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A REINTERPRETATION OF CHIN CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY BEYOND ONE
CENTURY IN THE LIGHT OF MARTIN LUTHER'S *FREEDOM OF A CHRISTIAN*

by

BAWIDUA

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

Luther Seminary

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines a brief history of Chin Christianity which primarily focuses on the *hlimsang* movement, the revival movement, and the free evangelist movement that impacted contemporary Chin Christians' understanding of Christian spirituality. The preachers of the three movements solely emphasized Martin Luther's notion of "justification by grace through faith alone." Unfortunately, they minimize the preaching and teaching of the good life and works in Christian life which Luther emphasized and discussed in his treatise *Freedom of a Christian*. As a result, Chin Christians emphasize too much the significance of Christian spirituality with emotional expressions in the worship service. Faith and Good works and the good life are not balanced enough.

Therefore, this thesis briefly examines Christian spirituality in the Bible and in the history of Christianity in order align the Chin Christians' misunderstandings of Christian spirituality with biblical spirituality. This research finds that Luther never rejected the good life and works in the Christian life as found in *Freedom of a Christian*.

This thesis also attempts to stress that Christian spirituality goes way beyond an emotional feeling. It is a long spiritual journey that walks with the Spirit and keeps in step with the Spirit until the end of our mortal life on the earth. Christian spirituality is described as quality of life in which inner faith in Christ is lived out through the good life and good works.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Generally, the word “spirituality” is very broad. Every religion uses the word “spirituality” (like Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Confucianism, Taoism), and some people also claim to be “spiritual but not religious,” viewing spirituality as a human phenomenon. This research project will focus on Christian spirituality based on Christian beliefs as it relates to Christian life, and specifically about Chin Christian spirituality. The Chin are an ethnic group in Myanmar/Burma.

Through the preaching of evangelists or crusaders, numbers of Chin Christians have increasingly become interested in spiritual persons and spirituality. However, most Chin Christians do not really understand the authentic meaning of Christian spirituality and what kind of Christians these spiritual persons are. I once posted “what kind of Christians are spiritual persons?” on my Facebook Timeline. Most comments stated that spiritual persons are those who actively dance, sing, and shout “Hallelujah!” and “Amen!” in worship services. For them, preachers who preach inactively or reservedly are non-spiritual preachers. Generally, most Chin Christians measure whether others are spiritual or not by their manners in worship service, not by daily life. Christian spirituality is not a characteristic to be seen only in the church. Rather, a person’s spirituality is to be seen in community and society as well as in the church by his or her

good life and service for others. Every believer has been freed in Jesus Christ by grace through faith to continue to live good lives and to serve others.

According to Alister E. McGrath, Christian spirituality is “the way in which the Christian life is conceived and lived out. Christian spirituality is reflection on the whole Christian enterprise of achieving and sustaining a relationship with God, which includes both public worship and private devotion, and the results of these in actual Christian life.”¹ In this research, Christian spirituality will refer to how we live out faith within all relationships in Christian community as well as in society by the power of the Holy Spirit in our daily life.

Background of the Research

Who are the Chins? The Chins are one of the ethnic groups in Myanmar along with the Burman, Kachin, Karen, Kayah, Shan, Mon, and Rakhine. According to Pum Za Mang, their “ancestral homeland is divided into Chin State in western Burma, Mizoram State and part of Manipur State in North-east India and the Chittagong Hills in Bangladesh as a direct result of British colonisation.”² According to Mang, the Chins are estimated to number over 3 million (about 1.5 million in Burma, 1.6 million in India and 50,000 in Bangladesh).³ Traditionally, it is believed that the Chins “came out of the

¹ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Spirituality: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1999), 2.

² Pum Za Mang, “The Politics of Religious Conversion among the Ethnic Chin in Burma,” *Studies in World Christianity* 24, no. 3 (2018): 188-189.

³ Ibid.

bowels of the earth or a cave called Chin-lung or Cin-lung.”⁴ No one knows the exact location of Chin-lung. Some historians believe that Chin-lung is located somewhere in China. Other scholars believe it is located in Tibet or Chindwin.⁵ However, Chin historians agree that the Chins originated from a cave called Chin-lung around 255 BC.⁶ The Chins themselves are ethnically and linguistically diverse.⁷ They have six major tribes: Asho, Cho (Sho), Khuami, Laimi (Hakha, Falam), Mizo and Zomi (Tiddim), some of which have different clans. According to Human Rights Report in 2009, “at least six primary Chin tribal groups can be identified and sub-categorized into 63 sub-tribes, speaking at least 20 mutually unintelligible dialects.”⁸ It is interesting to note that they have no common language. In communicating with other Chin ethnicities, they speak Burmese.

They already had some beliefs that were closely related to Christian beliefs, such as the concept of a Supreme God (*Khuazing*), life after death, sacrificial ceremonies, priest, and evil spirits.⁹ The first Christian missionaries, Rev. Arthur E. Carson and Laura Carson, from the United States, arrived on March 15, 1899 at Hakha, the capital of Chin

⁴ Lian H. Sakhong, *In Search of Chin Identity: A Study in Religion, Politics and Ethnic Identity in Burma* (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2003), 5. Sakhong defines the literal meaning of “Chin-lung” as “the cave or the hole of the Chin.”

⁵ *Ibid.*, 6-11.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

⁷ Human Rights Watch, “*We Are Like Forgotten People*”: *The Chin People of Burmas: Unsafe in Burma, Unprotected in India* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2009), 9. This report is available at <https://www.hrw.org/report/2009/01/27/we-are-forgotten-people/chin-people-burma-unsafe-burma-unprotected-india>.

⁸ Human Rights Watch, “We Are Like Forgotten People,” 9.

⁹ Sakhong, *In Search of Chin Identity*, 23-48.

State. From 1899 to 1966, the year that the Burmese socialist government expelled all the foreign missionaries from the country, Chin Christians had seven American Baptist missionary couples: Arthur Eric Carson and Laura Hardin Carson, Erick Hjamar and Emily Johnson East, Joseph Herbert and Elizabeth Smith Cope, John Gustav and Bessie Livers Woodin, Chester U. and Florence Talbot Strait, Franklin O. and Phileda Ogren Nelson, and Roberth Gustav and Elizabeth Lue Johnson. Due to God's blessing on the foreign and local missionaries' sacrifice, Christians now make up 85.3 percent of the total population of Chin State according to 2014 census of Chin State, Myanmar.¹⁰ Chin Christians celebrated the Chin Christian Centenary in 1999. By the late middle of the 20th century, after 40 years of Christianity in the Chin Hills, the Hlimesang Movement, Revival Movement, and Free Evangelist Movement became popular among the Chin Christians.

Statement of the Problem

The spirituality of the early Chin Christians emphasized less on emotion in church worship service but more on good Christian characters such as faithfulness, righteousness, justice, forgiveness, and serving others out of love, even though they did not deeply know the Bible and Christian doctrines. They were very enthusiastic in evangelizing to non-Christians. Every Christian was a missionary—at least to their closest neighbors. However, due to the impacts of the movements of Hlimesang, Revival, and Free Evangelism among the Chin Christians, Chin Christian spirituality started to emphasize more on emotional activities in worship services like dancing, clapping or

¹⁰ The Chinland Post, "Chin Ramkulh Chung I Peng Kip Ah Biaknak Dang Cio Cazin," <http://www.thechinlandpost.com/chin/chin-news/1784-chin-ramkulh-chung-i-peng-kip-ah-biaknak-dang-cio-cazin>, accessed December 8, 2017. According to the 2014 census, the total population of Chin State is 477253. By religion, Christians number 407,005, Buddhists 66,978, Laipian 3030, Muslims 105, and Hindus 78.

raising hands, and shouting “Halleluiah” and “Amen!” The impact of revival movement among the Naga Baptist Christians is very similar to that of Chin Christians. According to Imliwabang Jamir, the Naga Baptist Christians’ understanding of being filled with the Holy Spirit is “to become emotional during worship services, shedding tears and crying aloud while praying and preaching, shouting and jumping while singing, and having similar characteristic qualities.”¹¹ The Naga Baptist Christians also understands life in the power of being filled with the Spirit as a way that “dreams, visions, prophecy, and future prediction becomes the criteria for determining whether a person is filled with the Holy Spirit or not.”¹²

The evangelists strongly emphasize Luther’s key theology, justification by faith alone. They also preach about freedom in Christ by grace through faith alone. But they preach less about freedom for the service of neighbors. In his *Freedom of a Christian*, Martin Luther discusses the “inner person” and “outer person.” According to Timothy J. Wengert, “The inner person is free lord” and “the outer person is servant of all.”¹³ The evangelists hide the outer person as servant of all. Therefore, this research attempts to reinterpret Chin Christians’ understanding the freedom of a Christian. This research also attempts to discuss how Luther’s notion of justification that marked a crucial turning point in Christian theology relates to Christian spirituality. In his *Freedom of a Christian*,

¹¹ Imliwabang Jamir, *Vocation in Christ: Naga Christian Theology in Conversation with Karl Barth* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2016), 45.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Timothy J. Wengert, “Martin Luther (1483-1546): The Freedom of a Christian,” *Christian Spirituality: The Classic*, ed. Arthur Holder (New York: Routledge, 2010), 187, 189.

Luther speaks of not only faith, but also Christian life. By freedom of a Christian, Luther tried to make sense Christian life in community and society.

Because Myanmar's people, including the Chins, used to live under military dictatorship rule for more than 50 years, people love very much the word "freedom," but many people do not understand the real meaning of the word "freedom." Everyone wants to be free to do what he or she wants to do and to live as he or she wants to. But in reality, freedom does not mean that we are free to do everything we want to do. Myanmar changed to a democratic country in 2010. In this transition period, the people need to know the right meaning of freedom so that they do not abuse their freedom and do use it for the well-being of church, community and society. Particularly, Chin Christians need to understand the real meaning of Christian freedom. When it comes to Christian freedom, Martin Luther's *Freedom of a Christian* is the clearest and the most meaningful treatise. For this reason, to reinterpret the Chin Christians' understanding of Christian freedom, the researcher chooses Luther's *Freedom of a Christian*.

Regarding Christian spirituality, some Christians claim, "I am spiritual but not religious." In her book *When "Spiritual But Not Religious" Is Not Enough*, Lillian Daniel writes that a man once told her, "I'm spiritual but not religious, and I want to give you my testimony, if you will, about why I do not attend church."¹⁴ For Lillian, this claim "I'm spiritual but not religious" is not enough. As a spiritual person, attending church and finding spiritual vitality in community is also important. It is a challenge for how we

¹⁴ Lillian Daniel, *When "Spiritual But Not Religious" Is Not Enough: Seeing God in Surprising Places, Even the Church* (Nashville: Jericho Books, 2013), 3.

define the term “spiritual” or “spirituality.” Therefore, this research seeks a contemporary definition of the word “spirituality,” and what being a spiritual person means.

The Nature of the Research

This research is an academic and practical approach of research from a Baptist view. To achieve the goals of the research, the research is based on library resources of Luther Seminary, Dallas Theological Seminary, archive of American Baptist Historical Society, Atlanta, and private books. All the selected books, unpublished thesis and dissertations, and articles are available to the researcher through Luther’s library and its interlibrary loan, Dallas Theological Seminary’s library, and my own books. Then, American Baptist Chin missionaries’ reports used in this research are taken from the microfilm of the American Baptist Historical Society’s archive. In addition, local websites are also used as needed to capture the current situation of Chin Christianity and spirituality.

Purposes and Questions of the Research

Chin Christians’ understanding of Christian spirituality as emotionalism, which appreciates the gifts of the Holy Spirits but depreciates the fruits of the Holy Spirit, is the main problem that motivates the researcher to reinterpret Chin Christian spirituality. The purposes of the research are:

1. To explore Chin Christians’ misunderstanding of Christian spirituality and to create a new authentic interpretation of Christian spirituality and the work of the Holy Spirit in Christian spirituality for the Chin Christians and to contribute some spiritual discipline for spiritual growth.

2. To introduce Martin Luther's road to Christian freedom and his *Freedom of a Christian* so that my readers might know more about the life and thought of Martin Luther the Reformer, and the relationship between his key notion of justification by faith and Christian spirituality in terms of the "Freedom of a Christian."
3. To explore a brief history of Chin Christianity and of spiritual movements among Chin Christians in Myanmar.
4. To contribute a resource for the study of Chin Christian spirituality.

The leading questions of this study are as follows: What are the Chin Christians' inauthentic understandings of Christian spirituality and the freedom of a Christian that need to be reinterpreted beyond one century of Chin Christianity? What is authentic Christian spirituality? What are the works of the Holy Spirit in Christian spirituality? What are the most appropriate spiritual disciplines for Chin Christians?

Thesis Statement

Christian spirituality is the outworking in real life of the inner faith for the service of others out of love and willingly using our freedom in Jesus Christ by faith through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit in our daily life. Christian spirituality begins with the freedom of a Christian or justification by faith in Christ. In his *Freedom of a Christian*, Luther firmly believed that a Christian is freed or justified by faith alone from the power of the death apart from good works. Precisely, freedom of a Christian is a gift of God. It is not by good works. However, it is for good works. We are freed by faith in Christ to do good works for others out of love. Our freedom is to be used for the good works of our church, community and society through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit

in our daily life. Christian spirituality is living out of our faith in Christ. The Holy Spirit empowers and strengthens a freed Christian in order to live out faith in Christ. Christian spirituality is to be seen not only in the church, but also outside of the church. Through our spirituality in daily life, to God be the glory.

CHAPTER 2

AN OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY OF CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

This chapter will be a very brief overview of the study of Christian spirituality, including the definition of spirituality and Christian spirituality, the relationship of mysticism, theology and personality to spirituality, Christian spirituality in the Bible and in the history of Christianity, and considerations of different denominations regarding Christian spirituality. Christian spirituality has never been seen as a static or ready-made, but as a process, renewing, and transforming by the power of the Holy Spirit in our daily life. Christian spirituality is life living out our faith in community, society, and workplaces as well as in the church.

Defining “Spirituality”

In a broad sense, the term “spirituality,” according to Philip Sheldrake, is a word that “stands for lifestyles and practices that embody a vision of human existence and of how the human spirit is to achieve its full potential.”¹ In his understanding of spirituality, David B. Perrin describes, “authentic spirituality is not to be identified with only one part of the life of the person, cut off from other aspects. ‘Spiritual life’ is not separate from ‘body life,’ from the entire sphere of human action and human desire.”² Perrin continues

¹ Philip Sheldrake, *Spirituality: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1.

² David B. Perrin, *Studying Christian Spirituality* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 17.

to define the word spirituality as the meaningful involvement and commitment to a particular religious or spiritual set of belief, rituals and ethics, which shape the way people live and allow them to integrate their lives.³ For Alister E. McGrath, a historical theologian, there are three main elements in thinking about spirituality, beliefs, values, and a way of life.⁴ McGrath goes on to define spirituality as “about the life of faith—what drives and motivates it, and what people find helpful in sustaining and developing it. . . . Spirituality is outworking in real life of a person’s religious faith—that a person *does* with what they believe.”⁵

In a Christian view, for Sheldrake, the word “spirituality” originated in Christianity with the Latin adjective *spiritualis*, or “spiritual,” which is derived from the Greek adjective *pneumatikos*. In the New Testament, especially in Paul’s usage, “spirit” and “spiritual” are not the opposite of “physical” or “material” (Greek *soma*) but of “flesh” (Greek *sarx*), which refers to everything that is contrary to the Spirit of God.⁶ Simply, for Sheldrake, “a spiritual person” (1 Cor. 2, 14-15) is “someone within whom the Holy Spirit dwelt or who lived under the influence of the Spirit.”⁷

To sum up, in a general view of all humans, the contemporary meaning of spirituality considers the whole human existence and all aspects of life, or the whole

³ Ibid., 20.

⁴ McGrath, *Christian Spirituality*, 3.

⁵ Ibid., 2.

⁶ Philip Sheldrake, *Spirituality: A Brief History* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 2.

⁷ Ibid.

meaning of life. In other words, spirituality concerns life as a whole. In the particular view of Christians, spirituality is to be considered as the state of intimate relationship to God, which shapes everyday life, constructs hope and the meaning of life in the midst of daily life in our society and community as well as in our church.

Defining “Christian Spirituality”

In Christianity, spirituality is not just about ideas, but it is about the way in which the Christian life is conceived and lived out. Christian spirituality concerns the living out of the encounter with Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. McGrath clearly defines Christian spirituality:

The term “Christian spirituality” refers to the way in which the Christian life is understood and the explicitly devotional practices which have been developed to foster and sustain that relationship with Christ. Christian spirituality may be thus understood as the way in which Christian individuals or groups aim to deepen their experience of God, or to “practise the presence of God,” to use a phrase especially associated with Brother Lawrence (c.1614-91).⁸

Timothy C. Geoffrion, a teacher, spiritual life coach and consultant, defines Christian spirituality as “the nature and quality of our relationship to God—both how we know and experience God and how we live out our faith in our relationships and in every other aspect of our life.”⁹ There are two things that directly related to Christian spirituality, vitality and transformation. For Geoffrion, spiritual vitality is “a right relationship with God, grounded in God, the Father (Creator and Loving Parent), marked by faith in and devotion to Jesus Christ, and dependent on the active presence of the Holy

⁸ McGrath, *Christian Spirituality*, 3.

⁹ Timothy C. Geoffrion, *One Step at a Time: A Pilgrim’s Guide to Spirit-Led Living* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2008), 5.

Spirit working in and through the believer's life."¹⁰ When Geoffrion thinks of the life of the spiritually vital Christians, he understands that "spiritually vital Christians develop a faith-based orientation toward life, a godly frame of reference for interpreting their experiences, power for fulfilling their purpose, and meaning for human existence."¹¹ For him, key to spiritual vitality is the Holy Spirit. Without the Holy Spirit, our faith would be simply intellectual, self-generated, or guided by other spirits.¹² Geoffrion asserts that "only when we are dynamically engaged with the Holy Spirit does our spirituality truly become Christian, with God as the primary driving force in our relationship with God. . . . [T]he key to fulfilling our purpose in life is God's presence and working in us through the Holy Spirit."¹³ Spiritual transformation is a spiritual journey which begins by "gratefully embracing the God who embraces us in love and by following the Holy Spirit's prompting and leading to order our minds and life in ways that fit with God's will."¹⁴

In quest of Christian spirituality, the relationship between spirituality and religion is a controversial issue because many people today claim to be "spiritual but not religious."¹⁵ J. Harold Ellens notes, "Today most people in our world are feeling less interested in religion and more interested in spirituality."¹⁶ This is a questionable

¹⁰ Ibid., 5.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 6.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Parrin, *Studying Christian Spirituality*, 16.

