NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY (POTCHEFSTROOM)

In association with

Greenwich School of Theology, UK

Theological Education and the Effect of Tribal Identity upon Christian Unity and Mission in Burma

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For the thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Missiology at the Potchefstroom Campus of North-West University

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November 2016

ABSTRACT

Many Burmese are isolationists by default because of their strong ethnic and tribal sensitivities, compounded by extended socio-political repression. This insularity is often undiminished even among Christians, leading to the impoverishment of both the local churches and the greater body of Burmese believers, by extension. Biblical theology militates against any form of ethnic factionalism. Therefore, the local churches must actively seek to interact with one another, insofar as they differ only in tribal or ethnic composition, as opposed to significant doctrinal disparity. One way in which this issue may be addressed is through holistic theological education within the country in a missiological context. This thesis investigates the origins and development of tribalism in Burma, contrasts tribal factionalism with biblical principles of Christian unity, evaluates the extent to which factionalism has impacted the Burmese church, and considers how holistic theological education can be instrumental in addressing this problem. The original contribution to knowledge in this thesis is the cause and the extent of disunity among a number of small Reformed churches in Burma.

Keywords:

Burma, Myanmar, Tribes, Factionalism, Isolationism, Christianity, Reformed, Unity, Theological Education, Missions

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER ONE

1.0   Introduction

1.1   Background and Problem Statement

1.1.1. Background

While consisting overwhelmingly of Buddhist culture, the nation of Burma does possess a Christian minority that persists despite facing varying degrees of persecution over the years (see Sakhong, 2001:525-556; Uca Newsreporter, 2013; Win, 2000:170-175). Both the Buddhist majority and the Christian minority reflect the reality that Burma is a tribal nation, with a number of different people groups within its borders. The military government has reported that there were officially 135 ethnic groups, which are categorized into eight national ethnic races: Burman, Mon, Karen, Kayah, Shan, Kachin, Chin, and Rakhine (Kramer, 2010:52), though these divisions are far from universally endorsed by the tribes. These tribes are, as often as not, in some manner of conflict with one another (South, 2008).

The unfortunate result of this reality is that many churches in Burma, following the culture, are decidedly tribal and insular; that is, there is very little interaction between churches of different tribal backgrounds. Surely, the common bond of faith should be thought to supersede such division (Jn 17:22ff; 1 Cor 12:12ff; Eph 4:1-7). In fact, it has been noted that the church may be thought of as a "supranation" which transcends cultural (or tribal) division. However, the real question that must be addressed is this,

"How are the people of God from various cultures [or tribes] united in light of the natural inclination to resist unity?" (Pocock, Van Rheenen & McConnell, 2005:32). This "natural inclination to resist unity" is at the heart of the internal dilemma that must be confronted and healed if the church in Burma is ever to experience the essence of true Christian fellowship in the global church, beyond their respective communities.

There are a number of challenges to the realization of healthy, collective growth of the churches in Burma, not least of which are the ongoing political, social, and religious obstacles and the almost crippling financial needs that define the budgets of most indigenous churches and their parishioners. These obstacles, however, are external and largely beyond the control of the churches themselves; such is not the case of the self-constructed obstacle of tribal divisions, as imposed by the leaders of each tribe (Kipgen, 2010:163-173; Kuhn, 2013; Wong & Kessel, 2012).

The authority of these tribal leaders cannot be overstated. In a discussion of tribal leadership within Islamic traditions, Zaidi (2010:134) makes an assessment that is equally relevant in all tribal cultures, writing that tribal barriers serve to protect "the familiar cocoons of cultural identity" and that, when these barriers are threatened, the tribe experiences a "weakening of [the] central genealogical principle of common descent, which again engenders a loss of identity." This identity vis-à-vis tribalism is an ancient reality in Burma, as well. Further, each tribe is subdivided – first into clans and then into family groups (which can extend quite broadly, as well as deeply). Each tribe, just as with each clan and family, is subject to a hierarchy of leadership and authority. One of the principle functions of this hierarchy is to maintain the status quo or, the

"cocoons of cultural identity." Thus, when anyone from the tribe (such as Christian pastors) seeks to tear at this genealogical fabric (by, for instance, seeking education in another tribe's theological institution), the tribal leaders may feel compelled to intervene. This intervention perpetuates the sense of tribal factionalism and further inhibits the potential for a trans-tribal unity of the Christian community. The present writer has been directly involved in this dilemma: working in Burma with Christian leaders from different tribes, who were unwilling to study and/or serve together, due to suspicions and concerns brought about by their tribal differences. This involvement, in fact, precipitated the desire to conduct this study. While there is a dearth of literature supporting this reality, the present work will test the writer's personal observation through empirical research of a number of small Reformed tribal churches in Burma.

The *gemeinschaft* of the Christian community should be as palpably real as that which unites blood relatives. Jesus, in fact, indicated that it should even surpass earthly bonds (Mt 12:46-50). This has not been the case in practice among many of the Christians in Burma, with tribes often operating in isolation from one another. Breaking through this traditional obstacle will certainly not be without its challenges. However, unlike the ecumenical attempts among Christian denominations, which usually result in a dilution of doctrine to the least common denominator (Carson, 1991:568), many of the pastors and churches in Burma, which stem from Reformed roots, already agree in principle on all essential matters of faith, subscribing either to the Westminster Confession of Faith or the 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith. All that remains is to elevate that faith to a place of primacy, where tribal distinctions may still be acknowledged, but not wielded as a weapon of division.

1.1.2. Problem Statement

It has been argued that "Burma has never been a popular subject for academic research" (Selth, 2010:401). However, this reflects Burma studies from the academic community outside of the nation. Selth (2010:402) continues, "Arguably, there is a long tradition of indigenous Burmese scholarship, dating back to the eleventh century." To the extent that it has been studied, there has often been a decidedly distorted perception of early Burmese history. It has been suggested that, for many centuries prior to British colonialism, the culture of Burma was essentially static (Harvey, 1967:249; Aung-Thwin, 1981:39-40). Lieberman (1987:162) rightly challenges such a perspective as suggesting that the British came across "an exceptionally insular society that had shown itself incapable of creative growth." In fact, this myopic perspective ignores the fact that, within this insular society, there were ancient divisions already present. There is evidence that tribal relationships existed at least as far back as the Pagan Dynasty of the ninth and tenth centuries (Aung-Thwin, 2008a:694). The historiography of Burma has often neglected to accurately assess these divisions because Burma was, indeed, insular. Nevertheless, a proper study of tribalism would seem to require inclusion of the pre-colonial period, for, as Kane points out (1986:223), colonialism may have only a parenthetical effect, holding tribalism in stasis while the tribes must "live together in some semblance of unity." While Kane is specifically discussing an increase of tribalism in Africa; nevertheless, the principle of tribalism vis-à-vis colonialism obtains in our context, as well. In a post-colonial period, tribal identity may again be prominent over national (or any other) identity, due to the influence of the worldviews entrenched in many of the tribal traditions. It is the goal of this research to

consider the history of Burma in light of the impact of these worldviews and tribal traditions.

In Burma, there was a secondary period of essential tribal stasis as the colonial "unifier" was replaced by a military junta that harshly imposed an even greater degree of "unity." Now that the iron fist of the junta is purporting to have yielded to a freer, less isolated society, it is not unreasonable to consider whether there will be some measure of return to the degree of tribal identification that prevailed in pre-colonial times. Because pre-colonial tribalism has not been adequately included in the social equation, this potentiality has not been fully addressed. Perhaps it has been largely dismissed as irrelevant to the discussion. Or, as Lieberman argues (1987:164), "the landscape seems flat because it has been viewed from an exceptionally great distance." It is the goal of this research to view the "landscape" of Burma's tribal divisions, especially as they relate to Christian missions, from a much closer vantage point.

In the history of Christian missions in Burma, there is evidence that Western missionaries, at times, exacerbated the divisions between tribes, even if only by tacitly overlooking the reality of intertribal conflict. Perhaps, as one writer (Leigh, 2011:61) notes, missionaries "chose issues that offended their own proclivities rather than the most urgent needs of Burmese society." Perhaps, the reason was less internal, and their focus was simply on the people among whom they laboured, with no clear vision of the nation around them. It is true that much missions work in Burma took place in the peripheral and isolated regions of the hill country (Neill, 1990:248), and thus it may well be that those who served there were less likely, geographically, to interact with other

people groups. It is the goal of this research to assess the manner in which, and the degree to which, historic Protestant missions reinforced tribal identity in Burma.

The very existence of denominationalism attests to the fact of a divided Christian church in the world. This division is undergirded, of course, by divergent theological convictions via a variety of potential divisors. For instance, there are considerable resources available that address historical occasions of disunity in the global Christian community because of theologies of race (Engdahl, 2012; Goodwin, 1984; Harvey, 2012), economics (McConnell, 2000), and even political ideologies (Patterson & Lenerville, 2011). Much can be learned from these discussions, which bear directly upon the issue of unity in the Burmese churches and theological institutions. Yet there remains a lacuna with regard to the disunifying effect of tribalism, particularly as it is expressed in Burma.

As the nation of Burma is taking steps toward reform and shrugging off isolationism in favour of opening up to the outside world (Mieno, 2013; Nilsen, 2013), so the Burmese church is increasingly interacting with the broader international Christian community. This will undoubtedly lead toward a growth in missiological consideration of the unique elements present in the Burmese context. There are certain elements that are common to many developing nations such as poverty, disease, and illiteracy. However, tribal divisions in Burma present unique challenges for missions, which require comprehensive and meaningful investigation. It is the primary goal of this research to address this particular missiological concern.

1.2 Main Research Question

What is the effect of tribalism in Burma upon Christian unity in the local church and missional outreach, and could it be addressed in theological education?

Sub-questions:

1. What factors contributed to the historic development of Burmese tribalism?

2. What has been characteristic of the historic interaction of Christianity in Burma vis-à-vis tribalism?

3. What are the factors contributing to the persistence of tribal factionalism?

4. What is the biblical and theological perspective of factionalism?

5. How has tribalism affected Christian unity in Burma and how can theological education be instrumental in addressing the impact of tribalism in local churches and in a missional context?

1.3 Aim and Objectives

1.3.1 Aim

The aim of this thesis is to investigate the origins and development of tribalism in Burma; to contrast tribal factionalism with biblical principles of Christian unity; and to evaluate the extent to which factionalism has impacted the Burmese church in its character and mission, in order to properly consider how theological education can be instrumental in addressing this problem in a missional context.

1.3.2. Objectives

The specific objectives of this study are to:

- study the foundation of the problem; that is, how, why, and when tribal exclusivism/isolationism emerged in the culture of Burma;

- study the relationship of missions and the Burmese church to the problem of ethnic factionalism;

- assess the contemporary situation in Burma vis-à-vis the persistence of tribal factionalism;

- analyze the problem of ethnic factionalism biblically and theologically and missiologically; and

- evaluate how tribalism has affected Christian unity in Burma and how it should be addressed missionally in holistic theological education.

1.4   Central Theoretical Argument

The central theoretical argument of this study is that holistic theological education – equipping students with knowledge, ministry skills, and character formation – should contribute positively toward Christian unity and the transformation of the culture of tribal factionalism in Burma, thereby assisting churches in their well-being and outreach.

1.5   Methodology

The historical, theological, and biblical aspects of this study are conducted from the perspective of the Reformed tradition and the following methods are used to answer the various research questions:

- In order to evaluate the factors which contributed to the growth and development of tribal factionalism in Burma, including the role of competing worldviews and traditional beliefs, an historical analysis will be conducted and existing, relevant literature will be assessed. This will properly situate the main research problem by establishing how, when, and why factionalism emerged in the culture.

- In order to evaluate the factors which contributed to the growth and development of tribal factionalism in the Burmese church, an historical analysis will be conducted. This process will serve to establish the relationship of the church to the main research problem.

- In order to define the biblical and theological principles regarding unity and tribal factionalism, the applicable parts of Scripture will be identified and exegeses of them will be conducted. The method for exegesis is the grammatical-historical method (Berkhof, 2003; Poythress, 1999) and literature study by comparing the views in standard commentaries. The method of theological investigation will be confined to the Reformed tradition.

- In order to evaluate the factors contributing to persistent tribal factionalism in Burma, in general, and in the Burmese church, in particular, empirical research conducted in Burma will augment a literature analysis and will be both

quantitative and qualitative in nature. The quantitative research shall consist of statistical data, gathered through questionnaires distributed among three tribal communities in Burma – Chin, Karen, and Kachin – to assess the perspectives of the participants, which will include four pastors from each tribe, as well as a control group from each tribe consisting of four Christian tribal members with no leadership roles in the tribe or in the church, with preference given to females and/or young adults. The questions, together with the resultant statistical data, shall be included in an appendix to this thesis. Though only 4.9 percent of Burmese people are identified as Christian, these three tribes possess the greatest concentrations of Christians among the many people groups in Burma, with 30 percent of Karen reported as Christian, 70 percent of Chin, and as many as 95 percent of Kachin, according to the most recent (1983) census (Steinberg, 2010). Qualitative data shall be gathered by means of personal interviews with eight representatives of the three tribes. Each of these interviews shall be in the form of loosely-structured conversations, consisting of a series of open, closed, and contingency questions (Babbie, 2012:255ff), designed to elicit the subject's personal beliefs related to tribal identity. It is believed that this data will serve as microcosms to provide insight into the issue of tribal identity in the greater evangelical Burmese culture, as these three tribes best represent the presence of Christianity in Burma at this time. At the very least, this research would provide an original contribution to knowledge for the missiological community with credible insight into the Chin, Kachin, and Karen tribes.

- In order to evaluate how the isolationist aspects of tribal identity could be addressed in the missional church through holistic theological education, a literature analysis will be conducted and interpreted in light of the results from the above-referenced empirical research.

1.6   Chapter Divisions

1.0   Introduction

2.0   Factors that Contributed to the Growth and Development of Tribal Factionalism in Burma

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7.1   Introduction

7.2   Missiological Objectives in Burma

7.3   Theological Education and Unity in Burma

7.4   Conclusions

8.0   Conclusion

Note: For the purposes of consistency, the name "Burma" will be employed throughout this paper, rather than "Myanmar." Additionally, and in accordance with present academic usage, the term "Burmese" will be used herein to identify those who live in Burma, while "Burman" will be used to identify those of the majority ethnic group in Burma.

1.7   Schematic Correspondence between 1.2, 1.3 and 1.5

Research Questions	Aim & Objectives	Methodology
What is the effect of tribalism in Burma upon Christian unity in the local church and missional outreach, and could it be addressed in theological education?	The aim of this thesis is to investigate the origins and development of tribalism in Burma; to contrast tribal factionalism with biblical principles of Christian unity; and to evaluate the extent to which factionalism has impacted the Burmese church in its character and mission, in order to properly consider how theological education can be instrumental in addressing this problem in a missional context.	The historical, theological, and biblical aspects of this study are conducted from the perspective of the Reformed tradition and the following methods are used to answer the various research questions:
What factors contributed to the historic development of Burmese tribalism?	To study the foundation of the problem; that is, how, why, and when tribal exclusivism/isolationism emerged in the culture of Burma	In order to evaluate the factors which contributed to the growth and development of tribal factionalism in Burma, including the role of competing worldviews and traditional beliefs, an historical analysis will be conducted and existing, relevant literature will be assessed. This will properly situate the main research problem by establishing how, when, and why factionalism emerged in the culture.

What has been characteristic of the historic interaction of Christianity in Burma vis-à-vis tribalism?	To study the relationship of missions and the Burmese church to the problem of ethnic factionalism	In order to evaluate the factors which contributed to the growth and development of ethnic factionalism in the Burmese church, an historical analysis will be conducted. This process will serve to establish the relationship of the church to the main research problem.
What are the factors contributing to the persistence of tribal factionalism?	To assess the contemporary situation in Burma vis-à-vis the persistence of tribal factionalism	In order to evaluate the factors contributing to persistent tribal isolationism in Burma, in general, and in the Burmese church, in particular, empirical research conducted in Burma will augment a literature analysis and will be both quantitative and qualitative in nature
What is the biblical and theological perspective of factionalism?	To analyze the problem of tribal factionalism biblically and theologically	In order to define the biblical and theological principles regarding unity and ethnic factionalism, the applicable parts of Scripture will be identified and exegeses of them will be made. The method for exegesis is the grammatical-historical method (Berkhof, 2003; Poythress, 1999). The method of theological investigation will be confined to the Reformed tradition.

| How has tribalism affected Christian unity in Burma and how should it be addressed in missional outreach and in theological education? | To evaluate how tribalism has affected Christian unity in Burma and how should it be addressed missionally in holistic theological education | In order to evaluate how the isolationist aspects of tribal identity could be addressed in the missional church through holistic theological education, a literature analysis will be conducted and interpreted in light of the results from the above-referenced empirical research, which data shall be subjected to analysis, interpretation and synthesis. |

Figure 1: Burma: Geo-Political Divisions (Karen Human Rights Group)

Figure 2: Burma: Ethno-Linguistic Divisions (Karen Human Rights Group)
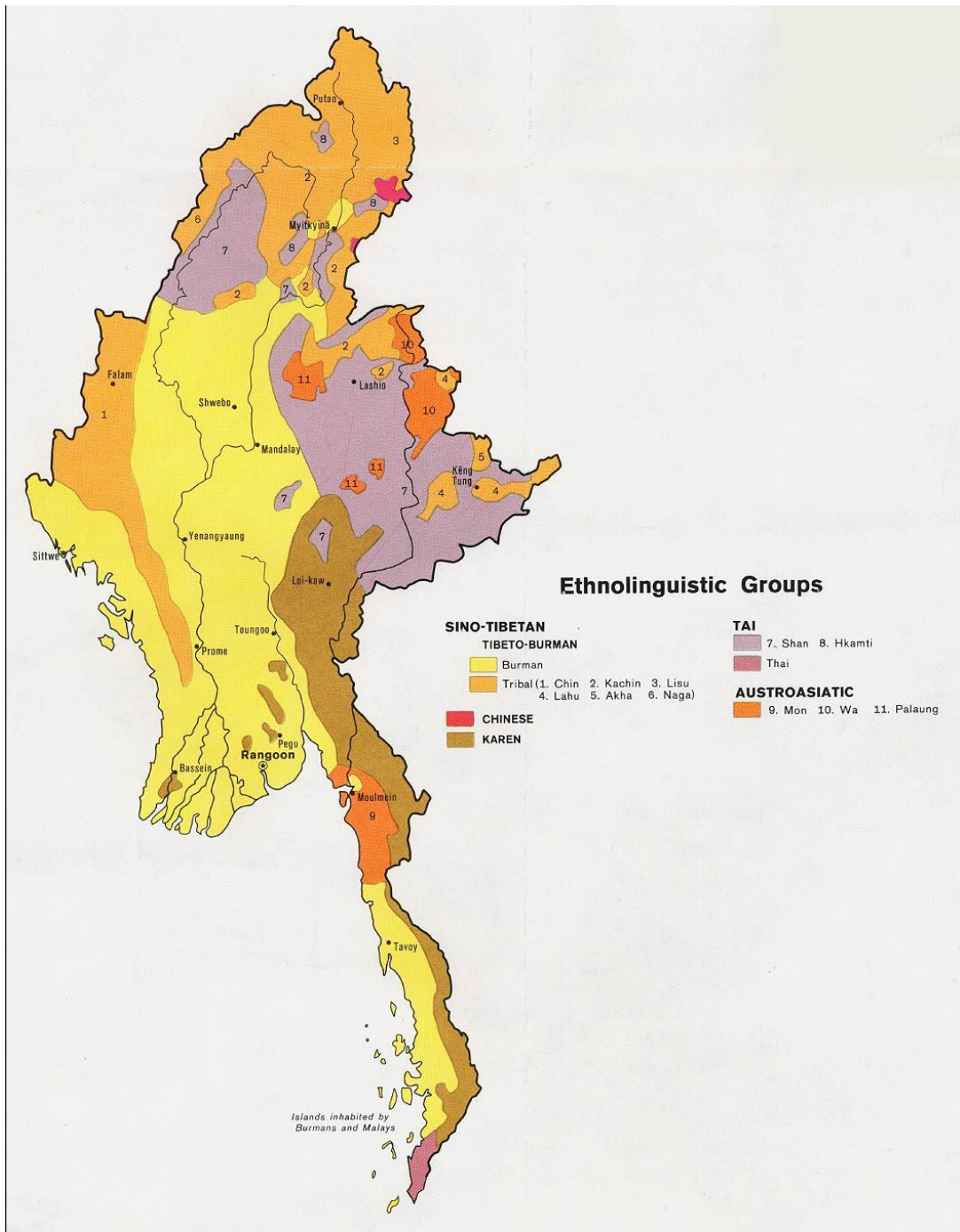
CHAPTER TWO

2.0 Contributing Factors to the Emergence of Tribal Factionalism

2.1 Introduction

The main research question of this study is to consider the effect of tribal factionalism in Burma upon Christian unity in the local church and missional outreach, and to explore how such factionalism might be addressed in theological education. To do this, the answer to the first research sub-question must identify the factors that contributed to the historic development of tribal factionalism in Burma, generally (see 1.5). This chapter presents a historical, anthropological survey of Burma, with a particular view toward identifying the principle tribes and situating them in their historic context.

2.2 Historical Background

2.2.1 Early History (1044-1885)

The *Maha Radza Weng*, or the Chronicles of the Kings of Burma, presents a fanciful account of the earliest history of Burma, inextricably tied to the Buddhist concept of the Brahmin and the fabled character of Gautama (cited in Phayre, 1867:13). In fact, the very name "Burma" has etymological roots in the word "Brahma." As Phayre (1867:13) surmised, "These legends constitute … the foundation of the authority, temporal and spiritual, of the Burmese kings." These early stories have surreal and mythological elements, but the history gains surer footing by the time of the Pagan Dynasty of the

eleventh century. Hall (1960:7) suggests that the stories in the Chronicles are merely "copies of Indian legends taken from Sanskrit or Pali originals." During this time, Buddhist missionaries from India were bringing their religion to the largely animistic tribes which inhabited the region bordered roughly by Assam and Bengal in modern India to the west and China and Siam (modern Thailand) to the east. Over the ensuing centuries, various kingdoms and dynasties ruled over some (but never all) of the disparate tribes. These kingdoms are traditionally classified into four major historical periods: the Pagan Period (1044-1287), the Ava Period (1364-1555), the Toungoo Period (1531-1752), and the Konbaung Period (1752-1855), with the intervening period between the Pagan and Ava Periods (1287-1364) consisting of historically significant, semi-autonomous city-states, most notably the Myinsaing, Sagaing, and Pinya kingdoms. The Ava and Toungoo Periods overlap because the Ava Dynasty was effectively overtaken in 1527 by the Confederation of Shan States and continued to function merely as a vassal state to the northern Shan, who were, in turn, defeated by the Toungoo kingdom.

These divisions are somewhat arbitrary and have been challenged as inadequate, most notably by Aung-Thwin (1981:2):

> Historians of Burma trained in the 19th century western tradition of classifying history into manageable segments confined by dates, have dominated the discipline since the inception of western education in Burma. Their arbitrary divisions of Burmese history into four 'periods' have long been accepted as the way of viewing pre-colonial, monarchical Burma.

Aung-Thwin (1981:3) goes on to argue that the pre-colonial period "should be viewed as one entity" [however, see Lieberman's critique of Thwin (1987:162)]. There are certainly concerns with imposing strict divisions upon human history. However, as this thesis is not primarily (or really even secondarily) a history in the fullest sense of the word, but merely utilizes broad historical themes in order to properly situate the issues of tribal factionalism and Christian unity, these divisions serve well toward that end and are thus employed throughout.

2.2.1.1 Pagan Period (1044-1287)

Though the city of Pagan was founded at least two hundred years earlier, the Pagan Dynasty began with the ascendency of the Burmans in the eleventh century and the kingdom of Anawrahta, who reigned from 1044-1077. Anawrahta was an empire-builder, who set out to expand his kingdom soon after beginning his reign. This he did by subjugating the Shan and, most significantly, by defeating Mon King Manuha at Thaton in AD 1057, thus conquering the Mon tribe to the south. As a consequence of this victory, the Burmans captured many Mon intellectuals, artisans, and priests, bringing them to Pagan, where they assimilated much of the Mon culture and, most significantly, Theravada Buddhism, which became the national religion. Some historians challenge the traditional assertion that Buddhism was introduced into Pagan with the sack of Thaton by Anawrahta in the eleventh century. Tun, for instance, argues that the Burmans were originally acquainted with the religion when they interacted with the Mon in the ninth century and that there was a significant Buddhist presence in Pagan long before to Thaton War (Tun, 1988:23-24).

While the Pagan Period is especially significant for the modern Burmese with regards to its culture and religion and has been, in fact, called the "greatest period in their history" (Aung, 1967:62), it would only last for slightly more than two centuries. Tun points out that the Pagan Dynasty "broke up under attacks from without and centrifugalism from within" (Tun, 1959:119), while Aung suggests that the decline of the dynasty was "merely a natural process of exhaustion and decay in a great empire" and due, in part, to poor leadership, as the "dynasty itself was able to produce only weaklings, who tried to hide their inadequacy by a show of arrogance" (Aung, 1967:63). Inadequate, indeed, was their response to the invading Mongols in the late thirteenth century.

In 1287, Kublai Khan led his army south from China and sacked the Burman capital at Pagan. Khan had designs to make Burma a Chinese vassal (Hall, 1960:25), but the harsh weather prompted a re-evaluation and change of heart. Instead, the Mongols loaded up the spoils from the city and simply abandoned Pagan. Nevertheless, the dissolution of the Burman kingdom was achieved, reduced to two minor kingdoms in 1315: Sagaing and Pinya. Meanwhile, the Mon reasserted their role in the south at Pegu and the Shan began to exert control in the north.

2.2.1.2   Ava Period (1364-1555)

The period of the Ava Kingdom is often discussed jointly with the loosely cotemporaneous Mon kingdom in Hanthawaddy Pegu in the south and the Arakan Kingdom in the west. However, these have been omitted from this historical sketch in

the interest of presenting a semi-fluid narrative. Those aspects of these people groups, which are germane to this study, will be addressed in subsequent sections.

During this intervening time, known as the Ava Period, Thadominbya, king of Sagaing, founded the city of Ava. It was situated at the great westward bend in the Irrawaddy River across from Sagaing, 174 kilometers north of Pagan. The location was critical, as it provided both access to river trade and to extensive irrigated rice fields. Thadominbya had a canal dug that connected the bend of the Irrawaddy and the adjoining Myitnge River, thus turning the city "into a makeshift island" (Aung-Thwin, 2012:110).

Thadominbya was a descendant of the Shan leader, Thihathu, who was co-founder, with his two brothers, of the Myinsaing Kingdom, which came into power after the collapse of the Pagan dynasty. Though Aung-Thwin (1996) stridently objects to the historical identification of Thihathu and his brothers as Shan, there remain compelling voices on the other side of the debate who, with qualification, justify identifying Thihathu as Shan (Aung, 1967:72-73; Harvey, 1967:76; Luce, 1970:280; Tun, 1959:121). However, unlike the animistic Shan of the northern *mongs* (city-states), the Shan colony at Myinsaing were Buddhists and were therefore somewhat more closely identified with the Buddhist Burmans (Harvey, 1967:79; Tun, 1988:121). Tun (1959:121) emphasizes that they were, in fact, "thoroughly Burmanized." Thadominbya dreamed of reuniting the Burmans, Mon, and Shan in one kingdom. Though his dream would never be realized, due primarily to ongoing conflicts between Ava and Hanthawaddy Pegu in the south, the Ava Dynasty played an important role in the cultural history of Burma, producing a number of treasured political and literary figures (including celebrated women poets in a

male-dominated society), as well as artists and craftsmen, responsible for a host of temples and monasteries. The Dynasty, though never controlling Lower Burma, achieved dominance in the north and has been variously described as "an age of romance and chivalry" (Aung, 1967:97) and a "model Buddhist kingdom by its peers" (Aung-Thwin, 2012:112).

The decline of this "model" kingdom came about when "remote" and "immediate" factors intersected, triggering an inevitable decline, or what Aung-Thwin calls a "critical mass" (2012:113). One of the remote factors, according to Aung (1967:114; Aung-Thwin, 2011:13), was Buddhist soteriology, "As long as the merit-path to salvation remained the primary social and political ideology of Ava state and society[,] wealth continued to flow to the religious sector," the *Sangha*, resulting in a financial crisis for the state. The immediate factor in the decline of Ava was the attack from the Shan of the north, as a confederation of Shan *mongs* collaborated to seize control of Ava in 1527. Though Ava would continue to function under a series of *swabwas* (Shan rulers) for several years, it would ultimately be reclaimed under the Burman rule of Toungoo king, Bayinnaung, in 1555.

2.2.1.3   Toungoo Period (1531-1752)

From the time of Pagan's fall to the Mongols, the Burmans had felt displaced. While many Burmans were welcome at and active in Ava, the fact remained that Ava was a kingdom ruled by a dynasty of Burmanized Shan, and Shan held the most important posts in the army and in the administration (Aung, 1967:81). Thus, during the

intervening period of the Ava dynasty, many Burmans had made their home at Toungoo, roughly 350 kilometres south of Ava. Though Toungoo was regarded by the Shan and the Mon as "an up-start little kingdom" (Aung, 1967:104) a mere four years after the defeat of Ava in 1527, the Toungoo dynasty emerged to accomplish the failed goal of Thadominbya: namely, reuniting the Burmans, Mon, and Shan in a single kingdom, which would, in fact, become one of the largest ever in the history of Southeast Asia.

Under the first two kings of the Toungoo Period (Tabinshewhti and Bayinnaung), the Burmans would rise again to pre-eminence in Burma. Tabinshewhti (r. 1531-1550), who assumed the throne at fourteen years of age, quickly set about expanding his kingdom. Rich in a host of coveted commodities, Burma was increasingly becoming a desired trading partner for Europe, which "was hungry for the spices, the perfumes the silks, and the precious stones of Asia" (Aung, 1967:102). With no access to the Irrawaddy for trade among the tribes, and no seaport for trade with other nations, Toungoo began to seek such access through the expansion of its kingdom. This led Tabinshewhti to capture the port city of Bassein (1535), attack the Mon capital of Pegu three times until capturing it in 1539, as well as conquering Shan mongs to the north. After Tabinshewhti's death, Bayinnaung (r. 1551-1581), who had grown up in the royal palace as a childhood friend of Tabinshewhti, aggressively continued that expansion, conquering Siam (modern Thailand), Lan Xang (in modern Laos), Manipur in northeast India, and parts of modern Cambodia and Vietnam, until the empire stretched "from Manipur to Cambodian marches and the borders of Arakan to Yunna" (Lieberman, 2003:152). After Bayinnaung died in 1581, his son, Nanda Bayin, continued to rule the

Toungoo Kingdom for eighteen years, though his rule was fraught with war and rebellion, resulting in a diminution of the kingdom (see the discussion of the Arakan below at 2.4.1.4). While the ensuing years would see strong and able rulers (most notably, Thalun, r. 1629-1648), the monarchy was populated far more often by a succession of weak kings, until the Mon revolted in 1740, ultimately bringing the Toungoo Period to a close in 1752.

2.2.1.4   Konbaung Period (1752-1855)

Soon after the Mon brought the Toungoo Dynasty to its knees, another Burman dynasty arose, led by a chief from the village of Shwebo (also known as Konbaung). Alaùngpayà, the founder of the Konbaung Dynasty, is widely considered one of the three great Burman kings, together with Anawrahta and Bayinnaung. Alaùngpayà defeated the Mon in the south, the Shan in the north, and even pressed westward toward Manipur and Assam and eastward into Siam. It would be the aggressive incursion into British India's northeast provinces that would precipitate the first Anglo-Burma War in 1824. Subsequent rulers in this period were able "to reduce Arakan to a Burmese province" (Yi Yi, 1965:49) and signed treaties with the British, as well as with the French and the Italians. The Konbaung Period extended through the turbulent final century of Burma's independence, engaging with the British in a number of minor skirmishes and three major wars (1824, 1852, and 1885). In the first Anglo-Burma War (1824), the British would take control of Arakan, Manipur and Tenasserim; in the second War (1852), they would seize Pegu. These wars, coupled with the economic and politic costs associated with them, and the reforms necessitated by them (Candier, 2011),

increasingly resulted in a weaker Burmese state and greater British control until, finally, all of the ethnic tribes became subjects of the British crown.

2.2.2   Colonial Era (1885-1948)

In 1885, Burma was officially declared to be part of British India. Heikkilä-Horn (2009:145) rightly comments, "There was no 'Burma' before the British started to 'imagine' it as a particular entity east of the British Raj and gave it a 'geo-body' by mapping it." Heretofore and henceforth, references to "Burma" as a nation are equated either with the prevailing historical kingdoms or the modern-day state. The colonization of Burma was, for the British, "both efficient and economical," while "from the Burmans' point of view it was humiliating" (Dunstan, 1962:34). Aung (1967:280) adds that the "divide and rule" policy of the British "had the full support of the Christian missions, who had looked upon the Burmese as their opponents since 1826 and who regarded the British victories as their own." This response will be taken up in greater detail in the discussion of the history of Christian missions in Burma (chapter 3).

In the modern era, "the military has claimed that historically the ethnic mélange that is Burma/Myanmar lived together peacefully in weal and woe, a peace disrupted by the evil colonialists" (Steinberg, 2010: Kindle loc. 641). Though Aung (1967:268) suggests that the British "showed sympathy toward the people" of Burma, and erected "no social barrier" between themselves and their subjects in Burma, there were certainly barriers among and between those subjects. British colonialism in Burma, in fact further exacerbated the long history of inter-ethnic divisions, as the colonialists' policy of divide

and rule "drew clear lines between the Burmans, living in the central plains, and the ethnic minorities in the hills" (Ranard & Barron, 2007:6).

Another significant effect of the colonial era was the economic model employed by the British, which led to a thriving international trade. "In the 1920s and 1930s, Rangoon was the busiest immigration point in the world after New York City, as thousands of Indian laborers entered and left the country each year to seek economic opportunities" (Taylor, 2004:299). Burma is a land rich in natural resources, such as timber and minerals, which, in no small measure, precipitated Britain's interest in the country in the first place. The colonial government quickly constructed a considerable network of railways and flotillas to transport these resources to ports for international commerce. Were these resources to be properly harvested and placed into normal trade channels, there would have been an economic boon for Burma. However, the profits arising from the trade of these resources accrued not to Burma, but to British companies. Further, even the wages paid to the many government employees and contractors were not paid into the Burmese economy, but were rather remitted to England or to India. As Aung (1967:273) comments, "... the Burmese candle was being burned at both ends. Her minerals and her timber were extracted but the money obtained in exchange for her products went out of the country." This, of course, coupled with the fact that British companies employed more Indians than locals, further led to the impoverishment of the people of Burma, which, in turn, led to an increasingly disgruntled local population. In response, the British government instituted laws to criminalize unemployment, allowing police to arrest those who had no "ostensible means of livelihood" (Aung, 1967:275). This downward spiral continued for several years. After a few decades, the Burmese

were able to secure a measure of freedom when, in 1937, the British allowed them to begin handling domestic affairs while the British retained authority over foreign affairs (though, in actuality, even domestic decisions were still subject to British veto).

In 1942, during World War II, the Japanese invaded Burma and gained control. At first, the Burmese welcomed the conquering fellow-Asians, as they saw in them full liberation from the British. Soon, however, the realities of Japanese rule began to demonstrate itself in harsh conditions and ethnic persecution. Many Burmese even began to work in concert with the British military to overthrow the Japanese. Indeed, by 1945, the British had re-established authority in Burma. As Dunstan (1962:35) poignantly notes: "The Burmans welcomed the British back, but the cost to the Burmans of the war had been enormous. Burma had been a victim of a world conflict in which it had no part."

2.2.3 Post-Colonial Era (1948-1990)

Soon after the end of the Second World War, Britain withdrew completely, and Burma became an independent nation on 4 January 1948. However, "Almost immediately civil war broke out" (Dunstan, 1962:37). The tensions arose as it became obvious to all that a self-governing national "union" was improbable if not impossible. At a conference in the northern town of Panglong, the military hero and popular Burmese leader, Aung San, met with representatives of the various tribal minorities and entered into a tentative partnership, whereby Aung San would be the titular head of a parliamentary government. Kung (2009:86) explains:

29

According to the Panglong Agreement in 1947, the Burmans and the ethnic minorities agreed to the concept of a federal union, and ethnic states were to be created with full autonomy over internal affairs. The ethnic states would have their own state councils, whose members would also serve in the union government's parliament.

Kipgen (2010:168) adds, regretfully, that this arrangement "has not materialized until today." The failure may be attributed, in part, to the assassination of Aung San and the resultant disarray in the new government. Kung (2009:81) points to the lingering effects of this disunity by saying that the tribal groups in Burma, particularly the Chin, are de facto "aliens" in their native land. Perhaps the effects both of colonization and liberation are best summed up in the words of the secretary of the Missions Conference in 1952 (Dunstan, 1962:37):

Burma has not known peace for ten years. Party strife, banditry, increasing opposition to the British, all preceded the coming of the Japanese. With their coming Burma was divided, some siding with the British and Chinese forces, and some with the Japanese. The Japanese won and life was bad. Then the British and American air onslaughts began and life was harder still. In due course Allied armies poured in and the Japanese were driven back and out. The people of Burma gave magnificent and costly support to the liberating armies. The British government then formally withdrew, according to agreement, and general disorder, banditry, assassination and civil war followed and continued until now. Burma, in her new independence, chose to stay outside the Commonwealth and go it alone, and alone she has suffered something bordering on bankruptcy and confusion.

In fact, as Kipgen notes (2010:168), "Burma has been at war ever since independence." This is because the central government undertook a program of "annexation" of the tribal regions whereby the territories inhabited by minorities were integrated without tribal consent or, when consent was given, it was on the condition of qualifications never

realized. Though there were experiments with parliamentary democracy (1948-1958), the various minority tribes never felt as if they held legitimate places at the table, and thus whatever alliances existed were tenuous and temporary. Eventually, in 1962, a military government, which came to be known as the Burma Socialist Program Party, was formed. Within a period of three years, this government nationalized all of Burma's banks and large industries. The government even demonetized much of the nation's currency to eliminate excess individual wealth (Kipgen, 2010:167).

On 8 August, 1988, there was a popular revolt. Known as the 8888 uprising, it was met with a massacre in which it has been estimated that thousands of demonstrators were killed. In response, a military junta, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), took control of the government. In 1990, SLORC held elections, with the hopes that the military-backed party would prevail. The elections themselves were considered to be free and fair; however, when the results were tallied and the overwhelming winners were the opposition party, headed by Aung San Suu Kyi (the daughter of Aung San), the military generals made it clear that they were not prepared to relinquish control. "The denial of power to the democratically elected members of parliament heightened the simmering political tension" (Kipgen, 2010:170). In the end, there was only a cursory attempt at reconciliation between the central, military-backed government and the ethnic tribal minorities which persists to the present day. Kipgen (2010:173) points out: "Because of the protracted nature of conflicts in an ethnically diverse society, the consequences are devastating. The conflicts have huge impacts on the socio-political, economic and educational system of the country."

2.2.4 Contemporary Era (1990-present)

As the subheading of this section indicates, for the purposes of this discussion, contemporary defines the period of time from 1990 to the present. This is significant because, unlike in generally stable nation-states, Burma has a history of repeated fluctuation from the extremes of human rights violations and religious (especially Christian) persecution to the more moderate position of tolerance or even disregard with respect to the personal exercise of religious expression. Thus, the following description is intended to demonstrate the very recent negative history while, optimistically, pointing out the hopeful signs of improvement, for it will be upon the present "edge" of contemporary that later chapters related to theological education and missions in Burma will be constructed.

To begin the contemporary story of Burma, it is perhaps helpful to consider the words of the famed leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, from the other edge of the period, in 1990. She noted then (Aris, 1991:184) that fear was a common state of mind for the citizens of Burma, "[F]ear of imprisonment, fear of torture, fear of death, fear of losing friends, family, property or means of livelihood, fear of poverty, fear of isolation, fear of failure ..." Demonstrating that this was a culture of fear and not a series of isolated events, a Washington Post editorial entitled, "Remember Burma," noted a decade later (July 15, 2001):

> Burma's thuggish ruling elite traffics in drugs and in people – in forced labor, child labor, slave labor. It throws people into medieval torture chambers at the slightest pretext: for owning a fax machine, for making jokes about the regime, for listening to foreign broadcasts. There are some 1,800 political prisoners.

Universities have been shuttered for much of the past decade, and poverty has deepened.

In Suu Kyi's analysis (Aris, 1991:184), however, she points toward the hope that sustained many Burmese through those otherwise debilitating fears:

> It is not easy for a people conditioned by fear under the iron rule of the principle that might is right to free themselves from the enervating miasma of fear. Yet even under the most crushing state machinery, courage rises up again and again, for fear is not the natural state of civilized man.

At this point, it is unclear whether the recent changes in Burmese governance will prove to be the genuine realization of that hope or whether those changes are motivated rather by a government merely desiring a more favourable opinion in the eyes of the international community. However, the state of being became what it is at present, and this is the environment in which both Western missionaries and indigenous churches must operate. It is also an important truth that the fear spoken of above – or at least an undercurrent of it – continues to be a factor in any interactions between Christians in Burma and Christians in the West.

Having thus surveyed the historical development of Burma generally, this study will turn to a more particular description of that development via the significant factors of migration patterns, tribal identification, language, and religion.

2.3   Migration Patterns

With regard to ethnic histories, it has been said that "each of us lives with a variety of potentially contradictory identities" (Bulmer & Solomos, 1998:826). Such is the very nature of anthropology and migration studies, with the fluidity of overlapping, blending, and harmonizing of peoples and their respective cultures. While that reality does not sound the death knell for such studies, of course, it does merit consideration when considering the vast, ethnic landscape in a place such as Burma.

Burma is a tribal melting pot: one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world, surrounded by still other ethnically diverse nations. On every side – Bangladesh and India on the west, China on the north, Laos and Thailand to the east, and even the Malay Peninsula to the south – this region of Southeast Asia is, at its essence, a region whose people identify themselves, to some extent, tribally. Each of these nations has rich tribal histories and part of those histories involves migration to the area now demarcated by political boundaries as Burma (or, Myanmar). Each of the Burmese ethnic groups have, to varying degrees, a sense of what Geertz (1996:41) called "primordial identities," bound together by "collective memories, symbols, values and myths, which so often define and differentiate" one people group from another. These identities are, to some extent, connected to, but not limited to, their respective histories.

The story of immigration into modern Burma arguably begins with the Ch'iang, who were, also arguably, the forebears of all other Tibeto-Burman groups, in the northwest of China, possibly in Gansu (Enriquez, 1932:7-8). Khai (1984:53) notes that Ch'iang

was "old generic designations for the non-Chinese tribes of the Kansu-Tibetan frontier" in Chinese history. He also notes that the Ch'iang were considered to be a "barbarian" tribe. Regarding the decision of the Ch'iang to migrate, Luce (cited in Tun, 1988:3) writes: "With the expansion of China, the Ch'iang had either the choice to be absorbed or to become nomads in the wilds. It was a hard choice, between liberty and civilization. [Burma's] ancestors chose liberty." Then, it would appear that they continued to move toward western China and eastern Tibet. Sakhong (2007:7) summarizes their onward movement into Southeast Asia, providing a chronological framework of migration, consisting of three waves from China and Tibet to Southeast Asia:

1. The Mon-Khmer (Talaing, Palaung, En Raing, Pa-o, Khasi, Annimite).
2. The Tibeto-Burman (Pyu, Kanzan, Thet, Burman, Chin, Kachin, Naga, Lolo).
3. The Tai-Chinese (Shan, Siamese, and Karen).

It must be noted that others, particularly anthropologists such as Edmund Leach (cited in Lehman, 1963:22) believe that "the hypothesis that the Southeast Asian peoples as known today immigrated from the region of China is a pure myth." In this refutation is the belief that these people groups *qua* people groups did not migrate "as the social and cultural units we know today" and, further, that they "cannot be identified with any particular groups of today" (Lehman, 1963:23). Anthropologists, like Leach, would argue that, to the extent that there are social and cultural units in Burma, these units were developed in, and are defined by, their present contexts as opposed to their historical contexts. Renard (1987:259) adds that there are also elements of a "blending" of identities that occurred throughout their history: "[A]t all times in pre-British Burma large

groups of people were affected in their culture and identity. For example, descendants of Siamese prisoners resettled by Bayinnaung near Ava eventually became Burmese." Tun (1984:408) says that "after one or two generations the ancestry of such people generally was forgotten."

While the several Tibeto-Burman tribes may well have originated in the same general region (as suggested by Tan and Luce), that is not to suggest that they originated from the same people group in that region (as suggested by Leach) and, in fact, may have taken significantly different routes from China or Tibet to reach Burma, accumulating separate aspects of their primordial identities in that long process. Thus, their common ethnic heritage (if, in fact, they share one) would have no bearing on the separation demonstrated between them historically since that initial migration. However, understanding the three waves of migration into Southeast Asia is helpful in a study that is concerned with tribal development in Burma. For in this taxonomy, one sees the people groups that populate this study: namely, the Mon in the first wave; the Pyu, Burman, Naga, Chin, and Kachin in the second wave; and the Shan and Karen in the third wave.

There were likely other people groups in Burma prior to these migrations, which were displaced by them. Ptolemy (Geographia ch. 2, § 16, cited in McCrindle, 1885:219) wrote of the Zamirai in "Further India" (Upper Burma) as being cannibals, and describes others in the south who bore physical resemblance to the Zamirai as "being fair-complexioned, shaggy, of squat figure, and flat-nosed" (§ 17). While these people may have been the "aborigines" of the region (Crawford, 1829:319), they were most probably

of Indonesian origin and likely not the forebears of any of the main tribes in Burma, which will be considered below although Cooler (2002:ch. 2, par. 7) argues for the Mon being the indigenous people group of Lower Burma.

2.4   Tribal Identifications

It has been argued that ethnic identity is always relational (Lehman cited in Aung-Thwin, 2008a:694). To the degree that this is true, even groups that may not be anthropologically authentic ethnic groups may well be sociologically authentic "ethnic" groups. Thus, while the anthropological argument (stated above) may be valid, the reality is that the various tribes in Burma – through genetics or generations – have real and meaningful tribal identifiers, which not only mark them as members of a particular tribe, but also delineate them from other tribes. Thus, a survey of the different tribes will further aid the situating of the research question of factionalism in the tribal culture of Burma.

The largest people group within Burma is the Burman, accounting for more than two-thirds of the total population. (Burmans are also called Mranma (Aung-Thwin, 2008b); hence the etymological source of "Myanmar.") Hall (1960:11) notes that, "as far as reliable records are concerned," the period of the Burmans' arrival into Burma, from the mid-ninth to mid-eleventh centuries "is a blank." As discussed above, it is reckoned that they originated as the Ch'iang in northwest China, who were pursued, first to northeast Tibet, then into modern Thailand, where they were under the suzerainty of Nan Chao, before "escaping" onto the plains of Burma (Hall, 1960:11).

Aside from the Burman, and in addition to smaller groups and residents of Chinese and Indian descent (Aung-Thwin, 2008b; Toyota, 2003), there are seven principle, and officially recognized, ethnic peoples in modern Burma, collectively accounting for nearly one third of the nation's population. These are the Mon, Shan, Rakhine (Arakanese), Naga, Kayah (formerly Karenni), Karen, Chin, and Kachin. While greater detail will be paid in subsequent chapters to particular tribes (specifically the Karen, Chin, and Kachin), at this point of the introductory survey a different taxonomy will be used, namely "lowlanders" and "uplanders." This is the method employed by Topich and Leitich (2013:2) and Renard (1987). Similarly, Smith refers to these divisions as "valley-dwelling" and "hill" people (quoted in Ranard & Barron, 2007:8). However, this dichotomy is not meant to imply that there are no overlaps. Leach (1965) discusses at length the relationship (particularly political) shared between the Kachin and Shan, and Renard (1987:262) adds that "the Karen were closely associated with the Mon, Burman, and Shan lowlanders."

The lowlands consist of the central plains around the Irrawaddy and Chindwin Rivers. This has traditionally been the home to the Burman, Mon, and Shan, as well as the Pyu (who were displaced by the Burmans) and, to the west, along the coast of the Bay of Bengal, the Arakan (known now as Rakhine). The other principle region, the uplands, is the horseshoe of rugged mountains and hills that stretch from the northern edge of Arakan, along the border regions with Bangladesh and India to the west, China and Laos on the north and east, and Thailand along the south-eastern border. These mountains and hills are the traditional home of the uplanders: the Kayah (formerly

Karenni), Naga, Chin, and Kachin. The Karen are divided into lowlanders and uplanders.

The two groups provide a stark study in contrasts. The pre-colonial lowlanders were historically the more "civilized" peoples, sharing certain Indo-Buddhist commonalities, such as "written scripts and literatures derived from India, the popularity of the Jataka or birth-tales, Indian concepts of monarchy, and the high social status of the Buddhist monkhood or Sangha" (Seekins, 2006:6). Conversely, the pre-colonial uplanders were not literate, they practiced swidden (slash and burn) agriculture, and, religiously, they were animists rather than Buddhists. These distinctions between the lowlanders and uplanders were clearly established early in Burma's history and were merely exacerbated as the two groups grew progressively less comfortable with one another, as will be seen below.

2.4.1 Lowlanders

2.4.1.1   Mon

The earliest civilization in Burma, and in fact among the earliest in Southeast Asia, is that of the Mon, who migrated into modern Burma more than 3 000 years ago (circa 1000 BC) and settled along the southern peninsula from Thaton to Taninthayi, establishing kingdoms in both Thaton (also known as Suwarnabhumi, and extending into modern Thailand) and, later, Pegu (Fredholm, 1993:19; Smith, 1999:32; Topich & Leitich, 2013:5). Originating in the Yangtze River valley in southern China from the Mon-

Khmer people group, the Mon of Burma and Thailand are "close cousins" (Mon, 2010:57) to the Khmer of Cambodia. As "pioneers of paddy- or wet-rice cultivation" (Mon, 2010:58), their search for usable land led them out of southern China and down into the Taninthayi coastal region.

Most likely through maritime commerce (Hall, 1960:7), the Mon were introduced to the Buddhism of India and, in turn, they disseminated that religion throughout Burma. A Mon myth tells of two brothers, Tapusa and Palikat, who travelled to India and were given eight strands of hair by Gautama, which were ultimately enshrined in the most revered stupa in this land of thousands of stupas: the Swe Dagon Pagoda, located in central Yangon (Murari, 2005:52). The Mon were also the first to develop a system of written language, which was adopted by the Burmans after Burman King Anoratha defeated Mon King Manuha at Thaton in AD 1057.

2.4.1.2   Pyu

The Pyu were a Tibetan group from the eastern Himalayas that moved into the area north of the Mon around the first century BC. They built walled cities, most notably at Beikthano, which means "the city of Vishnu," indicating that Hinduism – as well as Buddhism – must have reached the region by the time of this city, known to have existed prior to the fifth century. Ruins of Buddhist monasteries were uncovered during excavations of Beikthano (Cooler, 2002:ch. 2, par. 11; Hall, 1960:8). Vishnu had been introduced from India, but had been "brought into the fold of Buddhism" by declaring him to be a "guardian god" of Burmese Buddhism (Aung, 1967:41). Hall (1960:11) questions

whether the Pyu could have been "a very early wave" of Burmans, the "advanced guard some centuries ahead of the main invasion." There is certainly evidence that their language was similar to that of the Burmans who arrived four centuries later. There is also evidence that they were eventually conquered by, and assimilated into, the Burmans, to the point that there is little knowledge of them after the twelfth century.

2.4.1.3   Shan

The Shan (who refer to themselves as "Tai") are found not only in Burma, but in China and Thailand, as well. They were the last of the lowlanders to arrive in Burma, coming with the third wave. Rather than continuing into Lower Burma, as did the Mon and, to a lesser degree initially, the Burmans, the Shan settled in to the northern parts of the lowlands and into the surrounding hills. Their history is replete with wars with other tribes (e.g. Burman, Mon) others outside Burma (e.g. China, Thailand) and even other Shan tribes. Prior to the Pagan era, the Shan were ruled by *sawbwas* (minor kings). The British assumed control of the *sawbwas* during the colonial period yet left a measure of control in the hands of the local lords.

In a region already awash in ethnic diversity, the modern Shan state is "the most ethnically diverse" (Topich & Leitich, 2013:33). Geographically, it is also the largest of the ethnic states. Buddhism has been "gradually absorbed" in Shan culture since the thirteenth century (Aung, 1967:117). All the while the tradition practices of animism were maintained, as well. Thus, while self-identifying as Theravada Buddhists, a number of Shan beliefs are at odds with the doctrines of that religion. However, in identifying

themselves as Buddhists, the Shan are identifying themselves with the other lowlanders and distancing themselves from the other tribes in the north.

2.4.1.4   Rakhine (Arakanese) and Rohingya

The Rakhines (or Arakanese) appear to be a people descended from a number of different, ethnic groups: Pyu, Arab, and Mongol, though they speak a Tibeto-Burmese language, which is a dialect of Burmese. The Pyu were already in the central plains of Burma, prior to the arrival of the Mon and, later, the Burman. The Arabs arrived in the seventh century, while the Mongols invaded the Rakhine region in the thirteenth century.

From the fourth to eighteenth centuries, the Rakhine remained largely independent of the various trans-tribal kingdoms described above. In fact, they were more likely to look north-westward toward the Bengalis, with whom they shared much in the way of culture and commerce, than to look eastward toward the tribes of Burma. One notable exception to this is in what has been called the "century of Arakan's greatness and splendour" (Leider, 1998:190), or the hundred years extending from about 1580.

Many of the traders from the Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal were Muslim, and their influence was clear, even in the names assumed by some of the Arakan kings, such as Naradhipati (r. 1593-1612), who also took the name, Salim Shah I (Luard, 1927:xxiii). Naradhipati, who ruled an ascendant Arakan kingdom, laid siege to the port city of Bassien and then, after gaining control of it and establishing it as a supply base,

moved on to capture the great city of Pegu in 1598-1599. The Arakan rule was brief, however. Charney (1994:40) argues that Arakan lacked the administrative capability to maintain control of Lower Burma. They thus relied on their alliances with Portuguese mercenaries, under the leadership of Philip De Brito, and Muslim mercenaries, under the leadership of the Mon nobleman Binnya Dala, to administer the region. These would later abandon their ties with Arakan and, eventually, Pegu would again come under the rule of the Toungoo Dynasty, as Arakan would abandon any designs on expansion to the east. The Konbaung Dynasty would eventually take control of Arakan and, when the British gained control of all of Burma, the Rakhines were assimilated into the collective state of British Burma.

Most modern Rakhine are Buddhist. However, also in the region at present, are the Muslim Rohingyas, who were brought into the region as labourers by the British (and are not, therefore, related to the Muslims of ancient Rakhine history). These two groups have long been in tension with one another. As *The Economist* succinctly noted (3 November 2012), "For most Rakhines, Rohingyas do not really exist." Further, the Rohingyas have been ostracized by the Burmese government, which considers the Muslim minority not even to be citizens of Burma, but rather displaced Indians or Bangladeshis. When the nation gained independence, the new government, largely in an attempt to disenfranchise the Rohingyas, declared that Burmese citizenship was to be limited to those groups who predated the arrival of the British in 1824, which disqualified the Rohingya. The Rohingya situation remains at the fore of Burma's tribal conflicts to the present day, as myriad news reports attest.

2.4.2 Uplanders

The uplanders, or hill tribes, have a distinctly different history, which, at times, bears very little resemblance to that of the predominantly Buddhist and more organized states of the lowlanders. In contrasting the differences among these two groupings of peoples, Renard (1987:264) offers this helpful analysis:

> All these features, namely, the lack of Buddhism or the adoption of only superficial elements of the religion, the absence of large, highly organized states, illiteracy, and simple architecture caused majority peoples to treat such communities with disdain. In so doing, lowlanders regarded marginal peoples as uncivilized ruffians that were, in all probability, inferior human beings. When, for example, Christian missionaries began preaching to the Karen in the early nineteenth century, a Burman official objected that the Karen were too ignorant to know right from wrong and could be easily deceived:

> "This is the way you do, ... is it? You come and fight us and get away part of our country, and now you wish to turn away the hearts of the poor, ignorant Karens ... but if you gave these books to the Burmans who know too much to be carried away with their nonsense it would be no matter; ... but what do the poor, ignorant Karens know?"

It is clear that the Burmans (and other lowlanders) saw themselves quite apart from the hill tribes. Scott (cited in Renard, 1987:264), adds that lowlanders typically referred to uplanders using "derogatory terms which often included the use of the classifier for animals, such as 'two Karen animals' or 'a beastly Kachin.'" Also, Seekins offers an example wherein the Shan considered uplanders "dangerous and uncivilized outsiders" (2006:6). Finally, speaking of the uplanders who move among the Burmans, mostly doing agricultural work, one writer (Crawford, 1829:261) says, "They live in the midst of

the Burmese without associating with them, as if they dreaded contamination." Thus, the aversion appears to have been rather mutual.

2.4.2.1   Naga

The Naga people live in a region that begins along the edge of the Kachin State in the northern reaches of Burma, in a government-recognized "self-administered zone," and straddles the border with India. The majority of the Naga reside across the border in the Indian state of Nagaland, with a smaller number residing in the neighbouring state of Manipur. Within the larger Naga people group, there are a number of subtribes. Though the exact number is uncertain, it is estimated at thirty-eight (Lotha, 2009:23). Their villages are typically established on mountaintops, where they engage is swidden agriculture for sustenance. Because there is little to no industry in the area, the vast stores of natural resources, such as timber, petroleum, and natural gas, remain untapped (Lotha, 2009:27). Because the geographical conditions render the region largely inaccessible, they were long regarded as wild and barbarous, with Ptolemy using to describe their land the appellation "realm of the naked" (cited in Hutton, 1921:x).

Known as "fierce warriors" (Topich & Leitich, 2013:32), the Naga have long strove for independence, owing in part to their conviction that they are a separate people from their neighbours. One of the political leaders has said: "[W]e have a distinct identity and distinct culture different from that of the mainland India or for that matter even the majority in Burma … [We are] totally different from the Assamese, the Burmese, or for that matter, even Indians" (cited in Lotha, 2009:115). In their quest for autonomy, a

group of Naga have been engaged in insurgent activity against the Indian government, using their "self-administered zone" in Burma as a base for training camps and criminal enterprises, such as drug trafficking and counterfeit currency, to finance their operations. This had created tensions between India and Burma, as the Burmese junta have long "turned a blind eye to the presence of anti-India groups operating out of the remote" regions on the border (Egreteau, 2010:300). As with the other upland tribes, the Naga were traditionally animists. However, due to the activity of British and American missionaries, as many as ninety percent of Naga are now Christian (Imsong, 2007:24).

2.4.2.2   Karen

The Karen people constitute the second largest people group in Burma and may be further divided into three principle groups (Northern, Central, and Southern), though as many as twenty subgroups have been identified. A subgroup of Karen, sometimes classified independently, is the Kayah, also known as the Red Karen (or Karen-Ni; "Ni" means "red"). The Kayah are in the Central Karen primary group, located in the rugged mountainous region on the Thai-Burma border. As with the broader Karen people group, Kayah may be found in both Burma and Thailand. The Kayah, along with the Chin and the Kachin, are the subjects of the qualitative and quantitative research presented in chapter 6. Written accounts of the Karen first appeared in the 1700s in Burmese and Thai documents, and there they are called "forest people" (Ranard & Barron, 2007:29).

The Karen people are present in both Burma and Thailand, and represent the largest tribal minority in both countries, yet there are conflicting ideas about the migration pattern and timing of the arrival into Southeast Asia. It is probable that they originated in Central Asia and gradually passed through China before reaching the hill country along the modern Burma-Thai border. It is also probable that they arrived after the Mon, but before the Burman and Shan. According to the Census Report of 1911 (cited in Enriquez, 1932:25), the Karen entered Burma "peacefully, quietly, unobtrusively … avoiding all contact with the tribes they passed … preferring the hardship and obstacles of hills, jungles, and uninhabited regions to the dangers of conflict with fellow beings." Mouhot (cited in Tucker, 2001:14) notes that "early Western visitors noted this reclusiveness, as well as their 'cringing ways,' and their desire 'to live … on inaccessible heights … for the sake of their independence.'" The Karen fought alongside the British during the colonial era and, especially during that time, many were converted to versions of Christianity through the labours of missionaries from the Catholic, Adventist, Lutheran, Anglican, and Presbyterian traditions.

2.4.2.3   Chin

The Chin State, roughly the size of Switzerland, is located in the mountainous region along the western borders with India and Bangladesh, where they remain largely isolated from the rest of the nation due to the geographical challenges of the terrain. The Chin have likely been in Burma since the time of the Burmans' arrival, though it is thought that they arrived in Burma via a different route. Sakhong (2007:5) notes that "all sources of the Chin tradition maintain that the ancestors of the Chin people originated

from the cave called Chinlung," and adds that "in addition to individual scholars and researchers, many political and other organizations of the Chin accepted the Chinlung tradition not only as myth but as historical fact." Yet there is no consensus as to the location of Chinlung, with China and Tibet as the most likely possibilities, though Gangte (cited in Sakhong, 2007:8) says that the location of Chinlung "must be somewhere in the Chindwin Valley since the literal meaning of Chindwin is the cave or the hole of the Chin." As noted above, the evidence seems to suggest that the Chin are part of the Tibeto-Burman group that derived from the Ch'iang, and that view has broad, scholarly support (Enriquez, 1932; Gangte, 1993; Khai, 1984; Tun, 1988). Tun (1988a:3) insists, "The Ch'iang were not just the ancestors of the Chin but of the entire Tibeto-Burman group, and they enjoyed a civilization as advanced as the Chinese, who disturbed them so much that they moved south." Whatever the early history of the Chin may be, it becomes clearer as they begin to appear in the annals of Burmese history, interacting with the Burmans and other hill tribes. "Chin history begins after AD 750, with the development of Burman civilization and Chin interaction with it" (Lehman, 1963:11). While many Chin retain the animism of their forebears, there is a significant number of Christians among the Chin, as well.

