborn as a king, a rich man or a deva.

Schumann (1973:52) explains that favorable rebirth (reborn to be king, a rich man, deva etc.) is caused by good deeds, unfavorable rebirth (reborn to be animal, poor and bad people, etc.) by bad deeds. Thus one's present existence is the result of deeds performed by oneself in previous existences, that is, to lie in the bed one has made. One's future forms of existence determined by actions of today; one is now laying the foundations of one's future fate. All acts performed are rewarded or punished by an appropriate state in future existences. This universal law of causation operates in such a manner that a person's next existence might be that of a

god, a prince, a beggar, or an animal, depending on the deeds done in the past (Smith 1965:4).

Burmese Buddhists believe that charity (dana) is one of the principles of making good kamma. Many of the Burmese Buddhists interviewed said that they are poor because they had not given sufficient dana in their previous rebirths and that some people are rich because they have offered charity in their previous life. Sarkisyanz (1965:70) also says that Buddhist merit can be acquired by economic care for the monastic order and measures for public welfare.

There are two interpretations of the relationship between meritorious deeds, kamma, and retribution. The first interpretation states that a meritorious deed does not produce a separate retribution. Retribution is for accumulative acts rather than for individual ones. The second interpretation maintains that each meritorious act produces a separate retribution (Spiro 1970:116-117). According to the first view, no act escapes retribution. One may perform thousands of meritorious deeds in prior existences, but these meritorious deeds cannot erase a demerit. The moral law is absolute. The second view however affirms that good kamma can be changed into bad kamma by the accumulation of additional demerit; bad kamma can be

changed into good kamma by the accumulation of additional merit (Spiro 1970:119-121).

This concept of kamma is deeply rooted in the mind of Burmese Theravada Buddhists. They see everything in life in terms of this cause and effect principle. Buddhism teaches that even those who became Buddhas had to pay the penalty for their bad kamma before they could become Buddhas. For example, a Bodhisattva (a future Buddha) in one of his previous existences was a robber and had robbed many people. This Bodhisattva had to pay for his bad kamma, so he was robbed just before he became a Buddha. Good kamma has good results, and bad kamma has bad results. According to the law of kamma, there is no element of reward and punishment by any outside power. It is not justice, reward, or punishment meted out by any power sitting in judgment, but by virtue of its own nature and its own law. The doctrine of kamma, therefore, places on humans the responsibility of using the present moment or present life in the right way (Chit 1995:55). The law of kamma is absolute and there is no escape from it.

Burmese Buddhists are brought up with these doctrines as guideposts for their conduct. Acceptance of the Law of kamma comes easily to them, almost second nature. Acceptance of rebirth and future lives gives the

Burmese Buddhists hope and a sense of responsibility. It is up to them to do good deeds, instead of moaning over their lot. The past is past, but the present is in their hands to make good investments for the future. They face an unending round of rebirths to perfect themselves until they attain the full perfection, nibbana (Chit 1995:56).

In Myanmar, when Christians tell about the grace of God which forgives all the sins of humankind, Buddhists cannot believe what they hear. They have been so conditioned to think in terms of the absolute law of kamma that they cannot think otherwise. Many times Buddhists will say, “Your preaching about the grace of God is too simple, it cannot be true.”

Petchsongkram (1975:128) says that Thai Buddhists, who also practice Theravada Buddhism, believe that everything is born and is extinguished according to the power of kamma, and that one needs not have anything to do with God. One Thai writer says that the hand of God cannot reach down into the affairs of those who believe in kamma. One is good or evil according to the power of kamma.

Both Burmese and Thai Buddhists hold that there is no need for God because the principle of kamma will produce automatically the consequences of deeds in all beings. In the Buddhist understanding, kamma, an ethical law of cause and effect, has taken the place of a God who metes

out reward and retribution; for Buddhists kamma renders God unnecessary.

Thus, the concept of kamma is a challenge to Christian mission.

Dana (Giving) In Theravada Buddhism, dana is a means to acquire merit. As previously noted, good kamma produces merit, and bad kamma produces demerit. The kamma of a person in the past is believed to affect both one's present and future life. Some of the Burmese Buddhists interviewed in Yangon said that some people are poor because they had not given sufficient dana in their previous rebirth, and that other persons are rich because they offered charity.

Theravada Buddhists predominately practice the giving of gifts to those who are in need and to the religious establishment. Giving is the result of the faithfulness of a person to the dhamma, the teaching of Buddha. As a person gives, the merit of the giver is increased, so that he or she will enjoy even greater wealth in the future (Swearer 1981:13).

U Nyunt Maung, a Burmese Buddhist writer (1997:204-205) explains that in performing charity, the accomplishment of three steps of volition are necessary in order to produce great benefits to the donors. The three steps of volition are: (1) Volition before giving (Pubbacetana); (2) Volition while giving (Muncacetana); and (3) Volition after giving (Aparacetana). These three-fold volitions must be made pure when giving. Charity is praised by

Buddha in many ways. It is: (1) the stairway to celestial realms; (2) the packet of provisions for the long cycle of rebirths; (3) the direct way to a good destination; (4) the support to attain Magga, Phala and Nibbana; (5) the cause of becoming a ruler; (6) capable of producing luxuries and wealth; (7) capable of enjoying happiness; (8) capable of giving self-protection; (9) capable of civilizing the uncivilized; (10) capable of bringing success in everything; and (11) the noblest auspiciousness. The practice of dana in donating to individual monks and by supporting Buddhist monasteries financially is regarded as the most important and most effective form of giving.

Even though samsara and nibbana are thought to be different metaphysical location for Theravada Buddhists in Myanmar, kammatic merit is the prerequisite for both of them: the greater the kammatic demerit, the more distant is nibbana; the greater the kammatic merit, the closer is nibbana (Spiro 1970:84). Hoping to get merit through good kamma, the practice of dana is very important for Burmese Buddhists.

Meditation. Meditation is believed to be a means to attain wisdom necessary for the achievement of nibbana. There are two types of meditation: tranquility-meditation and insight-meditation. Only through the latter can a person attain wisdom. In Theravada Buddhism, the practice of

meditation is believed to be the path to the attainment of nibbana. In Myanmar, insight-meditation is practiced by Buddhist monks during meditation in monasteries. When laymen enter meditation monasteries they, like the monks, continuously observe the following ten precepts:

1. Not to take life;
2. Not to steal
3. Not to lie;
4. Not to engage in sexual activity;
5. Not to drink alcohol;
6. Not to take food from noon to the next morning;
7. Not to adorn their bodies with anything other than the three robes;
8. Not to participate in or be spectator to public entertainments;
9. Not to use high or comfortable beds; and
10. Not to use money (Lester 1987:91).

Through meditation they seek for an experience of “calmness, great inner coolness in order to attain wisdom for achievement of nibbana” (Spiro 1970:55). The doctrine of dana and meditation is a challenge to the Christian teaching, “It is by grace you have been saved through faith. It is not the result of your own efforts, but God’s gift” (Ephesians 2:8). For Buddhists salvation is attained through dana and meditation.

Metta (Loving-Kindness)

Metta is a Pali word which means loving-kindness. Metta is one of the Four Sublime Abiding, which are loving-kindness, compassion, appreciative joy, and equanimity. Burmese Buddhists believe that loving-

kindness has power to protect them from bringing disasters upon their lives and power to control evil mental states such as anger, cruelty, jealousy and impatience. Metter aspires for the happiness of all beings and is the remedy for all kinds of fear and hatred. Loving-kindness is seen as outgrowth from generosity. It is a factor that undercuts the attachment of “I” (Indaka 2000:27).

The meaning of metta includes sending out thoughts of love towards others, sympathy, harmlessness, and goodwill. Metta according to the Buddha’s teaching has two aspects. First, it is adosa (amity), meaning the absence of hatred and hostility. Second, metta is “friendliness.” It is also loving-kindness without a desire to possess but with a desire to help. Metta is willing to sacrifice self-interest for the welfare and well-being of humanity. Metta is without any selection or exclusion. It embraces both the good and the bad, the lovely and the unlovely in humanity. Metta is not just feeling but action. It performs charitable deeds and ministry for the good of one and all (Thittila 1986:81-83).

Indaka (2000:27-28) describes three ways to cultivate loving-kindness. First, it can be developed by showing love to those who are in poverty and to those who are diseased, so that we may not take advantage of their weaknesses. Second, it can be developed by having appreciative joy

and gladness about others' success in life, so that we may not be jealous of them. And third, it is cultivated by implementing equanimity when encountering troublemakers, so as to avoid impatience and anger with them.

Indaka (2000:28-30) continues to describe three kinds of loving-kindness. (1) Bodily love: love that can be expressed by showing unconditional love to all beings through bodily action by performing social services, such as cleaning public places, repairing and constructing streets, digging ponds and planting trees and flowers for the pleasure of people and animals. (2) Verbal love: loving-kindness that can be expressed by showing love through speech and words. The practitioner of verbal love has to avoid verbally bad actions such as telling lies, back-biting, gossiping, speaking harsh, abusive words, and nonsense. (3) Mental love: love that can be developed by thinking of the welfare of all beings and by reciting the loving-kindness meditation which reads,

As I, may all beings be free from enmity.

As I, may all beings be free from hatred and anger.

As I, may all beings be free from pain and suffering.

As I, may all beings be happy and peaceful (2000:29).

The Buddhist concept of metta has a horizontal dimension. It is love towards one another. It is not a vertical love towards God. When Christians

tell about the love of God (Agape), Buddhists cannot understand, because there is no concept of God in Buddhism. Thus, the doctrine of metta is a challenge to the Christian teaching about Agape -- “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

Samsara

Samsara means rebirth. The process of samsara is continuous rebirth. It is the wandering through the world in a succession of states or connected lives (Petchsongkram 1975:131). Samsara is the wheel of rebirth, an endless cycle of existence -- birth, death and rebirth (Smith 1965:4). Here the death of an unliberated person is followed by his rebirth, in which the suffering of living and dying is repeated, that is, to be born and to die and to be born again (Schumann 1973:50). According to one of the Sanskrit/English dictionaries, the original meaning of the Sanskrit word samsara was: “. . . Going or wandering through, undergoing transmigration. . . Course, passage, passing through a succession of states, circuit of mundane existence of the world” (Cheetham 1994:11).

According to popular Buddhism, an imperfect being can, after death, be re-incarnated in one of several worlds. Egerton C. Baptist (1955:210) describes how the physical constituents of the body will go into the water as

fluids, into earth as salts and minerals, and in a short time may form the parts of a flower, or fruit, or animal. Concerning the realms of rebirth, Baptist (1955:33) writes that some people are reborn in heaven, some are reborn in hell, some are reborn as hungry ghosts, and so on. Siegmund (1980:44) mentions five states of existence in the process of samsara: (1) The lower world (niraya) (2) the animal kingdom (tiracchanayaoni), (3) the spirit sphere (petavisaya), or the sphere of ghost-beings and demons, (4) the realm of human beings (manussaloka), and (5) the realm of gods (devaloka). The davaloka itself has several levels.

Cheetham (1994:14) calls these states of existence, “World System” (Lokadhatu). For Buddhists, the world looks like a flat-bottomed pan. The pan bottom consists of ocean waters, and at the outer edge of the pan rise concentric circles of mountain ridges interspersed with seas. The outermost rim is a circular range of mountains, enclosing the whole area. In the center is Mount Meru, the pivot or axis of the world.

There are three layers of existence in Lokadhatu. The lowest layer is called Kamadhatu, consisting of the lower heaven, the earth, and the nether regions. The second layer is called Rupadhatu (the Realm of Form). It consists of seventeen separate heavens in ascending order and falls into four sections, which correspond with the four dhyanas (meditative absorption).

The first three dhyanas have three distinct heavens each, while the fourth has eight heavens. It is among these eight heavens of the four dhyanas in Rupadhatu that the king of all the gods, Brahma, is found. The third layer is called Arupyadhatu (Realm of No Form). This layer consists of four heavens. The lowest is the Realm of Continuous Space; the second is the Realm of Continuous Consciousness. The next higher is the Realm of Continuous Nothingness. The fourth is the Realm of Neither Perception (Cheetham 1994:15-16). Within these three layers of existence, Kamadhatu, Rupadhatu, Aruphadhatu, everything happens and repeats itself over and over. In other words, samsara, an endless cycle of rebirth, occurs within these three layers of existence. Birth and death is constant in all the three layers.

According to Buddhism, everything is governed by impermanence, the structure of the world-system is also subject to this. Buddhists also believe that the whole three realms or layers of existence are periodically destroyed and renewed. The whole world-system is said to last three kalpas, which is the equivalent of 960 million years (one kalpa consists of 320 million years). A partial destruction occurs after every kalpa. The mode of destruction of the world-system involves three of the basic elements. The most frequent mode of destruction is by fire, the other two

are flood and wind. After the destruction of the world-system, everything is renewed and the whole process begins again (Cheetham 1994:16-17).

The length of life varies between various modes of existence. In the early phase of a new kalpa, human life lasts for 80,000 years. This span shortens progressively as the kalpa proceeds until life lasts for a hundred years or less. The life spans of animals are not specified. Infernal beings who are suffering the punishment of hell have lives lasting from thousands of years in the lesser abodes, and up to millions of years in the great hell. The gods of Kamadhatu have lives lasting 500 or 1,000 years. The gods of Rupadhatu in the first dhyana have life spans of 160 million years, and those in the other three dhyanas live up to 640 million years. The lives of the gods of Arupadhatu outlast all other forms of existence in the structure of the world-system (Cheetham 1994:21).

Samsara is a world-system in a constant state of turmoil, anguish, and tumultuous onward flow. Beings pass through the realms of human, gods and hell with different spans of lives. Samsara is a gigantic cosmic flood of events, of beings heaving and tumbling in perpetual pandemonium (Cheetham 1994:28). Kamma decides where will a person be reborn and what sort of life he/she shall have. How we think and act now will influence how we will be in the future (Baptist 1955:34).

As previously noted, within the samsara, beings move from one realm of existence to another. Beings do not stay permanently in one form of existence; even life in the hells and the heavens is not permanent. As stated before, this concept of impermanence is just the opposite of the concept of the eternal unchanging God in Christianity. Buddhists are not used to the idea of permanence, whether material or non-material. This concept of samsara and impermanence held by the Buddhist contrasts with the Christian teaching about eternal heaven and eternal hell and no perishable life after death, which is subject to impermanence and death. The Buddhist concept of impermanence is a challenge to Christianity in Myanmar.

Nibbana

Nirvana in Sanskrit, nibbana in Pali, is the complete dissolution of the three unwholesome roots: greed, hate, and delusion. It means that the physical form, feeling, perception (both physical and mental), drives, consciousness, and all factors binding to samsara and suffering are totally dissolved in nibbana (Glaser 1966:106). Winston King (1952:45) describes nibbana as deathless; the ambrosial; peace; calmness and coolness; release; bliss, the going out of greed, hatred, and delusion; a haven; an unborn, uncompounded essence; and so forth. Nibbana means a complete cessation of sorrow, selfish desire, the absence of craving, hatred and

ignorance. It is supreme bliss, and the blowing out of the flame of personal desire (Thittila 1986:76). Siegmund (1980:46) describes nibbana as cessation of greed, giving up of greed, abandoning of greed, release from greed and detachment from greed.

Nibbana is without a substantial self; it is perfect peace, a nothing as compared with all visible configurations. It is something that can be expressed in the negative only. It is figuratively described as the cool cave in the heat of everyday life, and as the place of no death. It does not belong to the world, has no relationship with it, nor does it affect the world. It is the totally other (Glasenapp 1966:106). Nibbana is characterized as happiness, peace, security, bliss, deathlessness, purity, truth, health and the permanent (Schumann 1973:79). Melford Spiro (1970:56-57) describes nibbana (quoting from Rhys Davis) as:

The harbor of refuge, the cool cave, the island amidst the floods, the place of bliss, emancipation, liberation, safety, the supreme, the transcendental, the uncreated, the tranquil, the home of ease, the calm, the end of suffering, the medicine for all evil, the unshaken, the ambrosia, the immaterial, the imperishable, the abiding, the further shore, the unending, the bliss of effort, the supreme joy.

Some of the definitions and descriptions of nibbana in the Pali texts are:

A complete cessation of that very “thirst” (tanha), giving it up, renouncing it, emancipation from it, detachment from it. Calming

of all conditioned things, giving up of all defilements, extinction of “thirst,” detachment, cessation, nibbana. (Rahula 1959:37)

Some short statements about nibbana from the Pali records of the Buddha’s words are such phrases as “stopping of becoming,” “getting rid of craving,” “going out of the flame,” “deathlessness,” “peace,” and “the unchanging state” (Cheetham 1994:292-293).

In the Udana Sutta we find the clearest affirmation of the ontological otherness as well as the soteriological necessity of nibbana:

Monk, there is a not-born, a not-become, a not-made, a not-compounded. Monks if that unborn, not-become, not-made, not-compounded were not, there would be apparent no escape from this here that is born, become, made, compounded. But since monks there is an unborn, not-become, not-made, not-compounded, therefore the escape from this here that is born, become, made, compounded is apparent. (Drummond 1974:120)

The etymological meaning of nibbana is “blown out” or “extinguished,” “become cool,” “extinct.” The image is of the unfed flame, no longer given the materials by which its formal continuity may be sustained (Drummond 1974:116). Rahula states,

In nibbana the four elements of solidity, fluidity, heat and motion have no places; the notions of length and breadth, the subtle and the gross, good and evil, name and form are altogether destroyed; neither this world nor the other, nor coming, going or standing, neither death nor birth, nor sense-objects are to be found. (1959:129)

Drummond also describes nibbana as causeless, whereas the whole of phenomenal existence is characterized by subjection to the chain of causation. It is unconditional whereas existence is conditioned (Drummond 1974:121). Because nibbana is here expressed in negative terms, there are those who have the wrong conception, saying that it is negative and expresses self-annihilation. Rahula (1959:37) notes that nibbana is definitely not self-annihilation, because there is no self to annihilate. If at all, it is the annihilation of the illusion, of the false idea of self. All these expressions make it clear that nibbana is understood both positively and negatively.

A majority of Burmese Buddhists interviewed believed that nibbana as a total extinction is a heretical opinion. It is only an extinction of suffering and impurities. When all sufferings and impurities are extinguished, the purities and pleasantness remain. All these expressions make it clear that nibbana for the Burmese Buddhists is not understood as nothingness but is regarded as something positive. Most of the Burmese Buddhists would not desire nibbana if it meant the cessation of existence. For many Burmese Buddhists, nibbana is not viewed as extinction but as a blissful state.

The way to nibbana is through knowledge and meritorious work. Saw Myat Yin, a Burmese anthropologist, (1994:56) describes three requirements for the journey to nibbana. They are charity (dana), morality (sila) and wisdom (bhavana). But Siegmund (1980:51-54) says that full nibbana is achieved by wisdom in passing through four stages: (1) the stream-enterer (Sotapanna), (2) the once-returner (Sakadagami) and (3) the non-returner (Anagami) and (4) the perfect one (Arahat).

The stream-enterer is one who has escaped from the samsaric level of personality. As one escapes from the samsaric level, the heavy chain that once bound him to sense-objects is broken, but he is not yet fully free; mind remains attached to earthly objects through less firm cords. The Buddha enumerated ten such cords of bondage: (1) self-illusion or pride, (2) doubt or flimsiness, (3) trust in the superstitious power of rites and ritual, (4) desire for sense-gratification, (5) hatred or ill-will, (6) desire for objects with form, (7) desire for objects without form, (8) self-conceit, (9) restlessness or aimless rushing about and (10) ignorance (Siegmund 1980:50). The stream-enterer has broken the first three cords, but since his mind is not perfectly clear of doubt, he regresses into samsara, the old life of greed.

The second stage, once-returner is more firm than the first and less likely to regress into samsara. In the third stage, the non-returner breaks

fully the two cords (4 and 5) that are not easily broken. When these two cords are totally broken, there is no danger of regress into samsara. The non-returner also breaks the rest of the five cords of bondage (6,7,8,9,10). By breaking these, he enter into nibbana (Siegmund 1980:51).

Christianity offers salvation through faith in Christ, whereas for the Buddhists liberation (salvation) is attained by self-effort, self-dependence, and the ability of self to free oneself from suffering (Dal 1999:54). Some Christians think that the Christian heaven is more or less like the Buddhist nibbana, and when they speak to Buddhists they use the two words as if they are the same. It is very apparent that nibbana and the Christian heaven are not the same. The word heaven however is misleading, because Buddhism teaches the existence of many heavens, as previously noted. The Buddhist heavens, however, are not the same as the Christian heaven. The heavens in Buddhism are part of the samsara from which the Buddhists wish to be liberated. Even if we explain that the Christian heaven is eternal bliss in fellowship with God, the Buddhists would not choose the Christian heaven assuming that the aggregates in endless cycle of becoming and destruction are still in process in the Christian heaven. Also in the Christian heaven, human beings are in fellowship with God. Some Buddhists see the God-human fellowship as attachment. Attachment they say is the result of tanha

(craving or desire), a characteristic of samsara; thus Buddhists conclude that the Christian heaven is not yet a liberated place. Since Buddhists long to be free, liberated from tanha, they would choose nibbana rather than the heaven of Christianity. Thus the conception of nibbana is a challenge to Christian mission in Myanmar.

The Four Noble Truths

The Four Noble Truths is the best text through which we can understand the philosophy of the Buddha. It is the very first sermon of the Buddha, and the one that is universally accepted as the clearest summary of all that he taught and stood for. Ven. S. Dhammika (1987:13-18) describes the four Noble Truths as follows:

(1) The First Noble Truth is that life is suffering. To live, we must suffer, which involves such physical sufferings as sickness, injury, tiredness, old age and eventually death. It also involves such psychological sufferings as loneliness, frustrations, fear, embarrassment, disappointment, anger, etc.,

(2) The Second Noble Truth is that all suffering is caused by craving or desire. We suffer psychologically when we do not get what we want. We feel frustrated when we expect people to live up to our expectations and they do not. Even when we want something and are able to get it, this does not often lead to happiness, because it is not long before we feel bored with that

thing, lose interest in it and commence to want something else. In short, the Second Noble Truth says that getting what we want does not guarantee happiness. Rather than constantly struggling to get what one wants, a person should try to modify one's wanting. Thus wanting deprives us of contentment and happiness.

Dhammika, a Burmese monk says that a life time wanting and craving for this and that, especially the craving to continue to exist, creates a powerful energy that causes the individual to be reborn. As previously noted, when we are reborn, we have a body, which is susceptible to injury and disease; it can be exhausted by work; it ages and eventually dies. Thus desire or craving leads to physical suffering because it causes us to be reborn.

(3) The Third Noble Truth is that suffering can be overcome by eliminating desire, and thus happiness is attained. The Buddha assures that true happiness is possible when we are no longer obsessed with satisfying our own selfish wants. This state of happiness is called nibbana, where both physical and psychological suffering cease.

(4) The Fourth Noble Truth is the Path leading to the overcoming and cessation of suffering. This Path is called the Noble Eightfold Path, which

contains everything a person needs to lead a good life and to develop spiritually.

The Noble Eightfold Path. Liberation (salvation) means deliverance from that ignorance of the self-will (craving or desire) which clings to existence. For Buddhists, such liberation is to be found by walking in the Noble Eightfold Path.

This Path is called the “Middle Way” between austere and sensuous worldliness, avoiding extreme self-indulgence and extreme self-mortification. It is the way to cessation of desire (tanha), in other words, cessation of suffering. Schumann (1973:68-73) describes the Eightfold Paths as follows:

1. Right View (Perfect Understanding),
2. Right Resolve (Perfect Thought),
3. Right Speech (Perfect Speech),
4. Right Conduct (Perfect Action),
5. Right Livelihood (Perfect Livelihood),
6. Right Effort (Perfect Effort),
7. Right Awareness (Perfect Mindfulness),
8. Right Meditation (Perfect Concentration).

1. *Right View* is the knowledge of the Buddhist Four Noble Truths. It also consists in discarding the Four Perverse Views, which are looking for something permanent in the impermanent, for happiness in suffering, for a self in the non-self and for beauty in what is ugly.

2. *Right Resolve* has a triple division: a resolve to renunciation, to benevolence, and not to harm living beings.
3. *Right Speech* is speech that does not consist of lies, gossip, abuse and idle talk.
4. *Right Conduct* means desisting from taking of life, from taking things not given and from debauchery.
5. *Right Livelihood* implies the pursuit of a harmless bread-winning, one which does not cause suffering to others, such as earning one's bread by selling weapons, meat, living beings, liquor, and poison.
6. *Right Effort* is an endeavor to ward off unwholesome mental phenomena and to produce wholesome ones. Its most important exercise is the guarding of the sense-gates in order to train for purity. This step is mental effort to progress in knowledge by patience and perseverance.
7. *Right Awareness*, or attentiveness, means mindfulness of the body, sensation, mind and mental objects. It is a cure for states of agitation. Its aim is to lift semiconscious actions like breathing, walking, standing, sitting, lying, etc., into the light of full awareness. After having become aware of the body in this manner, one proceeds analogously with sensations, thoughts, and mental phenomena. The purpose is to achieve concentration and to bring the fickle mind under control.

8. *Right Meditation* promotes understanding to distinguish between the techniques of meditation and exercises of meditation (Schumann 1973:68-72).

The Noble Eightfold Path is a series of steps up the ladder of spiritual advancement toward ultimate liberation. Winston King (1964:187) in his book, *A Thousand Lives Away*, describes three classification of the Path. Steps 3 through 5 are put in the domain of sila or morality, mainly aimed at the acquisition of kammatic merit which lays the foundation for a better rebirth. Steps 6 through 8 are classified as belonging to the domain of samadhi or meditation. Steps 1 and 2 are considered to be the order of panna or wisdom, which brings one to nibbana. King (1964:188-190) goes on to show that there are relativities and inter-relations between these three stages of the Eightfold Path. For example, as one progresses in the meditative life, one reaches the stage of panna (wisdom). Saintliness is the perfection of one's morality, the turning from mere observance of external standards to the spontaneous exercise of inward virtues. However, the higher attainment of nibbana is actualized by meditation. King tells us that there are two routes to nibbana, that is, a direct route and an indirect route. The former is called the "dry-visioned" way, that is, the way to nibbana

without attainment of the Jhanic Power; the latter is the way to nibbana through the Jhanas.