¹⁶ J. Harold Ellens, *Understanding Religious Experiences: What the Bible Says about Spirituality* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2008), viii.

statement. A question can be raised: Can a person be a spiritual person enough without engaging in any religion? Ellens believes that “a person may practice a religion and be religious without that being connected to his or her spirituality. Conversely, one may be intensely spiritual without being religious or engaging in religious practices.”¹⁷ He also states the difference between religion and spirituality, and says, “While spirituality is the inner quest for meaning, religion is the outward behaviors that seem appropriate to express the meanings we create or discover inside ourselves in this quest, and that we want to act out with each other or toward God.”¹⁸ He rightly makes a statement on the difference between religion and spirituality. However, spirituality that seeks the inner faith and peace, and religion that concerns the “outward behaviors” have to go hand in hand in our daily life. Spirituality and religion are an inseparable element in Christian spirituality. For Christians, Bloesch asserts that a true religion is a religion purified and reformed by the Word of God.¹⁹ A person without religious commitment, who claim to be “spiritual but not religious” cannot be recognized as an authentic spiritual person. Lillian Daniel wrote a book entitled *When “Spiritual but Not Religious” Is Not Enough*.²⁰ The author tried to make sense that a spiritual person is to be involved actively in his or her religious affairs like worship programs, services and ministries through many different ways. The researcher supports Bloesch’s claim that, “spirituality is a way we

¹⁷ Ibid., 1.

¹⁸ Ibid., 2.

¹⁹ Donald G. Bloesch, *Spirituality Old & New: Recovering Authentic Spiritual Life* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2007), 27.

²⁰ Daniel, *When “Spiritual But Not Religious” Is Not Enough: Seeing God in Surprising Places, Even the Church* (New York: Jerico Books, 2013).

live out our religious commitment.”²¹ Christian spirituality without religious commitment and engagement in religious practices, ministries and activities cannot be considered an authentic Christian spirituality.

To explore inauthentic Chin Christians’ understandings of Christian spirituality, this research examines three points. The first point is to view Christian spirituality as one element among many in Christian existence. Many Chin Christians consider Christian spirituality as only a spiritual matter like actively and lively singing, dancing, clapping or raising hands and shouting “Hallelujah! Amen,” preaching, and speaking in tongues in worship services in the church. The contemporary meaning of Christian spirituality pays attention to “what is holistic—that is, a fully integrated approach to life.”²² Traditionally, Christians consider spirituality as holy. The Old English word for “holy” is “halig,” which means “whole” or “complete.” It is also related to the ancient Greek “holos.” In this sense, Christian spirituality is best understood as Christian “life-as-a-whole,”²³ not just spiritual matters.

Authentic Christian spirituality concerns serving others in order that they may grow up in every aspect of life. Bloesch meaningfully states,

True spirituality entails the sacrifice of the self for the good of our neighbor and for the glory of God. It means serving the despised and forsaken of the world for the sake of Jesus Christ, who died on the cross and rose again so that all might

²¹ Bloesch, *Spirituality Old & New*, 28.

²² Sheldrake, *Spirituality: A Brief History*, 3.

²³ *Ibid.*

live. It entails letting the light of God's glory as we see this in Jesus Christ shine in every aspect of our existence.²⁴

True Christian spirituality is a call for living for the good of others. The true spiritual person lives not for their own glory and happiness, but for the glory of God, for elevating humanity to the fellowship with the living God, and for the restoration of true humanity. A true spiritual person also bears witness through his or her words and deeds to what God has done for him or her in Christ.²⁵

Second, many Chin Christians regard Christian spirituality as a solely individual matter. One may argue that since spirituality concerns personal experience, well-being, inner harmony and happiness, Christian spirituality is an individualistic matter. Truly, personal relationship with God and personal inner peace are essentially important in Christian spirituality, but these are not enough. True Christian spirituality does not end individualism. It is concerned with the good and peace of our community and society. Precisely, Christian spirituality is not only individual but also communal. Our spirituality is the well-being of our community and society. Therefore, viewing Christian spirituality as an individualistic matter is an inauthentic Christian spirituality.

Third, the other inauthentic Chin Christians' understanding of Christian spirituality is that their greatest emphasis is on emotion and feeling in worship services. In reality, Christian spirituality is spirituality of service or mission rather than emotion and feeling. Christian spirituality begins with faith in Jesus Christ. Through faith in Jesus

²⁴ Bloesch, *Spirituality Old & New*, 29.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 30.

Christ, we are freed and made righteous before God. In Jesus Christ, we are a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). Through faith in Jesus Christ, we have new nature and life to do good works. This is God's gracious gift out of His grace. We are saved by faith, not by works (Eph. 2:8-9). Then, we are saved and freed for good works (Eph. 2:10). Our freedom in Christ is for the service of others out of love that bases on God's unconditional love to us. Christian spirituality without service or mission is an inauthentic Christian spirituality.

Spirituality, Mysticism, Theology and Personality

The term spirituality and mysticism are synonymously used to indicate an authentic personal relationship with God or personal inner experience of God. Some writers understand both terms are just different ways of speaking about personal relationship with God while others see mysticism as a special type of spirituality that more deeply emphasize on a direct personal experience of God.²⁶ Needless to say, in this research, the term "mysticism" is avoided because it is more confusing than spirituality.

Christian spirituality is a correlation of theology and experience. The present work agrees with McGrath when he notes, "Spirituality is not something that is deduced totally from theological presuppositions, nor is it something which is inferred totally from our experience."²⁷ A theology requires personal experience as well as personal experience requires theological reflections. McGrath continues to say, "It arises from a creative and dynamic synthesis of faith and life, forged in the crucible of the desire to live

²⁶ McGrath, *Christian Spirituality*, 5.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

out the Christian faith authentically, responsibly, effectively, and fully.”²⁸ Therefore, spirituality, theology and personality are inseparably interrelated.

Christian Spirituality in the Bible

Although the word “spirituality” does not appear in the Bible, the study of Christian spirituality is rooted in the Bible, particularly in the New Testament. In other words, Christian spirituality is biblical spirituality. What are the scriptural markers of Christian spirituality? It is believed that the Bible is God’s revelation to human beings. The peak of God’s revelation to humans is the incarnation of Jesus into human history out of His unconditional love. Out of his grace and love, God gave the best (His only begotten Son) to us, and demands us the best (faith) and promise the best (eternal life) to us (Jn. 3:16). The best thing that God asks us is to have a loving relationship with Him and to join in bringing His Kingdom on the earth. Joining in God’s ministries as a disciple of Jesus is a biblical spirituality.

The writer strongly agrees with Sheldrake when he states, “A fundamental scriptural image for Christian spirituality is discipleship.”²⁹ According to Sheldrake, the notion of discipleship has two related elements. The first is a call to conversion in response to the incoming reign of God (Mk. 1:15). The second is following the way of Jesus. Following the way of Jesus means to adopt and learn his life and to join in the work of building the Kingdom of God (Mk. 1:17).³⁰ In his ministry, Jesus calls people to

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Sheldrake, *Spirituality*, 25.

³⁰ Ibid.

repentance and discipleship. Sheldrake presents four things in a call to discipleship. First, discipleship is not self-chosen but is a response to a call, a response to God's grace. Second, the identity and title of "discipleship" is not given because of social status or because of some kind of religious or moral perfection. Jesus also calls tax-collectors (Mt. 9:9), all kinds of sinners or socially unacceptable people (Mk. 2:15-17). Jesus calls all, regardless of social status or class, which means that Jesus wanted everyone to repent and to welcome the Kingdom of God. Third, the call to discipleship is a radical break with the past that involved leaving family, previous work, possessions (Lk. 14:26; Mk. 2:14; 10:21), indeed everything (Lk. 5:11) for the sake of the gospel. In other words, radical change and transformation mean taking up the cross or losing one's life in order to find it (Mt. 10:38-39). Fourth, the call to discipleship implies sharing in the work of Jesus in bringing God's Kingdom into being. This sharing in the work of Jesus means to take the lowest place or service (Mk. 9:35) or even to give up one's life out of love (Jn 15:12-13).³¹

Jesus calls everyone out of his deep love and gives those who believe in Him "the right to become children of God" (Jn. 1:12). The children of God are co-heirs to God's promise in Jesus (Rom 8:15; Gal. 4:6) and they act as membership of a family or community. This community is described as union and participation as a body, the living body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12-13).³² Actively participating and being involved out of love in the activities and ministries in the church and community as a branch of a body is a

³¹ Ibid., 26.

³² Ibid., 27.

true Christian spirituality. Joining in the work of Jesus Christ that serves people out of love regardless social classes, color, gender with the character and spirit of discipleship is an authentic spirituality. Discipleship is union with Jesus Christ in serving others out of love as Jesus commends us to love God and our neighbors (Matt. 5:38-42). As Jesus was anointed to bring good news to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, to free those who are oppressed (Lk. 4:18), we, disciples of Jesus, are also called to join in these works of Jesus. Therefore, proclaiming good news to the poor and serving them out of love is a biblical spirituality.

Christian Spirituality in History of Christianity

In history of Christianity, the view, understanding, and formation of Christian spirituality have changed and reinterpreted as the situation has changed age by age. For instance, early Christian spirituality and monastic spirituality were pretty different. Early Christians spirituality focused on martyrdom while monastic spirituality on asceticism. Under this topic, the researcher attempts to briefly observe the early Christians spirituality, monastic spiritualities (300-1150), spirituality in the city (1150-1450), spiritualities in the age of reformations (1450-1700), spirituality in an age of reason (1700-1900), and spirituality from modernity to postmodernity (1900-2000), and the twenty-first century spirituality base on Philip Sheldrake's work of *Spirituality: A Brief History*. It is a very broad topic. This work is a briefly overview of that how Christians interpreted and understood Christian spirituality in history of Christianity from early church to the twenty-first century.

Early Christian Spiritualities

The main features of early Christians' spirituality were living as a community and responding to hostility and persecution in the public forum until Christianity became a public religion in the fourth century. According to Acts 2, the early Christians had things in common, and used their possessions and goods for taking care of the poor. They lived as a family. It can be noted that the early Christians spirituality was communal. Within the community of believers, they were sustained by a common life, shared rituals, and expressed really in mutual love and acceptance.³³

Martyrdom was closely related to spirituality in the life of early Christians because they suffered a series of persecutions. During the first four centuries, to be a Christian was to be persecuted and martyred. Martyrdom was an expression of loyalty, sincerity, witness and faithfulness to God, which pushed many people to conversion. Tertullian declared, "The blood of the martyrs was a seed, for the more it was spilled the greater the number of Christians."³⁴ Thus, for the early Christians, according to Sheldrake, "martyrdom became the ultimate symbol of faithful Christian discipleship and thus of Christian holiness."³⁵ Those who had confessed their faith in the midst of cruel torture were called the "confessors," (a new title of honor), and these confessors were highly respected by other Christians.³⁶ Another mark of early Christians' spirituality was

³³ Ibid., 44.

³⁴ Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity: The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation*, Revised and Updated (New York: HarperOne, 2010), 101.

³⁵ Sheldrake, *Spirituality*, 32.

³⁶ Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, 102.

sacrificing life as a martyr. When some Christians fled to other areas because of persecution, they also proclaimed and witnessed Jesus Christ. In the early church, every Christian was a missionary. Therefore, Sheldrake classifies early Christian spirituality as “a way of transformation towards fullness of life in God and at the same time a way of mission through following the way of Jesus and by means of the power of God’s indwelling Spirit.”³⁷ Early Christian spirituality teaches us that considering Christian spirituality as transformation and mission is the true Christian spirituality.

Monastic Spirituality (300-1150)

In times of persecution, martyrs were regarded as the faithful, witnesses, and true Christians. When the persecutions came to an end, martyrdom was no longer a mark of faithfulness. In such circumstances, the Christians considered: Who is a true, faithful Christian? Considering a mark of a faithful Christian led to the idea of monasticism. The birthplace of monasticism is the Egyptian desert. The most remarkable monk of the desert was Anthony (c. 251-356), who was born in a small village on the left shore of the Nile, the son of relatively wealthy parents. The inheritance of his parents was sufficient for his future better life. But he planned to live off his inheritance because he was inspired by the words of Jesus to the young rich ruler: “If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven” (Matt. 19:21). Then, he saved only portion of his property for the care of his sister and the rest was given to

³⁷ Sheldrake, *Spirituality*, 40.

the poor. He also inspired by Jesus' words: "do not be anxious about tomorrow" (Matt. 6:34).³⁸

Anthony's monasticism focused on solitude (quietness not loneliness), memorizing scripture, prayer without ceasing, work, and alms.³⁹ Monasticism was also inspired by Paul's words that those who chose not to marry had greater freedom to serve the Lord. This impulse toward celibacy was often strengthened by the expectation of the immanent return of the Lord. Monastic spirituality was a flight from human society, leaving everything behind, and dominating the body and its passions, which gives way to temptation.⁴⁰ In other words, monastic spirituality concerns isolation from society and living as ascetics and practicing celibacy. Christians in this period thought that asceticism and celibacy as spiritual perfection and an indispensable means of following Jesus Christ.⁴¹

Similar to Anthony, Pachomius' monasticism also focused on memorizing scriptures. However, in contrast to Anthony, Pachomius' monasticism focused on communal life. Pachomius argued that if the center life of Christian is love, how could one practice love if he or she lives a solitary life?⁴² Since Christian spirituality concerns service for others, community life is essentially important in Christian spirituality

³⁸ Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, 162.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 163-164.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 157-158.

⁴¹ Sheldrake, *Spirituality: A Brief History*, 51.

⁴² Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, 164-166.

because one who lives alone has no one to serve. The monastic spiritualities center on the disciplined, exemplary Christian life, the practice of meditating and ruminating upon scripture, and the spread of Christian missions. In the early medieval period up to the eleventh century, Christian missionaries were often monks.⁴³

Spirituality in the City (1150-1450)

From the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries, according to Sheldrake, Christian spirituality was associated with five critical religious and cultural factors: the Gregorian reform, apocalyptic movements, the *vita evangelica* movement, the so-called Twelfth-century Renaissance, and the rebirth of cities.⁴⁴

The Gregorian reform took its name from Pope Gregory VII (1073-1085). The core of the reform was to purify the Church from secular and political domination, and to promote the power of papacy. Finally, the reform failed to satisfy laypeople and resulted a new spirituality that favored evangelical simplicity and piety. There also emerged various radical-popular apocalyptic groups. The apocalyptic movements, based on the Book of Revelation in the New Testament, focused on eschatological fervor concerning the imminent second coming of Christ. One of the most noted apocalyptic prophets was Italian Cistercian abbot Joachim of Fiore. Before his death in 1202, he saw himself as the secret bearer of a new age, the imminent coming of a “third age” of the Holy Spirit. The third factor is the *vita evangelica*; was not an organized movement, mainly concerned for

⁴³ Sheldrake, *Spirituality*, 65-67.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 80.

simplicity and social services based on the Gospels and the literal imitation of the poor and homeless Jesus. The most noted group was the Franciscans in the thirteenth century. Their spirituality was regarded as spirituality of service, ministering to the poor, nursing to the sick, caring for the pilgrims. Fourth, the so-called “Twelfth-Century Renaissance” was begun in Italy, focused mainly on the power of human reason. It developed a religiously based humanism. As a result, the fifth factor, the rebirth of cities, was a transition from rural monasteries to urban cathedral schools and to the new city universities. Previously, “the sacred” was located primarily in rural monastic communities, but in this period, people became to view cathedrals and universities in the cities as a sacred space and as a bearer of religious life and spirituality. Later, Western spirituality developed devotional spirituality that concerned feelings rather than ideas. The devotional spirituality focused on the production of devotional manuals including collections of saints’ lives, handbooks of prayers, books of spiritual guidance and instruction, and collections of structured meditations. However, Eastern Christian spirituality focused on veneration of icons. Eastern Christians saw icons or images as a medium of direct engagement or communion with God and the saints.⁴⁵

Spirituality in the Age of Reformation (1450-1700)

The mid-fifteenth to the end of the seventeenth century was very complex. The Renaissance opened up new ways of knowledge. Sociologically and politically, the feudal system finally collapsed. The crisis of religious authority began with the Great

⁴⁵ Ibid., 80-102.

Schism and continued throughout the fifteenth century.⁴⁶ During this period of complexity, the Reformation was born. According to Sheldrake, there are two seeds that birthed the Reformation, the *devotio moderna* (modern devotion) and Christian humanism. The *devotio moderna* spirituality concerned education, and produced a literary culture and promoted methodical approaches to prayer. Another that birthed the Reformation was Christian humanism. The most influential person for Christian humanism was Desiderius Erasmus (1469-1536), a priest and theologian, whose primary concern was to revive Christian virtue. Concerning external rituals like veneration of relics and invocation of the saints, processions and pilgrimages, Passion devotion, and the excessive practice of penances, Erasmus focused on human effort rather than God's grace. In contrast to Erasmus, Martin Luther (1483-1546), the Reformer, focused on God's grace.⁴⁷ The essence of the spirituality of the Reformation elevated by Martin Luther is the spirituality that deeply concerns the relationship between the gracious God and the saved sinner. For Luther, the keys to authentic spirituality, according to Sheldrake, were "first, being clear about human sinfulness yet also about God's generous forgiveness and, second, having regular access to the means of God's grace—that is, the scriptures and sacraments."⁴⁸

Although the Reformation of the sixteenth century has many themes and aspects, according to Herman J. Selderhuis, "the decisive theme is clear: justification through

⁴⁶ Ibid., 112.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 113-115.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 115-116.

faith alone.”⁴⁹ In this period, Christians were dominated by the constant fear of being eternally damned and ending up in hell; freedom from such fear largely depend on one’s own lifestyle and good works. In this context, Martin Luther pointed out long-forgotten words of the Bible which said that people were justified by faith and not by works. Luther considered salvation as a gift of gracious God, not a task of humans. Luther’s doctrine of justification by faith, for Selderhuis, led people to see “God less as Judge and more as Father, and to see themselves less as slaves and more as children. The fear of God was replaced by love of God.”⁵⁰ Selderhuis notes that “Reformation spirituality is characterized by the desire to make myself less in order that Christ can grow in me.”⁵¹ It can be noted that the spirituality of the Reformation rooted in the love of gracious God rather than human efforts. Out of great mercy and grace, God gave his begotten Son, Jesus Christ. By faith in Christ, people are justified and made righteous before God. Luther said, “Christians are not made righteous in doing righteous things, but being now made righteous by faith in Christ, they do righteous things.”⁵² In short, the Reformation spirituality concerns a deep and joyful relation of faith and trust between God and the believer and keeps its focus on a practical faith and society. The relationship between justification and spirituality will be discussed in more detail in chapter three.