2.4.2.4   Kachin

The name "Kachin" means "red earth," and signifies a valley along the upper Irrawaddy. The Kachin primarily live there, in the extreme north, along the borders with China and India. Also (and historically) known as Jinghpaw, the Kachin are a Tibeto-Burman people group. Swedish-American missionary, Ola Hanson, who translated the Bible into

Kachin and was thus intimately acquainted with the language, suggested that the name Jinghpaw likely derived from the Tibetan word, *sin-po*, meaning cannibal, attesting to either the conduct of the Jinghpaw or, at the least, to the Tibetan's perception of them (Hanson, 1907:381-382). Similarly, the name Kachin is a "Burmese corruption of the Chinese *ye jein* (wild men)." At the dawn of the twentieth century, Hanson (1907:381-382) predicted that the names would, in time, lose their "unpleasant reference to the uncivilized and barbarous ways of the marauding hill tribes," and such appears to have become the case. Hanson's translation utilized Roman, not Burmese, characters, which not only "promoted literacy," but also "ethnic consciousness among the Kachins" (Seekins, 2006:238).

The Kachin have been called "the most fiercely independent of all ethnic groups" in Burma and they strenuously resisted British colonialism (Topich & Leitich, 2013:31). In that vein, Sadan (2013) dedicated an entire book to their group identity, which allowed the Kachin to remain tightly united, even to the point of organized, armed conflict against the emerging Burmese state at the time of national independence following World War II. The Kachin arrived in the same migratory pattern as the Burman and Chin (Tibeto-Burman), but began to become associated with the Shan, with whom they share a number of linguistic and cultural similarities (Leach, 1965:246). Among the connections between the Kachin and the Shan is the history of exporting raw and processed opium (Seekins, 2006:56), though a number of eradication programs have reduced the role of this as an agricultural staple. Kachin State is also a source of jade, which is sold across the border into China. Like the Karen and the Chin, a significant

number of Kachin converted to Christianity, with a large representation of Baptists and Catholics.

2.5   Language

Crawford commented (1829:318) that "the diversity of language prevailing among mankind … is at once a proof and a means of perpetuating barbarism." He went on to conclude, "[I]n the Burman empire we have a striking illustration of this theory." It is indeed true that Burma is a very linguistically diverse nation. This diversity serves as yet another factor in the persistent factionalism among the people groups.

In Burma's history, there have been several large, yet minority, language groups, such as Tai (e.g. Shan), Mon-Khmer (e.g. Mon), and the ancient language Pyu, which died sometime prior to the twelfth century. The Mya Zedi Inscription, which Cooler (2002:ch. 2, par. 11) calls "the Burmese rosetta stone," is a quadrilingual inscription, written in the Pyu, Mon, Burmese, and Pali languages, which was erected at Pagan in AD 1113. After its discovery in 1911, this allowed for the translation of the previously unknown Pyu language. The majority language family in Burma is Tibeto-Burmese, a derivative of the Chinese language, Nuoso. Tibeto-Burmese is the linguistic family to which Burmans, Karen, Kachin, and Chin belong. However, even among this large group, there are subdivisions between the lowlanders (among Burman subgroups) and uplanders (Karen, Kachin, and Chin).

The lowlanders, with their interaction with and influence by early Indian culture, acquired elements of the language associated with the Buddhism and Hinduism in that region. Conversely, the hill tribes, separated as they were from the religions of the lowlanders, were far less likely to incorporate the language associated with those religions. These large representative languages notwithstanding, there remain more than one hundred different indigenous languages in Burma, chiefly among the hills tribes, with a reported 117 living languages (*Ethnologue*, 2014). While Burmese is the national language, and the language of commerce, there remain significant populations of uplanders who have little to no knowledge of the Burmese language. This presents a formidable challenge for intertribal communications and, in turn, relationships.

2.6 Religion

2.6.1 Animism

The uplanders of Burma have practiced animism for centuries. In traditions rooted to the time before the arrival of Buddhism in the region, this practice involves worshipping a host of spirits, or *nats*. The *nat* cultus will be discussed at length below (4.3.3.4). There are *nats* of sky and rain and tree, together with a host of others, "drawn from indigenous pre-Buddhist cosmology as well as Hindu or other outside sources" (Nash, 2009:82). Some are believed to be people who have died and others to have never borne human form. Nash (2005:6427) defines *nats* as a "structured system of animistic spirits, predating the advent of Theravada Buddhism but coexisting with it." Hall (1960:13) noted more than half a century ago that animism was "still today a factor of prime

importance in the religious outlook" of the tribal people of Burma, and that has changed but little, particularly in the more isolated tribal regions. The Thirty-Seven Lords represent the "core of the nat cult" (Nash, 2007:83), a nationally recognized pantheon of *nats*, with origins in the Pagan kingdom of Anawratha, though there are also *nats* at the local, or village level, as well as the family or household level. The worship of *nats* remains a central component in the religious life of the uplanders and, in no small measure, also affects the religious life of the lowlanders, despite this latter group self-identifying as Buddhists. The extent to which this is true even among professing Christians in Burma will be demonstrated in chapter 6.

This idea of a juxtaposition of the two systems (Buddhism and animism) prompted Lehman (2005) to question whether Burma should be said to have one or two principle religions. In reply, De la Perrière (2009:196), who challenges the "Buddhism-centric" view of religion in Burma studies, posited that at least as concerns what he calls the "cult" of the Thirty-Seven Lords, the syncretistic relationship of *nat* worship with Burmese Buddhism is too significant to be identified as a separate religion, yet too interweaved with Buddhism to be excluded from any discussion of Burmese Buddhism. Indeed, some have called the two "hopelessly intertwined" (Brohm, cited in Morris 2006:54). Going a bit further, Spiro (1967, 1970) has argued that the two religions, Buddhism and "supernaturalism" (his term for animism, or *nat* worship), are in a constant tension, as they present "conflicting and incompatible orientations" (Morris, 2006:54). These worldviews, and the tension between them and Christianity, will be explored in depth in chapter 4. Though there may be less conflict between Buddhism and the informal traditions associated with the worship of lesser *nats*, Spiro's

assessment would certainly seem to be accurate with regard to the more formally recognized practice of worship surrounding the Thirty-Seven Lords, involving organized ceremonies and festivals on the national level. In fact, many of the national holidays in Burma originated in the pre-Buddhism era and still contain lingering animist celebratory elements (Hall, 1960:13). For instance, the three-month period of Vassa (or, Buddhist Lent), observed during the rainy season (July to October), predates Buddhism, yet was later infused with Buddhist significance. Thadingyut is a celebration held at the end of Vassa in honour of the return of Gautama from the heavens, where he is believed to have taught the Law to his mother, Maya. As Hall (1960:13) points out, this "is a clear case of a Buddhist legend being grafted on to a pre-Buddhist practice."

Regarding the practical significance of *nat* worship, Nash (1960:121) wrote that "animistic faith ties the Burman more strongly to his village than does the village monastery" and went on, in her contrast of animism with Buddhism, to say "the social aspect of religion negated in the Buddhist ideal of the monastic life survives in the nat cult." The idea of individualism vis-à-vis salvation in Theravada Buddhism will be discussed below. However, the significance of Nash's insight for this study is that the undercurrent of animism plays a significant role in how the different people groups of Burma identify themselves with one another and, for that matter, distinguish themselves from those outside their group. Subjectively, one unidentified Burmese man summed up the general perception of the two religions in this way, "When we do something for Buddha, we do it for the next life; and when we do something for the nats, we do it to help us in this life" (cited in Nash, 2007:81). Thus, it becomes apparent that, at least from the perspective of the man on the street, religious affectations regularly involve

both Buddhism and animism. Yet, when questioned as to their state religion, most Burmese will reply, "Buddhist." Thus, despite the almost universal inclusion of *nat* worship in the religious life of the people of Burma, the emic reality is that the religion with which most people of Burma identify is Theravada Buddhism. In fact, it is an "innocuous truism" (De la Perrière, 2009:202) to say "To be Burmese is to be Buddhist."

2.6.2   Buddhism

2.6.2.1   Excursus on Buddhism

The Buddhist religion began with a young prince, Siddhartha Gautama, who was born in Lumbini in the present state of Nepal, four or five centuries before Christ. He is said to have fervently sought comfort and meaning through Hinduism, but to no avail. He turned increasingly to more diligent asceticism, abandoning all the trappings of his family's wealth and position, and even limited his diet more and more until he neared starvation. At the point of death, he collapsed under a bodhi tree and, before rising, he sensed that he had become awakened. The term, "The Awakened One," is commonly translated as Buddha.

In his "awakening," Gautama (also known as Sakyimuni, from the name of his family and clan), believed that he had been shown the answers to life's puzzling questions of purpose and suffering. Central to the Buddha's awakening were the "Four Noble Truths" (Andrea & Overfield, 2009:76):

- Life is suffering.

- All suffering is caused by ignorance of the nature of reality and the craving, attachment, and grasping that result from such ignorance.

- Suffering can be ended by overcoming ignorance and attachment.

- The path to the suppression of suffering is the Eightfold Path.

The Eightfold Path are usually divided into three categories that form the cornerstone of Buddhist faith (Scott, 1995:127): *sila* (morality), *Samadhi* (concentration), and *panna* (wisdom).

In the "Setting in Motion the Wheel of the Law," as his first message to his new followers is called (Andrea & Overfield, 2009:75), the Buddha discussed the issue of suffering by saying:

> Birth is suffering; decay is suffering; illness is suffering; death ... the presence of objects we hate ... not to be able to obtain what we desire is suffering (Davids & Oldenberg, 1878:101).

All of this suffering, Buddha said, was because of a wrong attitude toward life. Our cravings and desires cause our suffering. Hence, when we learn to deny our cravings, suffering ceases. Buddha then described eight ways by which one may stop craving, known as the Eightfold Path (Bhikkhu, 1993:par. 3):

- Right Viewpoint.

- Right Aspiration.

- Right Speech.

- Right Behaviour.

- Right Livelihood.

- Right Effort.

- Right Mindfulness.

- Right Contemplation (through yoga).

The one who successfully mastered these directives could achieve Nirvana. Nirvana is not a place so much as a state of mind free from evil intent, and, most critically, it represents an end of phenomenal experience. It is not to be confused with total annihilation, however. It is considered a state of consciousness beyond definition (McDermott, 2003:66). Nirvana can even occur prior to death (as is said to have happened to Buddha under the bodhi tree). The ultimate reward for achieving Nirvana is that one is released from the "Round of Becoming," the virtually endless cycle of reincarnation which reflects the doctrine of karma.

Karma is a system of consequential reaction. Based on Buddha's conception of a universal and natural moral law (rather than on a moral law established and ordered by divine judgment), karma rewards good behaviour and punishes bad behaviour through reincarnation. According to the Buddha, "karma of varying types can lead to rebirth as a human, an animal, a ghost, a denizen of hell, or even one of the Hindu gods" (McDermott, 2003:86). The Karmic debt (or, bad karma) can be burned off by those who attain Nirvana in this life. They then await final Nirvana (*parinirvana*) at the moment of death. Those who do not achieve Nirvana in this life must endure as many reincarnations as necessary until they do so in successive lives.

It was the exhaustive idea of endless reincarnations which initially motivated many disgruntled Hindus to investigate the new ideas suggested by Buddha. Nevertheless, as it became clear that Buddhism was an entirely new religion and not simply a clarification of Hinduism (as some had originally thought), the Indian people gradually rejected it, largely because Buddha omitted many of the traditions of Hinduism which had become integral to their culture.

Eventually, Buddhism took root through missionary movements into other lands, chiefly in the Far East. Adherents in China, Japan, Korea, Vietnam, and Tibet follow the form of Buddhism known as Mahayana (which means "great vehicle"). Mahayana Buddhists hold to the belief that many will be able to achieve Nirvana. The smaller movement of Theravada, or The Way of the Elders, has the distinctive doctrine that only a small number of people will successfully find release from suffering. Theravada is sometimes called Hinayana ("small vehicle"), though this originated as a derogatory term coined by the Mahayana. This type of Buddhism made its way into Thailand, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, and Burma.

A significant distinction between the two groups is that the Mahayana insist that, as Buddha was helpful in sharing his insight with others, so too should every good Buddhist help one another achieve salvation. They honour and venerate those who refuse to go on to Nirvana until all others can enter with them; such individuals are known as Bodhisattva. Though Theravada Buddhism would win the day in Burma, there is evidence that Mahayana Buddhism made at least some inroads there, as a bronze statue of Avalokitesvara, one of the three chief Mahayanist Bodhisattvas, was found in

Beikthano (Aung, 1967:17; Hall, 1960:8). A Buddhist poet describes the Bodhisattva thus:

> I would be a protector of the unprotected, a guide to wayfarers, a ship, a dike, and a bridge for them who seek the farther Shore (cited in Ross, 2013:130).

By contrast, Theravada stresses the role of the individual in "salvation." They further believe that the best way to achieve what Buddha achieved is to do what Buddha did. They are therefore encouraged to go through a similar learning process of rigorous self-discipline. This ideology continues to persist in the Buddhism commonly adhered to in Burma, though other elements had been modified vis-à-vis Buddhists in other lands, especially in regards to the assimilation of indigenous, animistic traditions.

2.6.2.2   Pre-Colonial Era

Disputes abound regarding the religious foundations of Burma. Crawford (1829:490) held the opinion that Buddhism reached Burma at the precise year, 301 BC Hall (1960) suggests that Buddhists from the East Indian region of Orissa colonized Burma's Irrawaddy Delta in the fifth century BC, and, three centuries later, Hindu colonists arrived across the Bay of Bengal, while Myint-U (2006:45) argues that Buddhism reached Burma in the second century as Burmese sea merchants traded with Indians across the Bay of Bengal. In any event, archaeologists have discovered stupas, monasteries, and inscriptions that demonstrably prove the presence of Theravada Buddhism in Burma by no later than the fifth century AD Nevertheless, the influence of Buddhism in Burma would reach its stride with the ascendency of the Pagan Dynasty.

It has been noted (Dingrin, 2005:74) that "the crucial event in the history of Burma is [P]agan's acceptance of Theravada Buddhism during the reign of Anawrahta (1044-1077)" who had sought to obtain Buddhist writings from Thaton after that city was sacked in 1057. Consequently, Theravada Buddhism became the state religion of Pagan, though Cooler (2002:ch. 3, par. 5) points out that evidence shows the presence of other varieties of Buddhism – as well as Hinduism and animism – at Pagan, as well.

The rise of Theravada Buddhism in Pagan led to the frenetic building of temples, stupas, and pagodas. Cooler notes (2002:ch. 3, par. 7) that "so many temples were constructed that the 12th century is known as the Golden Age of Burmese Temple Building." He also comments that Pagan "became an international centre for Buddhist learning" during this time. This time also saw the rise of "forest ascetics," who were ideological descendants of Indian monks (Ranard & Barron, 2007:160). It was believed that uplanders had magical powers, derived from their connection with the forests and hills. This led to the folklore that monks who lived among the uplanders had spiritual powers as well as magical powers and further led to the development of a strain of Buddhism that uniquely reflects the history and culture of Burma.

Renard (1987:160) explains one way in which Buddhism was "Burmanized":

> Buddhism in Burma, however, was not doctrinally the same as early Buddhism ... The Buddha's teachings as a means or way of avoiding suffering on earth remained essentially the same but when Buddhism was adopted by different Southeast Asian peoples, some animistic practices invariably entered the religion. The folk Buddhisms in pre-British Burma, for example, varied between different states while an animistic, non-Buddhist emphasis on power led to the recognition of various forms of power, namely, political, spiritual, and magical.

More formally, political power in the Buddhist sangha (Buddhist monastic communities) was generally centred in the major states with prominent religious figures or patriarchs.

De la Perrière (2009:186) makes a similar point – noting that the presence of numerous folk traditions and religious practices belies the common designation of Burma as overwhelmingly Buddhist in the "purest" sense – "one finds religious practices that large swaths of the population would cast out as being 'non Buddhist.'" This is due, at least in part, to the reality that the Buddhism of Burma was affected by the animism already present upon its arrival. Another contributing factor, however, is that when Buddhism did arrive as it did through the Indian channels, it carried with it Hindu elements as well. Commenting upon this, Hall (1960:16) noted that the Buddhism of Pagan "was mixed up with Hindu Brahmanic cults." Nevertheless, whatever religious morphology occurred, it resulted in the pre-eminence of a distinctly Burmese Buddhism that has come to define the nation.

2.6.2.3   Colonial Era

The commencement of British rule in 1885, of course, brought a number of changes to Burma: From the annexation of the various constituent parts (tribes and kingdoms) into a contrived, cobbled together whole (The Burmese Province of British India), to an imposition of vastly different political and economic models. Yet another significant impact was related to the interaction between the British and the Burmese Buddhists, which would fuel the simmering tension between the conquerors and the conquered for decades.

As Hall (1960:70) rightly points out, "[O]ne of the most potent influences upon the Burmese national movement was Buddhism." The British conquest of Burma was seen, on one level, as a repudiation of the people's religion. For the Burmese, the king personified the Buddhist faith (Taylor, 2004:298). When the British removed the king from power, and when they summarily disregarded the sociological implications of this affront to Buddhism, their actions were interpreted as "an attack on their faith (Taylor, 2004:298). The revolution of 1930-1931 testified to this outrage, as the Buddhist monk, Hsaya San, led a makeshift "army" against the British forces in the Tharrawaddy district. Of course, their vastly inferior resources led to a wholesale slaughter of as many as 10 000 peasants, but it reflected the intensity with which the Burmese clung to their faith and resisted the challenge to it. Though the British were eventually able to restore calm, the Burmese were not done; they simply began to practice non-violent resistance through organizations such as the Young Men's Buddhist Association (founded in 1906) and the General Council of Buddhist Associations (founded in 1920). These organizations are microcosms of the Buddhist ideology, which permeates Burmese culture to this day, seeking to foster a deeper appreciation for the religion and to foment a mindset that resists any challenge to it.

2.6.2.4   Post-Colonial Era

After the death of Aung San in 1947, the newly-drafted Constitution was changed significantly. The phrase "the Union shall observe neutrality in religion and religious matters" was amended to say "the state recognises the special position of Buddhism as the faith professed by the great majority of citizens of the Union" (Yan Kung, 2009:86.).

Thus, Buddhism gained an even greater stronghold. This is especially relevant in understanding Burma's history because it helps to explain the cultural lethargy at the thought of initiating revolutionary – and lasting – change. Kung notes that, for Buddhists, "suffering in this life is a result of bad deeds in the past, so one might as well just accept the political situation as inevitable." He goes on (Yan Kung, 2009:82) to connect this philosophy of acceptance with the Burmese government's model of repression:

> When the time for change comes, it will happen by itself. Particularly in times of intense repression, such thinking tends to predominate. If this is so, Buddhism is nothing other than a defender of status quo. This is exactly the role that the military government intends Buddhism to play.

In 1955, U Nu, the Prime Minister of Burma, made the following statement in Washington that aptly connects the foregoing historical survey with the challenge of Christian missions in subsequent chapters:

> First, Burma has a long history. We had a great and flourishing civilization in Burma, based on one of the great religions of the world, Buddhism, at the time when William the Conqueror was crossing the English Channel.

> This civilization, passed on to us by our forebears, has now become our national heritage. It is our way of life. We prefer it to any other way of life on this earth. We do not say that it cannot be improved or that it cannot be adapted to suit modern conditions; but we do not wish to change its basis. We are not prepared to exchange it for any other way of life (cited in Kane, 1986:256).

Buddhism still run incalculably deep in Burma. It is obvious both in the striking golden pagodas that dot the landscape at every turn and in the berobed monks, walking along the way singly or in groups, carrying their ceremonial fans and begging bowls. Less obviously, these monks are cultivating a culture that, in its very essence, resists the

efforts of Christian missionaries who seek the conversion of the Burmese. Perhaps one of the ways that this training is most culturally visible can be seen in the rite of passage, known as the novitiation ceremony. It is typical for boys about ten years old to become novices in the Sangha, if only for a few days. After being presenting to the tutelary *nats* to request permission to leave the community (De la Perrière, 2009:199) the boys begin their time with monks. During this time, the boys' heads are shaved and they are given brightly-coloured orange, yellow, or pink robes to wear, as they move through city streets, soliciting food and financial gifts from merchants and passersby. In the monastery, they are instructed in Buddhist doctrine and the principles of meditation. In this way, each new generation is raised up with fervour for Buddhism that stands as a wall, high and thick, dividing the hearts of the Burmese from the transformative truth of the gospel.

2.7   Conclusions

2.7.1 History

In this introductory survey, it has been shown that the roots of tribal identity in Burma are deep. The narrative demonstrates that each of the epochs in Burmese history is defined, to some degree, tribally. The history of the people groups makes this clear, as kingdoms arose and fell with respect to a distribution of tribal power; that is, whatever tribe held the most power would seek to exert that power over the other tribes. These tribal connections continue to persist to this day, as will be demonstrated in chapter 6.

2.7.2 Migration and Tribal Identification

The migration patterns also show the significance in tribal identity. While there is likely no way ever to know precisely whence and how each people group reached Burma, there are enough indicators to suggest that there was a sense of unity, most probably tribally defined, which held the migrating groups together as they made their way into Southeast Asia. Further, the unique tribal indicators demonstrate how each tribe, to varying degrees, possesses markers that set them apart from those who are not of their tribe. To the extent that there was a tribal connection in the distant past, however, this may not be the critical (or only) connection in defining the present tribal distinctions; these may rather have been sociologically developed.

2.7.3 Language

The plethora of languages present historically and presently in Burma also attest to a demarcation among and between people groups. Practically, there are many people in Burma at present who are simply prevented from meaningful communication with others because of the language barriers that exist. Further, many people, particularly in the tribal regions, have no access to the national language (Burmese) or even the tribal dialects that may be found in neighbouring villages. This renders cross-tribal communication unattainable apart from an educational effort to teach the Burmese language among the tribes.

2.7.4 Religion

Finally, the religions of Burma – most notably Buddhism, but also the various animistic permutations – serve to set the people of Burma in opposition to one another and, ultimately, other religions. The bulk of this study will be concerned with the historical, present, and potential interaction between Christian theological education and those Christians in Burma with lingering elements of Buddhism and/or animism. It is important to note however, that the religious culture of Burma is a complicated syncretism of varying elements of Buddhism, varying expressions of animism, and, in some cases, varying degrees of comprehension of the Christian faith. While these syncretistic religious practices may not be clearly demarked along tribal lines, they are certainly the product of tribal history, as has been demonstrated herein, and Buddhism, in particular, overshadows all of life in Burma. These worldviews are in perpetual tension with the biblical worldview espoused and promoted by the orthodox, Reformed expression of the Christian faith. The importance of understanding these competing worldviews, coupled with the importance of conveying a biblical worldview through theological education is of the essence of this study; therefore, these issues will be considered in depth in chapters 4 and 7, respectively.

In conclusion, former Prime Minister U Nu was quoted above in reference to Burmese Buddhism as saying, "We are not prepared to exchange it for any other way of life." The same could be said of many aspects of the tribal culture that defines Burma. Of course, it is precisely the intention of missional Christian missions to change the basis of a life (if not a culture) grounded in what is understood as a false religion. Further, the essence of

the gospel is, in fact, to "exchange" the former way of life for the new life in Christ. It is in light of this challenge and this context that the analysis of Christian missions in Burma may now begin.

CHAPTER THREE

3.0   Survey of Missions in Burma and Obstacles to Christian Unity

3.1   Introduction

The main research question of this study is to consider the effect of tribal factionalism in Burma upon Christian unity in the local church and missional outreach, and to explore how such factionalism might be addressed in theological education. To do this, the answer to the second research sub-question must identify the historic relationship of missions and the Burmese church (see 1.5). This chapter presents an historical survey of missions in Burma, with a particular view toward establishing the relationship of the church to the main research problem.

To the knowledge of this writer, a comprehensive survey of Christian missions in Burma does not exist; nor will one be attempted in this present work, as that would be beyond its scope. However, there are a number of accounts of the work of individual missionaries and denominations, as well as in-depth accounts of missions activities among certain tribes. This chapter will, first, present findings from some of these accounts in order to attempt to answer, broadly, the question of *who* has done *what* in Burma with regard to missions. This will be discussed under the heading, "A Sampling of Accounts of Christian Missions in Burma." Second, under the heading, "Obstacles to Christian Unity," there will be a reflection upon the issue of the collective results of these missionary endeavours.

3.2   A Sampling of Accounts of Christian Missions in Burma

In the Great Commission, Jesus Christ instructed His followers (and their spiritual progeny, by extension) to make disciples of "all nations" (Mt 28:19). Over the centuries and with varying degrees of faithfulness, the church has set out to fulfil that commission. While the "nations" referred to by Christ were surely not the political nation-states that exist today (see 7.2.1.2), nevertheless the modern boundaries are helpful both to trace missions history and to develop missions strategies in the present day. Burma, as one such nation-state, has both a rich missions history as well as an exciting (though challenging) missions potential.

Beginning in 1813 with the labours of Adoniram Judson, the first foreign missionary to serve from the United States, much of Burma has had access to the gospel. That access, however, has been challenged by intertribal conflicts, the competing (and government-endorsed) religion of Buddhism, as well as by oppressive and/or repressive political and military systems that persecuted those Christians – foreign and domestic – who sought to propagate the gospel. In fact, the past, present, and future of Christian missions in Burma cannot be properly understood apart from this unique juxtaposition of tribe, religion, and governmental/military powers. Therefore, this chapter will first provide a sketch of the historical development of Christianity within the framework of the Burmese context, and then assess that history from the perspectives of general missiological foci and, in particular, theological divisions within the various Reformed churches in Burma.

3.2.1 Roman Catholic Incursions

The possibility has been noted that elements of Christianity may have reached the land of Burma (known then as the kingdoms of Ava and Pegu) in the eighth century, after Nestorianism arrived in China in the seventh century (Keenan, 2005:2). Indeed, Ludovico di Varthema, an Italian linguist, reported on the existence of Armenian and Nestorian Christians scattered throughout South and Southeast Asia, including in Burma (Jones, 1863:217). Also, one tribe in particular, the Karen, are believed to have stretched into what is now Vietnam and Cambodia, where they may have learned of the faith and incorporated elements of it into their native animism. While these accounts may be accurate, there is little indication that there was any broad or substantive grasp of Christian doctrine or practice prior to the arrival of Roman Catholic missionaries after Pope Alexander VI "gave the whole of the East to Portugal to balance his gift of the West to Spain" (Purser, 1911:86).

The Portuguese, with so great a prize laid before them, sailed throughout the East and, finally, to Burma for exploration and trade, and brought with them priests to baptize into the Roman church whatever natives they encountered. Thus it was that Filipe de Brite, an adventurer from Portugal, arrived in Burma in the early 1600s and became friends with the king, Nat Shin Naung, who was converted to Catholicism by the Jesuit priests accompanying de Brite. However, the efforts of the Roman Catholic missionaries were often met with tragedy: with massacres at Syriam in 1612 and, again, at Pegu in 1692 (McLeish, 1929:32). Later, in 1722, Pope Innocent XIII sent two missionaries with the

express purpose of evangelizing Burma and, twenty years later, Benedict XIV appointed a "vicar Apostolic" over Burma (Herbermann, 1913:82).

While it is commonly known that the later Baptist missionaries, Judson chief among them, would produce significant works of translation into Burmese, it is nonetheless true that the Roman Catholics had already laid considerable linguistic groundwork several decades earlier in the translation of tracts, which introduced several important theological terms into the Burmese language. Dingrin (2005:92-93) lists a few of these, such as the Burmese words for God (*Bhurā"),* God the Father (*Khamaññ ̒"to ̒*), God the Son (*Sā" to ̒*), God the Spirit (*Viññāñ ̒ to ̒*), Trinity (*Sum"pā" Bhurā" ta chū*)*,* religion (*bhāsā*), law (*tarā"*), commandment (*paññat ̒*), sin (*ʼaprac ̒*), grace (*gun ̒kye"jū"to ̒),* and glory (*bhun ̒"*). Thus, subsequent missionary translators were able to build upon this foundational vocabulary, though Cope Suan Pau argues that because the Burmese vernacular 1) was/is laden with conspicuous Theravada Buddhistic meaning and 2) is not representative of the "primal beliefs" of the indigenous hill tribes, "the early nineteenth-century Protestant missionary translation of the Christian faith to the Burmese vernacular had been ineffective in terms of spreading [the] Christian faith" (Pau, 2013:71).

Over the next hundred years, Roman Catholic efforts waxed and waned until there were 11 priests and about 5 000 Catholics in the land in 1855, though with few Burmese converts. By 1926, there were more than 80 000 Roman Catholic adherents in Burma, drawn primarily from the hill tribes (McLeish, 1929:78). At present, there are estimated to be about 400 000 Roman Catholics in the country, representing less than 1% of the

total population. While the Roman Catholic presence would continue to grow at a nominal rate, it would be the Protestant missions incursions which would ultimately render large numbers of Burmese Christians.

3.2.2   Protestant Incursions

3.2.2.1   Nineteenth Century: Foundations for Missions in Burma

3.2.2.1.1   Baptists: Adoniram Judson

The central human figure in the missionary history of Burma is Adoniram Judson. Born a pastor's son in Malden, Massachusetts, on 9 August 1788, it was apparent from an early age that there was something different about Judson. At age four, he would gather the neighbourhood children and preach to them, imitating his father. By age ten, he had developed significant mastery of mathematics, Greek, Latin, and even navigation (Anderson, 1956:17-18). His father was convinced that Judson would be a great man someday, and the boy would take this to heart for many years.

He enrolled at Rhode Island College (now Brown University) at age 16, in 1804, and was graduated as the valedictorian. While there, he became fast friends with Jacob Eames, a committed Deist, and began to assume that perspective himself. Soon after graduation, he started an academy and wrote two textbooks on English grammar. These pursuits, however, merely frustrated him and, coupled with a declining conviction of his father's faith, led him to take up briefly with travelling actors in New York.

While travelling, he arrived one night at an inn and was told that the only available room was adjacent to that of a young man who was in the very throes of death. Through the night, as he listened to the moaning through the dividing wall and the footsteps going in and out of the sick man's room, Judson found himself compelled to consider eternity and the destiny, first, of the man next door, and, then, of himself. In the morning, he was informed that the young man had died. While that did not shock him terribly, it did when he was further informed that the young man was none other than Jacob Eames (Anderson, 1956:42-43).

This revelation, together with the thoughts that the preceding night had wrought, caused Judson to reconsider his own life and enrol at Andover Theological Seminary. Ultimately, he wrote that he "made a solemn dedication of himself to God" (Judson, 1894:13). Later, he discovered a sermon entitled, "The Star in the East," from a chaplain with the East India Company. At about the same time, he read a book by a British official describing the exotic land of Burma. He began to think that perhaps his destiny was to go to the Orient as a missionary and, more specifically, to Burma. This would, he thought, fulfil both his own quest for a right path to eternity and his father's determination that Judson be a success in life. The latter would occur (he thought) because there had yet to be an American foreign missionary to the East. He set his sights on this goal.

After a number of fits and starts with churches that had little experience with (or interest in) foreign missions, Judson was able to prevail upon a group within his Congregationalist Church to form a mission board in 1810. True to his objective,

Judson, along with six other men who shared his vision, became the first American foreign missionaries. Having recently married the former Ann Hasseltine ("Nancy"), he set sail for Burma by way of India, where he met with the English missionary, William Carey. On the journey, he became a convinced Baptist, believing that the paedobaptist practice of Congregationalism was inconsistent with Scripture. While this caused financial concerns, the Baptists in America welcomed him into their fold and replaced the support from his former denomination, which was lost with his change of conviction.

In India, Judson was faced with the harsh realities of his calling. The East India Company was prohibiting any missionaries from entering the country because they equated Western ideas as being catalysts for revolt among the Indian people. Further, he learned that Burma was far from the idyllic place he had thought. He heard of the common practice there of punishing minor criminals with beheading, crucifixion, and "pouring melted lead in small quantities down the throat" (Cornhill & Armstrong, 1815:86). He learned that one ruthless Burmese leader had even had 500 men buried alive. He was faced with a quandary. He could not stay in India; he dared not return home a failure; and yet he was counselled by many that he should not go to Burma. Believing in his call to Burma despite the risks, he set sail for the "Golden Shore" in 1813. Burma was called "Golden" because of the many gold pagodas that rose above the horizon. Indeed, the famous Shwe Dagon pagoda, which purportedly enshrines eight hairs from the head of Buddha himself, was Judson's first sight as the ship drew close to the coastal town of Rangoon.

The early years of his ministry were frustratingly devoid of converted Burmese. After six years, there had been only one public profession of faith in Christ, followed by baptism. By 1820, seven years after they arrived, there was a total of three native converts. Part of the difficulty lay simply in communicating biblical concepts; another difficulty was the ruling monarch, who was concerned that Judson was "turn[ing] the bottom of the priests' rice pot upwards" (Snodgrass, 1827:243) by challenging the long-held Buddhist beliefs. Judson was not deterred. He continued to share the faith whenever there was someone willing to listen. All the while, he was about the business of translating the New Testament in Burmese. By 1823, the entirety of the New Testament had been translated, along with a summary of the Old Testament. Despite the challenges, Judson could take comfort in that progress. Until, that is, the British invaded Burma in 1824.

The invasion being unforeseen, the Burmese rulers made a slapdash assumption that the foreigners in the land – including Judson – must be covert spies for the British. Quickly, the foreigners were gathered up and imprisoned. The ensuing year in prison was unspeakably horrible, with each prisoner bound with five sets of fetters, and their feet hoisted into the air each night, with only their head and shoulders supporting their weight as they tried to sleep (Judson, 1894:170). Daily, men were pulled from the "Death Prison" to be executed. Judson said of this period, "If I had not felt certain that every additional trial was ordered by infinite love and mercy, I could not have survived my accumulated sufferings" (Harrison, 1954:73).

Finally, with the British having the clear upper hand in the conflict, the Treaty of Yandabo was signed, with the British choosing to retain control only of coastal areas to

the east and west of Rangoon. A key condition of the treaty was that the Burmese release the foreigners, including Judson, who was reunited briefly with Nancy in Amherst before having to visit the new British capital. Soon after arriving, he was informed that Nancy had died of an illness. This led to a low point in Judson's life as he considered his lifelong "lust to excel" (Anderson, 1956:383) and wondered if he had been driven by other than godly motivations and whether this had led to the death in his family. This period culminated with a long respite in the jungle, where he sought the Lord in prayer and in the Bible. He came out of this time with his faith intact and his passion renewed.

He relates in his writings how he began travelling up and down the river, only to be amazed that so many of the natives had heard of him and his work. Everywhere he went passing out tracts, he was met with people who said: "Sir, we hear that there is an eternal hell. We are afraid of it. Do give us a writing that will tell us how to escape it ..." and "Sir, we have seen a writing that tells about an eternal God. Are you the man that gives away such writings? If so, pray, give us one, for we want to know the truth before we die" (Goodrich, 1845:46).

While his ministry was seeing much fruit, there was a void in his personal life without Nancy. Another missionary, George Boardman, had recently died, and his widow, Sarah, undertook to serve in his place with Judson. Soon, they fell in love and were wed. Sarah would bear eight children for Judson, six of whom would live. The couple worked well together, and entered what Anderson (1956:415) terms, "the quiet years" in the midst of such a tumultuous life. It had taken nine years to baptize the first eighteen

converts; however, in the next five years, 242 natives and 113 foreigners were converted. In 1831 alone, 217 souls professed faith in Christ (Anderson 1956:403).

Judson was about the work of translating the Old Testament, while preaching sermons every day and overseeing an ever-growing group of missionaries. As seems to have been the case so often, illness struck his family; this time, it was Sarah. It was thought that a sea voyage may help, and so the couple, together with three of their children, set sail for the United States. As the ship passed the Cape of Good Hope, however, Sarah succumbed to her illness. Before she died, Judson asked her, "Do you still love the Saviour?" To which she replied, "O, yes, I ever love the Lord Jesus Christ" (Canoll, 1854:100). Judson then asked, "Do you still love me?" This she affirmed with a kiss (Anderson, 1956:440). Soon afterward, Judson buried his second wife; this time, at St. Helena. Later, he would write,

> For a few days, in the solitude of my cabin, with my poor children crying around me, I could not help abandoning myself to heart-breaking sorrow. But the promise of the Gospel came to my aid, and faith stretched her view to the bright world of eternal life, and anticipated a happy meeting with those beloved beings whose bodies are mouldering at Amherst and St. Helena (Chubbock, 20123:247).

Judson continued on to the United States, which he had not seen since first being commissioned to the mission field thirty-three years earlier. He expected there to be precious few who would even remember him, and he rather anticipated the peace of such anonymity. It was not to be, however, as Judson had become tremendously famous throughout the nation. Throngs were awaiting him at the docks and "a hundred families competed for the honour of receiving him" (Anderson, 1956:444). Indeed, in his

absence, he "had been the subject of thousands of sermons, the theme of hundreds of thousands of prayers" (Anderson, 1956:445). Thus, he was shuttled from town to town as people eagerly hoped to hear tales of the exotic Orient.

Judson proved to be somewhat of a letdown in this regard. He was not interested in regaling the crowds with stories of his own experiences, but rather used each opportunity to share the gospel. When informed that the crowds were displeased, he replied: "Why, what did they want? I presented the most interesting subject in the world, to the best of my ability ... I gave them a story – the most thrilling one that can be conceived of" (Wayland, 1853:368-370). Judson would be the source of some consternation once again, as he took a personal interest in the fiction of one Fanny Forester and, soon after, with the lady behind that *nom be plume*, Emily Chubbuck.

Upon inquiring whether Emily was a Christian and being assured that she was, a meeting was arranged at the home of a friend. As was his nature, Judson quickly got to the first point: he wanted her to write Sarah's biography. Soon after, he got to the second point: he wished her to be the next Mrs Judson. Emily was well aware of Judson, having followed with interest the stories of Nancy and the tragedies of the years in Burma. Though nervous at the prospect of moving to this foreign land, she acquiesced and, soon, the newlyweds were on a ship bound for the golden land of Burma.

For four years, the couple laboured; she with the biography of Sarah, he, now with a Burmese dictionary, which he completed in 1849. Along the way, Emily bore Judson a

daughter. For his part, Judson devoted much of this period of his life reflecting upon the instruction of Christ to love as He loves. During this time, he became ill and was confined to his bed. One day, he called Emily to his bedside and told her, "I have gained the victory at last. I love every one of Christ's redeemed as I believe he would have me love them" (Wayland, 1853:825). Not long after, his illness grew more severe and the palliative of a sea voyage was again suggested. Emily, pregnant with their second child together, could not travel with him as he, now unable to walk, was carried upon a ship by a trusted Burmese convert. On 12 April 1850, "Adoniram Judson reached his golden shore" (Anderson, 1956:504). He died believing that not only Burma, but the entire world, would soon see the dismantling of every false religion. He wrote, "In about one hundred years, all false religions will disappear and the religion of the Lord Jesus Christ will be established throughout the world" (Dingrin, 2009:486). Perhaps this conviction spurred him on despite the early challenges. Whatever the case, the legacy of Judson is unparalleled in Burmese missions history. Yet, there were certainly others who served with and after him.

3.2.2.1.2   Baptists: Others

While many Baptist missionaries have served in Burma, a few (in addition to Judson) are of particular note. Among these is George Boardman. While Judson concentrated much of his effort to work among the Burmans, Boardman laboured among the Karen (McLeish, 1929:22). Boardman ministered among that tribe alongside the first Karen Baptist, Tha Byu (1778-1840). Formerly a robber, murderer, and slave, the converted Byu served with Boardman to evangelize the Karen.

Of Byu, Dwe (2001:829) writes:

> In the 22 Apr 1827 entry in his journal, Judson recorded, "Maung Tha Byu, a poor man belonging to Maung Shwe Be". Judson described Tha Byu as "a Karen by race, imperfectly acquainted with the Burmese language, and possessed of very ordinary ability. He has been about us several months and we hope that his mind, which is exceedingly dark and ignorant, has begun to discern the excellency of the religion of Christ." Judson recorded that Tha Byu had "a diabolical temper, but after much prayer and hard work there was a breakthrough."

Another important figure in Burmese missions history was the Baptist, Edward Abiel Stevens (1814-1886). The grandson of Josiah Stevens, a missionary to the Isle of Shoals off the coast of New Hampshire, Edward Stevens was consecrated by his mother to the foreign missions while still an infant. He would own that consecration, setting off to Burma at the age of 23. In 1837, with his new bride, Stevens was given a "sending-off" service in Boston, with a hymn written for the occasion (Stevens, 1897:9), which said, in part:

Go where idol gods unheeding
Burmans crowd the Salwen's side;
Go where souls for light are pleading,
Of the lamp of life denied.

Together with missionaries Lyman Stilson and DL Brayton and their wives, Stevens landed at Moulmein, where Judson joined the boat for that stage up the Irrawaddy River. Though only 47 at the time, Judson was considered "the venerable missionary" in Burma, and Stevens was glad to begin his ministry alongside the seasoned veteran. He would go on to be "intimately associated" with the work of Judson for years. In fact, Stevens was entrusted by Judson with the final revision of the Burmese Bible, as well

as the manuscript of Judson's Burmese dictionary – written in pencil and, in places, barely legible. It was Stevens who ultimately saw to their printing and distribution (Stevens, 1897:17). In addition, he personally wrote and/or translated commentaries, hymns, church histories, as well as general historical texts.

Though he was based in Rangoon, ministering to the Karen, Stevens would regularly make trips into the jungle, to the distant tribal villages. His grandson attested to Stevens' singular passion by noting that the "joy of his life" was "to watch the breaking of the morning light upon a nation shrouded in the gloom of heathen night" (Stevens, 1897:24). Indeed, he could not for long stay away. Late in life, on a visit to America, he was preparing to return to Burma, when a friend asked, "Why go back? Why not, after a life of toilful service on heathen shores, spend the evening of your days in well-earned rest in your native land?" To which Stevens replied, "The love of Christ constraineth us" (Stevens, 1897:27-28).

William Kidd, pastor of Rangoon Presbyterian Church and a contemporary of Stevens, likened the latter to Nathanial "in the guilelessness and humbleness of his spirit"; to John "in the affectionateness an amiableness of his disposition"; and to Paul "in the earnestness and steadfastness of his faith"; and to Christ "in the gentleness and meekness of his manner" and "in the tenderness and charitableness of his heart" (Stevens, 1897:30-31).

In 1890, Henry Mabie, Secretary of the American Baptist Missionary Union, visited Burma. He reported that he was delighted to encounter so many who had been serving

in that country for so long, many of whom had worked alongside Judson. He visited with DL Brayton, "82 years of age, hale and hearty after 53 years of service, a contemporary of Judson still continuing his daily toil." He also met with "83-year-old Mrs Cephas Bennett, appointed with her husband in 1828, who recalled how the formidable Dr Judson, though busily engrossed in the task of Bible translation, would take time to romp with her children." Yet again, another saint was still serving, "Mrs Dr EA Stevens who had laboured more than 50 years in Burma and had cared for the infant Edward Judson after the untimely death of his mother, Ann" (Armstrong, 1995:62).

Perhaps such commitment to lifelong service is reflective of Judson's own standards for missionary service. Writing to Luther Rice regarding the recruitment of missionaries for Burma, Judson instructed:

> In encouraging other young men to come out as missionaries, do use the greatest caution. One wrong-headed, conscientiously obstinate fellow would ruin us. Humble, quiet, persevering men; men of sound, sterling talents (though perhaps not brilliant), of decent accomplishments and some natural aptitude to acquire a language; men of an amiable, yielding temper, willing to take the lowest place, to be the last of all and the servants of all; men who enjoy much closet religion, who live near to God, and are willing to suffer all things for Christ's sake without being proud of it, these are the men (Warburton, 1937:72-73).

While these requirements may seem restrictive, there were, in fact, many who heeded the call. By 1864, there were 103 American Baptist missionaries in service in Burma (Carter, 2007:167). Throughout Judson's life, and the balance of the nineteenth century, the Burmese church continued to grow, despite the stigma attached with conversion, for as Leigh remarks, in the mid- to late-1800s "conversion from one religion to another was

highly political and potentially explosive" (Leigh, 2011:40). Such obstacles would prove a far greater hindrance, however, in the century that followed.

3.2.2.1.3   Anglicans

The Anglican Church was established in Burma through the chaplains sent from the Calcutta Diocese to serve the British military stationed in Arakan and Moulmein soon after the first Anglo-Burma War (1824-1826). Following the second war (1852), the Anglican Church was established in Rangoon and, in the subsequent years of that decade, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG) began to develop a missions presence in Burma. While there were some medical missions foci, this would not be significant until the early to middle decades of the twentieth century. In the earlier years, the missiological efforts of the Anglican Church were principally concerned with planting schools and churches.

The SPG. sent John "Saya" Marks to begin a school in Rangoon in 1863, which was later to become St. John's College. Prince Thonze, one of the sons of King Mindon of the Konbaung Dynasty, happened to meet with Marks in Rangoon. Interested in Marks' message of Christianity, Thonze invited Marks to Mandalay, where he was granted an audience with the king. Marks was encouraged by the king to build a church and a school in Mandalay and, eventually, nine of the king's sons would attend that school, including one, Thibaw Mintha, who would himself become king (Vuta, 1983:82). Purser (1911:109) would later suggest that "[p]erhaps no English man has ever exercised so powerful an influence over the Burmese boys or won the affection of so many of them, as Dr Marks."

In addition to St. John's College for boys, St. Mary's school for girls was founded in Rangoon in 1864. Thus, the Anglican Church adopted the missiological strategy of developing schools and, by 1881, they had begun fourteen schools in Rangoon, with St. John's having more than 500 students. Vuta (1983:86) notes that "most of the school teachers were missionaries and Anglo-Burmese." While the Anglicans would make use of the school approach, there were also concentrated efforts put in place to plant churches.

Vuta (1983:87) writes that the sixth bishop of the Rangoon Diocese, Rev GE West, was convinced that "it is the missionaries' business to found churches in the region where they find themselves at work, and …the Gospel must be self propagatory ..." To this end, a number of churches were planted, and locals were converted. The SPG summarizes the success of the Anglican mission at the close of the nineteenth century by saying that there were about 3 500 native Christians in three town churches and 49 village chapels of the Anglican Church (SPG, 1881:40).

The work of the Anglican mission would continue in Burma over the ensuing decades. In 1877, the diocese of Burma in Rangoon was separated from Calcutta (though Burma was politically a province of British India). By 1886, the *Prayer Book* and *Hymn Book* were printed in Burma. Vuta (1983:151) suggests that, compared to the missions work of the Baptists in Burma, the Anglicans were "a little less indigenous," though "more successful among the Eurasians and foreigners" in the country.

3.2.2.1.4   Methodists

From 1878, American Methodist missionaries from India began to labour in Lower Burma. While there was some success among the Indians, Chinese, and Burmese, the work was primarily focused among the Europeans in and around Rangoon (Purser, 1911:105). One of their missionaries at the time lamented on the challenges they faced, "Burma has been one of the most indifferent and unresponsive fields for Christian evangelism, and the walls of spiritual lethargy will not collapse through any human agency" (Purser, 1911:29). The first Methodist church in Rangoon was established in 1880, and organized as a district of the South Indian Conference (Vuta, 1983:90). By 1927, the Methodist church in Lower Burma would reorganize as the Burma Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

By 1885, the Methodist missions effort had reached Upper Burma, as English Methodists arrived from Ceylon and established several schools. In addition, WR Winston, a Methodist street preacher, founded a leper's home to care for the many people afflicted with such disease in Mandalay. It had been the custom for lepers to live in cemeteries (Vuta, 1983:90) and this new alternative quickly led to the rapid growth of this ministry; hundreds of diseased people came to live there.

While the Methodists saw modest results among the Shan in the north, their missionaries likewise attested to the difficulty of their charge, as can be seen in this report, "Long centuries of Buddhist teaching have led the Burman to ignore God; he does not retain Him in his thoughts, and consequently the Christian message does not attract him" (McLeish, 1929:28).

3.2.2.2   Twentieth Century: Challenges for Missions in Burma

When the colonization of Burma by the British was in place, there was a freedom on the part of Christian missionaries to be about their work without fear of governmental persecution. However, this same freedom to "evangelize" was also available to missionaries from other religions. Thus, as one historian writes, there was a bit of a race afoot to win souls for Christ before they were more deeply embroiled in one of the false religions which were sweeping the country:

> British rule has come, and the missionary and his converts can dwell in safety. There is the open door. But observe another result. The Animist tribes are always ready to accept higher religious teaching, Buddhist, Mohammedan, or Christian. The question is, which will reach them first (Knight, 1911:ix-x).

As Kane (1986:307) noted, the Christian missionaries fared far better in the tribal hill countries than among the Burmese who had been converted to Buddhism already (though their efforts exacerbated tribal factionalism, as will be discussed below in 3.3.1). Brant and Khaing (1961:44) add that the hill tribes, when compared to the Burmans, provided a "rich field" for missions. In fact, nearly 95 percent of Burmese Christians came from animistic and not Buddhist backgrounds (Kane, 1986:307). This challenge to address the overwhelming Buddhist population will be addressed in detail in the next chapter in this study.

As the Japanese army entered Burma, the situation changed quite radically. Suddenly, the Christian church in Burma was cut off from the rest of the world. The missionaries serving in-country were either captured or, where possible, evacuated. Some of the

captive missionaries were martyred. The Japanese army destroyed some church buildings and commandeered others for their own use. Dunstan (1962:34) summarizes the horror this way, "It was as though a tremendous tornado had swept across the land, bringing destruction, confusion, and devastation." Yet, despite the severe challenges faced by the indigenous church, they were remarkably resilient.

Ed and Virginia Fletcher, Baptist missionaries who were "invited to leave" during the Japanese occupation, described the state of the church upon their departure in 1942, "Baptists carry on work in 18 languages ...; usual attendance at Convention was about 2,500, from at least all the major groups of Burma's 29 languages and 130 dialects" (Fletcher & Fletcher, 2006:413). This seems to indicate that the church was growing or at least in good health; however, the church would thrive even more in the adversity of war and persecution.

Three years later, when missionaries began to return to the British-liberated Burma, they discovered, interestingly, that church membership had grown at a greater pace during the war than prior to it. One author suggests the reason for this being that "the church in Burma had met the full force of man's destructive power and had emerged victorious; and that without the presence of missionaries to guide and direct and sustain it" (Dunstan, 1962:36). Another writer noted,

> The Christian church in Burma is tied to no one's apron strings after this. The welcome [given returning missionaries] was deeply affecting; but let no one assume that he returns to missionary leadership, old style. Burma's Christians have earned the right to lead in the advance of Christ's kingdom among their own people (Anon., quoted in Dunstan, 1962:36).

Along with the return of the missionaries in the post-war years, there was the sea change in the Burmese political environment, alluded to previously. As a result, by 1952, there was one missionary per 4 250 Christians in Burma, down considerably from a ratio of one to 1 400 just ten years earlier (Thomas, 1952:1332). Visas were increasingly denied to Christian workers and the Burmese church was again faced with a measure of isolation, though less aggressively so than during the Japanese occupation. They were not often openly persecuted for their faith; they were merely cut off from the outside world, as all citizens of Burma were gradually becoming.

From 1966 onward, the situation worsened. Missionaries from all Christian denominations were expelled from the country (Kane, 1986:335). All existing churches were nationalized, and all printed literature was subjected to censorship by government officials, who required permits to purchase paper to print magazines, books, and Bibles (Win, 1988:279). Yet, once again, despite the government's intentions, the Burmese church flourished, growing in the interim, with the estimated evangelical population rising from two percent to five percent. These are still, of course, very small numbers, though trending in the direction of growth.

It remains to be seen how the Burmese church will fare in the current political climate. What can now be demonstrated is the work of the indigenous church, in concert with limited assistance from the global church, from the period of the military junta in 1988 to the present day. It is to the analysis of this contemporary context that this study turns next.

3.2.2.3   Twenty-First Century: Opportunities for Missions in Burma

3.2.2.3.1   Greater Access to Burma

In light of the oppression suffered by many Burmese, it can rightly be said that Burma has witnessed a significant transformation in the past few years, particularly with the overwhelming defeat of the junta (SLORC) in favour of the party of Aung San Suu Kyi, the National League for Democracy (NLD). The military is still in control of some ministries (defence, home affairs, and border affairs), but has certainly loosened restrictions in two areas that are important in this study: foreign visitors and indigenous churches. The following descriptions are drawn from accounts related to the writer from other missionaries to Burma or from the writer's own experiences as a missionary in that country.

As recently as 2008, foreigners who visited Burma could expect to be challenged in three ways: in the visa application process, at passport control upon arrival, and by "watchers" while in country. In 2008 (and for years before), the process for acquiring a visa involved providing an explicit description of the traveller's purpose for the visit, his occupation, and his assurance that he would not engage in anything other than the stated purpose which, generally, had to be "tourism" to gain access to the country at all (there were occasional exceptions, such as visas granted for the purpose of archaeological projects or other scientific/historical research). Then, upon arrival at the airport, the traveller could expect to have a government official review the terms and limitations, while stressing the penalty for violation (ranging from expulsion to imprisonment). Finally, the visitor would routinely discover that his hotel room had been

searched, and it would not be unusual to see a "familiar" face at different public places; these "watchers" were understood to be reporting upon the visitor's activities.

Significant progress has been made with regard to foreign visitors, particularly in the past five years. Now, the process is less restrictive. There is still a visa application, of course, and it does still require that the applicant provide current and previous employment information. The government of Burma has initiated a "visa on arrival" process; however, at the time of this writing, the traveller is still required to apply for, and be approved for, the visa prior to arriving. Thus, all that has really changed is that the physical visa is affixed to the passport upon arrival, rather than before arrival. Again, there is an acknowledgment on the application that the traveller's signature attests to his promise not to engage in any activity other than that stated. The process at passport control, however, has been significantly streamlined. Upon arrival at the Yangon International Airport, for example, the traveller simply presents his passport, receives a stamp, and proceeds. There is no discussion or questioning, unless (as at any international port of entry) a traveller appears suspicious or unduly nervous to immigration officials. Further, unauthorized searches and "watchers" are either no longer part of the process or so clandestine as to pass unnoticed.

3.2.2.3.2   The State of Indigenous Churches

With regard to indigenous churches, there have been noticeable changes there, as well. It was not uncommon in the not-too-distant past for local churches to be subject to raids, harassment and, at times, even physical persecution without warning or provocation. Such was the case of a random crackdown in 2009, as reported in the March issue of

Christianity Today (Compass News Direct, 2009), "Pastors from more than 100 Yangon churches were summoned to a meeting and told to sign documents pledging to cease operation of their churches, according to Mizzima, a Burmese news agency." The article goes on to say that this particular case is thought to have been "related to Christian involvement in relief efforts for the victims of Cyclone Nargis," which had devastated Burma the year before. Still, while the possibility of such drastic measures remains, the probability would appear to be less likely at present, due to the increased interest in Burma from the international community and a corresponding call to improve upon the liberties of the people. Indeed, most churches are free to gather and worship without fear of persecution, though they do still face difficult bureaucratic obstacles when they try to avail themselves of such things as permits, tax considerations, and other actions that require government interaction. Such discriminations and how this occurs differs vis-à-vis "registered" and "unregistered" churches.

Prior to 1966, the government would regularly issue permits for churches to be built. This practice was gradually reduced until, in 1990, the decision was made to halt the issuance of all church building permits. Thus, the only churches in Burma that are officially "registered" are those in possession of the proper permits for their buildings. Of course, there are many house churches that have no formal buildings (and, thus, no need of permits) but these are not considered churches by the government and are treated as would be any private gathering of people by the hyper-paranoid junta: with wary scepticism.

3.2.2.3.3 Fewer Hindrances for Foreign Visitors

Another positive improvement in the present era in Burma is that many missionaries have taken advantage of the looser entry procedures to renew ministry in the formerly closed country. One hotel, in particular, has gained a reputation as a "missionary hotel," and the guests can gather in the common area, share meals, and speak openly about their respective ministries. Such open talk is not always wise in public, as the government is still not keen to people flouting their newfound opportunities. In fact, the rules have not changed; only the enforcement of them has (Seymour, 2015). Therefore, a "safe" place to meet and talk freely is welcomed indeed. Again, however, this improvement is counterbalanced by the continuing challenge for missionaries to bring resources (Bibles, books, etc.) into the country. While immigration officials are less likely to contest a visitor bringing in a personal Bible, the scrutiny would intensify if it were a *box* of Bibles.

3.2.2.3.4 Greater Access between Burma and the Global Church

In several places throughout Burma, it is now possible to access the Internet, though this is almost unheard of in the rural areas, which account for most of the country. This access opens the door for local Christians to interact with the global church, make use of innumerable resources, and makes possible a sense of community even with other believers within Burma. At some places, such as the hotel mentioned above, there are even wireless networks available. That being said, it is still a well-known fact that the government continues to monitor all communications (written or electronic) and, since the laws that have been in place for decades have not been repealed, the authority still

exists to use those laws to impede or forbid any communications deemed undesirable by the government. This takes the place of unexplained Internet outages (which the locals understand to be simply temporary access restrictions imposed by the government) or even various degrees of censorship. Thus, some missionaries choose to reserve emails home for general information such as health rather than detailing ministry particulars. Also, for those believers in the rural areas, the Internet remains out of reach. Still, that there is any access at all is a positive development.

3.2.2.3.5   Emergence of Evangelical Seminaries

One particularly bright spot in the evangelical communities of Burma is the passion, commitment, and perseverance of the Christians, the pastors, and the Bible college/seminaries. The typical Burmese Christian may not have a fully-developed theology, because the typical pastor has not been adequately trained to provide this to his church (this is a matter to be addressed in subsequent sections of the present work). Still, the typical Burmese Christian is passionate about that which they do know – often, the simple gospel of the love of God demonstrated to them in the cross and Christ and received through faith – and eager to share what they know with others (though, for some, there is a reticence to venture outside of their tribes even for evangelism, as will be discussed in chapter 6).

Likewise, the pastors are hungry to be filled with the meat of God's Word so that they may be better followers of Christ themselves and, in turn, better leaders of the flocks under their care. This writer has personally encountered a number of such pastors who labour bivocationally, engaging in gruelling physical labour by day and still spending

hours each evening pouring over the Bible and whatever other training materials they may have. They are also anxious to pass on what they learn, holding impromptu Bible studies in their homes for any who would like to come.

Finally, there are a handful of evangelical Bible colleges and seminaries that are allowed to operate freely in Burma. Most of these were founded prior to the restriction on church and other Christian permits and licenses. Many of the "registered" colleges and seminaries have drifted into either liberal theology (that bears a striking resemblance to Buddhism) or into a myopic focus on social issues to the detriment of the gospel. However, there are a few that have remained faithful to their evangelical roots, and though they have precious few resources, they are using what they have for the training of pastors. Because of the dearth of resources, however, these schools are only able to serve a very small fraction of the pastors who desperately need sound biblical and theological training. Equipping these schools and the pastors they serve is a key aspect of a successful missions strategy for Burma, as they will, in turn, nourish the believers throughout the land.

3.3   Obstacles to Christian Unity in Burma

3.3.1 Missiological Foci

3.3.1.1   The Missiological Dynamics of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*

In the early twentieth century, German sociologist, Ferdinand Tönnies (1855-1936) coined two phrases to reflect what he perceived to be two distinct dynamics of social

groups: *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* (typically translated as "community" and "society," respectively) (Tönnies, 1957). *Gemeinschaft* essentially describes a community that involves strong personal relationships and relatively weaker social institutions. These communities are perhaps best exemplified within families; however, such communities are also present across a more broadly dispersed group connected by common beliefs (e.g. religious identification). These groups evoke a high degree of loyalty and commitment.

By contrast, *gesellschaft* defines a social group, or society, that is composed of individuals pursuing their own interests, often at the expense of others. While these individuals are part of the larger group, the group per se, is not their prime concern, but is more properly understood as a means to an (individually-desired) end. *Gesellschaft* is perhaps best exemplified by a business wherein all involved are less concerned about the success of the business than about how the business's success redounds to their benefit vis-à-vis their interests and objectives.

These concepts are helpful in diagnosing three historic missiological deficiencies in Burma, which can be broadly classified as 1) tribal exclusivism; 2) Western individualism; and 3) denominational separatism. The first and third of these reinforces and validates the tribes' cultural *gemeinschaft*, or the sense of community within the tribe, whether that is the ethnic tribe or the denominational "tribe." At the same time, however, the individualistic emphasis upon the doctrines of salvation presented by some Western missionaries encourages a contrasting and conflicting *gesellschaft* among the tribal converts. The result is a missiological "mixed message," which does

little to foster Christian unity across tribal and denominational boundaries and, in fact, impedes such unity.

3.3.1.2 Tribal Exclusivism

One factor that has contributed to ethnic factionalism in the Burmese church is the manner in which the various missions endeavours have typically targeted a particular tribe exclusively. Brant and Khaing (1961:47-48) explain:

> The Burma missionary works in a small, well-defined field, unavoidably at first, perhaps, because the hill tribes have different languages and dialects and the new missionary can learn but one language at a time and thus prefers to confine his activity to one group.

Not only linguistic concerns, however, but geography and culture affect the missionary's ability to interact fluidly with multiple tribes, too. There are, as was seen in the previous chapter, numerous cultural elements dividing the various tribes throughout a diverse and often inhospitable terrain. Thus, the foreigner who is attempting to gain mastery of the language of one tribe will face considerable cultural obstacles and often geographical challenges, as well. To attempt to penetrate multiple cultures would make the task exponentially more challenging and, thus, such attempts are, and were historically, rare. Brant and Khaing continue (1961:47-48),

> But even after long residence, during which diverse peoples could be gathered under one roof, this separateness persists. One consequence is partisanship, applied to strictly demarcated spheres of activity.