The Traditional Jhanic (indirect) Route

This traditional, or indirect, route starts with both sila (morality) and samadhi (meditation). It begins the lowest domain of sila at the stage of “ordinary consciousness.” And then the meditation continues on to the second domain of samadhi. In that domain the first stage of meditation is “preparatory concentration” and the second stage is “neighborhood concentration.” Then one comes to “the nine stages of jhanic absorption.” The one who meditates climbs one jhanic stage after another until the ninth stage is reached. After reaching the ninth stage a person cannot continue on to the third domain of panna and that person has to break off the jhanic absorptions and return to the lowest domain of sila, to the stage of “ordinary consciousness” again. From the domain of sila the person has to ascend again to the second domain of samadhi, to the stages of “preparatory concentration” and “neighborhood concentration.” From there, one can go directly to the third domain of panna, into vipassana meditation. From vipassana meditation, the person climbs the next step into the nirodha sanapatti meditation. From that stage the person enters into a stage where one can become an arahat and finally attains nibbana.

The Route of Bare Essentials (the direct route). This meditation route of the bare essentials also starts from the lowest domain of sila at the “ordinary consciousness” stage. The meditation continues upward to the domain of samadhi, to the stages of “preparatory concentration” and “neighborhood concentration.” Up to this point the direct route goes through the same stages as the indirect route, but from this point on the two routes diverge. Instead of going through the nine stages of jhanic absorptions, this route takes a direct path to the domain of panna, to the vipassana stage of meditation. From vipassana meditation it goes straight to arahatship without going through the nirodha-samapatti stage. From arahatship one finally attains nibbana (King 1952:194-196).

This direct or vipassana route is the preferred form of meditation, especially among the laymen in Myanmar. Vipassana meditation, however, is more demanding spiritually and morally. It is more severe because it is simpler and more direct.

Since meditation is the route to nibbana, Burmese Buddhists take it very seriously, practicing very complex and systematic methods of it. Burmese Buddhists emphasize disciplined meditational living. Every city, town and village has a meditational center. Many devout Buddhists spend some time in meditation every day and set aside a day each week to

meditate. For the Buddhist, meditation is the route to nibbana, so a religion without serious meditation is not seen as a route to nibbana; the Buddhist looks upon down this as an inferior religion. Thus the practice of meditation is a challenge to Christianity.

Dhamma

Dhamma comes from the root dhar, which means to bear or to carry.

Dhamma denotes a firm bearer of all that happens in the world. It is the norm which rules all great and small events of the natural and moral life.

Dhamma manifests itself in factors of being which condition each other and which produce by their interplay the outer and inner world of an individual (Glaserapp 1966:48). There is no term in Buddhist terminology wider than Dhamma. It includes not only the conditioned things and states, but also the non-conditioned, the Absolute, nibbana. There is nothing in the universe or outside, good or bad, conditioned or non-conditioned, relative or absolute, which is not included in this term (Rahula 1959:58).

There are two groups of dhammas: (1) The Non-conditioned dhamma, dhamma which forms the state of liberation. This is eternal, that is, not conditioned by karmmatic causes, and is not subject to the formative power of kamma. In Theravada Buddhism, only nibbana is considered a Non-

conditioned dhamma. (2) The Conditioned dhammas are factors of existence, understood as follows:

1. The sensual or perceptive faculties, the corresponding sense-spheres, namely the visible, audible, etc., and the contents of perception;
2. Consciousness and thought-activity;
3. The innate abilities and talents of an individual as well as his moods, emotions, impulses and interests - in short, the psychological processes;
4. Non-physical relations and processes like obtaining, non-obtaining, vitality, ageing, impermanence, etc. (Schumann 1973:86-87).

All empirical beings and all that is reflected in them as the external world are but phenomena formed by Conditioned dhammas. The dhammas are the structural elements of empirical existence that cannot be further reduced. There is no substratum, no 'true reality' or 'essence' behind or beyond them (1973:87).

With regard to the nature of the dhammas, the Theravada and the Sarvastivada or Abhidhamma school hold divergent views. The Theravada Buddhists see the Conditioned dhammas as short-lived. They arise, combine with others into dhamma-groups or phenomena and vanish in order to give way to new dhammas and new phenomena.

The Sarvastivadins view the nature of the Conditioned dhammas differently. According to them the dhammas are also effective for only a short time, then they remain latent. However, they can change from latency to activity. The function of dhamma by the example of a stone on a mountain peak is noteworthy. For a long time the stone lies there, ineffective. One day it begins to fall, becomes effective until it comes to rest in the valley, and it slides back once more into ineffectiveness. Here the stone on the peak is comparable to a dhamma of future, while falling it is like a dhamma of the present, when come to rest again it is a dhamma of the past. In the stone -- as in the dhammas -- the three times are not dead: past, present and future co-exist in them (1973:88).

According the Theravada Buddhism, the whole universe and everything in it is an ordered sequence of dynamic processes, a play of the forces of dhamma. Personality is an ever-changing stream of dhammas which arise from multiple conditions, are active for a short time, and again cease, to make room for others (Glasenapp 1966:51).

Buddhas are born from the dhamma and have the dhamma as their right, as their realm. All wholesome things, whether worldly or supramundane, are born from the dhamma, originated from the dhamma. Dhamma is timeless, and always constant. It is invincible and

immeasurable. Dhamma as the central concept of Theravada Buddhism, has been compared with the Brahma of the Upanishads. Both Brahma and dhamma are the premise for the existence of this world and lead from this world to liberation (1966:53).

The connotations of the term dhamma implies that:

1. Every element is a separate entity or force.
2. There is no inherence of one element in another, hence no substance apart from its qualities, no matter beyond the separate sense-data, and no soul beyond the separate mental data.
3. Elements have no duration; every moment represents a separate element. Thought is evanescent. There are no moving bodies, but consecutive appearances, flashings, of new elements in new places.
4. The elements cooperate with one another.
5. This co-operative activity is controlled by the laws of causation.
6. The world-process is thus a process of co-operation between seventy-two kinds of subtle, evanescent elements. Such is the nature of dhammas that they proceed from causes and steer towards extinction.
7. Influenced by the element avidya (basic ignorance), the process is in full swing. Influenced by the element prajna (transcendent comprehension and understanding), it has a tendency toward appeasement and final

extinction. In the first case, streams (santana) of combining elements are produced which correspond to ordinary men; in the second, the stream represents a saint. The complete stoppage of the process of phenomenal life corresponds to a Buddha.

8. Hence the elements are broadly divided into unrest (dukkha), cause of unrest (dukkha-samudaya), extinction (nirodha), and the cause of extinction (marga-prajna).
9. The final result of the world-process is its suppression, Absolute Calm: all co-operation is extinguished and replaced by immutability (asamskrta-nibbana) (Gard 1962:111-112).

Buddhism also teaches dhamma as the ultimate authority; it is with this ultimate authority that the Buddha identified himself, “He who sees the dhamma sees me, and he who sees me sees the dhamma” (Coomaraswamy and Horner 1948:23, quoting Samyutta-Nikaya iii. 120, Itivuttaka 91, Milindapanha 73). The Buddha often used dhamma to denote his own teaching. Later the word is used to mean Buddhist doctrine. When Buddha sent out his disciples to preach they were told to teach dhamma (Drummond 1974:133). Exalted language is used of dhamma: “The gift of the Law (dhamma) exceeds all gifts; the sweetness of the law exceeds all sweetness” (Drummond 1974:134, quoting Dhammapada 354, Sacred Books of the

East, X, 84). The connection of the way with the goal is suggested by the statement that the monk who behaves with kindness and is happy in the dhamma of the Buddha will reach nibbana (Drummond 1974:136, quoting Dhammapada 368, Sacred Books of the East, X, 87).

In Buddhist literature, in the Sutta-Nipata, we find references to the dhamma as the “aloof state,” as also the way by which men may cross the flood. Dhamma “reigns” over the enlightened person. Dhamma is his delight; he takes his praise in dhamma and knows its judgments. He orders his conduct lest dhamma reveals his guilt. Dhamma has sight that may be seen; it is the state reached as the goal, the reality awakened, set astir by the stainless one; dhamma is the ancient, deathless word of Truth, the goal in which “calm men stand fast.” Dhamma is that which ends craving, that by which he “who finds and knows and fares alertly may cross over the world’s mire.” (Drummond 1974:134-135, quoting Sutta-Nipata 1064-1065).

The doctrine of dhamma in Buddhism is a challenge to Christianity. Buddhists feel that they have everything a religion should have because they have the dhamma. Buddha told his followers that “dhamma is the way, and the truth” (Petchsongkram 1975:42). Buddha also said that those who find their joy and satisfaction in the dhamma would be at peace, and the dhamma

would defend them. They would not descend to one of the hell, but would go to heaven instead (1975:43).

In Thailand, Buddhists feel superior to the Christians because of their concept of the dhamma. In Thai Theravada Buddhism there are many categories of dhamma. Among them there is Lokiyadhamma, (worldly dhamma) and Lokuttaradhamma (non-material or other-worldly dhamma). The Thai Buddhists assume that other religions have Lokiyadhamma, which means the other religion have the worldly dhamma only, while Buddhism alone has Lokuttaradhamma, the other-worldly dhamma. This makes Buddhism superior to all other religions in the world (Petchsongkram 1975:24,125).

Wan Petchsongkram (1975:45) says that when the Thai Christians tell Buddhists, “We depend on God,” they simply reply, “And we depend on the dhamma” (1975:45). There are a number of books written in Thailand on the subject, “dhamma is God.” The Thai Buddhists and the Burmese Buddhists, both being Theravada Buddhists, share a similar concept of the dhamma. For many Theravada Buddhists, dhamma more or less takes the role of god in their lives. What God is to the Christians, dhamma is to many Buddhists. When Christians try to explain human beings’ need of God in human lives, the Buddhists reply that they have dhamma, and this is

sufficient for their lives. When the Buddhists feel they have everything, they are not in a position to receive anything more from Christianity. That is why the concept of dhamma is a challenge to Christianity.

The Buddha

The Buddha occupies an important place in the thoughts and feelings of the contemporary Theravada Buddhists in Myanmar. The attitudes of Burmese Buddhists to the Buddha is a key point to properly understand the quality of the Theravada tradition.

The Buddha as Revealer of Truth

Some writers on Buddhism say that there is no revelation in Buddhism, but this statement is not totally true. Theravada Buddhists believe that without the teaching of Buddha, sentient beings can never come to the knowledge of nibbana. So we may say that as far as the Buddha is related to other people, he is a revealer of truth. Buddhists regard the Buddha's dhamma (his teaching) as a full-fledged revelation to the world (King 1964:170-172).

The Religious Function of the Buddha

The Buddha was the supreme teacher of the way to salvation in the world epoch. However, he is not the Supreme Being to whom Buddhists should address prayers and give adoration. Buddhists in Myanmar, like

Buddhists elsewhere, bow down before the image of the Buddha. However, they are not worshipping this image. They are just expressing “veneration,” “reverence” or “respect” for the Buddha.

There is a question to be asked about this act of veneration. Does a Buddhist think the Buddha is actually present there? According to orthodox teaching, the Buddha is not present. In reality most worshippers in Myanmar seem to feel that the Buddha is present. As Winston King (1964:177) states, “There is clearly something of the ‘Buddha-presence’ which is available here before the image and not elsewhere.” Despite orthodox teaching to the contrary, certain powers are attributed to the images of the Buddha. Wishes uttered in the vicinity of a Buddha image have a greater chance of being fulfilled than in some other places (1964:178).

For many Buddhists in Myanmar, the Buddha is a present power available for human needs. Orthodox Buddhism teaches that Gautama Buddha has attained nibbana and no longer exists as a person. Even during his existence on earth, Gautama taught that he was not able to save or help any one. Burmese Buddhists would intensely hold on to this orthodox teaching on the one hand, while on the other hand they believe the Buddha is available to respond to their spiritual petitions and requests. Many practice

this petitioning form of Buddhist devotions by saying, “Let this be,” or “May this come to pass.” Their conviction is that somehow the power which was in him is still active in the world today; almost inevitably present-tense, personal-relational language creeps in during their prayers. Winston King writes on what the Buddha means to many of the Burmese people:

Yet for the mass of Buddhists the Buddha-figure still represents an ideal personal life, a well-beloved Master-Teacher, a Superman of Supermen far more powerful than any God, and a spiritual potency that is not entirely a matter of the past. Functionally, therefore, or at least for the purposes of religious devotion if not for the categories of theology, the Buddha is a deity or locus of supreme values. (1964:179)

The way the Burmese Buddhists relate to the Buddha in their daily lives becomes a challenge to the Christian mission effort in Myanmar. The paradox in Myanmar is that Theravada Buddhists firmly hold on to the orthodox view of Buddha with their intellect, while at the same time they relate to the Buddha as if he were a living reality who is present with them personally. So in the daily lives of many Theravada Buddhists in Myanmar, Buddha is believed to be a living reality, just as much as Jesus is believed to be a living reality by Christians. When Christians try to offer Jesus to the Theravada Buddhists in Myanmar they would say, “We already have our Buddha.” The Buddhists regard Jesus as the God of the Westerners and so

Jesus to the Burmese Buddhist is a foreign God. They see no reason why they should accept this foreign God.

Buddha as a Refuge

There are three refuges in Buddhism, and Buddhists often recite them this:

I go to the Buddha for refuge
 I go to the dhamma for refuge
 I go to the Sangha for refuge

They are also called the triple gems, or the threefold jewels (triratana).

Ratana means jewels, and just as worldly jewels give worldly pleasures, these spiritual jewels give spiritual pleasure. The Buddhist takes these jewels or refuges as guides against the evil power of ignorance, greed, hatred and ill-will (Thittila 1986:207). The notion of “refuge” here is not that of a place to hide. Refuge here means something which purifies, uplifts and strengthens the heart. When people meditate on these three refuges they will be guided to a better way of living. The three refuges remind Buddhists of calm, wise, spiritual people and their states of mind, and so help them engender these states (Gard 1962:135).

Buddhists go to the Buddha for refuge because he had boundless compassion for human beings. Buddha also found a path of deliverance by his own ceaseless effort through countless lives. Thus he is a model for all

Buddhists to follow; he is their supreme teacher (Thittila 1986:207-298). A frequently used chant drawn from the Pali Canon affirms:

Thus he is Lord: because he is an Arahāt, perfectly and completely Enlightened, endowed with knowledge and (good) conduct, well-gone (to nibbana) knower of worlds, an incomparable charioteer for the training of person, teacher of gods and humans, Buddha, Lord. (Gard 1962:137)

The Buddha is regarded as a refuge because he is the rediscoverer and the exemplifier of dhamma who also showed others how to live by it and experience it. He is a pointer to the faculty of wisdom developing within the practitioner (Thittila 1986:208). Thus the Buddha himself is a challenge to the Christian proclamation of Jesus Christ as the Way, the Truth and the Life (John 14:6).

In this chapter, we have examined the worldviews of the Burmese Buddhists. In light of this study, we examine, in the next chapter, how the gospel was miscommunicated to the Burmese people due to a lack of understanding of their worldview.

CHAPTER FIVE

Strengths and Weaknesses in Cross-Cultural Communication

We have seen that the belief systems of Buddhism and Christianity are not the same. The worldview, the thought forms, and the cosmology of these two religions are vastly different. These contrasting belief systems generate considerable problems in the communication of the gospel. When adherents of these two religions meet and talk on religious matters, people may interpret statements made by the other group in different ways. When Christians make statements of faith, these statements are based on the Christian worldview and belief system. When Buddhists hear the statements of Christians, they interpret those statements according to a Buddhist worldview and belief system. Thus, Christians may try to convey one message or concept, but most likely the Buddhists will understand a different message.

Kraft's (1979a:151) second principle of communication states that what is understood in communication is dependent on how the receptor perceives the message and how the communicator presents it. The third principle demonstrates that when communicating the gospel, the communicator only transmits the message not the meanings, because the meanings are in the minds of the receptors. Therefore, the receptor always

misses something intended by the communicator and adds something not intended.

In the first part of this chapter, we examine the weaknesses of Myanmar Christian efforts in their communication of the gospel to Buddhists. Here we shall examine some important words and terms that Myanmar Christians have been using when they communicate the gospel. With the Buddhists' cosmology, worldview and belief system in mind, we try to discern how the Theravada Buddhists in Myanmar have been interpreting our Christian message. And then in the light of Kraft's second and third principles of communication, we try to discern how the gospel has been miscommunicated to the Buddhists, due to their interpretation of Christian terms and words based on their own worldview and cosmology. After recognizing a miscommunication of the gospel to Burmese Buddhists due to a lack of understanding their worldview, we explore in chapter six how the gospel message can be meaningfully presented by adapting it to the Buddhist worldview. Using what we learned about the Buddhist worldview in chapter four, we look for as many points of contact as possible on which we can develop a meaningful presentation of the gospel to the Burmese Buddhists.

In the second part of this chapter, we examine the strengths we have in our communication of the gospel, so that we may be able to continue utilizing them, and also develop better strategies in our communication to Burmese Buddhists.

Weaknesses in Cross-Cultural Communication

We previously noted that the same word used in one religion may have a vastly different meaning for another. Certain terms can appear to be similar, but each religion may attach different meanings to those terms or words. In light of this principle, we examine words and terms by which Myanmar Christians unintentionally miscommunicate the gospel to Burmese Buddhists because the latter attach different meanings to those terms.

God or Phayar (A term for God)

There is no word for God in the Burmese language which fully conveys the Christian meaning of God. In Christianity, God is the Creator, the Ruler, the Sustainer, the Source; God is omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent; God is eternal, without beginning and end, through whom and for whom everything exists and has its being. The last chapter of the Bible describes God as “Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end” (Revelation. 22:13). No person, object, or idea can be compared to God. Anything said about God must be based on God’s revelation to us.

The reality of God is always much greater than human minds can understand or express. In Burmese Theravada Buddhism, such a being does not exist, so there is no word for such a being. Burmese Buddhists call enlightened human beings Phayar, which can be translated “god or God.” The Burmese know that the orthodox term for the enlightened beings is “Buddha,” but they normally use the word Phayar for Gautama, other Buddhas, and monks.

When Adoniram Judson translated the Burmese Bible, he had a hard time translating the word “God” into Burmese. Phayar was the only Burmese word for God. The problem was that Burmese call Gautama and monks Phayar even though they are human beings. Therefore, if Judson used the Burmese word Phayar for “God,” the Burmese would think of the Christian God, the Creator of all things, on the level of human beings. Judson was well aware of the possibility of miscommunication and misinterpretation, so he always added the word “Lord” in phrases that would describe the Christian God. Judson never used the solitary word Phayar for God. In every use of the word Phayar, Judson attached the word Thakin, which means “Lord” in Burmese. Thus, Judson always translated “God” as Phayar Thakin, which means “God, the Lord.” The term Phayar Thakin, however, may not be the best translation for “God,” because the Burmese attach the word Thakin in front of the names of national leaders. Our

national leaders are known as Thakin Aung San, Thakin Mya, Thakin Than Tun etc. Burmese Buddhists, moreover, call the Buddha, Myat Swa Phayar, which means “the Most High, “the Supreme,” the Most Esteemed,” “the Most Worthy God.” The Buddhists do not claim that the Buddha is a God; he is just a human being like us. Still, they call the Buddha Myat Swa Phayar or “Most High God.” We Christians, on the other hand call our God, Phayar Thakin, “God, the Lord.” People feel that there is a great distinction between Phayar Thakin (God, the Lord) and Myat Swe Phayar (the Most High God). By looking at the Christian term “Phayar Thakin, Burmese Buddhists assume that the God the Christians worship is a lesser god. This is the most basic example of how Myanmar Christians miscommunicate the gospel to Burmese Buddhists by the terms they use.

Burmese Buddhists call Gautama Buddha Myat Swa Phayar, “the Most High God,” so can the Myanmar Christians call God, Myat Swa Phayar? This expression for “God” would be meaningful to them, but it is still misleading. Hesselgrave (1991:149-158) states that selection is always necessary, and great care should be taken to select culturally appropriate expressions for God’s message to humankind. I believe Myanmar Christians should also select culturally appropriate words for a meaningful communication of the gospel to the Burmese. The phrase Myat Swa Phayar

could be used for God, the Creator. It must, however, be used in a distinctive way. For example, Myanmar Christians could attach the word Tawara (eternal) to the front of the phrase Myat Swa Phayar, and then the name for Christian God would be Tawara Myat Swa Phayar, which means “the Most High Eternal God.” Buddhists understand that dhamma, the Four Noble Truths, and nibbana are tawara (eternal) because they never change. This would distinctively convey the Christian idea of God. The Buddhists never use the word Tawara when mentioning Gautama Buddha, simply because he is not an eternal being but just a human being subject to impermanence. When we use such phrases as “the Most High Eternal God,” “the Eternal God,” “the Creator God,” “the Mighty Eternal God,” “the All Powerful God,” etc., we come nearer to the true meaning of the Christian God. These phrases are familiar to Burmese Buddhists. We need to explain, however, what we mean by those phrases in reference to the Christian God, especially what we mean by the word, Tawara (eternal). Without any preliminary explanation, Burmese Buddhists are bound to equate the Christian God with the Buddha or a human being.

Adoniram Judson was well aware of this problem of accurately communicating the concept of God to Burmese Buddhists. Unfortunately, missionaries who came later were not so careful with word selection, and

third and fourth generation Myanmar Christians became less and less aware of this communication problem. Especially during the time of British colonialism, Myanmar Christians were well protected in the mission compounds and well nurtured in the so-called Christian way of life. Each mission compound was a “Little Europe” or “a Little America.” Myanmar Christians were prevented from having much contact with the Burmese Buddhist community outside, so Myanmar Christians understood less and less of the Burmese Buddhist belief system and the Buddhist worldview. Myanmar Christians were taught to witness or evangelize using methods and materials designed and produced in Europe and America by people who had no knowledge of Theravada Buddhism. The missionaries asked the Myanmar Christians to translate gospel tracts written in America or Europe directly into Burmese, and these were used to explain Christianity to the Buddhists. These Christian gospel tracts and Christian literature produced confusion rather than elucidation of the Christian gospel. For example, whenever the Burmese Christian translators came upon the word “God” in English, they would simply translate that word as Phayar. When Burmese Buddhists read the word Phayar, they understood the word to mean a Buddha, or someone who was enlightened, or even monks. So, whenever the Christians were writing and telling Buddhists about the Christian God,

they understood that the Christians were trying to introduce another Buddha to them.

In Burmese Theravada Buddhist teaching there are as many Buddhas as there are grains of sand on the seashores. What is more, every male Buddhist is a potential Buddha. So why should a person be excited about another Buddha which the Christians seemed to be proclaiming? It is no wonder that Christians continue to complain that their message of the good news has fallen upon deaf ears.

God as a Person

The Christian God is a personal God. The Theravada Buddhists' understanding of a personal God, however, is different from that of the Christians. John R. Davis (1993:43) says that this is not a suitable term to use with Theravada Buddhists. He shows that misunderstanding has arisen in Thailand when the Buddhists perceived the Christian God as "personal." For Buddhists, the idea of personality always includes impermanence, transience, feelings, always attaining to but never realizing Enlightenment. Buddhists thus tend to identify the "personal" God of the Christians with Buddha before his enlightenment.

In Myanmar when Christian evangelists tell the Buddhists of God, they describe Him as a personal God. They do not realize how they are thus

communicating the wrong image of God. Petchsongkram (1975:76) suggests that we should speak of God as a “Spirit” rather than a “Person,” stating that the word “spirit” conveys a more accurate concept of the Christian God to the Buddhists than the word “Person.” Burmese traditional religion is nat (spirit) worship. Burmese Theravada Buddhists worship thirty-seven spirits because they believe that spirits have power (see pages 60,63). Thus the term “spirit” is familiar to the Buddhists.

The Love of God

Christianity is the religion of love – in theory at least, if not always in practice. It is about the love of God. This expression, however, is not understood by the Burmese Buddhists. Because there is no concept of God in Theravada Buddhism, there can be no equivalent expression for “the love of God.” This does not mean, however, that there is no concept of love in Burmese Theravada Buddhism. As we noted in the previous chapter, Burmese Buddhists have the concept of metta (loving-kindness), a love for other people. Metta might be a Buddhist equivalent of Christian love (Jesus’ commandment, “love one another,” John 13:34), but it is an unattached kind of loving-kindness. Being unattached in nature, metta cannot be used to describe God’s love (Agape - an attached love).

In Burmese Buddhism there are two kinds of attached love. These are “520 Ahchit” which is equivalent to the filial love of the Greeks, and “1500 Ahchit” which is like the erotic love of the Greeks. “Ahchit” in Burmese means the kind of love which has elements of attachment in it. The numbers “520” and “1500” represent different levels of love. The love of God, of course, is neither “520 Ahchit” nor “1500 Ahchit.” The love of God, which is higher than metta but which is attached to humankind, is not found in Burmese Buddhism; so there is no one word or phrase for God’s Agape in the Burmese language. When Adoniram Judson translated the Bible into the Burmese language he combined the two words, “metta” and “chitchin” (“chitchin” and “ahchit” are interchangeably used to refer to “an attached love”) so as to read “the love of God – Agape” as “chitchin metta.” This phrase in the Buddhist belief system seems like a contradiction, because “metta” is unattached loving-kindness while “chitchin” or ahchit is attached love. According to Burmese Buddhism, by combining metta with ahchit, the unattached nature of “metta” is adulterated and degenerates into attached love. Buddhists would conclude that “chitchin metta” is a degraded form of loving-kindness. So whenever Christians talk or write about the love of God or God’s “chitchin metta” to Buddhists in Myanmar, some clarification of what we mean by the love of God is necessary. Otherwise, the Buddhists

misunderstand the message. We need to explain to the Buddhists that there is a form of attached love which is higher than “520 ahchit” or “1500 ahchit.”