⁴⁹ Herman J. Selderhuis, “The Protestant Tradition in Europe (16th to 19th Centuries),” *The Story of Christian Spirituality*, eds., Gordon Mursell (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 166.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 168.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*, 171.

Spirituality in an Age of Reason (1700-1900)

Some view the eighteenth century as spiritually dead. However, Sheldrake comments that this is an unfair conclusion because “much was going on that would flower in the late nineteenth century (and even more in the twentieth century) in new and creative directions.”⁵³ It is sure that during the past three centuries Christians in Europe and North America faced enormous challenges in their faith. A dominant philosophy was Nominalism (associated with the Franciscan William of Ockham) that stressed a separation of faith from reason or science. The nominalists would argue that God was ultimately unknowable and therefore could not be revealed through reason or the natural world. As a result, theology, faith, and spirituality were on one side and human knowledge (philosophy and science) were on the other.⁵⁴ In this modern period, human reason and knowledge took more space than God in the mind of humans. People more engaged science and philosophy than theology or faith. The separation of science and faith has often identified as the process of secularization or “de-traditionalization.”⁵⁵ Modern secularization led Christian teachings to emphasizing moral obligations and justice. Thus, Christian spirituality effectively became ethics.⁵⁶ Personal autonomy became the sole arbiter of what is true, good, or beautiful and in embracing and following belief systems, social practices, or religious traditions. This thinking enlarged the idea of

⁵³ Sheldrake, *Spirituality*, 147.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 147.

⁵⁵ Diana Butler Bass and Joseph Stewart-Sicking, “Christian Spirituality in Europe and North America since 1700,” *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Spirituality*, ed. Authur Holder (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005), 140.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 148.

freedom of individual religious conscience.⁵⁷ It is important that the freedom of individual religious conscience not to result the decline of formal structures of Christian organizations, beliefs and practices.

German Pietism was a dominant spirituality in this period. Pietism emphasized the presence of God in everyday life, genuine conversation to God, inner transformation, and holiness of life expressed in good works rather than a mere affirmation of doctrinal orthodoxy. Pietism influenced John Wesley in a part. Paying attention to personal holiness, John Wesley was increasingly fired by a desire to evangelize. Wesley's understanding of scriptural holiness was a spirituality that combined prayer and action (faith and works). Wesley accepted justification by faith but rejected Calvinist ideas of limited atonement. He preached Arminianism, a universal offer of salvation.⁵⁸

Other significant spiritual movements in this period were the Great Awakening and the Shakers. A key figure in the "Great Awakening" in the mid-eighteenth-century America was Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758). The message of the Great Awakening emphasized the necessity of personal conversion, new birth, and the presence and work of the Holy Spirit. Edwards wrote against an excessive emotionalism, but accepted "holy affections" (i.e., emotions, passions, and inward experience). The Shakers, led by Ann Lee (1736-1784), emerged along with a Spirit-filled worship that included ecstatic dancing. They believed that they were called by God's Spirit to seek a greater light in

⁵⁷ Bass, "Christian Spirituality in Europe and North America since 1700," 140.

⁵⁸ Sheldrake, *Spirituality*, 150-152.

order to pursue spiritual perfection. They concerned more about inward experiences than outward actions.⁵⁹

The spirituality of the English Evangelicals led by the Wesley brothers (John Wesley and Charles Wesley), William Cowper (1731-1800) and John Newton (1725-1807) was also a significant spirituality in this period.⁶⁰ Sheldrake notes six central characteristics of the English Evangelical spirituality.

First, the centrality of the Bible was preached as the moral and spiritual touchstone of life. Through hearing the word of God, people experienced both the need for and assurance of salvation. Second, everyone needed conversion. This implied an inner transformation which in turn involved a deepening relationship with Christ. Third, the cross of Christ was at the heart of the human experience of salvation. Consequently, conversion implied giving up one's own way and following the crucified savior. Fourth, following this way necessarily led to a serious sense of moral responsibility. Fifth, prayer should accompany all aspects of life, personal, family, and social—and this involved serious Bible reading as a means of spiritual growth. Finally, conversion to Christ implied a life of action.⁶¹

Spirituality from Modernity to Postmodernity (1900-2000)

The twentieth century was a transition from modernity to postmodernity. Modernity implies confidence in the power of human reason to address any question. The century was also a period of immense change, culturally, socially, politically, and religiously. Two world wars happened, European empires declined, colonialism in Asia and Africa ended, optimistic attempts to create international organization for peace and economic cooperation such as the United Nations and the European Union were formed,

⁵⁹ Ibid., 153-155.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 162.

⁶¹ Ibid

international travel and communication (radio, television, and information technology) rapidly developed,⁶² multicultural populations were accepted in Europe and the United States, and the world religions are moving toward a better understanding of one another.⁶³ Postmodernity views the world as radically plural and cultural, religious and ethnic diversity as the fundamental reality of human existence.⁶⁴

Surely, the major social, political, religious and cultural changes had a serious impact on Christian spirituality. Sheldrake summarizes the impacts of such changes in three elements. 1. In Europe in particular, institutional religion noticeably declined; 2. The previous hard boundaries both within Christianity and between Christianity and other faiths began to erode and then the ecumenical movement was born in the early twentieth century and by the end of the century had extended to a wider inter-religious dialogue; 3. Christianity became truly global.⁶⁵

Christian spirituality became to express a sense that inward transformation and outward action are to be integrated for a more complete spirituality. Growth in spirituality concerns ecumenical friendship (spiritualities of reconciliation one another), inter-religious dialogue, social justice, world peace (by Thomas Merton and Dorothy Day),

⁶² Ibid., 174.

⁶³ Bradley P. Holt, "Spiritualities of the Twentieth Century," *The Story of Christian Spirituality*, eds., Gordon Mursell (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 307.

⁶⁴ Sheldrake, *Spirituality: A Brief History*, 175.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

liberation of the oppressed and marginalized (spiritualities of liberation by Gustavo Gutierrez), and a costly commitment to a living God (by Dietrich Bonhoeffer).⁶⁶

Through an evangelical revival at Azusa Street in Los Angeles in 1906 under the inspiration of the African American ecumenist William Seymour (1870-1922), modern charismatic spirituality was born. This movement gave birth to the Pentecostal family of churches, emphasizing on baptism in the Spirit, the active presence and word of the Holy Spirit, speaking with tongues, the gift of prophecy and the Spirit, interpretation of the speaking, healing, a spirituality of praise, and the need to spread radical spiritual renewal.⁶⁷

Spirituality in Twenty-First Century

In the twenty-first century, according to Sheldrake, we face three realities when we think of Christian spirituality: a globalized world, cyberspace, and inter-religious encounter.⁶⁸ First, we live in an increasingly globalized world. In fact, Christian spirituality has not been seen mainly as a European or Western possession. The people of Africa, Asia and Latin America are not merely passive recipient of spiritual wisdom imported from the west. They have been contributing many kinds of their indigenous Christian spirituality. Second, the impact of information technology and of communication through the Internet presents a major challenge to Christian spirituality. Through the social media, we hear and read many kinds of news, teachings, and opinions,

⁶⁶ Ibid., 177-184.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 199-200.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 205-210.

and see many kinds of life style. Therefore, the right discernment is necessarily important to us. Third, religious plurality is another reality that we face in the twenty-first century Christian spirituality. Therefore, awareness of religious plurality and mutual respect of religions becomes essential. However, it is important to keep maintaining the uniqueness of Christian spirituality in meeting with other religions without neglecting and ignoring their religious values.

As we live in a multi-cultural and multi-faith world, Christian spirituality concerns spiritual values in business and economics and in the workplace. As a Christian, to show Christian spiritual values in the workplace becomes an essentially important Christian spirituality. Christian spirituality relates to human purpose and meaning and concerns human well-being and flourishing in the world of business and commerce. Then, the world is rapidly becoming urbanized, Christian spirituality relates to city spirituality that concerns “open-minded space,” and the “common good.”⁶⁹ Since our world is facing lots of environmental crises, the twenty-first century Christian spirituality also concerns eco-spirituality that focuses on environmental ethics and viewing nature as a part of us. Since Christian spirituality is built on a certain foundation that believes that God acts in the world and in human lives, and has embraced human condition in the person of Jesus Christ, Christian spirituality also has a deep concern on human existence and what will lead it to ultimate fulfillment.⁷⁰ In this sense, Christian spirituality is a long journey away from self-centered attachment towards the abundant life (John 10:10).

⁶⁹ Ibid., 217-218.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 221.

Denominational Considerations

Each denomination might have different concerns and value regarding Christian spirituality. For this research, it is very broad to convey the distinctive spiritualities of all denominations. Thus, the present work attempts to present the Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant spirituality very briefly based on the work of Alister E. McGrath's *Christian Spirituality: An Introduction*.

Catholic Christians Spirituality

The term “catholic” here refers to Roman Catholicism, which is the largest denomination in the world. Frankly speaking, as a non-Catholic Christian, it is very difficult to summarize the distinctive ethos of Catholic spirituality. McGrath points out four major elements which are particularly important in relation to spirituality. First, for Catholics, church is generally seen as a visible divine institution, whose structures are grounded in divine reality. Second, Catholics are strongly liturgical. The forms of their prayers and worships are fixed and laid down centrally, and inextricably bound up to what the church believes. They consider the liturgy as a public statement of the beliefs and values of the church. Third, Catholics are strongly sacramental. They recognize seven sacraments. The sacraments are essentially important to their spirituality. Fourth, the Catholics strongly emphasize the role of the saints in general, and the Virgin Mary in particular in their spirituality because they believe that the saints and Mary act as intercessors for both the living and the dead.⁷¹

⁷¹ McGrath, *Christian Spirituality*, 14-15.

Orthodox Christians Spirituality

Orthodox Christians trace their liturgy and doctrines directly back to the early church. Numerically, they are the majority in eastern Europe, particularly in Russia and Greece. McGrath included the following points to describe the distinctive ethos of Orthodox spirituality. First, they have a strong sense of historical continuity with the early church. Their spirituality is deeply rooted in the writing of the Greek fathers like Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus, John of Damascus. For them, tradition is crucially important as a resource for building their spirituality because they see it as a living entity. Second, their theologically distinctive ideas that the Spirit proceeds from the Father alone, and of their understanding of salvation as “deification,” which is the idea that God became human, in order that humans might become God, are immensely important for spirituality. Third, icons like the pictures of Jesus Christ, Mary, and other religious figures are helpful for their spirituality because they consider icons as the “window of perception,” through which the believer may realize the divine reality. Fourth, the form of their prayers, like “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me,” are considered the insightful words for their spirituality. Fifth, monasteries continue to play an important role in defense of their ethos and spirituality.⁷²

Protestant Christians Spirituality

Protestant Christians trace their historical origins back to the European Reformation of the sixteenth century through the inspiration of Martin Luther. There are

⁷² Ibid., 16-17.

many different denominations among Protestant churches like Lutherans, Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, charismatic and evangelical denominations. They are also known as evangelicals. McGrath summarizes the Protestant Christian spirituality with four points. First, Protestant Christians emphasize the importance of the public and private reading of the Bible in their understandable language. It is one of the most important features of the Reformation. Involvement in small Bible study groups and reading the Bible regularly in personal devotion are essentially important in shaping their spirituality. Second, their sermons, hymns and songs, and teachings strongly focus on the saving death of Jesus Christ on the cross. Third, they emphasize the need for personal conversion and transformation. Their preaching often stresses the need for Christians to be “born again” (Jn. 3:1-16). Fourth, they have a deep commitment to evangelism—that is, to converting others to the Christian faith.⁷³

Protestant Christian spirituality, especially Baptist Spirituality deeply considers “cultivating communion with God, conforming to the image of Christ, and enriching the life of the Spirit, all of which included the outward journey of compassionate service for justice, peace and freedom.”⁷⁴ For Dennis L. Johnson, a retired American Baptist pastor with over forty years experiences, the spirituality of Walter Rauschenbusch⁷⁵ is a model for Baptist spirituality. According to him, the spirituality of Rauschenbusch is “a

⁷³ Ibid., 17-19.

⁷⁴ Dennis L. Johnson, “Walter Rauschenbusch: A Baptist Model for Spiritual Formation in Baptist Congregations,” *American Baptist Quarterly* 37, no. 3 (Fall 2017), 322.

⁷⁵ Walter Rauschenbusch (1861-1918) was convinced of the demand for social salvation along with personal salvation by the extreme poverty of the neighborhood along with disease, crime, unemployment and malnutrition.

spirituality which is deeply personal and passionately social, contemplative and active, experiential and communal, inward and outward, faithfully Baptist and wholeheartedly ecumenical; a spirituality that holds together the inner spiritual life of the person and the corporate social life of humanity.”⁷⁶

In conclusion, Christian spirituality is rooted in the unconditional love and grace of God. The peak of the revelation of God’s love to humans is the incarnation of Jesus into human history. Through faith in Jesus Christ, we are freed, saved and made righteous before God. This is the foundation of our spirituality. Moreover, we have to use our freedom to join enthusiastically in working the mission of Jesus Christ out of love. A credible mark of Christian spirituality is costly discipleship of Jesus Christ. Christian spirituality is to be seen not only in the church, but also in the workplaces and in everyday life in our community, and society. Christian spirituality has never been static, but a long journey towards the fullness of life into Christ Himself (John 10:10; Eph. 4:15) as a renewing by the Holy Spirit (Tit. 3:5; Eph. 4:23) and as a transforming by the renewing of our mind (Rom 12:2) since we are recreated, renewed and transformed in Jesus Christ to keep growing up in the image of our Creator (2 Cor. 3:18; 5:17; Col. 3:10).

⁷⁶ Johnson, “Walter Rauschenbusch,” 323.

CHAPTER 3

AN OVERVIEW OF THE HISTORY OF CHIN CHRISTIANITY

It has been over a century since the Gospel of Jesus Christ reached the Chin Hills. In 1999, the Chin Christians celebrated the Chin Evangel Centenary with excitement and rejoicing, commemorating the arrival of the first Baptist missionaries from the United States of America to the Chin Hills. After 1999, the Chin Christians have been progressing toward a second century of Christianity. Among them during the first century, social, political and religious changes and movements emerged among the Chin Christians. This chapter attempts to briefly overview the history of Chin Christianity and explore spiritual movements during the first 100 years. It is difficult to cover the history of all Chin denominations due to the vast geography of Chins living in Myanmar and abroad. Therefore, this chapter mainly focuses on the history of the Chin Baptist Convention in the city of Falam, Chin State.

The Roman Catholics arrived in the Chin Hills at the end of 1891 prior to the arrival of American Baptists, but were not successful. One reason according to the book *History of Catholic Church in Myanmar*, was that a certain English officer refused to give permission to the Catholic missionaries to work in the Chin Hills.¹ The Roman Catholic missionaries then returned to the plains area below. An American Baptist

¹ Catholic Bishops' Conference of Myanmar, *History of Catholic Church in Myanmar* (Yangon: Catholic Bishops' Conference of Myanmar, 2017), 1235-36.

missionary couple, Arthur and Laura Carson, arrived in Hakha, the capital of Chin State on March 15, 1899.

Christianity before the Foreign Missionaries

Generally, Chin Christians affirmed that the birth of Christianity in the Chin Hills was the fruit of the American Baptist mission efforts. However, the *Chin Church History* published by the Zomi Theological College (now Chin Christian Institute of Theology, Falam, Chin State) recorded the presence of Chin Christians in the Falam area during the pre-foreign missionary period. On February 1, 1906, Dr. Erik East baptized seven new believers from Khuasak village. A woman among them confessed, “My father told me about god but they did not worship him. I was like a man carrying a heavy burden. Then I was told of Jesus who was able to save me from my sins. This made me glad and worship Him.”² Where did she hear about Jesus Christ? *Chin Church History* speculated, “Maybe some Lusei who, enroute their way to the Burma plain, could have preached to her, Johnson surmised. During those periods, Mizoram sent out two evangelists in 1903 and an additional seven in 1905.”³ The *Chin Church History* reported, “If this had been the case that prior to the year 1899, people never took notice of them and there appeared to be quite a number of Christian believers. Pau Cin Hau in 1892 and 1896 went over to Lusei territory and on his return introduced a pseudo Christianity, we may note.”⁴

² Zomi Theological College, *Chin Church History* (Falam: Zomi Theological College, 2012), 42.

³ *Ibid.*, 43. “Lushai” and “Lusei” are the same.

⁴ *Ibid.*

A Chin researcher, Biak Hlei Mang, who examined the history of Chin Christianity from a Falam perspective, also observed that there had been some Christians in the Falam area before the arrival of the American Baptists missionaries.⁵ He cited that in a final tour to the Falam area in the early summer of 1909, Dr. Erik East, the second American Baptist missionary, saw many people who had Bibles and Christian hymnals in their hands, which were probably in the Lushai language. Dr. East was surprised to find that the gospel he preached was not new to the people. He realized that the Lushai Christians had come earlier to evangelize that area. Dr. East recorded, “A strong Christian influence existed among our central Hills people, brought by Lushai Christians.”⁶

Laura Carson recorded her encounter with a local Christian man at a Kalaymyo bazaar on her first missionary journey to the Chin Hills in 1899 with her husband Arthur Carson:

In the evening, while going through the bazaar in the vain search for something to eat, we noticed an old man sitting in front of his shop reading a book which looked like a Burmese Bible. We approached and asked what book he was reading. Sure enough, it was a Bible, and he was a Christian! We were mutually surprised and delighted for he had no more expected to see missionaries there than we had hoped to find a Christian. We soon enlisted his services in trying to obtain food for us. He promised to bring rice, eggs and chickens the next day.⁷

⁵ Biak Hlei Mang, “A Chin History of the Encounter with British Colonial Rule and the American Baptist Mission Works in the Chin Hills: A Story of Cultural Adaptation and Transformation in Burma (Myanmar)” (PhD diss., Lutheran School of Theology, 2010), 136.

⁶ Erik East, *Burma Manuscript* (Yangon: Christian Literature Committee, 1996), 167, cited in Biak Hlei Mang, “A Chin History of the Encounter with British Colonial Rule and the American Baptist Mission Works in the Chin Hills,” 137.

⁷ Laura H. Carson, *Pioneer Trails, Trials and Triumphs: Personal Memoirs of Life and Work as a Pioneer Missionary among the Chin Tribes of Burma* (New York: Baptist Board of Education, 1927), 153-154.