Despite the challenges associated with missions in the unique context of Burma, this "partisanship" compounds the problem of disunity in the church. One potentially

negative effect of this practice of tribal exclusivism is that it tends to project a posture of inherent partiality on the part of the missionary for a particular tribe over other tribes. This can further lead to a reinforcement of the already present intertribal wariness, as the "preferred" tribe is inclined toward an expectation of preferential treatment. (This will be demonstrated in the discussion of pastoral interviews in chapter 6.) Consequently, this perceived partiality (real or not) serves to validate the tribe *qua* tribe; that is, the tribe is properly valued for its being (*esse*), which, in turn, is often improperly interpreted as imbuing the concomitant qualities (*concomitans*) of the tribe (e.g. its culture and traditions) with inordinate value, as well. Finally, this creates an heightened atmosphere of *gemeinschaft*, wherein converted members of the tribe, with which the missionary serves, are disinclined to reject even those elements of the tribal milieu that are antithetical to their profession of faith.

The present state of intertribal wariness in the church suggests that at least some missionaries in Burma have not challenged this sense of accommodation nor stressed that converts must "come out from among" a worldview hostile to Christ, even if that means disassociation from their tribal culture (though not necessarily from their tribal identity). Subsequently, those converts have not been encouraged to embrace the unity of fellowship in Christ beyond their tribe. Stepping out in faith into an authentic relationship with Christ may well involve leaving the security of "the familiar cocoons of cultural identity" (Zaidi, 2010:134), but with the promise of so much more. As Garner (2014:3) notes in his critique of the Insider Movement (IM) in Muslim-directed missiology, "The Church … has always grown by its radical otherness, not by accommodation." As in IM, there has been in Burma (and perhaps also in missiological

stratagems in other tribal cultures), a desire to minimize the "radical otherness" of publicly embracing a relationship with Christ, so that the convert may avoid the potential for cultural and even familial ostracism. However, to allow converts to blur the lines between their previous identity as '*x*' and their present identity as a disciple of Christ is to confound and confuse the new believer with a false sense of peace, when peace (other than spiritual peace) is not promised. There is no biblical warrant for "lessening the blow" of conversion; it is a cross that Christ warns may well divide even families (Lk 12:53). There is a cost to discipleship, and to mitigate that cost – at the higher cost of denying it (even outwardly) – is simply not the answer. To separate "identity" between how a convert perceives himself and how others perceive him is to set up a false (or, at the least, deceptive) dichotomy. Thus, the answer, then, is not to avoid the "radical otherness" of Christianity by retreating to the "familiar cocoon," or *gemeinschaft*, of tribal identity; rather, it is to step boldly into the *gemeinschaft* of Christian unity.

Drawing again from the similarities with IM, Rebecca Lewis, an IM proponent, (2009a:674) argues, "In many countries today, it is almost impossible for a new follower of Christ to remain in vital relationship with their community without also retaining their socio-religious identity." Of course, missionaries ought not to seek to have communities divided! Yet it must be acknowledged that such may, at times, be the response when someone places their faith in Christ. Tennent (2006:113) is right when he says, "A more open witness in a straightforward, but contextually sensitive way seems to hold the greatest promise for effective and ethical Christian penetration into the Muslim [or any – SC] world."

While some are blessed to be living in a culture that renders the only danger of conversion to be mild ridicule and a lack of socio-cultural respect, there are others who, by the providence of God, are born into a time or a place where the dangers are significantly greater. The martyrs catalogued in the annals of history would have had but retain their Roman Catholic designation (or, in earlier cases, acknowledge the Roman emperor) to save their lives. Yet one reads such accounts with awe and appreciation precisely because they did *not* do so. It is the willingness to sacrifice that validates the reality of the conversion.

While accommodation, as manifested through tribal exclusivism, has proven harmful to Christian unity in Burma, this is not to say that the missionary to Burma should not engage the tribal culture in his approach. He must simply not – even tacitly – validate those aspects of that culture, which oppose the unity of the Church, across all (even tribal) lines. Garner (2014) explains:

> Accommodation and contextualization are not the same. Faithful contextualization begins with the gospel and then addresses the culture; accommodation starts with the culture and seeks to fit in the gospel. When this critically important orientation gets muddled or reversed, contextualization quickly turns to compromise.

A discussion of contextualization in and through holistic theological education will be presented in chapter 7. In conclusion, it is helpful to point out the potential for disunity in the intertribal church whenever tribal converts are misled to believe that their tribal identity, *in toto*, remains valid and is consistent with their new identity in Christ.

Misrepresenting one tribe as "better" than another, through the missiological practice of tribal exclusivism, is often the first (if unintentional) step toward such accommodation.

3.3.1.3   Western Individualism

Up through the period of the Protestant Reformation and beyond, the predominant social theory in the Western world was collectivistic; that is, the individual was understood to stand within the framework of his society. However, the liberal social theories of Hobbes and, especially, Locke reversed this idea "with a sharp, clean stroke," asserting that the individual is, in fact, prior to the society (Rossides, 1998:49). This notion of *gesellschaft* burrowed deeply into Western sociology until it could be said (Bellah, *et al.*, 1996:142) that "individualism lies at the very core of American culture" and, indeed, the same could be said of the cultures of many Western peoples. As Elmer (2002:136) notes, "Whereas independence is an important value to Americans and Westerners in general, interdependence is the way of most societies of the world." This latter classification would certainly obtain within the tribal culture of Burma.

While there is no doubt that orthodox Christianity understands a person's salvation as being distinctly individual and personal (for, as it has been said, God has no grandchildren), the journey by which an individual understands his salvation travels through, and is expressed by, the cultural milieu in which it is experienced. To attempt to divorce the Christian faith from the convert's cultural perspective is sometimes necessary, such as when the culture is inextricably tied to a false religion. Of course, there are times when the desire to extricate a new convert from his culture is merely a

reflection of the missionary's own ethnocentrism, such as in the case of New England missionary, John Eliot, who believed the Indians must adapt to English culture before they could be saved, even when their own cultural practices were not inherently sinful, but merely un-English (Curtis, 2015). Missions history in Burma reflects elements of a similar ethnocentric emphases (Knight, 1911;xi). This is evidenced by the fact that there are churches to be found in the distant hills, where there is no electricity, no running water, and no cars, but the worshippers can be heard on any given Sunday morning, singing Fanny Crosby-penned hymns – in English.

As will be discussed in the following chapter, there are certainly aspects of any non-Christian culture that must be jettisoned if one is to become a disciple of Christ; there is simply no room for two worldviews, which are inherently in conflict with one another. That being said, there are also elements to virtually every culture that reinforce the fundamental notion of community (*gemeinschaft*), which lies at the heart of Christian unity. The essential missiological challenge in this regard is to strike a proper balance between the importance of the community of faith while, at the same time, conveying the necessity of an individual commitment to follow Christ.

3.3.1.4   Denominational Separatism

Thus far, it has been shown that it is not uncommon for missionaries to Burma to, first, reinforce a group's *gemeinschaft* by validating, even inadvertently, the unifiers of the tribe's traditions and trappings and, second, to infuse a foreign individualism that promotes an equally foreign *gesellschaft*. Converts, therefore, are simultaneously

encouraged to rally corporately around their tribal identity, while individually pursuing the manifestation of that faith in their own lives, often at the expense of its manifestation in the lives of one's neighbours. To this is added yet another new (and often confusing) dimension: the Christian denomination.

Denominational divides exist throughout the world for a number of reasons: among these are theological and/or ecclesiastical convictions, as well as simple historical persuasions. In 3.2.2 above, the missions efforts of the various Protestant denominations in Burma was introduced. While it could be assumed that the traditions represented by these different denominations shared a primary purpose, to wit, the propagation of the gospel, the reality is that there were, and are, secondary goals in play, as well; namely, the expansion of their respective traditions through church plants. Of course, for the most part, this desire is borne of a sincere belief that one's tradition is more "right" than the others; nevertheless, as it does in missions everywhere, this rigidity often serves to further entrench indigenous churches in a particular Christian tradition, thereby increasing the degree of separation between them and churches of other, equally sincere traditions. Brant and Khaing (1961:47) note that this denominational separatism has historically served as fodder for intensifying tribal factionalism among the hill peoples,

> Here is an idea they can grasp at once: My God is right and yours is wrong. The American Baptist Lahus and the Roman Catholic Kaws formerly chanted this phrase at each other until, with the advent of the Japanese occupation in 1942 and the evacuation of American pastors while Italian priests remained, the Kaws were to be heard shrieking those words in triumphant vindication of their claim.

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They (Brant & Khaing, 1961:45-46) further describe this denominational tension as it can be observed in Burma (and as it has been observed by this writer):

> Christian churches, all of which believe in one, true, omnipotent Creator-God, in the divinity of Christ, and in His crucifixion as a loving sacrifice in atonement for human sins, make so much of their differences in ritual and non-fundamental doctrines that they have made a church into an organization controlled, financed and attended exclusively by those who subscribe to its particular creed. The adherents of such an organization are said to belong to their church and they belong to no other; indeed, if they are fervent supporters of their church, they will not, if they can avoid it, have contact with another.

Thus, there is a real missiological challenge to plant churches and promote their growth within the purview of the sending denomination while, at the same time, taking care to avoid creating "rivalries" between those denominations, which have the core doctrines of the Christian faith in common.

It is interesting to note how denominational separatism is perceived by the Buddhists in Burma:

> All of this seems very strange to Burmese Buddhists, who embrace as brothers their co-religionists in Tibet, China and Japan, despite the fact that the Buddhism practiced in those countries differs from the Burmese type far more than a dozen Christian denominations differ from one another (Brant & Khaing, 1961:46).

And, again,

> [W]hen Christianity is offered to its converts in Burma, the pastor and the particular source of authority behind him, the church, become as important as the doctrine and, indeed, inseparable from the doctrine. Consciously or not, this attitude is ingrained in the missionary himself. Observation among converted hill peoples leaves no doubt that these folk identify the Christian religion with their particular church (Brant & Khaing, 1961:46).

Further compounding the potential dangers of denominational identification in Burma is the persistent memory of the nation's colonization. Walls (2004:53) has noted, "Perhaps no conversion is complete without the conversion of the past." As the colonial powers arbitrarily cobbled together a "state," which was merely politically and economically expedient, many continue to be distrustful of any such homogenizing efforts. Thus, whenever there is a push to do so in the church, the distrust remains. The missiological challenge here, then, is to take care not to elevate disproportionately one's denominational identity at the expense of Christian unity among believers who share belief in the essentials of the faith.

3.3.2 Theological Division within Reformed Churches

3.3.2.1   History of Reformed Churches in Burma

In addition to the above obstacles that exist among Christians in Burma in a broad sense, there are also notable differences between those Christian groups in Burma that would self-identify as "Reformed." As shown above, several other denominations were making inroads into Burma in the nineteenth century; however, the arrival and growth of Reformed and Presbyterian churches would not occur until the twentieth century and, for the most part, late in that century.

One person prominent in this expansion would be David Evan Jones (1870-1950) from Llandderfel, North Wales. A missionary from the Presbyterian Church of Wales (known at the time as the Calvinistic Methodist Church), Jones was sent to the Mizoram region

of Northeast India. In addition to his considerable work there, he also crossed into the bordering region of Burma between 1899 and 1905. Though only in his 30s, Jones was nicknamed 'Zosaphluia,' (old missionary) by the people among whom he ministered. As he travelled, he would sell hymnals "typically for four eggs, to remind purchasers of their value" (Ellis, 2010:4). This had the dual benefit of also providing sustenance for Jones and his party. Ellis (2010:4) explains the rationale of using hymnals in this work, "A hymn was easier to remember than a sermon and hymns preceded missionaries and evangelists to many places." He goes on to tell the story of another Welsh missionary who served alongside Jones in the Mizoram regions of Northeast India and Burma and who translated a number of hymns. Several years later, "while on a tour in a strange village, Edwin Rowlands … was astounded to hear two little boys playing on a swing and singing a hymn he had translated. A hymn of thanks for the Gospel ... *'Aw Pathian, Nangman Chanchin Tha min pe'"* (Ellis, 2010:4). Thus began the Reformed tradition in Burma.

One factor of the story of these missionaries and those with whom they served, which is particularly relevant to the study at hand, is the way in which Christian unity superseded denominational division, as noted by Zairema (1978:13):

> A Baptist or Presbyterian migrating to the other area becomes automatically a member of the church in that area, and no question arises concerning change of denomination. A Baptist minister may baptize infants if parents so demand. The highest church court of the Baptists at one time was called a Presbytery which is now changed to Assembly, perhaps due to teasing of their co-baptists in other parts of India. Many of our people did not know to what denomination they belonged — they knew, however, that they were Christians and that their duty is to spread the good news.

Another Reformed ministry was dedicated to evangelizing the fierce head-hunters of Maraland, a region of Northeast India, which also crosses into modern Burma. In 1905, Reginald Arthur Lorrain (1880-1944) founded the Lakher Pioneer Mission in London, after being rejected by the Baptist Missionary Society (Khailochhoh, 2014). The Lakher Pioneer Mission, an interdenominational, evangelical ministry, was created specifically for the proposed work in Maraland. By 1907, Lorrain and his wife, Maud Louisa, had begun to minister among the Mara, where they planted what was to be among the first churches in Chin State. The couple laboured together there until his death 37 years later, while she continued the work until her own death in 1960. Lorrain produced dictionaries of the Mara language, as well as a grammar. He then translated the Bible into that language, with the New Testament published in 1928 and the Old Testament published posthumously in 1956 by his son-in-law. He also established schools where the Mara people, illiterate until then, were taught to read. Their daughter, Louisa Margaret Tlosai (1907-1968), was reported to be the first English person born in Maraland, where she would spend her entire life. She and her husband, Albert Bruce Lorrain Foxall (1928-1977), would continue her parents' ministry, as would their daughter, Violet Louise (1938-), who remains in Maraland to the present day.

In 1847, India gained independence and, the following year, Burma did, as well. Consequently, Maraland, which straddled the newly defined political boundaries, was divided in two, with half in the Mizoram region of India and the other half in the Chin State of Burma (Khailochhoh, 2014). The church in Burma took on the name of the Mara Evangelical Church, which it bears to the present day. It is essentially Presbyterian in ecclesiology and remains moderately Reformed in its theology.

While these are examples of early Reformed ministries in Burma, a casual Internet search will reveal a host of Reformed denominations in the country at the present time. [It should be noted that Judson was, essentially, Calvinistic in his theology, though the Baptist churches that grew from his ministry are less so.] Among these are: United Reformed Church in Myanmar; Reformed Evangelical Church of Myanmar; Reformed Presbyterian Church in Myanmar; Christian Reformed Church in Myanmar; Independent Presbyterian Church of Myanmar; Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Myanmar; and the Reformed Churches of Myanmar. Most of these are of far more recent vintage, with a number being formed since no earlier than the 1990s. Typically, these represent a handful of churches, planted by one pastor. They range from just two or three churches with less than 100 adherents to 35 to 40 local churches and as many as 5 000 members or more. There is some interaction among them, such as through membership in the Reformed and Presbyterian Fellowship in Myanmar, and the World Reformed Fellowship. However, most of the denominations are, in practice, insular and almost aggressively independent.

While, at first blush, it might be said that these newer, microdenominations in the Reformed tradition are an encouraging development, they are, in reality, primarily the product of the principle problem addressed in this thesis; that is, rather than fostering Christian unity in the churches where they served, a number of Reformed leaders in Burma chose instead simply to form a series of new denominations, which would allow them to foster and maintain yet another *gemeinschaft,* unbeholden to fellowship beyond their own community. It is hoped that the leaders of these microdenominations would be

responsive to potential, unifying efforts by the broader, global Reformed community, the promotion of which is the principle objective of this study.

3.3.2.2   Doctrinal Conflicts and Confusion

A central thesis to this study is that there is a significant and persistent need for holistic, comprehensive theological education in Burma, both as a missiological objective and, ultimately and optimally, within an indigenous framework, as clarity of foundational theology is critical to the proliferation of orthodox Reformed churches. While there are notable exceptions (as discussed above), theological education as presently available in Burma simply does not adequately equip pastors to assess competing worldviews, or even competing nominally-Christian theologies, with proper biblical discernment. As was shown, churches and/or denominations in Burma have often been planted either by missionaries from the West or by local pastors, who received formal theological training (often outside of Burma). However, the second and subsequent generations of pastors, who are often lacking such training, are wont to blend orthodoxy with whatever other resources are easily available to them in their limited context.

Sometimes, this leads to uncertainty regarding such defining doctrines as baptism and eschatology, which have historically divided otherwise similar churches into denominational families (e.g. Reformed Baptist and Presbyterian). At other times, however, these resources, which unlearned pastors incorporate into their own theology, reflect the proliferation of books and other materials produced by the myriad Word of Faith teachers from the West (and, increasingly, from the East), identified herein as

Prosperity Theology. The former case (e.g. differences over baptism and eschatology) can lead to somewhat odd (but otherwise functionally orthodox) churches, such as a "Presbyterian" church that practices believer's baptism exclusively. The latter case of Prosperity Theology presents a far more harmful challenge to orthodoxy in Burma, as will be demonstrated below (3.3.2.5).

3.3.2.3   Baptism

In a study of the interrelations between the missions efforts of various denominations in the Philippines, Clymer (1980:192) provides the antithesis to the situation described above by Zairema, writing of the "competitive instincts combined with differing doctrinal perspectives which produced considerable interdenominational tension." The situation in the Reformed churches of Burma at present is more reflective of this tension than of Zairema's concord. Because of the inestimable impact of the Baptists (especially Judson), there is a sense of priority by way of tradition. While loosely Reformed in their theology, many of the spiritual progeny of Judson in Burma have a dim view of the theological convictions of their paedobaptist brethren. Likewise, though of somewhat more recent (and less prolific) provenance, the Presbyterian/Reformed pastors in Burma, many of whom have received formal theological education outside of the country, have a sense of priority by way of academics. They often imply that the problem is not in their paedobatistic convictions but in the unwillingness or even inability of their Baptist brethren to reconcile the practice of infant baptism with the Bible. The two sides have drawn clear lines between their camps, most notably surrounding this issue of baptism.

This is not unusual in Reformed communities around the world; in fact, apart from the matter of baptism, there may be many Baptists who would worship comfortably in Presbyterian churches and vice versa. While there are other distinctives, of course, especially the ecclesiological, confessional, and covenantal, most are not offended by these as they are offended by the visual demonstration of baptism in a manner inconsistent with their own belief system. This seems to be particularly true in Burma, where a church's baptismal practices are often a litmus test for truth or heresy. Again, as Clymer (1980:192) notes in the Philippines missions experience, "the best relationships existed among the Presbyterians, Methodists, United Brethren and Congregationalists." In other words, baptismal convictions are often more profound than even the soteriological harmony between Reformed bodies, such as the Reformed Baptists and Presbyterians in Burma. Granted, most informed Baptists and Presbyterians around the world believe that their theology is "right," which renders implicitly the verdict that the other camp's theology is "wrong" on the matter of baptism; in Burma, however, that judgment is often not the least implicit! Though it is not reasonable to expect either party to acquiesce on these important matters, it is reasonable to expect the debates about these issues to be gracious and charitable, for there is much comity indeed between Reformed Baptists and Presbyterians that could serve to unify and edify the believers in their churches in the midst of the overwhelmingly, and aggressively, anti-Christian environment in Burma.

3.3.2.4   Eschatology

Another example of a doctrinal divide, which is present and pervasive among the churches of Burma, can be found in the more literal interpretation of millenarianism of the Baptists and some Presbyterians on one side and the more idealized eschatology of those Presbyterians that embrace some form of post- or amillennialism. As with the matter of baptism, however, one church's preference for one eschatological view or another is sometimes less the product of exegetical and hermeneutical conviction than the reflection of the view espoused by the missions organization and/or missionary responsible for forming and/or funding the church or, in some cases, simply the view promoted in a book belonging to the church or the pastor, whencesoever it may have come. For example, there are many resources of a Dispensational perspective distributed throughout Burma; this results not only in emphatically held eschatological views, but in the centrality of eschatology to one's whole theological system.

Again, this is not merely an ancillary matter relegated to friendly (if, at times, animated) debates among parties recognizing one another as fellow believers, as is often the case in the West, for example. Rather, this writer has personally encountered leaders of Reformed churches in Burma who refuse to fellowship with another simply of the basis of differing eschatological views. With eschatology, as with baptism and other legitimate areas of healthy debate within Reformed communities, holistic theological education is an important factor in reducing the caustic nature of what should be irenic debates.

3.3.2.5   Prosperity Theology

In addition to the admittedly divisive issues of baptism and eschatology, both of which are common historically within Reformed communities worldwide, there is a rapidly growing theological perspective that is encroaching upon, and overlaying, many churches in Burma, including Reformed churches: Prosperity Theology. By this term is meant not merely the set of convictions, typical among modern, self-described "Charismatics" (such as expressive worship, an expectancy of physical healing, and the demonstration of "sign" gifts), but rather the extreme manifestation of these convictions, which are more often seen among "Word of Faith," "Prosperity," or "Health and Wealth" teachings (hereafter: Prosperity Theology). These teachings have moved many in the global church away from her orthodox moorings, as documented in the Cape Town Commitment of the Lausanne Movement (2011): "The widespread preaching and teaching of 'prosperity gospel' around the world raises significant concerns." Beginning in the United States and emanating outward, through missions efforts, into the rest of the world, including Burma, Prosperity Theology demands fuller consideration. The following discussion and analysis is drawn from an article written by this writer (Curtis, 2010).

3.3.2.5.1   Background

In some quarters, the church of the twentieth century took on a decidedly different form than had been the case for the prior 1900 years. One of the most drastic departures emerged in what is known as the Prosperity Theology movement (McConnell, 2011; Bowler, 2013). This movement gained significant traction in American culture due to the

propagation of its teachers via mass media outlets such as cable television – especially the channels devoted specifically to the movement (Jones & Woodbridge, 2011:80). The movement quickly gained an immense following, appealing to the innate desires of humanity to be in good health and prosperity. Coupled with the alleged underpinnings of Scriptural authority, this has become the most "popular" form of contemporary Christianity. Though the movement itself has been described as "false and gravely distorting of the Bible" and "a false gospel" (Wright & Lausanne Committee, 2010:99), an alarming number of sincere believers in Burma have fallen under the tantalizing "spell" of charismatic teachers who make such grand promises but, inevitably, fail to deliver. The expectations are seldom realized because their foundation is both unbiblical and untenable. The data in chapter 6 will reveal some of the ways in which the teachings of Prosperity Theology have become embedded in the Christians in Burma.

The Prosperity Theology movement may readily be identified by a number of doctrines that are formulated quite differently than orthodox hermeneutics would allow (Gbote & Kgatla, 2014:1). The doctrines of Prosperity Theology are typically derived either by taking biblical passages out of context or appealing to a "new revelation" from God that "clarifies" or expands what the Bible says. By taking verses out of context, Prosperity Theology teachers are able to proof-text their doctrines and make them sound wholly biblical. When another text seems to contradict the doctrine they are espousing, they reverse the historic, Reformed hermeneutic principle of the analogy of faith (*analogia fidei*) and allow the obscure to interpret the clear. To say that the teachers are receiving new revelation (understood to be the direct word of God) is to infer that what they say,

in turn, is as authoritative as the Bible. They usually (though not always) deny this when it is put to them, but they present these "truths" in this way, and their followers receive them in this way. The result is that people begin to look primarily to the teachers for Truth rather than searching the Word (as did the Bereans; Ac 17:11) to see if what is being taught is in fact true, or they read their Bibles only through the prism that their teachers have presented. This type of interpretation then colours the whole of the biblical message and redirects the focus from the glory of God to the glory of man.

Following are eight key doctrinal perversions, which are often employed by Prosperity Theology teachers and which this author has witnessed in the belief system of some pastors in Burma, and which is attested to in the survey data contained in chapter 6. Not all Prosperity Theology teachers use each of these in the same way, and, in many cases, the doctrines overlap. However, each reflects a fundamental departure from orthodoxy which, if carried out, renders the doctrine dangerous and heretical. Likewise, not all of the pastors in Burma who adopt one or more of these teachings adopt them all; nonetheless, to the extent that any of them are adopted, this represents a real danger to the spiritual wholeness of the collective Body of Christ. They are presented here as evidence for the urgent missiological need for holistic, orthodox theological training in Burma.

3.3.2.5.2   Doctrinal Error

God. Prosperity Theology teaches that God is subject to the authority of man on earth. In granting dominion to Adam over the earth, God abdicated His sole authority and willingly put Himself under the will and word of His creation (Lee, 2007:228). Further,

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Prosperity Theology teachers routinely speak of visions wherein they have seen God and describe Him as looking very much like a man. With this doctrine, God is reduced to a "cosmic bellhop" (Sproul, 2010:211). Prosperity Theology teachers promote the idea that because God is bound by His Word, man can use God's Word to "make" Him do things. This, obviously, denudes God of His kingship, as such a god is neither sovereign nor omnipotent. Further, to say that God has a physical form does violence to the biblical record of God as a Spirit (Jn 4:4) and contravenes the doctrine of God's omnipresence, and to say that God the Father is made manifest in all of His glory before the eyes of man contradicts the passages where it is said that no one can see God and live (Ex 33:20; Jn 1:18; 6:46).

Man. Prosperity Theology teaches that because man is created in the image of God, he is a "copy" of God (Vincent, 1991:2). This means that Adam had a divine nature. With the Fall, however, Adam lost his divine nature and authority, losing it to Satan who now has dominion over the earth. After conversion, man regains that divine nature and, with it, a "creative power" that can be loosed with enough faith and an audible "positive confession." Man is, therefore, described as a "little god." This doctrine confuses the distinction between Creator and creation. Further, it suggests a "yin/yang" idea of equal and opposite powers, rather than the biblical idea of God as sovereign over all (the earth, humanity, Satan, etc.).

Revelation. Prosperity Theology teaches that "anointed" pastors/teachers receive "revelation knowledge" that speaks directly to a doctrinal issue or to a person's condition or situation (Jenkins, 2006:12; MacArthur, 1992:54ff). This revelation is the true and

accurate Word of God. It is to be appropriated and obeyed. Prosperity Theology teachers often speak as if the "revelation knowledge" they have received is infallible, which results in two problems: first, it often leads them into a quagmire of conflicting and contrary statements that are impossible to unravel; and, second, it reveals a form of the Gnostic heresy – a special knowledge that others long for but never attain. It is often preceded by "God told me to tell you …" or some variation of that formula, the implication being that the teacher is more likely to hear from God than the one sitting under his teaching.

Positive (and Negative) Confession. Prosperity Theology teaches that speaking something audibly makes it so – whether for good or for ill (McCann, 1998:para 2). Words contain power or, as it is often phrased, "What you confess, you possess." This idea, drawn from the passages relating how God "spoke" creation into being, is another twist on the "we are gods" theme. It has the net result of crediting the believer for whatever is good in his or her life (healing, wealth, etc.) and blaming the believer for the bad (sickness, poverty, etc.) based solely on the words that they speak. It is known as Rhematology, or the "theology of the spoken word."

Faith. Prosperity Theology teaches that faith is a force that, when sufficiently held, will bring to pass whatsoever is believed to be true (e.g. "I am healed"; "I have been promoted" – even when these things are not yet true). This is based on the idea that God created the world "by faith," and endowed man with the same kind of faith that He has (Hanegraaff, 1990:2). This was corrupted in the Fall, but can be reclaimed by believers. This kind of faith requires the person to ignore the reality of the present and

"see" the desired reality instead. Thus, Prosperity Theology proponents advocate putting faith in faith. Finally, the Prosperity Theology movement hinges upon the misinterpretation of Mark 11:22, which they read as Jesus instructing His followers to have the "faith of God" (though the objective genitive construction of this phrase is most sensibly translated "have faith in God"). This faith of God theology drives much of the movement. God operated by faith in creation, they say, and all believers are instructed to have that same faith.

Poverty/Sickness/Failure. Prosperity Theology teaches that all bad things are directly brought about in the believer's life by Satan due to either sin in the person's life or a lack of faith (Lee, 2007:230). This doctrine denudes God of His sovereignty and elevates Satan to the sovereign ruler of all that is not "reclaimed" by believers. It further denies that God may sovereignly use means to mature, teach, or correct believers. Finally, it denies the reality that evil is present in a fallen world, and naturally occurs.

Health and Prosperity. Prosperity Theology teaches that God never wills that Christians suffer physically or materially (McCann, 1998:para 6). The reference to "by His stripes we were healed" means that physical healing is always available if the believer has enough "faith" and makes a "positive confession" (i.e. "claims" it). Further, Prosperity Theology teaches that it is always God's will that believers be wealthy, too, with wealth (or materialism, more generally) being reflective of true happiness (Platt, 2010:10).

Atonement. Prosperity Theology teaches that 1) Christ died spiritually on the cross; 2) Christ took on the nature of Satan; and 3) the atonement was won because Satan took Christ to Hell "illegally," thus nullifying the power of death (Onken, 1984:3; Atkinson, 2007). Consequently, after the third day, Jesus was "born again." Believers, therefore, upon being born again, are made like Christ. Prosperity Theology teachers say that the plan of redemption merely began when Jesus died on the cross, and that if His death on the cross was enough, anyone could have died for the sin of another. They restate the Nestorian heresy that said that the God-Jesus watched as the Man-Jesus was tormented in Hell, which violates the doctrine of the hypostatic union of Christ.

3.3.2.5.3   Impact upon Christian Unity in Burma

Each of these doctrines represents a significant departure from historic orthodoxy, and yet each may be found among the churches of Burma, in varying degrees. Each is certain to result in confusion and an obstruction to spiritual maturity as, in them, Jesus is promoted as merely a means to some other desired end, rather than being the chief and highest end in Himself.

Within the various evangelical churches in Burma, and within the Reformed churches as well, the perverted doctrines of Prosperity Theology are being diffused. This is due, in part, to the lack of theological precision in the preparation of the pastors of these churches. It is also due, in part, to the widespread availability of Prosperity Theology teaching via printed materials and the Internet, and the corresponding lack of orthodox resources. Perhaps most insidiously, it is due, in part, to the attractiveness of the content; that is, Prosperity Theology appeals to the basest of human passions and

desires for physical and material prosperity. This appeal is particularly acute, of course, in the context of extreme poverty, such as is the case in much of Burma, where 25.6 percent of the population lives below the national poverty line (Asian Development Bank, 2016).

Despite this appeal, however, there remains a remnant of biblical, Reformed pastors who resist Prosperity Theology. While this is noble and good, in and of itself, such polemical debates add to the weight of the wedge of tribal and/or denominational division already present among the churches. Rather than finding in the Christian faith a source of unity in which to stand against the onslaught of competing worldviews, pastors and laypeople alike are taking sides on the issue of Prosperity Theology and thus against one another. These debates, further, are often and increasingly argumentative rather than gracious in nature, resulting in hurt feelings and even animosity between those who profess faith in Christ. This represents yet another evidence of the need for holistic theological education, which will properly inform pastors-in-training in both the orthodox theological formulations of the faith and in their pastoral application. As the Cape Town Commitment (2011) states, "Where prosperity teaching happens in the context of poverty, we must counter it with authentic compassion and action to bring justice and lasting transformation for the poor." Surely, this is the optimal, if not the only, way to eradicate the weeds of false doctrine from the vine of Christian unity in the Reformed churches of Burma.

3.4   Conclusions

3.4.1   Missions History in Burma

This chapter has demonstrated that the roots of Christian missions in Burma are deep and wide: deep, because the pages of that history are rich with inspiring tales of missionary heroes, who were tested and tried and found faithful, even in the face of severe persecution; wide, because there are multiple Christian traditions that exist alongside one another, though rarely intersecting. One exception to this separateness is the Burmese Bible. The translation of Judson (the Baptist) continues to be the standard in use by most of the Christian churches (though tribal churches often have translations – or are seeking such – in their native tongue). So prevalent and esteemed is Judson's translation that a former Burmese prime minister, U Nu, was part of a discussion about the possibility of a fresh translation. In response, U Nu declared: "Oh no, a new translation is not necessary. Judson's captures the language and idiom of Burmese perfectly and is very clear and understandable" (Hunt, 2006). Indeed, Judson's entire ministry stands at the fountainhead of Burmese missions history, with even quite disparate denominational traditions acknowledging the singular importance of his ministry. Yet, from this essential starting point, the fact remains that there are many disparate traditions and, for the most part, few acknowledged points of comity among them.

Ecumenism is not the objective of this study, at least not as it has often been manifested in modern history through the reduction of denominational distinctives to the

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barest of common denominators in the interest of unity but at the expense of conviction. Rather, the objective is the pursuit of charitable and gracious relationship, and harmony where possible, among those churches which share a broad base of essential beliefs: i.e. specifically Reformed churches. More specifically, the objective is to promote this harmony among Christians in Burma who are separated primarily by their tribal identity, both as it naturally occurs and as it has been exasperated by a history of colonialism. This would seem to be fundamental to missions and, in fact, Latourette (1948:63) suggests that the purpose of Western missionaries is "to spread the Christian faith" and not, for instance, to promote "economic or political imperialism." Sadly, missions history in Burma has revealed that such idealism is not always the case in reality. As Brant and Khaing note (1961:49-50):

> "[A]t the time that the nineteenth-century British pacification of Burma had seemed a well-nigh impossible task because of the guerrilla tactics of bands of Burmese, settlements of Christian converts had been armed by a reluctant civil authority on the insistence of the missionaries and had been used effectively to subdue the guerrillas. Missionaries commented with pride on the results, which had greatly exceeded the expectations of the administrators, in terms of the "unifying power of Christianity."

Unfortunately, this "unifying power of Christianity" only effected the establishing of a safe, political environment within which the missionaries could work, and not a true biblical awareness of the unifying power of a common faith in Christ. Mon (2010:50) emphasizes the political aspect of this relationship, "the British took advantage of the divided society and applied the 'divide and rule' policy. Its 'divide-and-rule' further divided the divided society." Missions history reports that this division was not effectively rebutted, and was at times even reinforced, by those whose sole work was to promote

the conversion of souls to Christ. Present missions in Burma must acknowledge and seek to correct such errors and it is hoped that this study, with its proposal for the further development of holistic theological education, may provide some direction toward this desired end.

3.4.2 Missiological Foci and Theological Division in Burma

This chapter has also demonstrated a number of missiological practices and stratagems, which have failed to adequately promote unity between different groups of converts in Burma and, in fact, fostered or encouraged disunity among a people already predisposed toward isolationism. Tribal exclusivism, Western individualism, and denominational separatism have all served to extend and expand that gulf of identity, which already separates many people in Burma. Further, a lack of proper theological education hinders unity, as a host of conflicting doctrinal systems collide among the local churches, resulting in congregants looking ever-increasingly inward for fellowship, seeking only those most similar to themselves.

Thus, upon a foundation of tribal isolationism, these missiological practices, coupled with the doctrinal errors of an un- or ill-informed pastorate, have erected a façade of "justified separatism"; that is, converts were encouraged to unite around their particular missionary or denomination (usually within tribal boundaries), while further disassociating from believers converted through the efforts of other missionaries and/or denominations. All of this took place against the not insignificant backdrop of a number of competing worldviews, which predate the arrival of Christianity in Burma and, in fact,

define the belief systems of the vast majority of people in that land and which, unfortunately, continue to inform the belief systems of many Christians in Burma, to varying degrees. To better understand how holistic theological education can serve to equip pastors to minister in this context, it is important to understand these worldviews as they exist in Burma. Thus, this study will next consider these competing worldviews in depth.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0   Cultural Obstacles to Christian Unity in Burma

4.1   Introduction

The main research question of this study is to consider the effect of tribal factionalism in Burma upon Christian unity in the local church and missional outreach, and to explore how such factionalism might be addressed in theological education. To do this, the answer to the third research sub-question must identify factors contributing to the persistence of tribal exclusivism (see 3.3.1.2). This will be done in two parts with a particular view toward establishing the relationship of the current situation in Burma to the main research problem. This chapter will study the socio-political situation and worldviews in Burma. Chapter 6 will present data gathered from empirical research conducted in Burma, which will augment the analysis in this chapter.

While the previous chapter demonstrated that there are historical, missiological factors to consider in regard to Christian unity in Burma, there are also a number of cultural factors inherent to Burma as a complex socio-political reality. The underlying worldviews impressed upon that reality through the various religious traditions wield considerable influence upon the culture, as well. This chapter will consider, first, the theme of isolation in Burma's social construct: specifically, the reality of the "plural society"; the way in which tribes are identified independently of one another (ethnonyms); and the way in which the tribes (as in-groups) view out-groups ("image theory"). Next, the

chapter will consider the mistrust that has developed in the wake of political destabilization and human rights concerns, while recognizing the political fluidity presently on display in Burma's apparent climate of rapprochement. Finally, the Burmese worldview(s) will be considered, together with the corresponding religious and cultural influences, with respect to their beliefs and how those beliefs present as obstacles to Christian missions and, ultimately, Christian unity.

4.2 Socio-Political Challenges to Christian Unity in Burma

4.2.1 Isolationism in the Social Construct of Burmese Tribal Communities

4.2.1.1 Introduction

It is perhaps best to begin this section with the "official" view of intertribal and cross-religious harmony, as described by the government of Burma, and then seek to deconstruct this view in light of the reality presented by the opposing views of the people of Burma. An article entitled "Freedom of Religion in the Republic of the Union of Myanmar" in the *Global New Light of Myanmar* (Sein, 9 September 2016) declared:

> It is known that there has already been freedom of religion in the Republic of the Union of Myanmar since a thousand years ago. Altogether 135 national races have been living harmoniously and peacefully in the Republic of the Union of Myanmar since (sic) dawn of ancient history...

> The Myanmar national races live harmoniously and peacefully and always pay respect and loving-kindness to each other in spite of their different religious faiths, and any problems, difficulties and conflicts never arise among them relating to their belief in different religions ...

…financial grants and other necessary materials for the communities of religions are supported and provided by the Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar in order to promote and flourish their religions.

While such declarations describe a harmonious situation indeed, it bears little reflection upon the state of Burma in *fact*, for as Jürgen Habermas writes, "Hidden behind any fade of cultural homogeneity lurks, at best, the oppressive maintenance of a hegemonic majority culture" (cited in Rosenberg, 2001:4). Such is the case in Burma, as shall be demonstrated in the following discussion.

First, the article itself must be viewed warily, as it may be shown that, in Burma, the press has long been heavily censored by the ruling junta. In 2006, World Audit wrote of Burma:

> The ruling military junta zealously implements a 1996 decree banning speech or statements that "undermine national stability," and those who publicly express or disseminate views that are critical of the regime are subject to strict penalties, including lengthy prison terms. A number of journalists and writers continued to serve lengthy sentences as a result of expressing dissident views.

While there have been indications of a freeing of the press (Associated Press, 2013), the Committee to Protect Journalists (2015) still listed Burma as one of the top ten, most-censored nations as recently as April of 2015 (as well as one of the top ten nations for jailing journalists whose reports are considered "anti-state").

Despite the addition of non-government controlled media outlets, the most widely-disseminated ones remain the organs of the State Peace and Development Control (SPDC). The national newspaper, *New Light of Myanmar*, quoted above, is one such

organ. Also, the *New Light* is hardly an unbiased source, as it is known to favour the Buddhist perspective; for instance, it has always had the Buddhist calendar date on its masthead and, in what one writer (Matthews, 1995:304, fn 22) has called a "prudential appeal to Buddhism," the masthead also includes the refrain *Attasammapanidhi ca,* which means that "to establish oneself rightfully is the way to auspiciousness."

Second, if the source of the article is impeachable, its content is even more so. The idea that there is (or has ever been) such a state of bliss in Burma (religious or otherwise) defies the nation's very history, which is replete with evidence of division. Despite the efforts of the British colonialists to unite the disparate people groups, Burma remained – and remains – an uncomfortably and unnaturally cobbled together *plural* society.

4.2.1.2   Burma as a Plural Society

In his seminal work, *Colonial Policy and Practice*, Fabian socialist and pro-Burmese activist J.S. Furnivall (1948) developed the idea of the "plural society" to describe those cultures, such as exists in Burma, where different peoples interact in commerce, strictly for economic reasons, but were "so atomized that they had lost the ability to form a common social will, thereby weakening the social demand necessary to organize activities to improve social welfare" (Pham, 2005:322). In other words, they mix but they do not combine. Furnivall was uniquely focused on Burma when he developed his thesis, as he spent fifty-eight years of his life in the country as a representative of the Indian Civil Service until he was expelled by the isolationist government of President Ne Win in 1960. Although Furnivall's emphasis was on the theme of colonialism as a

detriment to social welfare, his conclusions are applicable to the issue at hand, as well. Specifically, the tribal interactions in Burma, limited as they are to the "necessities" of the marketplace, must engage on a broader level if there is to be deeper unity.

Furnivall (1931:ix) saw the solution to this fracturing in an increased, post-colonial nationalism, writing, "Nationalism in Burma is morally right, and economically sound and *may* be made economically attractive." The form of nationalism that emerged following Burmese independence was addressed above (2.2.3) and will be explored below, as well. For the purpose of this study, however, the answer (as least as regards the fracturing among believers) lies not in any form of nationalism, of course, but rather in a fuller understanding of Christian unity, which will be discussed at length in the following chapter.

While Furnivall saw colonialism as causal in "rupturing the Burmese *gemeinschaft*" (Pham, 2005:322), it is the goal of this study to discern what ruptured (or even prevented) the Christian *gemeinschaft* and, further, to discern what prompted the development of a variant *gesellschaft* in its place ("variant" in that it is not the interests of the individual that are being promoted, as is the case in classic expressions of *gesellschaft*, but rather the interests of the subgroups of the society: the tribes, or even the clans within the tribes).

Tönnies' social theory of *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* was discussed above (3.3.1.1). Commenting upon this theory, Bauman (2001:10) notes both the importance of

gemeinschaft in a community and the difference between a true and an imposed

gemeinschaft (the latter of which is really no *gemeinschaft* at all). He writes:

> [Tönnies] suggested that what distinguished the bygone community from the
> rising (modern) society (*Gesellschaft*) ... was *an understanding* shared *by all its*
> *members*. Not a consensus, mind you: consensus is but an agreement reached
> by essentially differently minded people, a product of hard negotiation and
> compromise, of a lot of bickering, much contrariness, and occasional fisticuffs.
> The community-style, matter-of-factly (*zuhanden*, as Martin Heidegger would
> say) understanding does not need to be sought, let alone laboriously *built* or
> *fought for*: that understanding 'is there', ready-made and ready to use – so that
> we understand each other 'without words' and never need to ask,
> apprehensively, 'what do you mean'?

This, then, is what underlies the issue in Burma: the government has sought to cobble

together a harmony amongst the various people groups. To the extent that there is an

appearance of success, it is quickly revealed to be but a surface harmony, as the

workaday interactions between dissimilar peoples belie any deep or meaningful unity.

This extends, unfortunately, into the Christian communities, as well.

In a similar vein as Tönnies' *gemeinschaft*, Rosenberg (2001:3) speaks of a "warm

circle" – that is, an environment of community where the people in the circle "won't have

to prove anything, and whatever they do they may expect sympathy and help." He goes

on to explain, "Nation-state democracy is thereby inherently split, between the warm

circle of belonging, identity and emotional loyalties on one hand, and the cold sphere of

citizenship, political institutions and constitutional loyalties (justice) on the other." This,

then, represents the reality of the plural society in Burma: these "warm circles," or this

gemeinschaft, do exist; however, they are strictly defined in terms of ethnic and/or tribal

identity and not, with regard to Christians in Burma, pre-eminently by their identity in Christ, irrespective of other identifiers, as will be demonstrated in the empirical research in chapter 6. Where there is interaction amongst Christians of different tribal backgrounds, it is more likely to reflect Rosenberg's idea of a "cold sphere" than of a "warm circle." Thus, the plural society in Burma has exacerbated the problem of disunity in the church.

4.2.1.3   The Social Impact of Ethnonyms in Burma

Behind the plural society in Burma lies the simple differentiation of tribal identities by name; that is, each person claims for his identity an *ethnonym*, which serves to classify him, both to others claiming the same name as well as to those claiming a different name. In 2.3 above, the various developments of the tribes in Burma were considered. While it was demonstrated that there is a rich history of a number of diverse people groups migrating into Burma from as early as the ninth century, there are legitimate questions surrounding the lingering effects of those historical traditions. Nevertheless, despite the changes that may have been wrought by co-existence in a plural society for centuries, the ethnonyms persist. Thus, the tribal moniker itself is a powerful divider, irrespective of whether any significant differences actually undergird the name(s).

There has been an academic debate as to the legitimacy of ethic identities. For instance, Leach (cited by Aung-Thwin, 2008a:693) argues that there may be only "myth" connecting the tribes historically. Other authors suggest that the tribal divisions in Burma are "imaginary" (Sakhong, 2007:208), exogenous, and/or political (Dudley, 2006;

Michio, 2007; Sadan, 2007). The Kachin, for instance, were originally called such in derision by Tibetans who viewed the tribal people as inferior "savages" (Hanson, 1907:382) – though Sadan (2007:43ff) argues for colonial origination of the ethnonym – yet now they claim the name as their own identifier. Similarly, as Lieberman (1978:469) notes, "The very category 'Karen' was a derogatory invention of the Burmese which was only given respectability by Christian missionaries in the nineteenth century." Sakhong (2007:200) argues that the ethnic identity "Chin" may have originated with the missionaries who arrived in the eighteenth century. Aung-Thwin (2008a:694) pushes back, however, noting that because

> [B]oth exonyms and ethnonyms of these ethnic groups under discussion can be found centuries earlier during the Pagan and Ava periods, when such relationships obviously also existed, the role played by colonialism and the nation-state in [the] classificatory process of reifying ethnicity is only part of the story.

Elsewhere, Aung-Thwin (1998:147) draws from the historical record to minimize the degree to which ethnicity played a part in power struggles in Burma, stating, "[E]thnicity was neither implied nor explicitly stated to have been a major causal factor" in such struggles. This is a naïve assumption, however, for, as De la Perriére (2009:287) replies, "to sustain this position by arguing that [it is found] in the Burmese sources is to forget that the Burmese chronicles being the emanation of Burmese power, written to legitimate it, it could hardly have recognized ethnic difference as a causal factor."

Finally, Lehman (cited in Aung-Thwin, 2008a:693) suggests that ethnic identity is always *relational* and, therefore, the ethnonyms in Burma continue to matter because of

the relationships within each tribal identity. Mon (2010:56) expounds on this idea, noting that ethnic identities are formed "by sharing common myths, ancestors, language, culture, historical memories, and territory." It is unquestionable that generations spent in close relationship creates a deep bond, and this is certainly the case among those identified in Burma by their various ethnonyms. Thus, while it is not the purpose of this study to attempt to prove unequivocally that genuine ethnic divisions exist in Burma, it is germane to the discussion to argue that ethnic divisions are *believed* to exist, irrespective of the justification(s) for such beliefs. This will be explored in chapter 6.

Perhaps a more familiar situation will demonstrate this conceptual influence of ethnic identities. For instance, while the European Union (EU) may strive to create a unified identity among the various member states, it is unlikely that many will ever identify solely as "European," as opposed to French, German, and so forth. Renard (1987:286) recalls, "Romantics and nationalists like Lord Byron and Giuseppi Mazzini believed that nations possessed a mythical individuality based on a shared heritage and a common culture." This, he says, led to the move away from empires (such as the Austro-Hungarian) and toward the creation of new nations (such as Italy and Germany) around their respective, shared heritages. Regardless of the extent to which such romantic notions of common cultures were legitimate, the reality remains that, after successive generations adopt an ethnonym, such beliefs are embedded into one's identity.

It may be argued that this is not a valid comparison, as the ethnic divisions (real or not) in Europe were (and are) at least demarcated by national boundaries, whereas those in Burma co-exist within the same nation. However, the geo-political boundaries in Burma

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(as in many other places) are, at least to some degree, purely the product of colonial cartography: lands and people partitioned for the political and/or economic benefit of the colonizers. Hlaing (2008:239-240) observes, "the history of Burma does not imply more than the history of a sequence of socio-political entities that have 'evolved' into what we now call Burma, a product in many ways of British colonial construction." He goes on to argue that the predecessors of the modern nation-state were, in fact, not "Burma" or "Myanmar," but the respective and, at times, symbolic "kingdoms" as discussed above (2.1). Thus, in Burma as in Europe, the attachment to ethnonyms (whether French, German, or British or Chin, Kachin, or Karen) predate any broader, unifying identity (whether European or Burmese).

As yet another example, in the United States, each of the principle regions (and many of the subdivisions within those regions) possess a lingering identity with different cultural/ethnic heritages, as attested to by the regional identifiers or hyphenated expressions used to define them: Southerner, Midwesterner, African-American, Italian-American, and so forth. These ethnonyms are often worn as badges of honour and, conversely, even employed as terms of derogation by others. It could be argued that in the United States, as in Europe and even in Burma, the modern world has brought about a lessening of the real distinctions between the historically disparate groups. Though plural societies may combine but not mix, that combining, in and of itself, results in some measure of overlapping and blurring of cultural differences. Still, the ethnonyms persist and, perhaps in reaction to the loss of real cultural distinction, take on even greater vitality and thus *become* the distinction. Therefore, regardless of whether there

are any real cultural distinctions between different tribes, the ethnonyms themselves *suggest* that there are.

The challenge, then, is whether it is reasonable to expect people who hold tightly to their ethnonyms to discard them in favour of assimilation into a broader identity (whether national, e.g. "Burmese" or religious, e.g. "Christian"). This latter consideration is a missiological concern throughout the world. In many nations, for instance, it is a persistent challenge to cultivate a "multi-ethic" congregation. The missiological (and ecclesiological) questions remain: How can the church move past this inherent sense of separatism – even if it is merely subconscious – that results from an attraction to others like us (race, language, etc.)? Even as a missionary, this writer has to resist the urge to spend time exclusively with other missionaries and expatriates from the West! The dilemma is compounded when people are not only attracted to those like them but are wary of – or even hostile to – those *not* like them, as the following section will discuss. The biblical and theological response to this dilemma will be addressed at length in chapter 5.

4.2.1.4   Image Theory as a Contributing Factor in Intertribal Relations

Not only is it important to consider how the various tribes view *themselves*, it is equally important to consider how these tribes view *others*: that is, how do they understand the distinctions that separate them (and those like them) from those *not* like them. Ethnonyms not only lead people to feel that they belong together but also to sense that they are "different" in some way(s) from "other types of human group[s] and social

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bond[s]" (Smith, 1999:127). Image theory may help to ascertain critical elements of this difference in perception.

In 1959, Boulding (1959:120-121) introduced the idea of image as "the total cognitive, affective, and evaluative structure of the behavioural unit, or its internal view of itself and its universe." In 1977, Richard Cottam (1977:62) developed image theory as a way of acknowledging that "man behaves in perceptually patterned way[s]." Originally conceived as a method for understanding international relations (Bilali, 2011:1), this theory promoted the idea that nation-states both project an image of themselves and visualize an image of the other nation-state(s). The theory developed largely around the "mirror perceptions" held by the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War. In 1986, Martha Cottam expanded the theory to the "cognitive process of categorization and specifically the assignment of characteristics to external entities (as opposed to internal motivation)" (Young & Schafer, 1998:80). In so doing, she described image as a way to provide "the perceiver with a body of knowledge about the perceived" (Cottam & Cottam, 2001:88). She went on to classify seven potential categories: enemy, ally, imperialist, colonial, barbarian, rogue, and degenerate. Mon (2010:19) provides Cottam's definitions of the attributes from the perspective of the tribes in Burma:

Table 1: Image attributes (Cottam & Cottam, 2001:98)

Image	Capability	Culture	Intentions	Decision Making	Threat/Opportunity
Barbarian	Superior	Inferior	Harmful	Small Elite	Threat
Imperialist	Superior	Superior	Harmful	A Few Groups	Threat
Colonial	Inferior	Inferior	Benign	Small Elite	Opportunity
Degenerate	Superior or Equal	Weak-Willed	Harmful	Confused, Differentiated	Opportunity
Rogue	Inferior	Inferior	Harmful	Small Elite	Threat
Ally	Equal	Equal	Good	Many Groups	Threat

Table 2: Images and policy predispositions (Cottam & Cottam, 2001:121)

Image	General Policy Predisposition	Policy Predisposition in Intense Conflicts
Enemy	Wary suspicion, containment	Hostility, defence
Barbarian	Fear, form alliances (e.g., ethnic alliance of Burma, NDF)	Pre-emptive strikes, precipitate alliance intervention
Imperialist	When domination is stable: fear, avoid conflict, submit	When conflict is unstable: anger, shame, struggle for liberation
Colonial	Paternalistic policy guidance and direction	Most commonly nonviolent repression
Degenerate	Contempt, mobilize for competition	Disgust, offensive aggression
Rogue	Derogate, isolate	Hostility, violent repression (genocidal violence)

Image theory is closely related to "stereotypes," and as such, has been applied to relationships other than political. For instance, Michael Infranco (2005) studied genocide in Rwanda and Bosnia using image theory. Also, Alexander, Brewer, and Livingston (2005:1) used image theory to study race relations in the United States, in an attempt "to better understand divergent interethnic images and to highlight the important role of intergroup context and perceived intergroup relations in shaping the content of social stereotypes." In so doing, they demonstrated that it can prove helpful as a general model of intergroup relations and, thus for present purposes, as a particular model when analysing the way in which the various tribes in Burma perceive other tribes.

Cottam and Cottam (2001:96) suggest that image theory may also be defined as "in-groups and out-groups." As such, images provide information (whether factual or not) about out-groups, which offers "an automatic screen that helps us to determine what is correct or important and what is false or irrelevant" (Cottam, 1994:18). Mon (2010:25) adds that, "When compared to beliefs and attitudes, an image is considered to be more difficult to change. Once it is formed, image is hard to change." He goes further to note, "If it changes, most of the time, it changes only in intensity." (For a contemporary example of this in US-Turkish political relations, cf. Özkeçeci-Taner, 2012.) Finally, as Lehman (2007:115) summarizes, "it is a common ethnographic fact that each ethnic 'group' sees itself always in contrast with neighbouring groups." As will be demonstrated through qualitative and quantitative research in chapter 6, the Christians among the Chin, Kachin, and Karen tribes are scarcely less influenced by their respective tribe's traditional images of out-groups than are the non-Christians in those tribes. To the extent that there are differences between the perceptions of the Christians and the non-

Christians, these are most often merely differences of degree (or "intensity"). Chapter 7 will address ways in which theological education in missions can be instrumental in modifying these traditional images, as it is clear that the way in which the tribes view out-groups remains a challenging obstacle for Christian unity among believers from different tribes.

4.2.2   Politics and Human Rights

4.2.2.1   Political Destabilization and Mistrust

As has already been suggested, the extremely fluid nature of the political situation in Burma at present renders improbable a durable analysis;. However, current events in the political situation at the time of this writing are legitimate considerations when discussing obstacles to the unity of the church. For instance, in the weeks leading up to the November 2015 elections, President Thein Sein orchestrated the ouster of Shwe Mann, his chief rival within the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), in an apparent effort to minimize his political risks, as Mann had recently aligned himself with the popular leader of the opposition, Aung San Suu Kyi (Radio Free Asia, 13 August 2015). This tension within the ruling party seemed, at the time, to belie Sein's repeated gestures toward honest political discourse, fair elections, and a vigorous pursuit of acceptance by the international community. The hope (and, in fact, the promise) was that the military junta was gradually stepping aside in favour of a government elected by, and representative of, the people. After Sein's crafty dismissal of his chief adversary, however, one commentator opined, "Don't be fooled by the display of

colourful logos and slogans from various political parties: The army is back in force"
(Zin, 2015). Nevertheless, the National League for Democracy (NLD), the party of Aung
San Suu Kyi, posted an overwhelming victory. However, with the Constitution
mandating that the military retain twenty-five percent of the seats – and with any
significant legislative or constitutional changes requiring seventy-six percent of the
Hluttaw (parliament), it seems unlikely that the new government will be able to institute
any sweeping changes (at least not without the cooperation of the military). Further, the
military also retains control of the important ministries of defence, home affairs and
border affairs.

Thus, even though the elections defied conventional wisdom and gave the people of
Burma much hope, many insiders remain convinced that, to some extent at least,
Burma will continue to operate as, what one local terms it, a "military monopolistic
capitalism" (BBC, 2015). That is, while the military continues to exert control (even if it is
only in the form of ensuring that they maintain a sufficient number of seats to veto any
legislation with which they disagree), they also continue to present themselves as a
viable market for, and participant in, international commerce. This has the net effect of
lessening global tensions and removing some of the stain of controversy related to
Burma in the eyes of the world while, at the same time, doing little to dispel the
concerns of her own citizens, who well remember the despotic rule of the junta. At that
time, as was mentioned in chapter 1, the government would employ countless citizens
to spy on their neighbours, reporting back with any evidence of "anti-state" activities.
The active practice and propagation of evangelical Christianity was numbered among
such activities, with one persecuted but optimistic pastor putting it this way, "Nothing is

legal but everything is possible, when it comes to church work" (Seymour, 2015). Even as recently as 2015, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF, 2015) declared, "Discrimination against non-Buddhists through law, regulation, and practice… is pervasive in Burma."

The challenge remains, therefore, for the Christians in Burma to discern between the soaring rhetoric about freedom and a "new era," on the one hand, and their lingering and painful memories, coupled with ongoing experiences that conflict with the rhetoric, on the other. Additionally, the Christians in Burma, as do those in other nations, have taken various stances with regard to the political situation in their country. Some are more active participants in the political process (protesting, attending rallies, and so forth) while others watch more cautiously from the perimeter. Some back the opposition party of Suu Kyi (the National League for Democracy) while others continue to encourage reform from within the USDP. Those on opposite sides of the political discourse – even if they are Christians – are increasingly finding themselves likely to be ridiculed by those on the other side, whose positions are held with equal fervour. In this climate of socio-political confusion then, the church in Burma finds solace in varying degrees of isolation. Confining interaction (other than the economic interaction of the plural society) to one's own local church or tribe is simply seen as safer than traversing church or tribal boundaries where one might encounter social persecution or even political prosecution.

Further, the open persecution faced by Christians in Burma has not abated, despite the government's rhetoric about religious liberty. For instance, in Chin State, the

predominantly Christian tribe is presently facing renewed (and at times, quite vigorous) persecution, as the government has been routinely destroying publicly displayed crosses – a practice that began during the height of the junta, leading Pu Zoe Ram, chairman of the Chin National Democratic Party, to conclude, "There is no improvement with regard to religious freedom in Chin State" (Kim, 2015). Kim continues:

> Teak and steel crosses atop clock towers, hillsides and Chin State's nearly 2,000 churches have long identified the local majority religion. Area Christians consider their destruction, at the behest of government agencies, a direct attack on their faith community.

> The Chin Human Rights Organization documented 13 incidents of large crosses being destroyed by order of the Ministry of Religious Affairs during the country's half-century military regime, which formally ended in 2011. Since then and under nominally democratic rule, at least four more large crosses have been destroyed.

According to Daw Zar Tlem (cited in Kim, 2015), who was a member of Myanmar's House of Representatives prior to the 2015 elections: "The previous regime repressed the Christian religion. The army pulled down crosses, which are sacred. The new government is doing the same and is refusing permission to build new churches."

Additionally, and affecting Burmese Christians throughout the nation, former president Thein Sein recently signed the Special Marriage Bill and the Religious Conversion Bill, which seek to restrict conversions and interfaith marriages, according to Human Rights Watch (Myanmar Government, 2015). The marriage law will allow the public posting of marriage applications for a 14-day objection period. Couples may only get married if no objections are made and women under 20 years of age must have parental consent to marry a non-Buddhist partner.

These are fairly well-known challenges Christians face in Burma. Less well-known (but related in personal conversations to this writer) are the obstacles faced on the local level (H Lyan, 2013, personal communication, 22 August), as churches interact with disagreeable municipal officials on issues from building permits to taxation. These clashes range from the merely time-consuming to the openly hostile, yet often result in a denial of the churches' request, often via prejudice for a similar request from Buddhist petitioners (despite the government's "official" position of religious equality). To this extent, then, the current political climate is a contributing factor to the persistent disunity among the churches in Burma.

4.2.2.2   A Climate of Human Rights Violations

The struggle for growth and maturity among the Christian churches in Burma must occur within the confines of the larger human rights issues that continue to plague the nation. While the pursuit of social, economic, and/or political justice does not *by itself* represent the historic definition of the gospel (Glasser & McGavran, 1985:156), it is nevertheless true that *any* activity – whether of a Christian or non-Christian nature – must confront the reality of the social structure in which it exists. In Burma, where there have long been concerns about human rights violations, this is especially the case – even in light of the progress that appears to have been made.

It has been said by a Burmese national that "human rights are anathema to the Burmese military generals" (Win, 2000:170). Whether this is still the case remains to be seen. Rampant drug manufacturing, distribution, and use; human trafficking and child

slavery; widespread abuse and diminution of women – all are endemic to the Burmese culture and all, to varying degrees, have been sanctioned or even perpetrated by the nation's rulers (Winn, 2016). The drug trade is, in fact, an integral component of the Burmese economy, as Burma is second only to Afghanistan in heroin production (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2014:15). The drug trade is also closely connected with much of the country's problems, historically. One author summarizes the matter this way, "Political crisis, civil war and human rights violations in Burma are always related with the notorious golden triangle drug trade" (Sakhong, 2001:526). Yet the local churches in Burma have a long history of attempting to interject, in the name of Christ, benevolence and charity into a culture where such qualities are "officially" lacking. Such intentional acts of grace and love must continue to be practiced – among the Buddhists, the tribal people, and among the churches themselves, through intertribal dialogue and reciprocal service.

Missionaries called to serve among the Burmese must never forget that this is a nation with a uniquely painful past – a past that haunts most of the older generation and not a few of the children. These are not ancient memories, but they are deep. Thus, the local churches in Burma are in particular need of training and resources that will provide guidance as they seek to heal themselves, each other, and their countrymen.