The sad fact is that the Burmese Christians who were reared and nurtured in little “Christian ghettos” for many generations have been oblivious to the linguistic dimensions of metta, ahchit, and chitchin metta in relation to the thought patterns of the Buddhist belief system. Myanmar Christians have been using these terms indiscriminately for God’s love without any explanation as to what these words mean in Christian belief. Hesselgrave (1991:150-151) says that missionaries need to define the terms they use. Their definitional process must proceed by comparison and contrast. For generations Christians have been using metta for God’s love, and the Buddhists have been saying that our Gautama Buddhist has metta also. We Christians have been declaring God’s chitchin metta, and the Buddhists have concluded that the Christian God had a degenerated form of love. This miscommunication partly explains the scant number of conversions of Burmese Buddhists to the Christian faith. This same kind of miscommunication is also happening in Thailand, another Theravada Buddhist country. Petchsongkram (1975:16) relates that when Thai Christians tell the Buddhists, “God so loved the world. . .,” the Thai

Buddhists hear it and think, “Oh, how pitiful; this God is full of unwholesome passion. He is still very sinful . . .”

The Wrath of God

The wrath of God is an important aspect of the Christian faith. However, it is not wise to tell Burmese Buddhists about the wrath of God, especially in our initial encounter with them. Buddhists need to have a more comprehensive knowledge of God before they are told that he is also a God of wrath.

Petchsongkram (1975:16) insists that the whole idea of the wrath of God in Christianity is very offensive to Buddhists in Thailand. They conclude that such a God is not worthy of respect. Very strict Thai Buddhists count even the words they speak; when they walk they walk slowly; when they move they move gently; and when they speak they speak softly. All this is to indicate that they are in complete control of themselves, in charge of their own feelings, their movements, their walking, their sitting (1975:17). This kind of lifestyle comes from the Buddhist teaching of upekkha, a term which can be translated as even-mindedness or equanimity. Upekkha is the fourth of the Brahma Viharas in Theravada Buddhism and follows logically from the other three Brahma Viharas namely: metta

(loving-kindness), karuna (compassion), and mudita (sympathetic joy).

Humphreys states,

Upekkha is the equanimity of the mind which is reached after one has shared the emotions of other human beings in every form. It is the restoration of the mind's impersonal serenity. The characteristic of equanimity is evolving a central position towards others; its function is seeing others impartially; its manifestation is the quenching of both aversion and sycophancy; its proximate cause is seeing how each belongs to the continuity of his own kamma. (1959:126)

When Christians tell about the wrath of God, Buddhists conclude that the God of the Christians does not possess those four Brahma Viharas of metta, karuna, mudita, and upekkha. Such a God, they assume, is not worthy of respect. This kind of miscommunication occurs when there is no attempt to explain the full implication of what the wrath of God means in the Christian belief system.

The World

Christian cosmology is dualist. "Heaven" and "earth" are the terms often used to describe this duality, but different Christian theologians use different terms. The goal of all Christian theologies, however, is reconciliation of the two elements, reconciliation of a fallen world with God.

Christians in Myanmar have been telling Buddhists that God loves the world. By that the Christians simply mean that God loves the world no matter how fallen it has become.

For the Buddhists, “world” has a different, much more diverse meaning. The Burmese word for the “world” is Loka. A Sanskrit word, it is one of two that may be translated as “world”: Jagat and Loka. Jagat means the world as it is in itself before any conscious beings enter it. Loka is the world as experienced by conscious beings. In chapter four it was mentioned that the world-system is called Lokadhatu. There are three main levels or layers of existence in Lokadhatu: Kamadhatu (the sensuous realm), the Rupadhatu (the realm of form, and the Arupadhatu (the formless realm). Kamadhatu (the sensuous realm) has six divisions: the heavens of peaceful deities “devas”, the heavens of the wrathful deities “asuras”, the dwelling places of humans, ghosts, animals, and also sixteen hells. Rupadhatu consists of a number of heavens which are the dwelling places of deities. These deities have color, but no solidity. In Arupadhatu there are also many heavens, and the deities that dwell in them are formless. They are pure consciousness, and they exist in space. As previously noted, terms may appear to be similar, but each religion attaches different meanings to the words. For the Theravada Buddhist, “the world” means the whole Lokadhatu with all the heavens, hell, and other places of existence (Corless 1989:142-144).

Therefore there has often been miscommunication when the Christians use the word “world” and do not explain what is meant by this word. For generations, Christians have been preaching that Christ came to save this “world,” meaning, to save human beings from hell and to bring them to heaven. According to the Buddhist worldview, however, both hell and many heavens are included in the same state, which is called Lokadhatu. Because of the differences in cosmology, the words, “heaven” and “hell” used by the Christians as two separate places have also been miscommunicated to the Burmese Buddhists because for them, heavens and hell are located in the same world (King 1964:88-96). Whenever Christians tell Burmese Buddhists about “world,” “heaven,” and “hell,” they need to explain to them the Christian meaning of these expressions.

Heavens

For Christians, heaven is eternal. There is only one heaven. In Buddhism, there are many heavens. These are part of the world-system, Lokadhatu, which has thirty-one planes of existence. These thirty-one planes proceed vertically upward from the depth of the earth into the vast space beyond. As previously mentioned (see page 118-120), there are three main layers of existence in Lokadhatu. The lowest realm is called Kamadhatu, the realm of sense enjoyment and in this realm there are six

deva-worlds, or heavens of the deities. Also included in Kamadhatu are the planes of human beings, of demons, of ghosts, of animals, and hell. The quality of life in the heavens of the devas has a two-fold difference from human life. It is much longer, and it is filled with the unalloyed bliss of supreme sense enjoyment. The length of life on the plane of the Four Great Kings is nine million years and the length of life on the plane of the gods who control pleasure is 9,216 million years (King 1964:93). In these deva planes there is food in abundance in endless varieties, changes of sumptuous clothing beyond imagination, a thousand new garments every day, servants to minister to one's every whim, magnificent, spacious mobile mansions and gardens that float at the owner's will through infinite space (1964:94).

The second realm is called Rupadhatu, or the realm of form. In this realm there are sixteen heavens or planes of existences. This realm is also called the Fine Material Realm. The significance of the term "fine material" is that as one progresses upward through these planes, the materiality of one's form or embodiment is progressively finer, or more nearly immaterial. Physical forms and functions are more and more attenuated, so that these beings are practically self sustaining, needing no physical food. The sense organs disappear, and in the place of sexual relations a mere touch or even a glance suffices. At this level another distinction may be made. The sixteen

levels are sub-divided into subgroups of 3, 3, 3, and 7. When thus grouped, these heavens are called Jhanic Heavens because they are directly related to Jhanic meditational trances. Those human beings who achieve mastery of Jhanic meditations will be reborn into the corresponding Jhanic Heavens (King 1964:95).

The third realm is called Arupadhātu, or the realm of formlessness. Beings exist here without form – without physical components; it is a purely mental existence. In this realm beings reach an almost imperceptible purity and the highest level of immateriality. To enter this realm one has to master the four formless meditations of Infinity of space, Infinity of Consciousness, Nothingness, and Neither Perception or Non-Perception (1964:96).

Miscommunication to Buddhists occurs when Christians just mention the word “heaven” and do not explain what they mean by that word. When Buddhists hear Christians preach about heaven, they naturally assume that we are referring to one of the many heavens in the thirty-one planes of existence. So, all along, Christians have been understood as talking about entering one of their own Buddhist heavens by one or another kind of meditation. The Buddhists think they do not need any help or instruction from Christians in order to go to one of their heavens. They are well-informed about the different kinds of meditation methods and good deeds

that would help them reach their heavens. Consequently there is a lack of interest by Buddhists in the offer of heaven which Christians make.

Hell

A similar misunderstanding occurs around the word “hell.” For Christians hell is like a one-way street. There is no return, no repentance, no remorse, and no hope in hell. It is a place where one suffers eternally. Kraft’s (1979a:148) third principle of communication demonstrates that when communicating the gospel, the communicator only transmits the message not the meanings, because the meanings are in people. Therefore, the receptor frequently misses what was intended by the communicator and adds things not intended. For Buddhists, hell is located at the lowest level of the thirty-one planes. It is a nether place called niraya, which means, in essence, death or destruction, and connotes pure suffering, without any admixture of pleasure or relief. It is a place where one only suffers. The victims might be cut to pieces and revived countless times, crushed by mountains, pierced by burning weapons, cast on burning stakes, and burned by unceasing flames for thousands of years (King 1964:90). However, hell for Buddhists is not a place where one suffers eternally. It is like a two-way street from whence there can be a return. It is a place where one can repent and have hope for the next life (King 1964:89).

The major difference between the Christian and the Buddhist hell is that the former is eternal whereas the latter is temporary. For Buddhists, hell while very unpleasant, is not the greatest threat. When Christians offer hope to the Buddhists from the condemnation of hell, Buddhists are not as excited as those who consider hell to be eternal punishment. For them, their stay in hell is temporary; after their bad kamma is consumed they can always rise up to a higher plane of existence. They do not need anyone's help to be saved from hell. Myanmar Christians need to recognize the Buddhists' concept of hell so that they may be able to explain to them the Christian doctrine of hell in a meaningful way.

Eternal Life

One of the core messages of the gospel concerns eternal life. Christ came into the world and suffered crucifixion on the cross so that we may have life spent eternally in heaven. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). John describes this eternal life, "There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away" (Revelation 21:4). Thus, preaching about "eternal life," is good news for Christian people. But, Buddhists do not understand "eternal life" in the Christian sense.

For example, one day a young male evangelist went to downtown Yangon to tell Buddhists about Jesus Christ. The first Buddhist he met was an old Burmese lady. The young man began his presentation by asking her, “Grandma, do you want eternal life?” When she heard about the eternal life the young evangelist was offering her, she retorted, “No, I do not want eternal life. For me one life is enough; even one life is too burdensome and weary for me. I do not want to go through the endless cycle of lives in samsara.” Here is a classic case of miscommunication that has been repeated over many decades. The Christian evangelist asked a question based on his worldview, not realizing that his listener had a different worldview. Consequently, even though he used the common term “eternal life,” as previously noted, this expression communicated a different meaning to his audience.

Eternal life for Christians is synonymous with heaven in the sense that eternal, blissful life will be spent in haven. We use these two words interchangeably. Even though hell is also a form of eternal life, we Christians seldom use the term eternal life for hell. For Buddhists, eternal life has a totally different meaning. It means an endless cycle of lives or rebirths in the thirty-one planes of existence in Lokadhatu, also referred to as samsara. Beings revolve endlessly in these thirty-one planes of existence

because of tanha or craving. Life in these thirty-one planes is characterized by suffering. When Christians preach about eternal life, Buddhists assume that the Christians are preaching about samsara, with all its suffering. When Christians offer eternal life to the Buddhists they think they are extending to them the best option in life. Eternal life for the Buddhists, however, is the worst option in life, and so they reject our offer.

Robertson McQuilkin, a missionary to Japan, preached on “Eternal Life” to Japanese Buddhists for ten years. During this long period of time he did not receive any enthusiastic response. Later he changed the subject and preached on the “Abundant Life” offered by Jesus. Japanese Buddhists then began to show more interest in his preaching, being more interested in “Abundant Life” than “Eternal Life.” Myanmar is one the poorest countries in the world. Preaching about “Abundant Life” would be relevant to the people in Myanmar (this story about Robertson McQuilkin was shared by Dale Khai Za, a teacher at Nyan Lin Burmese Bible training center, May 2001).

Condemnation, Repentance, and Confession

In Christianity, human beings are sinners and need repentance, confession of their sins, and belief in Jesus Christ in order to be saved. If they do not repent from their sins, they are condemned to eternal hell. But

this process of condemnation, repentance and confession is foreign to Buddhist teaching.

Condemnation. The concept of negative consequence for sin/offense is present in both Christianity and Buddhism. In Christianity, however, sin is against God and, therefore, the punishment and condemnation come from God. There are two types of offense in Christianity: (1) offense against God and (2) offense against others. God can punish or forgive both offenses. In Buddhism, there is no such sin against God. Offense against others is regarded as a sin, but the punishment is not meted out by God. Sayadaw Nawadapada, one of the Burmese monks interviewed in Yangon, said that one thing he does not like about Christianity is “forgiveness of sin.” He said that if the Christian God is so forgiving, it should not be a problem for people to commit sin because God will forgive them. For Buddhists, the offenders must pay for their deeds according to the law of kamma. Whatever pain or suffering one inflicted on others, he or she will have to bear with the same intensity of suffering later on.

There is no teaching of sin against God in Buddhism, because there is no God to offend. Thus, Christian teaching of condemnation by God because of one’s rebellion against God is not found in Buddhism. In the teaching of Buddhism, there can be no punishment for sin which one does

not commit. Many Christian evangelists have preached to Buddhists about the sin of rebellion of humankind against God. This does not communicate very well to Buddhists because this concept is not a part of their belief system. When we preach things which are not familiar to Buddhists, we quickly lose their attention.

Repentance and Confession. Christians preach about repentance and confession of sin so that human beings may be forgiven. But in Buddhism, one must bear the consequences of sin or wrongdoing against others, according to the law of kamma. Repenting and confessing wrongdoing may make a person feel good, but nobody can save us from the law of kamma. One must reap what one has sown. Since there is no God in Buddhism, Buddhists see no need for repentance and confession to God.

Therefore, when we speak about repentance and confession to God, Buddhists must be clearly shown that it is precisely at this point that Christianity differs from Buddhism. Since this is a new idea for many of them, Christians first of all should preach to Buddhists about repenting and confessing to people they have wronged; gradually they may then lead them to understand the necessity of repentance and confession before God.

Salvation or Liberation

Christianity teaches that human beings are sinners as a result of their rebellion against God. The condemnation for their sin, is eternal punishment in hell. But Jesus came to bear the consequences of our sin and whoever repents, confesses and believes in Him will be saved from eternal punishment. This is the belief-system of Christianity.

But for Buddhists, the main problem in life is dukkha (suffering). Tanha (desire or craving) is the cause of suffering. As long as there is life, there is suffering. As long as one is reborn to samsara (the cycle of life) there is life, and therefore, suffering. Freedom from suffering means liberation from samsara. In order to be freed from samsara, one must eradicate tanha (desire). And to abolish tanha, one must follow the Eightfold Path taught by the Buddha. The crucial issue for Buddhists, is to eliminate tanha so that they may be liberated from samsara.

Christians tell Buddhists that they are sinners destined to eternal condemnation. In order to be freed from this eternal condemnation, they need to repent, confess their sins and believe in Jesus Christ for forgiveness of their sins. By doing so they will have eternal salvation. This belief system is not found in Buddhism; there is no teaching about salvation through another person. Everyone's concern is to be liberated from samsara,

the cyclical rebirth, and people can do this only by depending on themselves; salvation is from the self by the self. Many Christian evangelists do not begin with the Buddhists' greatest concern, "liberation from suffering." But Myanmar Christians can begin to lead Buddhists to an understanding of "salvation in Jesus Christ" by explaining it in terms of liberation from suffering.

Jesus Christ and His Atonement

Jesus' atoning death on the cross for the sins of the world is an important message of the gospel. However, this concept of substitutionary death is not present in the teachings of Buddhism. Eugenio Kincaid faced the difficulty of convincing several Burmese intellectuals to accept the doctrine of substitution or atonement. They objected that the death of an innocent person for guilty people under the righteous administration of God seemed to conflict with common justice (Morris 1961:3). According to the teaching of Buddha no one can liberate another person. The Buddhist scriptures say, "Evil is done by self alone, by self alone is one stained; by self alone is evil undone; by self alone is one purified. Purity and impurity depend on one's own self. No man can purify another" (Petchsongkram 1975:148, quoting from Dhammapada 165).

According to the Burmese understanding of causality, the innocence of Jesus in his death on the cross could only result in merit instead of demerit. For Buddhists, Jesus' suffering could only be the result of his bad kamma in the past. Here the difference in belief systems causes miscommunication. Christians tell Buddhists about the noble sacrifice of Jesus Christ, but Buddhists see this as the basest of doctrines.

The sacrificial death of Christ on the cross can be misunderstood in still another way by Buddhists. They may compare it with a kind of Parami. In Burmese Buddhism, Parami is the standard of perfection and transcendent virtue. There are thirty categories of Parami, each with subdivisions arranged in ascending order of moral difficulty. Every Bodhisattva has to practice these thirty stages of moral achievement before he or she can attain Buddhahood.

The first stage of Parami is almsgiving, or the giving of material things, such as money or possessions. The second stage is to give a part of one's body. The third stage is to give one's life for another. Some Buddhists conclude that Jesus gave his life on the cross to attain this third stage of Parami. Thus they even classify Jesus as a bodhisattva because he gave his life for others (Petchsongkram 1975:179-180).

Many Christian evangelists are not aware of how Buddhists interpret Jesus' atoning death on the cross. They miss a good missional opportunity by not realizing that Buddhists see Jesus' substitutionary death as an act of Parami.

Lost Souls

The term "lost souls" is often used by Christian evangelists. They tell Buddhists that their souls are lost and that they need to return to God so that their lost souls may be saved. Christians' preaching about "lost souls" confuses Theravada Buddhists.

Theravada Buddhism is a religion of no-soul (anatta). This term means that there is no real enduring and identical self that passes through life's many diverse experiences and persists after death (King 1952:21). As previously noted in chapter four, Buddhists see soul as a function, not a permanent identity. The soul is merely an aggregate of five skandhas, a complex of sensation, perceptions, predispositions, consciousness, and forms (Rahula 1959:17-20). If the functions of these aggregates are referred to as souls, then souls in this sense are never lost in Theravada Buddhism. These aggregates function in a perennial process of flaring up and burning, of endless birth and rebirth (Sarkisyanz 1965:37). What Buddhists seek is cessation of this cycle of rebirths. In this sense, it can be said that they wish

their souls to be lost, that is, to escape from this bondage of cyclic life or samsara. Christians are offering them the very opposite of what they are trying to achieve: the annihilation of their souls. Thus Christians should not begin with the premise of lost souls when presenting the gospel to Theravada Buddhists.

Strengths in Cross-Cultural Communication in Myanmar: Past and Present

Judson worked hard for five years in house-to-house and door-to-door personal witness for Christ. His primary concern was to convert Buddhists and bring them to his mission station where there was a church. He called the “church,” “Ah Thin Daw” in the Burmese language, meaning “a holy association.” This term was coined by Judson and was not present in Buddhism. Thus it was a Christian term not familiar to the Buddhists. Within this period, he won no Buddhists to Christ. Later, Judson realized that it would be difficult to convert Burmese Buddhists unless the gospel was expressed in terms that are familiar to the Burmese people. As a result, he began to utilize Burmese zayats as a place of worship and fellowship. The zayat was a place of gathering for social and religious purposes. After Judson realized the importance of the zayat in the life of Burmese Buddhists, he began to utilize this in a more contextual approach to reaching the people. He erected a wooden zayat and built a social bridge to the Burmese people.

No Burmese felt intimidated by stopping at his zayat, because the zayat was a part of their life. Judson held weekly worship services at the zayat. Its atmosphere was as relaxed as that of all other Burmese zayats. He did not utilize the word, “Ah Thin Daw” or “church” for a worshipping place. He simply called it a “zayat.” He used the zayat for two purposes: (1) as a place for worship, and (2) as part of a contextual approach to Burmese.

In the zayat, Judson would talk with the Burmese about the weather, crop conditions, and other matters of mutual interest that people normally talked about in zayats. In this way, he built relationships. Then he would start talking about religion, and then Christianity (see page 9). Judson adopted a two-way communication procedure, and thus he dialogued with the people. He did not preach a sermon, which would have been only a one-way communication. Many times he engaged in a one-to-one discussion with individual persons in the zayat. Sometimes a few others would listen, contribute their comments, or ask questions. This form of communication minimized miscommunication, since the inquirers always had the opportunity to ask Judson questions about anything they did not understand clearly. Also, Judson had studied Buddhism thoroughly and was well versed in the Buddhist scriptures, so he was able to give good answers to questions raised by the Burmese. The zayat ministry enabled Judson to express

Christianity and its message in forms and terms that were familiar to the Burmese people.

The effectiveness of his use of local terms and contextualized methodology can be seen in the number of Burmese Buddhists won to Christ in his lifetime. In 1836, after twenty-three years of missionary service, there were a total of 207 Burmese and 729 Karen Christians (Wa 1963:129). The ratio of Burmese to Karen believers was 1:3. Many Burmese converts had first heard the gospel as they visited Judson's zayat. Judson died in 1850, and the number of church members at the close of Judson's life was 293 Burmese and 1681 Karen Christians (Wa 1963:135). The ratio was then 1:5.

After the death of Judson, no Zayat ministry was mentioned. The Church was called "Ah Thin Daw," Judson's first tentative terminology. Where there was an Ah Thin Daw, there was a Western typical church building with a cross-shape. Up to the present time, the words Ah Thin Daw and the English word "church" are used interchangeably. When Buddhists hear the term Ah Thin Daw or "church," they quickly recognize that this is a Christian church which comes from a Western country. Unfamiliar terms and noncontextual forms which we use in communication

of the gospel miscommunicate the message. The result is a decline in conversion.

We may analyze the results of the work of missionaries who expressed Christianity in terms of a foreign form. By 1864, fourteen years after the death of Judson, the number of Burmese Christians had increased to 341 (Torbet 1955:231). To gauge the result of the work of later missionaries we need to compare this figure of 341 Burmese Christians with the number of Karen Christians won up to that period and put them in ratio. The only available figure of Karen Christians won up to the year 1866 is from the Bassein field (Bassein is a town in the southeast of Myanmar and east of Yangon, the capital of Myanmar). The report shows that by 1866 there were 5,658 Karen Christians in the Bassein Field (Wa 1963:179). The Bassein field does not represent all the Karen Christians in Myanmar, but even looking at the number of Bassein Christians with the number of Burmese won all over Myanmar, the ratio is 1:17, or one Burmese to seventeen Karen Christians. This ratio shows that the number of conversions among Burmese did not increase much in comparison to the number of Karen Christians.

Forty-seven years later, in the year 1913, the Baptists in Myanmar celebrated the centennial of Judson's arrival in Myanmar. At this

celebration the reported number of Burmese Christians was 2,700 (Phinney 1914:55). There was no separate figure for Karen Christians in that centennial report. The report simply stated a church membership of 61,000 won to Christ from the racial groups whose religion was Spirit worship. But Torbet (1955:246), however, recorded the number of Karen Christian as 50,000 for the year 1910, very close to the year of the centennial celebration. If we compare 2,700 Burmese Christians to 50,000 Karen Christians, the ratio comes up to 1:19. Thus, in the year 1913, sixty-three years after the Judson era, the number of Burmese Christians compared to Karen Christians had greatly decreased from the ratio of 1:5 to 1:19.

Another report of the number of Burmese and Karen Christians was given in 1925, twelve years after the Judson centennial celebrations. The report stated that there were 5,028 Burmese Church members and 59,399 Karen Church members (Hughes 1926:34). This gives us the ratio of 1:12, an improvement from the 1913 centennial celebration ratio of 1:19. However, the two terms, “Burmese Church members” and “Burmese Christians” are not the same. The term “Burmese Church members” includes all the people who had joined the Burmese Church. They might have been from other ethnic groups, but for one reason or another they had become members in the Burmese Church. If we could count only Burmese

Christians, the ratio would not be 1:12 but far wider. Thirty-nine years later, in 1963, the Baptists in Myanmar celebrated the Judson Sesquicentennial Celebration. The report from this celebration records 5,341 Burmese Christians and 94,030 Karen Christians, a ratio of 1:17. Apparently a dramatic drop in the conversion rate had taken place since 1925. The figure of Burmese Church membership in 1925 was 5,028 and the Church membership of in 1963 was 5,341, an increase of only 313 members in thirty-nine years.

Statistics obtained from the Myanmar Baptist Churches Union up to June 1997 report that there were 16,018 Burmese Church members. Statistics from the Karen Baptist Convention for the same period report 206,909 Karen Church members, a ratio of approximately 1:13. However as previously noted, this ratio does not accurately reflect the number of Burmese to Karen Christians. The number, 16,018, indicates Burmese Church members and not just Burmese Christians. If we count only the Burmese Christians, then the ratio would be wider than 1:13. The total Christian population in Myanmar in 1997 was approximately 2.7 million (Light the Window software). If the number of Burmese Christians was 16,018 in 1997, the ratio between Burmese Christians and other Christians would be approximately 1:167. This means that of every one hundred sixty-

seven Christians in Myanmar, there is only one Burmese Christian. As we noted earlier, however, the Burmese make up 65 percent of the country's population.

The decline in the conversion of the Burmese people following Judson's ministry is probably due to a lack of utilization of local terms in communication of the gospel and failure to express Christianity in local forms which were indigenous to the Burmese people. It seems that Judson's mission work had been more successful because of his communication of the gospel in local terms and forms.

An important factor to understand about winning Burmese Buddhists is that there usually is a need for sustained dialogue with the same individual over a period of months and even years before that person will finally accept Jesus as Savior. Just one sermon at a street corner or in the market place will not convert a Buddhist to Christ. Judson labored five years before he could baptize the first Burmese convert. Only in exceptional cases do we find a Buddhist being won over to Christ without several months of concentrated, sustained personal dialogue. I emphasize the need for sustained dialogue with each individual Buddhist before that person comes to accept Jesus Christ as his or her Savior. The zayat is an ideal place where such a dialogue can take place. In contemporary Myanmar, an alternative

place would be the teashop or the coffee shop. At the teashops, religious matters can be discussed without belligerence or antagonism.