Unfortunately, Laura did not record his name and background, but according to Biak Hlei Mang, that old man was Shwe Hlaing in Burmese and Tial Hmung in Chin, born around 1879 at Lungpi village, forty miles east of Falam in the Chin Hills.⁸

From 1889 to 1892, Shwe Hlaing attended a Buddhist monastery school and became a Buddhist at Indin village in the Kalay valley. One day on his way home, he met a group of Burmese merchants who sold strings of beads, which were a precious treasure for the Chin and Lushai people. They planned on selling their beads in the Chin and Lushai Hills. They hired Shwe Hlaing as an interpreter. After selling their goods in the Chin Hills, they continued their journey to the Lushai Hills in India. The merchants returned to Burma, but Shwe Hlaing remained in Aizawl, India, where he met with British Baptist missionaries and received some education and later became a Christian around 1897. Shwe Hlaing stayed in India for about three years. When he returned home to Burma with his Christian faith, Shwe Hlaing's parents wanted to perform a sacrificial ceremony for the return of their son, but Shwe Hlaing refused to do so and said, "Please do not perform any sacrificial ceremony for me because I no longer belong to the spirit you worship. Now I belong to the eternal God who created heaven and earth."⁹ It is believed that while he was selling goods at the Kalaymyo bazaar, the missionary couple, Arthur and Laura Carsons, met him there. The *Chin Church History* similarly mentioned the story of Shwe Hlaing.¹⁰

⁸ Biak Hlei Mang, "A Chin History of the Encounter with British Colonial Rule and the American Baptist Mission Works in the Chin Hills," 138.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 139.

¹⁰ Zomi Theological College, *Chin Church History*, 44-45.

Some say a few Chins had encountered the gospel message before the coming of the foreign missionaries to the Chin Hills, but it could not be confirmed. Shwe Hlaing was thought to be the one who converted people in the Chin Hills, but he actually converted people in the plain area. The birth of Christianity in the Chin Hills is the fruit of the American Baptist missionaries and the Karen preachers who assisted to the missionaries. Although the American Baptist Mission board did not send any American Baptist missionary in the Falam area, they appointed the Karen preachers and teachers in those areas. Therefore, Falam Christians also grew out of the work of the Karen preachers and teachers who were appointed by the American Baptists.

The Roman Catholic Mission in the Chin Hills

According to the *History of the Catholic Church in Myanmar*, published by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Myanmar, the French priests (missionaries) of the Missions Etrangères De Paris (MEP, Parish Foreign Mission Society) had attempted to enter the Chin Hills since 1864. In that year, Bishop Bigandet sent Fr. Lecomte (MEP) to the Chin Hills, but he could not reach the Chin Hills because the king's soldiers did not allow him to go beyond the catholic village. In 1891, Fr. Laurent and Fr. Jarre headed to the Chin Hills from Pakokku, a city in Magwe Division, Myanmar. They arrived at Shonshi village, the foot of Chin Hills, where they met with some Chins and began learning the language there. At the end of 1891, Fr. Accarion joined Laurent and Jarre. They unexpectedly met with some Chin traders who were passing through the hills on their way to the plains. Through the guidance of the Chin traders, Fr. Jarre and Accarion arrived at Hakha, the capital of Chin Hills in 1891. Fr. Laurent remained at Gangaw for health reasons. The English officers urged Jarre and Accarion to return to the plains

saying that the Chins were not yet civilized and the life of priests would be in danger. Thus, the fathers heeded the warning of the English officers and returned to Gangaw.¹¹

On the second attempt fifty years later after the Protestant mission, under the leadership of Bishop A. Faliere, Fr. Audrain (MEP), and Fr. Alexis U Ba Din, a diocesan priest, with four catechists arrived at Kanpetlet, the capital of Southern Chin Hills on December 17, 1933. They proceeded to Mindat, 33 miles far away from Kanpetlet, on December 31, 1933 thinking that area was a better suited for them. The first Mass was offered there on January 1, 1934. The Word of God was sown by Fr. Audrain and Fr. Alexis in the Mindat area of Southern Chin Hills and through time it grew into a big tree.¹²

In 1938, Bishop Faliere met Colonel Burne, the highest authority in the Chin Special Division at Magwe, gave permission to begin the Catholic mission in the Northern Chin Hills. Coincidentally, at the time of their meeting, Colonel Burne just returned from his official visit to the Northern Chin Hills. In his visit at Falam, he was asked, “Does it matter if believers drink a little bit of liquor?” He answered, “I believe I am something of a Christian myself and still I enjoy a peck from time to time.” The Chins replied, “send us here missionaries who teach us such a religion.”¹³ Then, Colonel Burne strongly recommended Bishop Faliere to start the mission work in the Northern Chin Hills. The bishop and his companions arrived at the Northern Chin Hills in 1939.

¹¹ Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Myanmar, *History of Catholic Church in Myanmar*, 1235-1236.

¹² *Ibid.*, 1236.

¹³ Zomi Theological College, *Chin Church History*, 48.

Several priests and catechists were sent as missionaries to Falam and Tonzang since 1939.¹⁴ In 1948, Fr. Cloue Roy and Andre Bereigts were sent to Hakha.¹⁵

According to the observation of Chin Khua Khai, there were two reasons for the success of the Catholic mission in Chin Hills. First, drinking *zu*,¹⁶ a traditional alcoholic drink, was an essential cultural element of the Chin people. The Roman Catholic missionaries quickly adapted to the culture by allowing the new believers to continue drinking *zu*, which the Protestant missionaries strictly prohibited among their converts. Second, the Catholic mission held to the doctrine that no one obtains salvation outside the Roman Catholic Church. For those two reasons, the Catholic missions won many Chin people to the Catholic beliefs and practices.¹⁷

The American Baptist Missions in the Chin Hills

The American Baptist Mission in the Chin Hills began in March of 1899. The mission work was successful and fruitful. Chester U. Strait, the fifth missionary, reported

¹⁴ Catholic Bishops' Conference of Myanmar, *History of Catholic Church in Myanmar*, 1236.

¹⁵ Zomi Theological College, *Chin Church History*, 48.

¹⁶ For Chin people, drinking *zu* was a kind of nutrition and also the only consolation for them after a hard day's work. The Rev. Dr. Do Sian Thang, former principle of Zomi Theological College, Falam, Chin State, observes that "They [the Chin people] made one to another reconciliation through drinking *zu* (Chin beer). *Zu* was a symbol of peace making. But modern Chin people are used to drink *zu* for fighting and killing." Do Sian Thang, "Faithfulness as a Chin Spirituality," *Thinking About Christianity and the Chins in Myanmar*, ed. Cung Lian Hup (Yangon: No Publisher, 1999), 11.

¹⁷ Chin Khua Khai, "Dynamics of Renewal: A Historical Movement among the Zomi (Chin) in Myanmar" (PhD diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1999), 131.

a ten-year comparison of the Chin Hills mission (1927-1937) on May 1, 1937 to the Board as follows:¹⁸

Subject	1927	1937
Baptism	259	800
Total baptized Christians	1241	4090
Baptized and non-Baptized Christians (estimate)	3500	10000
Places of worship	30	225
Churches	9	60
Preachers (ordained)	3	10
Preachers (unordained)	8	15
Villages in which Christians reside	40	265

According to the report of the Zomi Baptist Convention in 1962, there were 40,800 baptized members and 556 churches within the convention.¹⁹ These two reports shows that Christianity in Chin Hills was growing fast and the missionary works were very successful. There were two main reasons for their success. The first reason is that the missionaries evangelized the Gospel not only through preaching, but also through education, medical efforts, agriculture and literature. Their missionary work of education, health, agriculture, literature and preaching transformed the society and increased their living standard. The second reason is the local and native leaders were very enthusiastic in evangelizing and helping the missionaries.

The First Missionaries Arriving in Hakha

The first missionary couple, Arthur and Laura Carson sent by the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society (ABFMS), arrived in Hakha, the capital of Chin State,

¹⁸ Chester U. Strait, "A Ten Year Comparison of the Chin Hills," May 1, 1937, microfilm of the American Baptist Historical Society's archive, visited on March 5, 2019.

¹⁹ Robert Johnson, "The Church in the Chin Hills," *Burma Baptist Chronicle*, eds. Generieve Sowards and Erville Sowards (Rangoon: Myanmar Baptist Convention Publication, 1963), 397.

on March 15, 1899. Laura Carson recorded her experience of the first night of their arrival in Hakha in her book *Pioneer Trails, Trials and Triumphs: Personal Memoirs of Life and Work as a Pioneer Missionary among the Chin Tribes of Burma*. She wept bitterly, “not more because of my disappointment in the place and the people than for my own ability to meet the situation bravely.”²⁰ She also said to her husband, “Arthur, I can’t do it! I simply can’t do it.”²¹ The Carsons were distressed by the situation they saw in Hakha. Laura described it this way, “But as the crowds flocked about us on the evening of our arrival, I looked about in vain for the cleaner, less repulsive, higher-class people. My heart sank, for I could not tell the chiefs from the coolies. All were dirty and filthy beyond description.”²² Then, she complained to her husband again:

I can’t stand it to shut ourselves out from the world and shut ourselves in with such people as these and in a place like this and never see or know anything else. I thought I could go with you anywhere that God called and stay there and work with you. But I have been weighed in the balance and found wanting. Oh, Arthur, I can’t—I can’t stand on and live out my life in this awful place, among these loathsome people.²³

Arthur replied, “Don’t talk that way. Things will look brighter in the morning.”²⁴ Then he added the most comforting statement of all. “Laura, remember our motto, ‘I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me.’”²⁵ As the next morning came, her disappointments changed. When Laura saw an unusually attractive eighteen-year-old girl

²⁰ Carson, *Pioneer Trails, Trials and Triumphs*, 163.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*, 162.

²³ *Ibid.*, 163.

²⁴ Johnson, “The Church in the Chin Hills,” 384.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

smiling, she expressed, “I looked into her bright face and realized that love is the greatest thing in the world.”²⁶ Laura decided then to work among the Chins. The first things they needed was to a place of their own and learning the language of their people. They received the government’s sanction to their application for land to build a mission compound in addition to a grant of thirty acres of the most beautiful land in the vicinity from Chief, Lien Mo (Lian Mo). The payment was forty-five rupees.²⁷

The Work of Missionaries

According to Bawihrin, the work of the missionaries was categorized as follows: education, medical work, agricultural work, theological schools and literature and translation.²⁸

Education

Along with preaching, the first method the missionaries used for God’s mission was education through starting mission schools. The first mission school was opened by the Carsons at Hakha in 1900. All missionary school teachers were Karen. Thra San Win was the first teacher in the history of Chin Hills. The second mission school was opened on May 1, 1902 in Tiddim. Thra Po Ku was the teacher at that school. The third was opened in Khuasak village in 1904. The teacher was Thra Shwe Zan. The fourth was opened in Tonzaang village in 1905. Thra Po Ku was the teacher. The fifth mission

²⁶ Carson, *Pioneer Trails, Trials and Triumphs*, 164.

²⁷ Thlaawr Bawihrin, *The Impact of Missionary Christianity on the Chins* (Indianapolis, IN: Published by the author, 2002), 120.

²⁸ Bawihrin, *The Impact of Missionary Christianity on the Chins*, 121-140.

school was opened in Theizang. The date is unknown. Thuam Hang was thought to be the teacher of the school. The sixth was opened in Zokhua village in June, 1905. Thra Maung Kya was in charge of the school. The seventh was opened in Lumbang village in 1906. Thra Po E was the teacher. The eighth was opened in Laizo in 1906. That school was taught by Thra Maung Gone. The ninth mission school in Chinland was opened in Thantlang in 1907. Thra Maung Kya moved from Zokhua to Thantlang to teach there. All teachers were Karen who assisted the missionaries. The missionaries in Chinland introduced the good news of Jesus Christ through education.

Medical Work

Before the Carson's arrival, the Chin people knew nothing about modern medicine. They believed that every disease was caused by evil spirits. When people got sick, they tried to appease the evil spirits by sacrificing animals instead of taking modern medicine. The Carsons thought that medical work was one of the best methods to convince and convert the Chin people. Arthur and Laura constantly pleaded with the Board to send a medical missionary to Chinland. The Board honored their request and sent a medical doctor, Erik Hjamar East and his wife Emily Johnson East. They arrived in Hakha on March 21, 1902. The people loved Dr. East, not only for of his preaching, but more so for his medical work. After Dr. East left Hakha, Dr. John Gustav Woodin and his wife Bessie Livers Woodin were sent by the Board to Hakha as medical missionaries. They arrived in Hakha on December 23, 1910.

Agricultural Work

The missionaries, especially the Carsons, were concerned about the Chin people's education, health, spirituality and personal lives. The survival of the Chin people depended on agriculture. A little corn seed, which he gathered in America, was distributed to each family, cautioning them to save the first year's crop for seed. The animals, livestock, fruits, crops, and potatoes brought by the missionaries were bigger, more delicious and more productive than the Chins' native ones. Therefore, the Chins call the bigger pigs "English pig," (*mirang vok*), and the smaller ones Chin pigs (*lai vok*) even today. The missionaries transformed the breeding, cultivating, and transplanting practice of the Chin and transformed their livelihood as well.²⁹

Theological Schools

Rev. Chester U. Strait, the fifth missionary to Chinland, started the Bible School in Hakha on May 1, 1928 training pastors and thirteen students. The language of instruction for the school was the Lai dialect or Hakha language. Unfortunately, according to Robert G. John, the Hakha Bible School was discontinued in 1931 "because of insufficient funds."³⁰ In June of 1948, the Johnsons reopened the Hakha Bible School. Regarding the Bible school, on April 4, 1948, Robert G. Johnson wrote a letter to the Mission Board in America, addressed "Dear friends back home," and stated,

The previous missionaries in Hakha, the Chester Straits, had a Bible Training School here about 15 years ago. Since that time the church has grown rapidly, some preachers have died, the war has prevented any further Bible training. The

²⁹ Bawihrin, *The Impact of Missionary Christianity on the Chins*, 121-132.

³⁰ Johnson, *History of the American Baptist Chin Mission*, 510.

situation is really tragic. At any rate, in the providence of God, we are starting up a Bible Training School at Hakha.... It is strictly a “by faith” project. I had said originally that we could admit 18 men. Fifty-six clamored for entrance. We reduced this number to 30 because we decided that no more than 30 men could live in one stone and mud building 28' x 21'. This figures out to an area about 4 x 5 feet for each student, poor fellows! We will try to give them rice and perhaps a bit of tea, sugar, and salt, and they can raise vegetables in a school garden.

Please make the Bible School a matter of prayer, that the Lord will overcome every obstacle of housing, food, language, and lack of literature. The sole material equipment for the school at this date, 1½ months before opening, consists of one small stone building with a mud floor and half a roof, one brass cooking pot, 2 aluminum kettles, 5 aluminum spoons, one soccer ball, some pencils, and a quart of ink. There are no beds, no furniture of any description, no library, and alas! not any even Bibles for the men to study.³¹

By God’s providence and the sacrifice of the missionaries and local leaders, the Bible School in Hakha now becomes Chin Christian University, and providing courses of Master of Divinity (MDiv), Bachelor of Theology (BTh), Diploma in Theology (DipTh), Bachelor of Ministry (BMin), Bachelor of Religious Education (BRE), Bachelor of Art in English (BAE), and Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA).³²

Later, the Tiddim Bible School was started by Rev. and Mrs. Franklin Nelson, the sixth missionary couple to Chinland, along with native Chin, Rev. Hau Go, on June 2, 1947 with 32 men and 3 women students. The language of instruction was English. The first commencement was held on Sunday, October 22, 1950 with 18 men and 2 women graduating student. The Tiddim Bible School was successful.³³

³¹ Robert G. Johnson, “Station Letter from R. G. Johnson,” April 4, 1948, microfilm of the American Baptist Historical Society, Atlanta, Georgia.

³² Chin Christian University, “Home,” <http://ccu.edu.mm/>, accessed on March 22, 2019.

³³ Bawihrin, *The Impact of Missionary Christianity on the Chins*, 134.

Literature and Translation

After Arthur Carson learned the Lai dialect, he translated the Gospel of Matthew into the Lai dialect and also wrote a Chin dictionary. Both works were completed by his wife Laura ten years after his untimely death in 1908, but it was never published. Arthur produced a hymnal and a textbook in the Hakha dialect for use in their missionary schools. The school in Hakha had translations of Sunday school lessons for the Chin Christians. Joseph H. Cope, the third missionary to Chin Hills, who arrived on the 21st of December, 1908 with his wife, Elizabeth S. Cope, translated three hundred hymns in 1927. He also translated the New Testament to the Tedim dialect in 1932 and published 35 small textbooks for school in the languages of Tedim, Falam, Hakha and Kanpalet. Dr. Strait published a Hakha hymnbook in 1932, a New Testament in the Hakha dialect in 1940, and church school lessons. Robert G. Johnson, the last missionary to Chin Hills, arrived in Tiddim on May 30, 1946 and moved to Hakha in February 1947 with his wife, Elizabeth Lue Johnson, translated and published other Christian books. Johnson was assisted by David Van Bik, a native Chin scholar. The first Hakha dialect Bible was printed by the United Bible Society in 1978.³⁴

The Emergence of Churches, Associations and Convention

In his article “The Church in the Chin Hills,” Robert Johnson, the last American Baptist missionary to Chin Hills, divided the history of Chin Christianity from 1899 to 1966 into four periods. The first period from 1899 to 1908 was the period of the entering

³⁴ Ibid., 135-136.

church. The second from 1908 to 1924 was the period of emerging churches. The third from 1924 to 1941 (World War II) was the edification of churches period. The last period from 1942 to 1966 was the period of the energized churches.³⁵ The present work also followed Johnson's divisions.

The Entering Church, 1899 to 1908

The missionaries used many methods such as preaching, education, medical treatment, and cultivation to reach the Chins for Jesus Christ. Through the preaching and witnessing of Thra Shwe Zan, a Karen believer who assisted the missionaries, Pu Pau Suan and his wife Pi Kham Ciang, Pu Thuam Hang and his wife Pi Dim Khaw Cing, from the Khuasak village, Tiddim township, accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord. Dr. East baptized them on May 1, 1905 at the Poklet stream near Khuasak. Pu Sia Khaw was baptized by Rev. Carson on January 1, 1906 in Hakha. Pu Thang Cin of Lumbang was baptized by Rev. Carson on September 5, 1906 in Hakha. Pi La Kau, the first woman convert from Laimi tribe, was baptized by Rev. Carson on October 1, 1906. Through constant preaching, Thang Cin of Lumbang and Pu Cawng Kam of Bualkhua village accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.³⁶ There were twenty-nine believers by the end of 1906. The first Christian Church in Chin State was founded in Khuasak on February 17, 1906. A second church was started in 1908 in Hakha.³⁷ On

³⁵ Johnson, "The Church in the Chin Hills," 384-385.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 136-137.

³⁷ Zomi Theological College, *Chin Church History*, 58, 60.

March 25, 1907, the Chin Hills Baptist Association was formed.³⁸ After seven years of evangelizing, Christians were baptized in Tiddim, Falam, and Hakha of the northern Chin Hills, but nothing had been done to start churches or evangelize the far south in Matupi, Kanpelet, Mindat and Paletwa. The first missionary, Arthur Carson, died on April 1, 1908.