4.3   Competing Worldviews in Burma

4.3.1   Worldview as a Concept

Essential to a study of interpersonal relationships at any level, including intertribal

relationships, is the consideration of the "worldview" to which each party subscribes and

through which values, judgments, and priorities are filtered and assigned. Prior to such

a study, however, the very idea of worldview must be defined. Neville (2009:233)

suggests that a worldview is a "useful vague notion." Koltko-Rivera (2004:4) expounds

on that idea and provides a helpful synopsis of the historic diversity in crafting such a

definition:

> Worldview has gone by many names in the literature: "philosophy of life" (Jung,
> 1942/1954), "world hypotheses" (Pepper, 1942/1970), "world outlook" (Maslow,
> 1970a, p. 39), "assumptive worlds" (Frank, 1973), "visions of reality" (Messer,
> 1992, 2000), "self-and-world construct system" (Kottler & Hazler, 2001, p. 361),
> and many others. In anthropology alone, worldviews have been denoted as
> "cultural orientations" (Kluckhohn, 1950), "value orientations," "unconscious
> systems of meaning," "unconscious canons of choice," "configurations," "culture
> themes," and "core culture" (Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961/1973, pp. 1-2).

While these labels are varied, the substance may be distilled to a broad, core idea,

which may be restated, for the purpose of this present study, as follows:

> A worldview is a culturally-informed, yet personal, system of thought, wherein are
> held existential beliefs, such as regards the existence or non-existence of a god
> or gods; evaluative beliefs, such as regards proper and improper expressions of
> social intercourse; and prescriptive beliefs, such as regards value and purpose.

Kolkota-Rivera rejects the inclusion of values (i.e. "prescriptive beliefs") in the broader

context of worldview. However, for the purpose of this study, values are inextricably

connected to the manner in which one's worldview impacts the degree of his willingness to interact on any meaningful level with others outside of his tribe; hence, their inclusion herein.

To this definition, however, must be appended the caveat that even one's understanding of worldview as a concept is, in some sense, affected by one's own worldview; in other words, a purely objective analysis of another's worldview will always be obscured, at least in part, by subjective presuppositions. Nonetheless, before one can begin to consider the missiological implications of the rituals, traditions, and so forth, of another culture, an attempt must be made to consider carefully the meaning of those events in the lives of the participants within that culture. With this in mind, the worldview(s) held by the people of Burma will be explored.

4.3.2 Worldviews in Burma: Introduction

As Witt and Wiles (2006:41) note, there are generally several inherent challenges when approaching the study of indigenous religions. These challenges must be faced with any study of indigenous religions of Burma, as well. For instance, the sheer number of tribes and clans inhibits a comprehensive analysis of the culture(s) present in Burma. In 2004, Krech, McNeill & Merchand (2004:667) estimated that there were over six thousand indigenous people groups (or "Fourth World Nations") around the world. Certainly, in Burma – particularly in light of the repressive nature of the government over the past decades – there is no way to quantify the exact number of indigenous religious permutations presently practiced there. Further, there is the question of the very idea of

being "indigenous." In Burma, while there are many tribes and subtribes (or clans), there are also various combinations of these to be found in cross-sections of Burmese culture. For instance, in the larger metropolises, there are representatives of many tribes and clans intermingling with one another, as well as with the larger Burmese Buddhist culture, in their common workday environment. These tribes and clans adhere to many elements of their heritage but are also influenced, to varying degrees, by the other traditions around them. In Burma, then, as a multi-tribal and isolated nation, the situation is quite complex, indeed.

Despite these challenges, however, certain general observations can be made vis-à-vis the most prominent, competing worldviews in Burma. Each of these, in some way, presents an inherent impediment to the adoption of the Christian faith and, in particular, to the unfettered expression of the unity of that faith, once adopted, across tribal divisions. While, again, each of the many tribes has its own unique worldview, these are all principally related, in some respects, to the three primary worldviews in Burma, as informed by the culture historically: animism, Buddhism, and, to a lesser extent, Hinduism.

Haarmann (2007:269), in discussing the degree to which animism impacts "import religions" in Southeast Asia, writes, "[W]e find a multi-layered historical continuum, with subsequent layers interacting with previous layers, without causing disrupture or annihilation of 'rival' systems." While it may be true that import religions, including Christianity, do not always annihilate previously espoused religions, it will be shown below that worldviews of each of the religions practiced in Burma do, in fact, disrupt the

purest expression of the others. Thus, there exists a syncretistic worldview, which fails to properly demarcate the several religious systems (and their corresponding worldviews) and which presents a missiological challenge: namely, to promote both the reception of the biblical worldview and the rejection of the unbiblical elements of the previously held worldview, whether that be principally animist, Buddhist, Hindu, or some blending thereof. In light of the definition given above (4.3.1), therefore, the worldview in Burma will now be explored as to its existential, evaluative, and prescriptive beliefs, with a summary statement, addressing both the most distinctive obstacles to Christian unity and the corresponding missiological implications.

4.3.3 Worldviews in Burma: Existential Beliefs

4.3.3.1   Existential Beliefs and Influences from Hinduism

In Burma, the two principle religious traditions are animism and Buddhism, which will be discussed below. However, with its close proximity to India, sharing a thousand mile border with this neighbour to the northwest, it is little surprise that the culture and religious traditions from India would make their way into Burma. As was noted above (2.4.1.2), there is evidence of Hindu influence in Burma as early as the fifth century. With regard to the adoption of some gods from the Hindu pantheon into the nat structure of the Burmese traditions, Bonnefoy (1993:145) notes that "the boundary between the Indian contribution and native beliefs is no more precise than the line between the gods and the divinities of nature."

Discussing the contemporary presence of Hindus, Matthews (1995:299) suggests that, though

> Hindu brahmins (poonas) from Assam were present in Burma six centuries ago (in Mandalay and Sagaing there are some Hindus who even now claim these brahmins as their forefathers), most Hindus in the country are associated with the largescale immigration of Indians under the British in this [the 20th] century.

There are likely around one million Hindus in Burma, though as has typically been the case in Burma with respect to minority religions, "state statistics deliberately minimalize the number of Hindus, citing only 220,000 in order to publicly minimize their importance or profile" (Matthews, 1995:308). Still, even at the one million mark, this is a rather small minority, accounting for about two percent of the total population. However, though small, it is not an insignificant group, particularly because of the deep roots Hinduism has in Burma (and its impact on cultural development) and the symbiosis between the Hindus and Buddhists in the country. Further, while certainly a minority, there are missiological implications with respect to the Hindus and Hindu influences in Burma. Finally, because of Hinduism's history with, and innate similarities to, Buddhism, a proper grasp of the latter requires familiarity with the former.

The basis for Hinduism, or *Sanātana Dharma* (the eternal truth, or way) is contained in ancient poems (called the Vedas), rituals of worship (the Brahmanas), and the sayings of the hermit teachers of the eighth and ninth century BC, known as the Upanishads (Curtis, 2009:122). All of these point to an idea of existence as being like a stream, flowing ceaselessly with neither beginning nor end (Ross, 2013:36). Everything is part of this stream: stones, plants, animals, mankind, and so on. Hindus believe that

everything exists in life after life, with endless opportunities to "get it right" – to conform

or merge the inner self, the Atman, fully within the supreme, the Brahman. Each

opportunity – each life – moves one up or down in that stream; good deeds makes one

better, and bad deeds makes one worse, until ultimately (hopefully) one does well

enough for long enough and is assimilated into Brahman, to be reincarnated no more.

The Brahman is not a god in the Western sense – not a Creator or sentient Being. In

fact, the neuter pronoun is used to avoid any such connotation (Curtis, 2009:123).

Creation did not happen; it *was*. In the Rig Veda, the *Hymn of Creation*

(Prabhavananda, 1963:33) says:

Existence was not, nor its opposite,
Nor earth, nor heaven's blue vault, nor aught beyond.
Death was not yet, nor deathlessness;
The day was night and night was day
For neither day nor night had come to birth.
Describing the Brahman as THAT, the hymn continues:
In THAT, the primal fount
Of light – immobile – rest and action joined.
Brooded in silent bliss. Itself besides,
In the wide universe there nothing was.

The Hindu, then, reaches a pantheistic conclusion; that is, all is divine. The goal of life

is, therefore, to connect with that all-encompassing divinity, no matter how many passes

through life it may require. As their scripture declares,

> The spirit within me is greater than this earth and sky and the heaven and all
> these united. It is Brahman. (Smith, 2003:4).

Meditation and yoga prepare adherents for an awareness of the Brahman (Eliade, Trask

and White, 2009:116). Though some believe the Brahman may be worshipped directly

(Keene, 1997:28), most have to go through one of many personal gods, who are further along in the stream of life; some worship animate objects as those who may have gone on to a higher level (Penney, 1999:8). Mahatma Gandhi (1999:248), the well-known Hindu leader, said that "cow-protection" was the distinctive contribution of Hinduism to the world's religious ideas.

Though temples abound in Hindu lands and in Burma as well, Bhattacharyya (1953:155) points out: "It is important to remember that for a Hindu worship is an individual experience. Communal and congregational worship are foreign to the fundamental idea of worship and the orthodox Hindu looks upon both as poses and artificial elaborations. The individual worship of the Hindu aims at the realization by the worshiper of the underlying unity with the deity." These deities are typically represented visually, in a host of idols, which adorn temples, public buildings, and private residences.

Discussing these idols, Banerjea (1953:78) explains: "In the anthropomorphic images of the gods, exaggeration is often found in the number of arms and heads. By this the Hindus were trying to emphasize the limitless attributes and the superhuman power of their deity." There is no consensus on the role of images in Hinduism. Some, such as the bhāgavatas, see in devotion to the image of their god an "indispensable" aid in worship, while others deride such reliance, "The Jābāla Upanishad says, 'Yogis should find god within their own selves, and not in images; the latter are meant only as aids to meditation for the ignorant" (Banerjea, 1953:79). Irrespective of their role in active

worship, the images of Hindu gods clearly demarcate those homes and other buildings in Burma where adherents to the religion may be found.

Chaudhuri (1979:186) notes that, for Hindus (as for adherents to many religions), their religion exercises "a rigorous control over their lives in every aspect and in every activity." This is why, as Bouquet (1966:11) says: "Hinduism, taken as a whole, is a culture quite as much as a religion. It is so much woven into the social structure of its adherents that the orthodox Hindu, like the Jew, if he should dare to give up his religion for any other, becomes by his choice an outcast from his own people." Chaudhuri (1979:186) provides greater detail, suggesting that such an "excommunication" would mean that "nobody would visit him, eat with him, or give help by carrying the dead body to the burning ghat. Even the village barber would not cut his hair or shave him, nor the washerman wash his clothes."

Thus, in Burma, there is a significant missiological challenge in overcoming the social ostracism, which conversion from Hinduism produces. Further, such converts typically embrace – and are embraced by – the local body of Christians responsible for the evangelism that led to the conversion. These are often churches largely populated by other converted Hindus, with little interaction with the broader Christian population. Together with the fellowship and communal worship that issues from this new relationship, there is often also the unfortunate transmission of that local body's prejudices and presuppositions regarding out-groups. The convert from Hinduism to Hindu-background Christian, then, is effectively a matter of relocating from one isolated group to another.

4.3.3.2   Existential Beliefs and Influences from Animism

Nida and Smalley (1959:50-55) provide an outline of the unique elements common to most belief systems in animistic cultures (though as Partridge (2005:Kindle location 2826) cautions "diversity abounds among indigenous religions"). These include 1) the unity of all nature; 2) a religion without ethics; 3) control of spirit power; and, 4) faith and scepticism. Each of these, as they are expressed in the animism of tribal cultures in Burma, will be enlarged in their appropriate section below. At this point, however, it may be possible to summarize animism as a system of thought, which recognizes "life" in all matter, whether animate or inanimate. Hiebert (1986:45) suggests with regard to animistic tribes:

> [M]ost Westerners assume that external to themselves is a real world made of lifeless matter. People in South and Southeast Asia, however, believe that this external world does not really exist; it is an illusion of the mind. And tribal people around the world see the earth as a living organism to which they must relate.

Harvey (1967:82), however, argues that this is too simplistic, and that what must be stressed is that animism assigns "personhood" to all matter (as "cultural beings"); thus, he defines animism as the "mutual recognition of the ability to reciprocate, relate and engage" between "other persons, only some of whom are human ..." This expansion in meaning may be helpful in exploring more deeply the mindset of animists in Burma from a missiological perspective (which will follow in 4.3.6.2); however, in an effort to distil animism to its most fundamental element, the collapsing of the categories of "animate" and "inanimate" into the broader idea of "life" is perhaps still best.

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4.3.3.3   Excursus: The Relationship between Animism and Buddhism in Burma

Animism in Burma co-exists with, and is intermingled with, the more dominant Theravāda Buddhism that is at the nation's religious centre. The nature of this relationship has been the subject of much debate. In his classic work, Temple (1906:1) argues that the typical Burmese "is at heart an Animist, his professed faith [Buddhism] being little more than a thin veneer of philosophy…" Likewise, Scott (1921a:390) wrote that "Buddhism is merely a sounding brass and tinkling cymbal, an electro-plating, a bloom, a varnish, enamel, lacquer, a veneer, sometimes only a pargeting, which flakes off, and shows the structure below." While some argue that they are so united as to be, in essence, one religion (Lehman, 2005), others (Spiro, 1967) argue that they are, in fact, distinct, and that Buddhism holds primacy over animism. Nevertheless, Spiro (1967:264) concedes, "The Burmese awareness of the inconsistency between animism and Buddhism has not led to any diminution in the intensity with which they hold to their nat beliefs, nor in the frequency with which they perform nat rites." Still others insist that, while the two do overlap, they also conflict with one another at several points, thereby retaining some degree of uniqueness (De la Perrière, 2009; cf. Ray, 1946:263, who suggests that Buddhism has "replaced" animism in Burma). Whether animism and Buddhism represent one syncretistic religion or two, they do seem to have different functions. As Nash (2005:6427) explains, the animism of Burma "is oriented to handling immediate and personal crises and avoiding evil, whereas Buddhism… is concerned chiefly with rebirth and eventually with salvation." Similarly, former Prime Minister U Nu (cited in Spiro, 1967:268) said,

Of course as Buddhists we believe in the existence of the nats – they do exist. And we propitiate them, i.e., we offer them food, just as I offer you food or tea if I would like you to do something for me. But the nats have nothing to do with religion, that is, with the release from suffering and rebirth. Only the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sanga are for that.

Spiro (1967:258) offers a helpful comparison between the various dimensions of Buddhism and the Nat Cultus:

Table 3: Comparison between Buddhism and the *nat* cultus in Burma

Dimension	Buddhism	Nat Cultus
Morality	Moral	Amoral
Sensuality	Ascetic	Libertarian
Reason	Rational	Non-Rational
Personality	Serenity	Turbulence
Society	Otherworldly	Worldly

This leads to a fuller consideration of the *nat* cultus, as well as its influence – and, subsequently, that of Buddhism – upon the prevailing worldview(s) in Burma.

4.3.3.4   The *Nat* Cultus in Burma

At the centre of the animism in Burma is the *nat* cultus, which consists of a realm of spiritual "lords," which resemble elements of "feudal overlordship" (Aung, 1962:2). These are "fundamentally, but not exclusively, anthropomorphic" (Nash, 1965:167). While there are countless *nats*, there is a principle group, known as the Thirty-Seven Lords (or nats). This formulation reveals the ancient connection between Burmese animism and Theravada Buddhism. Lehman (2005:1329) explains that this number

reflects the "hypothetical ideal organization" of a Buddhist kingdom which mirrors a "...Buddhist view of the... proportion between merit and status-power characteristic of the universe as a whole." In such a kingdom, there is "a center surrounded by thirty-two subordinate realms" with the addition of four kings who occupy the four quadrants of the earth. These Thirty-Seven, together with the innumerable other *nats*, "make up a structured system of animistic spirits, predating the advent of Theravāda Buddhism but coexisting with it…" (Nash, 2005:6427). This structure is unique among other nations that also practice animism alongside (or within) Theravāda Buddhism, such as Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Sri Lanka, which lack such structure among their animistic spirits. In Burma, the *nats* are "differentiated on four levels: the territorial nats reign over a region; the village nats guard a human settlement; the *mizaing* and *hpazaing* are nats at the family level inherited from the mother and father, respectively; and finally there are nats connected with special activities such as travel, domestic protection, and other frequent and mundane activities" (Nash, 2005:6427).

Spiro (1967:93), however, challenges this taxonomy:

> Since this classification confuses different dimensions, however, it implies that these classes are mutually exclusive when, in fact, they are not exclusive at all. Most of the Thirty-Seven nats are "inherited," perform some "activity," and are "territorial" or "village" nats simultaneously.

While Spiro's precision is doubtless correct, the classification is helpful in providing a general understanding of what nats are believed to be and to do. *Nats* may also be subdivided between the *deva*, or those *nats* of Brahmanic origin who reside at Mount Meru, and the *devata*, which are local spirits (Lehman, 2005:1329).

Nash notes that the *nats* "at all levels, are chiefly evil powers." They can both inflict harm and protect from other *nats*; however, "nat propitiation has less the feeling of wooing positive good than it does warding off probable evil" (Nash, 1965:168). While *nats* are seen as animistic spirits, they also include humans, particularly royalty or those who died violent deaths. Seekins (2006:328) notes, however, that there are different degrees to which this structure is believed in by animists in Burma, "Belief in nats is fluid, like Western belief in ghosts, and many Burmese today still believe that the place where a person met a violent death is haunted by a dangerous nat who must be placated with offerings." Perhaps this fluidity reflects the lack of cognitive structure in the animistic worldview, which, as Griffioen (1998:130) notes, is typically "passed on from generation to generation by way of nurture, ceremony, and storytelling" rather than formed (or attempted to be formed, at any rate) in a logical, cohesive manner as are, say, the Christian and naturalistic worldviews. Nevertheless, to be genuine, "a worldview needs to be neither conscious nor basically consistent" (Sire, 2004:93); thus, the worldview of the animist cannot be challenged simply on its lack of consistency, but on its effectiveness at answering the fundamental questions of life.

As evidence of the extent to which the *nat* cult is practiced in Burma, a casual observation reveals that virtually every home in every village will have a coconut suspended on its southeast post, known as the *uyudaing* (*nat* post). This is "simultaneously a representation of, and offering to, and the residence of the most famous of the Thirty-Seven nats – Min Mahagiri, the house nat" (Spiro, 1967:92). Tribal folk may place flowers beneath the coconut, as well as offerings of cooked rice. These

practices are intended, principally, to ward off dacoits (armed bands of robbers) and disease (Nash, 1965:168).

Nida and Smalley's generalisation of the existential beliefs of animistic cultures – that "reality is all of one piece" (1959:50) – fits well with the tribal cultures of Burma, which typically do not make concrete distinctions between the animate and inanimate (Berkes, 2005:1647). As Nida and Smalley (1959:50) explain, "Animals may be ancestors of men, people may change into animals, [and] trees and stones may possess souls …" This unity is understood to be held together by a "life force," which is distributed among the living and the dead, the animate and the inanimate. It also extends temporally to one's ancestors in the past and one's descendants in the future, yet within a cyclical (and not linear) framework. This poses a particular missiological challenge in that change – any change – may offend the departed ancestors (who nonetheless continue to exist and bless or haunt the living). Thus, it is believed that deep-rooted rituals and traditions must be honoured to avoid incurring the displeasure of one's ancestors.

While there is this concept of unity among all that is, there is also a sense of "spirit power," for, as Kraft (1990:31) notes, "The intense need for help from spiritual powers is part of the worldview" of every culture. In Burma, the "life force" of this spirit power is consolidated in one person over another, typically the witch or the shaman. Witches are often thought to be evil spirits inhabiting human form (Spiro, 1967:21), but more than their form, their power concerns the tribal people of Burma. While there are some witches who do good, they are generally seen as forces of evil, causing illness and

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death by invoking the power of *nats.* This power is harnessed by means of a complex

offering, as Spiro (1967:23) explains:

> [To gain power over nats, t]hey must be made an offering consisting of opposite,
> sacred and profane (*mato-mate*), elements. Typically, the profane elements
> might consist of the beak of a crow, the penis of a dog, a woman's skirt, and
> earth from a cemetery, a latrine, and a nat shrine. The sacred elements might
> consist of a streamer adorning a Buddha image and earth taken from a Buddhist
> ordination chamber. The master witch then sets fire to this mixed offering under
> the shrine of the Mahagiri nat, a nat who is repelled by fire, and thereby gains
> control over the nat he has chosen as his agent. Should this technique prove
> ineffectual, he smears the face of a nat image with this mixture, a technique
> which invariably succeeds in gaining control over the nat.

The witch performs his evil against a person at the behest of a paying client; however,

his motivation is not strictly, or even primarily, financial. Rather, the witch is seen as an

inherently evil being. This perception of the witch, as one who generally "harbor[s]

malice and ill will" (Spiro, 1967:24) towards others, leads most villagers to refuse to

speak of them for fear of inciting their wrath. Some data regarding witches (as well as

shamans, *nats*, and supernaturalism, generally) was gathered in the research of this

study and will be presented in chapter 6.

The other principle conduit of spiritual power in Burma is the shaman. Though there

may be three or four percent who are male (Spiro, 1967:205), most shamans in Burma

are female; hence, the translation of shaman from *nat kadaw* (*nat* wife). Shamans, who

are present in virtually every village, serve as oracles of their *nat* "husband," helping

villagers with issues ranging from illness to the location of lost articles. Animists in

Burma operate with the conviction that the power of the spirit world can be harnessed if

one has the right "magic." Thus, shamans (believed to possess such magical gifts) are seen as conduits of such spirit power, and therefore are believed to wield immense power of their own among the tribal people.

In addition to seeking out witches and shamans, the Burmese endeavour to "compel, entreat, or coerce" (Nida & Smalley, 1959:54) the *nats* to do their will in other ways. As it is understood that *nats* have the power to bring to men "happiness, health, wealth, luck and to preserve them from danger" (Bonnefoy,1993:145), the tribal people hope to persuade the *nats* "by invocations, prayers, offerings, dances, and feasts given in their honor" (Bonnefoy,1993:145).

As Karlsson (2009:75) notes, "Buddhist visual culture was, and still is, a uniting factor, it is also part of a process of enclosing and excluding peoples." The same can be said of the visual cultural of tribal animism in Burma. Geertz (1973:127) notes the intrinsic role of symbols in religious worldviews:

> Meaning can only be "stored" in symbols: a cross, a crescent, or a feathered serpent. Such religious symbols, dramatized in rituals or related in myths, are felt somehow to sum up, for those for whom they are resonant, what is known about the world that is, the quality of the emotional life that it supports, and the way one ought to behave while in it.

These symbols, however, can serve not only to unite but to divide. For instance, among the tribal Christians in Burma, the cross does indeed signify the unity of the church – and these Christians readily acknowledge this to be true. However, there are other symbols or rituals, reflective more of tradition and myth, which unite those who share them, as well. While these symbols may be clung to out of a sense of tribal identity (and

not, for instance, for their original religious significance), they are nonetheless clung to only by those to whom they belong: a particular in-group. Therefore, those who are not part of that in-group – even if they share the symbol of the cross and the faith it denotes – are perennially outsiders, reinforcing the isolationist tendencies of the animistic tribal cultures in Burma.

Discussing one such example, Woodward (2000:219) describes the practice, common to indigenous peoples throughout Southeast Asia, of "communal feasts in which cattle, water buffalo, or *mithan* (Asiatic bison) are slaughtered and offered to the inhabitants of the sky world." He goes on to stress (Woodward, 2000:221) that these sacrifices are "simultaneously religious, social and economic …" and that, therefore, these categorical distinctions, common in Western cultures, are not appropriate in, for instance Burma, where such acts bring together various traditions and beliefs. This writer has witnessed such feasts, conducted by Chin Christians. While they do not claim to be offering the slaughtered animal to the sky gods, the cultural import of the tradition is perpetuated – and sets the tribe apart from those outside. Only members of the tribe (in fact, only those of the same subtribe) were invited to participate.

Another example is the tradition of tattooing among the Karen. A common practice among the Karen is for young boys to get tattoos of magical symbols to protect them from harm. Many of the Karen have been converted to Christianity, and though they no longer subscribe to their earlier religious beliefs, they cannot as easily be rid of these symbols. Thus, to those outside of the Karen tribe, these tattoos are an example of how visual culture can serve as a barrier between peoples. A similar example is the facial

tattoos of the Chin. The Chin people have a long history of tattooing the faces of their women, for example (though the practice has been banned, there are many of the older women who still bear these marks). These tattoos were originally drawn to dissuade marauders from outside the tribe from taking the Chin women as wives. They have thus historically borne cultural significance and obviously do not fade away with conversion to Christianity.

4.3.3.5   Existential Beliefs and Influences from Buddhism

Smith (2009:133) argues that people are, in fact, not "primarily thinking things, or even believing things, but rather imaginative, desiring animals who are defined fundamentally by love." While there is merit in the idea that *feelings* (i.e. imagining, desiring) are fundamental to the human experience, it is also true that "thinking" and, for that matter, the always corresponding element of "believing" are fundamental, as well. Pascal (1966:235) chose to stress the element of *thinking* as a basic condition of humanity, tying the conceptual together with moral: "Man is obviously made for thinking. Therein lies his dignity and his merit; and his whole duty is to think as he ought." In a similar strain, Buddhism provides its own definition of worldview in the words of Buddha: "We are what we think. All that we are arises with our thoughts. With our thoughts we make the world" (Byrom, 1993:1). It is in this sense of thought-centeredness that Buddhism brings its existential beliefs to Burma.

The Buddhist concept of *bodhi* conveys the idea that Buddhism is "primarily experiential in nature and purpose. It concerns the life, here and now, of each sentient being and

thus interrelatedly of all existence" (Gard, 1962:15). It is, then, the process of growing in knowledge through experience. While some have used the terms "enlightenment" or "illumination" to define *bodhi*, Cohen (2006:1) prefers "awakened" to "enlightenment" due not to etymological reasons alone, but because "the event-oriented connotations of enlightenment are less accurate, conceptually and etymologically, than those of process-oriented awakening." Similarly, Gómez (2002:285) notes that "bodhi is not so much an 'illumination' as much as a process of realization, of coming to understand."

While *bodhi* is the prime epistemological element of Buddhism, *nirvana* is the teleological element. In fact, as Spiro notes (1970:66), *nirvana* is the soteriological doctrine of Buddhism, for it offers release from the present world and its suffering. As has been demonstrated, it is common for the Burmese to hold both animistic and Buddhist beliefs (even if paradoxically), as the former gives hope for the present life and the latter, the afterlife. It is here, with the thoughts of death and what comes after it, that Buddhism plays its principle role in the Burmese worldview for, in death, the soul is believed to move from one existence to the next, and "Buddhism is geared to make death only a stage in life" (Nash, 1965:151). Principal to Buddhism is the idea of *saṃsāra* and how one can be released from it. Stone (2005:57) identifies *saṃsāra* as the four sufferings of birth, old age, sickness, and death – the continued round of painful rebirth driven by ignorance and craving. She goes on to say:

> Buddhism holds out the promise of mastery over death, both in its "official" ideal of liberation from saṃsāra and by claims that its meditative and ritual practices— whether performed by the individuals concerned or by others on their behalf—are sufficiently powerful to intervene to soteriological advantage in the death process. This promise of control over that most mysterious and terrifying realm—death—

has been a chief source of Buddhism's attraction as a lived religion, and the perceived possession of such control has been one of its major sources of legitimation.

These elements of "mystery" and "terror," associated with death, are powerful forces, which drive the Buddhist to observe the rituals of his religion. For the Buddhist in Burma, death is seen as a "divine messenger (*devadūta*s) who warns of life's brevity and of the need for moral endeavor. Failure to heed its message is the mark of delusion" (Stone, 2005:58). There is a story (Aṅguttara-nikāya, quoted in Warren, 1982:257) that relates a conversation between King Yama, ruler of the dead, and an evildoer who has come before him:

> "Did you not see among men a woman or man that had been one day dead, or two days dead, or three days dead, and had become swollen, black, and full of putridity? ... Did it not occur to you, being a person of mature intelligence and years, 'I also am subject to death, and in no way exempt. Come now! I will act nobly with body, voice, and mind'?"
>
> He replies, "Lord, I could not. Lord, I did not think."

By way of contrast, another story, this surrounding the first Buddha, Gautama, points to a "right apprehension of death as a crucial turning point" for Buddhists (Stone, 2005:58). As the young prince was enjoying a pleasurable outing, he came upon a funeral procession. Seeing the corpse, and thus being confronted with the reality of death, is what led him to forgo worldly pleasure and pursue instead liberation from *saṃsāra* and its dreaded threat of death.

Perhaps most illustrative of the depth of Buddhist existential belief in Burma is this account of his wife's death, written by former President of the Union of Burma, Ba U (1959:80-81):

> Just before my wife breathed her last, an extraordinary event happened. We Buddhists believe that when a person dies, he goes to either the *Natpye* (the abode of the Celestial Beings) or the *Nga-ye-pye* (the Nether World), or else is reborn as a human being or in the animal kingdom. There is also a strong belief among the Burmese and the Singhalese Buddhists that a dying person sometimes experiences premonitory visions of his destination. For instance, if on his death a person is to go to the heavenly world, he will see heavenly cars coming to convey him thereto. If, on the other hand, he is to go to the Nether World he will see inhuman beings coming to drag him away with them. In order to enable a person to go to the Natpye, we generally say prayers, chant Pirith, and recite stanzas from Mingala Sutta and Metta Sutta (Buddhist scriptures) by his side. By so doing, we help the dying person, if conscious, to concentrate his thoughts and mind on Lord Buddha, His Dhamma and His Sangha. If the person dies concentrating on these Gems, we Buddhists believe that he goes to the abode of Celestial Beings otherwise he goes to the Nether World. During the last moments of my wife's life, both my mother-in-law and I, overwhelmed with grief, forgot to say our prayers. We just remained silent by her side. Suddenly, my wife started shouting, "Mother, Mother, there are big black men coming into the room to take me away with them. Please save me, please save me!"
>
> I said, "There are no black men inside the room. There are only two of us, your mother and I."
>
> My wife said, "No, no, there they are. Please help me, please help me!"
>
> Then I realized that the black men were the denizens of the Nether World and that they had come to take away the soul of my wife; we could not see them because of their supernatural powers. I said to my mother-in-law, "Please say prayers and recites mantras."
>
> She did, and I also recited prayers and stanzas from *Metta Sutta* and *Minala Sutta*. As we did so, my wife said, "The black men have run away. Oh! Now I see

Nat-thamee (fairy spirits) coming into the room to take me away with them. I now *shikoe* ["pay respect to" – SC] you, Mother, and I *shikoe* you, Ko Ba U. Please forgive any sins I may have committed." So saying, she passed away.

This consuming fixation with, and fear of, death – and the corresponding motivation to pass from this life to a better one – is, of course, not unique to the people of Burma. However, the way in which death is perceived in Burma does bear upon intertribal relationships. For, though each tribe has its own rituals and traditions associated with death, a common element in their belief systems is the idea that ghosts, witches, and *nats* are most feared as causal agents of illness and death (Spiro, 1967:144). These supernatural beings are often geographically situated (as are most tribes) and traditions abound regarding disloyalty to *nats* and their penchant for jealousy. Coupled with the principle of karmic debt in Buddhist thought, the fear of offending a household or regional *nat* and incurring his wrath, could lead to illness or death, with the debt being carried over into the next life. Thus, the superstitious elements of the perceived spiritual world, drawn from both animism and Buddhism (with its Hindu foundation), tend to encourage tribal isolation.

4.3.4 Worldviews in Burma: Evaluative Beliefs

4.3.4.1 Evaluative Beliefs and Influences from Hinduism

With regard to cultural values, Hinduism and Buddhism bring a similar influence to Burma. This is due, in part, to the evolution of Burmese Hinduism away from the mother country of India and more toward a blended interaction with Burmese Buddhism. As

Matthews (1995:300) notes: "[T]here is very little formal connection between either Indian religious or cultural institutions and the Hindus of Myanmar. Visits from Indian spiritual leaders are permitted, but rare." He goes on to explain this symbiosis with Buddhism:

> [V]irtually all Hindu temples have an enshrined image of the Buddha (considered an avatar of the divine), and it is estimated that over half of the devotees at Hindu temples are Burmese Buddhists (who are doubly welcome because they are said to be more generous than Hindus in their donations). Both Buddhists and Hindus also share the same reverence for sacred sites and relics. As long as both religious communities have access to more or less the same economic opportunities, the Hindus coexist with the Burmese more easily than do the other religious and cultural minorities.

However, there are differences. For instance, most Burmese Hindus wear Indian garb, thus identifying them as culturally distinct. With regard to the respective religions' moral codes, Benevides (2005:84) points out that a key difference lies in "attitudes toward physicality and intentionality in Hinduism and normative Buddhism; for whereas in normative Hinduism acts are believed to have moral—that is, polluting—consequences, regardless of the intentions of the agents, normative Buddhism and Jainism stress intention."

Perhaps most significant to this present study is the persistent presence of caste and the customs associated with it in Hindu society. This remains fundamental to the culture of Burmese Hindus, who not only arrange marriages based upon caste but govern other interpersonal relationships by it, as well. Hindu-background Christians in Burma, just as with Christian converts in India, are faced with strong familial and cultural pressure to

maintain their ethnic identity and, further, to prefer relationships (marriage or otherwise) with those of a similar background. In light of the Hindu attitude toward the morality of actions, then, social taboos carry not only cultural, but spiritual, consequences.

4.3.4.2   Evaluative Beliefs and Influences from Animism

While Nida and Smalley (1959:52) speak of animism as typically embracing "religion without ethics," it may be better (at least insofar as Burma is considered) to say that the animist's religion is concerned with the community's good over and above the individual, as the discussion in chapter 6 on Burma's shame culture will show. That is, the tribal-level *gemeinschaft* is prime; the individual may not elevate his own well-being above that of the tribe. Nida and Smalley are right to point out, however, that even in its concern for the community's well-being, the animistic religion does not possess the same ethical categories of "right" and "wrong" as in, for instance, Western civilization. When one tribe manages to acquire the property of another tribe (e.g. animals, materials, etc.), it is seen as good for the first tribe, irrespective of whether the property was gained through legitimate commerce, deception, or outright theft.

Nash (1965:268ff) provides a helpful survey of key concepts vis-à-vis social interaction (i.e. evaluative beliefs) in Burma. Among these are the concepts of a *nade*, *gon*, and *pon*. A *nade* (or *a nabade* in its formal form) is a form of interpersonal communication between persons of unequal status, or "a complex feeling arising from status non-symmetry in which the junior or weaker is constrained from direct confrontation of the

superior or more powerful by the operation of sentiments like shame, delicacy, and surrender." He then offers a helpful description of a *nade* by way of several illustrations:

> A person of venerable age and reputation drops in unexpectedly on a villager, and if the villager does not have good cigars, cake, or cream to offer with the tea, he starts out by saying a nabade. An older person scolds or corrects a younger one, but the older person is in error. The younger knows this, but he does not speak back or correct the older, and, if one asks why, the answer is a nabade … If one loses an argument, a possible reaction is a nade; in trying to begin a courtship, a boy may be stopped by a nade; teachers correcting pupils make the student have a nade; and superiors and more powerful persons can usually stir up a nade in inferiors and the less powerful persons.

It is important to understand that a *nade* is a cultural apparatus, then, which may well create obstacles for intertribal relationships, even among Christians. For, despite their common faith, the Burmese are acutely aware of their own status and that of others, as defined by culture and tradition. Further, in many cases, these cultural classifications antedated the conversions to Christianity and, as such, have deep roots in the collective worldview of the people. Addressing this aspect of Burmese culture will be a significant aspect of the theological education described in the final chapter of this study.

Another of the cultural concepts affecting interpersonal relationships is *gon*, which Nash (1965:271) identifies as "the moral content of social relations." Each person is understood to possess a certain level of *gon*, reflective of his character, wisdom, and success. These differentiations create yet another obstacle to social interaction for, as Nash (1967:272) continues, "gon is sort of a nimbus which may blind by its sparkle the lesser person." Again, though Christians, properly informed, will understand that being in Christ ought to alleviate such concerns as moral superiority/inferiority among fellow

believers, the reality is that many Christians in Burma are *not* properly informed or, if they are, it does not translate to practical application to relations between them. This, too, must be addressed in holistic theological education.

Finally, Nash (1967:272) describes *pon* as "charisma (in the secular realm) and glory (in the sacred realm)." Often, the person perceived to have the most *pon* is the village or tribal leader. Though the position itself brings a certain degree of power, it is the personality of the leader that draws people to him. To challenge the man of *pon* as to a particular belief or action is seen as an attempt to usurp his power, which is considered quite rude and culturally unacceptable. This is why many in villages and subtribes, who have seen the conversion of their leader to Christianity, have followed in his steps. Conversely, it is also why many Christians in villages and subtribes, whose leader has rejected Christianity, find that the practice of their faith is met with scorn or even persecution. This is yet another element of intertribal relations that can affect the way in which Christians interact across tribal divides. For one is bold indeed who rejects the declared stand of his village's man of *pon* in favour of the views of another village's leader. Such boldness, of course, is most often held in check by cultural restraints.

4.3.4.3 Evaluative Beliefs and Influences from Buddhism

Bishop Westcott of Durham (quoted in Appleton, 1958:31) described Buddhism as a system of morality "among the noblest as it is the vastest moral spectacle of history – the testimony of about one-third of the human race to the natural striving of man towards a pure Ideal which he cannot reach." This striving is based upon the Buddhist

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soteriological quest for merit. Thus, Buddhism brings to the evaluative beliefs of Burma the idea of accumulating merit for the afterlife through ethical living and sacrificial giving. As Stone (2005:59) suggests, "Merit accumulation during life is perhaps the most basic of Buddhist strategies for directing the death process to one's advantage." Following the ethical road laid out in Buddhism's Eightfold Path (2.6.2.1) is essential to merit accumulation. Commenting upon field research he had done in this area, Spiro (1970:45) adds that disciplining oneself to accumulate merit by obeying the precepts of Buddhist morality is the prime consideration for those who are serious about their religion: "When confronted with Micah's question – What does the Lord require of thee? – in Buddhist garb, all but two in my sample answered in effect: 'Compliance with the precepts.'" Burmese Buddhists, then, are very conscious of the ethical requirements of their faith, which factors significantly into the broader Burmese worldview, infused as it is with Buddhism.

Because of its prominent role in Buddhist ethics, the practice of giving is engrained in the Burmese worldview. Benevides (2005:82) develops this idea further by noting the role that giving plays in Buddhist merit accumulation, "[W]hat holds Buddhist communities together is the practice of ritual exchanges involving giving and merit making." He goes on to explain that, for Buddhists, a gift, if it is truly to be seen as a gift, must be a gift of something that one owns and, further, that to own it means that one has produced it. Thus, at the heart of giving is *work* or *labour*. As Beas (1997:47) writes (from a Hindu perspective, but consistent with Buddhist philosophy),

> [The saints] put great importance on the necessity of everyone earning his or her own living, for if we live from the earnings of others, we create another obstacle

to our own progress and growth. By being a burden on others we create debts that extend the time we have to spend at this place of consciousness so they can be repaid.

In Burma (as in other Buddhist cultures), monasteries serve not only as places of worship but as places for giving and receiving, for carrying out this important evaluative aspect of life.

Thus it can be argued that, for the Burmese, Buddhism has inculcated a sense of merit accumulation through ethical behaviour as typified by giving of what one has produced. Even when it is denuded of its soteriological significance following one's reception of the doctrine of grace via conversion to Christianity, the principle of giving remains (as does – all too often – the correlated idea of accumulating merit). However, when one considers the economic status of most Burmese, it becomes obvious that giving is virtually always sacrificial; rarely does one give from his abundance. Where, then, is the most likely object of one's sacrifice? The answer would seem to be: nearest to the giver. That is, the typical Burmese, whose possessions are dictated by his poverty, is less inclined to go to outsiders to fulfil his obligation to give (just as he would not expect to receive from the largess of outsiders, either). The exception to this rule would be the common practice of giving food to monks, who wander down every road and footpath in Burma with their begging-bowls. Even this practice is infused with religious meaning, as one notices that the monks stare straight ahead while receiving the gift, with no word of thanks, for they know (as does the giver) that this is an opportunity to acquire merit. For Burmese Christians, however, there is less of a sense of obligation to support the monks (as the religion itself has been jettisoned). Thus, it is common for Burmese

Christians, in particular, to give to others within their village or subtribe. This serves to strengthen the bonds between those of the same village while, at the same time, demarcating the boundaries between villages.

4.3.5   Worldviews in Burma: Prescriptive Beliefs

Having considered the existential beliefs of the Burmese (what they believe about a god or gods) and their evaluative beliefs (what they believe about ethics), it remains to consider the prescriptive beliefs: that is, the teleological aspect to their belief system. In Burma, the value and purpose in religious belief and expression incorporates elements from each of the religious traditions, yet these influences are not as clearly demarcated as are the existential and evaluative beliefs. Rather, the ultimate goal for the afterlife draws together the varied religious and cultural traditions into a single objective. The underlying value in, and purpose for, virtually all that Burmese believe and practice is *deliverance*: release from the round of rebirth (incrementally via better births; ultimately – and ideally – by achieving nirvana). For instance, as Nash (1965:112) points out, "The cosmology and cosmography [in Burma] is a Burmese Buddhist version of an older Hindu set of beliefs." Matthews (1995:306) also notes, "Hindus and Buddhists share almost identical astrological notions, an important underpinning for a shared worldview." Aung (1962:4) adds that the animistic concept of transmigration of souls, which many Burmese believe originated with Buddhism, in fact predated the arrival of the latter. The prescriptive beliefs of the Burmese worldview, then, reflect this comingling of the three main religious traditions, while it is predominantly understood in a Buddhist framework.

Thus, the prescriptive beliefs of the Burmese worldview will be considered in light of this framework.

Nash (1965:105) notes that, for the typical Burmese villager, Buddhism – as they understand it – "is the master artifice for giving unity, coherence, and meaning to their personal lives and to the world in which they live." Spiro (1967:272) adds, "the Burmese concern with Buddhism (at the village level, at least) is almost obsessive." This form of Buddhism, informed and augmented by the traditions and superstitions of tribal animism as it is, constitutes the basis for a moral code. Two related concepts in this religious expression are *kan* and *kutho*. *Kan* may be defined as "the bundle of ideas tied in with destiny, fate, luck, and life chances" (Nash, 2009:285). Alternately, Nash describes *kan* as "the whole sum of [a person's] past deeds – the moral balance of good and evil which goes on from existence to existence, now taking one corporeal form, now another." A common Burmese saying exemplifies the role of *kan* in daily life: *kan ame, kan aphe* ("*kan* is the mother and father [of whatever happens]").

Together with kan is *kutho* (merit) or *akutho* (demerit). These are concepts that are at top of the villager's mind as he goes about his daily life, earning *kutho* (and avoiding *akutho*) by what he does and does not do. These actions are guided, chiefly, by the *Mekgin Shitpa*, or the Eightfold Path (described above, 2.6.2.1). Among the precepts included therein are prohibitions against killing, stealing, lying, engaging in sexual misconduct, and intoxication. Following these precepts earns *kutho*, while failing to abide by them warrants *akutho*. Within these precepts, however, are yet still further gradations of merit. For instance, in the pre-eminent evaluative belief of Buddhism –

that is, giving, one can earn *kutho* by giving to a beggar; however, he can earn even more *kutho* by giving the same gift to a monk (Nash, 2009:286). The ultimate expression of giving (and the most meritorious of actions) is building a pagoda. Benevides (2005:84) points out that pagoda-building has a temporary positive economic benefit in the wages of the builders, the lasting impact is generally negative, as a result of the "tax-exempt status of ever increasing religious property." As one Burmese proverb puts it, "The pagoda is finished and the country is ruined" (Woodward & Russell, 1989:9). Yet the faithful are not deterred.

It is Buddhism, then, that infuses life with value and purpose, for Buddhism – not the *nats* of animism – offers a path to salvation. Scott (1921b:390) has been noted that whenever a villager

> [W]ants to build a house, launch a boat, plough or sow his fields, start on a journey, make a purchase, marry a wife himself, or marry his daughter to another, bury a relation, or even endow a religious foundation, it is the spirits he propitiates, it is the nats whom he consults.

However, as Spiro (1967:271-272) argues in response, this is true, simply because Buddhism "neither as a philosophy nor as a religion, has anything to say about these mundane matters." It is the issue of salvation – of escaping the wheel of rebirth (*samsāra*), of achieving the ultimate release of Neikban (*nirvana*) – that Buddhism addresses. Thus, this critical element of Buddhist thought is of the essence of the Burmese worldview.

While converts to Christianity will, in principle, have rejected these prescriptive beliefs in favour of biblical soteriology, the fact remains that this teleological component of Buddhism runs deeply through Burmese culture. This often results in a lingering, superstitious approach to Buddhist beliefs even among Christians. This is a contributing factor to persistent syncretism, which permeates the theology of many Burmese churches to varying degrees (typically in direct relationship to the access of the pastors to sound theological education). To the extent that churches differ with regard to which elements of Buddhist teleology are compatible with the Christian faith, there is a corresponding challenge to Christian unity. Holistic theological education, which will be considered in chapter 7, is integral to defeating this syncretism.

4.3.6   Worldviews in Burma: Summary

4.3.6.1   Obstacles to Christian Unity

Kraft (1990:6) argues that "the strongest resistance to an innovation comes when it contradicts the worldview of the people" and, indeed, the various convictions of the Burmese worldview(s) – whether subtle or stark – present obstacles to biblical unity among the Christians of different tribes and traditions. Several of these have been expressed in the preceding sections:

- The need for converts to defy the power of the shaman and/or the village leader.

- The caste system in Hindu-background churches.

- The potential for social ostracism when crossing tribal lines.

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- The exclusive nature of communal (tribal) feasts and festivals (and funeral rituals, as well).

- The lingering appreciation for tribal-identifying cultural symbols.

- The belief in, and fear of, offending jealous territorial/tribal spirits.

- The cultural concepts of a *nade*, *gon*, and *pon.*

- The cultural emphasis on giving (as meritorious) and the preference to give to one's in-group.

Bertrand (2007:211) speaks of a "suspicion of unifying narratives" in the modern world. This is actually amplified in the animistic tribal cultures of Burma, where the suspicions are grounded in an ancient, murky past, which codified the uniqueness of tribal identities. Perhaps this suspicion is at the heart of the disunity in the church in Burma.

4.3.6.2   Missiological Implications

In light of the foregoing discussion, it has been demonstrated that there are three principle missiological concerns: 1) the existential beliefs of the Burmese, with their intermingling of Hindu/Buddhist cosmology and animistic spiritism; 2) their evaluative beliefs, informed by Buddhist ethics, the traditions of *kan* and *kutho*, and *nat* supernaturalism; and 3) their prescriptive beliefs of merit-based salvation in Buddhism. These concerns are compounded, however, by the often irrational (yet nonetheless compelling) way in which the worldviews are held in tension.

As has been noted above, the Burmese subscribe to Buddhism for salvation beyond the present life, yet simultaneously cling to the *nat* cultus as a means of escaping unpleasantness in the present life. This dual conviction, however, carries with it an inherent conflict: the deterministic aspect of karma and the prospect of circumstantial change through propitiation of *nats* are irreconcilable. To be consistent Buddhists, the Burmese must accept the doctrine of karma: that their *kan* and *kutho* are responsible for where they are now and for where they will be in the next life. While karma offers the hope of escape from future suffering, it also insists that suffering in this life is the consequence of "bad" karma of previous lives and, thus, present suffering is unavoidable. On the other hand, the animistic traditions of the *nat* cultus lay the responsibility for present suffering on the *nats* (or other supernatural aspects), which, in turn, suggests the hope of relieving present suffering through the propitiation of the *nats*. They are, therefore, presented with a dilemma, as both religious systems, while conflicting with the other, hold out hope (Buddhism for a better future and the *nat* cultus for a better present). Spiro (1967:256) rightly points out the present practical effect of this tension: rather than resolving their dilemma by repudiating either karma (and, with it, Buddhism proper) or the *nat* cultus, "… the Burmese prefer to hold on to both its horns – they propitiate the nats *and* they remain Buddhist." He goes on to conclude that "when religious norms, however sacred, are inconsistent with personality needs, it is the latter, however strong the resulting conflict, which prevail" (Spiro, 1967:256). This, he insists, is why Christianity (together with higher education) has failed to deter the predominant Burmese convictions regarding *nats* and supernaturalism: people inherently long for solutions to this-worldly problems. Of course, it could be argued that

that Christianity, which failed, was an impoverished and anaemic diminution of the faith; a bolder, more robust understanding of Christian theology is precisely the remedy for that which ails the human soul, in Burma as elsewhere, with regard to the needs of this life and the next. Such a presentation of Christian theology is, therefore, the pre-eminent need for the churches in Burma.

4.4 Conclusions

4.4.1 Socio-Political Challenges

It has been shown that isolationism is endemic to the tribal culture in Burma. This is evident in the nation's plural society – both in how the tribes self-identify and in how they view those outside of their respective tribes. This isolationistic tendency is not limited to the non-Christian population, but extends to the churches, as well. It has also been demonstrated that the political environment in Burma has long created an atmosphere of mistrust – both in the government and in others (outside of the "warm circle" of one's own tribe or clan) who are seen as sympathetic to the government. This, too, has been counter-productive to the development of intertribal relationships, even within the church. Finally, it has been shown that there are a number of human rights issues in Burma, which define the social structure in which the church must exist. The mature response of intertribal Christian unity will likely not be fully realized until either this structure is fundamentally corrected or the churches themselves are adequately instructed in how to relate to one another on a higher plane, which reflects their common bond in Christ.

4.4.2 Worldviews

DeWitt (2010:14-15) argues that what we believe, or rather the evidence for what we believe, is most often obtained indirectly. For instance, he points out, most people do not possess direct evidence that the Earth revolves around the sun; rather, we believe that it does "because that belief fits in with the other pieces in your jigsaw puzzle of beliefs, and the opposite belief does not fit into that jigsaw puzzle" (i.e. worldview). He is emphasizing the critical role of *teaching*. We believe what we believe, in many cases, simply because that is what we have been taught to believe from our earliest memories. Such is certainly the case with one's worldview, as it is developed in a religious and/or cultural context. Such, then, is also the missiological challenge when seeking to instil Christian beliefs within a people already possessing a deeply-held, contrary worldview. As Andrew Walls (2004:28) has suggested, conversion "is not the substitution of something new for something old" nor "the addition of something new to something old," but rather "the turning, the reorientation, of every aspect of humanity – cultural-specific humanity – to God …" As has been shown, each of the unbiblical worldviews in Burma, as well as the pervasive, syncretistic blending of them, demands this reorientation of the whole person – together with his worldview – if there is to be any hope of promoting a healthy Christian community, united over and across traditional/tribal divisions.

In the end, the principle problem vis-à-vis worldviews in Burma is not simply that there are different religions presenting competing perspectives on life; rather, it is that there is a persistent syncretism of the traditions and beliefs of these religions into the Christian community. In other words, it is not that they *exist*, but that the churches in Burma have

not adequately differentiated between them and the true beliefs of the Christian faith. There has been, quite simply, a concession to these traditions and beliefs that make impossible a holistic Christian life (which encompasses much more than Sunday worship) and, consequently, a full expression of Christian unity, as these traditions encroach upon and interfere with that holistic Christian life. The churches in Burma have surrendered the various aspects of daily life – in an admittedly hostile and confusing climate for Christians to prosper – to the hybrid *Weltanschauung* that permeates the culture. Against this, the broader Reformed community outside of Burma must instruct the indigenous churches there to understand that the Christian faith does not allow for the co-mingling of worldviews, with elements of life devoted to the faith and other elements relegated to the common practices of the culture. As Kuyper (1998:488) boldly declared, "[T]here is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry: 'Mine!'" The churches in Burma must surrender their claim to anything – whether tribal identity or cultural tradition – which defies this sovereign cry.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.0   The Biblical Basis for Christian Unity

5.1   Introduction

The main research question of this study is to consider the effect of tribal factionalism in Burma upon Christian unity in the local church and missional outreach, and to explore how such factionalism might be addressed in theological education. To do this, the answer to the fourth research sub-question must identify the biblical and theological perspective of factionalism (see 1.5). This will be done by identifying and exegeting those parts of Scripture applicable to the main research problem.

Reformed and evangelical Christians boldly confess, and will vigorously defend, such essentials of the faith as the deity of Christ and the necessity of justification by faith alone in Christ alone. Yet, though the belief in the holy, catholic church is similarly confessed, this catholicity is less vigorously defended, if it is defended at all, as evidenced by the myriad schisms and denominational splits just in the past century (see Starke & Dyck, 1996; Sutton & Chaves, 2004). This is the case, despite John's explicit declaration that it is impossible to love God and not love those who confess the same faith (1 Jn 4:7-8, 20). In fact, the apostle goes so far as to say that one has not been born again (i.e. "abides in death") if he does not love his brothers and sisters in Christ (1 Jn 3:15-16). Quite simply, unity is of the essence of the Christian faith and "[e]fforts at Christian unity are extremely important to the triune God, to Christians, and to fellow

human beings" (Jennings, 2014:58). Indeed, there can be no doubt, upon even a superficial reading, that Scripture reveals the significance of a vital unity among the people of God: a significance that directly reveals the Church's relationship in Christ as a testimony to the world (e.g. Jn 13:34, 35; 17:20, 21).

Having established that there is a lack of such unity between Christians and Christian churches in Burma, it is proper at this point to consider more deeply the biblical response to that disunity. If there is, in fact, a biblical mandate for unity among those who profess to be believers, is it unconditional? Put another way, particularly in light of ongoing ecumenical conversations, is unity the starting point, under which all cultural, traditional, and even doctrinal differences are subsequently subsumed, or is unity the goal, the *telos*, which is realized only after a semblance of harmony of these differences exists? These questions will be addressed in 5.2, as "Conditional Ecumenicity" is considered. Then, in 5.3 and 5.4, a number of biblical passages will be considered, together with the role and focus of pastoral leadership in order to erect a framework upon which to propose a model of unity for the churches in Burma.

5.2   Conditional Ecumenicity

Putting the question in its broadest perspective, Garrett (1984:444) asks, "Is it to expect too much that all believers in Christ the world over, should be united in a common bond not unlike that which united God and Christ?" Similarly, in discussing the lack of unity among professing Christians in the Philippines – where there are as many as 350 different denominations or sects (Elwood, 1966:46) – Aoanan (1997:308) declares,

"Certainly, this is scandalous, an outright violation of the will of God." He goes on to concede, "Undoubtedly, there are different understandings and interpretations of what the New Testament teaches but what is central is God's liberating acts through Jesus Christ." There's the rub.

These "different understandings and interpretations" may only be dismissed as being of secondary (or lesser) importance when one's hermeneutic does not begin with a full-throated commitment to the *solas* of the Reformation; in particular, *sola scriptura*. While many will confess that the Bible is the highest authority, the interpretation of that authority is left to the individual, or the individual church, in a practice colloquially called "*solo scriptura*," a neologism, which (despite the grammatically incorrect Latin), is intended to convey the common idea that the Bible is the norm *apart from* any confession of faith, whereas the traditional Reformational idea of *sola scriptura* maintains that Scripture is the norming norm, but that the historic confession of the church is the normed norm, and thus the interpretation of Scripture is by no means subjective.

This postmodern emphasis upon subjectivity, together with the Western emphasis upon individuality, will, by definition, lead to a host of biblical interpretations, which, in turn, will continue to lead, as it has led, to an equally disparate landscape of professing Christians, joined only in name, and that but loosely.

In an analysis of the most obvious union, the World Council of Churches, McIntyre (1949:89) wrote:

There are certainly differences that can never be overcome. There is the structure of churches. The Episcopal form of government, the Presbyterian form of government, and the Congregational form of government are irreconcilable. They are simply different.

He goes on to offer this critique:

Christians in churches with those forms of government can have fellowship together in a council of churches, [b]ut to move on to organic union in one church, about which men dream, means that these organizational questions will have to be faced ... [and, furthermore,] delegates to the World Council could not agree on the question of authority – the Scriptures, tradition. They could not agree on the nature of the church. They could not agree on the nature of the ministry. There the confusion, the Babel, inherent in their attempt to build without agreement on elementary truth, was apparent.

Indeed, there are legitimate limits to what can be expected in the area of Christian unity. The reality of pride, discord, *sin* – all point to irreconcilable differences in the world: even in the Christian community. Consequently, it would be unreasonable to expect unconditional harmony amongst the believers in Burma (or anywhere else, for that matter). Nevertheless, there are certainly points of comity – particularly as relates to what McIntyre called "elementary truth," or the essential doctrines of the faith – which ought to bridge those gaps, at least to a degree. Of course, the "essential doctrines of the faith" may be (and have been) variously defined. For the purpose of the discussion at this point, these may be understood as the doctrines expressed in the earliest ecumenical creeds. In the particular case under consideration in this thesis (i.e. Christian unity in Burma), the additional elements unique to Reformed soteriology are also understood to be common to those churches, which this writer has in mind.

Further, "We make a mockery of what Jesus is saying [Jn 13:33-35; 17:21] unless we understand that he is talking about something visible" (Schaeffer, 1970:20). Thus, this comity must manifest not only in a *mystical* sense of the universal church, but in a *practical* sense, reflecting a tangible attempt at real fellowship with "all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 1:1).

It is the contention of this writer that Christian unity is, therefore, both biblical and conditional. That is, the Bible teaches that followers of Christ are to be united; yet, that unity is the product of genuine Christian faith, apprehended only through regeneration and conversion. It is, in truth, the fundamentals of Christian doctrine which define what it means to be a Christian. As Hodge (cited in Murray, 2001:238) said:

> A man who believes certain doctrines is a Christian. If his faith is mere assent, he is a speculative Christian; if it is cordial and appreciating, he is a true Christian. But to say that a man may be a Christian, without believing the doctrines of Christianity, is a contradiction. A man may be amiable and benevolent, without any definite form of faith, but how is he to be a Christian?

Biblical ecumenicity, then, is conditioned upon the genuineness of the faith confessed; yet, when a genuine faith *is* confessed, Christian unity adheres to that faith *necessarily*. Abdul-Mohan (2010:14) notes of unity vis-à-vis those who have experienced true conversion:

> It is impossible to remain divided, because we have been 'buried' through Baptism in the Lord's death – the very act in which God has broken down the walls of division. Division contradicts the will of Christ and strikes at the heart of the Gospel message as well as contradicts the truth of the gospel. Further, it impedes the work of Christ and the Church from manifesting the love of Christ. In the end, it is the love of Christ that will fully unify his followers.

To be sure, the significance of Christian unity – biblically defined – cannot be overstated. Every aspect of the church's life is either propelled or impeded by a corresponding presence, or absence, of unity. The goal, therefore, for believers in Burma and, in fact, for all true believers, is to realize spiritual unity, which is inherent to the Christian faith, together with visible unity, which is reflective of that faith, yet without attempting to cobble together an external façade of unity, which merely obscures undercurrents of cultural or doctrinal discord.

Baptists and Presbyterians, for instance, will always have profound differences, which preclude perfect unity between them. However, particularly among *Reformed* Baptists and *confessional* Presbyterians, there should be enough commonalities in doctrine to enable joint expressions of fellowship and, in some measure, worship and even mission. Butler (2003:320) is right to point out that "Much disunity arises from the fact that we put denominational and cultural unity before Christian unity"; therefore, we must begin with a proper, biblical understanding of Christian unity, and proceed from there to assess and, as necessary, accommodate denominational and cultural differences, yet without violating the biblical construct.

5.3 Biblical Principles Concerning Christian Unity

5.3.1 Relevant Old Testament Principles

5.3.1.1 Israel as the People of God in the Old Testament

Throughout the Old Testament, it quickly becomes clear that the people of God are unique among the people of the earth (Ex. 19:5; Ps 135:4; Ml 3:17). These people ("Israel") represent a unique class (not unique because of anything inherent *in* them, but because of God's choosing *of* them for His own good pleasure; cf. Dt 7:6-8; 14:2; Rm 9:11). They are "purchased" (Ex 15:16), "redeemed" (Ex 15:13), the Lord's "portion" and "the lot of His inheritance" (Dt 32:9). In sum, they are the "congregation" or "assembly" (*qâhâl*) of the Lord (Dt 23:1). [Commenting on this usage of *qâhâl*, Christopher JH Wright (1996:93) suggests that the term is used as is – all Israel – "to signify the wholeness and unity of the people of Israel."] Further, they are identified solely on the basis of their place in the covenant, irrespective of any other standard. Mazar (1987:19) discusses the "leveling function" of the word "brothers" (*ahim*), in Deuteronomy (e.g. 1:16, 28; 3:18, 20; 15:7; 17:15, 20; 18:15, 18) to describe fellow Israelites, "regardless of social status or tribal divisions," emphasizing the unity of the people of Israel, in what he calls a "deliberate disregard for divisions within the people." He goes on to say that, particularly in Deuteronomy 3:12-20, "the point is made expressly that members of other tribes are also brothers."

This narrative theme of unity extends beyond the Pentateuch and throughout the Old Testament canon. In his study of Deuteronomic theology, Gordon Wenham (1971)

identifies five themes in the book of Joshua, one of which is the unity of Israel (the other themes are holy war, the land, the role of Joshua, and the covenant). In a discussion of Joshua, Thompson (2008a:121) agrees, "The contrast between 'all Israel' and the conquered peoples highlights a sense of shared identity." While the peoples of the land are referred to in the plural (Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, etc.), and while they are identified as having many gods and many kings, Israel is repeatedly identified as one people ("all Israel") with but one God. Nelson (1997:250) makes the important point that this unity "is founded not on geographic proximity, but on shared faith and fidelity in worship." This theme of unity through a shared faith will feature throughout the biblical narrative and, in fact, throughout this study, as the idea of the Church as the "Israel of God" (Gl 6:16) is developed.

In Chronicles, the inclusive phrase, "all Israel," is so common that nearly forty percent of its Old Testament usage is found here (Thompson, 2008a:30). In accounts relating the reign of David (1 Chr 11:1, 4; 12:38; 13:1-4), the unity of the people ("all Israel") is clearly established (Williamson, 1977:95-96). The theme of unity continues in the Ezra-Nehemiah narratives where, Thompson (2008a:50) notes, the "definition, identity, and continuity of the people of God" are highlighted. Further, with its extensive lists of names, the "wholeness of the people" as a "united community" is emphasized (Eskenazi, 1988:648, 656).