The main mission method following Judson's era, during and after colonialism, was through the use of institutions to evangelize unbelievers. Mission stations, mission compounds, and church buildings became the places where new converts gathered. The mission reports after Judson's time are concerned with the building of mission schools, hospitals, and orphanages, and the progress of the work of these institutions. No zayat ministry efforts are mentioned. The report called Review for the Quarter Century (1900-1925) gave an account of the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society in Burma. Chapter one was the report on "indirect Evangelism." Chapter two was about "Evangelizing Through Mission Stations." Chapter three was about "Evangelizing Through Schools." Chapter four talked about "Evangelizing Through Other Channels," meaning medical work, mission press, etc. Chapter five was the report of "The Little Homes of the Missions," meaning orphanages, leper homes, rest havens for tuberculosis patients, etc (Hughes 1926:34-35). This report clearly shows that mission work in Myanmar after the Judson era was predominantly through institutions. It was a centripetal approach, drawing people into the Westernized community instead of centrifugal, reaching out to the Burmese

community with the gospel. It represented a failure to express Christianity in a local form. As previously noted, Paul Hiebert (1994:76) describes the period of roughly 1850 to 1950 as a time of noncontextualization. Perhaps missionaries who arrived in Myanmar after Judson's death were influenced by this "Era of Noncontextualization," which coincidentally began around 1850, the same year in which Judson died.

Whether they were consciously following these ideas or not, the lack of utilizing local terms and indigenous forms in Myanmar caused the decline of conversions among Burmese Buddhists after the Judson era. The expression, "utilizing local terms and forms" does not mean a compromising of the gospel. We mean rather a critical contextualization such as that proposed by Paul Hiebert (1985:188). Critical contextualization, neither rejects local forms nor accepts them without examining them in light of Scripture. It balances Van Willigen's (1993:52) two extreme approaches -- rejecting all aspects of local culture or accepting all aspects of local culture as relevant to the gospel. Judson's zayat ministry avoided the two extreme approaches. He neither rejected Burmese culture nor accepted all aspects of the culture as relevant. But he made use of local forms and terms for a meaningful presentation of the gospel to the people.

If Myanmar Christians utilize terms, words, and expressions such as “suffering,” “loving-kindness,” “most high God,” “desire,” “permanence or impermanence,” “eternal heaven,” “liberation,” etc., which are familiar to Burmese people, the gospel will be communicated to them more meaningfully. If we are to win the Burmese people to Christ, we must prepare ourselves to express Christianity in forms and terms which are familiar to them.

In this chapter, we have discussed how the gospel was unintentionally miscommunicated by using misleading terms. We have learned the importance of utilizing terms and expressions which are familiar to the local people for an effective communication of the gospel. When Myanmar Christians understand the Buddhist worldview, then they will be able to adapt the gospel in the Buddhist worldview so that the gospel may be meaningful to the Burmese Buddhists.

In the next chapter we discuss adapting the message of the gospel in the Burmese Buddhist worldview and how to relate the teachings of Theravada Buddhism to biblical teachings. By doing so, we will attempt to discover as many points of contact as possible for meaningful presentation of the gospel to Burmese Buddhists.

CHAPTER SIX

Adapting the Message of the Gospel to the Burmese Buddhist Worldview

In Myanmar, Buddhism is attacked vehemently from the pulpit. It is proclaimed in public evangelistic meetings as well that Buddhism is “superstition,” “idol worship,” or worse yet, “worship of Satan.” The common understanding among most Myanmar Christians is that there is to be no compromise when they encounter any practice and worldview of Buddhism. Many Myanmar Christians have lived in the Burmese Buddhist community for decades and are familiar with the daily practices and ceremonies of the Buddhists. But they have neglected to learn what those practices and ceremonies are all about. For Myanmar Christians, Buddhists are “idol-worshippers” and have nothing to offer Christians. As a result, Myanmar Christians lack an understanding of the Buddhist worldview. As a matter of fact, Myanmar Christians lack knowledge of Buddhism. As previously noted in chapter five, failure to understand the worldview of Burmese Buddhists has resulted in miscommunication of the gospel. Since Christians have so little knowledge of Buddhism, they are not aware of how the Buddhists interpret the Christian message differently, due to their different worldview.

Hesselgrave (1991:145) has shown that when missionaries reach a people group of another culture, the first step should be to analyze the worldview of that particular target group. Only when they know the worldview of the respondent's culture, will they be able to adapt the message to make it understandable to those within that culture. He also affirms that missionaries can communicate the gospel from their own worldview into another worldview in three ways (see pages 28-29). Out of these three ways I am utilizing the second, that is that missionaries can temporarily adopt the worldview of their non-Christian respondents and adapt their message so that it will become meaningful to them (1991:209-210). He further maintains that sensitive missionaries carry on a closely related and continual process of adaptation. They note special concerns caused by particular worldviews and adjust to those concerns (1991:155).

Kraft (1979a:149) also describes two approaches for communication of the gospel: (1) an identificational approach, and (2) a universal approach. According to the former, the communicator presents the message within the receptor's experiential frames of reference in order to communicate the gospel meaningfully. In the latter approach, both the communicator and the receptor are in a position to attach similar meanings to the symbols employed. By doing so, they operate within a common context or frame of

reference (1979a:151). In light of the above approaches discussed by Hesselgrave and Kraft, we pursue our dialogue within the Buddhist worldview and proceed as far as our Christian faith can be in agreement with Buddhism. Once we reach the point where our Christian faith does not concur with Buddhists beliefs, we take a firm stand and declare the beliefs of Christianity unequivocally.

This contextual approach avoids the two extremes described by Van Willigen (1993:52): (1) rejecting all aspects of local culture, or (2) accepting all rituals, customs and all aspects of local people culture as being meaningful and significant. In Paul Hiebert's terms, Van Willigen's first approach can be described as "non-noncontextualization" which would lead to alienation from the local culture. The second approach can be termed "uncritical contextualization" which would lead to syncretism.

In order to avoid these two extremes, we utilize Hiebert's (1987) model of critical contextualization (see pages 43-44). According to this model, old beliefs are neither rejected nor accepted without examination in light of biblical truth.

In this study, based on Hiebert's contextual model, we critically analyze the worldview of Burmese Buddhists in light of the Scriptures. By doing so, we try to adapt the message of the gospel in the context of the

Buddhist worldview. This contextual approach enables us to avoid miscommunication of the gospel because it adapts the message to the respondent's worldview. In this chapter, we discuss adapting the Christian message to (1) the Buddhist notion of life, and (2) the Buddhist notion of liberation.

Adapting the Christian Message to the Buddhist Notion of Life

In this section, we reexamine the doctrines of dukkha, anicca, anatta, and no-Creator which we studied in chapter four and relate the message of the gospel to the Buddhist notion of life and liberation so that the message may be understandable and meaningful to Burmese Buddhists.

Dukkha

Dukkha means “suffering,” “pain,” “sorrow,” or “misery.” It covers both mental and physical pains and diseases. The Burmese Buddhists believe that life itself is dukkha because it is impermanent. The Buddha taught that everything is impermanent and therefore, suffering is the inevitable consequence of all experience (see page 95-97). Dukkha also includes deeper ideas such as “imperfection,” “emptiness,” and “insubstantiality” (Rahula 1959:17). According to the second Noble Truth, desire or craving (tanha) is the cause of suffering. The fact is that as long as there is desire, there is life. As long as there is life, there is suffering. Here

the root cause of suffering is desire. Unless people eliminate their desires, they cannot attain freedom from suffering. This is a critical issue for Buddhists (Spiro 1970:38-39).

Christianity also accepts that there is suffering in life. But the cause of suffering is not desire, but “sin,” which comes from human disobedience and rebellion against God (Genesis 3). In Romans 5:12 we read, “Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man (Adam) and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned. . .” With the issue of sin in mind, Christians tell the Buddhists that the cause of suffering is sin and rebellion against God. This concept of original sin, however, is not present in the teaching of Buddhism and therefore causes confusion to Buddhists. The law of kamma teaches that people do not need to bear any consequences for the sins they do not personally commit. Therefore, original sin as the cause of suffering is not understandable to the Burmese Buddhists.

There is a way, however, to adapt the Christian message to the Buddhist concept of dukkha. As noted above, in Buddhism the cause of suffering is tanha, “desire” or “greed.” In Christianity also, greed and covetousness are understood as evil. In the Old Testament, one of the Ten Commandments says that you shall not covet your neighbor’s house, wife,

manservant or maidservant, ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor (Exodus 20:17). In Proverbs 15:27 we read, “A greedy man brings trouble to his family.” In the New Testament, Jesus said to the crowd, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed” (Luke 12:15). James 1:15 says, “Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.” James vividly describes that if we follow our carnal desire, it can bring us to sin and finally to death. Peter also reminds his readers that those who follow the corrupt desire of sinful nature will be brought to judgment (1 Peter 2:10). Paul said that sin produced in him every kind of covetous desire (Romans 7:8). When talking about God’s wrath against humanity, Paul says, “[People] have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice” (Romans 1:29). Paul counsels people to put to death what comes from their sinful nature: “sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry” (Colossians 3:5). Since these biblical passages are similar to Buddhist ethical teachings, these Christian teachings could also be meaningful to Burmese Buddhists.

Christian desiring to preach about sin to Buddhists should not start from stories of the temptation and the fall of humanity in Genesis 3:1-7 and

Romans 5:12. They should instead start with greed and selfishness as the causes of suffering. The Bible teaches that desire is a cause of both suffering and sin. The understanding of “desire” as the cause of suffering can lead the Buddhists to understand “sin” as the cause of suffering.

“Desire” as the cause of suffering is a common reality in both Christianity and Buddhism. The question is, “Can human beings eliminate their ‘desire’ so as to free themselves from suffering?” The answer is “no.” Ninety percent of the Burmese Buddhists surveyed in Yangon answered this question “no.” The response from U Myut Khin, a Burmese Buddhist, was typical. He believes that human beings cannot eliminate “desire” as long as they live. This indicates the fact that Buddhists understand human incapability to free oneself from dukkha. Jesus says, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). For Burmese Buddhist, “suffering” is a burden imposed on them. They carry this burden as long as they exist. There is no rest until the burden of suffering is lifted. Buddhists believe that they will find rest only when they enter into nibbana. The Buddha taught his disciples that he had discovered the path that leads to nibbana, but that he could not lead them to nibbana; they had to follow the path by themselves. The problem is that Buddhists find that they cannot follow the path discovered by Buddha. The good news

for them is that Jesus is capable of lifting their burden of suffering and bringing them into heaven, if they believe and accept him as their own Savior and Lord. Nyan Lin said,

Before I was converted I thought that I could attain nibbana but this was only during the time of meditation. When I stopped practicing meditation, I felt I did not have peace anymore. Therefore, what was obtained through meditation was only temporary peace. After conversion, I was assured of eternal life and peace because of what Jesus had done for me. (interview in April 2001).

As a strategy of communication of the gospel, Nyan Lin also teaches students at his Bible training center that they could encourage Burmese Buddhists to practice vipassana meditation. The Buddhists could be asked how long the peace they got from vipassana meditation lasted. Then they could explain that the peace received from Christ lasts forever. Nyan Lin also explains how he adapted the gospel message to the Buddhist worldview:

I explain the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Paths to the Buddhists. I also explain the Ten Commandments and the incapability to observe them. Then I tell them the impossibility of following the Noble Eightfold Paths. And then I bring the gospel of Jesus Christ (Interview with Nyan Lin, March 2001).

Here the Noble Eightfold Path is a channel to tell them about the Ten Commandments, the failure of the Israelites to observe them, and the need for God to send his Son, Jesus, to save us from suffering. Here Jesus' ability to free people from suffering by his power could be good news for Burmese

Buddhists who struggle throughout their lives to liberate themselves from dukkha.

Anicca

As we have seen in chapter four, anicca means “impermanence,” “non-lasting,” and “transient.” Everything in the universe is a ceaseless becoming and a never-ending change. Human life is an ever-rolling wheel of birth, growth, decay, death, and rebirth (Humphreys 1951:80). The whole universe is in a state of flux; there is incessant change: things originate, change, pass away, and originate again. This never-ending cycle goes on and on. There is no constant being, but only becoming (1951:81). This conception of anicca makes Buddhists skeptical concerning Christian teachings about the existence of an eternal God, eternal life, and an eternal heaven.

Before Christians respond to this Buddhist teaching of anicca, we can point out that although Buddhism teaches impermanence, there are also laws and principles in Buddhism which strongly suggest permanence. As an example, we can look at dhamma in Buddhism. There is no term in Buddhist terminology wider than dhamma. It includes not only the conditioned things and states, but also the non-conditioned, the absolute nibbana. There is nothing in the universe or outside, good or bad,

conditioned or non-conditioned, relative or absolute, which is not included in this term (Rahula 1959:58). This description denotes dhamma to be more of a permanent than an impermanent principle. We may ask the Buddhists whether they think dhamma is permanent or impermanent. This question can help them to see the possibility of permanence even in Buddhism.

There are also other factors that seem to be more permanent than impermanent in Buddhism. There are the teachings of the Buddha, such as “the Four Noble Truths,” “the Eightfold Pathway” and “the law of kamma.” The truths underlying these teaching are unchanging, even if the form of the teachings themselves are not. In Appendix B, Question 12 asks if the Four Noble Truths are impermanent. All of the Burmese Buddhists interviewed believe the Four Noble Truths, the teachings of the Buddha will never change. We may ask Buddhists if the law of kamma will change; they will answer that the law of kamma never changes. Even though they do not actually say that the law of kamma is permanent, the teaching of Buddhism strongly suggests that it is. According to this law, all living beings have to suffer the consequences of their past deeds. Even the bodhisattvas (future Buddhas) had to pay the penalty of their bad kamma before they could become Buddha. No god can ever negate the consequences of kamma. No one can escape from the law of kamma. The law of kamma is absolute and

universal (see pages 104-109). This indicates that the law of kamma is permanent.

After helping Buddhists think about the possibility of a permanent state, we can share our Christian teaching on permanence. Christians agree that many things in this world are impermanent; many things in life do change and decay. But we cannot agree that all things are impermanent. For Christians, God is permanent and eternal. In the Christian Bible, God says, “I the Lord do not change” (Malachi 3:6), and “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). Jesus says, “He who feeds on this bread will live forever” (John 6:58). Christians proclaim that since God is permanent, God’s attributes and God’s laws are permanent. ““Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed,’ says the Lord, who has compassion on you” (Isaiah 54:10). Jesus tells the Jewish leaders, referring to his followers, “I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand” (John 10:28). The Buddhists’ perception of the possibility of permanence can lead them to understand the existence of an eternal God, an eternal heaven, and eternal life.

Anatta

Among the basic truths on which Christianity and Buddhism differ is the doctrine of the immortal soul. According to the preaching of Jesus Christ, the “soul” is a person’s most precious possession, the basis of all his worth; its eternal salvation is the center of his striving. Buddhism, on the contrary, denies the existence of a true spiritual soul. Anatta does not mean an individual soul or self. The soul and the ego are conceived not as a permanent identity, but as a function (Sarkisyanz 1965:37). Buddhists regards neither soul nor body as self-sufficient, independent substances that retain their identity despite the changes they endure, but rather as complex substances with no existence outside an unending process of birth and death (Siegmund 1980:94).

Before we give our Christian response to anatta, we should discuss this doctrine with the Buddhists. We can ask them how they can explain the doctrine of anatta in relationship to the beliefs of kamma and samsara. If there is no self or soul, how can there be kamma, since kamma is the result of the past deeds of previous lives. No soul means no past, no present, and no future life, and no life means no kamma. Anatta also presents difficulties in relationship to the belief of samsara, the transmigration of souls in

ceaseless cycles of existence. If there is no soul, there will be no transmigration, and so there can be no such process as samsara.

The Buddha taught that to free oneself from samsara, one cannot depend on anyone else. He taught that he himself could help no one; everyone had to be self-reliant and free one's own self. At this juncture, the teaching of no-self contradicts samsara. If there is no-self or nothing, how can self be liberated. This dialogue can lead Buddhists to the possibility of the existence of a soul.

After Buddhists perceive the possibility of the existence of a permanent soul, Christians can share with them the biblical teaching about the existence of a permanent soul. According to Genesis, God is the one who breathes the breath of life (soul/spirit) into the body. The lifeless body of Adam formed out of the dust becomes a living being only after God implants a soul into his body. This indicates that an individual person is composed of two essential principles: the soul, the life-giving principle, and a material body which the soul animates. Life means the coexistence of body and soul. Death means a separation of body and soul. Jesus reminds a rich man that when God demands his soul, his body will not live (Luke 12:16-20).

At death, the body perishes and decays, but the soul lives on forever. Jesus said that he came to this earth to seek lost souls (Luke 19:10). Jesus enjoined, “What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Mark 8:36-37). These biblical passages show that one soul is worth more than the whole universe. Jesus also says, “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather be afraid of him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28). In Christianity, the soul is most essential when a person dies. Jesus says, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies” (John 11:25). Paul encourages the Thessalonians, “For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise” (I Thessalonians 4:16). Even though the body dies and decays, the soul lives forever, because God will raise the soul at the last day. If Myanmar Christians can convince Buddhists of the existence of the soul, the above biblical passages will become meaningful to them.

No Creator God

In Buddhism, there is no clear reference to a Creator God. The Buddha was silent on the question of the existence of God. He was also

silent on the question of the origin of the world, or creation. But there are some discernable implications. For Buddhists, “god” is only the natural law which governs the universe. Everything came into being on its own by factors and causes within itself. There was no creator to arrange it all. Sayadaw Pandana, a Burmese Buddhist monk, when interviewed reasoned that if there is a god, that god must be the law of kamma. All beings have kamma in themselves; the “god” who punishes and rewards has its own kamma. Everything has a principle of truth hidden in it. He says, for example, that when he picks up a piece of chalk and writes with it, there is a law in the chalk that it will gradually wear down until nothing is left. This law is hidden in the chalk. If he lays it down it will lie there quietly (interview with Sayadaw Pandana). Buddhists say that every action has its own accompanying law without anyone having to create it.

As we noted in chapter four, for Buddhists, the forms of the world originate in a process of “dependent arising.” While Christians recognize that there is a causal interdependence between the forms of life, and can thus appreciate the Buddhist doctrine of dependent origination, they also recognize a “transcendent causation” that is called “creation.” We can tell Buddhists that God’s creation is not only a past event at the beginning of time, but also a continuing process by which God conserves the cosmos in

being and enables the interdependent forms of that cosmos to interact freely. Therefore, creation means that all interdependent forms of life are in a continuous relationship of dependence on God. Seventy percent of the Burmese Buddhists interviewed in Yangon accept the idea that there is no cause without a first cause, but for them every first cause itself is “the very essence of ignorance.” This means that the first cause is unknowable. For Christians God is the ultimate Ground of all being and action.

The second reason for formulating the no-creator concept is the chaotic state of the world. Buddhists see the illness, pain, and suffering of the world and conclude that there is no God. They reason that if there is a God, God would not allow such things to happen. They also ask that if God is the creator, why has God made such a poor job of this world, so full of suffering.

In response to this assumption, Christians can tell Buddhists that God is not the origin of human suffering. Everything that God made was inherently good. The Bible says that God saw his creation was good (Genesis 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25). I Timothy 4:4 also says, “everything created by God is good. . . .” Then where did that which is not good (suffering) come from? This is a question to which we must try to find a satisfactory answer. We cannot overlook it, for every time we preach we confront it;

if we have no answer to give, it will be very detrimental.

The answer is that God created everything good, but that what is not good comes from Satan. Human beings embraced the disobedience suggested by Satan and thus humans themselves cause suffering. Using God's gift of free will to humanity, the first humankind ate the forbidden fruits from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (Genesis 3:6). These human actions disrupted the perfect design of God. God created a good world; Adam and Eve, the first human beings abused God's creation. Their descendents throughout the history of humankind continued to abuse God's creation. Human beings destroy natural environments which God has so beautifully created. The disruption of the eco-balance is not the work of God, but the deeds of humankind. It is human beings who destroy nature. In like manner, human mistreatment of other humans is not the work of God but the deeds of humankind. Since Buddhists understand human destructiveness and the inability to eliminate desire, they can also come to realize that suffering is not God's creation, but the result of human actions.

Another way we can share with Buddhists about God is by means of a "controller concept," an idea suggested by Nyan Lin. His reasoning goes as follow: Many Buddhists look at the orderly universe with its reliable laws and conclude that this whole design could not continue to exist on its own

with no one controlling or managing it. They are convinced that there is a controller behind this entire far-flung universe. Even before they hear the gospel, Buddhists are prepared by the Holy Spirit with this “controller concept” of God. Buddhists with these beliefs might come in contact at some point of time with Christians who can tell them of the Creator and Sustainer God. This “controller concept” can arouse their interest in Christianity.

Nyan Lin and Maung Kyaw are Burmese converts who became Christians through this “controller concept.” They said that through looking at the regular movements of millions of stars, moon, sun and other planets, they always reasoned that there must be somebody who controls all of these heavenly bodies so that the stars, planets, moon, and sun can move in their respective courses in order to avoid collisions. This search for Truth finally led them to Christ (interviews with Nyan Lin and Maung Kyaw).

In orthodox Buddhism there is no mention of the controller or creator of the universe. Here the Christian creation story of heaven and earth from the book of Genesis can be meaningful to those Buddhists who have reasoned their way to the controller concept of the universe. The Bible declares that God created heaven and earth and everything that is in it (Genesis 1:1,21,27;5:1; Deuteronomy 4:32; Mark 13:19). In Psalm 19:1 we

read, “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.” Once they find that Christian teaching confirms their personal conviction, their interest can be aroused to study Christianity. This can lead them to conversion by the conviction of the Holy Spirit. God as a controller and sustainer of the universe is a good starting point in our dialogue with the Burmese Buddhists.

Adapting the Christian Message to the Buddhist Notion of Liberation

In this section, we respond to the Buddhist notions of liberation, such as kamma, metta-karuna (loving-kindness and compassion), samsara, nibbana, and dhamma. We make a comparative study of Jesus Christ and Gautama Buddha, and we also discuss two Burmese ceremonies: the thingyan water festival, and the shinbyu ceremony. In doing this, we examine what symbols of these ceremonies are useful for communication of the gospel to Burmese Buddhists.

Kamma

Kamma means volitional action which produces effect. There are good and bad volitional actions. Good volitional action produces good kamma, and bad volitional action produces bad kamma. Likewise, good kamma produces good results, and bad kamma produces bad results. In other words, kamma is the effect of merit or demerit. Good or bad action

produces merit or demerit, respectively; they in turn produce good and bad kamma. Merit produces good kamma, and demerit produces bad kamma. Kamma in turn produces the appropriate reward or punishment for the action. (see pages 107-112).

In witnessing to Buddhists, we must by all means ask what is the meaning of the word kamma and let them answer. They will say kamma means “action” or “doing.” Then we can make it clear that there must be an agent of the doing. The person who does the act must be above the act, but the Buddha places the act above the person. The act affects the person. If kamma causes rebirth and kamma is an act, who is the one who produces the kamma which causes rebirth? If people are willing to admit that kamma must have someone to do it before it can take place, then we can make it clear that doing alone, without an agent of the doing, cannot cause rebirth.

The question is, does Christianity teach kamma? It does teach something very similar to kamma. It is called the law of cause and effect. The Bible says, “A man reaps what he sows” (Galatians 6:7). Jesus says that each person will be rewarded according to what he has done (Matthew 16:27). Paul also says the same thing in Romans 2:6, “God will give to each person according to what he has done.” We read in Revelation 20:13, “Each person will be judged by God according to what he had done.” This is the

law of cause and effect. We know that if one does good, he or she will be rewarded. If one commits murder, the police will arrest him or her and put him or her in jail. This is the concept of kamma: one is responsible for what he or she has done. Petchsongkram (1975:135) illustrates this in telling about a priest who was a bookmaker for the state lottery. Every seven days people would consult him to ask the winning number. If he was wrong the buyers would say, "I really haven't any luck," meaning no "merit." The buyers would not blame the priest, but only themselves. But if the priest were right they would say, "This priest is really good; he is always right." Buddhists do not blame Buddha or anybody but themselves when they are down on their luck.

The problem is that a person apart from Christ cannot do what is right (Romans 7 & 8), because all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. We are saved only by God's grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus (Romans 3:23-24). Paul writes to the Christians in Ephesus, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8). We are not saved by works but by faith in Christ (Romans 9:12; Ephesians 2:9). Everyone needs Christ and his guidance to be able to do what is right and be saved.

Adoniram Judson, the first American missionary, however, faced the big problem of convincing Burmese intellectuals to accept the doctrine of substitution or atonement. They said to him that the death of an innocent person for the guilty under the righteous God seemed to be opposed to common justice. (1961:18)

In Myanmar, people who are animists still practice blood sacrifices to appease the evil spirits. Their frequent blood sacrifices could enable them to comprehend Christ's supreme sacrifice and the atoning power of his blood. Traditional biblical terms like "atonement" and "blood sacrifice" are meaningful to them. For the Burmese Theravada Buddhists whose ancestors long ago abandoned blood sacrifices practiced in the animistic and pre-Buddhist period, the terms "atonement, substitutionary" have no longer any religious meaning. Therefore, explaining Jesus' atoning death in terms of a sacrificial system will not be understood by the Burmese Buddhists.

According to the Burmese doctrine of causality, at least in the average person's understanding of it, the innocence of Jesus could result in merit, but not in suffering and death. Therefore, for the Buddhists, Jesus' suffering is understood in terms of the result of his bad kamma in the past. In this Buddhist view, Jesus could not be an innocent man, because of his terrible suffering and death on the cross.

The crucified Christ, who became a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles (1 Corinthians 1:23), is also a stumbling block to the

Burmese Theravada Buddhists. In contextualizing Christology, Khin Maung Din (1973:47) encouraged Christians in Myanmar by saying, “Jesus Christ is an ongoing, living, dynamic reality in the lives of the people in Myanmar, as well as in the lives of other peoples, yesterday, today and forever.”