The Emerging Churches, 1908 to 1924

After Carson's death, the missionary work was further strengthened by the arrival of Herbert J. Cope and his wife in Hakha a few days before Christmas in 1908. Dr. East needed medical attention so he and his wife departed to America for a year. Laura Carson and the Copes remained in the field. Dr. Woodin and his wife arrived in Hakha in 1910 and assumed the duties of Dr. East. The Copes moved to Tiddim, a hundred miles from Hakha, to further the evangelistic work. In the Hakha area, the Good News was spread through the medical work of the Woodins and through the teaching of Laura Carson.³⁹ The missionary schools continued and the Gospel began to take root in many villages. By 1915, there were 150 Christians and 80 were present at the annual Association meeting. The meeting location was unknown. Three years later, the Hakha area alone reported 600 baptized Christians and 8 churches. There was a total of 200 baptisms in 1919 for the whole Chin area.⁴⁰

³⁸ Ibid., 64.

³⁹ Johnson, "The Church in the Chin Hills," 387.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

During this period, many Christians faced persecution by their chiefs. Tsong Kham, the first Ngawn convert, in Bual village, Falam area, was beaten brutally and taken as a slave with his wife and children. Their property, house, and farmland were confiscated by the chief. The chief and the upper class of Chin society in this period were almost universally opposed to the Christian message because Christians gave up drinking and animist feasts, greatly reducing the amount of tribute beer and meat given to the chieftain. However, Christians faithfully stood firm in their faith. In 1913, a few Christian young people violated the spirit altar at Tonzang town by becoming Christians and destroying their family altar.⁴¹ The chiefs were continuing to oppose Christianity. Mr. Hau Chin Khup, the chief of Tonzang town, gathered the village headmen and councilors of his area in 1920 and exacted an oath:

we . . . the headmen, councilors and the villagers should not become Christians, nor our families, relatives and friends and even our children, generation after generation; and those who abolish this promise and become Christian should be fined 99 rupees, the cost of a mithan, a buffalo, and pot of beer.⁴²

In 1924, despite the threat of the oath and heavy fine, the tithes and offering of the Chin Christians increased to the point of paying for their Chin pastors. It meant that the churches had become self-supporting. This was indeed a landmark in the emergence of churches.⁴³

⁴¹ Ibid., 389.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 390.

The Edification of the Churches, 1924 to 1942

In 1925, there were 1,289 confirmed believers and 13 established churches.⁴⁴ Around 1929 local associations in Falam, Hakha, and Tedim were formed, despite the challenges with dialects, transportation, and communication. According to Robert Johnson, the word “edification” meant “solidly strengthening and firmly building.”⁴⁵ This period was a time of such edification. From 1924 to World War II, it was a time of gathering strength and producing the two indispensable books: The New Testament and the hymnals in the Hakha language. It was also a time of building a Bible School and willingness for the Chins to accept leadership responsibility. Dr. and Mrs. Chester U. Strat arrived in Hakha in 1925 and began a Bible School in Hakha in 1928 after learning the language. During his second term, he began translating the New Testament in earnest. Dr. Strat desired to, but found it difficult to incorporate Mrs. Carson’s work on the Gospels and Acts because of changes in spelling and other challenges. He also wanted to follow the Greek and English rather than the Burmese, so it was a whole, new translation. Dr. Strat was working primarily with Saya Sang Ling, the pastor of the Hakha Church. He averaged ten verses a day for years, working mostly in the mornings. In 1940, the New Testament was published. He also expanded the Hakha hymnal to 283 songs and published it in 1937. Dr. Cope translated the New Testament and the Hymnal in the

⁴⁴ Zomi Theological College, *Chin Church History*, 87.

⁴⁵ Johnson, “The Church in the Chin Hills,” 390.

Kamhau language of Tiddim and published it in 1936. He also wrote more than 35 small textbooks in several languages for the missionary schools.⁴⁶

In 1942, for safety reasons, the missionaries went home due to the Japanese invasion and conquest of Burma. After the missionaries left, the young Chin churches had to rely on the guidance of local leaders. Fortunately, the local churches had the New Testament in the Hakha and Tiddim languages and the hymn book in five languages. They also possessed a body of earnest pastors and over 4,000 baptized members.⁴⁷

The Energized Churches, 1942 to 1962

From April 1942 to February 1946, there were no foreign missionaries present in the Chin Hills because of the war between the Chins and Japanese. The Japanese soldiers occupied certain parts of the Chin Hills, including the large villages of Hakha, Falam and Tiddim. During the war years, the Christians persevered and even increased their zeal. From 4,000 believers before the start of the war, they increased to 9,000 believers at the end of the war. By the 50th Year Jubilee celebration in Hakha in 1949, there were over 18,000 baptized members. New baptisms ran over 2,000 per year for ten years.⁴⁸

The churches during this time period were self-supporting and sending local missionaries to the southern area as well. The Chins started new mission work and sustained it by themselves without any foreign support. That Dun and Pa Hrek were sent

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 391.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 391-2.

to work among the Matu tribe. The Hakha Association supported both of them until the churches in the area was strong enough to pay its own pastors. As the fruit of their mission efforts, the Zo-Matu Association was formed in 1956, only twelve years after the evangelization began.⁴⁹

Soon after the war, Franklin Nelson and his wife, Phileda Ogren Nelson arrived at Tiddim in February in 1946. A new family, Robert and Elizabeth Johnson, the last missionary couple to the Chins, arrived at Hakha in May of that year. Their most pressing tasks for both couples was to reprint more Bibles and hymns and help train and equip pastors for ministry. Since membership was increasing, churches needed more leaders. Therefore, Nelson taught “Biblical Foundations” at the Tiddim Bible School and Johnson at the Hakha Bible School.⁵⁰

Forming the Zomi Baptist Convention (ZBC)

Rev. E. E Soward, Secretary of the America Baptist Mission Board of Burma, visited the Chins, conducted a survey from February 10 to March 23, 1952 and proposed the following: (1) to establish the Chin Hills Baptist Convention, (2) to open a Bible Training School, and (3) open a hospital, high school, and agriculture training school.⁵¹ In order to implement Rev. Soward’s proposal, Rev. S. T. Hau Go held a meeting at Falam from October 31 to November 1, 1952. Ten delegates, from different areas such as

⁴⁹ Ibid., 392.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Erville E. Sowards, “Report on Trip to the Chin Hills Mission Field (February 10-March 23, 1952),” *Thinking about Christianity and the Chins in Myanmar*, ed. Cung Lian Hup (Yangon: No Publisher, 1999), 80-90.

Hakha, Falam and Tedim, unanimously agreed to establish a Baptist convention in Chinland and named it the Zotlang Baptist Convention. During that meeting, a constitution drafting committee was selected.⁵² In the Chin Hills Baptist Association meeting at Saikah Village on March 5-7, 1953, the constitution was adopted and a Baptist convention was formed and named the Zomi Baptist Convention. Naming it Zomi Baptist Convention instead of Chin Baptist Convention was a huge issue. Rev. S.T. Hau Go explained why the name Zomi Baptist Convention name was proposed instead of Zotlang, Lai or Chin Baptist Convention, saying:

We are forming a purely national organization. I propose that the name of our organization should bear our own national name. Outsiders called us Chin, we never call ourselves by that name. So I believe you all agree to reject Chin to be the name of our organization and all the members of the Committee agreed by acclamation. Then I propose that we should take Zomi as our name as this is our correct historical name. And we should call our organization Zomi Baptist Convention.⁵³

One of the participants whose name is unknown proposed Laimi instead of Zomi, implying this word “Zo” in Hakha refers to the most backward and the most despicable

⁵² The delegates were (1) Rev. S. T. Hau Go (Tedim), (2) Rev. Thawng Khaw Nang (Tedim), (3) Rev. Kham Kho Kai (Tedim), (4) Rev. S. T. Chin Khaw Gin (Tedim), (5) Rev. Mang Khaw Pau (Tedim), (6) Hon. Captain Pau Chin (Tedim), (7) Rev. Mang Kam (Tedim), (8) U. R. Khai Za Nang (Tedim), (9) U. L. Tun Thawng (Tedim), (10) U Ngul Lang (Tedim), (11) U Thawng Suak (Tedim), (12) Rev. Sang Fen (Zokhua, Hakha), (13) Rev. Sang Ling (Hakha), (14) Rev. Heng Cin (Hriphi, Hakha), (15) Rev. Van Lo (Sihhmuh, Hakha), (16) Rev. Za Ling (Sakta, Hakha), (17) Rev. Lian Hrang (Surngen, Hakha), (18) Rev. Lung Tum (Vuangtu, Hakha), (19) Rev. Huat Vung (Thau, Hakha), (20) Rev. Leng Kham (Bungtlang, Hakha), (21) Saya Khua Kil (Naabual, Hakha), (22) U Al Khar (Hakha), (23) Rev. Than Sai (Bualkhaw, Falam), (24) Rev. Za Duh (Lumbang, Falam), (25) Rev. Thanga (Falam), (26) Rev. Tuang sum (Phaizawl, Falam), (27) Rev. Kyon Bil (Belawi, Falam), (28) U En Thawng (Falam), (29) U Sun Thang (Zatlang, Falam), (30) U Shin Vir (Bualkhaw, Falam), (31) U Pek Thang (Falam), (32) U Tial Zam (Zongte, Falam). See Zomi Theological College, *Chin Church History*, 90-91.

⁵³ Bawihrin, *The Impact of Missionary Christianity*, 152.

people. “We do not want this name for our big, Christian organization.”⁵⁴ Rev. H. T. Hau

Go replied:

I proposed Zomi because I believe it is the correct original historical name of our people, from the Naga Hills to the Bay of Bengal. To the north of Tedim people call themselves Zo, the Lusei, Mizo, in Haka Zotung, Zophei, Zokhua. In Gangaw area Zo is pronounced Yaw, in Mindat Jo or Cho, and Bassein areas, they called themselves Asho. So I am convinced, that in spite of a slight variation, this Zo is our original historical national name.⁵⁵

After that explanation, Rev. Sang Ling and Rev. Sang Fen from Hakha agreed with Rev.

Go’s explanation, and the name Zomi Baptist Convention was approved.⁵⁶ The

convention was formed with the Tiddim Baptist Association, Falam Baptist Association,

Hakha Baptist Association, and the Kale Valley Baptist Association. An Executive

Committee of 22 members was formed to care for business between the Triennial

Convention meetings.⁵⁷ By 1962, the convention reported 38,376 baptized members, 556

churches, 88 ordained pastors, 68 unordained pastors, 6 women workers, 8 associations,

and a mission field in Kapatlet in the northern area. There were 2,425 new baptisms

during the year.⁵⁸

In 1996, the socialist government of Burma expelled all foreign missionaries.

That marked the end of foreign missionaries in the Chin Hills, but churches became self-

supporting and self-sustaining under the leadership of local leaders. In 2013, the name

⁵⁴ Ibid., 153.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Johnson, “The Church in the Chin Hills,” 395.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 397.

Zomi Baptist Convention (ZBC) was changed to Chin Baptist Convention (CBC) because of the name recognition. The Myanmar government and people knew Chin, but not Zomi. According to the 2014 Chin Baptist Convention records, the convention was comprised of 28 associations and 6 local churches making it the third largest convention in the Myanmar Baptist Convention.⁵⁹

The Chin Baptist Mission

As mentioned earlier, Robert G. Johnson divided the history of Chin Christianity from 1899 to 1962 into four periods: entering church (1899-1908), emerging churches (1908-1924), edification of the churches (1924-1941, World War II), and the energized churches (1942-1962). The period from 1962 to the present can be labeled as the period of growing the churches numerically, spiritually and evangelistically. Each Christian and association were very active in evangelism. However, probably due to the lack of finances and leaders, Chin Baptist Associations couldn't send native missionaries to the Southern Chin Hills till 1944.⁶⁰

Chins for Christ in One Century (CCOC: 1983-1999)

In order to strengthen the work of the Zomi Baptist Convention, an Evangelism and Education Committee was formed in 1964. The committee continued emphasizing evangelism with the motto: "Chin Hills for Christ." In 1980, Rev. Charles Hrang Tin

⁵⁹ Chin Baptist Convention, *History of Chin Baptist Convention Mission* (in Burmese) (Falam: Chin Baptist Convention, 2014), 125.

⁶⁰ The some missionaries were Rev. That Dun (in 1944), Rev. Pa Hrek (in 1945) and Than Ceu (assistant to Rev. That Dun) in Matu area, Paw Khua Mying in Zotung area, Rev. Ceih Kio and Rev. Lung Tum in Mindat area. Zomi Theological College, *Chin Church History*, 206-212.

Khum, General Secretary of the Zomi Baptist Convention, was in the Falam general hospital recovering from a heart attack. While in the hospital, he had a vision of evangelizing all Chin people through the Chin Baptist churches before the celebration of Chin Christian centenary in 1999. Reverend Charles discussed his vision to his coworkers Rev. John Cuai Sang (E&M secretary), Rev. Chum Awi (Principle of Zomi Theological College), and Rev. James Tial Dum (Vice President). The coworkers agreed with his vision of “Chin for Christ before one hundred years” being proposed at the coming Executive Committee meeting of the Zion Baptist Convention on 4-7 December of 1980. The vision statement was passed at that meeting with a call for a consultation in May 1981.⁶¹ The follow up consultation was held at Falam on May 13-17, 1981. Forty-six delegates representing various parts of the Zion Baptist Convention attended the consultation and agreed on the project name as the “Chins for Christ in One Century” (CCOC). The Triennial Meeting of the ZBC in 1983 approved the CCOC project. The theme of CCOC was “Jesus is Lord” (Phil. 2:11).⁶²

The aims and objectives of CCOC were:

1. The salvation message was to be preached to all Chin people prior to the Centenary Celebration.
2. To bring about revival in the existing churches and to acquire edification from God.
3. The 100th year Centenary Celebration was to be held at Hakha.
4. After the Centenary Celebration, evangelism and mission work was to begin with renewed vigor to non-Chins.⁶³

⁶¹ Chin Baptist Convention, *History of Chin Baptist Convention Mission*, 143-144.

⁶² Zomi Theological College, *Chin Church History*, 219-220.

⁶³ Ibid.

The CCOC was a systematic fifteen-year project (1983-1998) divided into 5 parts with a 3-year plan for each part:

1. The first three years (1983-1986): to preach the gospel.
2. The second three years (1986-1989): to form new churches and to acquire strength from God.
3. The third three years (1989-1992): to strengthen the new churches and be self-supporting.
4. The fourth three years (1992-1995): to transform the mission field into regional associations.
5. The fifth three years (1995-1998): to strengthen the regional associations to be self-supporting in preparing for the Centenary Celebration in 1999.⁶⁴

The Chin Baptist Convention's statistics of CCOC from 1983 to 1999 were in the following table.⁶⁵

Year	Ambassadors	New Converts	Money Expenditure (MMK)
1983-1984	85	2610	255,937.48
1984-1985	112	1517	401,882.78
1985-1986	373	6513	684,042.91
1986-1987	88	821	557,690.29
1987-1988	79	768	643,300.00
1988-1989	253	1756	1,097,670.29
1989-1990	75	1185	1,097,160.00
1990-1991	96	939	2,092,001.00
1991-1992	106	2201	3,707,134.00
1992-1993	127	2294	4,347,036.55
1993-1994	143	1069	5,590,488.60
1994-1995	201	1172	5,736,712.70
1995-1996	99	1337	5,281,402.50
1996-1997	125	783	7,518,746.00
1997-1998	163	205	11,111,871.00
1998-1999	208	125	22,399,567.00
Total	2333	25295	73,371,643.10

Seven ambassadors of CCOC died during this time furthering God's mission.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Ibid., 220.

⁶⁵ Chin Baptist Convention, *History of Chin Baptist Convention Mission*, 213.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 227-228.

Centenary Mission for Christ (CMC: 1999-2013)

After joyfully celebrating the Chin Evangel Centenary in 1999, the mission project of CCOC was changed to Centenary Mission for Christ (CMC) to start a new century. The theme “Jesus is Lord” (Phil. 2:11) continued. CMC proceeded with the fourth objective; the mission of evangelizing the Chins and non-Chins within five mission fields: Chin Diaspora Mission, Chindwin Mission, Pakokku Mission, Ayeyawaddy Mission, and Rakhaing-Ann Mission. The convention opened the Centenary Mission Training School in October 1999 with 50 trainees attending to achieve their objective of reaching the Chins and non-Chins. More trained leaders meant more people would be reached with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The trainees were dedicated and sent out to the mission field in February 2000. A Mission Training Center also opened in Pakokku offering 6-month courses.⁶⁷ Eight believers died during this period of CMC. The Chin Baptist Convention recorded the strength of Centenary Mission for Christ project (1999-2013):⁶⁸

Year	Missionaries	Ambassadors	Bible Students	Village students	New Converts	Expenditure
1999-2000	34	25	19	60	220	20,393,210
2000-2001	46	21	15	100	117	15,937,062
2001-2002	53	32	18	150	2608	23,331,758
2002-2003	53	32	19	191	98	36,056,073
2003-2004	56	30	14	292	181	56,146,132
2004-2005	57	31	18	105	101	56,677,454
2005-2006	57	21	22	107	288	52,430,826
2006-2007	56	30	20	140	102	72,441,272
2007-2008	50	30	20	140	109	79,197,116
2008-2009	54	30	22	150	63	116,608,355
2009-2010	57	30	22	150	69	131,732,104

⁶⁷ Zomi Theological College, *Chin Church History*, 269-271, 277.

⁶⁸ Chin Baptist Convention, *History of Chin Baptist Convention Mission*, 338.

2010-2011	64	30	24	150	237	142,454,854
2011-2012	68	31	25	150	67	158,680,055
2012-2013	85	48	24			
Total	790	421	282	1885	4260	934,869,988

Chin Baptist Mission (CBM: 2013-2028)

The CCOC and CMC functioned in convention-centered style of administration, which meant the churches carried out the desire of the convention and did not act independently. The responsibilities of the convention included selecting and sending ambassadors for revivals, soliciting financial sponsors, collecting money from the associations for mission work, appointing missionaries and other mission workers, managing all mission churches and much more. As churches and associations were increasing numerically, the work of the convention became overwhelming and less effective. Therefore, the convention organized two consultations in 2008, one in 2009 and one in 2010 to find ways to be affective so all churches would benefit. The consultants were mainly Chin pastors within the convention.

The recommendation from the consultations was to switch from a convention-centered policy to a church-centered policy. The church-centered policy allowed churches to be autonomous but still working closely with the association and convention. Each church was also challenged to be a missionary-sending church.⁶⁹ The Chin Baptist Mission continued to work with local churches and associations of the convention under the supervision, but not controlled by the convention.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 339-344.