The Psalmist also addresses this issue, dedicating an entire psalm to it, writing:

> Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity! It is like the precious oil on the head, running down on the beard, on the beard of Aaron,

running down on the collar of his robes! It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion! For there the LORD has commanded the blessing, life forevermore. (Ps 133).

Commenting upon this passage, Spurgeon and Clarke (1997) notes,

> Christian unity is good in itself, good for ourselves, good for the brethren, good for our converts, good for the outside world; and for certain it is pleasant: for a loving heart must have pleasure and give pleasure in associating with others of like nature.

Further, in Psalm 68:6, it is written "God settles the solitary in a home." John Gill (1999) understood this to refer to

> [T]he fruitfulness and increase of the church with converts, under the Gospel dispensation, even from among the Gentiles; who were before solitary, or were alone, without God and Christ, and aliens from the commonwealth of Israel; but being called and converted by the ministry of the word, were brought into and placed in Gospel churches, or families …

Henry (1706) concurred, noting that this verse indicates that God "brings those into comfortable relations that were lonely … that were forced to seek for relief abroad." What, indeed, is this "home" or "family" if not the universal Church – experienced most often in local assemblies, of course, but joined one with the other to the head of that Body, Christ Jesus? That this unity transcends racial or ethnic boundaries is clear when the Psalmist cries out: "Praise the Lord, all nations! Extol him, all peoples!" (Ps 117:1; cf. Ps 33:8; 47:1) Indeed, from every tribe, language, people and nation, God has called one people (Rv 5:9; 7:9).

5.3.1.2   The Missiological Relationship between Jew and Gentile in the OT

While the Old Testament is principally concerned with relating the narrative and redemptive history of the people of Israel, there are many instances in Scripture where the idea of mission to those outside of Israel can be seen to be integral to the plan of God. Kaiser (2009:10) argues that there is a "missionary mandate" from the earliest pages of the Old Testament. Three passages that support this idea are Genesis 12:1-3, Exodus 19:4-6, and Psalm 67.

In Genesis 12:1-3, two points are worth noting. First, God directs Abram to "leave your country." This is an early indicator that God sends (Latin: *missio*) His people. Second, God promises Abram that, in going where God is calling him to go, all the peoples on earth will be blessed. This indicates the universal aspect of the plan of God. Verkuyl (2009:43) calls this passage "God's election of Israel with His eye on the world." In Exodus 19:4-6, God expresses His particular intent for Israel: to be His "treasured possession," a "kingdom of priests," and "a holy nation." The second of these descriptors, "kingdom of priests," indicates that God is setting Israel in place to mediate as priests between Him and the nations of the world. Finally, in Psalm 67, the psalmist, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, makes known God's desire to be praised by "all the peoples" as His salvation is made known "among all nations" (Curtis, 2016:10).

This missiological perspective is also evident in that a number of the prophets were sent to declare God's judgment to the Gentile nations and/or to call them to repentance. For instance, God sent Obadiah to Edom (Ob 1:1), Nahum to Assyria (Nah 1:1), and

Zephaniah to Canaan and Ethiopia (Zph 2:5, 12). Amos and Ezekiel conveyed the judgment of God to several heathen peoples, including the Ammonites, Phoenicians, Egyptians, and Edomites (Am 1:3-2:3; Ezk 25:2; 27:2; 29:2; 35:2). Perhaps the clearest example is the account of Jonah, whom God sent to call the people of Nineveh to repentance (Jnh 1:2). In response, many Gentiles became proselytes, as is recorded in Jonah 4:5: "And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them."

That there were a significant number of proselytes to the faith from other peoples is evident elsewhere, such as in the account of the mass conversions of Chaldeans recorded in Esther 8:17:

> And in every province and in every city, wherever the king's command and his edict reached, there was gladness and joy among the Jews, a feast and a holiday. And *many from the peoples of the country declared themselves Jews*, for fear of the Jews had fallen on them.

That this was the case – even in the context of a nation uniquely separated unto God – should not come as a surprise, as the Bible tells of God's "love" for the sojourner/alien (*gêr*), and instructs the people of Israel to imitate it (Dt 10:18-19; cf. Lv 19:33-34). The Septuagint translates *gêr* with the Greek, *prosēlytos* ["proselyte"] (Martin-Archard, 1997:309). While this is most probably a reference to God's common benevolence toward all creation, it is surely also indicative of the missional nature of redemptive history for, as has been shown, foreigners were received into the nation of Israel as proselytes to the true faith. The inclusion of these proselytes in the Passover (Ex 12:40-49) is "highly significant theologically" (Hays, 2003:69), as it portends a fuller

understanding of the composition of the "Israel of God." Other passages indicating the reception of foreigners into the covenant community, such as Leviticus 24:22 and Numbers 9:14, 15:15-16, 29, point to the instruction that there was but one law for both the native-born and the converted heathen in the rituals of Jewish religion; thus, the theme of unity is expounded even in the most uniquely "Jewish" of events as Passover and priestly sacrifice for atonement.

The idea of present and future unity between Jew and Gentile is also a recurring theme of the prophetic books, as can be seen, for instance, in Isaiah 14:1:

> For the LORD will have mercy on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel, and set them in their own land: and the strangers shall be joined with them, and they shall cleave to the house of Jacob.

Of this verse, Calvin (s.a.) notes that, while it has a more immediate context vis-à-vis the Babylonian Captivity, the meaning cannot be confined to it:

> The Prophet foretells the calling of the Gentiles; as if he had said, "Not only will the Lord restore them to the possession of the land of Canaan, but will enlarge them by a great increase; for he will associate the Gentiles with them, that the two peoples may become one and the same body." This benefit, therefore, is not limited to a short period, but extends to the whole Church, which the Lord promises to place in safety; for he speaks, not of the Church in his own time, but of the Church which shall be till the kingdom of Christ, and during his kingdom; otherwise that addition would have been inappropriate.

Likewise, Ezekiel 47:21-23 points to a future time where there would be unity between the natural-born of Israel and those born outside of the covenant:

> So you shall divide this land among you according to the tribes of Israel. You shall allot it as an inheritance for yourselves and for the sojourners who reside

among you and have had children among you. They shall be to you as native-born children of Israel. With you they shall be allotted an inheritance among the tribes of Israel. In whatever tribe the sojourner resides, there you shall assign him his inheritance, declares the Lord GOD.

M'Crie (1821:9) comments, "The stranger who embraced the true religion, in 'joining himself to the Lord,' did at the same time 'cleave to the house of Jacob' and 'surname himself by the name of Israel'." In so doing, the divisions between the people of God, both within and without the nation of Israel, began to erode. In the Gospel dispensation, this erosion of disunity was, of course, amplified, as the Apostle declared that, in Christ, there is neither Jew nor Greek (Gl 3:38) and that the Lord has broken down the "dividing wall" between Jew and Gentile (Eph 2:14). It is to this reality that this study now turns.

5.3.2   Relevant New Testament principles

5.3.2.1   Ekklesia and Koinonia

In addition to those Greek words related to the idea of unity, which translate fairly equivalently into English(ἑνότης = "unity"; ἑνός = "one"), there are two Greek words the New Testament canon, integral to the doctrine of Christian unity, which are particularly important to define for the balance of this discussion. The first of these is *ekklesia (ἐκκλησία)*, which is translated as "church" in English versions of the Bible. The Greek word is formed from a compound of the prefixed preposition *ek-* ("from" or "out of") and a derivative, noun form of the verb *καλέω* ("to call"); thus, the literal translation in English would be "the called out [*ones*]." The word is employed in the New Testament by Matthew, Luke (in Acts), John (in 3 John and Revelation), Paul, Jude, and the author

of Hebrews. Minear (1962:607-608) notes that there are four uses of this word in the New Testament, which may be broadly classified as meaning: 1) an assembly of persons that has been summoned for a particular purpose; 2) a community of believers that has been gathered from the inhabitants of a specific area; 3) a community gathered by God through Christ; and 4) the eschatological people of God. These usages may reflect either the local church (i.e. believers from a specific geographical area) or the universal church (i.e. believers from all places and, for that matter, from all times). Paul uses the word in both ways: to refer to a local gathering of believers (Rm 16:1; 1 Cor 1:2, 4:17; 2 Cor 1:1, 12:13; Gl 1:2; Phlp 4:16, even referring to a house church: cf. Rm 16:4-5; Col 4:15-16) and to the universal church (cf. 1 Cor 10:32, 12:28, 15:9; Gl 1:13; Eph 1:22, 3:10, 21; 5:23ff; Phlp 3:6; Col 1:18, 24).

Lambert (1952:651) notes that the Septuagint uses *ekklesia* to translate the Hebrew *qâhâl*, "which in the Old Testament denotes the "congregation" or community of Israel, especially in its religious aspect as the people of God." It is in this sense that Stephen uses the word in Acts 7:38, "This is the one who was in the congregation (*ekklesia*) in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our fathers …" Ridderbos (1997:328) notes that this usage "must not be taken as a simply repristination." He goes on to explain,

> Rather, in it the consciousness was voiced that in its existence as the Christian church, the true people of God, the Messianic congregation of the great end time (Matt. 16:18ff), had been revealed, and that the privileges and qualities attributed to ancient Israel in the making of the covenant in the wilderness had found their God-intended application in this church.

Thus, the New Testament church – composed as it was of both Jews and Gentiles – is inextricably bound together with the Old Testament people of God ("all Israel," composed of native-born Jews, together with Gentile proselytes) as the covenant people of God: the "called out ones."

The second term, related to the doctrine of Christian unity, and flowing out of the idea behind *ekklesia*, is *koinonia (κοινωνία)*. *Koinonia* is often translated simply as "fellowship," yet that lacks the force (or the *focus*) intended in the original Greek. "[T]he primary idea expressed by *koinōnos* and its cognates is not that of association with another person or persons, but that of participation in something in which others also participate" (Campbell, 1932:352). Or, as Kittel (1965:797) summarizes, it means simply "to share with someone (to be *koinōnos*) in something which he has." Clowney (1976:51) adds that its verb form is often used as a synonym for *μετέχω*, meaning "to partake of" or "share in." He concludes, therefore, that this idea represents something other than "the camaraderie of a religious club," as it "is not social or associative, but theological and constitutive." This is why the author of Hebrews can use cognates of *μετέχω* to identify true believers as those who have "come to share in Christ" (3:14) and "have shared in the Holy Spirit" (6:4).

So it is that *ekklesia* describes the people of God as those who have been "called out" by Him and for Him; it identifies them as those who have God as their Father. *Koinonia*, as a complimentary term, identifies the life and activity of those who have, in fact, been called out. As children of God, they are brothers and sisters to one another, and *koinonia* exemplifies that relationship. Both terms express the work of God: the former,

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as regenerative and salvific; the latter, as sanctifying and nurturing. The role of the people of God is to reflect these works of God, both in the way in which they relate to Him and in the way in which they relate to one another. This is most evident in the exercise of unity as one Body under one Lord.

5.3.2.2   From the Gospels

5.3.2.2.1   The Synoptic Gospels

The basis for the theme of Christian unity is evident throughout the synoptic Gospels, particularly in the missiological theme of reaching out to those whom one's culture would deem untouchable. Regarding the first Gospel, Keener (2012:506) notes that "Matthew sought to motivate his audience to embrace controversial cross-cultural mission to culturally undesirable people." While Matthew may indeed have been writing with such an objective in mind, each of the Gospel authors clearly described such mission in their reportage. The accounts of Jesus' interaction with the most culturally-disdained peoples are well-known (cf. Mt 9:10-11; Mk 2:13-16; Lk 5:27-30). In fact, a principle rebuke of Him by the religious leaders was precisely that "this man receives sinners and eats with them" (Lk 15:1).

Further, Jesus challenged the culturally myopic view of His own people by interacting with those who were not only socially unaccepted, but racially unaccepted, as well. Perhaps the best example of this would be the dialog between Christ and the Samaritan woman at the well, when even she was taken aback by the culturally-forbidden conversation (Jn 4:9). Similar examples are recorded in Jesus' interaction with the

Samaritan leper (Lk 17:11-19) and in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37). Thus, while not related directly to the concept of Christian unity, this early theme of cross-cultural mission is foundational to any discussion of the doctrine of Christian unity: for if the Church is unwilling to engage the culture missionally, it is certainly no more likely to embrace one another across cultural barriers. Thus, Keener (2012:525) concludes, "Ultimately, the goal of cross-cultural evangelism is the multicultural church" and emphasizes that, in "addressing cross-cultural conflicts, the Spirit guides believers to cross-cultural *unity."* Understanding, then, that the foundational tenet of cross-cultural engagement in missions is present in the Gospels, how does that translate to cross-cultural fellowship among Christians? The Gospels, particularly the Fourth, have much to say in that regard, as well.

5.3.2.2.2   The Gospel of John

In his gospel, John stresses unity in truth. Jesus' glory is "full of" truth (1:14) and truth, in fact, came from Him (1:17). Jesus, of course, went even further, making the explicit declaration that He *is* truth (Jn 14:6); therefore, especially in John's writing, Christology is at the root of Christian unity. Further, John stresses the active role of the Holy Spirit in the dissemination of truth. Three times in John, the Holy Spirit is referred to as the Spirit of Truth (14:17, 15:26, and 16:13).

After delineating four areas of truth in the fourth Gospel, Köstenberger (2008:157) suggests that the Holy Spirit is involved in each of these aspects of truth: "he accurately represents the truth regarding Jesus; he is the eschatological gift of God; he imparts true knowledge of God; and he is operative in both worship and sanctification."

Particularly in this last function, we see the role of the Spirit of Truth in cultivating unity among the followers of Christ, for it is He who leads believers into a deeper understanding of the truth of Christ as the head of the Body: that is, the Church.

While arguments in favour of Christian unity often draw heavily on the prayer of Jesus, as recorded in John 17, it should be noted that this prayer for unity is often misunderstood to promote a broad ecumenism (á la the efforts of the World Council of Churches addressed by McIntyre above). While this is not the thrust of Jesus' prayer, His words are nevertheless quite instructive in constructing a biblical basis for Christian unity: truth. In this section (17:19-23), Jesus prays:

> And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth. I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.

In John 17:21 ("that they will be one as we are one"), Jesus is not directing instruction to *people* (not "you must act/think/etc. as one") but is directing a prayer to His Father – "keep the unity *that you brought about* in the people you have given to me" [i.e. not *all* people (nominal ecumenism), but rather a select group (true believers)]. This is, first and foremost, a spiritual unity – not simply an organization, established and perpetuated by man. Of this verse, Lloyd-Jones (1962:13) writes:

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It is quite obvious that this statement is not one to be handled lightly, glibly, and loosely, as if its meaning were perfectly clear and self-evident. Our Lord is dealing here with the mystical union which subsists between the three Persons of the blessed Holy Trinity. It is the highest mystery of the Christian faith. And yet this is the term, the verse, that is being bandied about as if its meaning were obvious, and indeed as if it had but one meaning, namely some external organizational unity. Everything about the statements indicates the exact opposite. It is concerned about a unity of essence.

For the believer, this unity of essence is not something one *does*; rather, it is something that one *is.* This unity of essence is not "something voluntary. It is something which is inevitable because it is the result of being born into a given family" (Lloyd-Jones, 1962:14). Similarly, Hunter (1965:164) points out that this unity finds "its ideal in the unity between Father and Son – in a personal relationship of mutual love, not in some external incorporation." While such external entities may well serve worthwhile purposes (such as those alluded to above by McIntyre), they should function as pieces of a whole and not as whole pieces in and of themselves (insofar as there is among them a common confession of essential, biblical truths).

Further, Jesus makes clear the purpose of His death and the function of the unity for which He prays. Earlier in His prayer, He asks the Father to "keep" His followers, "so that they may be one" (Jn 17:11b: ἵνα ὦσιν ἓν). Elsewhere (10:16), John records Jesus speaking of "one flock" (not merely one "fold"; Hendricksen, 1976:114) and "one Shepherd," and in 11:52, John writes that Jesus' death was meant "to gather together in one the children of God." These two verses (10:16 and 11:52) together speak loudly to the issue of unity.

Jesus (note that it is *He* who gathers) brings together two groups: the nation and the children of God who are scattered abroad. The nation cannot refer to the *political* body of Israel; as Hendricksen (1976:164-165) notes, "You cannot join a *political* with a *purely spiritual* concept ('the children of God')." Therefore, this first group must refer to the spiritual "nation"; that is, those "children of God" who are *not* scattered abroad: i.e. believing Jews. The second group consists of those who *were/will be* scattered abroad: believing Gentiles. John is saying that both groups will be joined together as one: children (*τέκνα*), who become so through the new birth. While Paul uses both υἱός and τέκνα to refer to believers as "children of God," John only uses τέκνα. Hendricksen (1976:81) concludes that this represents, "the impartation of life, the being begotten by God, so that one becomes his child (1 Jn 2:29; 3:9)." It follows, then, that if John declares that God is love, "being begotten of God is manifested in loving the brethren" (1 Jn 4:7-8).

Clearly, Jesus extends the concept of unity beyond the disciples:

> I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me (1 Jn 17:20ff).

This last phrase, "so that the world may believe," provides a teleological purpose of unity: perhaps its *ultimate* purpose (Michaels, 2010:875).

How is this to be accomplished if the "unity of the Spirit" is merely a spiritual unity? It cannot. "To maintain the church's unity means to maintain it visibly" (Nefefe, 2000:43).

Clearly, the world must see evidence of that unity for this objective to be realized; therefore, there must be visible signs of unity among believers: love, *koinonia*, and so on. "The world cannot see, or ''now', a merely 'spiritual unity' … but it can recognize the love believers have for each other …" (Michaels, 2010:879). Moreover, the world cannot witness that which occurs only within the cloistered doors of the local church; the testimony must swell beyond those doors and overflow into the clear sight of the "world" outside.

Further, that Jesus declares that "they *all* may be one" extends this call for unity beyond any individual group(s), whether denominational or cultural. The only limiter seems to be that they are those of whom Jesus says, they "believe in me" (Jn 17:21) and are loved by God (Jn 17:23); that is, those who have experienced the new birth and placed saving faith in Christ: i.e. Christians. Arguing for the rendering in earlier manuscripts of "those who believe" as a present participle (ὧν πιστευσόντων) rather than the less reliable future rendering (ὧν πιστευόντων), Michaels (2010:875) says, "Because the accent is not on futurity, the point of the prayer for unity is not that later generations of believers should bond with earlier generations by holding fast to the apostolic tradition, but simply that all believers everywhere should be united with each other in their commitment to Jesus and to the Father."

Thus, while John's Gospel (in particular, chapter 17) does not build a case for generic, "at-any-price" ecumenism among merely nominal Christians, there are strong inferences in favour of spiritual and visible unity among true believers. These began to migrate

from the prayer of Jesus to the life of the church in the post-Pentecost accounts recorded in the book of Acts.

5.3.2.3   From the Acts of the Apostles

The goal of unity was a persistent issue, even among the churches of the New Testament. After the initial outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, which some see as a prefiguring (in the obliteration of language barriers) of the universality of the church (Lange, Schaff, Gotthard, Gerok & Schaeffer, 2008:29), the several churches identified in the New Testament all seemed to experience some degree of disunity. For instance, Judaizers challenged the church in Jerusalem (Ac 11:2; 15:1ff), the Corinthians were divided (1 Cor 1:10ff), and a disagreement between Euodia and Syntyche in Philippi was significant enough for Paul to address it in his epistle (Phlp 4:2-3).

However, despite this trend, two related themes are prominent in the Book of Acts. First, the unity of the church as definitive: "praying together" (1:14; 2:42; 4:24), "being together" (1:15; 2:1; 5:12), "holding everything in common" (2:44), "being of one heart and mind" (4:32; 15:25), and sharing material possessions (2:45; 4:32, 34). Second, in those instances where the unity was challenged, there is the theme of the resolution of disputes and the restoration of unity: e.g. Ananias and Sapphira (5:1-11), the dispute between the Hellenistic and Hebraic Jews (6:1-7), the Cornelius episode (10:1-11:18), and the matters before the Jerusalem Council (15:1ff). Thompson (2008a:2) notes also the "remarkable agreement between Paul, Isaiah, and the Holy Spirit" in the closing verses of the book, specifically Acts 28:25.

Regarding Luke's comment that "the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul" (4:32a), Lechler (1866:83) explains, "Believers ought to be not only of one heart (as far as the will is concerned), but also of one soul (united in opinions and views)." This, the early church seems to have been (at least in general), and this is why M'Crie (1821:11) could conclude that, "The unity of the church, in profession, worship, and holy walking, was strikingly exemplified in the primitive age of Christianity." Going further, he continues, "This union was not confined to those who lived together, but all of them in every place formed one sacred brotherhood" (M'Crie, 1821:12).

In Acts 10, Luke records the revelation of God to Peter and the ensuing conversion of Cornelius. There are two important aspects to this encounter. First, the ancient divide between Jew and Gentile "had an immediate social implication," as there was a Jewish tendency to think of their standing with God as a propriety one. "No matter how bad they were, they were still the 'people of God.' And no matter how 'good' the Gentiles might be, they were still outcasts" (Thomas, 2011:285-286). Stott (2006:328) observes how this story is not only about the conversion of Cornelius, but about Peter's own racial prejudice, which God forcefully rebutted with "hammer blows" of revelation that, "… demonstrated conclusively that God had welcomed Gentile believers into his family on equal terms with believing Jews …" and that, on the basis on this revelation, "the church must give them an equal welcome." As Keener insists (2012:495), God was "driving" the mission to the Gentiles "no less than in the book of Jonah." Likewise, Lechler (1866:192) notes, "That all the circumstances connected with this conversion of the first pagan, were controlled and shaped exclusively by divine Providence, is apparent …" In spite of the ingrained division between Jew and Gentile, God was

breaking down the Jewish perception of exclusivity. Therefore, one important aspect of this account is the dismantling of Peter's (and, ultimately, all) racial bias.

This account is also of particular significance because it represents a Gentile conversion apart from any aspect of Judaism (such as was the case with the Samaritans and the Ethiopian eunuch); in other words, while proselytes had historically been admitted to the covenant community only after converting to Judaism, this revelation demonstrated that Gentiles could be directly admitted to the Christian community, without first "becoming" Jews (Fuller, 1884:477). It made clear the fact that the gospel was to be proclaimed to all, irrespective of their race. This would also factor into the first church-wide debate recorded in Acts 15.

The debate at the centre of the Jerusalem Council has, itself, been the subject of much debate, as some (such as Baur, Zeller & Menzies, 1875) have suggested that Luke, desiring to present an idealized unity, recorded a "less important quarrel" than what was really the issue. Others have argued that, while Luke was interested in conveying the presence of unity, which the church did enjoy (in general), his interest was not merely in an "abstract ideal" (Thompson, 2008b:541) of unity but rather a representation of historical realities, together with reports of instances of disunity. While the latter arguments are more compelling, it is nevertheless doubtless that the preserved account of the debate is but a synopsis. One can well imagine the heated arguments presented all around. Perhaps Dunn (1990:353) is correct to suggest that Luke, in his writing, "rubbed off the sharp angles of Paul's personality and polemic." Likewise, the resolution was doubtless not received warmly by all concerned. Nonetheless, the account is clear

on this central point: despite any residual tension, the principle remains, the goal was unity in submission to Christ.

5.3.2.4   From the Epistles

5.3.2.4.1   Paul and the Body passages (1 Cor 12:12-27)

On more than one occasion, Paul painstakingly crafts an analogy of the Body of Christ, where he seeks to stress the importance of the "parts" separately, and as a collective whole, with Christ as the head (Curtis, 2009:433). In Romans 12:5, he writes "… we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another." In Colossians 2:19, he returns to this theme to make clear that Christ is the "Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God." It is in 1 Corinthians, however, that Paul's analogy of the Body is most explicitly developed. He writes,

> The body is a unit, though it is made of many parts. And though all of its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. (1 Cor 12:12, 14).

He goes on to give examples of feet and ears and eyes, all of which have important functions in and of themselves, but which are utterly lost without the others (verses 14-26). He brings the analogy back to the Church by saying, "Now you are the body of Christ and each one of you is a part in it" (1 Cor 12:27).

Then, Paul immediately embarks on his classic treatise on the attributes of love in 1 Corinthians 13. On the heels of his insistence that believers are all interdependent upon

one another and ultimately upon Christ as head, he methodically outlines the characteristics of love in such relationships: it is patient and kind; it does not envy or boast; it is not proud or rude or self-seeking; it is not easily angered and it keeps no record of wrongs. It doesn't delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. Love always protects, trusts, hopes, and perseveres (1 Cor 13:4-7). This fits beautifully with his comments in the Body analogy: If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it (1 Cor 12:26).

So, while the Love Chapter (as it is often called) is used so often in marriage ceremonies (and certainly is useful as such), its original context concerns relationships with all other believers, in hopes of being able "to bring the heavenly rhapsodies down into our own worldly realities" (Smedes, 1978:xx). A mature Christian life consists of the believer fulfilling his or her particular role in the Body, while drawing support, strength, and sustenance from Christ, *through other believers*.

5.3.2.4.2   Paul and the Unity of the Spirit (Eph 4:1-6)

In Ephesians, Paul makes clear that the essence of Christian unity is spiritual; more specifically, the source of Christian unity is the Spirit. As such, it must be rooted in the truth of the Word. He writes,

> I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (Eph 4:1-4).

Craig (1966:5) is surely right to stress that the goal of Christian unity must not be "some kind of ostensibly Christian pragmatism which concentrates on practice and ignores the fundamentals of Christian doctrine." Indeed, as Lloyd-Jones (1962:18) argues in a discussion of Ephesians 4, Paul makes the case for Christian unity *based upon* common doctrine, rather than the oft-touted theme of pursuing fellowship *so that* a unity of faith may be achieved, "[Paul] does not start with unity and then proceed to doctrine; he takes up unity because he has already laid down his doctrine." He goes on to conclude:

Thus, only those who have been "chosen", "predestinated", and been made "accepted in the beloved" (Eph. 1:4-6), "quickened" (2:5) and "raised up" and "made to sit in heavenly places in Christ Jesus (2:6) – only these are able to experience such unity. Yet, again, it is not something that they actively *do*; rather, passively "they are what they are as a result of what God has done to them and in them." Lloyd-Jones (1962:22).

Bonhoeffer (2009:30) wrote, "Christian brotherhood is not an ideal which we must realize; it is rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate." This, then, is the substance of this section of Paul's letter: that the believers come into a fuller understanding of the unity which exists because of the work of God. He is not instructing the believers to "produce a unity, not to create a unity, not to try to arrive at a unity, but to 'keep the unity'" (Lloyd-Jones, 1962:24), through lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love (Eph 4:2-4; cf. Col 3:12-13). One commentator explains that the unity of which Paul speaks "is certainly the unity given by

the indwelling of the Holy Ghost. This we cannot create, for it is the gift of God; but we can 'keep' it: that is, cherish it, guard it, and make it effectual by love" (Barry, 1901:37). What one can "make effectual" is only that which already exists, but which requires attention to be given to it for the purpose of positive expression. Therefore, the call is not for the churches in Burma to *seek* unity, as if they can cobble together an alliance, but to seek to *understand* more fully the unity that already exists among those who have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit, and to do so by means of an increasingly sanctified and Christ-like demonstration of spiritual characteristics.

If these spiritual characteristics are the expression of this unity, right (and common) doctrine is the basis for it – and yet it is a *fundamental* doctrine that is in view, rather than a mature, comprehensive *system* of doctrine. Paul goes on to lay out explicitly the foundation for this unity in an apostolic confession of faith, declaring that there is "one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (4:4-6). It is important to recognize that the force of "one faith" and "one baptism" is not encompassing a system of doctrine, but is rather tied specifically to "one Lord"; i.e. this "one faith" represents simply the common belief in Christ (Bruce, 1984:336). Similarly, "one baptism" signifies the entrance into the covenant.

Nevertheless, Paul would certainly argue (as he did, for instance, in Rm 3:29-30, 5:1, 1 Cor 12:13; etc.) that even this simple faith in Christ must be a *right* belief in the "right" Christ; i.e. this πίστις represents a salvific, justifying event with a proper understanding of the Person and work of Christ as its object. Therefore, true believers are "one" –

irrespective of differences vis-à-vis peripheral, non-essential doctrines – simply by virtue of the "one Lord," "one God," "one Spirit" who is the "animating principle of the corporate body of Christ" (Bruce, 1984:336).

This "unity of the Spirit," then, is based upon the fundamental doctrine of justification by faith alone and expressed through the outworking of the Holy Spirit through the lives of those so justified. This unity knows no distinction between the local church and the universal church. Clowney (1976:14) points out that, for Paul and the early church, there was no sense of local or universal in their understanding of Christian unity:

> The church they know exists before the face of the Lord, in the heavenly Jerusalem … Both the catholicity and the localization of the church are manifested in the power and presence of the Spirit."

Local churches (or denominations) may well be separated by differing convictions regarding peripheral doctrines (though often rejecting that they are peripheral), yet there is no room for utter separation between those with a saving confession of faith in Christ.

5.3.2.4.3   Paul and a Model of Christian Unity (Phlp 2:1-4)

In Philippians 2:1-4, Paul provides a model for unity in the church, which has true conversion as its foundation, a common mission as its essence, and external demonstration as its ultimate expression. These verses may be parsed as follows [For a similar structure, and corresponding exegetical support, see Black (1985:299-308)]:

1. Conversion as the Grounds of Christian Unity:

So if there is *(a)* any encouragement in Christ; *(b)* any comfort from love; *(c)* any participation in the Spirit; *(d)* any affection and sympathy,

2. Comity of Purpose as the Character of Christian Unity

complete my joy by *(a)* being of the same mind; *(b)* having the same love; *(c)* being in full accord and *(d)* [being] of one mind.

3. Corresponding Action as the Evidence of Christian Unity

(a) Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but *(a₁)* in humility count others more significant than yourselves [and] *(b)* let each of you look not only to his own interests, but *(b₁)* also to the interests of others.

In light of this diagrammatic analysis, further consideration reveals that the subjects under consideration in any biblical discussion of Christian unity are *converted* believers: those who have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit and are in a genuine, salvific relationship with Christ. Thus, any discussions of ecumenicity, which attempt to embrace merely *nominal* Christians together with truly converted Christians must fail, as there is lacking the common ground that defines the global church as the true Body of Christ.

Further, Paul is instructing the believers to "have the same mind." Later (Phlp 2:5), he will identify this "mind" as the "mind of Christ"; in other words, in the Body of Christ, while there may be differences of approach and interpretation (as reflected through a diversity of orthodox denominations, for instance), there should (ideally) be no division of "minds" or, for that matter, churches or Christs. "The Church is the mystical body of Christ. As there cannot be two Christs, so there cannot be more than one Church of Christ" (Marias, 1957:4). Again, this is not to deny the reality of sincere – and sometimes

profound – divergence of beliefs among professing believers (e.g. nature and mode of baptism, ecclesiology, eschatology, etc.), any of which can promote "subdivisions" within the global Church – yet these divisions must not supersede the cohesive unity that defines the whole: to wit, the common bond of life in Christ, for "as He is the life of each, so is He the life of the whole; and the compelling link of the Christian society is the abiding of each one in union with the life-giving Saviour" (Johnston, 1943:93).

Finally, for Paul, this idea of unity is of the same essence as familial bonds. Paul's preferred salutation to the churches typically addressed the members as *ἀδελφοὶ*. This

> kinship terminology not only expressed the bonds of affection between the apostle and the churches to which he was writing but also the bonds that joined the members of the church together in a fictive family and distinguished them from outsiders who did not belong to the church of God (Collins, 2006:645).

Paul calls on this fictive family to display evidences of their unity through gestures of affection, such as a "holy kiss" (Rm 16:16; 1 Cor 16:20; 2 Cor 13:12; 1 Th 5:26). This gesture was not restricted to Paul, as Jesus (Lk 7:45), Luke (Ac 20:37), and Peter (1 Pt 5:14) make similar references.

Not only is *intra*-unity thus instructed (among believers in the local church), but *inter*-unity (among believers of different local churches) is likewise expressed, for Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 4:9-10 that this familial bond, demonstrated through brotherly love – φιλαδελφία, is divinely taught – θεοδίδακτος, and extends beyond the local congregation, as evidenced by the love shown by the believers at Thessalonica "to all the brothers throughout Macedonia." Paul records similar affection shown to the church

at Corinth from the believers in Ephesus (1 Cor 16:19-20) and Luke describes favourably the interaction between the churches at Jerusalem and Antioch as well (Ac 11:22; 15:2). Thus, tangible evidence of unity among believers – both within and beyond the local church – is a critical element to Paul's model.

5.3.2.4.4   General Epistles

Other NT authors make various references to the church and to the idea of unity among the people of God. Peter addresses his first epistle, not to a single, local congregation, but to "elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia …" (1:1). Thus, he is addressing a very broad group of people when he issues this instruction, "… all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind" (3:8). This idea of a "unity of mind" is similar to that expressed by Paul (Phlp 2:2; cf. 1 Cor 1:10), and Peter is clearly indicating that it should cross over geographical (and, therefore, cultural) boundaries. In his second letter, he continues that theme, writing, "Love the brotherhood of believers" (1 Pt 2:17).

In addition to his strong words about the necessity of brotherly love in the Body of Christ (discussed above), John records the words of Christ to the seven churches of Asia (Rv 2-3). It is likely that these churches, while real (and thus really addressed by the Lord), were also representative, as there were more than seven churches in Asia (e.g. Miletus, Tralles) and each of the seven reflect a different spiritual condition. If they are, in fact, representative, this is further evidence of the universality of the church, as various local churches would find commonalities, and therefore co-identity, with one or another of

these seven. Also, in Revelation, the "climax of prophecy" (Bauckham, 1993), John reveals that the heavenly company, which offers endless worship to the Lord, is derived from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages (7:9).

As a final example, the author of Hebrews employs the term *ekklesia* twice. In 2:12, he quotes from Psalms 21:23 (Hebrew; 22:22, LXX), where the term referred to the nation of Israel. Hence, a parallel between old Israel and the church is intended. Later, in Hebrews 12:23, the term is used, it would seem, to refer collectively to the church triumphant, though some commentators (RH Fuller, 1957:48) have taken this usage as merely a synonym for *πανήγυρις*. This would point to the ultimate – and eternal – expression of unity among the people of God.

5.4   Pastoral Leadership and Christian Unity

For the church in Burma (or anywhere) to move toward a more biblical expression of Christian unity, godly leaders must provide an example and promote a model of unity, which is consistent with the biblical bases of unity outlined above. First, the leaders must demonstrate a spirit of unity among themselves, resisting the temptations of competition and pride in ministry. Rather, they must seek out partnerships with other leaders for the purposes of fellowship and, where appropriate, worship and mission. Second, these leaders must then actively promote the same unity among their churches, teaching the biblical bases for unity, while challenging the obstacles of cultural biases. This section will consider the role of pastors as leaders, as well as the proper focus of their teaching for Christian unity, in order to lay a paradigmatic

foundation for the final chapter in this study, regarding holistic theological education as a response to the problem of disunity among the churches in Burma.

5.4.1 The Role of Pastors as Leaders to Promote Christian Unity

The NT churches were blessed to have the apostles (or their immediate spiritual progeny) as their pastors and leaders. While these men were not infallible, they do provide a helpful model for church leadership, steeped in prayer and passion for the gospel and preserved for later generations in Holy Writ. Further, this they did in the midst of cultures (both Semitic and Western), which were often hostile to the gospel. Tertullian (a*d nat.* VIII) wrote that they were, in fact, referred to derisively as a "third race," after the Romans/Greeks (combined as the "first" race) and the Jews. It was important, then, for them to stand united in the faith against the onslaught of opposition from other religious leaders. Therefore, they are instructive as examples for contemporary church leaders. In fact, the Bible makes clear that this was God's design.

Paul instructed Titus, a young pastor, to "show yourself in all respects a *model* of good works" (Tt 2:7; cf. his similar instruction to Timothy: 1 Tm 4:12). The writer of Hebrews instructed believers to "Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and *imitate their faith*" (Heb 13:7). Paul, in fact, went so far as to say several times something such as, "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1 Cor 11:1; cf. 1 Cor 4:14-16; Gl 4:12; Phlp 3:17, 4:9; 1 Th 1:6; 2 Th 3:7). This is the heart of the model: pastors are called to imitate Christ, so that the people who follow them can witness – and imitate – their faithfulness.

In Philippians 4:9, Paul writes, "What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you." At its essence, this is about modelling and replication. While this verse may not provide a strict taxonomy of discipleship methodology, it may be helpful to consider Paul's choice of words. He writes that the Philippians ought to "practice" four things: 1) What they "learned" from him, which likely refers to doctrine; that is, the product of his direct teaching; 2) What they then "received," which may refer to what they took from his teaching and accepted into their hearts as truth; 3) What they "heard," which could be a restatement of the first or may mean something more to do with his reputation; that is, what they heard *about* Paul; and 4) What they had "seen," which undoubtedly means that which they had personally witnessed in Paul's life and character that proved him consistent in practice with his teaching. This instruction confirms and expands upon what he had set forth earlier, in 3:17, "Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us." Thus, the essence of Paul's discipleship was holistic, encouraging others to listen, watch, absorb, examine, and emulate the "pattern" he demonstrated – even in the face of cultural and religious opposition (both from the Jews and the Gentile leaders).

Drawing on Newbigin (1984), Roxburgh and Romanuk (2006:122) insist that Paul, along with the other leaders of the apostolic church, "carefully and daringly" approached life "from the perspective of God's revelation in Christ." They go on to explain:

> They did not first seek out some framework or resource in the broader culture
> and then justify it by arguing that it was consistent with this revelation. They went
> much further. They centered their understanding, framing, and practices of

Christian formation (and therefore the nature of leadership) on the fact of the Incarnation as the place where God's intentions and purposes are made known. (Roxburgh & Romanuk, 2006:122)

This biblical perspective challenges the intrinsic impulse to "fit" one's faith within an existing cultural motif. Of course, this impulse is no less present amongst the pastors and other leaders of the churches in Burma than among leaders elsewhere and, in fact, by virtue of the rigid cultural boundaries in Burma, it is perhaps more pronounced. Overcoming this impulse requires what Bosch (1991:30) has called the "boundary breaking" work of Christ through the activity of the Holy Spirit, who reveals 1) a *telos* for the church, which diverges from the merely human perception of its purpose and design, and 2) a means to achieve that *telos*, which challenges the misguided methods of leaders who are not submitted to this revelation.

This is an important principle, which is lacking in much of church leadership in Burma today, "there is little theological wrestling with the questions of how to form or socialize a people into an alternative community" (Roxburgh & Romanuk, 2006:119). Indeed, and perhaps especially in tribal cultures, the newly-acquired Christian faith (of an individual, family, or entire tribe) is typically laid across the existing cultural framework rather than being "called out" (*ekklesia*) of that framework in order to adhere to the superstructure of the universal Body of Christ and then to confront that culture with the gospel. This "theological wrestling" is chiefly the responsibility of those called by God to lead the local churches. When they, however, have not been adequately exposed to such tradition-shattering concepts (through proper theological education), it is far more likely that they will lead the church down the path of least resistance: perhaps shaving off

those cultural-religious edges, which directly violate essential Christian theology, yet without rending the church from divisive, isolationist traditions, which reinforce the "familiar cocoons of cultural identity" (Zaidi, 2010:134). By contrast, effective leaders in the church will help people to identify with the Christian meta-narrative, assigning it a superseding primacy over the tribal narrative.

MacIntyre (1981:205) has argued that "selfhood" requires a narrative that stretches from birth to life to death. While the Christian meta-narrative has fallen out of favour in much of Western culture due to the rise of its postmodern deconstruction, in the East the challenge is more likely to come from the pervasive influence of tribal culture, which provides a competing meta-narrative, comprised of both religious and traditional elements. The churches in the East have often been able to adequately address the religious challenges to the gospel, yet the traditional challenges are often not resisted as vigorously. This results in a deficient faith cobbled together with a persistent cultural narrative, which challenges that faith on several practical levels.

"Narrative history of a certain kind turns out to be the basic and essential genre for the characterization of human actions" (MacIntyre, 1981:208). In other words, one's worldview (that is, the meta-narrative in which one finds a sense of "belonging") will certainly affect one's actions and interactions with others (largely determined by whether they share the same meta-narrative). Therefore, the pastor must lead his people into a fuller understanding of what it means to be "in Christ," to find their identity therein, and to celebrate the *koinonia* that is the unique possession of "the called out

ones": all those who, irrespective of their tribal identity, are members of the "household of faith" (Gl 6:10).

5.4.2 The Focus of Pastoral Teaching to Promote Christian Unity

The pastor must not only lead his church toward a fuller expression of unity, he must also teach them the principles of such unity from the Bible; for it is true that some people will follow a leader on the strength of his character and charisma alone – and this is exponentially compounded in a tribal culture, such as exists in Burma, where the leaders are followed unquestioningly. Instead, leaders in the church must instruct people in the *why* of Christian unity, so that they are enlightened as to God's will for them, encouraged by the benefits of fellowship with other believers, and cautioned against the sin of division within the Body of Christ.

As was seen above, the leader is to lead by example. Of course, such leadership is contingent upon the *ability* of others to follow. In other words, when Paul says, "Imitate me," he is working on the premise that the people are *able* to follow him as he follows Christ because they, too, are "in Christ." He is not showing (or telling) them something that is unattainable for them; he is modelling that which they are empowered to do through the reality of their conversion. He is showing them that "it" can be done – the Christian life is really possible; he is simply demonstrating, "Here's how" (Dodd, 2003:98). Paul, in his discussion of unity in Ephesians 4:1-6, provides an important summary of the characteristics (the "how") that pastors must not only model, but teach

to their churches, that the Body may be united in Christ. A return to this passage, therefore, is warranted.

As he often does, Paul begins this discussion with a "therefore," pointing back to the doctrinal discussion which precedes it; that is, he transitions from the indicative to the imperative at this point of his letter. Marcus Barth (1974:426) suggested that this was not so much a transition from *kerygma* to *didache* as it was a response to praise, noting that the first three chapters are more doxological than dogmatic. Mbennah (2013) suggests that there is a transitional pericope, Ephesians 4:1-16, which describes the spiritual maturity required to move from the indicatives of chapters 1-3, wherein Paul describes the believer's new identity in Christ, and the imperatives of Eph. 4:17-6:20, which calls for the believer to live life in response to that new identity.

Closely paralleling his instruction to the Colossians (Col 3:12-15), Paul begins this pericope by urging his readers to "walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called." By "walk," Paul is intending to convey the whole of life: walking, here, means not a "casual promenade" but "to follow a prescribed way in a fixed order" (Barth, 1974:427). This suggests that the characteristics he is going to encourage are life-encompassing, and flow out of the Christian's "calling." In other words, these characteristics ought not merely to be *reactive* (to external circumstances), but are to be initiatory: the fruit of the life of the Spirit, who indwells the believer (Loscaizo, 1988:688). Further, Paul qualifies the way the believers are to walk: in a manner *worthy* of that calling. "Worthy" (ἄξιος) originally meant "to bring up the other beam of the scales into

equilibrium" or "to put things into proper balance" (Foerster, 1964:379). In other words, the calling of God and the walking of the Christian ought to be "in balance."

Paul then offers six characteristics that demonstrate a walk worthy of the Christian's calling: lowliness (or humility), meekness (or gentleness), patience, love, unity, and peace. Garland (1979:518) suggests that the first three are correlatives of the second three, and there is certainly a sense in which the first triad points to an internal disposition, whereas the rest are more interactive in nature. Victorinus (quoted in Edwards,1999:159) wrote of the first set: "Lowliness consists in having a humble mind. Meekness is a curb on pride and cruelty. Patience consists in bearing any adverse circumstances that may befall them." In the ancient world, the word, "lowliness" (*ταπεινοφροσύνη*), "received only disparaging notice in Greek literature as being a trait suitable only for the insignificant, weak and poor. It was typical of the obsequious slave but shunned by any self-respecting person" (Garland, 1979:518). Quite on the contrary, in the New Testament, its every usage implies godly virtue, and it is, Muddiman (1999:179) suggests, this humility that "ensures the unity of the Church" (Phlp 2:3; Rm 12:16).

These first three personal virtues, then, give rise to the final three corporate ones; they, in fact, enable them. For only with the practiced "walk" of humility, gentleness, and patience, can the church ever be revealed to the world as ambassadors of Christ, demonstrating His life in them through love, unity, and peace. Of this love, it has been said, "Personal tastes and predilections and likes and dislikes have no business to intercept feelings of brotherly kindness" (Simpson & Bruce, 1957:189). Indeed, much

the same could be said with regard to cultural traditions and tribal loyalties. What are these in the face of the redeeming grace of Christ and the unity of His Body? This is why Paul writes that believers are to be "eager" or "take pains" to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace. In the Greek, *σπουδάζω* represents an urgency; "not only haste and passion, but a full effort of the whole man is meant, involving his will, sentiment, reason, physical strength, and total attitude" (Barth, 1974:428). It is with this intensity that the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace is to be desired and maintained.

Paul then shifts, in verses 4-6, to a series of "verbless, creed-like aphorisms" (Muddiman, 1999:181), by which "the meaning of unity in the Spirit is unpacked" (Martin, 1991:48), "… one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (KJV).

Martin (1991:48) finds in this declaration a triad of couplets:

One Body (the church)	One Lord (the head of the church)
One Spirit (by which Christ is confessed)	One faith (1 Cor 12:3)
One hope (accepted by baptism)	One baptism (1 Cor 12:13)

These are "sealed" by the declaration of "one God… over all, through all, and in all." Because of this one God, of whom all believers are children, there exists an ontological unity among them. Paul is simply exhorting his readers to live accordingly. This is why he would write elsewhere, "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, *especially to those who are of the household of faith*" (Gl 6:10) and "... you are no longer

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strangers and foreigners, but *fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God*" (Eph 2:19). These verses, and so many others like them, stress the uniqueness of the relationship among believers and of the love, unity and peace to which the church has been called by God in Christ. Far deeper than the love due to enemies or even to "neighbours," fellow believers are to be extended a very special love.

In fact, in a very poignant declaration, Jesus indicated that the love between believers is even uniquely different from that experienced among earthly families. After being told that His mother and brothers were looking for him, Jesus responded with a question:

> "Who is My mother or My brothers?" And He looked around in a circle at those who sat about Him, "Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother (Mk 3:33-34).

Certainly, Jesus was not denying His flesh and blood, but He was putting human relationships in biblical perspective. He came to redeem a *people* of God so committed to doing the *will* of God that, if necessary, they would forsake all – even their closest earthly relatives – for the *kingdom* of God (Curtis, 2009:432). Later, He would say,

> He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who does not take his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me. (Mt 10:37-38).

With a proper grasp of the life formed by faith, it begins to become clearer that Christ is dwelling within His people, and to forsake *them* is to forsake *Him*. Corporally, in the unity of the Body, there is unity with Christ. The Westminster Confession of Faith says:

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Saints by profession are bound to maintain a holy fellowship and communion in the worship of God; and in performing such other spiritual services as tend to their mutual edification; as also in relieving each other in outward things, according to their several abilities, and necessities. *Which communion, as God offers opportunity, is to be extended unto all those who, in every place, call upon the name of the Lord Jesus.* (WCF, 26.2).

At the root of the disunity in Burma, and everywhere in the true church of Christ, lies nothing more than ignorance, at best (and this is suggested most charitably), and personal sin, at worst (and this is far more often the case). Essentially, this sin manifests itself in a prideful refusal to "maintain a holy fellowship and communion" with "all those who, in every place, call upon the name of the Lord Jesus." In Burma, such refusal is tacitly defended with appeals to tribal identity and traditions. These stand in opposition to Paul's admonition to pursue – eagerly and urgently – lowliness, meekness, patience, love, peace and, of course, unity. The focus of pastoral instruction vis-à-vis unity in the church must, therefore, begin with the dismantling of these oppositions. In their place must be instilled those godly characteristics, which promote Christian unity and, consequently, redound to the glory of the one God and Father of all.

5.5   Conclusions

5.5.1 Conditional Ecumenicity

It has been demonstrated that, while unity is an essential aspect of the Christian faith, this unity is not merely organizational in nature; rather, it is conditioned upon genuine conversion. Also, this unity is not merely spiritual; rather, there must also be a

corresponding, visible expression of unity. Finally, this unity is not confined to the local church; rather, it encompasses all of the Body of Christ, universally. Therefore, it has been demonstrated that there should be not only intra-unity *within* the local churches of Burma, but inter-unity *among* local churches that share a comity of essential, Reformed doctrine.

5.5.2   Christian Unity and the Biblical Bases

It has also been demonstrated that the idea of the people of God as "one" is present in Scripture from the earliest days of Israel's existence and that, further, this oneness extended even to foreigners who aligned themselves, by faith, to Israel's God. With the Incarnation of the Messiah, any residual division between Jew and Gentile was done away with, and the new revelation of God's people as the Body of Christ became a central theme of the New Testament.

While the unity of Israel over against the heathen nations is instructive for Christian unity in the present, so the history of division within Israel – rendering two nations (Israel and Judah) – is indicative of the modern dilemma in Burma and in the universal church at large and serves as a cautionary example. As M'Crie (1821:23) points out,

> Judah and Israel, originally one, and bound together by the most sacred ties, were rent asunder, and formed into two independent nations, divided in worship, as well as in secular and political interests. And this was followed by the usual effects of such breaches – rivalship, hatred, and mutual hostilities. 'Ephraim envied Judah and Judah vexed Ephraim' [Is. 11:13]. The same thing has happened to the Christian church.

Thus, it has been demonstrated that the church in Burma must be reminded of the unity to which it has been called, irrespective of tribal identity.

5.5.3   Christian Unity and the Role of Leaders

It has also been demonstrated that the biblical model for unity relies upon leaders who are committed to that unity. Many of the pastors in Burma are ill-equipped to adequately promote unity amongst the believers in that country because of a lack of proper biblical and theological education.

While not intended as an endorsement of his conclusions, Hearne (1982:1) is nonetheless correct when he cautions against laying all responsibilities on pastors vis-à-vis unity, "It is not enough merely to blame the church leaders for prejudice, nor to see vested interests as the main reason for the lack of progress" toward unity. Indeed, the controlling presence of tribal identity and the traditions and biases related to it, run deep, naturally, among the people of Burma. The burden for overcoming these obstacles to unity, however, falls to the leaders of the churches in Burma. Thus, it has been demonstrated that theological education, such as will be recommended in chapter 7, may well serve to enlighten these leaders as to their biblical responsibilities, as well as equip them to fulfil those responsibilities with an aim to produce within Burma the unity of that Body, which Scripture prescribes.

CHAPTER SIX

6.0   Ethnographic Research

6.1   Introduction

This chapter will consider and analyze data collected by this writer in the field via empirical research. This research is limited to the tribes of Chin, Karen, and Kachin. It is further limited to the smaller Reformed churches and denominations (none with more than twelve churches) with which this writer is familiar after several years of intermittent ministry in Burma. The nature of these churches and denominations – comprised as they are of individuals with little to no formal theological education (or without access to the global academic community) – is such that there is virtually no indigenous literature or scholarly research pertaining to the main research problem under consideration in this study. Thus, the research contained herein, together with the cumulative historical analysis and literature assessment developed in earlier chapters, represents an original contribution to knowledge, to wit: the cause and extent of disunity among these tribal churches in Burma.

6.2   Empirical Data: Methodology

The empirical research in this chapter is confined to the three tribes in Burma with the highest concentration of professing Christians: Chin, Karen, and Kachin. A census was conducted in Burma in 2014. Some provisional data from this census have been released; however, the data related to religion and ethnicity is still deemed "too

sensitive" to be released by the government (Phyo, 2016). Therefore, the most recent data available at this time remains that collected more than three decades ago, in the 1983 census (Myanmar Government, 1983). Though less than five percent of the total population in Burma claimed to be Christian at the time (Steinberg, 2010), it is clear from the data collected in 1983 that the three tribes included in this research had large numbers who professed to be Christian. This chart shows the total number (in 1983) in each tribe professing a religion other than Buddhism or animism (*nat* worship):

Table 4: Religions other than Buddhism or animism

Tribe	Christian	Muslim	Hindu
Chin	310,612	259	147
Kachin	431,186	16,022	12,219
Karen	105,930	75,126	7,816

The Christian population in these tribes, therefore, is relatively significant. The hope is that an analysis of these tribes, as a microcosm representing the bulk of Christians in Burma, may be useful in increasing knowledge of the broader situation among churches in Burma, in general. At any rate, this information will be useful in increasing knowledge of these particular tribes vis-à-vis the research problem of this study. The historical backgrounds of these tribes, as well as their interaction with Christian missionaries,

were presented in earlier chapters. What follows in this chapter, then, will be a discussion and analysis of the data gathered from the research among these tribes.

6.2.1 Purposeful Selection

The usefulness of purposeful selection as a sampling technique for collecting empirical data is generally acknowledged (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Castellan, 2010; Gall, Gall & Borg, 2003). In fact, Patton (1990:169) argues, "The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth." As objective criteria has been employed in the determination of the sample (namely, that the subjects are from the tribes with the highest concentration of Christians), and because the persons selected for this sample have direct, personal knowledge of the intertribal relationships of Christians in Burma (simply by virtue of their subjective perspective of those relationships), they were indeed considered by this researcher to be "information-rich cases" who could provide insight into the main research problem of this thesis (Bouma & Atkinson, 1995:143). Thus, it is anticipated that a deeper analysis of this sample will enable generalization from tribal microcosms to a broader perception of the state of the Church in Burma with regard to intertribal unity.

6.2.2 Quantitative Research

The first part of the research in this study involved the purposeful selection of pastors and control groups from three tribes: Chin, Karen, and Kachin (hereafter: "subjects"). Specifically, subjects from two categories were selected from each of the three tribes:

four pastors and a control group of four women and/or youth, who hold no church office. Thus, eight representatives of each tribe participated in this research, for a total sample of twenty-four subjects.

This study employed cross-sectional questionnaires to obtain quantitative data from the twenty-four subjects. In order to test the hypothesis of this study (namely, that there is intertribal disunity among the churches in Burma), such questionnaires are a valid research tool (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2003; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Lowe, 1991). The goal of this research is to collect information from each subject in the sample and collate the resultant findings (Abdullah & Raman, 2000; Gall *et al.,* 2003). The questionnaire itself is included herein as Appendix A. All of the responses of each subject are included as Appendix B. The statistical analysis of the resultant data from the subgroup "All Subjects" appears as Appendix C. Some of the findings of these questionnaires, together with the impressions of this researcher will be presented below (6.3.2).

6.2.3 Qualitative Research

Finch (1985:114) rightly notes, "Quantitative work can only document correlations but itself cannot account for them." Consequently, in addition to the quantitative research conducted via the questionnaires, qualitative research was also drawn from interviews and personal conversations with pastors and other Christian leaders in Burma over the last five years (hereafter: "participants"). This second part of the research for this thesis, then, serves to account for the correlations demonstrated in the results of the questionnaires. Van Maanen (1979:520) notes that the qualitative method is "an array of

interpretative techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world." Thus, this researcher conducted "unstructured interviews" (Cohen & Manion, 1989:293) with eight pastors representing the three tribes: three each from the Chin and Kachin tribes; two from the Karen tribe. Regarding such interviews, Cohen and Manion (1989:293) point out that the content of the interview is under the control of the interviewer, yet the interview itself is governed by the research question(s). Torbert (1981) calls these types of interviews a "collaborative inquiry," as the participant and the interviewer each bring something of value to the research. First, there is the essence of the participants' perspectives vis-à-vis the central research problem; second, the researcher considers both the participants' responses and the researcher's own impressions of those responses. The latter is an important element of qualitative research, as it is critical for the researcher to "empathise with the people being studied" (Abdullah & Raman, 2000:124; cf. Bouma & Atkinson, 1995; Cannell & Khan, 1968). Therefore, the findings of the qualitative data include both the participants' responses as well as the researcher's analysis of those responses.

Each pastor was asked to explain, in his own words, why there was intertribal disunity among the Reformed churches in Burma. Each pastor gave several answers, many of which duplicated the responses of the others. However, they were each able to contribute at least three possible reasons. Consequently, there are eight corresponding reasons suggested for the lack of Christian unity. A graph at the end of the findings will

indicate which answers were offered by each pastor to show the frequency of each answer.

6.2.4 Triangulation

It is the belief of this writer that, with respect to the particular research problem under consideration in this study, both quantitative and qualitative research needed to be employed (Babbie, 2012). While the findings from these two approaches will be analyzed independently of one another, there is considerable overlap between the two methods, generally. As Davies (1982:29) puts it, interviews and questionnaires are "neither inherently qualitative nor quantitative. All quantification involves judgments as qualities and all qualitative statements invoke hierarchy, number and amount to give shape to meaning." Thus, the method employed herein is a combination of quantitative and qualitative research, or triangulation, which Krathwohl (1993:329) defines as "the process of using more than one source to confirm information: confirming data from different sources, confirming observations from different observers, and confirming information from different data collection methods." This method increases the likelihood of greater credibility and reliability (Abrahamson, 1983; Babbie, 2012; Cohen & Manion, 1989; Gall *et al.*, 2003; Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 1991). As Abdullah and Raman (2000:129) warn, however, "Triangulation is not an end itself; it is an imaginative way of maximising the amount of data collected." Therefore, the findings presented below are the product of both the research and the writer's analysis, based on extensive interaction with, and knowledge of, the culture of the tribal churches in Burma.

6.2.5   Anonymity and Confidentiality

In order that their responses might be optimally genuine and candid, the subjects and participants in this research (those who completed the questionnaires and those who agreed to personal interviews, respectively) were assured that their participation would be anonymous and confidential. Therefore, the respondents to the questionnaires are identified only within the context of their "group" (e.g. pastor or control; Chin, Karen, or Kachin; etc.). Likewise, the eight pastors who were interviewed are identified by tribe and number (e.g. Chin_1; Chin_2; Kachin_1; etc.).

6.3   Empirical Data: Findings

Drawing upon all of the data collected through the questionnaires and interviews, the researcher was able to identify causal and parallel relationships between the traditions and perceptions of the respondents and the likelihood that they embrace tribal identity above any other identifiers (Asian, Burmese, Christian, etc.). Specifically, the research revealed that there are eight traditions and/or perceptions, which, depending upon the degree to which they are embraced, predispose the subjects toward tribal exclusivism, which, in turn, tends to promote intertribal disunity even among professing Christians of different tribes. Each of these traditions/perceptions will be addressed below. First, however, information on the subjects' religious backgrounds and beliefs, drawn from their responses, will aid in situating the findings with respect to intertribal relationships.