Jesus’ image of setting the light of a lamp on the lampstand (Matthew 5:15) had dynamic equivalents in many cultures. Only a few realize that it is the oil of the lamp which is burning. Similarly, the cross of Jesus and his blood sacrifice as a visible cultural form is not significant for the Burmese Buddhists. We have to show the significance of the cross with other terms, such as incarnation, emptiness, love, etc., which are familiar to the Buddhists. For example, in comparison to the Buddha’s emptiness, Christ’s emptiness (kenosis) would be a relevant contextualized image to make the atonement meaningful to Buddhists – the Buddha empties himself to be able to guide people to nibbana. Likewise, Jesus empties himself so that he may save the world from sin (John 3:17). Buddha never said that he is the way, the truth and the life but Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6).

Of course, at some point the “new” idea of Jesus’ sacrifice must be introduced to Burmese Buddhists. After a relational groundwork has been laid, it can be done. No matter how deeply Burmese Buddhists believe in

the law of kamma, experiences in life can help them to understand the Christian position of vicarious substitutionary death. Both in Thai and Myanmar history and literature, there are renowned epics in which one person gave his or her life and saved the whole nation. A very famous record in Thai history was the sacrificial act of Queen Srisuriyothai. When the Burmese army attacked Thailand, a Burmese general was about to cut down king Chakraphat, the king of Thailand. Queen Srisuriyothai drove her elephant between the two fighting elephants and took the fatal sword blow herself. She did this because she knew that if the king were killed, the country of Thailand would be lost. In Myanmar everyone knows about General Aung San, who fought to gain independence for the country and was later assassinated by traitors. He is regarded by the Burmese people as a person who died to save the nation. So even though orthodox Buddhism teaches that the law of kamma is absolute, Buddhists in Myanmar understand that vicarious, substitutionary death is possible. Christians in Myanmar often compare the story of General Aung San sacrificing his life to gain independence for Myanmar to that of Jesus giving his life to save all human beings. By this illustration, we are using the nation's historical event to elucidate the death of Christ for all humankind. By using events of

Burmese history, we are able to communicate the gospel message to the Burmese in a more meaningful way.

Agape and Metta-Karuna

In the Old Testament the use of love is found in contexts dealing with love for one's neighbor (Leviticus 19:18), love of oneself (Leviticus 19:34), love of God with all one's heart (Deuteronomy 6:5), love towards one's wife (Ecclesiastes 9:9), love of one person toward another (Psalms 109:4-5), and love between man and woman (2 Samuel 1:26). In the New Testament the concept of love, agape, is explicitly applied to God: God is love (1 John 4:8, 16). Jesus said that God so loved the world that He gave his one and only Son (John 3:16). The baptism of Jesus also revealed that God loves his Son (Matthew 3:17). Jesus replied to the question of an expert in the law and said that "to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" is the first and greatest commandment, and that "to love your neighbor as yourself" is the second (Matthew 22:37:-39). Jesus taught his followers to love their enemies (Matthew 5:44) and reminded the rich young man of the commandments to honor his father and mother, and to love his neighbor as himself (Matthew 19:19). A new commandment given by Jesus to his disciples was, "Love one another" by which all people would know that they were His disciples (John 13:34-35).

According to Paul, the love of God is revealed in the death of Jesus Christ for sinners (Romans 5:8). He said, “Because of God’s great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgression For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God not by works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:4-9). Love is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). According to 1 John 3:10 anyone who does not love his brother is not a child of God.

The love of God, agape, is the most important salvific virtue in Christian theology (1 Corinthians 13:1-13). For the Theravada Buddhists, however, since they have no concept of God it is very difficult for them to understand the love of God. In Buddhism, human beings cannot receive any help from outside. The Burmese Buddhists believe that they cannot be saved by the Buddha himself, even though they faithfully follow him. Therefore, the Buddhists cannot understand the meaning of John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

This does not mean, however, that there is no concept of love in Buddhism. There are two words for love in Buddhism: metta (loving-kindness) and karuna (compassion). They refer mainly to the horizontal

dimension, that is, love and compassion for other human beings, not for God. Theravada Buddhists believe that metta and karuna, do produce merit, that is benefits for the individual life in this life as well as in the next, as a result of a great love for others. If you love and have compassion on others, then you accumulate good kamma, which results in a better rebirth.

Jesus also says “Love one another as I have loved you” (John 13:34), and “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 19:19). This concept of Christian love could be understood by Burmese Buddhists, for metta (loving-kindness) and karuna (compassion) in Buddhism are related to the love for other human beings. Therefore, speaking about Jesus’ second commandment, “Love your neighbors as yourself” will make the love of God meaningful to the Burmese Buddhists. Speaking about metta instead of agape would be more meaningful and profitable. In other words, Myanmar Christians, by living a life of loving-kindness and compassion toward their neighbors, can lead Buddhists to understand agape, the love of God shown in Christ.

Thus Christian love, which comes from Jesus Christ, could have powerful dynamic-equivalence in the Buddhist’s value of great love (metta) and compassion (karuna) for other human beings. Both love and compassion are evident in the reality and life of human beings. Aye Ko and

Maung Kyaw Maung, Burmese converts, in their response to question 3 (1) (f) in appendix A, maintained that they had become Christian because of the love and the kindness of Christians shown to them. Saw Nwaik Man Han and Tan Naing, converts from Buddhism, suggest that Christian churches could be more effective in their communication of the gospel to Burmese Buddhists if they lived lives full of love and compassion toward other people who are in need (interview in May 2001). Michael Rodrigo (1995:200) writes, “The Buddhists will discover Jesus’ praxis only through the Christian’s action of love.” As noted above, by loving and having compassion toward others, Jesus’ second commandment could channel the Buddhists’ experience of metta and karuna into the love of God, agape. Through Christian action of love, metta, and karuna, and by living the values and principles of the gospel, Buddhists will learn God’s love in Christ. Involvement in community development, social organizations, and activities could also provide an example of Christ-like living to Burmese Buddhists.

Samsara

Samsara means an endless cycle of existence - births, deaths and rebirths, which go on and on endlessly within the thirty-one planes of existence in lokadhatu (the world system). Samsara is transmigration from one existence to another in Lokadhatu which includes heavens, hell, gods,

human beings, animals, and spirits. The Buddhists believe that the Lokadhatu and everything in it is impermanent. They also believe that the Lokadhatu is destroyed and renewed again, and this goes on and on endlessly.

There is perhaps nothing more different in the Buddhist and Christian worldviews than this understanding of rebirth. Even here, however, we can find some point of contact. For example, Christianity accepts that there are cycles in life. We see cycles in nature. Day is followed by night, and night is followed by day. The seasons in the year go round in circles year after year, without end. A seed brings forth a tree, and a tree brings forth fruit, fruit brings forth seed, and the seed brings forth a tree again. From the chicken comes the egg and from the egg comes the chicken. This is the nature of cycles in life.

Buddhism has a cyclical view of life, i.e., life goes round and round without direction. Christianity has a linear view of life, i.e., life has a direction, a goal. The message of the Christians to the Burmese Buddhists is that even though life goes round and round, it is also going somewhere. According to Christianity, people are either going toward God or going away from God. Those who go toward God will enjoy eternal heaven, and

those who are going away from God will undergo suffering in hell (Matthew 25:32-33).

Nibbana

The etymological meaning of nibbana is “blown out” or “extinguished,” “become cool,” “extinct.” It is a state of deathlessness, peace, calmness, coolness, release, bliss; it is the going out of greed, hatred, and delusion; it is a haven, an unborn, uncompounded essence, and so forth (King 1952:45). Physical form, feeling, perception (both physical and mental drives), consciousness and all factors binding to samsara and suffering are totally dissolved in nibbana (Glazenapp 1966:106). Nibbana is causeless, whereas existence is subject to the chain of causation. Nibbana is unconditional whereas existence is conditioned (Drummond 1974:121).

Here nibbana is expressed both in negative and positive terms: nibbana as “nothingness” (negative), and as a place of peace, calmness, and bliss (positive). As noted above in chapter five (see pages 124-125), a majority of Burmese Buddhists interviewed believed that nibbana as total extinction is a heretical opinion. It is only an extinction of suffering and impurities. When all sufferings and impurities are extinguished, the purities and pleasantness remain. All these expressions make it clear that there is often a difference between the orthodox teachings regarding nibbana and the

popular understanding of that teaching. This is an opportunity to introduce Christian teaching regarding heaven.

Although orthodox Buddhism teaches one view of nibbana, many Theravada Buddhists in Myanmar consciously or unconsciously hold a view of nibbana which is more like the Christian heaven. Many Buddhists in Myanmar are not attracted to a state of “nothingness.” Some Buddhists young people, who are more vocal, would say that nibbana is a bleak and dreary state, since there is nothing there. Here we can ascertain human nature rebelling against the concept of void and emptiness. In real daily life when Burmese Buddhists refer to a state of life with all its enjoyments and pleasures, they would say it would be like nibbana. They do not say it would be like a Buddhist heaven, meaning one of the realms of the gods. By these kinds of references, we can assume that consciously or unconsciously the ultimate desire of Buddhists is to go to nibbana, which is more like the Christian heaven than a state of nothingness.

The question is, “Should Myanmar Christians bring the correct concept of Christian heaven to Burmese Buddhists, and only then preach Jesus as Lord and Savior?” I believe we should start with Jesus. It is more important to tell the Buddhists about Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. When they accept Jesus as their Savior, we can gradually lead them to the

understanding of the Christian concept of heaven. I believe the Holy Spirit working in their hearts will lead them to understand that the pleasantness, the bliss, and the enjoyment they expect is in heaven which is prepared by Jesus Christ for all who believe in Him.

Buddhists also believe in samsara-nibbana, a nibbana which is attained in life, continuing after death. Being reborn to be a rich man, a king or a deva is believed to be a samsara-nibbana.

In the New Testament, the kingdom of God is related to both the present reality on earth (Luke 17:21) and the future reality such as the return of Jesus Christ, a new heaven and a new earth (2 Peter 3:13). In many verses of the New Testament, the kingdom of God is also related to a spiritual, nonmaterial reality. Paul said, “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Romans 14:17), and, “Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God” (I Corinthians 15:50). The interpretation of the kingdom of God as both present and future reality is relevant to the Burmese Buddhists’ concept of samsara-nibbana, of the coming Buddha and of a new world.

In popular Burmese Buddhism samsara and nibbana are interpreted as different locations on the same plane. Samsara is graded from states of great suffering to states of great pleasure. A state of great pleasure is viewed as

samsara-nibbana. Burmese Buddhists prefer a great pleasurable samsara, being reborn as a wealthy man or a deva. They also believe that when the Buddha appears, the present world will be destroyed by fire, water, and storms, and then a new world will come (Cook 1993:134). Thus Burmese Theravada Buddhism includes belief in both the present reality and the future reality of nibbana. The Thai Bhikkhu Buddhadasa argued that nibbana exists in samsara, and that pleasure and peace in samsara are a foretaste of nibbana (Swearer 1981:141).

Myanmar Christians should emphasize the present reality of the kingdom of God. The present reality of difficulty, hopelessness, and poverty in Myanmar needs to be transformed into bountifulness, richness, and hope in Christ. Jesus says, “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened” (Matthew 7:7). This passage can be good news to the Burmese people.

The kingdom of God should be interpreted not only as a present, social, and material reality but also as a future reality, individual, and spiritual. This concept of the kingdom is compatible with the Burmese concept of samsara-nibbana. As samsara and nibbana are viewed as

different locations on the same plane, the present kingdom in this world and the future kingdom in heaven can be viewed as the continuation of Christian life on the same journey from this world to the next. Although the Christian heaven and a Buddhist nibbana are not interpreted as the same, the kingdom of God, in some ways, could be contextualized with nibbana and samsara. The understanding of samsara-nibbana as present reality as well as nibbana as a future reality of bliss can lead the Burmese Buddhists to understand the richness of God's grace and the eternal heaven which is prepared for all believers in Christ (John 14:2).

Dhamma

The doctrine of dhamma is a tenet of Buddhism which is conducive to promoting dialogue between Buddhism and Christianity. Topics such as dhamma as truth, dhamma as way, and dhamma as authority can bring about a meaningful dialogue.

In this dialogue, we should let the Buddhists tell us what they mean by dhamma as truth, dhamma as way, and dhamma as authority. It is true that in our dialogue with Buddhists, we should look for an opportunity to tell them about Jesus Christ. But we must also prepare ourselves to listen to what they say. By doing so, we can create a friendly atmosphere for dialogue with them. We must express respect for their religion. A

meaningful and mutually respectful dialogue would win the attention of Buddhists and may finally lead them to conviction and conversion by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Dhamma as truth. What is truth in Buddhism? This is one of the questions I asked Burmese Buddhists in Yangon. About ninety percent of the responses referred to the Four Noble Truths. The Four Noble Truths are the dhamma, the teaching of Buddha, true for all Buddhists. In response to question 8 (8), eighty-five percent of Burmese converts said that the Four Noble Truths are still relevant to them. The first noble truth states that life is suffering; the second that desire is the cause of all suffering; the third that cessation of desire will lead to the cessation of suffering; the fourth presents the way to the cessation of desire, i.e., following the Noble Eightfold Path.

Christian do not deny the fact that desire causes suffering, but we do not believe that all suffering is caused by desire. Not all desires bring suffering and not all desires are bad. Only a desire which pursues what is not good/right brings suffering, but desire to do what is good/right brings benefits to human beings. For Christians, desire is not the chief problem for human beings so far as suffering is concerned. Myanmar Christians assert that the main cause of suffering is alienation from God, as a result of human rebellion and disobedience. For Buddhists, cessation of suffering is attained

by cessation of desire, and cessation of desire is achieved by following the Noble Eightfold Path. Nyan Lin said, “In my life as a Buddhist monk, I was teaching the Four Noble Truths, which were discovered by Buddha. But I found that in practice I could not follow the Noble Eightfold Path continuously in daily life.” Maung Kyaw Maung, a Burmese convert interviewed in Yangon, said that the teaching of Buddha is good, but the problem is that people are not capable of following it. Nyan Lin and Maung Kyaw Maung, realizing their inability to follow the dhamma in order to liberate themselves from suffering, had at last come to Christ for help. The good news for them was that Jesus could set them free from suffering if they believed in him. Their discovery of Jesus as truth, as the way to the cessation of desire, and as Savior brought them to conversion by the power of the Holy Spirit (interviews with Nyan Lin and Maung Kyaw, May 2001). Many Buddhists know that they are unable to follow the teaching of Buddha, even though they believe it as the truth. Question 3 (1) (b) in appendix A, asks recent Burmese converts: “Why did you look beyond Buddhism to Christianity?” Eighty percent interviewed in Yangon gave the same reason: that they had no hope for liberation (salvation) from dukkha because of their incapability of fulfilling the requirements of dhamma (interviews April, 2001). Question 3(1) (h) asks: “Were there doubts about Buddhism that

made you seek to know Christianity?” Saw Nwaik Man Han, a Shan Buddhist convert discovered his deficiency and helplessness in following the Buddha’s pathway; thus there was no guarantee for his salvation by depending on himself.

Realizing the human inability to follow the dhamma convinces Buddhists of the need to search for a solution outside Buddhism. Jesus say, “I am the truth” (John 14:6), and “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). The Buddha claimed to have discovered the way that leads to truth, but Jesus claims that he is the truth and whoever comes to him will find freedom from suffering and will have eternal peace. This message of liberation from dukkha can be good news for Buddhists who struggle to liberate themselves from suffering.

Dhamma as the Way. As previously noted, desire, the root cause of suffering, can only be eliminated by following the Noble Eightfold Path taught by Buddha. Only after desire is eliminated will people be freed from suffering; this means attaining nibbana. Therefore, the eightfold path is the way to nibbana, i.e., the cessation of desire. When Buddhists says that “dhamma is the way,” they are referring to “The Eightfold Path.” This is attained through following strict meditation (see pages 113-114). Following the Eightfold Path is easier said than done, so Myanmar Christians should

ask Buddhists what they will do if they cannot achieve the Eightfold Path.

The answer which we often hear from Buddhists is that human beings are to try and try again, until they are able to master the whole Eightfold Path.

Christians can answer that there are many things human beings cannot achieve in life just by trying. Just trying harder is not the answer to all life's problems.

The Buddha never told his disciples that he was the way to nibbana or that he was God. He was just a human being like us, though one of the great teachers of religion in world history. The Buddha, however, claimed that he had discovered the way to nibbana. Buddha did not draw people to himself, but rather pointed his disciples to the way he had discovered, i.e., the Eightfold Path, and instructed them to go by themselves. He pointed people away from himself, like John the Baptist who said, "I am not the Christ but I am sent ahead of him" (John 3:28) and "He (Christ) must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). The Buddha taught his disciples to follow "The Eightfold Path" in order to attain nibbana. John the Baptist instructed his disciples to follow Jesus Christ in order to get to heaven, because Jesus was the way. After Jesus appeared, all of John's disciples followed him. Jesus himself says, "I am the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

For Buddhists, to eliminate desire is to follow the Eightfold Pathway. To follow the Eightfold Path is to discipline oneself to follow exact rules and regulations in meditation. We studied two major means of meditation in chapter four, i.e., (1) the Traditional Jhanic – the Indirect Route, and (2) the Route of Bare Essentials – the Direct Route (see pages 133-134). These are harsh meditation techniques, difficult to follow. As noted preciously, most of the Buddhists surveyed in Yangon think that it is difficult for human beings to follow the Eightfold Path in order to abolish desire. Aye Ko, a Burmese convert, in a response to question 3(1) (b) maintained that he looked beyond Buddhism, because he discovered that he could not attain nibbana by following the eightfold path laid out by Buddha. The good news for him was that Jesus could bear all consequences of his bad kamma and liberate him from suffering if he accepted him as his own savior. This discovery of the truth in Christ finally led him to conversion (interview with Aye Ko, March 2001).

If Buddhists accept Jesus as their Savior, a desire for God and for what is good can be instilled in them. They will be able to do what is good by the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit. The desire for God and for what is good will banish desire for worldly things. Christianity, like Buddhism, disapproves of desire for worldly things (1 Peter 1:18).

Christianity, however, says that human beings cannot eradicate the desire that is within them. Only Jesus Christ can eradicate our desire and bear the consequences of our bad kamma so that we may be freed from suffering and sin. There is no condemnation, in other words, no consequences of bad kamma, for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ the law of the Spirit of life has set them free from the law of sin and death (Romans 8:1,2).

Dhamma as Authority. Buddhists see dhamma as the authority found in Buddha and his teachings. The Jatakas, which are the stories of the previous lives of Buddha, are authoritative models of life for Buddhists. The Tripitakas, the teachings of the Buddha, are the authoritative scriptures for Buddhists. For Christians, the life of Jesus is authoritative model of life (1 Peter 2:26), and the teachings of Jesus and his apostles are authoritative Scriptures for ordering of their lives. Dhamma as authority offers ample opportunities for dialogue between Buddhists and Christians.

Dialogue could begin as “story dialogue.” We may let the Buddhists tell something from the story of Buddha, and then Christians can tell a story from the life of Jesus. We can go on with this alternate telling of stories until we finish with all the stories of the life of Buddha and of Jesus.

This kind of “story dialogue” is a very contextualized way of telling the story of Jesus. When we witness to Buddhists, it can never be one-way communication; it has to be a dialogue. Moreover to begin with “story dialogue” is a practical and appropriate approach. If we begin our dialogue with religious beliefs Buddhists may not listen. If we begin our dialogue by exchanging the stories of Buddha and Jesus this certainly arouses interest, and most Buddhists would engage in this kind of interchange. But stories dialogue can be performed in a more relaxed and sociable atmosphere. Other kinds of dialogue have the potentiality of becoming heated discussions. Stories convey forceful messages; stories are sometimes even more forceful than intellectual clarifications. The stories of the life of Jesus have greater impact than any other stories in the world. In a story dialogue Buddhists will come to hear the stories of Jesus in the most friendly atmosphere possible. In that kind of congenial situation, the probability for impact is at its highest potential. Through this dialogue, such topics as Jesus’ emptiness, humility, incarnation, love and compassion towards others will be interesting and meaningful to Buddhists. Christians in Myanmar should employ this “story dialogue” with the Burmese Buddhist.

Jesus Christ and Gautama Buddha

The Buddha's personal name was Siddhartha, meaning "he who has achieved his goal." His family name was Gautama. The personal name of the Christ was "Jesus," meaning "he who shall save his people from their sin" (Matthew 1:21). The word "Christ," Christos in Greek, means "anointed," or "sent by God." The word "Buddha" means "enlightened" or "mentally awakened" (Fernando 1981:10).

Both Jesus Christ and Gautama Buddha are called exemplary teachers by their followers. The Buddha preached to his five companions concerning the self-mortification he had discovered through his enlightenment. The five companions were soon convinced and became his disciples. Five months later, the Buddha sent sixty strong disciples to disseminate his new doctrines (Tithe 1959:10). Jesus also asked his disciples to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). He also taught them that he was the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6), and commanded them to follow him in order to be saved from sin. To the Theravada Buddhists, the Buddha is not a savior but only the truth-discoverer and the path-finder to nibbana (Pieris 1988:124). To the Christians, Jesus is the Savior and the Way which leads to heaven.

The births of both Jesus and the Buddha were miraculous. Each of their conceptions was apart from ordinary sexual relations. Jesus' conception in Mary was from the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:18-25, Luke 1:26-37). Maya, the mother of Siddhartha, had "a dream in which a six-tusked white elephant, after circumambulating her seven times, entered directly into her right side. After carrying the fetus for ten months, she gave birth to the infant who stepped down from her right side, pure and undefiled" (Prebish 1956:11).

The infancy narratives of both included cosmic signs. A star appeared at the birth of Jesus (Matthew 2:2). At the birth of the Buddha, an earthquake occurred. Flowers and two streams of water fell from heaven. As the Magi from the east worshiped and honored Jesus (Matthew 2:1), the Hindu gods rejoiced at the Buddha's birth, and the Brahmins honored him. As Simeon predicted the future of the Messiah and his mother (Luke 2:28-35), Asita predicted the future of the Buddha. Both of them were threatened by kings: Jesus by Herod, and Siddhartha by Suddhodana, his father (Nakamura 1977:10).

Unlike Jesus, Siddhartha married Yasodhara, at the age of sixteen or seventeen, and bore a son Rahula, meaning "hindrance" (Drummond 1974:17). As "Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by

the devil” (Matthew 4:1), in the forest the Buddha also was tempted by Mara, which means “destruction,” “killing” or “death,” so that he would not become enlightened. However, both of them overcame the temptations (Fernando1981:11).

After his enlightenment under the bodhi tree, the Buddha preached to his followers the Four Noble Truths. In his teachings he focused on the mind and mental training as the basic power to free a person from the suffering caused by greed and ignorance. He never preached about sin, but about suffering. Jesus, after his baptism and victory over temptation, began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near” (Matthew 4:17, Mark 1:15). He began to teach the crowds the “beatitudes.” For Jesus, faith in God accesses the power of the Holy Spirit to bring a person to salvation.

Both Jesus and the Buddha taught about love. Jesus taught his followers about God’s love, agape, and to love God and one’s neighbor (Matthew 22:37-40) as the basic quality of life for his followers. The Buddha taught that metta (loving kindness), karuna (compassion), mudita (gentleness), and upekkha (equanimity) are the basic qualities of a liberated person (see pages 154-157).

The mission statements of both are universal. In his lifetime, the Buddha announced his followers’ mission as follows:

Delivered am I, monks, from all forms of enslavement. You also are delivered. Go now, and wander for the welfare and happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the gain, welfare, and happiness of the entire universe. . . . Proclaim the dhamma that is so excellent, so meaningful and so perfect. Proclaim the life of purity, the holy life, consummate and pure. There are beings with a little dust in their eyes who will be lost through not learning the dhamma. There are beings who will understand dhamma. (Fernando 1981:15)

After his resurrection, Jesus expressed his disciples' mission as follows:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. (Matthew 28:18-20)

Jesus died and was resurrected. The Buddha died at the age of eighty as an ordinary person would die. Jesus preached the present and future reality of the kingdom of God, while the goal of the Buddha's mission was to attain nibbana. Both Jesus and the Buddha had eschatological concepts. As Jesus predicted the coming of the Comforter, and the coming of the Son of man, Gautama Buddha also predicted the coming of Metteyya, the fifth and last Buddha, a king ruling in righteousness.

Although the teachings of the Buddha and of Jesus Christ are not identical, the goal of each is to save or free humanity from death and suffering and to bring persons to heaven or nibbana. These similarities in the teachings of Christ and Buddha and in their personal lives could help the Myanmar Christians discover profitable points of contact on which they can

build a meaningful dialogue with Burmese Buddhists.

Burmese New Year, Water Festival (Thingyan)

When I was in Yangon, I observed and participated in the Burmese water festival. This festival is the biggest religious celebration and the merriest time of the year. The celebration lasts for four days, April 12-15. During the celebration, all Buddhists, especially the young people are out on the streets to be sprayed with water. The pouring or spraying with water symbolizes purification of minds and thoughts. To get wet means to be purified. It is a time when the whole Buddhist community returns to a sacred and pure condition. Buddhists believe that what is sacred has faded away with the old year, and in the New Year it is restored. By repeating this annual renewal, the sacred is perpetuated year by year.

The thingyan water festival is a symbol of newness, cleansing, purification, freedom and reconciliation. Captured birds and fish are freed, symbolizing freedom from dukkha. Disputing parties are brought to reconciliation. During thingyan, Buddhists also celebrate a hair washing and fingernail cutting ceremony. They believe that the greatest impurities of the whole body reside in fingernails and hair. Therefore, once their fingernails and hair are clean, the whole body is clean. These redemptive terminologies -- newness, cleansing, freedom, and purification -- are meaningful to the

Burmese Buddhists.