The Spiritual Movements among Chin Christians

After 40 years of planting churches in Chin Hills by the Baptist missionaries, a few spiritual movements such as the *hlimsang* movement, revival movement, and free evangelist movement emerged and caused conflict and divisiveness among the Chin Christians. The movements were very controversial and critical issues arose which the Chin Baptists needed to address. The American Baptist missionaries and the Zomi Baptist Convention (now Chin Baptist Convention) took a strong stand against these movements especially the *hlimsang* movement.

The Hlimsang Movement

The *hlimsang* movement originated in the Lushai Hills of India around 1943. The Lushai word literally meant “high joy.” “Hlim” meant “joy or ecstasy,” and “sang” meant “high.” The name was also used in Chin dialects and the meaning was well understood.⁷⁰ The term could be understood as rejoicing in the Spirit. The *hlimsang* people expressed their joy by dancing, rolling and singing. Robert G. Johnson, the last American Baptist missionary to the Chin Hills, who himself experienced the *hlimsang* movement in the Chin Hills, reported it as a “type of religious frenzy characteristic of holy-rollerism among the Lushais and among some Chins.”⁷¹ He also expressed the characteristics of the *hlimsang* saying, “Hlimsang is characterized by a certain type of off-beat, off-tune, off-

⁷⁰ Robert G. Johnson, *History of the American Baptist Chin Mission*, Vol. 2 (Valley Forge, PA: Published by the author, 1988), 1194-1195.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 1194.

pitch singing, the beating of drums, dancing as a religious act, and what the devotees call ‘speaking in tongues’ but which is a gibberish.”⁷²

The *hlimsang* movement first took place with the Hualgo people in the city of Falam, Chin State from Lushai, India in about 1948. It spread into the border villages of Dawn, Ralpel, Bungtlang, and Lungler in Chin State around 1958. Then it also spread to Ngalang, a border village of India. In 1962, it reached the southern part of the Chin Hills, specifically the Matu area.⁷³

In over ten years, the *hlimsang* movement spread to all parts of Chin Hills and became a very controversial issue among the Baptist churches. The *hlimsang* people not only sang and danced in church but also in homes. In the home gathering they beat drums, sang and danced. They called the fellowship meetings in homes “*lengkhawm*.” “Leng” meant outside and “khawn” meant gathering so the literal translation was “gathering outside the church.” The favorite songs of the *hlimsang* people were “He Has Taken Sins Away,” and “When the Roll is Called Up Yonder.” They sang songs with the characteristic *hlimsang*, off-tune style. The rapid beating of drums stirred up the people.⁷⁴

U Lian Za Nang, the Subdivisional Officer of the Matu Subdivision, made this report to Robert G. Johnson:

In August [1963] I gave orders not to beat drums [paran] or to have hlimsang dances, because they are destructive to good morals. People tend to neglect work. After this order, the hlimsang died for a while. Formerly, students of the state

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid., 1196.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 1197-1198.

high schools were neglecting to come to classes because they had been up all night singing and dancing. After the order was given, the students behaved better. But we have not been able to enforce the order throughout the whole area. I think that now *hlimsang* is on the increase again.⁷⁵

Johnson also felt that the *hlimsang* produced evil, immorality and unwanted results. He noted:

When people crowd into ill-lit homes at night and sing and dance the whole night through, as often happens, boys and girls, men and women are sometimes thrown together in situations that arouse sexual desires. They find themselves touching each other in the semi-darkness, of finding a dark corner for tryst. Sexual immorality or at least looseness has often been the result, with sad situations a scandal to the Christians. It is for this tendency of *hlimsang* to produce immorality that the fellowship meetings are rejected by Baptists. . . . Historically, the *hlimsang* movement has shown a childish fascination with the Second Coming of Christ, to the point that some people have failed to plant crops or otherwise prepare for the future in the belief that Jesus would soon come and make such planning unnecessary.⁷⁶

The *Chin Church History* reported “Even when they had illegal babies, they were pronouncing it as spirit begotten babies.”⁷⁷ According to Chin Khua Khai, an adherent of the Assembly of God, the *hlimsang* people also held to a belief that “sins on earth do not affect the salvation of one’s soul. For, soul and body are totally separate entities and the salvation of Christ is primarily for the soul. Unfortunately, this doctrinal stance created ethical questions about pursuing a holy life.”⁷⁸

On his visit to Matu in 1963, Johnson gave a sermon during the Sunday Worship. He contrasted the biblical act of worship acceptable to God, referencing the Day of

⁷⁵ Ibid., 1201-1202.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 1203.

⁷⁷ Zomi Theological College, *Chin Church History*, 159.

⁷⁸ Chin Khua Khai, “Dynamics of Renewal,” 150.

Pentecost in Acts 2 with the non-biblical nature of hlimsang and its dangers. In his conclusion, he asked the people in Matu to do four things:

1. Stop using the drums; instead use a song leader to keep the tempo.
2. Follow the correct tune and tempo and refrain from singing in the hlimsang style.
3. All pastors and preachers should oppose hlimsang by preaching and personal example.
4. All deacons should forbid dancing inside the church, at association meetings, and stop the dancing in the home (the lengkhawm) when done as an act of worship.⁷⁹

Along with the missionaries, the Zomi Baptist Convention also took action regarding the hlimsang movement. The Executive Committee voted on two items during the meeting of the ZBC on April 5, 1963. It read:

Voted, that we inform the Subdivisional Officer, Matupi, and the Chin Supreme Council, Kalaymyo, that hlimsang (holy-rollerism) is opposed to our Baptist principles, teachings, and practice, and that we do not give it any support, and that we will do our best to stop it wherever it is found in the ZBC area. (ZBC-EC 63/27)

Voted, that the ZBC-EC ask the pastors, sayas [teachers], and deacons of all areas where hlimsang is found to oppose hlimsang in the following ways:

1. They should not allow the beating of drums.
2. They should not allow “lengkhawm.”
3. They should not allow the hlimsang type of singing; that is, they should allow only the correct tunes as found in the solfa.
4. They should not allow dancing in churches (ZBC-EC 63/28)⁸⁰

They voted and the motion carried on the two recommendations.

Today, many Chin Christians who once was opposed to the *hlimsang* style of worship, see it as spiritual worship. A person who worshiped this way was seen as a

⁷⁹ Johnson, *History of the American Baptist Chin Mission*, 1199.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 1203-1204.

spiritual person. Even though the term *hlimsang* was no longer used in Chin Christian communities, the *hlimsang* movement still had a lingering impact on Chin Christian spirituality. For example, some free Chin evangelists still encouraged their audiences to dance at spiritual renewal conferences, crusades and camps because King David danced. Sadly, most people danced because they are stirred up by the music and drums rather than being stirred up by the Holy Spirit. Presently, most Chin Baptist pastors do not encourage their members to dance and sing in the *hlimsang* style and most Chin Baptist churches do not play drums while singing Christian hymns. As a result, Chin Baptists churches are regarded as being “dead churches” and most Chin Baptists pastors are seen as unspiritual. In reality, *hlimsang* dancing and singing are not the biblical criteria of Christian spirituality.

In church history, the early Christians did not dance like *hlimsang* people but they were the living churches. Jesus’ disciples and the apostle Paul were very spiritual people but never danced like the *hlimsang* people. Therefore, Christian spirituality should not be measured solely by the dancing and singing of the *hlimsang* people but measured by their faith and obedience to God under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Unfortunately, the *hlimsang* movement was followed by the revival movement and formation of new sects.

The Revival Movement

Since the 1970s, the revival movement has been very prominent among the Chin Christians. During the 1970s, the common questions in meetings and gatherings were “Are you born again?” “Are you saved?” “Are you going to heaven if you die now?” and

“Have you had the assurance of salvation?” According to *Chin Church History*, the prominent people of this revival movement were Rev. Hau Lian Kham, Evan. Langh Do Khup, Pastor Pau Lian Mung, Rev. Cin Za Mung, Rev. Khuanglianthanga, Rev. Nang Khan Mung, and Rev. Pau Khan Khai.⁸¹

According to Khuang Nawnni, an activist in the revival movement in 1970s, the central message of the revival movement was “regeneration and conversion in Christ.”⁸² The *Chin Church History* also mentioned that the main emphasis of the revival was “once saved always saved.”⁸³ Some of the revivalists blatantly claimed “After I have got the assurance of salvation I cannot lose it again even if I lie on a woman or if I murder a person,” the *Chin Church History* noted.⁸⁴ Due to such misunderstanding of the Bible, several Chin Baptist Churches criticized the revival movement. The Chin word “*piangthar*” meant “new birth,” “second birth,” or “born again,” and became a very popular word among the Chin Christians since the revival movement.⁸⁵ Being born again meant turning away from the old life and living for Jesus, contrasting the “once saved, always saved.”

The born-again preachers traveled on foot from village to village, church to church, sometimes walking the whole day carrying their bags. There was no local

⁸¹ Zomi Theological College, *Chin Church History*, 155.

⁸² Khuang Nawnni, “The History and Growth of Churches in Chin State, Myanmar (Burma)” (MTh Thesis, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1990), 73.

⁸³ Zomi Theological College, *Chin Church History*, 154.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 161.

transportation system. Preachers stayed at a church for one or two nights or even months, depending on the host church. They also conducted week long crusades. Teaching during the day and preaching at night was the typical format for a crusade. The preachers also conducted week long camps⁸⁶ for youth, men, and women, and even alcoholics at either a church, town hall, or the forest. Salvation was always the main theme for a crusade but also preached on many different topics such as sin, deliverance, the cross, justification, eschatology and the Christian life to name a few.⁸⁷

Khuang Nawnni compared the 1970s revival movement in Chin State with the Great Awakening in Europe and American.⁸⁸ She expressed the circumstances of revival in Chin State as follows:

The Great Revival transformed the whole northern part of Chin State. The air was full of gospel songs in the city, villages, in the forest, the proclamation of the gospel to awed multitudes, prayers in groves and forest, full of writing the name "Jesus" in every corner of the house, city, village and in the forest. Many thousands of nominal Christians were having personal experiences with Christ and mass conversions were happening in many villages as the Chins are group-oriented.⁸⁹

The revival movement is continuing among the Chins today with a more Pentecostal style which emphasize the gifts of the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues, singing and dancing in the Spirit, falling or being slain in the Spirit, signs, miracles and

⁸⁶ The word *camping* refers to a gathering people at certain place in which the gospel of *born again* is preached enthusiastically. A camping takes at least a week. Food is served for all participants. In some camping, fasting prayer is preferred.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Khuang Nawnni, "The History and Growth of Churches in Chin State, Myanmar (Burma)," 73.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 74.

healing. This is an influential movement among Chin Christians because Chin Christians identify Christian spirituality and spiritual persons with these Pentecostal characteristics. In fact, for many Chin Christians, the gifts of the Holy Spirit seem to be more important than the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). Many Chin preachers emphasize the gifts of the Holy Spirit more than the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Christian spirituality goes beyond these Pentecostal characteristics.

The Free Evangelists Movement

The free evangelist movement can also be regarded as a revival movement. As a result of the revivals, many people were born again and transformed by the Holy Spirit. Some of them were very enthusiastic in preaching and teaching even though they did not have any theological education. They took their Bible and traveled as evangelists. Some evangelists joined Bible schools or theological seminaries and received theological education. When evangelists increased in numbers, evangelical fellowships were formed. Truth Myanmar Evangelical Fellowship (TMEF), mainly a Mizo-speaking people, was formed on April 4, 1989 under the leadership of Evan. Rohmingliana of Tahan, Kalaymyo. Gospel Evangelistic Fellowship (GEF), mainly a Falam-speaking people was formed on February 23, 2001, led by Rev. Khaw Nei Khuai, Evan. Tha Nei Fai, and Rev. Lian Hlei Mang. Chin Evangel Fellowship (CEF), mainly a Hakha-speaking people was formed in 2003, led by Evan. Rual Uk.⁹⁰ Later, a very famous free evangelical group in Hakha called the Tluang Za Uk Group (now Disciple Group), was formed by three

⁹⁰ Zomi Theological College, *Chin Church History*, 162.

evangelists: Tial Uk, Tluang Thang, and Za Kian. Their group name was derived by taking one part of their name from each of the three evangelists.

It is very regretful that the Chin Christian community today has a different priority among Baptist ministers and evangelists within the Chin Evangel Fellowship (CEF) and the Disciple Group. The Baptist ministers emphasize a holistic salvation compared to soul winning emphasis of the evangelists. The evangelists' priority is to conduct crusades and camping for spiritual awakening. Evangelists view those who are actively involved in social service and who interpret the Bible from a social perspective as very liberal. Unfortunately, the evangelists in the Chin community seemed to think that the word "liberal" was synonymous with Baptist churches, Baptist ministers, and students and teachers of the Chin Christian University in Hakha, capital of Chin State.⁹¹ Baptist ministers on the other hand took the holistic approach which meant meeting the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual needs of each person. It included establishing health clinics and orphanages, practicing environmental care and providing a good education and spiritual development for the people.

On April 19, 2004, the Chin Christian University received a letter of invitation to participate in a Bible Conference regarding Biblical interpretation or belief from Chin Evangel Fellowship (CEF). The letter read:

In connection with the above matters our country experiences a lot of confusion due to activities of liberals and evangelicals. Therefore, in order that our country as well as our people's spiritual health may be improved, seminary faculties and Chin Evangelical Fellowship evangelists may please come to hold public

⁹¹ Ibid., 248.

discussions as per the following time and place schedule and in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ we respectfully invite you.

The authority of the Bible
 About Original Sin
 Assurance of Salvation and eternal security of believers
 The Incarnation of Jesus
 Comparison with other faiths: Pluralism, universalism
 The work of the Holy Spirit.

Vaue: Carson Hall, HBA
 Date: May 2, 2004
 Time: 1:00 to 4:00 pm

The feasibility or no feasibility of this proposed programme is to be replied before April 24, 2004.⁹²

The faculty of the college declined the invitation and replied that the proposed agenda was not possible to cover within three hours.

In order to have a closer relationship between Chin evangelists and ministers, the Evangelism and Mission Department of the Zomi Baptist Convention organized an Evangelists Workshop on October 1-4, 2004 at Hakha. Papers on “Chin Evangelist Today” and “Biblical Perspective of Evangelist” were presented by Rev. Dr. Do Sian Thang and Rev. Dr. Bernard Luai Hre. Sermons preached by five prominent evangelists: Evan. Rual Uk, Evan. Pau Lian Mang, Evan. Langh Do Khup, Evan. Hlawn Nei Sawn, and Evan. A Bi.⁹³ Unfortunately, the workshop did not achieve the mutual understanding and unity that was hoped for between the Chin evangelists and ministers.

⁹² Ibid., 247.

⁹³ Ibid., 146.

The Emergence of Denominations

When the *hlimsang* movement entered the Chin Hills in the 1950s, the stability of Chin Baptist churches was challenged as sects began forming. The revival movement and free evangelist movement brought on church divisions and the start of other denominations. According to the *Chin Church History*'s record in 2007, there were 36 denominations within the Chin Christians that were categorized into these main groups: Mainline Churches, Pentecostal Churches, Churches of Christ, Evangelical Churches, Baptist Sects, and other groups.⁹⁴

Mainline Denominational Churches

1. Baptist Churches (founded by the American Baptist missionaries since 1900s)
2. The Presbyterian Church of Myanmar (since 1950s)
3. The Methodist Church (since 1953)

Pentecostal Churches

1. The Assemblies of God Church (since 1960s)
2. The United Pentecostal Church of Myanmar (since 1965)
3. Myanmar Pentecostal Church of God (since 1979)
4. Foursquare Gospel Church of Myanmar (since 1988)
5. The Independent Church of Myanmar (since 1950s)

⁹⁴ Ibid., 195-202.

Churches of Christ

1. Church of Jesus Christ (since 1975, later Believers' Church of Jesus Christ, and now Believers Church)
2. Jesus Christ's Church (formed in 1978)
3. Church of Christ (formed in 1978)
4. The Living Church of Christ (formed in 1979)
5. Biblical Church of Christ (formed in 1980)

Evangelical Churches

1. Evangelical Free Church (formed in 1955)
2. Evangelical Baptist Church (formed in 1974)
3. Evangelical Presbyterian Church (formed in 1984)
4. Evangelical Reformed Baptist Church (formed in 1995)

Baptist Sects

1. Fundamental Baptist Church (formed in 1979)
2. Full Gospel Baptist Church (formed in 1983)
3. Revival Baptist Church (formed in 1985)
4. Faith Baptist Church (formed in 1985)
5. Redeemer Baptist Church
6. Original Baptist Church (formed in 2004, now Grace Baptist Church)

Other Groups

1. United Reformed Church (formed in 1993)
2. Reformed Presbyterian Church in Myanmar

3. Independent Presbyterian Church of Myanmar (formed in 1938)
4. Church of the Nazarene of Myanmar
5. Church on the Rock (COTR, formed in 1992)
6. Christian Missionary Alliance (formed in 1975)
7. End Time Message Church (formed in 1975)
8. Myanmar Presbyterian Community Church (formed in 1998)
9. Tabernacle Missionary Church (formed in 1997)
10. True Jesus Church, Sabbath (formed in 1990)
11. Unity Church of Myanmar
12. Beth Israel, Sabbath (formed in 1981)
13. Wesleyan Church (since 1990s)

The Root Causes of Emerging Denominations

With a dwindling population of over 400,000 in Chin State, questions like “why are there so many denominations,” and “why are the Chin Christians so divided?” surfaced. The *hlimsang movement*, revival and free evangelist movements were the main sources of birthing different denominations and bringing division among the Chin Christians. There were four major factors of increasing denominations among the Chin Christians: theological or doctrinal factors, psychological factors, economic factors, socio-cultural factors, and immigration factors.

Theological or Doctrinal Factors

Before the *hlimsang* and revival movement, Chin Christians were generally Baptist in their theology and doctrine. When the *hlimsang* and revival movements entered

among the Chin Christians, the *hlimsang* and revival preachers or adherents from other denominations felt that the real gospel message was not preached in the churches by the pastors and preachers. They considered the third and fourth generation of Chin Christians as nominal Christians. Chin Khua Khai, an adherent of the Assembly of God (AG) church commented, “Unfortunately, the third- and fourth-generation Zomi [Chin] Christians fell into nominality.”⁹⁵ He continued, “The gospel was not preached to church members. Pastors and preachers often preached sermons on ethical issues, but not on the gospel and the grace of God. Most of the ethical sermon messages were not uplifting but rather condemning. Many preachers did not even know what salvation was all about.”⁹⁶ Regarding the revival preachers, biblical criticism was considered liberal teaching. They assumed theologically or biblically educated pastors and leaders taught and preached theological liberalism and modernism and become spiritually lukewarm. Preachers who were dissatisfied, separated from their mother churches and formed other sects or denominations. Church members who felt the same way followed those preachers. Due to disagreements and dissatisfaction on doctrine, theology and practice some left their mother church.