6.3.1   Religious background and beliefs of all research subjects (combined)

6.3.1.1   Religious background of all research subjects (combined)

For the purposes of this study, it is important to ascertain the religious background of the subjects, particularly in light of the varied religious landscape in Burma and the relative obscurity of the Christian religion. Thus, the subjects were asked several questions intended to define their religious heritage. Some of these findings are presented below as a result of the combined responses of all twenty-four subjects:

- **Religious background question 1:**
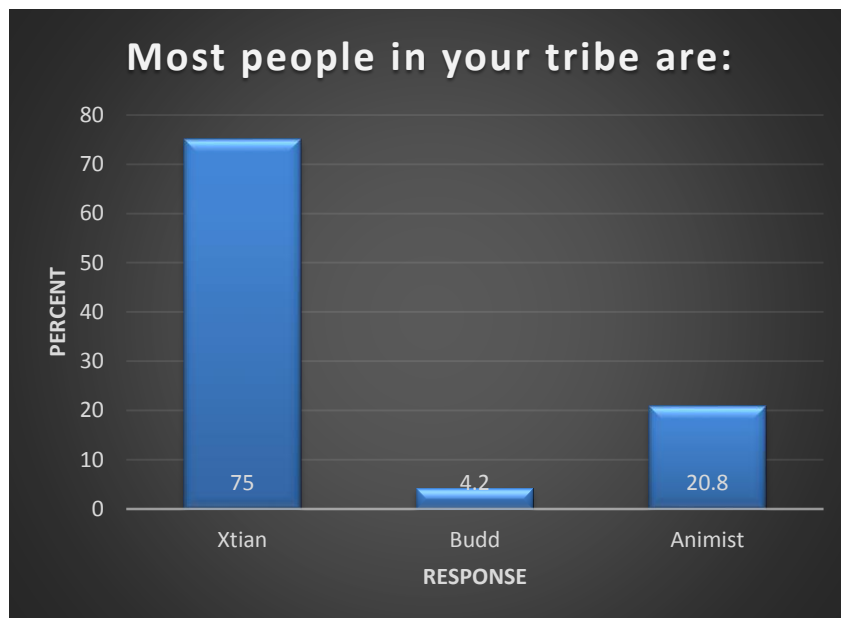
- **Religious background question 2:**
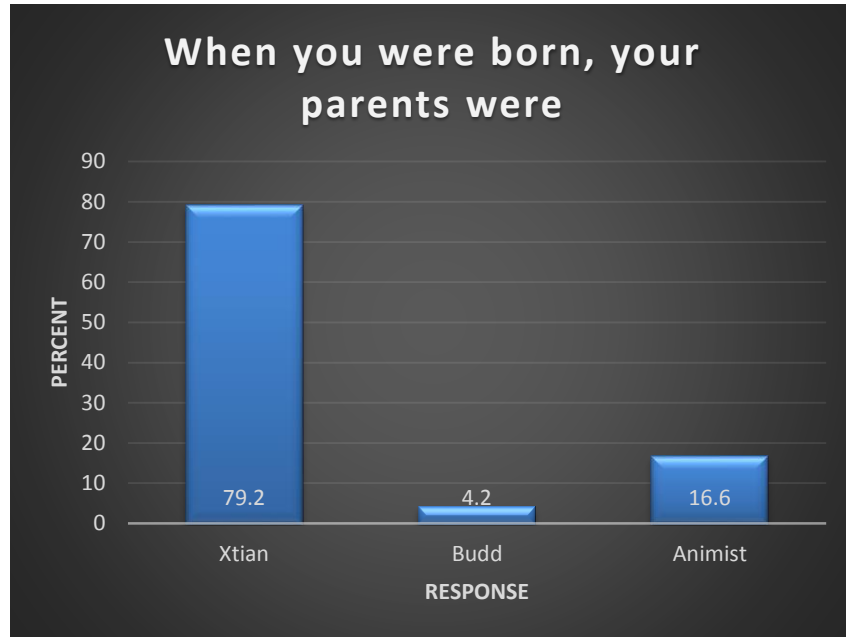
- **Religious background question 3:**

- **Religious background question 4:**

Most people in your tribe have a background that is:

RESPONSE	PERCENT
Xtian	62.5
Budd	8.33
Animist	29.16
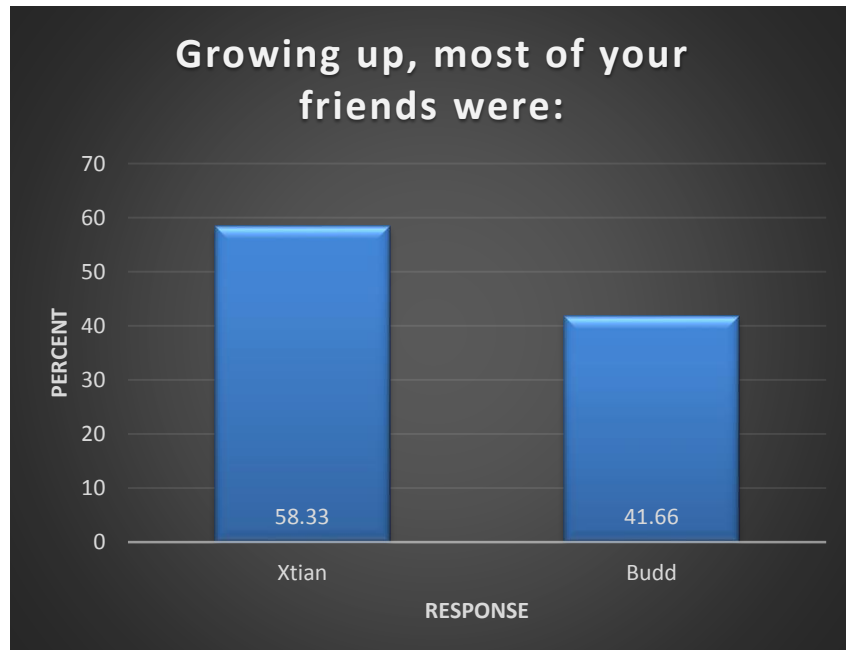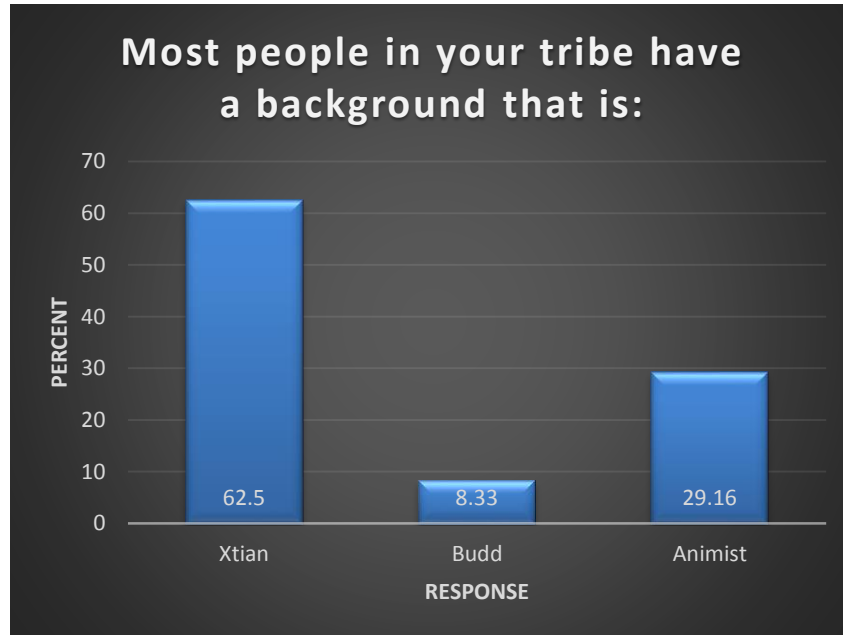
These results demonstrate that, for most of the subjects, the religion of their family is Christian, and has been since their birth. Similarly, the religion of most of their childhood friends was also Christian. While this is a testament to the "success" of missions activities in these tribes, it is also an indictment of the tribal churches (and, perhaps to some degree, the missionaries who planted those churches) for failing to instruct these believers in the biblical teachings about Christian unity. For, as will be seen below, these same subjects – professing to be Christians and coming from families that profess to be Christians – have a distorted idea of the unity of the church across tribal lines. Further, these Christians also demonstrate poor theological literacy, as indicated by the findings regarding their religious beliefs. This, despite the fact that each of the churches where these subjects worship self-identify as Reformed and claim to hold one or more of the historic Reformed confessions of faith.

6.3.1.2   Religious beliefs of all research subjects (combined)

In addition to ascertaining the religious background of the subjects, it is also important to grasp the depth and accuracy of their belief system, as it is only with a proper, biblical view of Christian unity that the churches can be expected to elevate their identity in Christ above their tribal identities. Therefore, a number of questions were posed to the subjects in order to elicit their theological literacy with regard to such critical issues as the errors of Prosperity Theology and the exclusivity of Christ for salvation. Some of the responses are found below (while all of the responses can be found in Appendix B). Comments will follow the charts, which warrant additional explanation.

- **Religious beliefs question 1:**

[SD = strongly disagree; D = disagree; N = neutral; A = agree; SA = strongly agree]
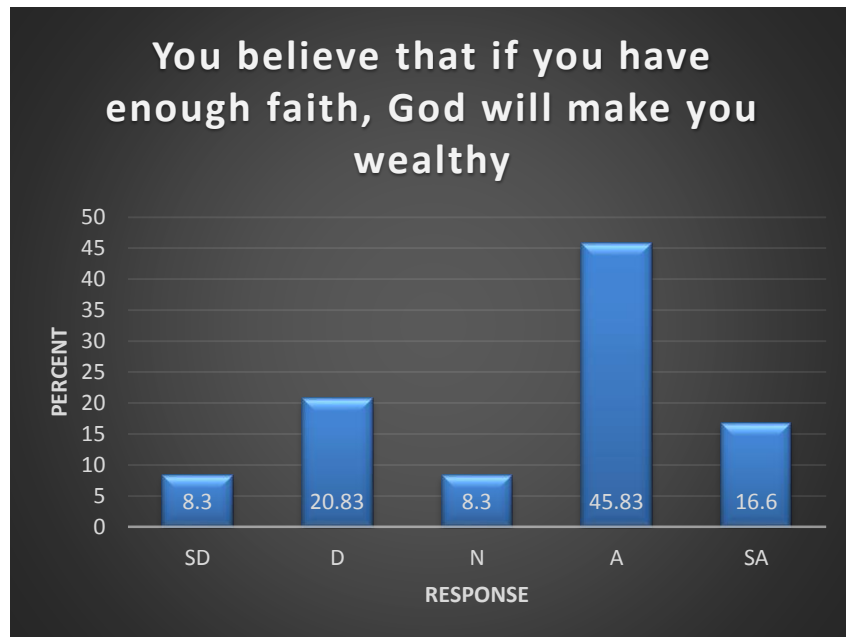
- **Religious beliefs question 2:**
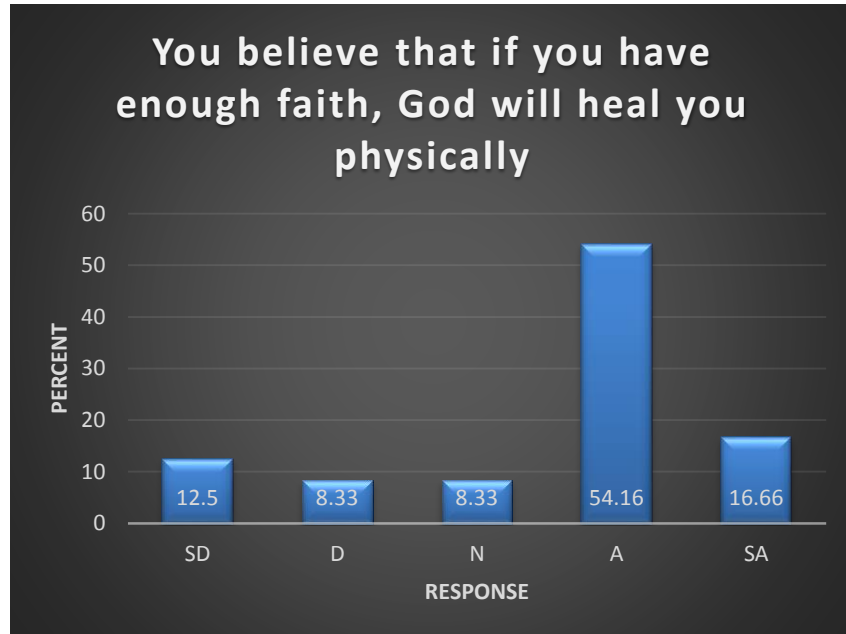
- **Religious beliefs question 3:**

- **Religious beliefs question 4:**

You believe that God rewards good behaviour with health and prosperity

Response	Percent
SD	25
D	29.16
N	4.16
A	29.16
SA	12.5

While these numbers from the entire sample show that more than 41% of the subjects agree or strongly agree with the statement that God rewards good behaviour with health and prosperity, the findings are more pronounced when the individual groups are considered. For example, among the Karen, the agree or strongly agree responses rose to 62%. Among the Chin, none of the control group agree or strongly agree with that statement; however, fully 75% of the All Pastors group did.

- **Religious beliefs question 5:**

You believe that doing things for *nats* will bring good results in your life

(Bar chart showing PERCENT on the y-axis (0–60) and RESPONSE on the x-axis)

RESPONSE	PERCENT
SD	54.16
D	25
N	12.5
A	4.166
SA	4.16
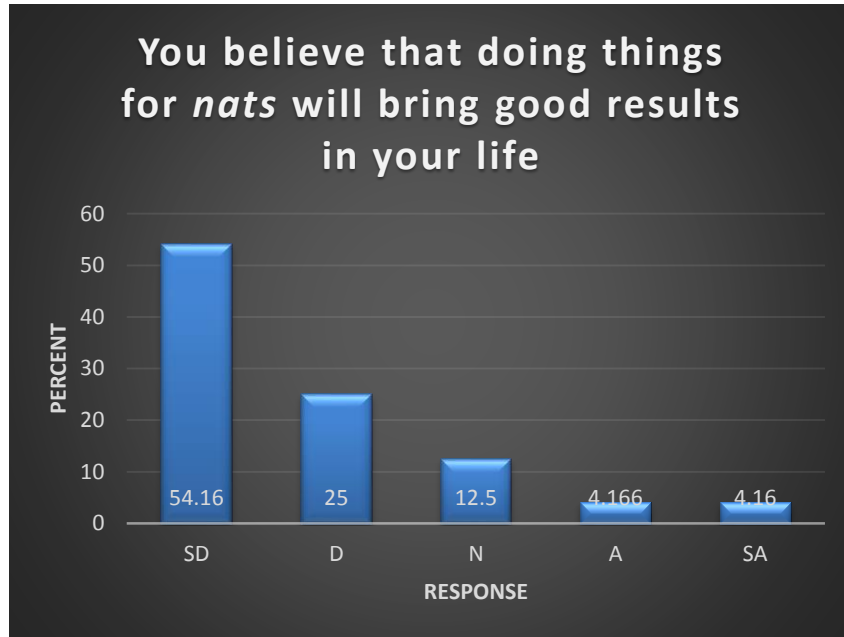
Again, while the overall total from all participants is low (8% of the subjects agree or strongly agree), the Karen group consisted of 25% who agree or strongly agree that doing things for *nats* will bring good results in their lives.

- **Religious beliefs question 6:**

You believe that *nats* will punish you if you betray your tribe

Response	Percent
SD	37.5
D	33.33
N	20.83
SA	8.33

- **Religious beliefs question 7:**

Sincere Buddhists will be saved by their good works/religious duties

Response	Percent
SD	54.16
D	16.66
N	12.5
A	12.5
SA	4.16
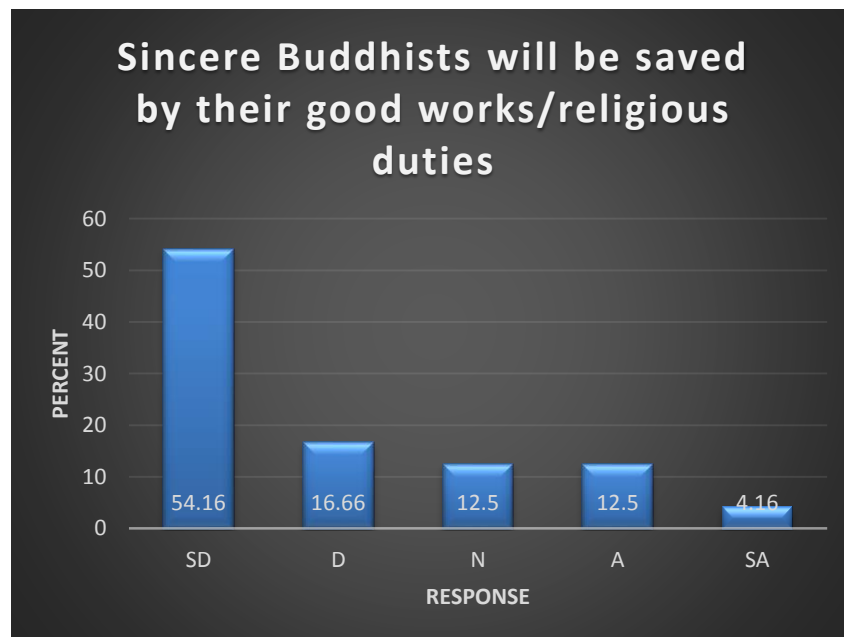
As this data indicate, more than 16% of all subjects in the sample agree or strongly

agree that sincere Buddhists will be saved by their good works/religious duties. Among

the Chin group, this number rises to 25%. Also, 25% of all subjects in the control group

agree or strongly agree with this belief, compared with 8.3% of all pastors in the sample.

- **Religious beliefs question 8:**
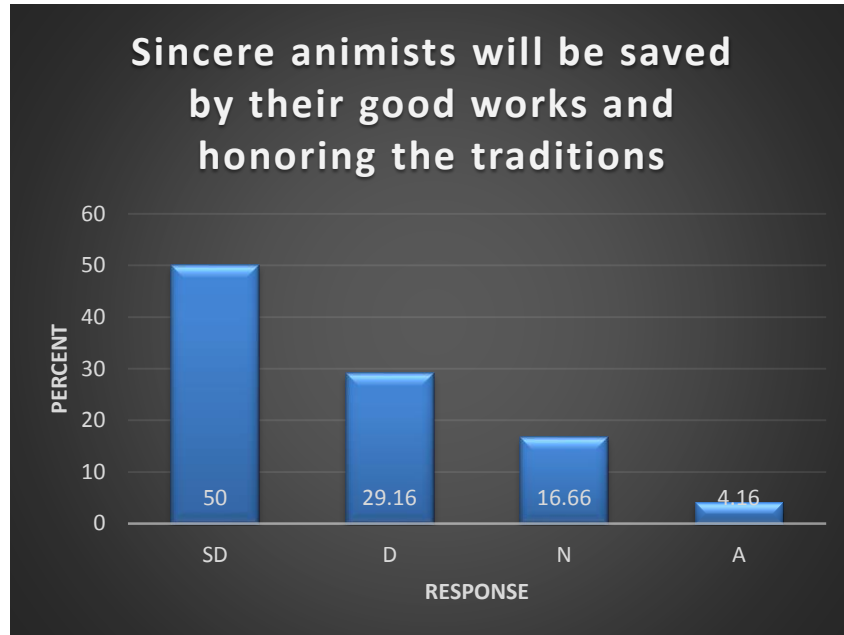
While only 4% of the total sample agree that sincere animists will be saved by their

good works and by honouring the traditions, 25% of the Karen group agree or strongly

agree with this statement. Among that 25%, all are in the Karen control group; none are

in the Karen pastors group.

- **Religious beliefs question 9:**

Sincere Hindus will be saved by their good works/religious duties

RESPONSE	SD	D	N
PERCENT	58.33	29.16	12.5

6.3.2   Tribal views of all research subjects (by tribal category)

Having situated the research subjects according to their religious backgrounds and beliefs, it is now possible to consider their views concerning their own tribe, other tribes, and relationships between their tribe and other tribes. This data will be presented in the following six categories, with a summary analysis at the end of each data set:

- All subjects (i.e. the full twenty-four person sample).

- All Chin (i.e. the four Chin pastors and the four-person Chin control group).

- All Karen (i.e. the four Karen pastors and the four-person Karen control group).

- All Kachin (i.e. the four Kachin pastors and the four-person Kachin control group).

- All pastors (i.e. the twelve pastors in the sample: four from each tribe).

- All control (i.e. the twelve subjects in the control groups of each tribe).

❖ **Tribal views, question 1:**

[SD = strongly disagree; D = disagree; N = neutral; A = agree; SA = strongly agree]

➢ All participants

Tribal identity is very important to you

Response	Percent
D	8.33
N	4.17
A	41.67
SA	45.83

➢ All Chin

Tribal identity is very important to you

Response	Percent
D	12.5
A	37.5
SA	50
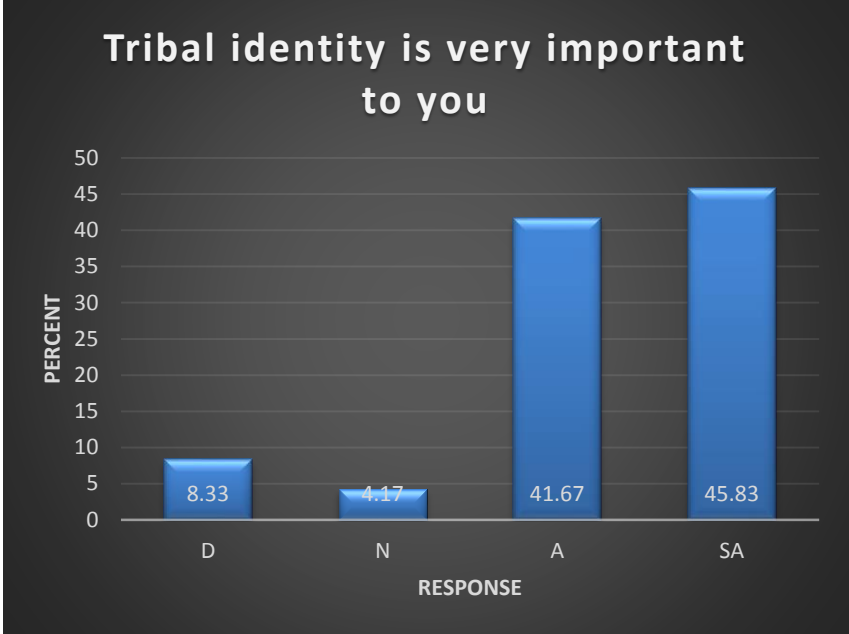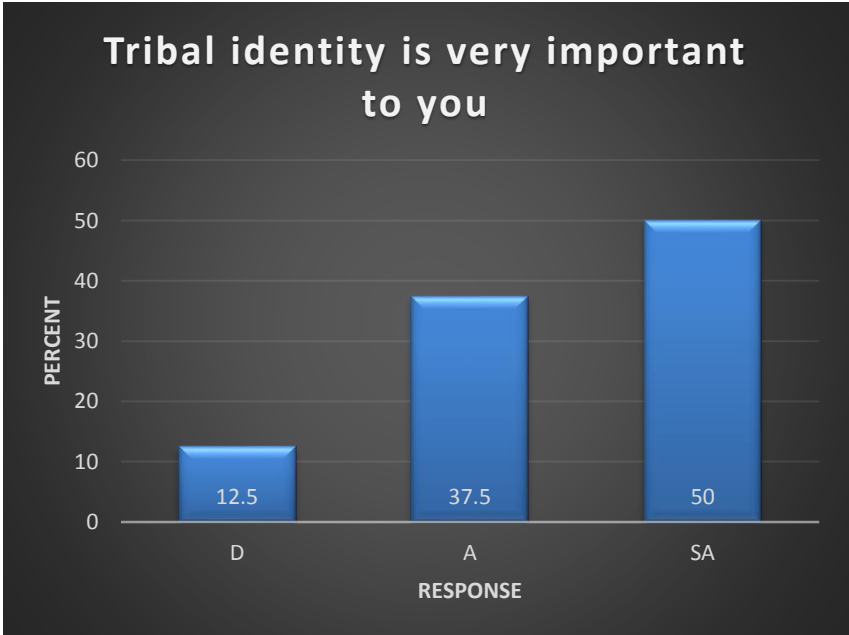
➤ All Karen

➤ All Kachin
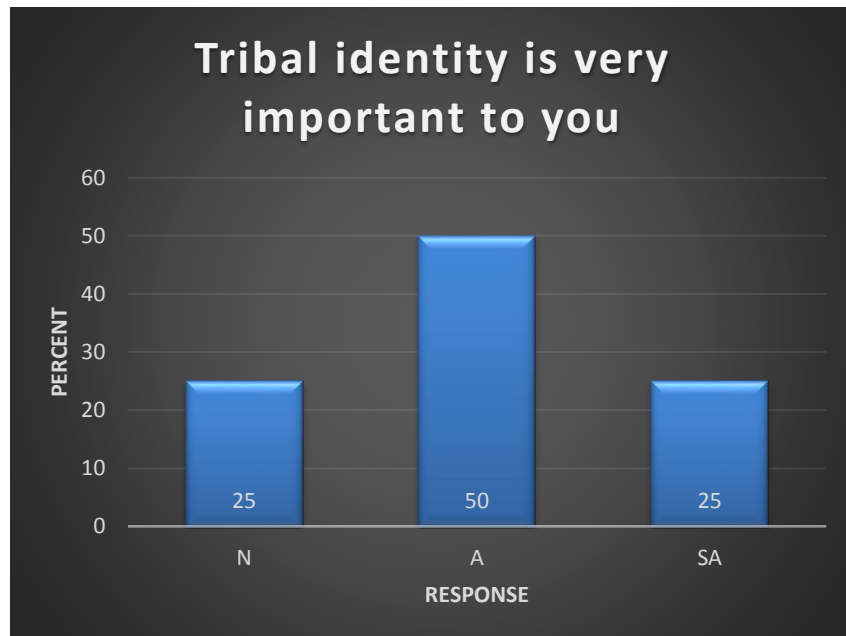
➤ All pastors
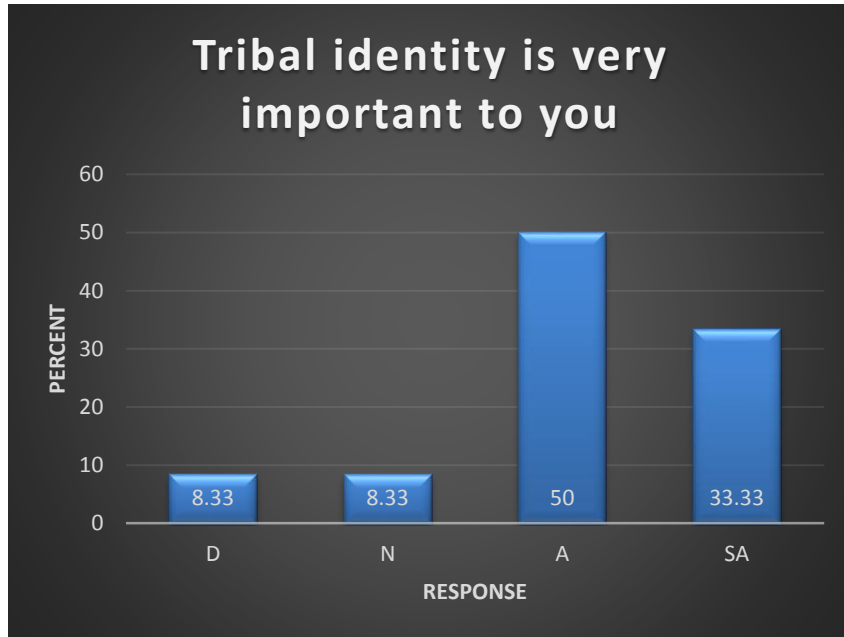
➤ All control
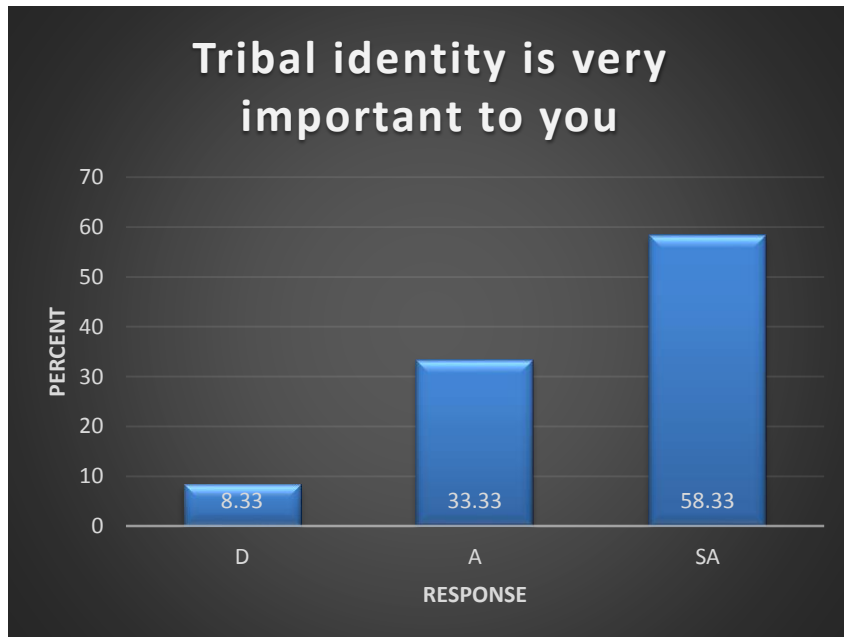
➢ Summary analysis

In each data group, it is obvious that tribal identity is very important. In fact, the positive responses to this question range from a low of 75% selecting agree or strongly agree (Kachin) to 100 % agree or strongly agree (Karen). Even among the pastors, those who chose agree or strongly agree total more than 83%. These responses are not unexpected, as the research to this point has clearly indicated that the culture of Burma is a tribal culture. These responses merely confirm that conclusion.

❖ **Tribal views, question 2:**

[SD = strongly disagree; D = disagree; N = neutral; A = agree; SA = strongly agree]

➢ All participants

➢ All Chin

➢ All Karen

➢ All Kachin

Christian relationships are more important than tribal relationships

➢ All pastors

Christian relationships are more important than tribal relationships

- ➢ All control

Christian relationships are more important than tribal relationships
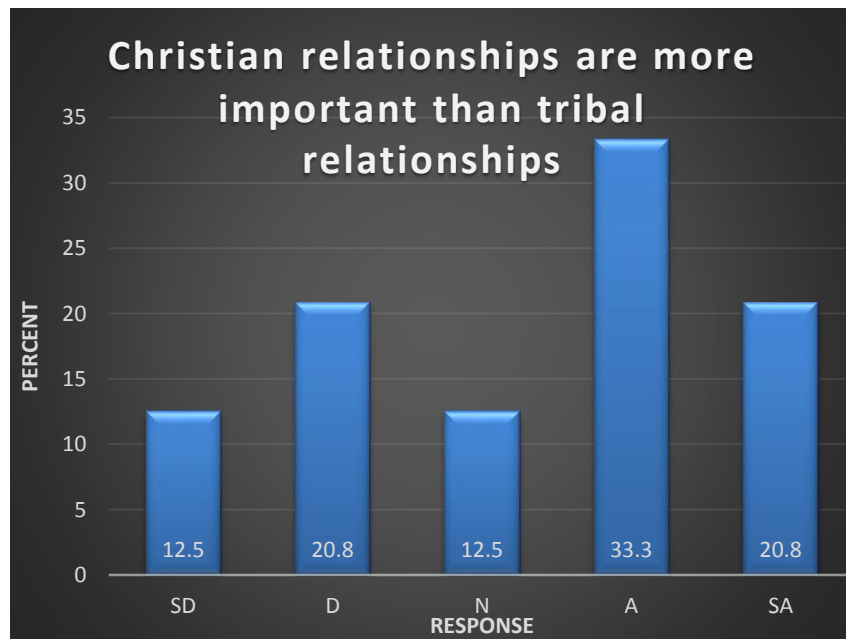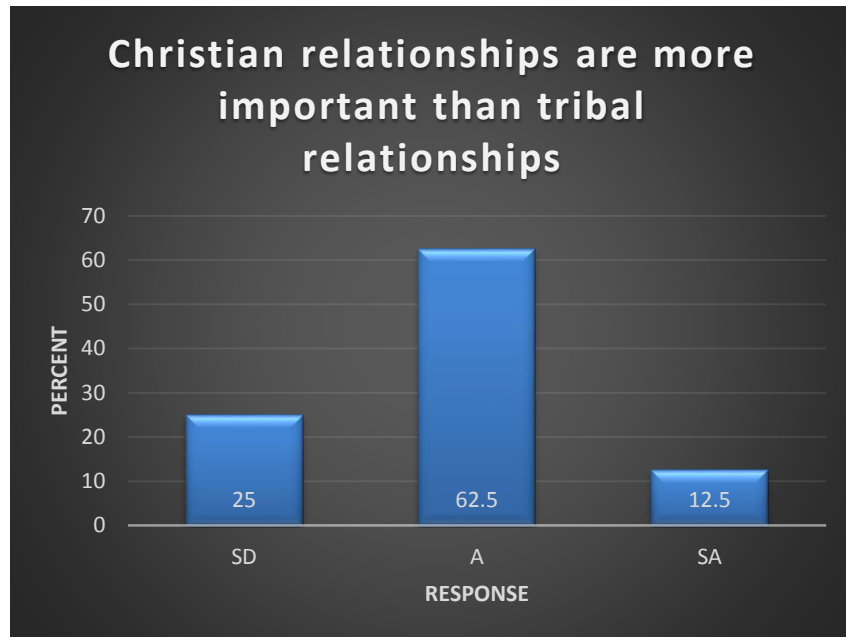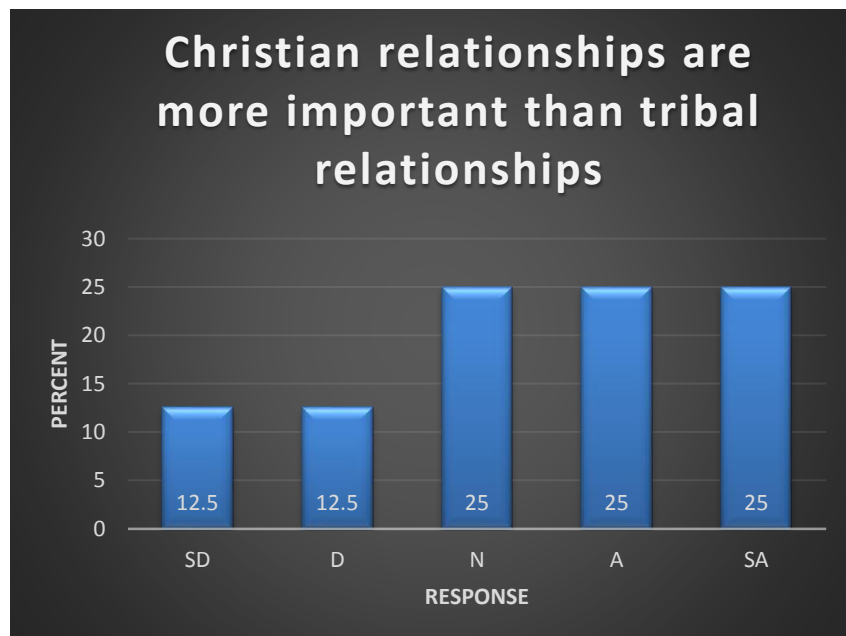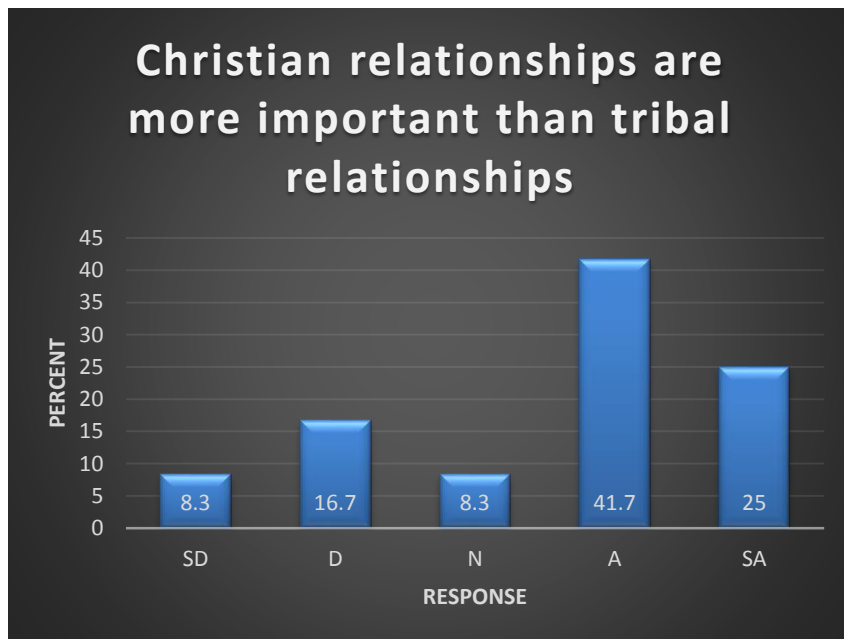
- ➢ Summary analysis

This question begins to reveal the distinction that is made between tribal identity and Christian identity. While a slight majority of all subjects either agree or strongly agree that Christian relationships are more important than tribal relationships, there remain over 32% of all participants who either disagree or strongly disagree. Both the Chin and the Karen groups show that 25% disagree or strongly disagree, while that number rises to 50% in the Kachin group. Among the pastors, those who disagree or strongly disagree represent 25% of the group. This is somewhat lower than the 41% of the control group who either disagree or strongly disagree. This may be owing to a deeper knowledge of the Christian faith on the part of the pastors (as one would expect). Nevertheless, the number of pastors who cling to tribal identity over Christian identity is not insignificant.

❖ **Tribal views, question 3:**

[SD = strongly disagree; D = disagree; N = neutral; A = agree; SA = strongly agree]

➢ All participants

➢ All Chin

➢ All Karen

➢ All Kachin

➤ All pastors

It is more important that your son/daughter marry a Christian than a member of your tribe

RESPONSE	PERCENT
D	25
N	16.6
A	41.6
SA	16.6

➤ All control

It is more important that your son/daughter marry a Christian than a member of your tribe

RESPONSE	PERCENT
SD	33.3
D	16.7
N	16.7
A	8.3
SA	25
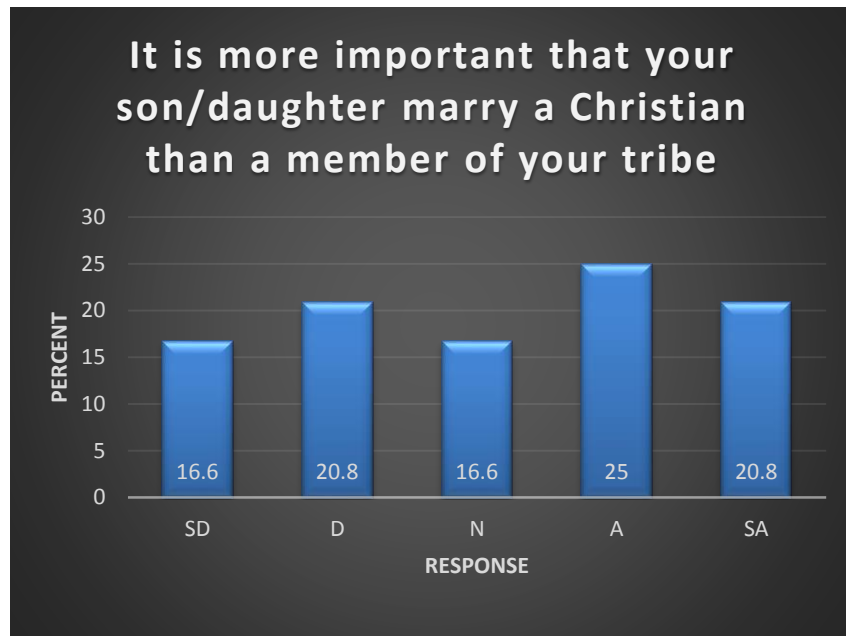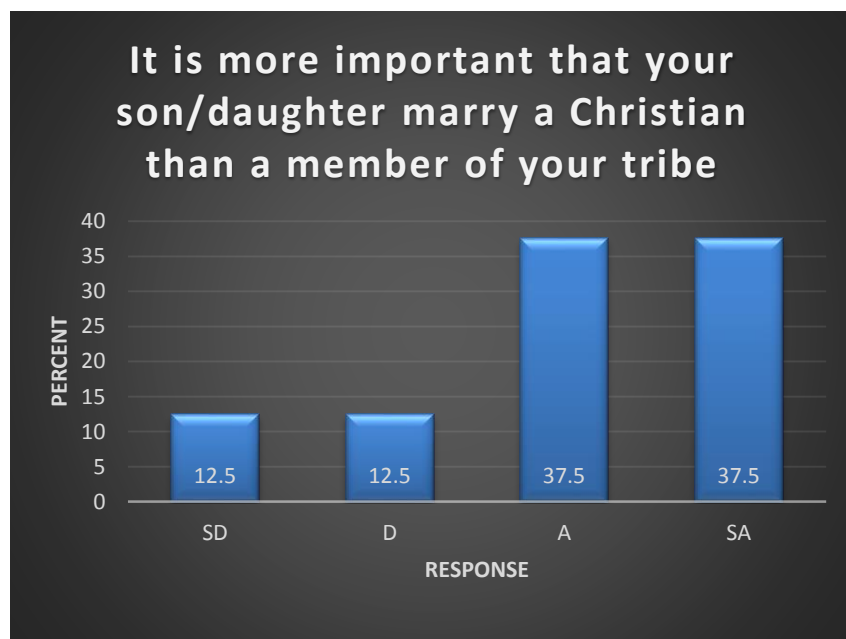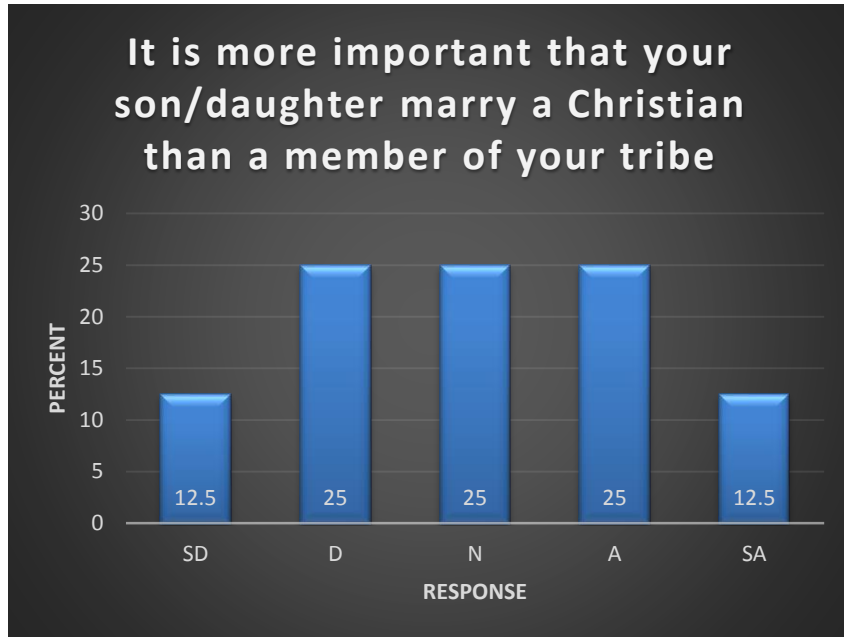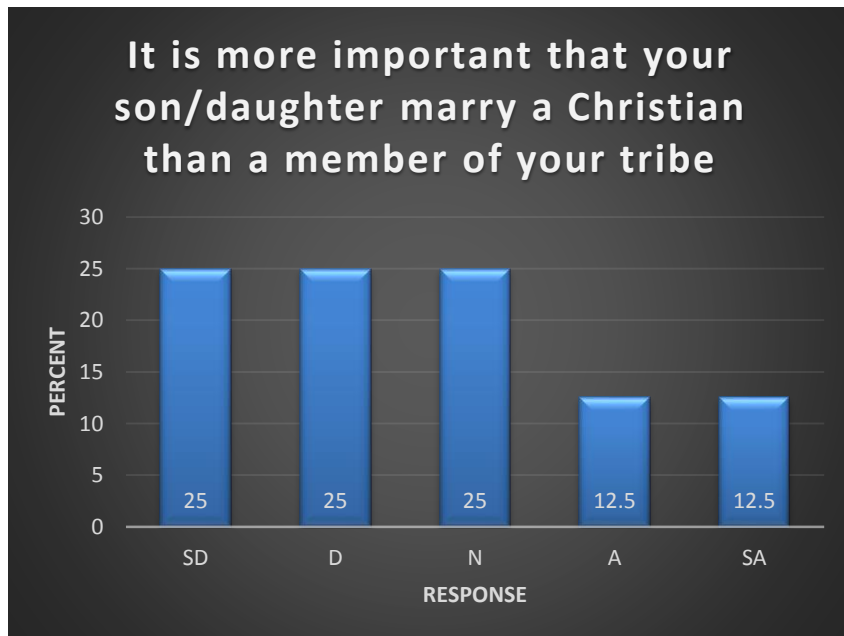
➢ Summary analysis

This question and its responses burrows more deeply into the belief system of the subjects vis-à-vis tribal identity, as it moves the discussion beyond a direct consideration of tribal identity to a more indirect approach: a discussion about their (real or potential) children. The findings, however, confirm those of the previous questions, in that a significant percentage of each group would prefer that their child not marry outside of their tribe – even if that meant that their spouse would not be a Christian. Overall, the entire sample presented a 45% response of either agree or strongly agree with this position. Among the Chin, that number soars to 75%, while it is a bit lower for the other two tribes: 37% for the Karen and 25% for the Kachin. Most surprising, perhaps, is that the total control group consisted of 33% who responded that they agree or strongly agree, while 58% of the pastors group so responded. Thus, unlike the previous question, where the pastors' responses demonstrated a likelihood to favour Christian relationships over tribal relationships, their responses to this question suggests that they, too, may prefer tribal relationships (at least for their children) over Christian relationships.

❖ **Tribal views, question 4:**

➢ All participants

Do you feel that other tribes look down on you and your tribe?

➢ All Chin

Do you feel that other tribes look down on you and your tribe?

➢ All Karen

➢ All Kachin

➤ All pastors

Do you feel that other tribes look down on you and your tribe?

➤ All control

Do you feel that other tribes look down on you and your tribe?
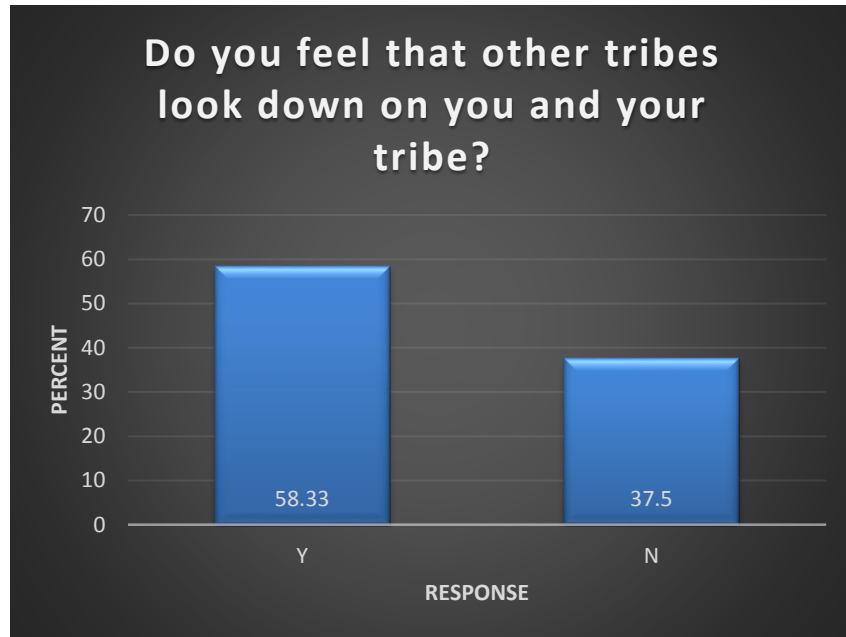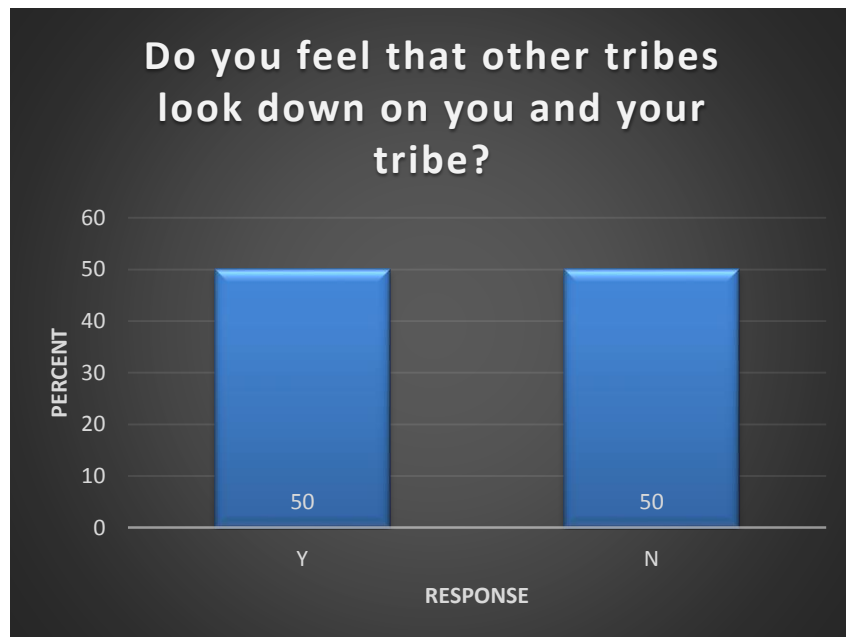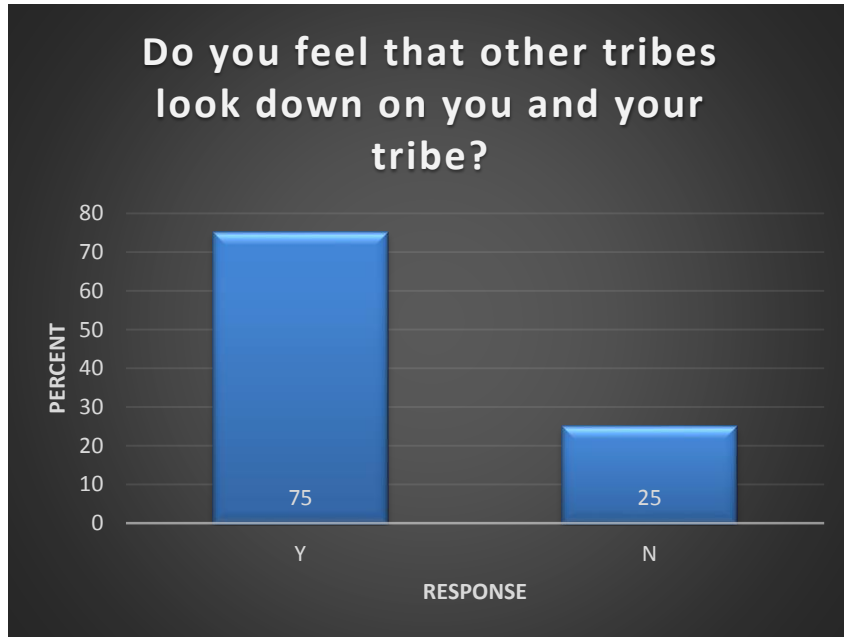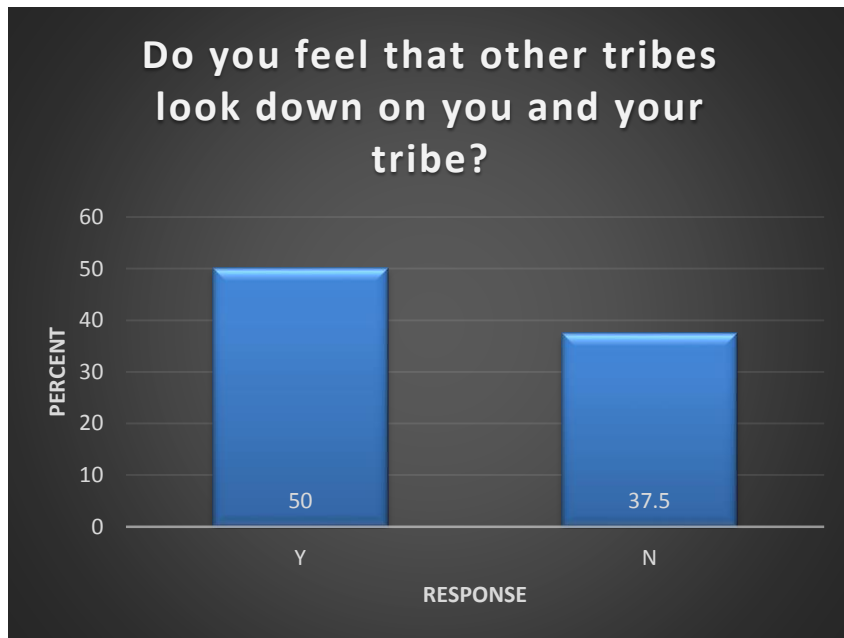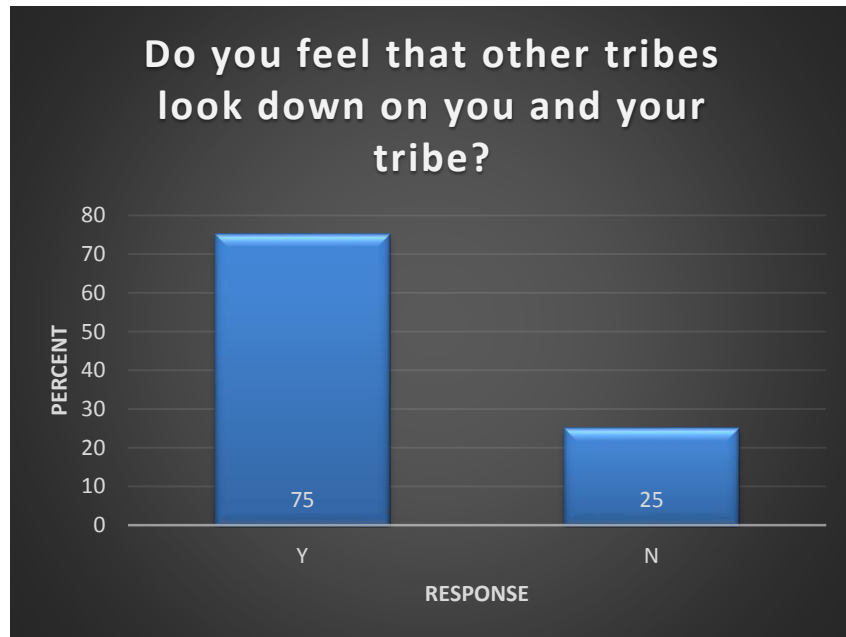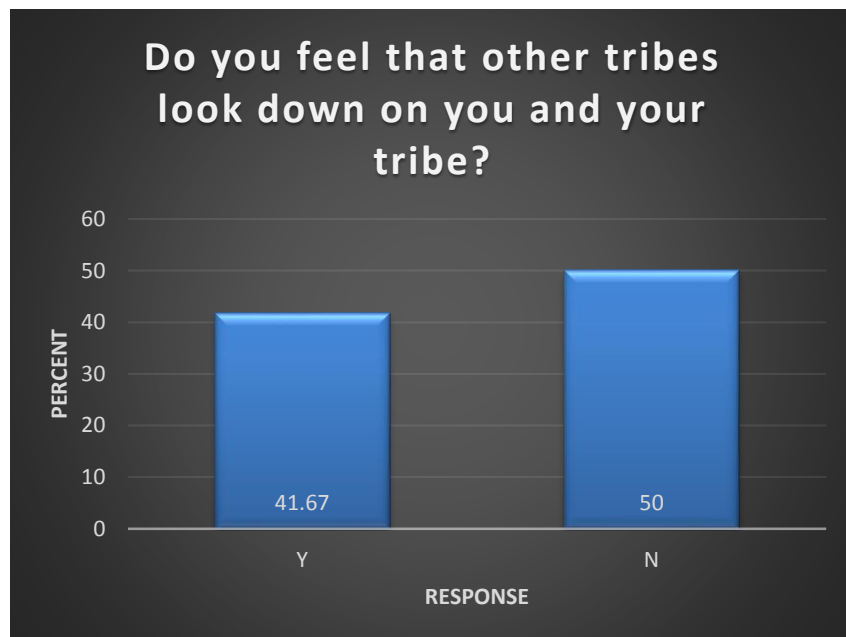
➢ Summary analysis

This data reveal the perceived disrespect between tribes (real or imagined). More than half of all subjects (58%) believe that other tribes "look down" on them. For the Chin and Kachin group, this number stands at 50%, while for the Karen group it rises to 75%. Perhaps most surprising is that, while the total control group is at 41%, the total pastors group is at 75%. This may point to a proclivity among the pastors to unduly emphasize tribal identity in the context of their ministry; at the least, it reflects their own sense of tribal isolation, as they admit to an inferior status in the view of tribal out-groups. This data is important as it lays the foundation for the next question, concerning the passion with which the subjects approach their tribal identity.

❖ **Tribal views, question 5:**

➢ All participants

➤ All Chin

➤ All Karen
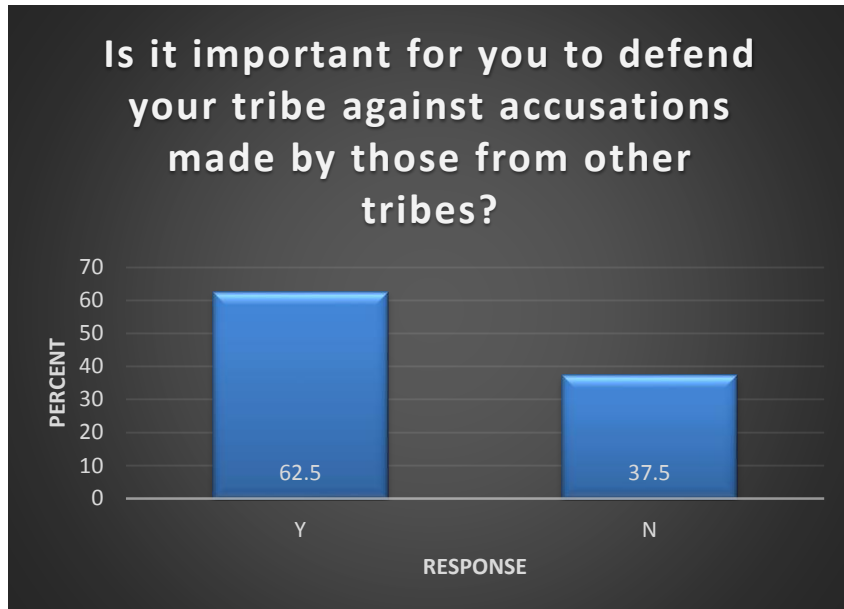
➢ All Kachin

➢ All pastors

➢ All control

➢ Summary analysis

This question shows the level of intensity with which the subjects feel compelled to challenge the perceived inferiority acknowledged in the previous question. Altogether, 66% of the subjects felt that this was important to them. For the Chin group, this number rose to 75%, while 62% of both the Kachin and Karen groups answered positively. Half of the total pastors group agreed, while fully 83% of the total control group shared this conviction. Some of the ways in which tribal identity is "defended" are discussed below (6.3.3); principally, this is done by way of simple isolation: minimizing the intertribal interactions to only those required of a plural society.

➢ All participants

➢ All Chin

➢ All Karen

➢ All Kachin

➢ All pastors

Some people in Burma think of themselves, first, as being members of their tribe, then, as citizens of Burma. How do you think of yourself?

PERCENT: 100, 80, 60, 40, 20, 0

Tribe: 83.33
Burma: 16.67

RESPONSE

➢ All control

Some people in Burma think of themselves, first, as being members of their tribe, then, as citizens of Burma. How do you think of yourself?