The Bible says, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come” (2 Corinthians 5:17). The writer of Romans says that when we accept Christ as our Savior, we are set free from sin. . . (Romans 6:18,22). Galatians 5:1 says, “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.” In Colossians 1:20, we read, “through Christ God reconciles to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.” Since such redemptive terms as purification, freedom, cleansing, reconciliation, are meaningful to Burmese Buddhists, Christians, by engaging a dialogue with Buddhists regarding the thingyan water festival, can lead them to understand God’s cleansing power by the blood of Jesus Christ (Revelation 1:5), the power of regeneration through the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5), newness in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17), and freedom from suffering and sin (Romans 6:18). Khin Maung Aye, a Burmese convert, in his response to the question 5 (1) in Appendix A, affirmed that he accepted Jesus Christ as his own Savior because of Christ’s power to liberate him from his bad kamma and change his life into eternal newness (interview in May, 2001).

Shinbyu (Initiation) Ceremony

Pe (1996:178) states, “The Shinbyu ceremony initiates a Burmese

Buddhist boy into the monkhood as a novice.” The Burmese shinbyu ceremony is an important event celebrated once in the lifetime of a Buddhist boy. It is a ceremony that initiates him into monkhood as well as into adulthood. The whole community of people participates in this celebration. Zahniser states,

There are three possible functions for a contextualized ritual process based on the Shinbyu ceremony: (1) it could function exclusively as a rite of passage for the young into adult participation in the community of faith; (2) it could be designed as a discipling structure for new converts; or (3) it could serve both of these discipling functions. (1997:12)

The initiation of a boy into monkhood is called phayar-wud. Phayar means “God,” and wud means “clothe or wear.” The meaning is that the boys are “being clothed with God.” After the ceremony, they are no longer ordinary people. Parents do not refer to their sons or address by personal names. They call them “phayar,” which means “god.” When the boys leave monkhood, this is called lu-wud. Lu means “people,” and wud means “wear.” The meaning is that they are “being clothed like people,” that means they become lay people.

This teaching of being clothed with God is also described in the Bible. In Galatians 3:27, Paul says, “for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.” Paul continues in verse 28, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in

Christ Jesus.” Christians can express their love towards their fellow Christians regardless of color, race, and status, because they are one people who are being clothed with Christ. When Christians look at fellow Christians, they see Christ. All Christians in the world are seen in this way.

Since the shinbyu ceremony is understood by Buddhists as “being initiated into monkhood and being clothed with God,” Christian baptism as an initiation of a person into God’s family, “being clothed with Christ” (Galatians 3:27), and becoming one in Christ regardless of race, color and social status can be meaningful to Burmese Buddhists.

Summary

In this chapter, we explored some ways to adapt/contextualize the message of the gospel to the Buddhist worldview. We also examined the relationship between the teachings of Buddhism and Christianity and looked for common ground on which we can build a meaningful presentation of the gospel to Burmese Buddhists. In the next chapter, we discuss contextualizing the lifestyles of Myanmar Christians by focusing on examining what Christian lifestyles can show Burmese Buddhists that Christians are Burmese. We also discuss contextualizing Christian worship in the Burmese cultural context in order to show Burmese Buddhists that Christ is the God of all nations and He is present and can be worshipped in

every culture.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Adapting Christian Lifestyles and Forms of Worship to the Burmese Cultural Context

Christianity was brought to Myanmar encased in Western culture. No attempt was made to unpack the gospel from Western culture and repack it in Burmese culture. Therefore, the Burmese people see Christianity, wrapped in Western culture, as a Western religion. Question 7 in appendix B asks if Christianity is thought to be a Western religion. Eighty percent of the Burmese Buddhists surveyed answered the question, “yes.” Twenty percent of those who gave a positive answer see Christianity as a Western religion because it came from Western countries, and eighty percent said that it was because of Western cultural practices in the churches (interviews in Yangon). The way the Myanmar Christians dress (with coats and ties, long pants, shoes), the way they greet each other by shaking hands, the way they worship and praise God in the church, all reflect the Western culture which the missionaries brought to them (Dal 1999:61). Unless Christianity can be expressed in forms that are familiar to Burmese people, their conversion is nearly impossible. As we studied Judson’s ministry in chapter five, it was obvious that his mission work to the Burmese people was successful due to his contextual approach through the zayat ministry. The zayat ministry

enabled him to present Christianity in a local form that was familiar to the Burmese people.

Darrell Whiteman (1999:43-44) states that contextualization is an attempt to communicate the gospel in word and deed, and to establish the church in ways that make sense to people within their local cultural context, presenting Christianity in such a way that it meets people's deepest needs, thus allowing them to follow Christ and remain within their own culture. Aylward Shorter (1999:48) states that culture controls our perception of reality, and it offers us a system of meanings embodied in images and symbols. It shapes our understanding, feelings and behavior. Charles Kraft (1979b:48) says that our physical and mental behaviors are pervasively influenced by our culture. It shapes both our acting and our thinking and provides the models of reality that govern our perception. Aram I (1999:32) also states that the gospel, to be meaningful to the local people, must be reincarnated from one culture to the other and be fully re-owned by people in and through their own cultural forms, patterns, norms and values. De Mesa (1999:129) suggests that by using the relevant cultural aspects as interpretative elements, we are able to discern and discover the riches and strengths of the Judaeo-Christian tradition in relation to the context of a given culture. These statements indicate that the gospel, to be meaningful,

must be reincarnated within a given culture.

On the other hand, Aram I (1999:33) reminds us that the gospel transcends every culture and is affirmed through culture, not in culture. Culture is only an instrument and context to embody and articulate the gospel. Only the gospel can give a real value to cultures. Bruce Nicholls (1975:647) also suggests that contextualization is the translation of the unchanging content of the gospel of the kingdom into verbal forms meaningful to the people in their separate culture and within their particular existential situations. I believe that Burmese culture, like every other culture in the world, has been tainted by sin. Therefore, we should examine it in the light of Scripture. Adapting Christian lifestyles and worship to the Burmese cultural context without being examined by biblical truth could end with syncretism.

As previously noted in chapter two, John Van Willigen (1993:52) describes two extreme approaches of applied anthropology: (1) rejecting all aspects of local culture and (2) accepting all local cultural practices and customs as relevant. Paul Hiebert calls the former approach non-contextualization, and the latter, uncritical contextualization (see pages 39-43). These approaches lead Christianity either to alienation or syncretism (see page 45 above). In order to avoid these two detrimental approaches, the

writer follows Hiebert's (1987:109-111) model of critical contextualization in utilizing local cultural forms for communication of the gospel.

Critical contextualization involves four steps (see pages 43-44). The first and second steps include phenomenological analysis and ontological reflections on traditional customs and beliefs. In the third step, Christians are to critically analyze traditional customs in the light of their new biblical understandings and to make the final decision regarding their use. The fourth or final step is to create a new contextualized Christian practice to communicate Christian beliefs in forms that are indigenous to the local culture. This approach is a valuable method and fits well in contextualizing or adapting Myanmar Christian lifestyles and Christian worship to the Burmese cultural context.

In this chapter, we examine what lifestyle choices of Myanmar Christians could show Burmese Buddhists that it is possible to be simultaneously good Burmese people and true patriots while embracing Christianity. We also examine what forms or styles of Christian worship are relevant to Burmese people so that they may see Christianity as a religion for all peoples in the world.

Adapting the Lifestyles of Myanmar Christians

In the past, especially during the British colonization, new converts to

Christianity were taken to mission stations in order to quarantine the Christians from being contaminated by the evil heathen society outside. As a result, Christians stopped mixing with their Buddhist friends and formed a separate community. Khai Za Dal quoted Choo Lak, a Burmese evangelist, from his article in Asia Journal of Theology,

The missionaries discouraged the faithful from walking, standing and sitting with the non-Christians. The missionaries' attitude was due to a desire to prevent backsliding of the new converts. But these practices eventually led to communalism and paternalism with the adverse result of the Christians becoming isolated and a distinct community. (1999:55)

This is how missionaries nurtured the new converts. The confinement of new converts within the mission compounds resulted in Westernization -- the production of Americanized or Europeanized Christians. Donald Smith (1965:83) writes, "To be a Burmese is to be a Buddhist." This means that to be a true Burmese, one has to be a Buddhist. This concept of "Burmese means Buddhist" naturally implies that "Christian means Western." To make matters worse, the Western lifestyles of Myanmar Christians naturally confirm the wrong perception of Burmese Buddhist about Christianity.

Many Christian churches in Myanmar still practice Western culture in their churches. Because of adoption of Western culture in the churches, Burmese Buddhists identify Christians with Westerners and see them as people who have lost their national identity. As long as Burmese Buddhists

see Christianity as a Western religion, and Christians as Westerners, they will not heed the message of the gospel.

In order to solve this problem, Myanmar Christians need to demonstrate to the Buddhists that Christianity is a religion for the whole world. One important way to demonstrate this is by the way Christians live, and by their cultural practices in the church. Christians need to show Buddhists that the Christian God is omnipresent, and that God can be worshipped by people in every culture of the world. The fact is that people do not need to leave their culture in order to become Christians. It is possible to be a Christian and at the same time be a true Burmese. If Myanmar Christians can illustrate through their lifestyles that they are true Burmese, it will become easier to convince the Burmese Theravada Buddhists that Christianity is a religion for the whole world, including the Burmese people.

Christians can demonstrate that they are Burmese by the way they dress, by their interpersonal practices and behavior, by appreciating Burmese cultural practices and by being good citizens of Myanmar.

The Way People Dress

Question 1 in Appendix C asks if Christians prefer Burmese dress or Western dress. About seventy-five percent surveyed among the Burmese people said that Christians prefer Western dress (interviews in Yangon).

Buddhists form their notions about Christians by looking at the way they dress. Dress is a big factor in Burmese culture. It defines a person's identity. In Myanmar, there are particular styles of clothing designed for people according to their social status or positions held in government offices. There is distinctive dress for kings, for royal ministers, for governors and for civil servants at all levels. Among the common people, each person's economic or social status can be judged by the way that person dresses.

Traditional Burmese dress has basically two parts. The men wear a kind of shirt and the women a kind of blouse for the upper part of the body. For the lower part of the body the men wear a pasoe, just like the sarongs worn by the Indonesians or Filipinos. The longyi women's dress is much like the men's pasoe; only the texture and color designs and the way it is tied are different. There are dress codes that the Burmese Buddha are careful to observe, especially those that pertain to modesty. In the past, women were required to wear long sleeved blouses that covered their arms down to the wrist. Their longyi had to cover their ankles.

Christians prefer wearing Western dress, such as long pants, shirts, coats and neckties, especially when they come to church. This clearly shows that Christians love Western dress. Thus, Burmese Buddhists identify

Christians as Westerners by what they wear. By appreciating Burmese traditional dress, Myanmar Christians can show Buddhists that they are also true Burmese. Maung Kyaw Maung, a recent Burmese convert, in his response to question 8 (11) in Appendix A, suggests that Christians should demonstrate their appreciation of Burmese traditional apparel such as the pasoe, the thaik bon (Burmese jacket) and the longyi, by wearing them on a daily basis, and especially when they come to church (interview with Maung Kyaw Maung, April 2002). If all the Christians in Myanmar wore Burmese dress and adhered strictly to the Burmese dress code, it would be a way to show Buddhists that we Christians are also true Burmese.

Daily Practices and Interpersonal Behavior

Burmese people are very conscious of a person's behavior towards other people. By our manners toward others, we are gauged as to whether we are cultured and well cultivated. There are prescribed standards governing the ways we are expected to behave towards others. These standards cover all levels of relationships. Persons who are well brought up know how to behave towards the clergy, teachers, grandparents, parents, uncles and aunts, elderly persons, elder brothers and sisters. Saw Nwaik Man Han, in answering Question 8 (8) in Appendix A, said that one of the teachings of Buddhism still relevant to him is its teaching on how to respect older people.

(interview with Saw Nwaik Man Han, May 2001)

Respecting older people. From childhood Burmese young people are taught that a person who is one day older than they deserves their deference. According to Burmese culture, age is a vital determinant. Respect for elders is a major social tenet in the Burmese community. Young people are judged on whether they have good upbringing through seeing their behavior toward their elders and the language they use in addressing them.

In the Myanmar language, there are various personal pronouns with usage depending on gender and social level. For example, when a man is speaking to his seniors he refers to himself as kyun daw, “your servant.” He cannot address them with khin-bya, thin, or min “you.” These words can only be used with persons of the same age and social status, or with persons younger than himself. A woman refers to herself as kyun-ma, “your humble servant,” and she addresses her seniors (both genders) as shin, “my lord/lady” (Chit 1995:116).

In addressing “a teacher,” one says saya, “a grandfather,” ahpo, “a grandmother,” ahpwa, “a father,” ahpay, “a mother,” ahmay, “an elder brother,” ahko “a big sister,” ahma, “an uncle,” Oolay, and “an aunt,” ahdaw. It is very rude if people do not use the correct word to address a particular person older than themselves. It is regarded as very rude if young

people mention older people by name. The word ngar, “I,” is a tricky pronoun. Ngar can be used only with persons of the same age or younger than ourselves. It is very flippant to refer to ourselves as ngar when we address older people. As noted above, in referring to ourselves when speaking to our seniors, we should use the word kyun-daw, (if a male) or kyun-ma (if a female).

So in speaking Burmese, younger people have to be very careful. If a person addresses everyone “you” and refers to oneself as “I,” regardless of age and social status, that person will be regarded as a rude person and not well-bred.

Burmese people also use honorific prefixes with the names of men and women. U is the prefix for the name of a man and daw is the prefix for the name of a woman. The prefixes for young persons are ko or maung for males and ma or ahma for females (Pe 1996:15-16). Young people cannot mention the names of their seniors without the proper prefixes. They must use U, daw, ko, or ahko, “big brother” and ma, or ahma, “big sister,” depending on gender and status. Calling people older than oneself by their names alone is regarded as insulting and rude. The names without the prefixes are used by elders addressing their juniors, or among close family members of similar status.

There are also gestures which demonstrate respect toward elders. For example, in the presence of elders a young person has to stand with the head bowed, walk in a stooping manner and sit demurely. And in offering something to elders one has to hold it with both hands. When people pass or cross in front of older people, they have to bend slightly and say, gadaw, which means “pardon.” They also have to say gadaw when they touch an older or superior person such as when flicking an insect or a piece of dirt off his shirt or jacket. Gadaw is the polite expression to seek pardon of an older or superior person in a situation which calls for respect.

There is also monastery language that Myanmar Christians should learn. For example, when people talk to a Buddhist monk, they should refer to themselves as tha-byi-daw meaning “your pupil” and address him as saya-dawphayar meaning “great teacher, god.” When laypersons converse with Buddhist monks a certain type of language is necessary. We cannot talk to a Buddhist monk as we do to a layperson. It would amount to an insult against the Buddhist clergy. Many Christians in Myanmar are not able to use the monastery language and do not know how to talk to Buddhist monks. When they are forced by circumstances to talk to Buddhist monks, they blunder in their choice of words in the monastery language. This does not promote the evangelistic cause. It only serves to confirm the Buddhists’ assumption that

“Christians are Westerners” and thus do not know how to speak to monks.

Respect is the paramount principle in young people’s relationships to their elders. There are many standard practices to which youths are expected to adhere in their behavior toward the elders. Question 6 in Appendix C asks if Christians respect their parents and elders. Ninety percent of Burmese Christians and Buddhists surveyed in Myanmar said that Christians respect their parents and elders, but show a lack of respect with body gestures. Today, many Christian young people do not bend when they cross in front of elder people. They are not exposed to such Burmese social behavior and language, and therefore, in the eyes of Burmese Buddhists, many things that Myanmar Christian young people do or say are out of place. This is another one of the indications which lead the Buddhists to consider Christians as Westerners and not truly Myanmar people. Contextualizing Christian lifestyle includes teaching Christian young people to speak and behave correctly in Burmese society. By doing so, Burmese Buddhists will come to realize that Christians are also true Burmese.

Relationships of boys and girls. In Christianity, with its concept of Christian fellowship (Galatians 3:28), boys and girls mix freely, especially in church youth programs. They are allowed to talk, sit, and walk together. Boyfriend and girlfriend relationships have been permitted in Christian

society. In Burmese Buddhist society, boys and girls stay separate from one another. A boy and a girl do not talk or walk together. Even as a group, boys normally congregate with boys, and girls with girls. A young boy is expected to keep away from a girl. This custom is still observed in Burmese Buddhist communities.

Christians have relaxed the strict prohibitions of the Burmese culture regarding their sons' and daughters' relationship. The free style of boy-girl relationships among Christians draws criticism from the Buddhist community. Here our Christian freedom becomes a stumbling block to our Buddhist brethren. Whatever position we take, we should not relinquish the dimension of Christian fellowship; yet at the same time we need to think of how we could avoid offending our Buddhist neighbors unnecessarily. Boys and girls should meet and talk with one another in the presence of parents or relatives. Confidential meetings in secret places would not be suitable in the Buddhist community.

By adapting Christian relationships to the Burmese cultural context, Myanmar Christians can dispel the myth that "Burmese means Buddhist" and "Christian means Western." Only when Burmese Buddhists accept the Myanmar Christians as true Burmese will they begin to listen to what Christians have to say about Christianity. Success in this respect means one

step closer for us to be accepted as true Myanmar citizens by the Burmese Buddhist community.

Appreciating Burmese Arts and Cultural Practices

Myanmar Christians prefer Western music, arts, literature and architecture, and disregard Burmese fine arts. This engenders the notion that Myanmar Christians are Westerners. Myanmar Christians can show Burmese Buddhists that they are true Burmese by engaging in Burmese music, arts, literature and architecture. Saw Nwaik Man Han, in his response to Question 8 (11) in Appendix A, suggests that if Myanmar Christians are to establish a church which is relevant to Burmese people, they need to utilize contemporary Burmese musical instruments and adopt Burmese music and dance in their Christian practices. Man Han also sees that if Christians use Burmese paintings, Burmese cartoons, Burmese proverbs, and Burmese poems in their sermons, the message can be more understandable to the Burmese people (interview with Man Han, May 2001). Tin Maung Win, a Burmese convert, also suggests that Christian preachers should draw illustrations for their sermons from Burmese stories, poems, history, comedies, movies, drama, and events which are familiar to the Burmese people (interview with Tin Maung, May 2001).

Appreciating Burmese music. Question 15 in Appendix C inquires if Myanmar Christians love Burmese music. Approximately seventy percent of those surveyed and interviewed said that Christians are not interested in Burmese music. There are two reasons for not being interested in Burmese music: (1) the style of Burmese traditional tunes is totally different from what Christians use. It does not use Western harmonics and cannot be sung in harmony. (2) Christians who are well accustomed to Western tunes and like to sing hymns in harmony assume that Burmese tunes are not suitable. As a Christian living in Myanmar, I seldom find Myanmar Christians showing a great love and appreciation for Burmese songs, especially classical Burmese songs. As a result, there are few Christians who can sing true classical Burmese tunes. This, of course, is not a good Christian witness. Our lack of love for Burmese music communicates that aesthetically we are not Burmese. If we Christians want to demonstrate that we are true Burmese, we will need to cultivate a love for Burmese music. We will need to learn how to sing Burmese songs and teach them to our children from an early age. If we can produce from the Christian community some well known composers of Burmese music, and great singers of Burmese songs, this will in some way alter the image of Myanmar Christians in the eyes of Burmese Buddhists.

Burmese also have musical instruments, many of which are different from Western instruments. Christians are not proficient in playing the Burmese musical instruments, because Christian parents do not encourage their children to play them. Instead, from their childhood, Burmese Christians are taught to play Western instruments. The common musical instruments in the Myanmar Christian churches are piano, guitar and violin. When Buddhists walk through a Christian community, they hear the sounds of pianos, guitars and violins playing Western music. The Buddhists naturally conclude that the Christians love Western music and reject Burmese music. These judgments of the Buddhists are not totally false. Here our choice of music which is not contextualized impairs the preaching of the gospel. When we try to preach the gospel to Burmese Buddhists, their hearts are closed for they do not want a foreigner's religion.

Christians should not abandon all Western musical instruments. They can contextualize them in the Burmese cultural context. For example, Christians can sing Burmese gospel tunes with the accompaniment of guitars, pianos and organs. I believe that the mere presence of Western music in Myanmar will not destroy our indigenous character as long as the foreign music does not dominate or destroy local music. What we need is to love and play the Burmese musical instruments also, and develop local

tastes. Christians should utilize Burmese musical instruments such as the bakdala, the sai, the paiwin, etc., in singing gospel songs. Also, they should sing the gospel songs to Burmese tunes even with the accompaniment of guitar, organ and piano.

Saw Nwaik Man Han, in his response to Question 8 (11) in Appendix A, suggests that if Myanmar Christians are to establish a Burmese indigenous church, they need to utilize Burmese tunes, Burmese musical instrument and Burmese dance in worship (interview with Man Han, May 2001). The more we can play Burmese musical instruments, the more we can repair the wrong image that we are projecting.

Appreciating Burmese literature. Burmese people are lovers of literature. Their children have to learn how to read and write in Buddhist monastery schools. Every Burmese village has a monastery school where children learn Burmese literacy from the monks. As a matter of fact, the average Burmese, both male and female, can read and write Burmese. They are proud of their language and literature. The Burmese people place great value on good literature and have deep respect for their great writers, both past and present.

In a context where people esteem their literature, Myanmar Christians, both old and young, are poor in their knowledge of Burmese literature. According to the survey conducted, the majority of Burmese Buddhists said

that Christians are not proficient in Burmese literature. The daily spoken Burmese language and written Burmese are not the same. We cannot write Burmese in the way we speak. The style and the flow between written and spoken Burmese is different. Christian students tend to write Burmese the way it is spoken and this form of writing is regarded as crude. Christians are also poor in Burmese grammar, spelling, and vocabulary.

There are a number of reasons why Christian students are poor in Burmese, compared to Buddhist children. First, Christian children do not have the opportunity to study under the Buddhist monks as the Buddhist children do. Second, Christian parents and teachers place more emphasis on learning English than on learning Burmese literature. This lack of knowledge of Burmese literature has been an obstacle to the evangelistic effort. Burmese Buddhists have little respect for Myanmar Christians who cannot even write their own language well. Tin Maung Win, a Burmese convert, in his comment on Appendix C concerning the lifestyles of Myanmar Christians, suggests that if Christians are to communicate the gospel to Burmese Buddhists effectively, they need to speak and write the Burmese language fluently. He also suggests that Christians should avoid employing English terminology and categories in their preaching and teaching of the gospel. Instead, they should utilize Pali words and terms

which are familiar to Burmese people (interview with Tin Maung April 2001).

Since Christian schools are forbidden by the government in Myanmar, Christians should have programs in homes and churches designed to promote the study of Burmese literacy. Church leaders and parents should begin to encourage children and youth to study Burmese literature diligently. The Christian community should produce Burmese scholars, professors, authors, novelists, and editors. By being proficient in Burmese literature, Christians can show Buddhists that they too are Burmese.

Appreciating Burmese poetry. Burmese people love to read poetry. Their common literature such as journals, magazines, school texts, newspapers, books on religion, and politics are full of poems. Through poetry their religious ideas, thoughts and philosophy are communicated to people. Poems are also used to describe great epics of Burmese history, to recount the heroic deeds of national leaders, and to praise the glory of their kingdom. In Myanmar great poets are highly respected and honored. Unfortunately, no Christian writers are nationally known for the writing of poetry. As a result, Christians are disparaged. If the Christian community in Myanmar could produce some notable poets, this would help to correct the stereotypes that Burmese Buddhists have about Christians.

In the Burmese community, where poems are widely read and esteemed, if Myanmar Christians could present the gospel to the Burmese Buddhists through well-written Burmese poetry, the Burmese people would surely read this Christian literature. We could use poetry to tell about the life and the teachings of Jesus. We could use poetry to portray the majesty of God, God's sovereignty and creation. We could use poetry to describe the love of God, Jesus' atoning death on the cross, and his resurrection from the dead. If these great stories in the Bible were to be presented through good Burmese poetry the Burmese would surely read them.

Appreciating Burmese traditional dance. Burmese people are fond of classical dances and are great performers of traditional dance. Burmese classical dances are centuries-old artistic performances. There are solo dances, duet dances and group dances. The movements in the dances are like acts in a drama or a play. In the past these dances were performed for kings and the royal families. The stories of Buddha, historical events, and legends of ancient Myanmar are also portrayed by dances. These dances are greatly valued as national treasures. Today these dances are performed on stages to entertain audiences. This stage performance of dance is called zat-bwe. Burmese people are fond of watching zat-bwe the whole night.

In the past, missionaries did not allow Burmese converts to dance or to watch Burmese dances. Dances were regarded as secular entertainment, or they were regarded as connected to Buddhism. Many Christian leaders used to assume that Burmese dances were part of Buddhism and animism and therefore, Christians should not perform them. Christian leaders, especially in the past, failed to distinguish the difference between Burmese culture and Buddhist religion. Question 16 in the Appendix C asks if Christians love Burmese dances. The survey conducted among the Burmese people in Yangon indicated that Christians dislike Burmese cultural dances and cannot perform them. This shows that Christian leaders were quite successful in discrediting Burmese cultural dances in the Christian community. Classical Burmese dances, however, are not indecent in any way whatsoever. The dancers are modest in dress and graceful in movement, and there is nothing indecent or immodest in classical Burmese dancing.

Christians need to show the Buddhists that they also value Burmese culture by engaging Burmese cultural dances. They can even use dance as a means to present the gospel to the Burmese people. For example, stories from both the Old and New Testament could be told through performance of Burmese dances. Burmese would surely watch their cultural dance no matter what Christian themes the dance is depicting.

Appreciating Burmese art. In chapter three we learned that the Burmese are a people with an ancient civilization. They possess centuries-old artistic skills. A visit to Myanmar will convince anyone of the skillfulness of Burmese artists. In the West there are artists and sculptors whose paintings are worth millions of dollars. But we cannot say that artists and sculptors of that caliber do not exist in Myanmar. It may be that the world has not discovered them yet. There are many other artistic media which are exclusively Burmese such as lacquer work, straw painting, Burmese tapestry, Burmese woodwork, cane weaving, bamboo work and a host of other crafts. Kent (2000:10) told about a Mrs. Upfill who established cooperation between local artisans and foreign patrons. This relationship of cooperation enabled them to develop a kind of hybrid oriental-Western aesthetic, in which Western utilitarian objects were constructed out of indigenous materials by local artisans.