Psychological Factors

Khuang Nawnni writes, “They [leaders] were jealous of each other for the positions they held, and they took advantage of this situation to kick out each other.”⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Chin Khua Khai, “Dynamics of Renewal,” 153.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 157.

⁹⁷ Khuang Nawnni, “The History and Growth of Churches in Chin State, Myanmar (Burma),” 78.

During the revival movement Chin Christians and new converts had a burning desire to become leaders in their churches. The *Chin Church History* states, “Many newly ‘born again’ want to become famous persons or prestigious leaders and thus criticized previous leaders as unregenerate or dead leaders. . . . Many new converts and first-degree obtainers are seen busy trying to become famous and important leaders, thinking themselves to be most important and theologically or biblically most informed.”⁹⁸ These two sources clearly describe that looking for the position of leader for the purpose of becoming famous caused church schism among the Chin Christians.

Economic Factors

Due to economic poverty, some seminary graduates or church leaders tried to find sponsors from abroad. When they found their “Pus” (here, the Chin word “Pu” means boss or financial benefactors), they tried to satisfy their Pus’ in order to receive more financial support. Some formed churches and joined their sponsor’s denominations even if their theology and doctrine differed. In addition, some denominations persuaded Christians to join their denominations by promising high salaries and providing needed items such as soap and salt. Some families gave into the temptation and followed them.⁹⁹

Socio-cultural Factors

Socio-culturally, when a kinsman or relative pursued something different, the relatives supported the person financially and personally. When a kinsman formed a new

⁹⁸ Zomi Theological College, *Chin Church History*, 187.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 188-189.

church, the relatives followed.¹⁰⁰ Culturally, the Chin people lived together with their relatives, villagers, and clan who spoke the same dialect. In a wider sense, therefore, some people joined and followed the founder of new churches not because of theology or doctrine but out of loyalty, obligation and culture.

Immigration to the Third Country and Its Result

In the 1990s, according to the Chin Human Rights Organization's report, the Chins migrated to Malaysia and India "to flee persecution in Myanmar, hoping to find safety and protection while resettling in another country."¹⁰¹ From the year 2000, many Chin people living in Malaysia, India and Myanmar people did not return to their homeland. Instead, they migrated to other countries that respected human rights such as America, Canada, the U.K., Germany, Sweden, Norway, Czech Republic, Denmark, Switzerland, South Korea, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Finland and the Netherlands.¹⁰² According to Hrang Tiam's estimation in 2010, approximate numbers of the Chins in other countries were: Mizoram State of India 80,000 to 100,000, Delhi, India 8,000, Thailand 2,000, Malaysia 45,000 to 50,000, Singapore 800, Philippines 200, South Korea 80, Japan 120, Australia 3,000, Switzerland 20, Holland 40, Germany 200, England 20, Sweden 200, Norway 1,000, Denmark 1,000, USA 16,000, and Canada

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 189.

¹⁰¹ Chin Human Rights Organization, "Burmese Chin Refugees in Malaysia," http://www.chro.ca/images/stories/files/PDF/special_reports/Burmese_Chin_Refugee_in_Malaysia.pdf (Accessed October 2, 2017).

¹⁰² C. K. Hrang Tiam, "The Chin Diaspora: A Great People Resource," *Torch Trinity Journal* 13, no. 2 (2010): 208.

1,200.¹⁰³ The Burmese American Community Institute recently reported that the total Chin immigrants to the United States was 59,679 people.¹⁰⁴ The two sets of data noted that approximately 43,679 Chins came to the US after 2010.

The Chin immigrants formed churches and ethnic-based communities like Chin Baptist Churches, USA (CBCUSA) and Chin American Community Development (CACD), Chin Youth Organization of North America (CYONA), and Chin Community of Indianapolis in the United States. In the United States, Europe, and other countries such as Malaysia, India, Singapore, Korea, and Japan, the Chins have established Chin Christian fellowships and Chin communities. The main purposes of forming churches were to grow spiritually and to take care of each other. The church played a central role in spiritual development and social networking for the Chin immigrants. The main purposes for forming ethnic-based communities was to help immigrants with employment, translating documents, interpreting, building relationships, networking with employers and staffing agencies, and resolving conflicts as needed while maintaining their culture and identity in their adopted country.

Immigration had both positive and negative impacts on Chin immigrants. One positive result was finding a job and sending money back home to their family to complete construction projects such as churches, schools, halls, office building, road and

¹⁰³ Ibid., 209.

¹⁰⁴ Burmese American Community Institute, "Major Findings: Population," <https://www.facebook.com/181038735285085/photos/a.1398526793536267.1073742131.181038735285085/1398526950202918/?type=3&theater>, accessed October 2, 2017. The total Burmese refugee arrivals in the USA as of July 17 of 2017 are as follows: 169,949 total; Karen: 71,353; Chin: 59,679; Karenni (Kayah): 12,490; Burmas: 5,878; Kachin: 3,916; Arakanese: 2,531; Mon: 2,261; Shan: 1,212; other: 10,629.

bridges in their homeland. Though they earned so little, they set aside a portion of their income and sent money to meet the needs of family and complete unfinished projects. As their income grew, Chin immigrants began sponsoring missionaries, Bible students and promoted education through publishing books and videos. The Chins in Myanmar considered those who live and work in other countries as heroes because the Myanmar government has failed on many levels to provide the basic needs for human life and modern development.¹⁰⁵ One religious leader expressed his gratitude by saying, “They are our backbone and helped us with what we ourselves cannot afford. They built churches, a Bible school, and made great contributions in other areas of Christian ministries.”¹⁰⁶As a result, families in their homeland have a higher living standard. Churches and villages have benefited and developed in certain areas as well.¹⁰⁷

The negative impacts were a decrease of population in the homeland and lack of effective leaders to train the youth and pastors in their community. Another negative impact was the attitude of their families back home regarding financial support. The families back home became more dependent on financial support and became less self-sufficient. In other words, they became lazier and kept asking for more financial support.

Reflecting on the history and work of the American Baptist Mission in the Chin Hills, the Chins had many reasons to applaud the efforts of the missionaries and their motives of converting the Chin to Christianity in spite of many difficulties which they

¹⁰⁵ Tiam, “The Chin Diaspora,” 211-212.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 214.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

encountered in the Chin Hills. The missionary schools were the beginning of education system in the Chin Hills. Their translation and literary work played an important role in forming the present Chin Christian Churches. The Chin people became literate and obtained a higher standard of living thanks to the missionaries. Later, strong Christian leaders were developed and sent them out to evangelize unreached areas.

In conclusion, this research attempts to give an overview of Chin Christianity through the history of established churches, the influence of the missionaries, the positive and negative impact of the different spiritual movements, the CCOC project, the establishment of churches, associations, conventions and denominations, and factors for increasing denominations among Chins.

Lives were transformed by the gospel message through the work of the Holy Spirit. Theological schools were established and missionaries were sent out. May there be unity among evangelical Christians to reach the world for Christ. Truly, we need spiritual awakening and renewal in our churches. It will take prayer, commitment, sacrifice, vision and unity to fulfill God's will and His Great Commission. It is the first steps toward a fulfilling spiritual journey.

CHAPTER 4

MARTIN LUTHER AND THE “FREEDOM OF A CHRISTIAN”

The central message of the *hlimsang* and revival preachers mentioned in chapter two was Luther’s justification by faith alone. The preachers focused on the faith alone aspect but failed to address Luther’s concern for good works and ethical life. As a result, a prominent Chin Baptist theologian, Samuel Ngun Ling, president of and professor of Systematic Theology at Myanmar Institute of Theology, argues that Luther overemphasized faith alone and did not speak of deeds that coincide with faith. Luther’s emphasis on faith alone led many to neglect to do good deeds in daily life. Ling went on to say that this is a great weakness in Luther’s theology.¹ When emphasizing faith alone, Luther expected good works that accompanied faith. Jane E. Strohl interprets Luther’s definition of faith this way: “Faith was to be a busy, active thing, abounding in good works for one’s neighbors. Believers liberated in Christ are no longer turned upon themselves but gifted with eyes to see and ears to hear the needs of the world.”² Strohl continues, “Luther expected the recipients of grace to live with their neighbors in a new way, with a generosity and an honesty that could well transform the world. Everyday

¹ Samuel Ngun Ling, *Re-evaluating the Baptist Faith and Order beyond One Century* (Lecture, Chin Baptist Association Bible Conference, October 20-23, 2016, and Lautu Association of Baptist Churches Bible Conference, October 27-30, 2016), 17.

² Jane E. Strohl, “General Introduction,” *Luther’s Spirituality*, eds. and trans. Philip D. W. Krey and Peter D. S. Krey (New York: Paulist Press, 2007), xxiv.

relationships and duties prove the greatest spiritual discipline of all.”³ Luther’s *Freedom of a Christian* certainly portrays good works as part of faith in Christ.

Luther wrote *Freedom of a Christian* in 1520 and stated “the confidence of a soul freed by the belief that we are justified by grace through faith alone and not by our works, efforts, or human achievements.”⁴ To extend his position on faith alone, Luther discussed “by what and for what” human beings are justified. Human beings are justified *by* faith *for* the service of others. Luther set forth two assertions: “The Christian individual is a completely free lord of all, subject to none. The Christian individual is a completely dutiful servant of all, subject to all”⁵ (1 Cor. 9:19; Rom. 13:8).

In *Freedom of a Christian*, Luther discusses the “inner person” and “outer person.” According to Timothy J. Wengert, “The inner person is free lord” and “the outer person is servant of all.”⁶ Luther said, “Insofar as a Christian is free, no works are necessary. Insofar as a Christian is a servant, all kinds of works are done.”⁷

³ Ibid., xxv.

⁴ Martin Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian*, translated and introduced by Mark D. Tranvik (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 24.

⁵ Timothy J. Wengert, *The Freedom of a Christian, 1520*, The Annotated Luther Study Edition (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), 488.

⁶ Timothy J. Wengert, “Martin Luther (1483-1546),” 187, 189.

⁷ Timothy F. Lull and William R. Russell, eds., *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*, Third Edition (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 414.

Martin Luther's Road to Freedom

Martin Luther was born to peasant parents, Hans and Margareta Luther, in Eisleben, Germany, on November 10, 1483.⁸ In the time of Luther, people were obsessed with the fear of death for two main reasons. The first reason was the bubonic plague. Some estimated that over a third of Europe's population died from this highly contagious disease. The second reason was their perception of God as a judgmental God instead of a merciful God, according to the official teaching of the church.⁹ The church taught that the believer must cooperate with grace through good works. As a result, Luther constantly worried about his own spiritual security and searched for it intently.

While searching for his own spiritual security, Luther enrolled at the University of Erfurt pursuing a law degree. He was about 22 years old when he completed his master's degree in law degree in early 1505, but his quest for spiritual security was still nagging at him. Luther eventually decided that he could find spiritual security by becoming a monk in a monastery. His parents, friends, and colleagues pleaded with him to continue studying law, but his mind was made up and entered the Augustinian Monastery in Erfurt on July 17, 1505. He spent much of his time there seeking the salvation of souls with the Observant Augustinians, who engaged in serious spiritual work.¹⁰ Luther, along with his fellows, awoke at 2:00 am, for the first worship service of the day then went into the

⁸ James M. Kittelson, *Luther the Reformer: The Story of the Man and His Career* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 31-32.

⁹ Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian*, 3-4.

¹⁰ Kittelson, *Luther the Reformer*, 51-52.

community to ask for money or food in exchange for singing. The community considered them religious beggars.¹¹

After passing the novitiate, Luther was free to choose an even more rigorous path, which included long periods without food, drink, and sleep. He lived without warm clothes in extremely cold conditions and also denied his own personal needs. For the sake of spiritual security, Luther rejected the world, his family, and his very self, and his soul still felt empty.¹² He exclaimed, “the soul feels and drinks nothing, but eternal punishment.”¹³ Being holy was so hard for Luther since he was filled with much doubt and anxiety. Luther realized that living as a monk, expending all his effort on the search for salvation, and following religious rites were not enough to please God and earn his salvation.¹⁴

In 1508 Luther started his theological studies and in 1512 obtained a doctorate in theology at the University of Wittenberg. He eventually became a professor of biblical theology at the same university. As a theological professor and biblical scholar, his soul was still troubled with many biblical passages pertaining to God’s role as judge and of his own unworthiness.¹⁵ For Luther, even Christ seemed to be the fearful final judge rather than the merciful savior of sinners. He said, “I was often terrified at the name of Jesus . . .

¹¹Ibid., 53.

¹²Ibid., 55.

¹³Ibid., 56.

¹⁴Ibid., 57.

¹⁵ Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian*, 12.

when his name was spoken, I would rather have heard the devil mentioned, for I thought I would have to do good works until by them Christ had been made my gracious friend.”¹⁶

Luther was frustrated in pursuing holiness in his own ability. He hated the phrase “righteousness of God” (Rom 1:17) because he thought that God was righteous and punished the unrighteous sinners. This angered Luther, but as he read the Bible in a new way, meditated on it day and night and focused on the cross, he realized that God was not angry with him, but he was angry with God.¹⁷ He began to understand that God actually gives righteousness to those who do not deserve it. Justification of sinners is the gracious gift of God and not earned by works, efforts and human achievements (Rom. 3:22-24).

Luther later confessed:

Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that he was placated by my satisfaction. I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners... I was angry with God . . .

At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the word, namely, “In it the righteousness of God is revealed, as it is written, ‘He who through faith is righteous shall live.’” There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely, the passive righteousness with which merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, “He who through faith is righteous shall live.” Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates.¹⁸

¹⁶ Ibid., 12-13.

¹⁷ Kittelson, *Luther the Reformer*, 57.

¹⁸ Lull, *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*, 497.

Luther finally understood the spiritual security that he tried to obtain in the monastery was given to him freely in Christ. He termed this the “happy exchange.”¹⁹ He continued saying, “Our sin kills Christ while his righteousness yields life and freedom for undeserving sinners.”²⁰ Luther came to this realization by reading the Bible with a deeper understanding.

Justification by Faith Alone and Its Relation to Christian Spirituality

An Old Testament passage that is a central biblical theme of direct relevance to the doctrine of justification is Genesis 15:6, “Abraham believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness” (NIV). Here, the term “righteousness” does not mean a moral virtue, impersonal standards of justice and morality. For Alister E. McGrath, “righteousness is a personal concept: it is essentially the fulfillment of the demands and obligations of a relationship between two persons.”²¹ When Abraham put his trust in God’s promise, his relationship with God was “right.” In other words, when Abraham put his faith in the faithfulness of God, he is credited as being righteous. In the Old Testament, we do not find the noun “justification,” but the verb form “to justify” is found. The meaning of justification is understood as something active or dynamic rather than static. Justifying is something God alone does and humans cannot do. God always

¹⁹ Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian*, 16.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Alister E. McGrath, *Justification by Faith: What It Means to Us Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Academie Book, 1988), 24.

takes the initiative of justifying sinful humanity not based on account of merit or goodness, but on His own loving and saving initiative.²²

In the New Testament, the essence of justification is like a verdict that declares an unjust person to be right in a court. A sinner is declared right before God as a judge on account of faith in the promise of God in Jesus Christ through his death and resurrection (Rom. 3:24-26; 4:24-25; 1 Cor. 1:30; 6:11). It is based on the individual's status before God rather than moral character or virtues. The root meaning of justification is "being in a right relation with God" or "being right with God" since the Greek verb "dikaioun" (to justify) stresses the relational aspect.²³ Being right with God involves being reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:18-20), being adopted (Rom. 8:15, 23; Gal. 4:5), being transformed (Rom. 12:20; 2 Cor. 3:18), and being sacrificed or consecrated (1 Cor. 1:20, 30). For Paul, justification takes place by the grace of God, through faith and not through the law (Rom. 3:22-24; Gal. 2:21). Faith is an active response to the gospel. It comes from hearing and obeying the gospel (Rom. 10:17; Gal. 3:2, 8). God's grace gives and faith receives.²⁴

A prominent issue regarding justification by faith is the relationship between faith and works. James, unlike Paul, describes justification by stating, "You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone" (James 2:24). McGrath goes on to say, "James's views are not directed against Paul's doctrine of justification by faith but against distortion or caricature of it—and indeed, there are points in Paul's

²² Ibid., 26.

²³ Ibid., 26-27.

²⁴ Ibid., 27-28.

letters which seem to indicate that he himself had to contend with just such a distortion as in Rom. 3:8; 6:1, 15.”²⁵ McGrath continues:

For Paul, faith involves the reorientation of the individual towards obedience to Jesus Christ—note the important phrase ‘the obedience that comes from faith’ (Rom. 1:5) and the assertion that both the faith and the obedience of the Roman Christians were widely known (1:8; 16:19). Paul and James merely state in different ways, and with different emphases, the basic meaning of the doctrine of justification by faith: we are graciously offered our salvation as a gift, which we receive by faith, and which transforms our natures (Rom. 12:20; 2 Cor. 3:18) so that good works result. . . . In other words, the gift of faith contains within itself the seeds of our new nature and our new desire for obedience to God, both out of gratitude for what he has done for us and as a result of the changes that are brought about within us through the transformative nature of faith.²⁶

J. I. Packer writes, “James’s statement that Christians, like Abraham, are justified by works (v. 24) is thus not contrary to Paul’s insistence that Christians, like Abraham, are justified by faith (Rom. 3:28; 4:1-5), but is complementary to it.”²⁷

Luther learned the doctrine of justification by faith from the thoughts of St. Augustine (354-430). St. Augustine, a clever young North African teacher of rhetoric, once agonized over the answer to human nature and destiny. In September of 386, while reading “clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 13:14), Augustine was touched by this verse and converted to Christianity.²⁸

²⁵ Ibid., 30.

²⁶ Ibid., 30-31.

²⁷ J. I. Packer, “Justification,” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, eds. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984), 594.

²⁸ McGrath, *Justification by Faith*, 33.