PERCENT: 100, 80, 60, 40, 20, 0

Tribe: 91.67
Burma: 8.33

RESPONSE
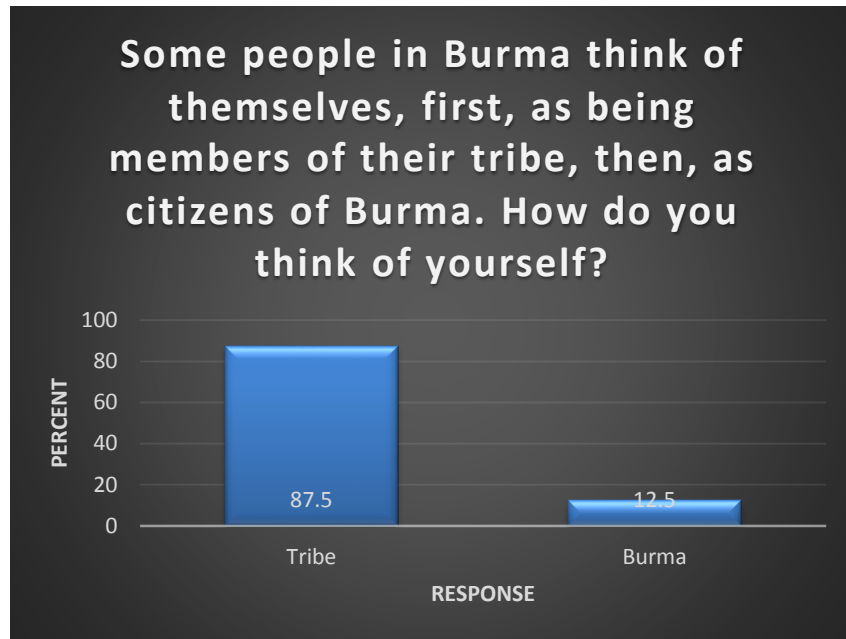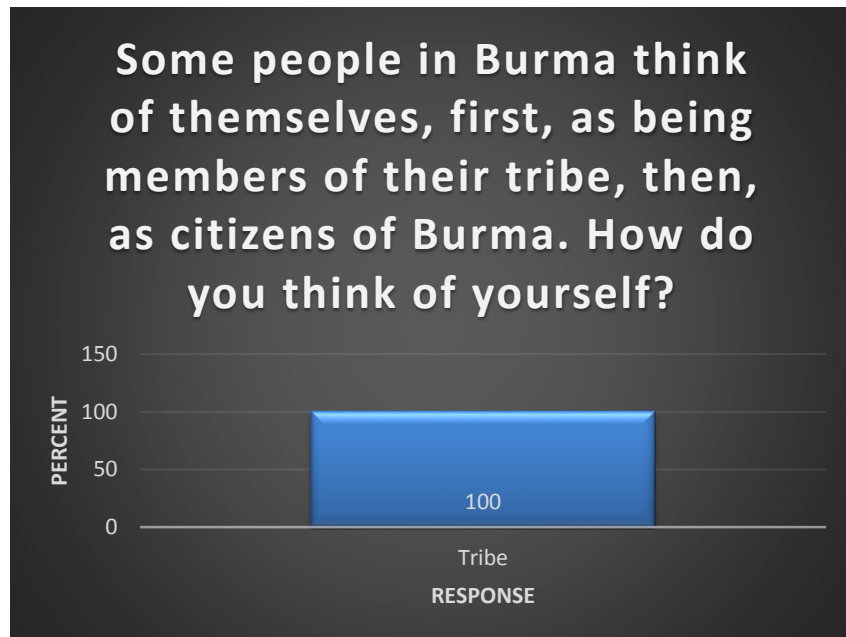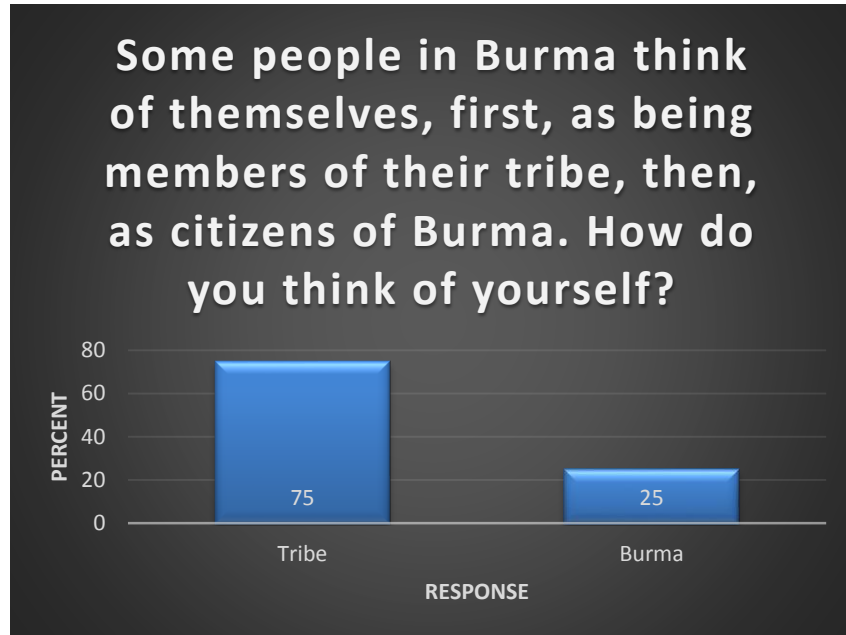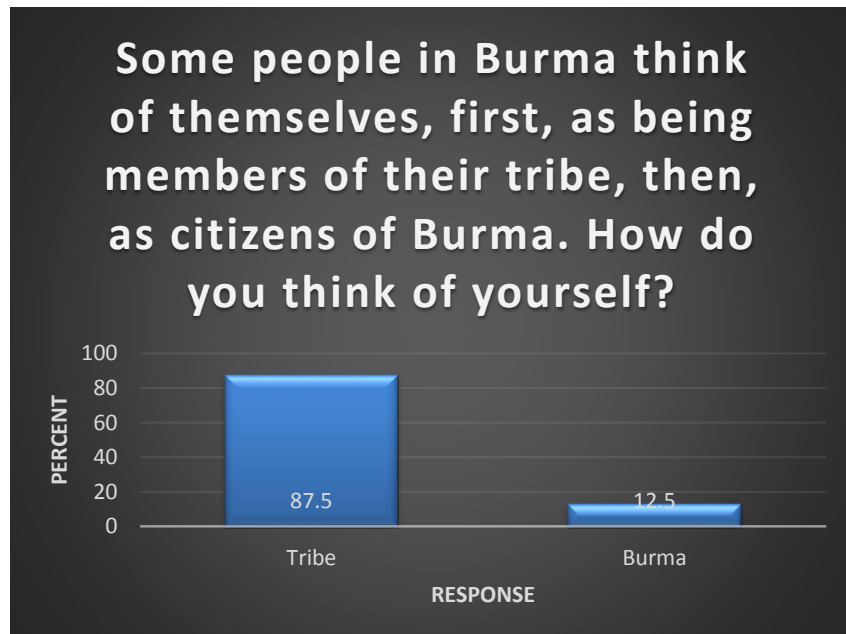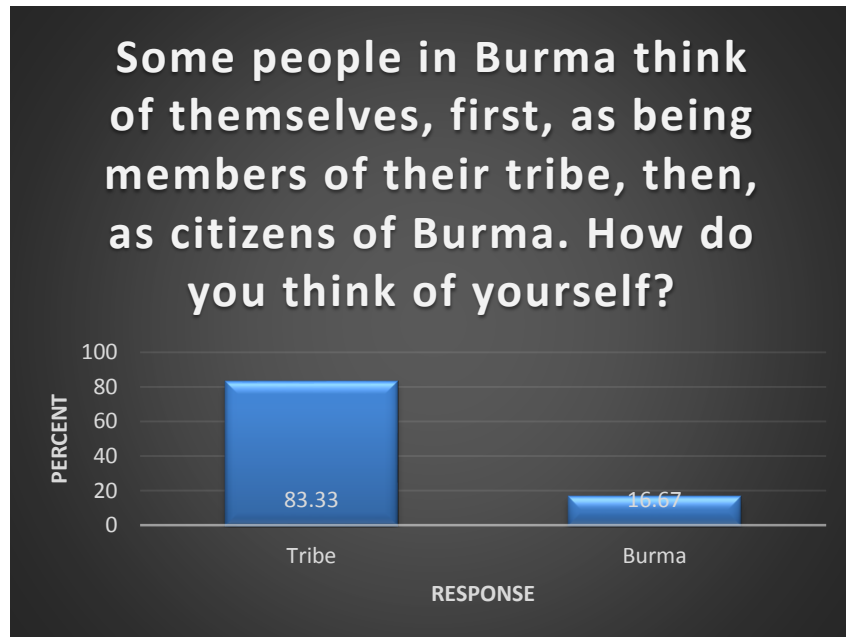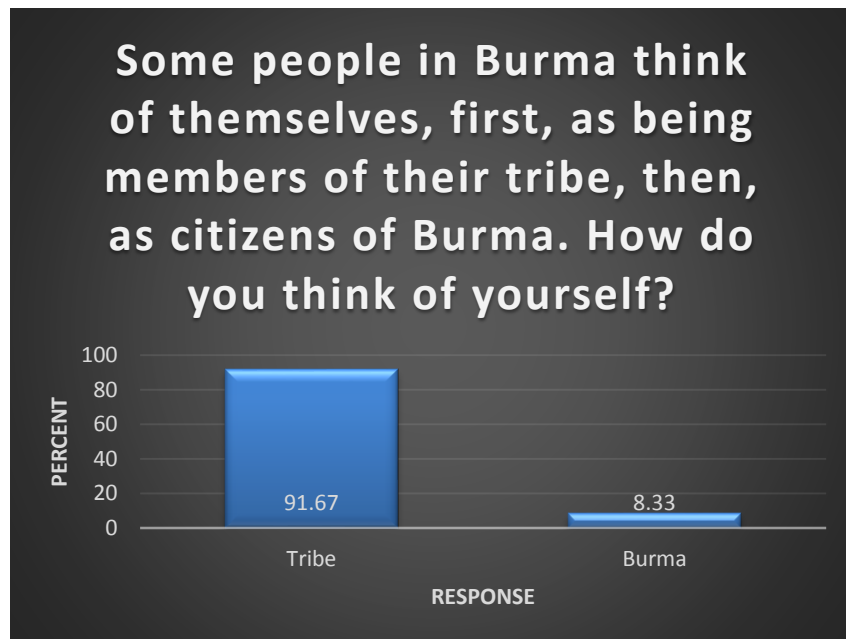
➢ Summary analysis

It is not uncommon for people to identify with their ethnic group. History is replete with accounts of ethnic groups seeking to improve their social or economic standing, to gain access to the political process, or even simply to have their existence acknowledged, as with the Rohingya, who are not recognized even by the new government in Burma nor by Aung San Suu Kyi (Paddock, 2016). Thus, it is not surprising to see that the subjects of this research likewise self-identify in accordance with their tribe. What is, perhaps, surprising is the extent to which they do so even above their identification with their citizenship. Of the total group, 87% are more likely to think of themselves by their tribal identity than as citizens of Burma. The number is the same among the Kachin group. For the Karen, the number is at 75%, while fully 100% of the Chin so identify themselves. The pastors answered in the affirmative 83% of the time, while the control group did so at 91%. These numbers reveal a passionate depth of tribal identity. When coupled with the prior results, indicating their belief that the other tribes "look down" on them and that they need to "defend" their tribe, it is not surprising that the tribes are intrinsically isolated from one another. The next question moves this issue from the general to the particular: from national to spiritual.

❖ **Tribal views, question 7:**

➢ All participants
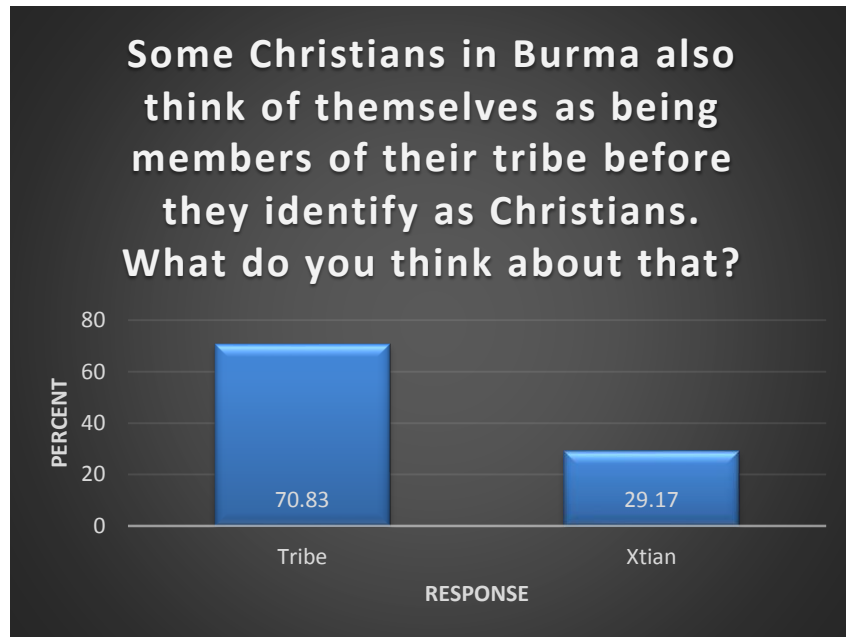
➢ All Chin
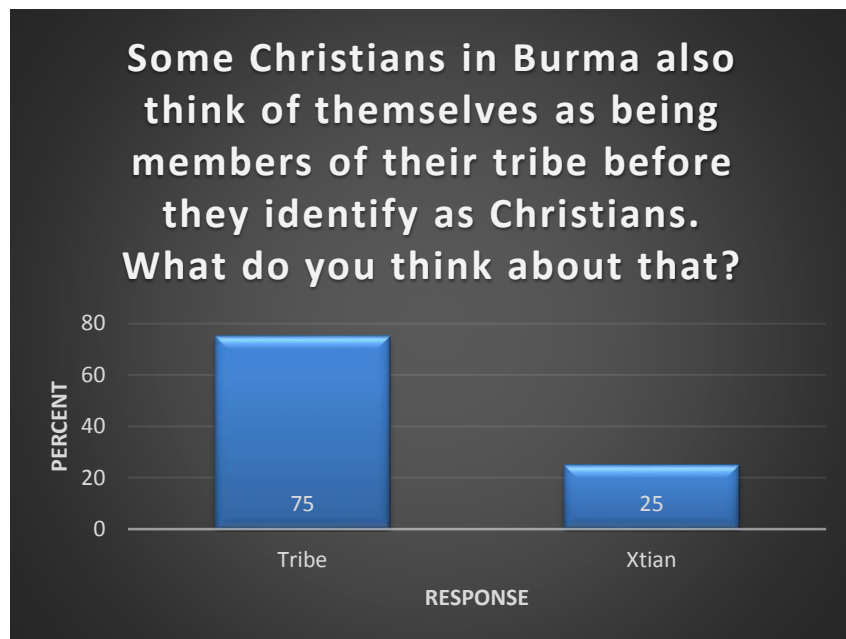
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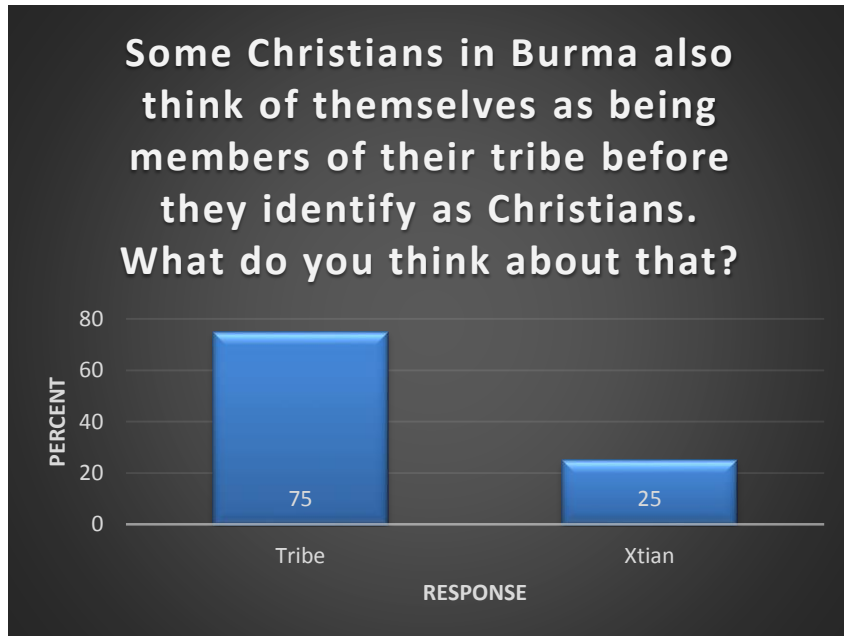
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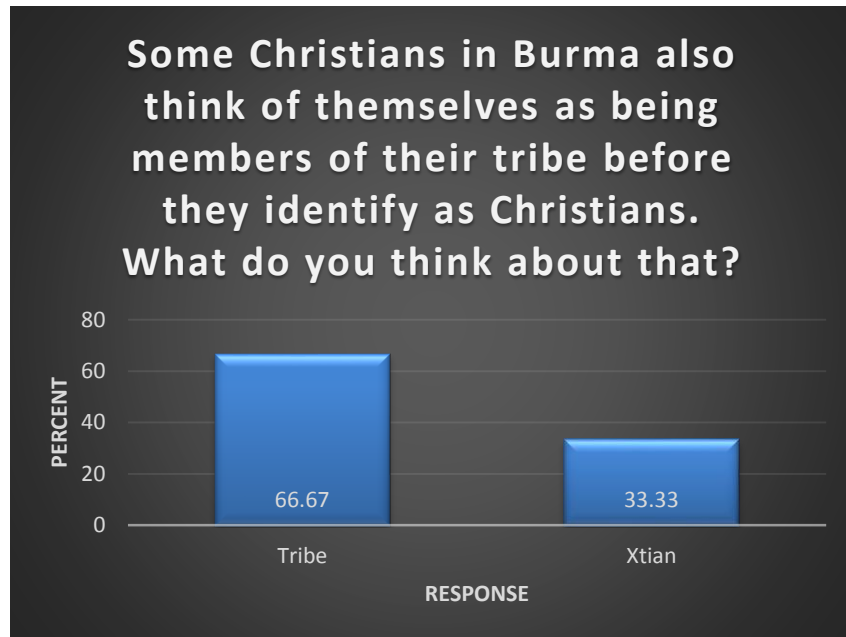
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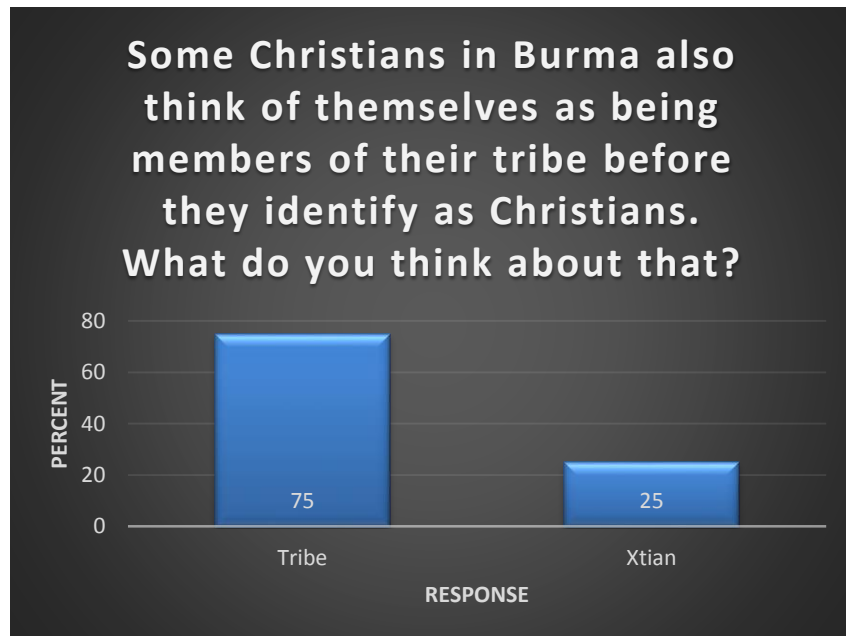
➢ Summary analysis

The answers to the previous question showed the degree to which the subjects identified tribally versus nationally. This question reveals the degree to which they find their identity in the tribe versus their faith community as Christians. Of the total group, 70% firstly think of themselves by their tribal identity and, secondly, as Christians. The breakdown among tribes was entirely consistent: 75% of each tribe questioned (Chin, Karen, and Kachin) agreed: they identify *first* according to their tribe; *then*, according to the faith. The total control group was also at 75%. The pastors group was only slightly lower, at 66%.

Is it any wonder that there are issues of intertribal disunity, even in the church? The supranation referred to in chapter 1, which is supposed to transcend tribal divisions among those who bear the name of Christ is anaemic, at best; absent, at worst.

6.3.3 Tribal factionalism and causal relationships
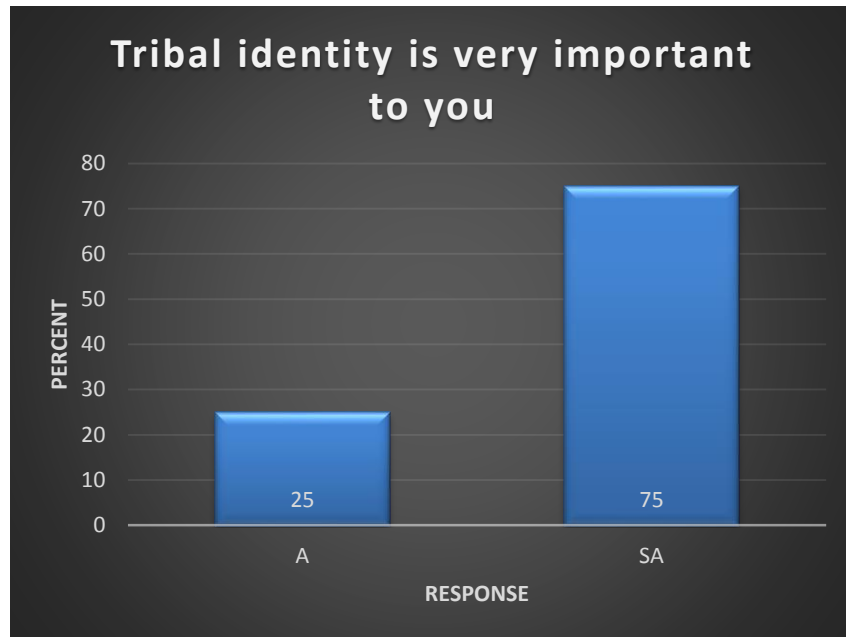
Having discovered that the religious background of most of the participants is Christian, yet also discovering that they generally have a deficient grasp of the Christian theology, which they claim to hold, it becomes clearer as to why that flawed theology allows for the intrusion of those traditions and/or perceptions, which preclude a healthy exercise of biblical unity, particularly among those Reformed churches that share (or claim to share) the same confession(s) of faith.

Finch (1985:114) was quoted above to say, "Quantitative work can only document correlations but itself cannot account for them." Indeed, the questionnaires in this research do document the realities that 1) there are professing Christians in Burma from different tribes and 2) there is an unbiblical preference among many of them for tribal identity/relationships over Christian identity/relationships, resulting in tribal factionalism; yet, that data does not explain *why* these correlations exist. The data collected from the pastoral interviews provides some answers to that question, revealing that there are (at least) eight principle traditions and/or perceptions, which exert a causal relationship to intertribal disunity among the Christian churches in Burma: 1) communication; 2) economics; 3) authority; 4) fear; 5) a culture of shame; 6) ignorance; 7) control; and 8) pride. Each of these will be considered, in turn.

6.3.2.1   Tribal factionalism and communication

One of the pastors interviewed (Chin_1) indicated that the practice of tribal factionalism occurred because it was deemed necessary in light of the challenges with communication. He indicated that many tribal areas are isolated because there remains a lack of even the most basic means of connectivity via land-line telephone and even radio and television signals. This is changing in the more urban areas, but in the rural areas, there are still many places without electricity or roads, let alone true means of communication. Access to the Internet, assumed in much of the world, is still virtually unheard of outside of the urban centres.

6.3.2.2 Tribal factionalism and economics

Another pastor (Karen_1) mentioned the role of simple economics as an impediment to intertribal social (and, thus, Christian) relationships. He acknowledged that, in the West, faith is often seen as a unifier (and he stated his belief that this is the biblical model); however, he noted that in Asia, generally, and especially in Burma (which, because of its international isolation, has not "benefitted" from Western influence, as has most other Asian nations), the *family* remains the primary identifier (followed by the clan – or subtribe – and the greater tribal identity). This exists to such a degree that the defining "unit" of humanity is *family*, not *person*. Thus, when "I" go to visit "you," it is really my *family* going – you have to feed and host all of us. In such a poor society, it is often all one can do to support his own family, let alone exercise the expected hospitality that would arise from close contact with others; thus, tribal isolation is a survival mechanism.

Pastor Chin_3 added that this is also a *socio*-economic problem, as the Christian minority suffers all the more from economic stress, because of social inequities that afford Buddhists "privileged status" (De la Perrière, 2009:186). Ng (2008:303) adds that the "[non-Christian Burmese] people usually look down on Christians as aliens." This typically leads the Christians, who accept their station in the eyes of the Buddhists and the government, to seek out their "own" for comfort and relationship. Thus, this tends to result in isolation of Christians from non-Christians by socio-economics, which translates into further isolation between tribes, as this socio-economic isolation is compounded by the existing intertribal tensions [or, the "cold sphere," cf. 4.2.1.2] and the corresponding "warm circle" of their own tribe.

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Another pastor (Chin_1) took this idea of isolation because of economics to the church level, by stating that many of the small churches have relationships with donors/ missionaries from the West (see discussion on patron-client relationships in 7.2.1.2). These relationships are the source of much of the church's funding. It is common, he said, to guard these relationships against other churches – especially in other tribes – lest the funding be shared (and, thus, the initial church's portion reduced). Though this could be a separate causal relationship (i.e. greed), it also fits well with the overall economic reality in this impoverished nation.

6.3.2.3   Tribal factionalism and authority

Pastor Chin_2 carried the idea of *family* further, to note the authoritative role of the family head, which is an especially significant factor in Burma's tribal culture. If the family head is of one position, his family is expected to follow. Thus, if he is Christian, other families will look to see if his family participates in his church. If not, he loses respect and cannot hope to win members from other families. On the other hand, if he is *not* a Christian, and someone in his family is converted, he will strive to either a) "unconvert" that person or b) ostracize that person by demonstrating that the family unit has been violated. In the West, the idea of nepotism is frowned upon – and often simply disallowed – in businesses and even churches (Hartley, 2012). However, by contrast, the tribal culture in Burma virtually *insists* upon it: there is no room for independence of thought, religion, or relationship, without risking incurring the antagonism of the rest of the family, especially the family head.

6.3.2.4   Tribal factionalism and fear

Pastor Kachin_1 drew attention to the national "shadow of fear" in Burma. He related how the government created an atmosphere where people did not know whom they could or could not trust. He said that this atmosphere lingers, despite the apparent improvement in the political sphere. It is easier, therefore, to keep one's circle of relationships as small and tight as possible, to avoid entering into a relationship that might end in betrayal or abuse.

Also, Pastor Chin_2 pointed to the persecution of Christians, in general, by the Buddhist majority. He referred to Buddhism, in fact, as "the silent killer," because of the way in which the Buddhist leaders, protected and even encouraged as they are by many local government officials, are often engaged in various kinds of oppression or persecution against Christians – social, economic, and even physical – in their efforts to suppress and even obliterate Christianity in Burma altogether. This aligns with Purser's (1911:97) assessment that the common perception that Buddhism has "never been a persecuting religion" is certainly not borne out by Burma's missions history. Pastor Chin_2 explained that this reality also tends to keep Christians isolated in smaller cliques, in order to avoid the risk of exposure to the ire of the Buddhist leaders. The recent political developments may even be emboldening the Buddhist majority – particularly the senior monks – to exert tighter controls over religious expression (McMah, 2016). Thus, there exists an isolation borne of fear – both from the government and from the powerful Buddhist leaders.

6.3.2.5 Tribal factionalism and the culture of shame

As has already been addressed (4.3.4.2), Burma has traditionally been understood to be a "culture of shame." This means, in essence, that the belief system and interpersonal relations of the people of Burma are motivated, primarily, by the external orientation of the community (i.e. their family, clan, and/or tribe) rather than an internal orientation, typical of Western societies, which are seen as "cultures of guilt." As Wong and Ts'ai (2006:211) explain in their discussion of shame cultures, "selves are contextually and situationally dependent." Unlike Western cultural models, there is little notion of the "individual"; rather, the emphasis is on one's role within the community. Consequently, the people in Burma are pre-eminently concerned with the perception of their behaviour by others in their tribe. To seek relationships with members of another tribe can be seen, according to Pastor Kachin_2, as a betrayal of one's own tribe. This leads to what another pastor, Karen_2, described as "defending tribal identity." Tribes are concerned that they will lose their distinctiveness if they are open to other groups; that is, they share a fear of hegemony. As participants in a shame culture, it is more common that their identity is bound up in their tribe, rather than in Christ, as would be expected of mature Christians. Thus, this can be described as isolation by culture.

6.3.2.6 Tribal factionalism and ignorance

Yet another pastor (Kachin_3) proposed that the answer may simply be a "lack of knowledge." He suggested that many Christians in Burma simply do not know – or do not believe – that they should be united across tribal lines and, further, that it will really

be a blessing to do so! It was mentioned in chapter 4 (4.3.6.1) that there is a "suspicion of unifying narratives" in the modern world (Bertrand, 2007:211), and that this may be a core issue with regards to the disunity in the church in Burma. The research indicates that this is, in fact, the case, as one pastor (Kachin_2) posited that the underlying animistic culture in Burma, with its fascination with supernatural phenomena and the disjointed "theology" of the *nat* cultus, prefers to see events as only tangentially connected to life beyond the immediate experience (or even in total isolation from it) rather than as part of a grand "theme" or narrative. Thus, ignorance of the truth of Scripture promotes tribal insularity, as the biblical motif of a superintended creation (and a superintending Creator) has often not infused the tribal culture. Quite simply, because of this ignorance, many of the tribal Christians in Burma do not see value in the pursuit of intertribal relationships and therefore cannot justify such a pursuit in light of its potential for attendant cultural costs.

6.3.2.7   Tribal factionalism and control

Pastor Chin_3 brought in the idea of mediation with regard to the matter of disunity. He noted that, from his reading, he had learned that in the West, whenever people have problems, they can seek mediation or counsel from third parties. In Western churches, this third party is often the pastor. In Burma, however, mediation is always the purview of the family head or, in the case of disputes between families within a clan, the mediator would be the family head of the most prominent family: i.e. the "chieftain." It would, in fact, be a violation of the unwritten, tribal "code" to seek mediation apart from this model. Thus, this results in isolation by the exertion of power or control.

6.3.2.8   Tribal factionalism and pride

Finally, pastor Karen_1 suggested the unfortunate reality that many of the churches may be mimicking "rivalries" among their supporters from West. In other words, as one tribal church's "patron" speaks ill of another tribal church's denomination or of its Western "patron," the first church assumes that same adversarial position against the denomination in question and, by extension, the tribal church that is aligned with it.

While this is, in part, a desire to deepen the church's relationship with its Western partner(s), it is also simply a reflection of pride: the sense of having garnered the "better" patron (i.e. most doctrinally sound, most charitable, etc.). When queried about this, pastor Kachin_1 suggested that this is because of the vestiges of the works-based religion of Buddhism (and, to a less defined extent, of the *nat* cultus). There is undeniably a lingering element of a works-based mindset even among the tribal Christians, as revealed by the questionnaires, which indicated that some of the subjects hold to a belief in the salvation of animists and Buddhists by virtue of their merit. Such pride inevitably creates division rather than unity.

6.3.2.9   Summary

Each of the eight pastors was asked to name at least three causes for tribal factionalism. The preceding eight causes were the result of this inquiry. Based upon the top three reasons offered by each participant, the eight causes may be identified according to the frequency of the pastors' responses, as demonstrated in Table 5:

Eight Causes of Tribal Exclusivism

Bar chart showing frequency of eight causes of tribal exclusivism:
- Pride: 4
- Control: 2
- Ignorance: 5
- Culture of Shame: 2
- Fear: 1
- Authority: 3
- Economics: 4
- Communication: 3
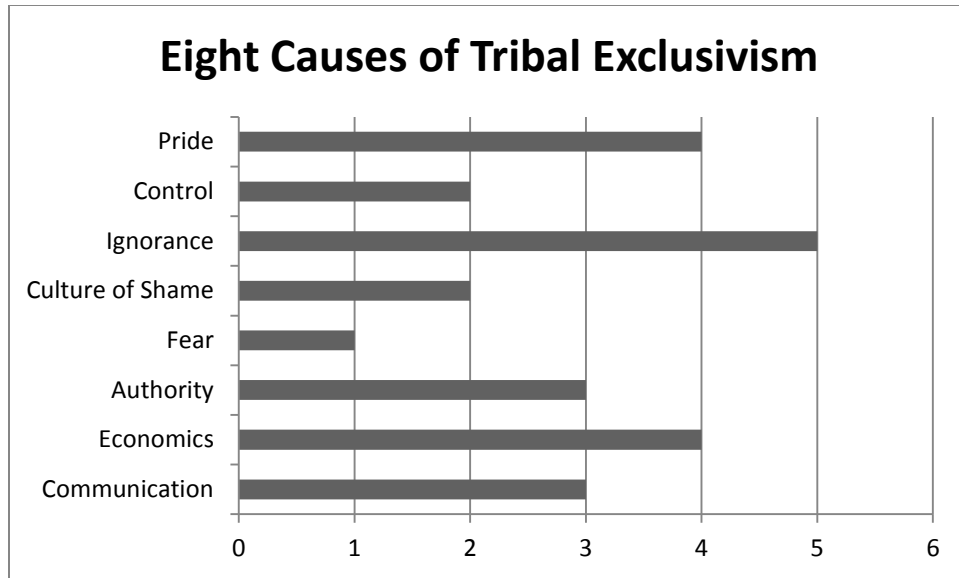
Table 5: Frequency of causes selected by participants

6.4   Conclusion

The quantitative and qualitative research in this chapter revealed that there is indeed a number of underlying beliefs among the tribal Christians in Burma. These tend to result in a preference for tribal identity over Christian identity; for tribal relationships over Christian relationships; and, ultimately, for the exercise of tribal factionalism. The research also revealed that there is a significant measure of deficient theology among both the laypersons and the pastors, which undoubtedly contribute to the lack of biblical teaching on, and understanding of, the doctrine of the unity of the Church in Christ.

These deficiencies will persist until their causes are addressed. While some of these issues may be addressed naturally through the evolution of culture and commerce (e.g. increased communication, reduction of poverty, etc.) and, consequently, improve

intertribal relationships, the theological deficiencies will not abate until such time as proper theology is introduced into the indigenous church, such that the pastors thereof promote a robust, biblical perception of the unity of the churches in Burma across tribal lines. Therefore, it is the conviction of this researcher that holistic theological education must be pursued as a means of reifying the unity of the body of Christ among the tribal churches of Burma.

CHAPTER SEVEN

7.0   Missions, Theological Education, and Unity in Burma

7.1   Introduction

The main research question of this study is to consider the effect of tribal factionalism in Burma upon Christian unity in the local church and missional outreach, and to explore how such factionalism might be addressed in theological education. To do this, the answer to the fifth research sub-question must consider how tribalism in Burma could be addressed in missional outreach and in theological education (see 1.5).

After setting forth the objectives of this study in chapter 1, the subsequent chapters have built upon one another to demonstrate the history of the problem of disunity among the churches in Burma (chapter 2); the failure of Christian missions to rectify that problem historically (chapter 3); the persistence of that problem in the modern context (chapter 4); the biblical response to the problem (chapter 5); and the qualitative and quantitative data to support these conclusions (chapter 6).

Specifically, in chapter 2, an anthropological survey of Burma demonstrated that tribal identity is central to the history of that nation and that, subsequently, such identity has often developed into tribal exclusivism. In chapter 3, it was demonstrated that this idea of tribal exclusivism was not overcome through the missionary efforts in Burma. In chapter 4, the contemporary factors contributing to a deepening sense of tribal exclusivism were considered. In chapter 5, the biblical and theological case was made

for dismantling tribal exclusivism in favour of Christian unity. In chapter 6, it was shown, qualitatively, that tribal identity continues to serve as a barrier to Christian unity. This final chapter will consider how the global Christian community – especially the Reformed wing of that community – can address the problem, and how theological education (missiological and indigenous) can serve as a remedy for disunity among the churches in Burma.

7.2   Missiological Objectives in Burma

7.2.1   The Missiological Role of the Global Evangelical Community – Generally

7.2.1.1   Missions and the Biblical Mandate

Perhaps the first step toward unity amongst the churches in Burma begins with a commitment by the global Church to see such unity as more than an ideal, but as a necessary reality. This may seem, at first blush, to be an obvious assertion. However, as has been demonstrated herein (3.3.1.2; 3.3.1.4), and as can easily be observed through both the history of missions and the current practice of missions, there is much more *verbal* acknowledgment to the unity of the global church than there is *active* acknowledgment; quite simply, the various expressions of the global church in the developed world are often as likely to be insular as the churches in Burma. As Lenski's (1961) research notably revealed, all religious communities tend to be socially, politically, and economically homogenous. Such is even the case at the sub-level of the local church, where congregants prefer to operate within cliques, as Balswick and Layne (1973:101-109) revealed. Many who profess faith in Christ love the *idea* of doing

good more than the *act* of good works; they love the *idea* of love more than the *act* of loving. To this point, Bonhoeffer (2009:36) rightly charged, "Those who love their dream of a Christian community more than the Christian community itself become destroyers of that Christian community even though their personal intentions may be ever so honest, earnest, and sacrificial." Thus, the missiological role of the church must begin with an active acknowledgement, firstly, that she is to *go* and, secondly, having gone, that she is to *make disciples*. The substantiation for these acknowledgments is readily at hand in Scripture; indeed, the mandate for missions is fundamentally a wholly biblical endeavour (Bavinck, 1960:11-76).

Not only is the practice of missions commanded in the Great Commission (Mt 28:18-20), but the concept of missions is woven into the fabric of who we are as Christians and who the Body of Christ collectively – the Church – is called to be. Missions is not about devising a paradigm or a strategy (Escobar & Driver, 1978:16-17; cf. Green, 1970). It did not begin – nor does it find its purpose – in the mind of man; rather, it emanates from the very nature of God, who "crosses frontiers toward the world" (Bosch, 1980:238). Bosch (1980:240) goes on to explain: "Mission has its origin in the fatherly heart of God. He is the fountain of sending love. This is the deepest source of mission. It is not possible to penetrate any deeper: there is mission because God loves man." From the earliest revelations of God's purposes in Scripture, it is clear that they always move from the local, or particular, to the global, or general. For example, as Bauckman (2001:46) notes:

> It was never God's intention to bless Abraham purely for his and his descendants' sake. It was never God's intention to reveal himself to Israel only

for Israel's sake ... God's purpose in each of these singular choices was universal; that the blessing of Abraham might overflow to all the families of the earth, that God's self-revelation to Israel might make God known to all the nations ...

The Bible is replete with evidences of this global aspect to God's plan (e.g. Gn 12:1-3; Ps 96:3, 105:1, 117:1; Is 12:4, 56:7, 60:3, 66:18-19; Rv 5:9-10, 7:9, *et al.*).

In an essay aptly entitled, "The Living God is a Missionary God," John Stott (2009:9) has written, "We need to become global Christians with a global vision, for we have a global God." Indeed, because God *is* a missionary God, we *are* a missionary people by definition (whether or not that is borne out in practice). "Th[e] *missio Dei* configures the *missiones ecclesia*, in that the triune God calls and sends the people of God into the world, to live and work amongst all God's people" (De Gruchy, 2010:43). Thus:

> [T]he global church should be in the vision of every local church and of every mature believer. There are (or should be) two primary components of this vision. First, the goal of evangelization: calling all men everywhere to repent and turn to Christ (Ac 17:30). Second, and really not materially distinguishable from the first, is the goal of discipling those who are thus converted so that they may be increasingly conformed to the image of Christ (Curtis, 2016:6).

If the global church truly embraces such a global vision, a commitment to global unity – including amongst the churches of Burma – will increasingly undergird the message, communicated missiologically, to those churches.

7.2.1.2   Missions and the Biblical Map

In light of the overwhelming biblical evidence for the practice of missions, two questions now arise: *where* does missions take the Church? And *what* does the Church take in missions? First, the Bible is clear that the missionary heart of God extends to "all the nations." God's promise to Abraham (Gn 18:18) was that he "shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him." The phrase, "all the nations" (*kol goiey* in Hebrew), is translated in the Septuagint as *panta ta ethne*. This same phrase, *panta ta ethne*, is used in the Great Commission, when Jesus instructs His followers, "Go therefore and make disciples of *all nations* (*panta ta ethne*)" (Mt 28:19). Missiologists, at least for the past four decades, have understood *panta ta ethne* to mean ethno-linguistic groups (and not geo-political states). Beginning with Ralph Winter's landmark declaration to this reality at the Lausanne Congress in 1974 (Winter, 1981:12), it has been generally accepted that the task of the church, in keeping with Christ's mandate, is not simply to reach people (as individuals), but to reach *peoples*; that is, each group of people who share a common language, race, history, tradition, and/or culture.

If, then, the missionary mandate is a call for the Church to reach every *ethnos*, then this includes each of the eight major ethnic races and each of the 135 subtribes in Burma. This means, missiologically, that no one tribe is of more value or importance than any other. Thus, the global church, collectively, must reach "all the nations" (*panta ta ethne*) of Burma, collectively. That is not to say that certain missionaries, missions agencies, or churches cannot focus on one particular *ethnos* (or one at a time), for as McGavran

(1982) rightly suggests that: "the society of the world is made up of a very large number of pieces of a mosaic. The world is not one homogeneous unit, one kind of people from end to end. There are many pieces in the mosaic and every missionary goes to a piece of the mosaic." It is to say, however, that great care must be taken *not* to suggest that in narrowly focusing on one *ethnos*, there is any missiological (or material or even racial) preference for the *ethnos* being served. Unfortunately, the perception among the tribes in Burma suggests quite the opposite, as was discussed in chapter 6.

As the visiting missionaries target a particular tribe for their service, there often develops what has been called a "patron-client" paradigm of missions. Discussing this phenomenon, Jean Johnson (2011) explains: "Patron-client relationships are based on social associations of unequal status. The patron is the protector, provider and defender within the relationship. In return, the client serves and becomes obligated to the patron." An additional negative aspect to the patron-client relationship is that the "client," or the targeted people group, begin to self-identify as merely "receivers," and not as contributors; remedying this aspect of the problem – by including the indigenous peoples in reciprocal relationships within the global community – will be discussed in greater detail below (7.3.3). Further, while such paternalistic paradigms create a problem in the relationship between the missionary and his field of service (misplaced priorities, loyalties, and expectations), it also fosters a problem between the group with whom the missionary is working and surrounding groups with whom he is *not* working. The missionary's "clients" view themselves as special because of the attention being shown to them; the other tribes acknowledge that the client tribe is enjoying special attention – an acknowledgement typically attended by feelings of resentment and/or

envy; either of which serve to deepen the divide between the tribes, exacerbating the perceptions of "in-groups" and "out-groups." This sociological phenomenon, known as image theory, was discussed in greater detail in chapter 4 (4.2.1.4). Therefore, missionaries must endeavour to soften such perceived inequalities, both in the people group they are serving, as well as other tribes, as they have occasion to interact with them. This is done, practically, by including the "levelling" concept of unity and equality, by grace, in Christ through relationships, counsel, and, perhaps most importantly, through theological education in the field.

7.2.1.3   Missions and the Biblical Message

7.2.1.3.1   The Whole Counsel of God

If missions is a biblical mandate for the church (by which is meant the collective efforts of all missions activities, whether from local churches, denominations, or other modalities), and if the church is to reach "all the nations," it is also true that the message that the church takes to the nations is the whole counsel of God – the sum and substance of that which has been recorded for the church through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Of course, as Carson (2007:177) rightly notes, when Paul says that he had, in fact, declared the whole counsel of God to the Ephesian church (Ac 20:27), he could not have meant that he had exegeted every line of Scripture: "[W]hatever else Paul did, he certainly did not manage to go through every verse of the Old Testament, line by line, with full-bore explanation. He simply did not have time." However, Carson (2007:178) goes on to stress that what Paul *did* do was teach every important doctrine,

What he must mean is that he taught the burden of the whole of God's revelation, the balance of things, leaving nothing out that was of primary importance, never ducking the hard bits, helping believers to grasp the whole counsel of God that they themselves would become better equipped to read their Bibles intelligently, comprehensively. [Though, of course, *all* of Scripture is "profitable for teaching" (2 Tim 3:16) – SC.]

If Paul is the model missionary (Polhill, 1999:442), then his message should be reflected in the message of every missionary – *leaving nothing out that was of prime importance*. Schnabel (2008:237) argues, "A first major focus [of Paul's methodology] was the theological instruction of believers." This, then, should be a major focus for all who desire to emulate his model. This theological instruction must be presented, not as a series of disconnected or independent ideas, however, but rather as integral parts of the grand biblical narrative, demonstrating the cohesion of God's plan and dealings with humanity, thus serving to establish a biblical worldview among those who become increasingly aware of the sovereignty of God over the whole of his creation.

Another truth to be gleaned from Paul's words to the Ephesian elders is that, in teaching the whole counsel of God, he could declare, "I am innocent of the blood of all." Again, if he is the model, his words poignantly remind the modern missionary that to neglect to teach the whole counsel of God is to be guilty of the blood of those who are led astray by that negligence. This is further impressed upon the elders when Paul exhorts them to do likewise, "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood" (Ac 20:28). Piper (1989) suggests that this passage also indicates that

the elders whom Paul addressed – and all who assume the mantle of teachers of the church – must teach with courage:

> This means that there are parts of the whole, unified counsel of God that might make an elder want to shrink back from teaching them. They might be hard to understand. Or they might be uncomplimentary to human pride. Or they might demand radical obedience. And so the elders might be tempted to declare only part of God's counsel—the part that is easy and that they know people especially like. But that would be a shrinking back from declaring the whole counsel of God. It would be cowardice not courage.

Therefore, the missionary model and pastoral instruction given by Paul is to teach the Bible – every doctrine revealed therein – as the church goes forth into the world. If the message of missions is this whole counsel of God, this means that missions is inextricably and necessarily connected with theological education at some level. And if theological education must teach the whole counsel of God, this includes, of course, communicating the biblical teaching on unity.

7.2.1.3.2   Unity

Miroslav Volf (2010:725) concludes, "At the very heart of what Christian faith is all about are two revolutions: a revolution of trust and a revolution of love"; Hedlund (1991:151) refers, similarly, to an "invasion of love." Piper (2003:155) connects this "revolution" or "invasion" of love with the purpose and practice of missions, noting that love both *demands* and *defines* missions. If the global church truly loves *panta ta ethne*, and are not merely the dreamers chided by Bonhoeffer above, she will endeavour to take all of the message of God to all of the peoples of the earth – declaring that God's call for His people is to be one in Christ. To be sure, the global church is like McGavran's mosaic

(1982), and each culture, race, language, and tribe is unique and to be uniquely cherished – but also to be united in Him. This theme of unity, then, is pertinent in every missiological context, and the biblical teaching on it (outlined in detail in chapter 5) must be at the fore of any theological education.

In addition to certain core doctrines, such as the knowledge of God, the Person and work of Christ, and the concept of unity and communion in the church, there are also biblical/theological issues, which are particularly germane to each specific context. For example, holistic theological education in Burma should also address such themes as 1) contextualization versus syncretism; 2) ethics and social justice; 3) a biblical response to the widespread prosperity teaching; 4) reconciliation as a ministry of the church; and 5) cultivating indigenous leaders who will guide the churches toward a biblically healthy composition. Each of these themes will be addressed, in turn.

7.2.1.3.3   Contextualization versus Syncretism

First, it is valid for the leaders in the churches in Burma to acknowledge their unique cultural context; the Bible nowhere insists that conversion demands repudiation of culture. In acknowledging that context, however, these leaders must also take care to properly situate their cultural/tribal identification as subordinate to their cross-cultural identity in Christ, avoiding the dangers of syncretising the two. As Pentecost (quoted in Thanga, 1993:24) argues:

> A clear line must be drawn between a syncretism, on the one hand, which allows basic Scriptural principles to be weakened or subverted by the permissiveness of practices that are antibiblical, and on the other hand, what we might call

harmonization which allows a true expression of the soul of a people within the cultural pattern but not in conflict with Scripture. Surely the newly formed and growing body of Christ should harmonize with the culture in which it has been born, with well-defined limits which Scripture indicates.

Holistic theological education must, therefore, advance the biblical message – that is, the "whole counsel of God" – *within* valid expressions of culture rather than *in opposition to* cultural or tribal identity. An example of this can be seen in Paul's model at Athens (Ac 17:16-34), where he demonstrated a connection with the culture of his hearers (even quoting from two of their philosophers, Epimenides and Aritus), while at the same time, confronting them with a call to repentance. While this is important for missionaries to practice, it is also a beneficial by-product of equipping indigenous people for leadership roles, rather than relying wholly upon the influences of those sent from the West: a challenge to culture is often more likely to be assumed of an "outsider," while the insider can speak truth from within the culture.

7.2.1.3.4   Ethics and Social Justice

Further, in the theological instruction of the church in Burma, the matter of ethics and social justice is especially relevant. With the nation's history of political turmoil and corruption with its resultant socio-economic degradation, coupled with the prevalence of such social ills as rampant drug abuse and human trafficking (Winn, 2016; Wyler, 2010), the church must be encouraged and equipped to step into the prophetic role of mediator: not simply for the sake of political peace or economic opportunities, but for the purpose of displaying a genuine concern for the broader communities in which the church finds herself (Dyrness, 1983:189; cf. Conn, 1982; Jayakumar, 2010:89). Indeed,

it is critical for the church "to resonate with the social and existential concerns" (Boursier, 2015:84) if she hopes for her message of hope to be heard. Or, as Boursier (2015:84) poignantly asks, "When the church ignores the world, why should (or would) the world pay attention to the church?"

Indeed, the local church is to be the fountainhead of hope for the communities in which she is providentially situated; perhaps especially so in impoverished communities or those embroiled in the rampant tumult of a host of social ills. Vander Meulen (1999:203) speaks of the church's responsibility for "faithfulness in doing justice," which he defines in this way:

> First, identification—be sensitive to injustices that affect those who are poor and powerless. Second, encouragement—promote informed, inclusive, and lovingly tenacious discussion of these issues within our church. In other words, the church should be a community of moral discourse. Third, engagement—change our own behavior.

Such active participation in the social issues of the surrounding culture will inevitably serve to connect the church with the community to some degree and, most optimally, introduce that community to the real presence of the Kingdom of God as expressed through His people: the Church. It is essential, however, that the church's commitment to social justice and reconciliation never eclipse her commitment to the proclamation of the gospel, but rather serve as its handmaid. Yiu (2012:263) argues:

> The message of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God is no longer something abstract, as though the distant future were seen through a telescope, but the message of the reality of the character of God's reign over all, personal and social, directly and now through the witness of the church. This message witnesses to the universal sovereignty of God's will over all creation. The church

must be more than just an evangelistic machine to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom but an instrument of the total package to exemplify it.

It is this "total package," or holistic theology, which incorporates both the orthodoxy and orthopraxy prescribed in Scripture for the church. Therefore, the church in Burma cannot exclude either component; rather, in her proclamation of the provision of redemption and eternal life, she must also declare that all of life – here and now – belongs to God and, as such, work to reflect in this life the realization of the Kingdom of God on earth. This is not to deny the eschatological hope, of course, but to see a harbinger of that hope in the present age, as God's will is made known and manifested in the world through the Church.

7.2.1.3.5   A Curative for Prosperity Theology

Also, with the proliferation of Prosperity Theology among the tribal churches in Burma (see 3.3.2.5), it is imperative that theological education presents a proper biblical foundation, which will a) directly challenge the "health and wealth" message; b) correct the element of works-based righteousness that typically accompanies that message; and c) enable indigenous leaders to better understand grace, which will help to "level" notions of tribal superiority/inferiority, and to confront any suspicions of the unifying narrative of the Christian faith (Bertrand, 2007:211). The more the believers in Burma truly comprehend the doctrine of grace, and the less they perceive material blessings as a marker of spirituality, the likelier they will be to come together in unity around their common faith in the Giver of that grace. More profoundly, as the believers in Burma increasingly comprehend the doctrines of *sovereign* grace – that is, that God is

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sovereign over all – any notion of tribal superiorities will be crushed beneath the overwhelming weight of that revelation. As Buys (2009) contends, "[T]he more you understand and the more you cherish the biblical vision of God as absolutely free and gracious and sovereign over all things, the more you will love and live and labor for racial diversity and racial harmony." This grasping of grace, then, is the ultimate equalizer.

Finally, proper theological education with regard to Christian stewardship will aid the Christians in Burma who are being misled by teachers of Prosperity Theology about what the Bible says about money. As Stott (1990:246) aptly says: "Life, in fact, is a pilgrimage from one moment of nakedness to another. So we should travel light and live simply." Conveying this very biblical message to those who have fallen under the enticing spell of Prosperity Theology will do much to dispel its allure. Likewise, biblical teaching on suffering and discipleship will correct the erroneous theology of healing promulgated by such heresies. Rather than being taught that it is God's will to deliver from every pain and suspend all suffering, the truth must be proclaimed that: "God's afflictive providences are the strokes of a father, not the wounds of an enemy. God smites that He may save. Out of the bitterest drug God distils His glory, and our happiness" (Watson, 1682:230). With missiological discipleship embodying such godly instruction, the Christians in Burma – afflicted as they are with poverty, suffering, and oppression – will see God's glory and obtain their happiness in Him.

7.2.1.3.6   Reconciliation

Anderson (2001:65-67) notes that it is an axiom that "revelation and reconciliation are reciprocal movements of a single event." In other words, God's revelation both enables and insures that those so called into a renewed relationship with Him will, in fact, be reconciled to Him. This may be extrapolated further to say that God's revelation – not only of His nature (*Deus revelatus*), but of His plan for humanity (*missio Dei*) – not only reconciles the world to Himself (2 Cor 5:18-19), but reconciles His people one to another. Jesus made this exquisitely plain as He expounded upon that revelation (e.g. Jn 13:34-35; 17:20-23). While the "perfect unity" of which Jesus spoke may only be fully realized at the consummation of all things, the biblical instruction is clear: the people of God are to practice love and forgiveness, seeking to make real that ideal. Engelsviken (2013:87) expounds upon this idea:

> The reconciliation with God through the Cross of Christ, a reconciliation that is shared by all believers, breaks down the wall between Christian, Jews and Gentiles, and therefore also all other walls of hatred and enmity between Christians. It should be impossible to be reconciled with God, and at the same time be enemies.

In Burma, particularly, this will mean engaging in concerted efforts to dismantle suspicions and bitterness, rooted in tribal discord for generations. Much has been written on the theme of forgiveness, as well as strategies for moving closer to incorporating this spiritual fruit into the individual life of the Christian, as well as the corporate life of the Body (see Anderson, 2001:291-310; cf. Augsburger, 1996; Flanigan, 1992; Patton, 1985; Smedes, 1996). Developing not only a theoretical knowledge of the biblical concept of forgiveness, but a practical application of it, is

essential to unity in Burma, for without forgiveness, there can be no hope of reconciliation between offending parties.

Augsburger (1996) points out that the aim of forgiveness is less about the healing of either the forgiving person or the forgiven person, and more about reconciling the fractured relationship. He notes that Jesus' objective in promoting forgiveness "is the re-establishing of relationship, the restoring of harmony, the regaining of community" (Augsburger, 1996:48). This, then, is critical to the theological education of the Christian leaders in Burma, as many of them remain susceptible to the radical influence of Burma's "shame culture," which permits – or even encourages – disparagement of other tribes as a sign of loyalty to one's one tribe (Benedict, 1946; Schirrmacher, 2013). The missiological focus, then, must emphasize the divine grace that forgives even the greatest of sins (Lk 7:47), and at the same time, the character of Jesus, which demonstrated the application of that grace in the context of humanity (Jn 8:1-11; Lk 23:34).

7.2.1.3.7   Developing Biblical Leadership

Plueddemann (2009:65) writes, "Leadership styles in every culture have the potential of reflecting good or evil in the heart of the leader." One missiological goal of theological education in Burma is to confront the vestiges of "evil," arising from engrained cultural biases, while cultivating the "good," which is an innate fruit of the new life in Christ. In so doing, leaders may be nurtured and discipled who will, in turn, be able to propel the churches in Burma toward, at the very least, a "Conditional Ecumenicity" (see 5.2); that is, a unity at the common denominator level of faith in Christ and submission to Him as

Lord. The role and nature of pastoral leadership was considered in detail in section 5.4. One additional missiological component in theological education regarding biblical leadership is the principle of mentoring, which is central to the idea of discipleship.

Mentoring may begin with the missionary as mentor to an indigenous leader; however, for there to be lasting success and replication, the indigenous leader must himself become a mentor to others. This mentoring process moves beyond mere education and is concerned with personal, spiritual growth and maturity (Lingenfelter, 2008:124). In the biblical models of individual discipleship, there is a recurring emphasis on an intimate, proximate relationship between the teacher/master/leader and the student/disciple/follower. Examples of this are evident in the relationship between Ezra as teacher and the people of Israel (Neh 8); in the relationship between Jesus and the apostles as Master and disciples (Jn 13-17); and in the relationship between Moses and the Israelites as leader and followers (Ex 1-5). Another example would be that of Paul as he encourages the believers at Corinth to follow, or imitate, him, as he follows Christ (1 Cor 11:1).

Lewis (2009b:42-56), in demonstrating the biblical nature of mentoring, describes seven clear examples in the Bible: Jethro and Moses, Moses and Joshua, Elijah and Elisha, Priscilla, Aquila and Apollos, Barnabas and Paul, Paul and Timothy, and Jesus and the Twelve. Each of these relationships shares certain common elements: the mentors recognized the call of God on the disciples' lives; they nurtured that call by investing themselves in the lives and ministries of the disciples; and they eventually "released" them to fulfil that call.

Critical to the missiological implementation of a mentoring paradigm is the ultimate "release" of the disciple to move into leadership. Lingenfelter (2008:128) explains: "A mentor who wants to equip leaders must focus on equipping these leaders to do the work and then release control ... The mentor must take the risk of letting go and trusting that God will accomplish the purpose." In so doing, the disciples may then step into the role of mentor and thus insure the sustainability of a healthy and spiritually mature indigenous church. A failure to release the indigenous leader will merely foster an ever-deepening dependence upon the "outsider," the missionary, and reinforce the patron-client dynamic.

7.2.1.3.8   Summary

In sum, the message of holistic theological education will encompass every aspect of the lives of the Christians in Burma, as well as equipping them to be effective instruments of the gospel in the world around them. In particular, it will provide to pastors the knowledge and discipleship necessary to teach new Christians the true antidote for tribal disunity. They will begin to better understand who they are in Christ, elevating that identity above even their tribal or cultural identities. They will begin to better understand their calling in Christ, both in how they are to conduct their own lives and how they are to interact with others – both believers and non-believers. Finally, they will begin to better understand God's will for them and for all the people of Burma, irrespective of tribal identity. As Wright (2006:358) has said: "[Christians] are called to be a light to the nations. But there can be no light to the nations that is not shining already in transformed lives of a holy people." Therefore, the goal of holistic theological

education in Burma will be to transform the lives of the believers so that they can transform their communities and their cultures to reflect the Kingdom of God.

7.2.2 The Missiological Role of the Global Reformed Community – Particularly

The Reformed community has played a significant role in missions to Burma; in fact, the churches under consideration in this study are all (to varying degrees) founded upon and committed to the Reformed faith as a result of Reformed missions and they self-identify as Reformed. However, the Reformed community has also played a part in compounding the problem of disunity among the churches in Burma. This is due, principally, to two factors. First, owing no doubt to the zeal with which Reformed Christians often approach theology, a hierarchy of sorts develops between those indigenous churches planted by Reformed ministries and all the rest (cf. chapter 6). It is assumed (by the churches planted through Reformed missions) that theological precision, which is perhaps the hallmark of the Reformed faith, results in a theological *superiority*, which is lacking in the churches planted by other, non-Reformed evangelical ministries. Second, this hierarchy is often reinforced by the Reformed missionaries themselves, as they prefer only to work with other, likeminded missionaries, and have little regard for the work of others. This seems to be particularly true of the younger generation of Reformed Christians (Merritt, 2014), known colloquially as "neo-Calvinists." The first factor aggravates the stereotypes associated with faulty image theory; the second reveals a haughtiness amongst some Reformed missions and churches, which further perpetuates those stereotypes. Regarding the propensity for exclusivity in missions amongst the Reformed, Harvie Conn (1984:x) asks:

> Has our love of the Reformed faith made it difficult for our churches to aim for unreached peoples, because we cannot recognize the legitimacy of other evangelical churches, not Reformed, also engaged in that task? Comity over unreached peoples is difficult to achieve when you will admit only the frailties of the other body trying to do a similar task.

This notion flows beyond the missiological work of evangelization of unreached peoples, to which Conn refers, to the ongoing ministry among those who have been evangelized; that is, the work of discipleship, church planting, and theological education.

Of course, there can be no denying that, in certain respects, the Reformed faith is quite simply incompatible with other strains of Christianity. This is neither a call to deny Reformed distinctives nor even to compromise them. Rather, it is a call to seek comity *where it is possible* with other, non-Reformed missions efforts. One area where such comity may be expressed is in the idea of *unity*: not unity in theology, not unity even in practice, but unity in the global Body of Christ. One way in which this unity may be expressed is in the practical outworking of what it means to be a Christian, whether Reformed or not. At any rate, such is not a novel idea, but a biblical one: quite simply, Christians are called not only to love God, but to love one another. "If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother" (1 Jn 4:20-21). James builds on this idea of love by describing it in terms of action, "If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed

and filled,' without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?" (Ja 2:15-16). So, Christian love produces Christian actions.

Discussing the Hebrew concept of *ḥesed,* Tushima (2013:93) notes that there are two "fundamental operational agents, namely, the divine and the human." While the covenantal aspect of *ḥesed,* as flowing from sovereign (God) to subject (humanity) is well acknowledged, Tushima (2013:93) goes on to stress the role of *ḥesed* as an emanation of redeemed humanity: "God's *ḥesed* is a wellspring of interminable loving-kindness. It is expected to flow out of anyone who has drunk of it for the benefit of the human community and its environment." Such is the love that typifies the relationship between God and man and which should be reflected in human relationships, as well. This love does not distinguish between tribe, between denominations, or even between the chasm that is often thought to divide Reformed believers and non-Reformed believers.

This love is, of course, between "brothers," which does emphasize the unique relationship among those who have placed saving faith in Christ. However, Jesus was clear that His people were also to show love even to enemies (Mt 5:34) and He further expounded on that dimension of love by showing it to be expressed in good works (Lk 10:25-37). In other words, that love, which began from God to man and which is reciprocated in the new birth, is demonstrated in real and tangible ways. René Padilla (2010:47) well noted this at the Lausanne Congress in 1974:

> The New Testament knows nothing of a Gospel that makes a divorce between soteriology and ethics, between communion with God and communion with one's

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neighbour, between faith and works. The Cross is not only the negation of the validity of every human effort to gain God's favour by the works of the law; it is *also* the demand for a new quality of life characterized by love – the opposite of an individualistic life, centered on personal ambition, indifferent to the needs of others. The significance of the Cross is both soteriological and ethical ... Just as the Word became man, so also love must become good works if it is to be intelligible to men.

Perhaps, some in the global Reformed community must repent of an inclination toward exclusivity and a penchant for theological discourse to the exclusion of demonstrable Christian charity to non-Reformed believers and non-believers alike. Moving sincerely toward a biblical perspective of the unity of all Christians and seeking to develop from that perspective a holistic outworking of what it means to *be* a Christian, would not only serve to heal the divisive wounds between churches in Burma, but would reflect more accurately the proper response to the saving work of Christ, thereby bringing glory to God.

7.3   Theological Education and Unity in Burma

7.3.1   Equip Indigenous Leaders

Having determined that there is a need for a new (or, at least, a fresh) perspective regarding global Christianity, and having determined that this need must be communicated to the churches in Burma if there is to be a remedy to their persistent disunity, it must now be determined how to communicate that need. One of the first approaches could simply be for missionaries on the ground in Burma to pursue dialogues about unity with their indigenous partners, as well as among one another.

However, for there to be a lasting and replicating understanding of Christian unity, there must be a concerted effort to teach this to the indigenous pastors who will, in turn, disciple their local churches accordingly. How, then, can this be done?

Donald McGavran (1969:xiii-xiv) rightly noted, "Theological education around the world must fit the economic and educational standards of the population being evangelized." Consequently, there is not a one-size-fits-all solution to the pressing needs of indigenous pastors for sound theological education. Even within the Majority World, there exists a wide social and economic diversity, allowing for some potential pastors to attend university, while depriving others of even a Bible in his native language. Thus, the solutions must be equally diverse. There is an array of options for indigenous theological education, some of which will be considered below.

7.3.1.1   Traditional Institutions and Programmed Instruction

The American model of denominational seminaries was developed only in the 1800s, specifically with the founding of Andover Theological Seminary by the Congregationalists in 1805 (Shelley, 1993:43), though Harvard College, founded in 1636, was similarly created for the purpose of training clergy (Marsden, 1994:41). However, the idea of a "place" where prospective clergy would go to study pre-existed this model by centuries, as cathedral schools from the eleventh century conducted ministerial training (*Britannica Academic*, 2016, s.v. 'cathedral school'; Riché, 1978:126-7; Verger, 2003). This continues to be a viable option for theological education in the Majority World. Though there are certainly instances where such institutions are not

effective (see below), there are likewise instances where they are. For example, in addition to training men for pastoral ministry, it is also incumbent upon the global Reformed community to train indigenous scholars, in order "to carry forward the basic research of the Christian cause" in their native context (Winter, 1969:218). This can only reasonably be done in an environment that allows for dialogue and debate, not to mention research and professional guidance. Of course, there is a plethora of resources now available to anyone with access to the Internet; however, these – in and of themselves – can often confuse or mislead if there is no one senior to the student to mediate the diversity of their content. Nevertheless, for all the benefits that one can describe with regard to traditional theological institutions (whether they be called Bible colleges, theological seminaries, or by some other, similar nomenclature), there are certainly disadvantages, which are addressed by alternative approaches to theological education: training centres and church-based options, each of which will be considered, in turn.