Even though Myanmar is rich in her artistic works, Christians value products that come from abroad more than what is locally available. Their homes are decorated with as many foreign products as possible. For example, most of the pictures hanging on the walls of Christian homes are portrayals of Jesus, pictures of singers from Western countries, and scenery from other countries. The homes of Burmese Buddhists are decorated with

portrayals of the Buddha, paintings of pagodas and rural scenery. Christians are unconscious of the fact that when they adorn their homes mainly with foreign artistic products, they are communicating to the Buddhists that Christians appreciate only foreign art. Decorating our homes appears to be an innocent act, but what the Buddhists see in our homes helps them define who we are.

Contextualizing the Christian lifestyle therefore includes the way people decorate their homes. We need to amend the opinion that what foreign is better. Christians need to remind themselves that Burmese art is as good as any art in the world. Contextualization of Christian lifestyle means greater recognition of Burmese art by Myanmar Christians.

Good Citizens of Myanmar

We have seen that missionaries before the British colonization had little freedom in their evangelism of Burmese Buddhists. After British colonial rule was established, however, missionaries were given more freedom and opportunity to preach the gospel to the people in Myanmar. As a matter of fact, colonial control facilitated the cause of Christian mission in Myanmar. Christians preferred colonial rule simply because they were given more freedom to spread the gospel. On the other hand, Burmese Buddhists were hostile to colonial rule. In chapter three, we discussed Burmese

nationalism (see pages 81-82). We saw how Burmese Buddhist monks instilled the nationalistic spirit in the Burmese people which led them to rebel against the British colonialists. We also mentioned U Ottama, a Burmese Buddhist monk who aroused nationalistic fervor, agitating the Burmese people for home rule. Many Buddhist monks and Burmese students participated in this nationalistic movement.

The Christian church, however, did not participate in this Burmese anti-colonial movement. Christians were living in their own enclaves and mission compounds, without any interest in the Burmese nationalistic movement. There were two possible reasons for Christians not wanting to participate in the anti-colonial movement: (1) the colonialists had facilitated the spread of Christianity, and thus Christians felt safer under British rule, and, (2) the anti-colonial movement involved armed rebellion and resorted to violence, such as Saya San's armed rebellion against British rule in 1930. There were, however, many non-violent movements and struggles, which were legal and which Christians could have participated in. For example, U Ottama's nationalistic movement was a nonviolent movement. One peaceful demonstration was led by Bo Aung Kyaw, a student leader. Bo Aung Kyaw was clubbed in the head by the police and died in a student and police confrontation. This student leader became a national hero. Whenever there

was an anti-colonial movement, Buddhist monks and Buddhist students were in the forefront.

Most probably the Christian students were in the mission compound, and were restrained by the missionaries and national pastors from getting entangled in politics. The Christian leaders probably counseled the Christian students not to get stained by the world. So while the Buddhist students were being beaten, jailed, or clubbed to death, the Christian students stayed silent within the confines of the Christian compound. If we read Burmese history, there is no mention of Christian leaders or Christian students struggling alongside other Burmese nationals to gain independence from Britain. This insensitivity of Christians to the historic national struggle strengthened the assumption of Burmese Buddhists that “Christians are Westerners.”

Because of failure to participate in national movements, Myanmar Christians were unable to demonstrate that they were also true Burmese and good citizens of Myanmar. If Christians had shown support for the Buddhists in the struggle for freedom, they would have been accepted as compatriots and good citizens of Myanmar. They would no longer be regarded as foreigners. The result of this failure to be part of the national movement in the past is the continued stigmatization of the Myanmar Christians as Westerners and the continued resistance of the Burmese

Buddhists to the Christian gospel. The question now is, “How can Christians today remedy the failure of their forefathers in history?” One solution would be to prove that Christians love the Burmese nation and the Burmese people. Christians will have to demonstrate their allegiance, loyalty, commitment, dedication, devotion, and faithfulness to the Burmese nation. By becoming good citizens who love the nation, Christians can to some extent erase the unfortunate negative image of Christianity painted through history.

Myanmar Christians can show their patriotic faithfulness by being wholeheartedly involved in the nation building venture at all levels in society, so that they may demonstrate their faithfulness and loyalty to the country. Participation should begin at the basic level of the local community. In Myanmar each local community usually organizes self-help programs to promote the welfare of the neighborhood. Community projects, such as digging drains, cleaning community parks, repairing community roads, establishing a local library or a local clinic, etc., are done by unskilled voluntary workers in the community. Every inhabitant of the community is called to work in these community projects. These voluntary labors offer excellent opportunities for Christians to show their love for the community and to prove their good citizenship.

There are many other ways in which Christians can participate in the community. Participation can be with finances, with physical labor, or both. There are also senior citizens, handicapped persons, shut-ins, the bereaved, and over-worked fathers or mothers who need help of one kind or another. If Myanmar Christians can show their love towards these needy people by helping them in whatever way possible, and also increase their involvement in community development projects and social services, Burmese Buddhists will gradually realize that Christians are good citizens of Myanmar.

In former days, many Christians worked in mission-related institutions. In 1964, the government ordered all missionaries to leave the country and nationalized all the mission institutions. With the mission institutions abolished, Christians were obliged to work in government departments and other venues. Today, we find Christians working in almost all government and private institutions. Christians have more opportunities to display their loyalty to the nation, and they can do it right in the places where they work. Christians working in the health departments, for example, could become the most dedicated para-medics, nurses and doctors, and by this show their love for the nation. Christians in the navy, army and air force could become the most loyal and courageous soldiers for the country. Our country has many government-owned economic ventures and Christians

who work in those ventures could be the most trustworthy employees. Christians who teach in the educational institutions could be the most committed teachers and professors. Christians who serve in the various government offices could become the most faithful workers. If Christians can excel in their performance right where they work, the non-Christians will come to realize this, and their attitudes towards Christians may gradually change.

Contextualizing Christian Worship

When missionaries left the country of Myanmar, Christians were left with two legacies: the gospel, and Western culture. Missionaries had developed the church for the Burmese people and had introduced Western styles of worship. They built church buildings after the models of the Western church. As a result, they looked exactly like the churches in Kentucky or Illinois. The Roman Catholics used the exact kind of wafer for mass as they did in Rome. The Anglican priests and bishops conducted services exactly the way they did in England. The Methodists and Baptists sang the same hymns as they did in Europe and America.

Paul Hiebert calls this approach non-contextualization, which can lead to alienation of Christians from their own culture. Kent (2000:2) in her article, "collecting Burma," writes that Western colonists collected objects

from Myanmar as symbols of foreign barbarism. She continues:

“Non-Western nations were considered to be culturally inferior to Western, Christian, English-speaking nations, and the task of Christian missionaries was to guide these backward people into more civilized ways of life”

(2000:5). Many missionaries in Myanmar rejected local culture as evil. The defect of non-contextualized Christian worship is that it conveys more Western culture than Christianity to the Burmese Buddhists. Unless Christians worship in forms and styles that are familiar to the Burmese people, the real image of Christianity cannot be presented in Myanmar. Kent says that one of the reasons why Buddhism became so well adapted to the Burmese cultural environment was its ability to adapt to the indigenous spirituality (Kent 2000:4).

The Burmese people in the pre-Bagan era worshipped spirits which they called nats. King Anawratha (1044-1077), the founder of the Bagan empire, received the teaching of Theravada Buddhism from the Mon monks. He introduced it to his empire and recognized it as the official religion. At the beginning, he tried to abolish the traditional religion of spirit worship, so that he could expand Buddhism throughout the whole country. The Burmese people, however, could not completely discard their old belief in spirits. They continued to practice animistic culture, paid homage to the spirits, and

made offerings to them. Despite drastic measures, the worship of spirits continued unabated. The king had no choice but to compromise. When he learned that the Burmese people would not totally discard spirit worship, he incorporated some of the important spirits into the Buddhist religion (see pages 60-64). As a matter of fact, the worship of thirty-six of the countless spirits managed to survive in people's daily lives. The king also added one more spirit called Sakra as the thirty-seventh spirit and appointed him as the king of all other spirits (Aung 1981:33). Later, Sakra was known as thingyamin in Myanmar. Sakra came from India as a Hindu god, was burmanized and renamed Thingyan. This shows us how Theravada Buddhism became contextualized in the Burmese traditional cultural context and was adapted to their animistic worldview.

Burmese Theravada Buddhism is basically a combination of traditional spirit worship and worship of the Buddha. It has developed through accommodation with traditional beliefs and practices. After Burmese people became Buddhists, they worshiped Buddha, but at the same time they also paid homage to the nats, which were incorporated into Buddhism. In December, spirit festivals are celebrated, most of them taking place in this month (see page 90).

This indicates that Burmese Theravada Buddhism has been adapted to beliefs and practices drawn from traditional Burmese animism. Such adaptation is one reason why Theravada Buddhism has been so influential in the daily lives of the Burmese people, penetrating into every aspect of their lives. That was why Buddhism, wrapped in their own culture, was well accepted by Burmese people.

We believe, however, that human cultures are tainted by sin and therefore, Christians need to examine them in light of the Scripture. We should not accept all aspects of local culture as relevant without examination in the light of Scripture. Paul Hiebert (1987:110-111) terms the “accepting of all aspects of culture as relevant” uncritical contextualization, which ends up as syncretism. In order to avoid the two extreme approaches, non-contextualization and syncretism, we employ Hiebert’s critical contextualization in adapting Christian worship to the Burmese cultural context.

There are two steps in our contextualization of Christian worship in the Burmese cultural context. (1) Abolishing all aspects of Western cultural elements which stand as stumbling blocks in the way of Burmese people. When we say this, we do not mean a total elimination of Western cultural practices. For example, Christians can sing Burmese gospel songs with the

accompaniment of organ, piano, and guitar in their worship; and (2)

Examining Buddhist forms of worship and adopting those elements which are culturally appropriate and do not conflict with Christian beliefs. The following forms and acts of worship will be examined for contextualization of Christian worship in the Burmese cultural context.

Contextualizing Christian Church Architecture

Many Christians are unaware of the fact that our church architecture communicates a message to the Burmese Buddhist community. The fact that Christian church buildings are patterned after Western traditional forms conveys the wrong image of Christianity. In every Myanmar Christian church there is a picture of Jesus hanging near the pulpit, in sharp contrast to the image of the Buddha in every Buddhist temple. Most Burmese Buddhists think that Christians worship a Jewish man, whereas Christians think that the Burmese Buddhists worship an idol of Buddha. Both Myanmar Christians and Burmese Buddhists, however, should realize that Asia is the home of both Jesus and Gautama, as well as the home of all other great religions: Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism. Myanmar Christians should, therefore, consider how to present Christianity in forms of the Burmese culture, with symbols that would convey deeper meaning to the Burmese Buddhists. We should alter the architecture of the church. This would not

affect any Christian beliefs. As Judson built a zayat as worship place, we can also do something similar, which would be relevant the modern Burmese cultural context.

When king Solomon was going to build the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, he said, “Who is able to build a temple for Him, since the heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain Him?” (2 Chronicles 2:6). Paul also says, “the God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands” (Acts 17:24). Stephen says, “the Most High does not live in houses made by men” (Acts 7:48). Both church buildings and Buddhist pagodas are temples or houses built by human hands. If the Temple of Jerusalem, the holiest place of the Jews, cannot contain God, a Christian church building cannot contain God either. Church buildings as well as pagodas are human products. The fact is that God can be worshipped any place. Kent (2000:8) relates that during the British rule in Myanmar, a Rev. Bixby, a British missionary, built a church at the site of Buddhist pagoda. This missionary believed that God could be worshipped in any place, even at the site of a Buddhist temple. God is omnipresent, and thus, we can worship God everywhere. God does not seek outward appearances, but seeks only the hearts of true worshippers, and we are to worship Him in spirit and truth

(John 4:24).

Contextualizing Christian Western Music

Singing Western hymns has become the most important part of the worship service. Myanmar Christians usually sing all hymns in harmony. Worship services are regarded as incomplete without singing Western hymns. Burmese naturally regard Christians as Westerners, however, because of their adoption of Western hymns. To amend this inaccurate perception, Myanmar Christians should use Burmese tunes in Christian worship. I believe that Myanmar Christians should not stop singing Western hymns in worship. But their praising God should also include singing Burmese tunes. Christian songwriters should compose as many contemporary Burmese gospel songs as possible with Burmese-style tunes. This will help Burmese people discover Christ in their own culture.

Burmese people love music. They like to sing and play all kinds of instruments. Burmese utilize the piano and violin, and these instruments are well adapted to Burmese tunes. Christians play piano, organ, and guitar when singing Western tunes. Western tunes accompanied by Western musical instruments sound exactly like the ones we hear in the church in the West. As previously noted, Christians do not need to abandon Western musical instruments. What they need to do is to contextualize them, i.e.,

Myanmar Christians can play Burmese gospel tunes using Western musical instruments. I believe that if Burmese gospel tunes are accompanied by the Western musical instruments, people will still recognize the music as Burmese. Christians should also utilize Burmese traditional musical instruments, such as the drum, the bakdala, the flute, the sai, etc. If Christians sing the gospel with the accompaniment of these Burmese musical instruments, the people will surely be curious to listen to the gospel music. By encouraging local forms in worship, Christian can convince Burmese Buddhists that Christianity is not a Western religion but is a religion for all nations.

Acts of Worship

The ways of worship in Buddhist temples and in the Christian churches are very different. In the Buddhists' temple there are no chairs; instead, people spread mats or carpets on which they sit with respect. In prostration, the worshipper's forehead, elbows, and kneecaps touch the floor. In meditation, the two hands with palms together are lifted higher than the face. It is in this posture that Burmese Buddhists consider the worshipper can have the greatest concentration and reverence. They show superb reverence to the Buddha when they worship, through various postures and rituals.

The ways of worship in the Christian churches are Western styles, such as singing hymns with Western tunes and utilization of Western musical instruments. Although we like this style of worship, for the Burmese Buddhists, this only shows that Christianity is a Western religion. Khai Za Dal (1999:28) states, “The Western style of worship, Western hymnology and Western musical instruments are barriers towards Christian witness to the Burmese Buddhists.” If Christians could worship in forms and styles that are familiar to the Burmese people, this would lead people to understand that Christianity is a religion for all peoples in the world. Nyan Lin, a Burmese convert who spent twenty-five years as a monk, suggests,

To make the Burmese Buddhists feel at home in our Christian churches, we can adopt the way of worship similar to that of the Buddhists in the temple: being properly dressed, removing shoes and slippers outside the church, being silent, etc., while listening to a sermon sitting on mats or carpets without chairs or benches, kneeling for prayer, a tithes and offering box near the entrance. (Interview with Nyan Lin).

In the following, we consider several aspects of Burmese Buddhist worship and examine how we can adopt them in Christian worship.

Dress in worship. When Burmese Buddhists go to worship, they wear a certain kind of maroon colored apparel. Wearing loose blouses or short shorts is strictly prohibited. This rule against short pants applies to men too (Pe 1996:24). Buddhist worshippers are required to wear decent clothes when they go to a monastery for worship. Women wear a maroon colored

shawl on their shoulders. As previously noted, dress articulates who a person is in Burmese culture, so someone who is wearing maroon colored apparel can at once be recognized as a worshipper. Thus, Buddhists display their veneration of Buddha by how they dress.

Myanmar Christians should take into consideration the way they dress for worship if they are to contextualize Christian worship in Burmese cultural patterns. In the past, Christians in Myanmar have been oblivious to the significance of dress in Burmese culture in general and in Buddhist worship in particular. Christian leaders have not given much thought to formulating a certain design of dress for Christian worship. This negligence of the church leaders has caused some churchgoers to dress in whatever manner they like for worship, mostly in a casual style. There are young people who dress up as if they are going to compete in a fashion show. Some rich people deck themselves with jewelry. When Buddhists see the way Christians dress for worship, they regard Christians as not being reverent to their God. Our casual dress in church worship services becomes a stumbling block to the Buddhists. To correct this wrong image of Christianity, Myanmar Christians should be careful with the way they dress for worship. Leaders should give some directions on the kind of dress that is presentable for worship. These clothes should not be costly, but they should

be decent in their appearance.

Removal of footwear. In Myanmar, it is considered essential to remove footwear before entering the compound in which a pagoda or shrine is situated. The same rule of removing footwear applies before entering a monastery precinct or a home. As soon as they reach the gate of a temple compound, people remove their footwear and walk barefooted to the temple. The temple may be very far from the gate, and the pathway may be burning hot because of the tropical sun; nevertheless, devotees will walk barefooted, braving the oven-like pathway. Tourists or foreign visitors who wish to see the temple are required to do the same. Even socks are not allowed; a person must be totally bare-foot.

Burmese Buddhists are also required by their culture to remove their sandals when entering a home. Entering a home with sandals on would embarrass a family. There are some very sound reasons for this practice. It rains very heavily for at least four months in a year. The rain causes the ground to be muddy and most Burmese roads are not paved. During the rainy season, sandals are always muddy and common sense shows that muddy sandals are not suitable for the floors of the house. The floors in most village homes are used for sitting and sleeping. People would not want to step with muddy sandals on the place where they sit and sleep.

When Christianity came into Myanmar, Christians were allowed to wear sandals in the church and home. This act seriously contradicts Burmese culture. In 1919, a group of Europeans (including women) wearing shoes while walking on the premises of Indawya Pagoda in Mandalay, were violently attacked by the angry monks (Dal 1999:27). The Burmese culture does not allow people to wear sandals even into anyone's home. The implication is that footwear is dirty and carries impurities, and therefore, entering a shrine or a church with sandals is regarded as an act of irreverence in worship. The Bible says, "For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them" (Matthew 18:20). Wherever we worship, God is there. The Bible says that the place where God is present is the Most Holy Place (Exodus 26:33-34). Christians should realize that worship takes place before the presence of God, and therefore, they should show reverence to God in how they worship.

Offering flowers. Before the actual act of worship, Buddhist devotees buy flowers to offer to Buddha. Offering flowers to Buddha is a common expression of devotion and reverence. With flowers in their hands worshippers kneel before an image of Buddha. With their two palms pressed together and flowers between them, Buddhists express their wishes and their prayers, and recite some Buddhist scriptures. At the conclusion of worship

they bow till their heads touch the ground and repeat this act a number of times.

I discovered that most of the Christian churches observed in Yangon used flowers in worship, such as the decoration of pulpits with flowers. This flower decoration makes the pulpits look colorful and attractive. Joshua Leme, a pastor of Insein Christian Church, told me that each week a certain person among his church members donates flowers. In Buddhism, offering flowers is one of the important acts of worship. For Burmese converts, it is more meaningful to worship in a church where the pulpits are well decorated with flowers.

Silence in worship. Silence is another act of reverence. In a Buddhist temple, worshippers have to speak softly, but speaking in the shrine is not advised. All are expected to refrain from speaking there. When you go to a Buddhist temple, the first thing you will notice is the silence. It is said that when worshipping in a Buddhist temple, even the sound of a needle dropping can be heard. Silence in the Burmese culture is a component of religious expression. People who seek religious maturity practice silence.

If Christians in Myanmar wish to express reverence for God in a more contextual manner, they should be more emphatic about observing silence in the worship services. On the other hand though, the Bible says, “Shout with

joy to God,” (Psalms 66:1; 47:1; 65:13; 132:9,16; and Ezra 3:11). We should praise God with shouts of joy. But silence should be observed before the worship service and while hearing the message. Our minds, our emotions, our souls need to have silence as we pray and listen to God’s word. I have been in churches where there is a lot of noise before the worship began. Everyone was talking. The great buzz was like the noise we hear in oriental market places where the buyers and the sellers bargain for the price, argue about the quality of the product and the way things are being weighed, etc. I believe worship has both horizontal and vertical dimensions. But the focus of worship should be vertical -- to worship God. When Christians speak to each other loudly before the service, what is objectionable from the view of Burmese culture is the noise in the place of worship. Singing is not a noise. Christians should praise God with a shout, but they should avoid speaking to each other while worshipping in the church.

Kneeling in worship. Kneeling is another indicator of reverence in worship. Kneeling is a proper posture of worship for the Buddhists. When they pray and meditate in the temple, they always kneel down before the image of Buddha. Buddhist young people give obeisance to their parents by kneeling down before them. In contrast, many Christians do not kneel when

they worship and pray to God. They like to make themselves comfortable with chairs and couches when they worship. To worship without kneeling is, however, not considered worship in the Burmese culture. For Buddhists in Myanmar, kneeling is imperative in worship. I absolutely believe that kneeling is not unchristian. King David writes, "Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker" (Psalms 95:6). When Jesus prayed he fell with his face to the ground (Matthew 26:39). Kneeling is not contradictory to the Bible. It is biblical and an act of Christian worship. When Buddhists listen to sermons, they kneel on the floor with their hands folded in the form of worship right in front of their chest. They remain in this position all throughout the sermon which may last from one to four hours. No matter how long the sermon takes, the devotee is required to remain in the same position to listen to the sermon. I believe Christians do not need to kneel for such a long period of time. Also, they do not need to kneel when they are singing and praising God or listening to the sermons. But kneeling is a good position when people are praying and speaking to God.

Observing a Sabbath Day

Buddhists observe a sabbath every week. The Buddhist Sabbath is called Uboke. On the sabbath day, the Buddhists put on their maroon

colored religious apparel and go to the temple or meditation center to fast and meditate. They stay in the temple all day long and do not engage in any mundane activity. Christians in Myanmar are not as serious as the Buddhists in observing a sabbath. Most Christians on Sunday go to church once or twice for only an hour or two. Serious fasting and praying is not common among Christians in Myanmar. Some Christians go to movie theaters, concerts and shopping centers on Sunday for entertainment. In former days, Christians were stricter in refraining from buying and selling and engaging in other mundane activities on Sunday. Today, Christians adhere less and less to sabbath day observance. It appears that Sunday is just a holiday for the Christians and not a sabbath day set aside for God. The Buddhists in Myanmar look at the way Christians spend Sunday, and naturally conclude that Christianity has inadequate teaching for observance of the sabbath day.

The question of observing sabbath in Myanmar is not so much a theological issue as it is a contextual issue. To contextualize worship in Myanmar, we need to observe sabbath more than we are doing now. If Christians dishonor their own sabbath day, others will dishonor not only that sabbath day but Christianity as well. When we observe Sunday seriously, we are witnessing to followers of other religions.

Summary

By the way they act, behave, dress, and worship, Christians can tell the Burmese Buddhists that they are also good citizens of Myanmar. The establishment of Burmese indigenous churches is most needed to create a Christian atmosphere where Burmese people can feel at home when embracing Christianity. Nyan Lin suggests,

We need to make our Christian faith more indigenous to the Myanmar Buddhist culture. We can worship God sitting on the floor or mats and listen to the sermon. Shoes and slippers can be removed outside the church. Christian hymns and songs can be made with Myanmar cultural terminology, in Myanmar without destroying the essence of the gospel. (interview with Nyan Lin, March 2001)

A failure to adapt Christian lifestyles and forms of worship to the Burmese cultural context will not produce and develop Burmese indigenous churches.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Summary of the Dissertation, Missiological Implications, Suggestions for Further Research, and Conclusion

In this dissertation, the study has focused on two important contextual approaches: (1) adapting the Christian message to the Burmese Buddhist worldview, and (2) contextualizing Christianity in the Burmese cultural context. The purpose of this study has been to find ways to present the gospel effectively to the Burmese people and to establish a church where the Burmese people can feel at home while embracing Christianity.

In the introduction, we learned that Burmese people make up sixty five percent of the country's population and almost one hundred percent of them are Theravada Buddhists. As noted in chapter one, Burmese people received the gospel in 1813 from Adoniram Judson, the first American Protestant overseas missionary. This means that the Burmese people received the gospel earlier than any of the other 134 ethnic groups in Myanmar. In spite of this, the Burmese people represent only a tiny percentage of the Christian population in Myanmar (see pages 4-5).

During the first five years (1813-1818), Adoniram Judson spent the entire time in preaching and teaching the gospel to the Burmese people. During these five years, he converted no Burmese to Christianity. Judson

learned from these first five years that the Burmese were hostile and very unresponsive to the gospel. Learning lessons from these first five years, Judson changed his evangelistic methodology and began to utilize the zayat ministry approach. As a result, the first Burmese convert, Maung Nau was baptized in 1819 (see pages 7-9). The result of the zayat ministry was remarkable: a substantial number of Burmese Buddhists were won to Christ, converts from Theravada Buddhism had increased. After Judson's era, however, the number of converts from Burmese Buddhists dramatically decreased. This trend has continued until today.

Since 1964 there have been no foreign missionaries in Myanmar. Today, missionaries working in Myanmar come from different ethnic minority groups such as Karen, Kachin, Chin, Lisu, Rawang, etc. These ethnic minorities do not have many differences in their cultures. Their traditional and cultural practices are similar. There is, however, a cultural gap between the tribal groups and the Burmese people.

The questions arising from this are: Why has the number of Burmese Christians remained stagnant over one hundred eighty nine years? Why are the Burmese Buddhists hostile to the gospel or why are the Christians hostile to Buddhism? Are there barriers between the Christian communities and Buddhist communities? Why was Judson's missionary work with the

Burmese more successful than that of the missionaries who came after him?

What forms of witness could the church of Myanmar use to evangelize

Burmese Buddhists? From research on these questions, we learned that

Christian evangelism to the Burmese Buddhists has not been successful

because: (1) Myanmar Christians have failed to adapt the message of the

gospel to the Burmese Buddhist worldview, and (2) they failed to express

Christianity in the Burmese cultural context. Also, we saw that the failure to

adapt the message to the Burmese Buddhist worldview was due to a lack of

understanding Buddhism, and the failure to express Christianity in Burmese

cultural context was due to a lack of contextualizing Christian lifestyles and

forms of worship in the Burmese cultural context.

In the past, Christians attacked Buddhism vehemently from the pulpit, and also in public sharing of the gospel. They argued that Buddhism is “a collection of superstitious beliefs,” “idol worship”, or worse yet, worship of Satan,” from which they had nothing to learn. With this attitude toward Buddhism, even though Christians had lived in a Buddhist community for many years, they failed to learn and understand the Buddhist worldview. As a result, Christians had no knowledge about Buddhism and the worldview of the Burmese people. They could not understand how the gospel was interpreted by the Burmese Buddhists who listened according to their own

worldview. Myanmar Christians, to be effective communicators of the gospel, must learn the worldview of the Burmese people.

In chapter four, we discussed two basic important notions of the Buddhist worldview: the notion of life and the notion of liberation. Concerning life, we discussed the conceptions of dukkha (suffering), anicca (impermanence), anatta (non-self or non-soul), and no creator or ruler of worlds. Concerning liberation (salvation in Christian terms), we discussed the conceptions of kamma, dana (giving), meditation, metta (loving-kindness), samsara, nibbana, the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, the traditional Jhanic (the indirect route), the route of bare essentials (the direct Route), dhamma and the Buddha. These two notions of life and liberation make up the worldview of Buddhism. Myanmar Christians need to know these two basic notions of Buddhism so that they may be able to adapt the Christian message to the worldview of Burmese people.

C. Kraft's (1979a:148) second and third principles of communication say that what is understood is dependent on how the receptor perceives the message and how the communicator presents it, and that the communicator only transmits the message not the meanings, because the meanings are in the minds of the receptors. Therefore, the receptor frequently misses something intended by the communicator and may add something not

intended. In the light of these two principles of communication, in chapter five, we examined the past models of communication of the gospel to the Burmese people. We learned that the belief systems of Buddhism and Christianity are not the same. The worldviews, thought forms, and cosmologies of the two religions vary greatly. These contrasting beliefs generate considerable problems in communication. The same word used in one religion may have a vastly different meaning for the other. Religious names, expressions and terms appear similar, but each religion attaches different connotations to those names or terms. Therefore, when the Buddhists hear the Christian message, they interpret those statements according to the Buddhist worldview and belief system. Thus, the Buddhists add something that the Myanmar missionaries did not intend. This creates miscommunication of the gospel.

The fact is that Myanmar Christians have miscommunicated the gospel because they did not know how the terms, expressions, and words they used were interpreted differently by the Burmese Buddhists. For example, when Christians use the word “eternal life,” they mean a life that will be spent eternally in heaven. However, for Burmese Buddhists, “eternal life” is understood as samsara, an endless cycle of lives which are full of suffering. Buddhism is a path discovered by Buddha for liberation of people

from samsara.

What Christians preach about “eternal life” is misconstrued by the Buddhists, who think that Christians are trying to bring them to samsara, a state from which they want to be liberated. If Christians understood the Burmese Buddhist worldview and how the Buddhists interpreted the Christian gospel differently, they would have been able to explain to the Buddhists that the Christian concept “eternal life” is not samsara, characterized by suffering, but an endless life which will be spent in heaven where there is no sorrow, no tears, no suffering, no death and no extinction of body and soul (Revelation 21:4).

In chapter five, we examined terms, expressions, and words which miscommunicate the gospel to the Burmese Buddhists. We discussed such terms and expressions as “Phayar” (God), God as a person, metta (loving-kindness) and the love of God, the wrath of God, the world, heaven, hell, eternal life, condemnation, repentance, confession, salvation or liberation, Jesus and his atonement, and lost souls. We saw how the Buddhists interpret these Christian terms differently based on their worldview. In the future, Myanmar Christians need to do more research in this area in order to discover as many terms as possible which may miscommunicate the gospel. They also need to find better terms for communicating the gospel. By doing

this, Christians will be able to avoid miscommunication of the gospel, and will be able to communicate the gospel more meaningfully to the Burmese people.

In the future, we plan to offer courses on Buddhism and contextualization at our college and seminary in Yangon, so that our students may become familiar with the worldview of the Burmese people and learn to adapt the gospel message to the Buddhist worldview. We will also seek opportunities for our students to be able to observe and participate in Buddhist religious ceremonies, such as thingyan (the water festival or New Year celebration), shinbyu (the initiation ceremony), the harvest festival, the festival of watering the Bo-tree, the Phaung-Daw-Oo pagoda festival, thadingyut (the festival of lights), etc,. We will be able to learn more about the Buddhist worldview by observing these religious ceremonies.

In the past, Christians have been isolated from Buddhist communities. The Christian community was limited and ingrown instead of being extended to their neighbors. The Christian approach to the Burmese Buddhists was centripetal, extracting them from their cultural context to join the Christian community. Due to this practice, Christians failed to establish Christianity within the Burmese cultural context. This also created barriers

between the Christian and the Burmese Buddhist communities. John the Baptist was a great preacher. He had a large audience, but when Jesus came, he pointed to Jesus and asked his audience to follow him, because Jesus must become greater; he himself must become less (John 3:30). Likewise, we should point to Jesus and ask every believer to follow him and worship him from wherever they are. God is omnipresent and he can be worshipped any place in the world.

If Myanmar Christians were to reach the Burmese Buddhists with the gospel and narrow the gap between them, they must extend their Christian community to them. Their approach to the Burmese people must be centrifugal. They need to reach them where they are and establish the church within their community. That is what Jesus wants us to do. He has commissioned us to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). By penetrating into the Buddhist community, Myanmar Christians can shine the light of the gospel. They will also learn more about the worldview of the Burmese people and adapt the message of the gospel to their worldview. In chapter six, we discussed adaptation of the gospel to the Buddhists' notions of life and liberation along with the communication of the gospel from a Christian worldview into another worldview, so that the

message may come meaningful to the people. This is a dialogue with the Buddhist worldview with openness, but taking a firm stand on the truth of the gospel and declaring the beliefs of Christianity unequivocally.

Our past evangelistic approach to the Burmese Buddhists was a one-way communication. Christians were preachers and teachers; the Burmese Buddhists were listeners. There was no attitude of dialogue and openness to the Buddhists. As we studied the work of Adoniram Judson, we learned that his evangelistic approach for the first five years was one-way communication: preaching the gospel to the Burmese Buddhists and trying to convert them to Christianity. This one-way communication brought no result; no Burmese were converted to Christianity during the first five years of his evangelistic effort (1813-1818). Learning lessons from the first five years of his ministry, Judson began to utilize zayat ministry approach (see pages 7-9). In the zayat he did not preach a sermon, which would have been a one-way communication. Instead he listened to the people and engaged in a one-to-one discussion with individual persons, first about the weather, crop conditions, and other matters of mutual interest, then about religion, and then Christianity. This form of two-way communication minimized miscommunication, because the inquirers always had the opportunity to ask questions about anything they did not understand clearly. The outcome of

the zayat ministry was remarkable: hundreds of Burmese Buddhists were won to Christ and his era became the most productive period in the history of missions to the Burmese Buddhists.

In the future, Myanmar Christians need more dialogue with each individual Buddhist before that person can come to accept Jesus Christ as his or her Savior. They need a zayat-like place where they can engage in a dialogue with the Burmese Buddhists. In contemporary Myanmar, an alternative place would be the teashops or the coffee shop. At the teashops, religious matters can be discussed without belligerence or antagonism.

The second reason for failure to communicate the gospel to the Burmese people is the lack of contextualization of Christianity in the Burmese cultural context. As noted in chapter seven, Christianity was brought to Myanmar encased in Western culture. No attempt was made to unpack the gospel from its Western culture and repack it in Burmese culture. Therefore, the Burmese people see Christianity, wrapped in Western culture, as a Western religion which has nothing to do with them. As Western culture dominates in the churches, the lifestyles of Christians and forms of their worship also look similar to those in America and Europe. Practices of Western culture in the churches in Myanmar have thus misrepresented Christianity. Unless Myanmar Christians can contextualize their lifestyles

and forms of worship in the Burmese cultural context, Burmese people will not be able to see Christianity as a religion for all the nations of the world.

In this dissertation, we have focused on adaptation of the message of the gospel to the worldview of the Burmese people, along with contextualization of the lifestyles and forms of Christian worship in the Burmese cultural context. We learned that failure to adapt the message to the worldview of the people brings those people no clear understanding of the message. It is like a seed that fell on the rocky and stony ground and bore no fruit. In other words, communication of the gospel to people with no consideration of their worldview causes miscommunication of the gospel. It is like sowing a seed without preparing the soil. It is imperative for Myanmar Christians to spend time and energy preparing the Burmese people for the gospel. They can carry out this preparation by building relationships with them and by learning the worldview and culture of the Burmese people. When the gospel is presented in terms and forms which are familiar to the Burmese people, it will be more meaningful to them, and a church can be firmly established in their community.

In other words, presenting Christianity in the form of Western culture is like serving meat cooked in the Western way, with Western ingredients. When Burmese were given the meat to eat, it tasted too strong to them. So

only an exceptional few ate the meat of Christianity with its foreign flavor.

What we should do with the meat of Christianity, therefore, is to bring raw meat to Myanmar and cook it in the Burmese way, with Burmese ingredients (hot and spicy). Then the meat will look typically Burmese, smell typically Burmese, and taste typically Burmese. When we offer this kind of meat, the Burmese will certainly savor it. In other words, only when a church is Burmese in its nature can the Burmese people feel at home in Christianity.

Missiological Implications

In this dissertation, we have focused on fitting the gospel message to the categories of the receptor's frame of reference, and also on developing Christianity in a concrete cultural setting. This study also emphasizes the significance of addressing the contemporary situation and utilizing local theological terms, expressions, and cultural forms relevant to a given people. From this study, two missiological implications can be drawn.

Having People Experience Salvation within Their Cultural Settings

We saw that Adoniram Judson's initial purpose in mission was to convert Burmese Buddhists to Christianity and then bring them to his isolated mission station, which was heavily influenced by Western culture. As a matter of fact, no Burmese were converted to Christianity during the

first five years (1813-1818) of his mission work. His mission during these first five years was not successful, primarily due to his ethnocentric attitude. After the first five years, however, he began to utilize the Burmese zayat as a means for communicating the gospel to the Burmese people. Judson was unhappy with the out-of-the-way location of the mission house. He wanted to mingle with the Burmese people and reach them at their own level. As a result, hundreds of Burmese were led to Christ. We learn from this example that failure to express Christianity in a given cultural context not only creates a gap between missionaries and local people, but it also hinders people from becoming believers in Christ.

Cross-cultural witnesses need to make a conscious effort to shift from an ethnocentric approach to a culturally sensitive approach, in order to minister effectively to people. If we are to be effective cross-cultural communicators of the gospel, it is imperative that we move from an ethnocentric perspective to one that acknowledges cultural validity, taking seriously the culture of our host society. This approach is the biblical model. God chose the culture of the Hebrews to convey certain meanings about himself, using cultural forms that were understandable to the Hebrews. The Old Testament is a vivid illustration of how God is willing to work with a culture that is not perfect. God even used heathen culture in order to

communicate his message to the Hebrews. For example, a sacrificial system and a temple were borrowed from heathen cultures, but God used them and gave them new theological meaning. Missionaries need to make use of rituals, myths, and symbols in cultures, filling them with new meaning by supplying the correct theological content. Darrell Whiteman (1983:417) states, “indigenous Christianity involves employing traditional forms to express the new meaning found in Christianity.”

Missionaries must recognize that the good in cultures is evidence of God’s grace, for God is at work in the world. They need to discern the work that God is already doing in a culture, and seek to build on this to bring the gospel of Christ to the people of that culture. To ignore the good already in a culture is to have a distorted view of God’s creation and of the God who is actively involved among all peoples and culture.

The cultural dimension needs to be taken into account in modern missionary endeavor. Missionaries must come to understand and appreciate both the importance of each culture to those born into it, and also the usability of each culture as a vehicle of God’s interaction with human beings. Most of all, missionaries must take pains to see to it that the message communicated by the totality of the mission witness (in word and deed) calls for conversion, not to a new cultural allegiance, but for truly Christian

conversion: new life under the gospel within the cultural context.

Understanding the culture must be a priority when a missionary begins work in a new country. An in-depth study of the culture should be a purposeful, well thought-out and planned part of starting a new work, right alongside all other strategies.

Having People Experience Salvation through Biblical Principles Lived Out by Christians

Burmese Buddhists, as deed-oriented religious believers, assess the validity of a religion in terms of how its adherents live it out in their daily lives. The positive and negative impacts of a religion on the people are seen by Buddhists as the criteria by which the value of a religion is assessed. In the past, Myanmar Christians have failed to demonstrate their Christian faith before non-believers, due to isolation from the larger Buddhist community. Demonstrating the message of the gospel in daily life is the most important task of missionaries. John Wesley (Pierson 1989:8) wrote, “Christianity is essentially a social religion; to turn it into a solitary religion is indeed to destroy it.” When we examine Jesus’ life, we see that his ministries involved acts of social responsibility, mercy and justice, such as healing, feeding the hungry and driving out evil spirits. Jesus’ second commandment says, “love your neighbors as yourself” (Matthew 22:39).

Doing mission requires individual Christians to live out the biblical

standard of their Christian faith, so that people around them can be attracted to their lifestyles and eventually to their faith. It is imperative for the gospel message to be demonstrated through the lives of Christians that identify with the host culture. Social structure and government policies may not change overnight, but new ideas about human life can be built through biblical standards lived out by Christians. Relationships between people can be nurtured through love and empathy expressed by Christians. The life that Christians live with the people of the community is the primary evidence they can present to that community of their faith in Christ. The living reality of Christ among the nations of the world must be demonstrated through Christ-like examples in our daily life. Effective communication must be built on a sense of personal relationships and greater sensitivity to the human situation.

Suggestions for Further Research

In this dissertation, we have studied contextualization of the gospel in the Burmese cultural context. A further question arising from this research is what evangelistic methodologies should be utilized to achieve a better contextualization of the gospel in Myanmar. I suggest that missionaries in Myanmar should utilize contextual evangelistic methodologies for achieving contextualization of the gospel. They need to evaluate their past and present

evangelistic methods to see if these are compatible with the context of the Burmese people. For example, our past evangelistic methods have been predominantly house-to-house and door-to-door Christian witness and roadside preaching. These methodologies represent one-way communication. They seek to bring about repentance through one rapid-fire sermon. This type of one-way communication provokes animosity rather than repentance. As far as we know, no Burmese Buddhists have ever been converted with such a one-time presentation. It takes months, and even years, for a Burmese to be converted.

In the future, Myanmar Christians will need to do further research on contextual evangelistic methodologies and seek to find indigenous media to express the content and the meaning of the gospel to the Burmese people. By doing this, Christians will be able not only to contextualize the past and present evangelistic methods, but also discover better contextual methods for future evangelism.

Conclusion

During my research in Yangon, I was privileged to interview Nyan Lin, an outstanding Burmese evangelist. Nyan Lin was a nationally known Burmese Buddhist monk who was highly respected by U Nu, Ex-Prime Minister. He passed high dhamma sarihyah (teachership in Buddhist

scripture), the highest qualification in training for Buddhist monks. He passed the recitation of the whole Tri-pitaka (the three baskets of the Buddhist canon) in Pali scripture. After his training as a monk he became a lecturer at the Pali University in Yangon. One night, looking at the stars and the moon, he began wondering who created them. In search of the truth, he heard the biblical creation story from Rev. Aung Than, a pastor of the Baptist Church, and was finally led to conversion by the power of the Holy Spirit.

After his conversion, he was disowned and ostracized by his family. Friends avoided him and did not want to associate with him any more. The Buddhist community considered him to be faithless and a traitor to the people, the country, and Buddhism. In spite of great pressures from his family and relatives, he never gave up his faith in Christ.

At the very beginning, Nyan Lin realized that Christians were heavily influenced by Western culture. Because of this Western cultural influence, he could not feel at home in the church. He discovered that practices of Western culture in the church were hindering the Burmese people from becoming believers of Christ. He realized that unless Christianity was contextualized and expressed in the Burmese cultural context, conversion of Burmese people would be nearly impossible.

Later, Nyan Lin was privileged to study at the Myanmar Institute of Theology and became a successful Burmese evangelist and church planter among the Burmese Buddhists. He has his own Bible training center in Yangon where about seventy percent of the students are converts from Buddhism. His Bible training center and the churches he has planted among the Burmese people are typically Burmese. Most of the churches have no seats and chairs except a table arranged for the preacher. Worshippers sit on the floor, men on the right side and women on the left side. That is typical in Burmese culture. No Burmese are intimidated coming to Nyan Lin's churches and the Bible training center, because of his adoption of aspects of Burmese culture in Christianity.

There are two primary reasons for the success of his ministry: (1) he was a Buddhist monk for twenty-five years and well versed in the Buddhist scriptures. He has an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the Myanmar Buddhist worldview. As a result, he is able to adapt the gospel message to their worldview and present the gospel meaningfully to the people, and (2) he has utilized a contextual approach in reaching out to the Burmese people, and has planted a church within the Burmese cultural context. Myanmar Christians should follow Nyan Lin's example if they are to win Burmese Buddhists to Christ.

APPENDIX A

Interview Questions for Recent New Burmese Converts

1. Please state your name, age and occupation
2. Contact With the Gospel Message
 - (1) At what age did you first hear the gospel message?
 - (2) How did you come to hear it?
 - (3) As a Buddhist, how did you feel when you first heard the Christian message?
3. Attraction of Christianity
 - (1) External factors
 - (a) Were there some external factors that make you more responsive to Christian faith? If yes, please check all that apply. Sickness _____, Death of loved one _____, Education _____ or others _____.
 - (b) Are there particular experiences in your life which made you look beyond Buddhism to Christianity?
 - (c) What positive impact does the Church of Myanmar make in your life? Please share some stories about its influence in your life.
 - (d) As a child and/or as a youth, how often did you associate with Christians?
 - (e) Was this mostly a positive or a negative influence on your life?
 - (f) Which persons most stimulated your interest in becoming a Christian? Pastor? _____ Friends? _____ Neighbor? _____ Evangelists? _____ and others? _____
 - (g) What were the characteristics of the persons who most simulated your interest in becoming a Christian? Personality? _____ Caring for others? _____ Explained Bible? _____ Relationship? _____ Caring for me? _____ Insistence? _____.
 - (h) Were there doubts about Buddhism that made you seek to know Christianity?
 - (2) Internal factors
 - (a) What aspect of Christian teaching attracted you?
 - (b) What book of the Bible did you read first?
 - (c) What book or passages of the Bible touched your heart?
 - (d) What part did the Bible play in your becoming a Christian?

4. Claiming Your Own Faith

- (1) How old were you when you became a Christian?
- (2) Is there a particular event or occasion you think of as your conversion or critical turning point in your relationship with Christ? Yes, _____
No, _____.
- (a) If "Yes," how old were you at this time? _____ (may/may not be same age as # 1).
- (b) Where were you when this happened? _____
- (b) What particular person most helped you arrive at this decision or discovery?
- (c) What was it about this person that most helped you make this decision? [Questions of (f), and (g) in number 3 can be used here]

5. The Experience Remembered

- (1) If you can remember, what were you looking for or seeking? in other words, why did you become a Christian?
- (2) Is there any specific way you sense God had been leading you to this decision?
- (3) What special insights or feelings did you experience when you encountered the gospel message?
- (4) How do you generally refer to this event in your life? What do you call it? How do you describe it?

6. Prior to becoming a Christian, what circumstances (political, social, economic, cultural barriers) or what persons, if any, kept you from becoming a Christian?

7. How did you overcome these obstacles or negative influences to become a Christian?

8. Your Life Since Becoming a Christian

- (1) Since becoming a Christian, have there been times when your faith has been severely tested or even abandoned? (Please explain)
- (2) Have you had additional special experiences that have enlarged or confirmed your faith? (Please explain)
- (3) As a Christian, what are your greatest longings or concerns today? (Please explain)
- (4) Would you consider yourself a growing Christian?
- (5) What helps you in your growth? In what ways?
- (6) What hinders your growth?
- (7) How did the Christian faith help meet your needs? (Please explain)
- (8) As a convert from Buddhism, what are the teachings of Buddhism which are still relevant to you?

- (9) If you were giving suggestions about how the churches could be more effective in communicating to Burmese Buddhists, what would they be?
- (10) What should the churches stop doing in order to better attract Burmese Buddhists?
- (11) What should the churches start doing in order to attract Burmese Buddhists?
- (12) Is there anything else about your story of faith that you would like to share?

APPENDIX B

Interview Questions for Buddhist Monks

1. Information about yourself (age, education and position).
 2. At what age did you become a monk?
 3. Why did you become a monk?
 4. Why did you choose Buddhism as your own religion instead of others?
(Please explain)
 5. Have you ever studied Christianity? If yes, did you find interesting teachings in the Bible? Do you see any similarities between Christianity and Buddhism? What are they?
 6. Do you think Christianity is a Western religion? If yes, please explain.
 7. How do you regard Myanmar Christians? Are they good citizens of Myanmar?
 8. Do you think/see Myanmar Christians are influenced by Western culture? Please explain.
 9. What do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of Buddhism?
 10. What do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of Christianity?
- Buddhism
11. What is truth in Buddhism? Is there an unchangeable principle in Buddhism? If yes, what would that be?
 12. Are the Four Noble Truths and the teachings of Buddha impermanent? Could everything be impermanent? Please explain.
 13. Do you think Buddhism is better than Christianity? If yes, how do you see it as better than Christianity?
 14. Any other comments you want to make about Christianity.

APPENDIX C

Interview Statements for Pastors, Lay Christians, and Lay Buddhists

What is your response to the following statements regarding lifestyles of Myanmar Christians and Christian worship?

Lifestyles of Myanmar Christians

1. Christians prefer Burmese dress to Western dress.
2. Christians people are modest (moral) in dress.
3. Christians love Burmese songs, both traditional and contemporary.
4. Christians use polite Burmese language.
5. Christians employ Burmese etiquette in daily living.
6. Christians respect their parents and elders.
7. Christians use the Burmese terminology in addressing monks, parents and elders.
8. Christian boys and girls adhere to the accepted Burmese patterns of behavior with the opposite sex.
9. Christians prefer Burmese food and prefer to eat with their fingers in the Burmese way.
10. Christians are good and loyal citizens.
11. Christians enjoy Burmese sports, like can ball, htoke si taw, etc.,.
12. Christians are good neighbors
13. Christians are concerned about the welfare of their communities and nation.
14. Christians value Burmese traditions, and customs.
15. Christians love Burmese music and can play Burmese music instrument well.
16. Christians love Burmese traditional dances.

17. Christians love Burmese folktales and are familiar with most of them.
18. Christians love Burmese poetry and can compose excellent Burmese poetry.
19. Christians enjoy Burmese puppet shows.
20. Christians enjoy Burmese plays and dramas.
21. Christians prefer Burmese architecture to other kinds of architecture.
22. Christians respect and use the Burmese calendar.
23. Christians greet one another and non-Christians in the Burmese way.
24. Christians are well versed in Burmese literature.
25. Christians are familiar with Burmese history and tradition.
26. Christians value traditional Burmese art, sculpture and architecture.
27. Christians should celebrate Burmese New Year.
28. Other suggestions you have on this subject.

Christian Worship

27. We should build Christian churches in Burmese structure rather than in Western architecture.
28. Christians should sit on the floor in Burmese fashion when they worship.
29. Christian preachers should sit when they preach as most Eastern teachers do.
30. Christians should sing in Burmese musical instruments in Christian worship.
31. Men and women should sit separately in the church in the Burmese way.
32. Christians should remove footwear upon entering the church.
33. Burmese monks shave their head and wear saffron robe. Christian preachers should wear some distinctive dress also.
34. Christians should wear some kind of dress like the Buddhists when they attend the church.

35. In Myanmar, religious leaders are expected to live an austere life.

Christian pastors and evangelists should adopt some form of austerity.

36. Other suggestions you have on this subject.

APPENDIX D

Interviewees

Aye Ko is a recent Burmese convert from Buddhism. He married a Lisu Christian girl in Putao, northern Myanmar and lived in a Christian community for three years. Finally, Christian witness led him to Christ. He currently studies at Bethany Bible Institute in Putao and is preparing to be a missionary to his own people.

Khin Maung Aye is a Burmese convert from Buddhism. He came to Putao and taught at an elementary school in a Christian village. He married a Rawang Christian girl and later became a believer. He studies at Bethany Bible Institute in Putao and is preparing to be a missionary.

Maung Kyaw Maung is a Burmese convert. He accepted Jesus at the age of twenty-five. He studies at Eastern Bible Institute in Yangon. He is planning to preach the gospel to his own people after graduation from the college.

Myun Khin is a Burmese Buddhist, a good friend of mine. We used to live in the same apartment building for three years and became close friends.

Nyan Lin is a Burmese evangelist, converted from Buddhism 13 years ago. He used to be a nationally known Burmese Buddhist monk who was highly respected by U Nu, Ex-Prime Minister. He had been a Buddhist monk for twenty-five years. Today he is the most successful Burmese evangelist, planting churches among the Burmese Buddhists.

Sayadaw Pandana is a Burmese Buddhist monk, head of a monastery in Eastern Insein Township, Yangon. He is a lecturer at Yangon Pali University.

Saw Nwaik Man Han is a Shan Christian evangelist, converted from Buddhism 12 years ago. His parents are strong believers in Buddhism. He graduated from Myanmar Bible Institute and became an evangelist, bringing the gospel to his own people.

Tan Naing is a Burmese young man, a recent convert from Buddhism. His parents are strong believers in Buddhism. He is a members of Lyaing Tha Ya Christian Church.

Tin Maung is a Burmese convert from Buddhism. He came to Putao, northern Myanmar and taught at one of the elementary schools in a Lisu Christian village. He fell in love with a Lisu girl and later married her. As a result, he became a believer in Christ. He resigned from his teaching career and currently studies God's word at Eastern Bible Institute in Yangon. He is planning to bring the gospel to his own people in central Myanmar.

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