7.3.1.2   Theological Training Centres

One step removed from formal institutions of education would be less formal (yet not non-formal) training centres. The principle difference here is that the first model requires that the students come to the institution and commit to stay for a fixed period of time to study a course of programmed instruction; the second model takes the learning to the student(s) and allows for greater flexibility with regard to time and course selection. This second model is perhaps best known through the paradigm typically identified with

Ralph Winter: *Theological Education by Extension* (TEE). Regarding the motivation for this model, he writes (1969:267):

> History and experience have taught us that only a handful of potential leaders ever find it possible to leave their families, their farms and other vocations to spend six or nine months a year in a central Bible school. If we continue to cling to this long-established, highly-cherished pattern of theological education we shall reach only a fraction of the total number of potential church leaders in any country.

In addition to a repudiation of the traditional seminary model, TEE and its founders sought to divest the concept of indigenous theological education from its historic dependence upon the West, ideally preferring indigenous instructors (Kornfield, 1976:13-22). In a discussion on transformative missions, Samuel (2010:131) notes that cross-cultural institutions are, by nature, seen as "provisional rather than permanent" vis-à-vis the indigenous culture, which can limit the institution's ability to affect cultural change. TEE attempts to translate this truth into the arena of theological education by eliminating the cross-cultural barrier. This writer has elsewhere offered some thoughts as to the efficacy of the TEE model (Curtis, 2016:28-29):

> First, because it is largely intended as a self-study program, and one easily accessed at that, there exists a real test of the participant's commitment. Also, the model presupposes that someone can serve as a tutor; however, the question arises: who? If a national, how does he gain the knowledge to lead others? In other words, who teaches *him*? Conversely, if a Western missionary is to be the tutor, the heart of the model (i.e., avoiding the stereotypical approach to Western-led theological education) is gutted. Thus, this permutation of educational missions is useful, but there are self-imposed obstacles. The stridently observed ideology of TEE supporters, that Western intrusion into the national's theological education should be minimal, produces a crippling blow.

Quite simply, the objective of TEE to minimize Western influence is difficult to maintain in cultures where there are no adequately equipped instructors. Even if indigenous instructors are trained (either in the West or by Western missionaries in the host culture), the result is only to remove Western influence by one degree. It is often simply not possible to extricate ministry wholly from any Western involvement – yet, need it really be? In fact, pursuing such an objective to its logical conclusion may even render a negative impact of the very idea of unity that undergirds this study. Rather, it may be wiser to seek an understanding of TEE that asserts that the West can indeed equip, yet without wresting control from the host culture. Once such limitations are acknowledged, there is no doubt that TEE has served – and continued to serve – an important function for a specific situation.

It is also important to note that TEE need not be seen *in conflict* with traditional seminary models; as Mabuluki (2010:261) reminds us:

> … it must always be borne in mind that the very genesis of the TEE method was the seminary. The method was developed not as a substitute but as a complement, to address those challenges that could not be addressed by the seminary. Yet TEE could not do that task in isolation. The key elements or aspects in TEE must also be in the seminary and vice versa.

There is, then, certainly room for both theological schools and training centres in the Majority World and both may be pursued with success. However, there are other options, which can also play a vital role in equipping indigenous pastors in Burma: these are found in an array of church-based options.

7.3.1.3   Church-Based Options

A third model would be to return the responsibility of instructing ministerial candidates to the church. This does, after all, appear to be the model closest in relation to the evidence of the New Testament (Frame, 1984:376; Vale, 2014). The first variation of church-based theological education would be apprenticeship (Jackson, 1997). In this model, ministerial candidates would study under the observation of a senior (presumably older) minister, who would undertake the training of the apprentice in all aspects of ministry – from doctrine and history to preaching and pastoral care. This is certainly an ideal model – if it were practical. Sadly, there are not many senior ministers who have the time, inclination, or, sadder still, the knowledge to oversee adequately the training of a young apprentice. Were that to change, and every senior minister was able and willing to apprentice a ministerial candidate, that would result in a doubling of trained ministers every four years or so. Even at that wholly unrealistic rate, the dearth of fully-trained ministers in the Majority World would persist for decades. Still, this is a valid model and when it can be implemented, it should be – subject to an understanding of the model's limitations and potential weaknesses. Charles Van Engen (1996:242) notes the strengths of this model, "[T]he formation of the being of the disciple over an extended period of time, the accountability of apprentice to teacher, and the high degree of contextualization to a particular organization or culture." He also mentions some potential weaknesses:

> First, it can sometimes be ideological, manipulative, and oppressive if the mentor does not allow the disciple the freedom of self-expression and self-discovery. Second, this paradigm is limited to the wisdom, skills, and creativity of the mentor; and, third, it may not be transferable to new contexts ("universalizable").

Keeping this in mind, there are certainly situations in the Majority World where the apprentice model is the best (and, perhaps, only) available option.

John Frame (1984:379) has proposed a variation on this historic model. He proposes the establishment of what he calls "Christian communities," where:

> [T]eachers, ministerial candidates and their families live together, eat together, work together. Without eliminating necessary privacy, the goal of the community will be for all members really to know one another, so that their habits, their tempers, their talents, their loves, their hates, their struggles, their sanctity and lack of it, are known to all. The teachers and older students would thus be examples to the newer, and the newer would be under the scrutiny of the older.

Such a communal approach would certainly foster an interrelational depth not often seen outside of the biological family. However, it begs many questions. Would this model be practical? How many families would be willing to sacrifice their independence? (It would seem to be more likely, though, in non-Western cultures, where large households and extended families are the norm.) Even if this model were implemented, how broad would be its effectiveness? How many families would really be living together – two, three, five, ten? At some point, it would seem that a greater size would diminish the interrelatedness that the model prizes. Conversely, more intimate communes of only two or three families would take considerable time to effectively prepare enough men for ministry in the local churches of a region.

A final, church-based option to be considered is the implementation of educational short-term missions (EdSTM). In this model, upon which this writer expounds at length elsewhere (Curtis, 2016), non-professional missionaries go into the Majority World and

conduct intensive training workshops. Non-professional missionaries (a term first introduced by Roland Allen, 1928:195-201) are those who are neither vocational missionaries nor ministers. Rather, these are spiritually mature laymen in the church who are both well-versed in their faith and gifted in the work of teaching that faith to others. While there are certainly opportunities for professional ministers to participate in EdSTM (and, of course, many do), this model intentionally acknowledges – and draws on – the significantly larger base of gifted laymen, as well.

This last model combines several elements of the others mentioned above. First, like the traditional seminary and TEE, EdSTM adheres to a curriculum that seeks to take the workshop participants through a series of studies on the principle doctrines of the Christian faith. Like TEE and the other church-based models, EdSTM takes this instruction to the students who are unable to access formal study at traditional institutions. Finally, like the apprentice model, as well as Frame's communal model, EdSTM develops relationships among an intimate group (usually no more than 5-7 participants).

The EdSTM model ought not to be viewed primarily through the lens of *short-term missions* as that label has taken on much controversy (Cook, 2005; Lupton, 2011; Winter, 1996), but through the lens of educating or *teaching*. It was seen above that Paul declared the whole counsel of God in his missionary pursuits. How did he do this? Through teaching. As Banks (1999:117) points out, "Many scholars have called attention to the educational dimension of Paul's work." He specifically cites E. Glenn Hinson (1973) and Joseph Grassi (1973). Paul regularly employs the word "teaching" to

describe what it is that he does (1 Cor 4:17; Col 1:28; 1 Tm 2:7; 2 Tm 1:11, 3:10) or implies it by indicating that those to whom he speaks are "learning" (1 Th 2:13; 1 Cor 15:3) and exhorts those whom he is teaching to teach also (Col 3:16; 1 Tm 4:11, 13; 2 Tm 4:2; Tt 2:1, 7). Unfortunately, teaching is not always granted the role in missions it deserves; David Sills (2010:15) calls it "the great omission of the Great Commission." EdSTM, as well as the other models discussed above (properly employed), each acknowledge the critical need for teaching in a missions context. If such teaching is absent, it is unlikely that the churches in Burma will ever develop a truly healthy interrelationship, consistent with the biblical concept of Christian unity across cultural lines.

7.3.2 Encourage Indigenous Leaders

Having assisted in the initial stages of equipping indigenous church leaders, the global missions community's work is hardly finished. Beyond the building of seminaries and training centres, and beyond the sending of teachers into the field, lies the critical task of developing and nurturing a culture of encouragement and vibrant, meaningful pastoral scholarship within those seminaries, training centres, and churches. Otherwise, there is a significant risk of eventual stagnation and digression. Such is, regrettably, the obvious case with many indigenous seminaries around the world at present. In discussing the state of such seminaries, Ferris (1990:7) writes: "Observers in the field today commonly employ language of concern – sometimes alarm – when discussing the situation. Seminaries are 'directionless,' faculties are 'competitive,' curricula are

'unrelated to life,' and graduates are 'ill prepared for ministry.'" Building on the ill-preparedness of the graduates, Frame (1984:374) mentions:

> [I]t seems to me that most seminary graduates are not spiritually ready for the challenges of the ministry. Seminaries not only frequently "refuse to do the work of the church"; they also tend to undo it. Students who arrive expecting to find a "spiritual hothouse" often find seminary to be a singular test of faith. The crushing academic work-load, the uninspiring and unhelpful courses, the financial agonies, the too-busy professors, the equally-hard-pressed fellow students all contribute to the spiritual debilitation.

Even though Frame is writing from a North American perspective, some of these concerns are more or less relevant in indigenous seminaries. The principle applies universally: it is a slippery slope from well-intentioned and sincere idealism to harried (or mundane) pragmatic realities. This is why the global church must not neglect her ongoing role in encouraging indigenous pastors and church leaders in Burma and elsewhere in the Majority World. Without this involvement and commitment, the seminaries may well produce graduates – and these men may well fill the pulpits of indigenous churches – while effecting no meaningful change in their own lives or the lives of those whom they shepherd.

Writing on his experience as a faculty member at Tamilnadu Theological Seminary, Andrew Wingate (1999:107) notes that it is really a "double question" to ask whether theological education in an indigenous context "makes a difference." First, there is the issue of whether theological education makes a difference for the student; second, whether it makes a difference to the church(es) the student pastors or will pastor in the future. As to the first part of the question, he concludes (Wingate, 1999:108) that

perhaps 25 percent of the students "would leave as they came, unaffected by their education, and 25 percent would imbibe everything new that was given and make it their own." This leaves the remaining 50 percent in the middle upon which the judgment of a seminary's "success" must be measured. In other words, merely *having* a seminary where pastors or potential pastors can attend is not enough; the seminary's philosophy and methodology must engage and buttress the students' existing knowledge and experience with a robust paradigm of *practical discipleship*.

Sharon Daloz Parks (2005:5) writes about leadership, "It is one thing to teach knowledge in the field, and it is quite another to prepare people to exercise judgment and skill needed to bring that knowledge into the intricate system of relationships that constitute the dynamic world of practice." In the context of pastoral education, this can be understood to mean that theological education for education's sake will seldom inspire indigenous pastors to passionate and vibrant ministry; education for the sake of *making disciples*, however, will. This is what Witvliet (2008:120) calls "a strong emphasis on heart knowledge in the context of scholastic precision." Such disciple-making must take into account the cultural context in which the disciples are situated.

Newbigin (1984:7) calls the word *contextualization*, "horrendous," but goes on to say: "The word is unattractive, but the thing sought for is essential. Ministry must be trained in a way which relates the gospel to the real issues of obedience which the church faces in this particular time and place." As Arles (1991:57) points out, "Though a Biblical Theology is developed from Christian Scripture, indigenous interpretation makes it Contextual Theology." It is this idea of "contextual theology" that will make biblical and

theological instruction relevant and personal for the indigenous students. This, in turn, will serve to "make a difference" in the churches they pastor. In order to move that middle 50 percent, then, toward the 25 percent who absorb everything they are taught and allow it to spill over into the lives of those under their care, the leaders of the seminaries – faculty and staff – must be rooted in, and committed to, a holistic theology that incorporates orthodoxy, piety, ministry, and worship (For more on the inclusion of worship in a theological curriculum, see Witvliet, 2008:117-149; Murphy, 2004). Further, in light of the data contained in this study, it is imperative that a healthy and biblical doctrine of Christian unity be proclaimed, as well. This element of the Burmese context cannot be ignored in these seminaries.

7.3.3 Include Indigenous Leaders

Perhaps the most neglected element in the process of developing properly trained indigenous church leaders – in Burma and throughout the Majority World – is the global embrace of these leaders as *peers*. Even when they are seen as part of the global church, even when they are considered *equals* before God, there is often a lingering condescension (even if it is suppressed). This is not the condescension of race or of social or economic status; rather, it is the by-product of the ethnocentrism that is ingrained in the cultures of the West. (There is doubtless a similar ethnocentrism among the peoples of the Majority World, as well; however, theirs is not the focus at this point.) Paul Long (1984:114-115) describes it this way, "Ethnocentrism prompts cross-cultural communicators to interpret and evaluate behavior and objects of a host culture by reference to the standards of his or her own culture rather than those of the culture to

which they belong." This ethnocentrism reflects an inherent conviction in the supremacy of one's own culture and motivates a *fenced fellowship*: fenced, that is, by the standards and comforts of a common culture. In the end, the outworking of this is the all-too-often exclusion of Majority World pastors from theological/academic and ecclesiastical circles of the developed world.

There are exceptions, of course. There are, for instance, theologians in the Majority World who have gained global recognition for the excellence of their work. There are a few international organizations, which exist to unite the people and churches of various nations – developed or developing – and to encourage dialogue and ministry between them. However, these exceptions prove the rule, and it is far less common for an indigenous pastor from the Majority World, who has been trained in his own culture (and not studied at a seminary in the West, for instance, or even ever received any "formal" education) to be welcomed by the global evangelical community (less still, the global Reformed community) at pastor's conferences or theological forums or to be invited to speak as a guest lecturer or speaker in a Western seminary or church. In the instances when they are, there is quite often an appeal to the "novelty" factor, rather than simply receiving them as peers – not as "them" but as "us" – this, despite the fact that there ought not to be any spectator cultures in the global church. Rather, each culture – as each Christian – has a role to play in advancing the work of the kingdom of Christ. As Poythress (2011:126) notes:

> The unity in the body of Christ is a unity in diversity. There is one body, but with many members, and the members have different functions (1 Corinthians 12). This unity and diversity applies not only to differences in gifts but also to

differences in culture as well. Each individual and each culture make a contribution to the body of Christ.

M'Crie (1821:14) takes this idea further, warning of the dangers of such ethnocentrism:

> Christianity being intended for general diffusion through the world, must in its nature be adapted to all countries and people. It would be extreme weakness to suppose, that its being embraced by people of different garbs, color, and language, of different manners and customs, barbarous or civilized, or formed into distinct civil communities and living under different forms of government, produces different religions, or a diversity of churches, provided their faith and practice are intrinsically the same.

In other words, there is not a church of "us" and a church of "them" (however "we" may define "them") and there are not gradations of value amongst believers or churches of the world in the eyes of God; rather, there is one church and, while there is of course a vast diversity of culture, there must be unity in that diversity. This is accomplished when the leaders of the Church, situated in the developed world, begin to perceive the leaders of the Church, situated in the Majority World, as both equals in Christ and peers with much to contribute to the global Church, as well. This may best be attained through the embodiment of what Schreiter (2013:10) has called, "mutuality in mission," or, including more fully the ones to whom the missionary is sent.

With respect, then, to the matter at hand (namely, tribal identity and disunity in Burma), it is critical that leaders from local churches throughout the various tribes begin to see one another as being accepted by the global evangelical (and Reformed) community, as they are accepted themselves. It is not enough to simply promote equality amongst the tribes; there must be a sense of equality amongst the totality of people groups

represented in the global Body of Christ. This is, ultimately, not only critical for the unity of the churches in Burma, but it is critical for the churches in the developed world, as it must be acknowledged that the base of the Christian faith has been shifting for some decades away from the West. David Smith (2003:63; cf. Jenkins, 2002) warns,

> It would be a grave mistake for Christians in the West to imagine that they are somehow in a position to predict, far less to control, the precise shape and nature of the twenty-first century Christianity which is emerging with its centre of gravity firmly located among the poor peoples of the Southern hemisphere.

Thus, to persist with an "us" and "them" paradigm will only end poorly for "us," as the expressions of the global church in the West are in decline, and the church in the Majority World is robust and accelerating at historic rates. The time has come not only to welcome leaders from the Majority World to the "table" of the global church, but to accede to them roles at that table commensurate with the numbers of believers they represent. Perhaps some at that table will be the Chin, Kachin, and Karen leaders presently rising in godly wisdom and stature among the church in Burma.

7.4   Conclusions

7.4.1 Missiological Objectives in Burma

It has been demonstrated that, despite a tendency in the global church to be apathetic with regard to missions, the Bible is clear that there is a mandate for missions, which springs from the very heart of God, and, further, that this mandate extends to *panta ta ethne*, or all the people groups of the world. It has further been demonstrated that the mandate not only concerns the extent of missions but also the content of missions:

namely, the whole counsel of God. This, then, must be the missiological objective of the global church with regard to the several tribes in Burma: to reach every *ethnos*, without showing partiality to one over another, and proclaim to them the truths of Scripture, including those that may challenge their traditions, their culture, and even their theology. These include, especially, 1) contextualization versus syncretism; 2) ethics and social justice; 3) a biblical response to the widespread prosperity teaching; 4) reconciliation as a ministry of the church; and 5) cultivating indigenous leaders who will guide the churches toward a biblically healthy composition.

For the global Reformed community, the missiological objectives are the same, yet with the caveat not to neglect its role because of theological haughtiness nor show disdain for working alongside other missionaries or missions agencies, which are non-Reformed (but evangelical). In fact, the visible expression of unity between Reformed and non-Reformed missionaries may serve as a powerful tool to encourage unity among the churches in Burma.

7.4.2 Theological Education and Unity in Burma

It has been demonstrated that an essential element of the biblical mandate for missions is to equip indigenous pastors with theological education. However, the fulfilment of this element of the missions mandate may take a number of forms. For instance, there is certainly a place for formal theological seminaries in Burma, particularly for the purpose of equipping indigenous scholars. There is also a place for less formal theological training centres, where pastors and other church leaders can gather in their own

geographical areas to receive theological instruction, rather than radically altering their lives to travel to urban centres to attend seminary. Finally, there is a place for informal, church-based theological training, whereby indigenous pastors are trained in the field by visiting missionaries, yet also equipped to train others, as well, thereby minimizing the need for the presence of "outsiders" in the indigenous culture. Whichever approach is implemented in a particular setting, however, whether formal or non-formal, it is critical that the various models connect with and augment one another, so that aspiring students can move up the educational continuum while resources and support flow from the established seminaries into the local churches and community-based training centres.

While the direct role of "outsiders" is optimally minimized in the teaching of indigenous pastors, there will always be a role for the global church to serve and encourage the indigenous church. This will be achieved most completely when the indigenous pastors and churches truly gain a sense of "belonging" to the global Christian community, and are able to participate actively as peers in the global church and in the global evangelical and Reformed academic communities. Such inclusion will advance the realization of Christian unity in Burma.

CHAPTER EIGHT

8.0   Conclusion

"I believe in the holy catholic church."

So the church has confessed for millennia, attesting to the organic unity of the people of God, the Body of Christ (Rm 12:5; 1 Cor 12:27; Eph 5:23). Many English-speaking communions have consciously modified that confession *in form* by replacing the word "catholic" with "universal" to assure that they are not misidentified as being part of the *Roman* "Catholic" church. Others, however, have modified their confession *in practice*, even if the written form remains unchanged. This they have done by adding any number of non-written, but qualifying, asterisks or footnotes, limiting that catholicity to that element of the global church most similar to them, whether that be in race, language, social or economic status, political affiliation, or denomination – all of which are forms of a "tribe," in some sense. This thesis has demonstrated that such a limiting of the confession exists in Burma, demarcated along *actual* tribal lines, resulting in disunity among professing Christians in Burma.

8.1   Review

The main research question raised by this thesis was this: What is the effect of tribalism in Burma upon Christian unity in the local church and missional outreach, and could it be addressed in theological education? Five sub-questions were also asked: 1) What factors contributed to the historic development of Burmese tribalism? 2) What has been characteristic of the historic interaction of Christianity in Burma vis-à-vis tribalism? 3)

What are the factors contributing to the persistence of tribal factionalism? 4) What is the biblical and theological perspective of factionalism? 5) How has tribalism affected Christian unity in Burma and how can theological education be instrumental in addressing the impact of tribalism in local churches and in a missional context?

The researcher has attempted to answer each of these questions by, first, considering the origins of this disunity; second, exploring the failures of the church to correct it; third, analyzing the compounding factors of Burma's rather unique social and political climate; and, ultimately, proposing a biblical solution: a more robust engagement of Burma by the global church (particularly the global Reformed church) and the development of indigenous, holistic theological education, designed to address specifically those underlying causes of disunity. This research confirms the central theoretical argument of this thesis: that theological education, equipping students with knowledge, ministry skills and character formation, should contribute positively toward Christian unity and the transformation of the culture of tribal exclusivism in Burma, thereby assisting churches in their well-being and outreach. This conclusion was arrived at via the seven previous chapters, each of which will be briefly reviewed, in turn.

8.1.1 Review of Chapter One

Chapter 1 introduced the problem of disunity among the churches in Burma as a result of the inclination toward tribal factionalism among the Christians in the tribal churches. The researcher provided an overview of the background of that problem, as well as the broader considerations unique to the socio-political context of the churches in Burma.

The researcher also laid out the aims and objectives of this thesis in chapter 1, together with the stated methodology employed in achieving those objectives, in order to prove the central theoretical argument.

8.1.2 Review of Chapter Two

In chapter 2, the researcher traced the anthropological history of the tribes of Burma, in order to demonstrate that the tribal divisions are indeed quite ancient. The researcher offered a survey of the various periods in the history of Burma, as well as the histories of the several, primary tribes, in order to exhibit the way in which the tribes self-identify. It was further proven that these divisions were impressed upon the tribes by their diverse migration patterns, disparate languages, and the isolated geographical locations where the various tribes eventually settled. Most significantly to this study, the researcher also showed in this chapter the degree to which the syncretism of Burma's two principle religions, animism and Buddhism, relate to tribal identity and the proclivity toward a suspicion of intertribal relationships.

8.1.3 Review of Chapter Three

In chapter 3, the researcher attempted to assess both the general history of missions in Burma, as well as consider both the positive and negative outcomes of that history. Neill (1990:24) had this to say about missions:

> Christian missionary work is the most difficult thing in the world. It is surprising that it should ever have been attempted. It is surprising that it should have been

attended by such a measure of success. And it is not at all surprising that an immense number of mistakes should have been made.

The researcher demonstrated that the history of Christian missions in Burma bears out each of these three comments. First, missions in Burma was an arduous undertaking, which could only have been attempted at the call and with the grace of God. Second, despite the seemingly insurmountable obstacles, God began to gather a people for Himself and has continued to build upon those first converted souls to expand the church in Burma. Third, mistakes were made. The promotion of tribal exclusivism, Western individualism, and denominational separatism were among the errors committed by otherwise well-meaning missionaries. This led to, and perpetuated, doctrinal conflicts and confusion among the Reformed churches in Burma, which ultimately contributed to disunity between them.

8.1.4 Review of Chapter Four

In chapter 4, the researcher analyzed the political and social context of Burma, as well as the prevailing (and competing) worldviews common to most of the people there. First, it was proven that isolationism – or, tribal factionalism – is woven into the social construct of Burma's tribal communities in their exercise of a "plural society." It was also proven that there are prevailing stereotypes, explained via image theory, which reinforce tribal factionalism. Additionally, the researcher showed how the past several decades in Burma have been characterized by political destabilization and a culture of mistrust and human rights violations, all of which compounded this factionalism. Finally, the researcher demonstrated the extent to which the three primary religions in Burma –

animism, Buddhism, and Hinduism – have shaped the predominate worldviews of the people in that nation, resulting in resistance to the Christian faith, generally, and the biblical unity of that faith, in particular.

8.1.5 Review of Chapter Five

In chapter 5, the researcher demonstrated conclusively that the Bible, in both the Old and New Testaments, is clear: the people of God are called to be one. This unity is "conditional," in that it is necessary that there be a sincere confession of essential doctrines of the Christian faith. It was also shown that when that common confession exists, however, unity must also be vigorously pursued. While Israel was unique as the people of God in the Old Testament, this writer demonstrated that the *missio Dei*, or the eternal plan of God, was always missiological; that is, the people of Israel were to bless the nations (i.e. Gentiles) by declaring the glory of God among them. In this way, the idea of unity between Jew and Gentile was commenced and was prophetically declared to be the ultimate objective in God's plan for the church. This writer then proved that the idea of unity became increasingly more explicit in the New Testament, as Jesus and the authors of the New Testament canon made plain.

8.1.6 Review of Chapter Six

In chapter 6, the researcher reported on the findings in the field from both quantitative and qualitative research. The validity of the premise of this thesis – that there is disunity among the churches in Burma – was confirmed by the resultant data. It was revealed

that the research subjects are more inclined to seek tribal relationships than Christian relationships. It was further revealed that this tribal insularity has a number of correlative causes. The research in this chapter, together with the corresponding historical and literature analysis in the earlier chapters make an original contribution to knowledge: namely, the cause and the extent of disunity among a number of small Reformed churches in Burma.

8.1.7 Review of Chapter Seven

In chapter 7, the researcher argued for the necessity of holistic theological education in Burma, both in a missional and an indigenous context. It was reiterated that there is a biblical mandate for the church to pursue unity on a global level among those who sincerely profess saving faith in Christ, which includes uniting with those believers in Burma and encouraging them to unite with one another. This writer further argued that for this to be accomplished, the global church must present, missionally, the whole counsel of God to the churches in Burma and further encourage indigenous pastors to propagate that message in their churches. In this way, the writer argued that this would not only attract a greater degree of Christian unity, but the doctrinal errors and divisions, common to many of the churches, would begin to be dispelled.

8.1.8 Summary

This writer would propose that this thesis has demonstrated that the research questions have been answered and that the central theoretical argument has been proven.

Further, it is hoped that this thesis has generated not only awareness of the missiological need for theological education in Burma, but also the urgency of that need, in light of the nation's tumultuous history and its correlative effect on missions. As one visiting journalist noted shortly after the 8888 uprising, this history brought about a weighty sense of despair, which permeated the culture at that time:

> Time no longer flows, it now pools. There is no sense of progression from one season or cycle to the next but, rather, a spinning out of the same set of circumstances into the future. The population comprises a nation in waiting. (Skidmore, 2003:7-8).

In the ensuing years, however, and particularly in the last year, that for which this nation was waiting may see fruition in the renewed sense of hope and cautious optimism. Yet these people have been encouraged before, only to be let down again. The current state of Burma may well be but a temporary step forward, to be followed by a depressing two steps back. Only time will tell if this will be the case. In the meantime, and while the conditions are increasingly conducive both to foreign visitors and to the local churches as well, the global church must avail herself of this providential opportunity. This should take the form of equipping the indigenous churches to be able to evangelize and disciple the people of Burma. In this way, the danger of yet another government crackdown might result in the expulsion of Western missionaries, but they would leave in their wake evangelical Burmese communities that are able to propagate the gospel and fulfil the Great Commission in their land.

Wright (2013:ix) is right to say, "It is not so much that God has a mission for his church in the world; rather, God has a church for his mission in the world." In the context of this

study, those missiological objectives, which I argue herein must be pursued, are intended both to reflect and fulfil God's purpose for His church in the world: that the world will know Him and, in that knowledge, will become one.

8.2   Suggestions for further research

The research in this thesis was limited to a small sample, representing three tribes. While it is true that these three tribes represent the largest concentration of Christians in Burma, it is true as well that, to a certain extent, this limitation was also the product of the lingering restrictions put in place by the military junta, which prohibit foreigners from travelling to much of the country. Consequently, the research contained herein was, of a necessity, conducted in the larger urban centres or those tribal areas where visitors are allowed. Therefore, if/when these travel restrictions are lifted, it would be beneficial to the missiological community to conduct additional research in those areas that have hitherto been forbidden, in an effort to assess more completely the need for missions and theological education. Such research might also explore further the deficient theology in those areas, in order to assess and prioritize the missiological work yet to be done in Burma.

Appendix A: Research Questionnaires

1.1. Survey questions:

1.1.1. Tribal identity is very important to you.	SD	D	N	A	SA
1.1.2. Christian relationships are more important than tribal relationships.	SD	D	N	A	SA
1.1.3. It is more important that your son/daughter marry a Christian than a member of your tribe.	SD	D	N	A	SA
1.1.4. Most people in your tribe are:	a) Christian Animists	b) Buddhist d) Hindu	c)		
1.1.5. When you were born, your parents were:	a) Christian Animistic	b) Buddhist d) Hindu	c)		
1.1.6. Growing up, most of your friends were:	a) Christian Animists	b) Buddhist d) Hindu	c)		
1.1.7. Most people in your tribe have a background that is:	a) Christian Animistic	b) Buddhist d) Hindu	c)		
1.1.8. You believe that if you have enough faith, God will make you wealthy.	SD	D	N	A	SA
1.1.9. You believe that if you have enough faith, God will heal you physically.	SD	D	N	A	SA
1.1.10. You believe that God is in control over all things that happen in your life.	SD	D	N	A	SA
1.1.11. You believe that God rewards good behaviour with health and prosperity.	SD	D	N	A	SA
1.1.12. You believe that doing things for *nats* will bring good results in your life.	SD	D	N	A	SA
1.1.13. You believe that *nats* will punish you if you betray your tribe.	SD	D	N	A	SA
1.1.14. Sincere Buddhists will be saved by their good works/religious duties.	SD	D	N	A	SA
1.1.15. Sincere animists will be saved by their good works and honouring the traditions.	SD	D	N	A	SA
1.1.16. Sincere Hindus will be saved by their good works/religious duties.	SD	D	N	A	SA
1.1.17. You know Christians from other tribes.	SD	D	N	A	SA
1.1.18. You have worshipped with Christians from other tribes.	SD	D	N	A	SA
1.1.19. You would be willing to worship with Christians from other tribes.	SD	D	N	A	SA
1.1.20. You would be willing to study at a Bible school/seminary with Christians from other tribes.	SD	D	N	A	SA

1.2. Interview questions:

1.2.1. If you were introducing yourself to a stranger, how would you identify yourself?

1.2.2. What was the religion of your parents when you were born?

1.2.3. At what age did you become a Christian?

1.2.4. As a child, did you have many friends who were Christian?

1.2.5. As a child, were most of your friends from your tribe?

1.2.6. As a child, did you have any friends who were from a different tribe?

1.2.7. After your biological family, what are the most important relationships in your life?

1.2.8. Are you closer to those who are Christians from other tribes or non-Christians from your own?

1.2.9. What Christian authors do you enjoy reading?

1.2.10.   What is your favourite Christian book, after the Bible?

1.2.11.   What is your favourite non-Christian book?

1.2.12.   How many years did you attend school?

1.2.13.   Have you had any formal training in the Bible and/or theology?

1.2.14.   Do you leave gifts out for *nats*?

1.2.15.   Do you believe that it is okay for Christians to follow the traditions for honouring *nats*?

1.2.16.   Do you feel that other tribes look down on you and your tribe?

1.2.17.   Is it important for you to defend your tribe against accusations made by those from other tribes?

1.2.18.   What makes your tribe "better" than the others?

1.2.19.   Have you ever lived or worked with people from other tribes?

1.2.20.   Would you be willing to live or work with people from other tribes?

1.3.   Exhibit questions:

1.3.1. Some people in Burma think of themselves, first, as being members of their tribe, then, as citizens of Burma. How do you think of yourself?

1.3.2. Some Christians in Burma also think of themselves as being members of their tribe before they identify as Christians. What do you think about that?

1.3.3. Some people in Burma believe that it is God's will for all Christians to be healthy and wealthy; others do not believe this to be true. What do you think?

1.3.4. Some people in Burma believe that the *nats* are responsible for the good and bad things in their lives. What do you think?

1.3.5. Some Christians in Burma believe that Buddhists can go to heaven based on how sincere and devoted they are in the religion. What do you think?

1.3.6. Some Christians in Burma believe that those who follow the traditions and worship *nats* can go to heaven based on how sincere and devoted they are. What do you think?

1.3.7. Some Christians in Burma believe that Hindus can go to heaven based on how sincere and devoted they are in the religion. What do you think?

1.3.8. Some Christians in Burma believe that it is better for them to worship only with other Christians from their tribe. What do you think?

1.3.9. Some men in Burma, who believe they are called to be pastors, would only study at a Bible college or seminary operated by their own tribe. What do you think about that?

1.3.10.   The Bible teaches that Christians are to love one another, serve one another, and fellowship with one another – no matter what tribe they are from. What do you think about that sentence?

1.4.   Demographic questions:

1.4.1. What is your age?
1.4.2. What is your gender?
1.4.3. What is your tribal identity?
1.4.4. What is your church office (if any)?

Appendix B: Responses to Questionnaires from All Subjects

Chin

			Pastors				Control			
		[Subject identification number:]	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*	*7*	*8*
		Survey questions: (1=SD; 2= D; 3= N; 4= A; 5= SA)								
1		Tribal identity is very important to you.	5	5	4	5	4	5	4	2
2		Christian relationships are more important than tribal relationships.	4	1	4	4	4	1	4	5
3		It is more important that your son/daughter marry a Christian than a member of your tribe.	4	5	2	4	5	4	5	1
4	1=xtian; 2=budd; 3=animist; 4=other; 5=none	Most people in your tribe are:	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
5	1=xtian; 2=budd; 3=animist; 4=other; 5=none	When you were born, your parents were:	1	3	1	1	1	1	1	1
6	1=xtian; 2=budd; 3=animist; 4=other; 5=none	Growing up, most of your friends were:	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1
7	1=xtian; 2=budd; 3=animist; 4=other; 5=none	Most people in your tribe have a background that is:	2	3	1	1	1	1	1	1
8		You believe that if you have enough faith, God will make you wealthy.	2	4	2	4	5	4	4	5
9		You believe that if you have enough faith, God will heal you physically.	4	4	1	4	4	4	2	4
10		You believe that God is in control over all things that happen in your life.	5	5	4	4	5	2	1	4
11		You believe that God rewards good behavior with health and prosperity.	5	4	2	4	1	1	2	2
12		You believe that doing things for *nats* will bring good results in your life.	1	2	1	1	1	1	2	1

13		You believe that *nats* will punish you if you betray your tribe.	1	2	1	1	3	2	2	2
14		Sincere Buddhists will be saved by their good works/religious duties.	1	1	1	4	4	1	2	1
15		Sincere animists will be saved by their good works and honoring the traditions.	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2
16		Sincere Hindus will be saved by their good works/religious duties.	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	2
17		You know Christians from other tribes.	5	4	2	4	4	4	1	4
18		You have worshipped with Christians from other tribes.	5	4	4	4	4	4	4	5
19		You would be willing to worship with Christians from other tribes.	4	4	4	4	4	2	1	3
20		You would be willing to study at a Bible school/seminary with Christians from other tribes.	5	4	4	4	5	4	5	4

Interview questions:

1	1=xtian; 2=tribe; 3=other; 4=no answer	If you were introducing yourself to a stranger, how would you identify yourself?	1	2	1	2	1	4	4	1
2	1=xtian; 2=budd; 3=animist; 4=other; 5=none	What was the religion of your parents when you were born?	3	3	1	1	1	1	1	1
3	1=<10; 2=11-20; 3=21-30; 4=31-40;5=>40	At what age did you become a Christian?	2	1	1	2	1	1	1	2
4	1=y; 2=n; 3=no answer	As a child, did you have many friends who were Christian?	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1
5	1=y; 2=n; 3=no answer	As a child, were most of your friends from your tribe?	2	2	1	1	2	2	1	2
6	1=y; 2=n; 3=no answer	As a child, did you have any friends who were from a different tribe?	1	3	1	1	1	1	1	1

#	Coding	Question								
7	1=xtians generally; 2=xtian's in tribe; 3=tribe	After your biological family, what are the most important relationships in your life?	3	2	1	2	1	1	1	1
8	1=xtian from other tribe; 2=non-x from my tribe	Are you closer to those who are Christians from other tribes or non-Christians from your own?	2	1	2	2	2	1	1	1
9	1=reformed; 2=evangelical; 3=prosperity; 4=other	What Christian authors do you enjoy reading?	1	3	1	2	1	3	1	1
10	1=reformed; 2=evangelical; 3=prosperity; 4=other	What is your favorite Christian book, after the Bible?	2	2	1	3	2	2	2	2
11		*Question deleted*								
12	1=<6; 2=6-12; 3=college; 4-grad	How many years did you attend school?	3	4	2	2	3	3	3	3
13	1=y; 2=n; 3=no answer	Have you had any formal training in the Bible and/or theology?	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2
14	1=y; 2=n; 3=no answer	Do you leave gifts out for *nats*?	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	2
15	1=y; 2=n; 3=no answer	Do you believe that it is okay for Christians to follow the traditions for honoring *nats*?	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	2
16	1=y; 2=n; 3=no answer	Do you feel that other tribes look down on you and your tribe?	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2
17	1=y; 2=n; 3=no answer	Is it important for you to defend your tribe against accusations made by those from other tribes?	1	1	2	1	2	1	1	1
18		What makes your tribe "better" than the others?	Un-ity	Hon-esty	Moti-vation	Sin-cerity	n/a	Un-ity	Un-ity	Un-ity
19	1=y; 2=n; 3=no answer	Have you ever lived or worked with people from other tribes?	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
20	1=y; 2=n; 3=no answer	Would you be willing to live or work with people from other tribes?	1	1	1	1		1	1	1

Exhibit questions:

1	1=tribe; 2=burma; 3=other	Some people in Burma think of themselves, first, as being members of their tribe, then, as citizens of Burma. How do you think of yourself?	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2
2	1=tribe; 2= christian; 3=other	Some Christians in Burma also think of themselves as being members of their tribe before they identify as Christians. What do you think about that?	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	2
3	1=y; 2=n; 3=no answer	Some people in Burma believe that it is God's will for all Christians to be healthy and wealthy; others do not believe this to be true. What do you think?	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	2
4	1=y; 2=n; 3=no answer	Some people in Burma believe that the *nats* are responsible for the good and bad things in their lives. What do you think?	2	2	1	2	1	1	1	1
5	1=y; 2=n; 3=no answer	Some Christians in Burma believe that Buddhists can go to heaven based on how sincere and devoted they are in the religion. What do you think?	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
6	1=y; 2=n; 3=no answer	Some Christians in Burma believe that those who follow the traditions and worship *nats* can go to heaven based on how sincere and devoted they are. What do you think?	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
7	1=y; 2=n; 3=no answer	Some Christians in Burma believe that Hindus can go to heaven based on how sincere and devoted they are in the religion. What do you think?	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
8	1=y; 2=n; 3=no answer	Some Christians in Burma believe that it is better for them to worship only with other Christians from their tribe. What do you think?	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	2
9	1=y; 2=n; 3=no answer	Some men in Burma, who believe they are called to be pastors, would only study at a Bible college or seminary operated by their own tribe. What do you think about that?	1	2	2	2	1	2	2	2
10	1=agree; 2=disagree; 3=not sure	The Bible teaches that Christians are to love one another, serve one another, and fellowship with one another – no matter what tribe they are from. What do you think about that sentence.	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1

	Demographic questions:									
1	1=15-19; 2=20-29; 3=30-39; 4=40-49; 5=50+	What is your age?	2	3	3	2	2	2	2	2
2	1=m; 2=f	What is your gender?	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2

Kachin

			Pastors				Control			
		[Subject identification number:]	*9*	*10*	*11*	*12*	*13*	*14*	*15*	*16*
		Survey questions: (1=SD; 2= D; 3= N; 4= A; 5= SA)								
1		Tribal identity is very important to you.	3	4	4	5	5	4	5	5
2		Christian relationships are more important than tribal relationships.	2	5	2	4	2	5	3	2
3		It is more important that your son/daughter marry a Christian than a member of your tribe.	2	5	2	4	1	3	3	1
4	1=xtian; 2=budd; 3=animist; 4=other; 5=none	Most people in your tribe are:	3	1	1	1	3	1	3	2
5	1=xtian; 2=budd; 3=animist; 4=other; 5=none	When you were born, your parents were:	1	1	1	3	3	1	1	2
6	1=xtian; 2=budd; 3=animist; 4=other; 5=none	Growing up, most of your friends were:	1	1	1	1	3	1	3	2
7	1=xtian; 2=budd; 3=animist; 4=other; 5=none	Most people in your tribe have a background that is:	3	1	1	3	3	1	3	2
8		You believe that if you have enough faith, God will make you wealthy.	2	1	4	2	4	4	3	5
9		You believe that if you have enough faith, God will heal you physically.	2	1	4	5	4	3	4	4
10		You believe that God is in control over all things that happen in your life.	1	5	5	3	2	5	4	3
11		You believe that God rewards good behavior with health	2	1	4	2	4	1	1	3

#	Legend	Question								
		and prosperity.								
12		You believe that doing things for *nats* will bring good results in your life.	1	1	2	1	2	3	3	2
13		You believe that *nats* will punish you if you betray your tribe.	1	1	2	2	3	1	5	2
14		Sincere Buddhists will be saved by their good works/religious duties.	1	1	2	1	3	1	5	1
15		Sincere animists will be saved by their good works and honoring the traditions.	1	1	2	1	2	1	3	2
16		Sincere Hindus will be saved by their good works/religious duties.	1	1	2	1	2	1	2	2
17		You know Christians from other tribes.	4	5	4	1	2	1	1	1
18		You have worshipped with Christians from other tribes.	3	5	5	1	1	1	1	1
19		You would be willing to worship with Christians from other tribes.	3	5	5	3	3	2	2	4
20		You would be willing to study at a Bible school/seminary with Christians from other tribes.	3	5	5	2	1	2	3	4
		Interview questions:								
1	1=xtian; 2=tribe; 3=other; 4=no answer	If you were introducing yourself to a stranger, how would you identify yourself?	4	1	1	1	1	2	2	2
2	1=xtian; 2=budd; 3=animist; 4=other; 5=none	What was the religion of your parents when you were born?	1	1	1	1	3	3	1	3
3	1=<10; 2=11-20; 3=21-30; 4=31-40;5=>40	At what age did you become a Christian?	1	1	2	2	3	1	1	2
4	1=y; 2=n; 3=no answer	As a child, did you have many friends who were Christian?	1	1	1	1	2	2	1	2
5	1=y; 2=n; 3=no answer	As a child, were most of your friends from your tribe?	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1
6	1=y; 2=n; 3=no answer	As a child, did you have any friends who were from a different tribe?	1	1	1	2	1	2	2	2
7	1=xtians generally; 2=xtian's in tribe; 3=tribe; 4=other	After your biological family, what are the most important relationships in your life?	1	2	2	2	3	2	2	2

#	Coding	Question								
8	1=xtian from other tribe; 2=non-x from my tribe	Are you closer to those who are Christians from other tribes or non-Christians from your own?	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	1
9	1=reformed; 2=evangelical; 3=prosperity; 4=other	What Christian authors do you enjoy reading?		1	1	3	2	4	3	3
10	1=reformed; 2=evangelical; 3=prosperity; 4=other	What is your favorite Christian book, after the Bible?	2	1	2	3	3	4	3	3
11		*Question deleted*								
12	1=<6; 2=6-12; 3=college; 4-grad	How many years did you attend school?	3	3	4	3	2	1	2	2
13	1=y; 2=n; 3=no answer	Have you had any formal training in the Bible and/or theology?	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2
14	1=y; 2=n; 3=no answer	Do you leave gifts out for *nats*?	2	2	2	1	1	1	2	1
15	1=y; 2=n; 3=no answer	Do you believe that it is okay for Christians to follow the traditions for honoring *nats*?	2	2	2	1	1	1	2	1
16	1=y; 2=n; 3=no answer	Do you feel that other tribes look down on you and your tribe?	1	2	2	1	2	1		1
17	1=y; 2=n; 3=no answer	Is it important for you to defend your tribe against accusations made by those from other tribes?	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	1
18		What makes your tribe "better" than the others?	Multi-ligual	n/a	99% xtian	love	kind	love	n/a	unity
19	1=y; 2=n; 3=no answer	Have you ever lived or worked with people from other tribes?	1	1	1	2	2	1	2	2
20	1=y; 2=n; 3=no answer	Would you be willing to live or work with people from other tribes?	2	1	1	1	2	1	1	2

Exhibit questions:

#	Coding	Question								
1	1=tribe; 2=burma; 3=other	Some people in Burma think of themselves, first, as being members of their tribe, then, as citizens of Burma. How do you think of yourself?	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
2	1=tribe; 2= christian; 3=other	Some Christians in Burma also think of themselves as being members of their tribe before they identify as	1	2	1	1	1	1	2	1

#	Key	Question								
		Christians. What do you think about that?								
3	1=y; 2=n; 3=no answer	Some people in Burma believe that it is God's will for all Christians to be healthy and wealthy; others do not believe this to be true. What do you think?	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	2
4	1=y; 2=n; 3=no answer	Some people in Burma believe that the *nats* are responsible for the good and bad things in their lives. What do you think?	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	2
5	1=y; 2=n; 3=no answer	Some Christians in Burma believe that Buddhists can go to heaven based on how sincere and devoted they are in the religion. What do you think?	2	2	2	2	1	1	2	1
6	1=y; 2=n; 3=no answer	Some Christians in Burma believe that those who follow the traditions and worship *nats* can go to heaven based on how sincere and devoted they are. What do you think?	2	2	2	2	1	1	2	2
7	1=y; 2=n; 3=no answer	Some Christians in Burma believe that Hindus can go to heaven based on how sincere and devoted they are in the religion. What do you think?	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	2
8	1=y; 2=n; 3=no answer	Some Christians in Burma believe that it is better for them to worship only with other Christians from their tribe. What do you think?	2	2	2	1	1	1	2	2
9	1=y; 2=n; 3=no answer	Some men in Burma, who believe they are called to be pastors, would only study at a Bible college or seminary operated by their own tribe. What do you think about that?	1	2	2	2	1	1	2	2
10	1=agree; 2=disagree; 3=not sure	The Bible teaches that Christians are to love one another, serve one another, and fellowship with one another – no matter what tribe they are from. What do you think about that sentence?	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2
Demographic questions:										
1	1=15-19; 2=20-29; 3=30-39; 4=40-49; 5=50+	What is your age?	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1

| 2 | 1=m; 2=f | What is your gender? | | 2 | 1 | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 |

Karen

		[Subject identification number:]	Pastors				Control			
			17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
		Survey questions: (1=SD; 2= D; 3= N; 4= A; 5= SA)								
1		Tribal identity is very important to you.	4	2	4	4	5	5	4	5
2		Christian relationships are more important than tribal relationships.	4	5	5	3	4	2	1	3
3		It is more important that your son/daughter marry a Christian than a member of your tribe.	4	3	4	3	2	5	1	2
4	1=xtian; 2=budd; 3=animist; 4=other; 5=none	Most people in your tribe are:	1	1	1	1	3	3	1	1
5	1=xtian; 2=budd; 3=animist; 4=other; 5=none	When you were born, your parents were:	1	1	1	1	3	1	1	1
6	1=xtian; 2=budd; 3=animist; 4=other; 5=none	Growing up, most of your friends were:	2	2	2	1	3	3	1	1
7	1=xtian; 2=budd; 3=animist; 4=other; 5=none	Most people in your tribe have a background that is:	1	1	1	1	3	3	1	1
8		You believe that if you have enough faith, God will make you wealthy.	1	4	4	4	5	2	3	4
9		You believe that if you have enough faith, God will heal you physically.	1	4	4	5	5	3	4	5
10		You believe that God is in control over all things that happen in your life.	5	4	5	2	4	1	4	2
11		You believe that God rewards good behavior with	4	4	4	2	5	1	5	2

		health and prosperity.								
12		You believe that doing things for *nats* will bring good results in your life.	1	1	3	2	5	4	1	1
13		You believe that *nats* will punish you if you betray your tribe.	1	1	3	2	5	3	3	1
14		Sincere Buddhists will be saved by their good works/religious duties.	1	3	1	1	4	2	3	2
15		Sincere animists will be saved by their good works and honoring the traditions.	1	3	1	2	4	3	3	1
16		Sincere Hindus will be saved by their good works/religious duties.	1	3	1	1	3	2	3	1
17		You know Christians from other tribes.	4	3	4	2	1	1	2	1
18		You have worshipped with Christians from other tribes.	4	4	4	2	1	1	1	1
19		You would be willing to worship with Christians from other tribes.	4	5	4	5	3	2	3	5
20		You would be willing to study at a Bible school/seminary with Christians from other tribes.	4	4	4	3	3	1	2	5

Interview questions:

1	1=xtian; 2=tribe; 3=other; 4=no answer	If you were introducing yourself to a stranger, how would you identify yourself?	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	4
2	1=xtian; 2=budd; 3=animist; 4=other; 5=none	What was the religion of your parents when you were born?	1	1	1	2	2	1	1	3
3	1=<10; 2=11-20; 3=21-30; 4=31-40;5=>40	At what age did you become a Christian?	2	1	1	1	1	3	3	2
4	1=y; 2=n; 3=no answer	As a child, did you have many friends who were Christian?	1	1	1	2	2	2	1	2

5	1=y; 2=n; 3=no answer	As a child, were most of your friends from your tribe?	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1
6	1=y; 2=n; 3=no answer	As a child, did you have any friends who were from a different tribe?	2	1	1	2	1	2	2	2
7	1=xtians generally; 2=xtian's in tribe; 3=tribe;	After your biological family, what are the most important relationships in your life?	2	2	1	1	3	3	2	3
8	1=xtian from other tribe; 2=non-x from my tribe	Are you closer to those who are Christians from other tribes or non-Christians from your own?	2	1	1	2	2	2	2	2
9	1=reformed; 2=evangelical; 3=prosperity; 4=other	What Christian authors do you enjoy reading?	2	2	3	3	4	3	4	3
10	1=reformed; 2=evangelical; 3=prosperity; 4=other	What is your favorite Christian book, after the Bible?	2	3	3	4	4	3	4	3
11		*Question deleted*								
12	1=<6; 2=6-12; 3=college; 4-grad	How many years did you attend school?	3	3	3	4	2	2	2	3
13	1=y; 2=n; 3=no answer	Have you had any formal training in the Bible and/or theology?	1	1	1	2	2	2	1	2
14	1=y; 2=n; 3=no answer	Do you leave gifts out for *nats*?	2	2	2	2	1	1	2	2
15	1=y; 2=n; 3=no answer	Do you believe that it is okay for Christians to follow the traditions for honoring *nats*?	2	2	2	1	1	2	2	2
16	1=y; 2=n; 3=no answer	Do you feel that other tribes look down on you and your tribe?	1	2	1	1	1	1	2	1
17	1=y; 2=n; 3=no answer	Is it important for you to defend your tribe against accusations made by those from other tribes?	2	2	1	1	2	1	1	1
18		What makes your tribe "better" than the others?	hospitality	love for one	love	unity	love	love	n/a	unity

#	Coding	Question		another						
19	1=y; 2=n; 3=no answer	Have you ever lived or worked with people from other tribes?	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2
20	1=y; 2=n; 3=no answer	Would you be willing to live or work with people from other tribes?	1	1	2	1	1	1	2	1

Exhibit questions:

#	Coding	Question								
1	1=tribe; 2=burma; 3=other	Some people in Burma think of themselves, first, as being members of their tribe, then, as citizens of Burma. How do you think of yourself?	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	1
2	1=tribe; 2= christian; 3=other	Some Christians in Burma also think of themselves as being members of their tribe before they identify as Christians. What do you think about that?	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1
3	1=y; 2=n; 3=no answer	Some people in Burma believe that it is God's will for all Christians to be healthy and wealthy; others do not believe this to be true. What do you think?	2	1	2	2	2	1	1	2
4	1=y; 2=n; 3=no answer	Some people in Burma believe that the *nats* are responsible for the good and bad things in their lives. What do you think?	1	2	1	2	1	2	2	1
5	1=y; 2=n; 3=no answer	Some Christians in Burma believe that Buddhists can go to heaven based on how sincere and devoted they are in the religion. What do you think?	1	2	2	2	1	1	1	2
6	1=y; 2=n; 3=no answer	Some Christians in Burma believe that those who follow the traditions and worship *nats* can go to heaven based on how sincere and devoted they are. What do you think?	1	2	2	2	1	2	1	1
7	1=y; 2=n; 3=no answer	Some Christians in Burma believe that Hindus can go to heaven based on how sincere and devoted they are in the religion. What do you think?	1	2	2	2	1	2	2	2
8	1=y; 2=n; 3=no answer	Some Christians in Burma believe that it is better for them to worship only with other Christians from their tribe. What do you think?	1	2	2	1	2	2	2	1

9	1=y; 2=n; 3=no answer	Some men in Burma, who believe they are called to be pastors, would only study at a Bible college or seminary operated by their own tribe. What do you think about that?	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	1
10	1=agree; 2=disagree; 3=not sure	The Bible teaches that Christians are to love one another, serve one another, and fellowship with one another – no matter what tribe they are from. What do you think about that sentence?	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	2

Demographic questions:

1	1=15-19; 2=20-29; 3=30-39; 4=40-49; 5=50+	What is your age?	3	3	2	3	1	2	2	2
2	1=m; 2=f	What is your gender?	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	1

Appendix C: Statistical Analysis of Questionnaires from All Subjects

Survey_1

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	D	2	8.3	8.3	8.3
	N	1	4.2	4.2	12.5
	A	10	41.7	41.7	54.2
	SA	11	45.8	45.8	100.0
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	

Survey_2

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	SD	3	12.5	12.5	12.5
	D	5	20.8	20.8	33.3
	N	3	12.5	12.5	45.8
	A	8	33.3	33.3	79.2
	SA	5	20.8	20.8	100.0
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	

Survey_3

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	SD	4	16.7	16.7	16.7
	D	5	20.8	20.8	37.5
	N	4	16.7	16.7	54.2
	A	6	25.0	25.0	79.2
	SA	5	20.8	20.8	100.0
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	

Survey_4

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Xtian	18	75.0	75.0	75.0
	Budd	1	4.2	4.2	79.2
	Animist	5	20.8	20.8	100.0
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	

Survey_5

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Xtian	19	79.2	79.2	79.2
	Budd	1	4.2	4.2	83.3
	Animist	4	16.7	16.7	100.0
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	

Survey_6

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Xtian	14	58.3	58.3	58.3
	Budd	6	25.0	25.0	83.3
	Animist	4	16.7	16.7	100.0
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	

Survey_7

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Xtian	15	62.5	62.5	62.5
	Budd	2	8.3	8.3	70.8
	Animist	7	29.2	29.2	100.0
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	

Survey_8

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	SD	2	8.3	8.3	8.3
	D	5	20.8	20.8	29.2
	N	2	8.3	8.3	37.5
	A	11	45.8	45.8	83.3
	SA	4	16.7	16.7	100.0
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	

Survey_9

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	SD	3	12.5	12.5	12.5
	D	2	8.3	8.3	20.8
	N	2	8.3	8.3	29.2
	A	13	54.2	54.2	83.3
	SA	4	16.7	16.7	100.0
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	

Survey_10

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	SD	3	12.5	12.5	12.5
	D	4	16.7	16.7	29.2
	N	2	8.3	8.3	37.5
	A	7	29.2	29.2	66.7
	SA	8	33.3	33.3	100.0
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	

Survey_11

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	SD	6	25.0	25.0	25.0
	D	7	29.2	29.2	54.2
	N	1	4.2	4.2	58.3
	A	7	29.2	29.2	87.5
	SA	3	12.5	12.5	100.0
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	

Survey_12

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	SD	13	54.2	54.2	54.2
	D	6	25.0	25.0	79.2
	N	3	12.5	12.5	91.7
	A	1	4.2	4.2	95.8
	SA	1	4.2	4.2	100.0
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	

Survey_13

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	SD	9	37.5	37.5	37.5
	D	8	33.3	33.3	70.8
	N	5	20.8	20.8	91.7
	SA	2	8.3	8.3	100.0
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	

Survey_14

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	SD	13	54.2	54.2	54.2
	D	4	16.7	16.7	70.8
	N	3	12.5	12.5	83.3
	A	3	12.5	12.5	95.8
	SA	1	4.2	4.2	100.0
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	

Survey_15

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	SD	12	50.0	50.0	50.0
	D	7	29.2	29.2	79.2
	N	4	16.7	16.7	95.8
	A	1	4.2	4.2	100.0
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	

Survey_16

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	SD	14	58.3	58.3	58.3
	D	7	29.2	29.2	87.5
	N	3	12.5	12.5	100.0
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	

Survey_17

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	SD	8	33.3	33.3	33.3
	D	4	16.7	16.7	50.0
	N	1	4.2	4.2	54.2
	A	9	37.5	37.5	91.7
	SA	2	8.3	8.3	100.0
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	

Survey_18

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	SD	9	37.5	37.5	37.5
	D	1	4.2	4.2	41.7
	N	1	4.2	4.2	45.8
	A	9	37.5	37.5	83.3
	SA	4	16.7	16.7	100.0
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	

Survey_19

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	SD	1	4.2	4.2	4.2
	D	4	16.7	16.7	20.8
	N	6	25.0	25.0	45.8
	A	8	33.3	33.3	79.2
	SA	5	20.8	20.8	100.0
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	

Survey_20

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	SD	2	8.3	8.3	8.3
	D	3	12.5	12.5	20.8
	N	4	16.7	16.7	37.5
	A	9	37.5	37.5	75.0
	SA	6	25.0	25.0	100.0
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	

Interview_1

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Xtian	14	58.3	58.3	58.3
	Tribe	6	25.0	25.0	83.3
	No answer	4	16.7	16.7	100.0
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	

Interview_2

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Xtian	16	66.7	66.7	66.7
	Budd	2	8.3	8.3	75.0
	Animist	6	25.0	25.0	100.0
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	

Interview_3

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	<10	13	54.2	54.2	54.2
	11-20	8	33.3	33.3	87.5
	21-30	3	12.5	12.5	100.0
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	

Interview_4

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Y	16	66.7	66.7	66.7
	N	8	33.3	33.3	100.0
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	

Interview_5

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Y	16	66.7	66.7	66.7
	N	8	33.3	33.3	100.0
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	

Interview_6

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Y	14	58.3	58.3	58.3
	N	9	37.5	37.5	95.8
	No answer	1	4.2	4.2	100.0
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	

Interview_7

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Xtian general	8	33.3	33.3	33.3
	Xtian in tribe	11	45.8	45.8	79.2
	Tribe	5	20.8	20.8	100.0
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	

Interview_8

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Xtian other tribe	9	37.5	37.5	37.5
	Non-X from my tribe	15	62.5	62.5	100.0
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	

Interview_9

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Reformed	7	29.2	30.4	30.4
	Evangelical	4	16.7	17.4	47.8
	Prosperity	9	37.5	39.1	87.0
	Other	3	12.5	13.0	100.0
	Total	23	95.8	100.0	
Missing	System	1	4.2		
Total		24	100.0		

Interview_10

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Reformed	2	8.3	8.3	8.3
	Evangelical	9	37.5	37.5	45.8
	Prosperity	9	37.5	37.5	83.3
	Other	4	16.7	16.7	100.0
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	

Interview_11

		Frequency	Percent
Missing	System	24	100.0

Interview_12

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	<6	1	4.2	4.2	4.2
	6-12	8	33.3	33.3	37.5
	College	12	50.0	50.0	87.5
	Grad	3	12.5	12.5	100.0
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	

Interview_13

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Y	12	50.0	50.0	50.0
	N	12	50.0	50.0	100.0
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	

Interview_14

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Y	7	29.2	29.2	29.2
	N	17	70.8	70.8	100.0
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	

Interview_15

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Y	7	29.2	29.2	29.2
	N	17	70.8	70.8	100.0
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	

Interview_16

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Y	14	58.3	60.9	60.9
	N	9	37.5	39.1	100.0
	Total	23	95.8	100.0	
Missing	System	1	4.2		
Total		24	100.0		

Interview_17

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Y	16	66.7	66.7	66.7
	N	8	33.3	33.3	100.0
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	

Interview_18

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid		1	4.2	4.2	4.2
	2	1	4.2	4.2	8.3
	99%	1	4.2	4.2	12.5
	honesty	1	4.2	4.2	16.7
	hospitality	1	4.2	4.2	20.8
	Kind	1	4.2	4.2	25.0
	love	6	25.0	25.0	50.0
	motivation	1	4.2	4.2	54.2
	multilingual	1	4.2	4.2	58.3
	n/a	2	8.3	8.3	66.7
	sincerity	1	4.2	4.2	70.8
	unity	7	29.2	29.2	100.0
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	

Interview_19

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Y	20	83.3	83.3	83.3
	N	4	16.7	16.7	100.0
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	

Interview_20

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Y	19	79.2	82.6	82.6
	N	4	16.7	17.4	100.0
	Total	23	95.8	100.0	
Missing	System	1	4.2		
Total		24	100.0		

Exhibit_1

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Tribe	21	87.5	87.5	87.5
	Burma	3	12.5	12.5	100.0
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	

Exhibit_2

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Tribe	17	70.8	70.8	70.8
	Xtian	7	29.2	29.2	100.0
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	

Exhibit_3

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Y	8	33.3	33.3	33.3
	N	16	66.7	66.7	100.0
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	

Exhibit_4

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Y	14	58.3	58.3	58.3
	N	10	41.7	41.7	100.0
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	

Exhibit_5

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Y	8	33.3	33.3	33.3
	N	16	66.7	66.7	100.0
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	

Exhibit_6

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Y	7	29.2	29.2	29.2
	N	17	70.8	70.8	100.0
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	

Exhibit_7

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Y	3	12.5	12.5	12.5
	N	21	87.5	87.5	100.0
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	

Exhibit_8

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Y	7	29.2	29.2	29.2
	N	17	70.8	70.8	100.0
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	

Exhibit_9

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Y	7	29.2	29.2	29.2
	N	17	70.8	70.8	100.0
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	

Exhibit_10

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Agree	18	75.0	75.0	75.0
	Disagree	6	25.0	25.0	100.0
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	

Age

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	15-19	3	12.5	12.5	12.5
	20-29	17	70.8	70.8	83.3
	30-39	4	16.7	16.7	100.0
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	

Gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	M	14	58.3	58.3	58.3
	F	10	41.7	41.7	100.0
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	

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