During the first four centuries, intense discussions among Christians centered around the identity of Jesus Christ and the nature of God, while the doctrine of justification had remained largely unexplored. Augustine, who was appointed the bishop of Hippo (now Algeria) in 395, had developed an understanding of justification that focused on the human inability to achieve justification and the need for divine grace reinforcing the apostle Paul's theology.²⁹ According to McGrath, for Augustine, "humanity is justified as an act of grace: even human good works are the results of God's working within fallen human nature. Everything leading up to salvation is the free and unmerited gifts of God, given out of love for his people."³⁰

After St. Augustine's death in 430, his view of the doctrine of justification by both faith and moral response was resurfaced and popularized by Luther and other reformers. From 430-1517, the doctrine of justification by faith alone was "long-forgotten words of the scripture."³¹ Regarding salvation, the medieval church was teaching salvation as "something that could be earned by good works, which included fulfilling the moral law and observing vast amounts of ecclesiastical rules. The sale of indulgences—which so outraged Luther shows—that it was widely thought possible to avoid purgatory by paying the appropriate amount of money."³² An extremely challenging

²⁹ Ibid., 33-34.

³⁰ Ibid., 43.

³¹ Herman J. Selderhuis, "The Protestant Tradition in Europe (16th to 19th Centuries)," *The Story of Christian Spirituality*, eds., Gordon Mursell (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 168.

³² McGrath, *Justification by Faith*, 47-48.

question for Luther was, “How can man, cut off from God by his sins and guilt, become acceptable to Him and enter into a living personal fellowship with Him?”³³

Luther knew of two views for being righteous before God. First was the view, common to the religious people of all time, that man is righteous before and acceptable to God if he is just in his activity or obeys the Law. In theological terminology, this view is called the “‘active’ view of justification.”³⁴ This view is known as justification by works alone. The second view came from the official teaching of the medieval church that claimed:

[M]an is justified by being healed from his sin-sickness and corruption so that he is able to love God and his fellow men and thus to fulfill the Law. He becomes acceptable to God, or righteous in His sight, by this grace-wrought renewal and the ensuing righteous activity, or good works. Thus, man is both “passive” and “active” in justification: he receives the healing and renewing grace as a gift of God, that is, “passively,” but he is “active” in doing good works by which he merits eternal life.³⁵

Justification is achieved through cooperation between divine grace and the efforts of man. A precondition or a specific human effort is required for justification. This view is termed as justification by both faith and works.

These two views did not satisfy Luther as he reflected on his own spiritual salvation. Luther constantly searched for the answer in becoming justified or righteous in the sight of the Holy God because he felt his good works were not enough for his

³³ Uuras Saarnivaara, *Luther Discovers the Gospel: New Light upon Luther's Way from Medieval Catholicism to Evangelical Faith* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2005), XIII.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., XIII-XIV.

salvation. He was seeking a way to peace with God and assurance of salvation. Luther increasingly realized that it depended more on the grace of God than his good works. While meditating on Romans 1:17, he was enlightened by God and came to the realization that justification is the gracious gift of God imputed to him by passive righteousness. Luther exclaimed, “Our righteousness is nothing but imputation. It consists not in any merits, but in the favor and imputation of God through faith.”³⁶

When we are justified by grace through faith, we are righteous before and acceptable to God. For Luther, this righteousness can only be given to us by God alone because righteousness is not in us even after being justified. Luther, therefore, calls this righteousness “alien righteousness.”³⁷ As a mother hen who covers her chicks with her wing, similarly, God clothes us with “alien righteousness.” Therefore, in our justification, we are passive and God is active. When we claim that we are justified by grace through faith, it means “grace gives, and faith gratefully receives—and even that faith must itself be seen as a gracious gift of God.”³⁸ Luther has never viewed faith as a human effort or work. For Luther, “Even the faith through which we are justified is a gift of God.”³⁹ According to McGrath, assuming faith as a human work, something which we do, is a popular misunderstanding of the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith.⁴⁰

³⁶ Ibid., 9.

³⁷ McGrath, *Justification by Faith*, 52.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 53.

Luther did not regard justification as a gradual process like Augustine, but as an event in a specific time. Uuras Saarnivaara writes “Justification is not a gradual process, but an instantaneous act of God whereby He pronounces the sinner free from his guilt. The sinner appropriates at once full forgiveness and complete righteousness in Christ.”⁴¹ However, Luther did believe that God forgives sins, reckons the sinner righteous, and renews him. For Luther, this renewal is the “second justification,”⁴² which is a gradual process through the work of the Holy Spirit. This renewal is the work of the Spirit of God received by faith. In justification, no human effort is necessary for the attainment of righteousness since it is received in all its fullness by faith in the promise of the Gospel. In sanctification, continuous striving is necessary.⁴³

Through justification by faith in Christ, we need to explore the ethical and spiritual consequences of new life in Christ. When Luther spoke of justification by faith alone, he never left out Christian values. Timothy J. Wengert writes, “because justification by grace through faith frees believers from worry about their relation to God, they are freed to serve the neighbor, especially the poor. Thus, service to neighbor is one of the most striking results of Luther’s spirituality.”⁴⁴

There are a couple of main differences between Augustine and Luther in justifying righteousness. “For Augustine, it is *internal* righteousness, something God

⁴¹ Saarnivaara, *Luther Discovers the Gospel*, 10.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 11.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁴⁴ Timothy J. Wengert, “Preface,” *Luther’s Spirituality*, eds. and trans. Philip D. W. Krey and Peter D. S. Krey (New York: Paulist Press, 2007), xvi.

works *within* us; for Luther, it is *external*, something God works *outside* us.”⁴⁵

Augustine believed justification as both an event of being declared as righteous and the process of becoming righteous. For Luther, the event (justification) and the process (sanctification) should be distinguished.⁴⁶ Luther considered justification as a change in an individual’s status rather than a fundamental change in an individual’s nature.

Although the individual believer is righteous by faith, he remains a sinner. For Luther, the believer is “righteous and a sinner at one and the same time (*simul iustus et peccator*).”⁴⁷

Whether justification by faith truly is the primary or secondary discourse in doing theology is a critical question for contemporary theologians. Some theologians like Eberhard Jüngel, Wolfhard Pannenberg, Jürgen Moltmann, and Robert Jenson do not espouse justification as primary discourse in doing theology. They argue that the doctrine of justification “should not structure doctrinal expositions of faith.”⁴⁸ In contrast, Mark C. Mattes asserts that justification is the discernment for and primary discourse in doing theology. He says, “Justification is a *discrimen* that cuts into the self-legitimizing structures embedded in these modes of thinking; it does not limit itself to primary discourse.”⁴⁹ For Mattes, claiming that justification is second-order of discourse of

⁴⁵ McGrath, *Justification by Faith*, 56.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁴⁸ Mark C. Mattes, *The Role of Justification in Contemporary Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 177.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

theology means that “the gospel, while certainly necessary, is not sufficient for life.”⁵⁰

Mattes contends:

Here, the gospel is necessary as a foundation for the edifice of theology; the entire edifice is planned on the basis of situating theology in relation to knowing, doing, or feeling. . . . justification is necessary and sufficient, not only as the basis of but also as the hub for theology, since faith constitutes human nature at its core. Receptivity, the passive life (*vita passiva*), is the most primordial stance of the human. All knowing, doing, and feeling come from this. Thus, justification is the lens through which all Christian truth must be presented.⁵¹

The present work agrees with Mattes’ assertion. For Christian spirituality, justification by faith is the first step in forming or building a Christian life, as a journey of thousands of miles beginning with a step. Justification by faith is the foundation of Christian spirituality. This does not mean that Christian spirituality ignores social responsibilities and accountability. Rather, through justification by faith in Christ, we are a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17) and have a new identity in Christ to transform the world. Luther connected faith and works in his *Freedom of a Christian*. Building Christian spirituality today immensely depends on how we understand freedom and use it. Therefore, an authentic understanding of the freedom of a Christian is necessarily important. Regarding Christian freedom, Luther’s *Freedom of a Christian* is classical writing for today Christians. In the *Freedom of a Christian*, Luther connected clearly connected the role of faith and works or justification and Christian ethical life.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 179.

⁵¹ Ibid.

Luther and Freedom

The word “freedom” can be defined in various ways. For instance, the economic and political definition of freedom may be quite different from Luther’s definition. According to Luther, human beings, by their sinful nature, are clinging to worldly materials that result in bondage that is deep and profound in daily living. To be freed from the bondage of sin and the power of death through faith in Christ is the real Christian freedom.⁵² It is grounded in Christ and received by faith as a promise from God in Christ. Christian freedom propels us to serve our neighbors. In short, Luther’s conviction of Christian freedom is “we have been liberated by God for attentive service in the world.”⁵³

Concerning the attitude of serving others, Luther exhorts, “We do not serve others with an eye toward making them obligated to us, nor do we distinguish between friends and enemies or anticipate their thankfulness or ingratitude. Rather we freely and willing to spend ourselves and all that we have.”⁵⁴

Freedom from the Power of Death

People love freedom. People want to be free. Free from what? It differs depending on the situation. For instance, prisoners want to be free from imprisonment. The poor want to be free from poverty. For Luther, the essence of Christian freedom is having no

⁵² Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian*, 28-29.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 30.

fear or worry about condemnation or spiritual death at the future judgment, but having inner peace by trusting in the divine promise that we stand “clothed only in the righteousness of Christ and for his sake is assured of life.”⁵⁵

Why do Christians indispensably need to be freed from the power of spiritual death? The answer is no one has the power and authority to set himself free by his own human ability. The Psalmist says, “Yet they cannot redeem themselves from death by paying a ransom to God. Redemption does not come so easily, for no one can ever pay enough to live forever and never see the grave” (47:7-8, NLT). No one can prevail over the power of spiritual death through self-effort because everyone has sinned (Rom 3:23; Ps. 41:1-2). For Luther, human beings are created in the image of God without sin by God to procreate descendants, rule over things and never die. However, after Adam’s fall, human beings are under the reality of sin and death, which cannot be overcome by their powers, and which lasts forever.⁵⁶ As a result of Adam’s sin, all human beings “are born together in sin, live and die, and would have to be judged guilty of eternal death.”⁵⁷ Sin is inherited by all human beings through Adam’s fall (Ps. 51:5). All are now under the control of the devil. No one can overcome the devil’s powers through their own power. The will of human beings is also bound. It is only through faith in the Son of God, Jesus Christ, that human beings can be freed and given eternal life as a gift.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Strohl, “General Introduction,” xxii.

⁵⁶ Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luther’s Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 154.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 193.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 154.

Freedom by Faith

According to Luther, there are two natures in every person: spiritual nature and bodily nature. The spiritual nature or the soul refers to the “inner” or “new” nature. The bodily nature or flesh and blood refer to the “sensual,” “outward,” or “old” nature.⁵⁹ Paul writes, “Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day” (2 Cor. 4:16). These two natures contend against each other as Paul states: “For what the flesh desire is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh” (Gal. 5:17).⁶⁰

Inner Person

The inner person, Luther contends, is a person justified by faith. For Luther, no outer or bodily works, such as visiting holy places, performing sacred duties, prayers, fasting, or refraining from certain types of foods, justifies a person, but only faith in the gospel justifies a sinner. Luther claims, “Nothing external can produce Christian righteousness or freedom.”⁶¹ Here, one might ask how faith alone, without the works of the law, justifies sinners while many passages of the Bible are commanding good works.

Luther addresses this by dividing the Bible into two parts: commands and promises. The commands teach us what we ought to do and know. The commands also express our inability or powerlessness to do good works perfectly. More importantly, it

⁵⁹ Lull, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 414. 2 Cor. 4:14.

⁶⁰ Luther, *The Freedom a Christian*, 51.

⁶¹ Lull, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 404.

does not give us the power to do it.⁶² Commands are like an x-ray or ultrasound that can find our diseases but cannot heal us. Through the commands, we realize that “there is nothing in ourselves by which we can be saved or justified.”⁶³ With commands being insufficient, the promises of God, concerning “Jesus Christ, who was made flesh, suffered, rose from the dead, and was glorified through the Spirit who makes us holy.”⁶⁴ Promises of the Bible alone can justify a person and set him or her free from sin and death through grace by faith (cf. Rom. 1:17; 3:22, 25, 28, 30; 5:1; Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8). Therefore, Luther said with great conviction, “the soul needs only one thing: the word of God. The word of God brings life, truth, light, peace, righteousness, salvation, joy, liberty, wisdom, power, grace, glory and every other blessing imaginable”⁶⁵ (cf. Ps. 107:20; Rom. 1:17). Faith in the word of God or gospel or the promise of God precedes everything regarding one’s spiritual nature or new nature. Luther declared the reason for preaching the law of God and the gospel, saying,

The first is the law of God, which is to be preached so that one thereby reveals and teaches how to recognize sin (Rom. 3 [:20] and 7: [:7])... Secondly, when now sin is recognized and the law is so preached that the conscience is alarmed and humbled before God’s wrath, we are then to preach the comforting word of the gospel and the forgiveness of sins, so that the conscience again may be comforted and established in the grace of God.⁶⁶

⁶² Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian*, 57.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁶⁴ Lull, *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*, 405.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 405.

⁶⁶ Martin Luther, *Luther’s Work*, Vol. 40, ed. Conrad Bergendoff (Philadelphia: Huhlenberg Press, 1958), 82.

The Threefold Power of Faith

Since faith is the foundation of Christian beliefs, how the word faith is defined is crucial. Luther defines faith as an “active and dynamic reality”⁶⁷ and “the source of good works.”⁶⁸ He states, “Faith active in love.”⁶⁹ When he focuses on faith alone, Luther does not reject good works. In contrast to the medieval church’s teaching on good works, Luther emphasizes “faith before works.”⁷⁰ For Luther, faith is “master workers and the chief in charge.”⁷¹ Regarding “faith alone,” he explains the functions, power, and benefits of faith as being essentially important. He explains the threefold power of faith.

First, the power of faith frees from the law. Since we are justified or freed by faith and not by works, we are freed from the law. Through faith in Jesus Christ, we are given the power to become the children of God (Jn. 1:12). In 1 Tim. 1:9 Paul remarked, “The law is not laid down for the innocent . . .”⁷²

Second, the power of faith honors God. If a person believes in someone, it means that the person trusts that individual with the most reverent and highest regard. The person regards the individual as trustworthy and clings to that individual. Similarly, we trust God fully without any doubt and cling to him in every situation. Faith is one of the highest forms of worshiping God. Conversely, if we do not trust God, it means that we

⁶⁷ Ibid., 385.

⁶⁸ Bayer, *Martin Luther’s Theology*, 282.

⁶⁹ Lull, *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*, 385.

⁷⁰ Bayer, *Martin Luther’s Theology*, 282.

⁷¹ Ibid., 283.

⁷² Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian*, 59-60.

think God to be a liar and untrustworthy. When we believe God to be trustworthy, our heart gives him honor.⁷³ Those who have faith in God like Abraham and Noah always give honor to God, obey his commands and keep his promises.

Third, the power of faith unites the soul with Christ. Through faith, the soul unites with Christ as a bride is united with her bridegroom. Christ and the soul become one flesh. It is important to understand that Christ is full of grace, life, and salvation while the soul is full of sins, death, and damnation. As a bridegroom, Christ takes all his bride's realities upon himself and bestows on her all that is his. Now our soul possesses eternal life because Christ's triumph over sin and death (1 Cor. 15:57; cf. Sol. 2:16) becomes ours.⁷⁴

Priesthood and Kingship

Through faith in Christ, Christ imparts upon every believer a double honor: priesthood and kingship.⁷⁵ It is very important for us to understand their true meaning. Without knowing the true meaning, one might argue, "Since through faith in Christ I am a priest and a king, I have rights to serve sacraments." This is not the true meaning of Luther's priesthood and kingship. In the Old Testament, God consecrated to himself all the firstborn males. The firstborn male was a priest and lord over all the others. Likewise,

⁷³ Ibid., 60-61.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 62-64.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 65.

only the firstborn Son of God, Christ is the true king and priest, but not by the standards of the flesh.

Christ imparts and shares the priesthood and kingship with everyone who believes in him (1 Pet. 2:9) through faith. The kingdom of Christ is not of this world (John 18:36), but a heavenly one. As Christ's reign is a spiritual one, our priesthood and kingship are spiritual as well. With regard to kingship by faith, when we are spiritually exalted above all and lord of all things, nothing is able to harm our inner person. As priests, we are worthy to appear before God, to pray for others, and to teach one another divine things.⁷⁶ On the other hand, we must understand that the role of priests or pastors differs from the laity in position and administration. The priesthood of all believers does not mean that all believers are priests or pastors in the church.

Freedom for the Service of Neighbors

Out of the two natures of a person, the inner person is spirit-filled and completely justified through faith. Thus, the inner person is to be joyful and glad about what Christ has done. The second part, concerns the outer person. What is the role of the outer person in everyday life? Does our body still need rules, disciplines, and ceremonies? For the great mercies of God, Paul commends, "present your bodies a living sacrifice" (Romans 12:1). The outer person is to serve God joyfully with boundless love with no thought of earning anything in return.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 65-68.

Outer Person

Luther was asked, “If faith does all things and alone is sufficient for righteousness, why are good works commanded [in the Bible]?”⁷⁷ Luther’s reply was, “in this life a person’s own body must be ruled and be in relation with other human beings.”⁷⁸ He further explains, “a Christian must take care to exercise moderate discipline over the body and subject it to the Spirit by means of fasting, vigils, and labor. The goal is to have the body obey and conform—and not hinder—the inner person and faith.”⁷⁹ Our body needs to be healthy and fit so that we can serve those who are in need. Luther did not reject the works and ceremonies that are done to meet the necessities of life and care for our bodies, but he strongly rejected ceremonies as a means of justification.⁸⁰ However, since human nature and reason are inclined toward sin, we need to pray that the Lord may shape us as *theoditacti*, those who are taught by God (John 6:5).⁸¹ The law needs to be written in our heart by God so we can discern right from wrong, good from bad, to follow or not to follow. We also need to be discerning about what to believe, what to accept, what to do, what to eat as well as other decisions in daily life.

Luther was criticized when he ignored good works and the ethical life in daily living by focusing on faith alone. But for Luther, good works are not required to be a

⁷⁷ Lull, *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*, 414.

⁷⁸ Wengert, *The Freedom of a Christian*, 511.

⁷⁹ Lull, *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*, 414.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 424.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 426-7.

righteous person but are required to please God. For instance, a tree precedes the fruit. The fruit does not determine whether tree good or bad, but the tree determines the nature of the fruit. “In the same way, a person first must be good or bad before doing good or bad work for one’s works do not make one good or bad, but it is the essence of the person determines whether work is good or bad.”⁸² Luther states, “Good works do not make a good person, but a good person does good works. Evil works do not make a person wicked, but a wicked person does evil works.”⁸³

Our good works are not for our own righteousness, but for benefit of all people. We do not live for ourselves in this mortal life on earth but live together with other human beings. Paul says, “For none of us lives for ourselves alone, and one of us dies for ourselves alone. If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord” (NIV, Romans 14:7-8). Luther continues, “All our works are to be directed toward the benefit of others. Given the abundance of our faith, our life and works become a surplus to be used freely in serving of the neighbor.”⁸⁴ We live to be a benefit for our neighbors: “As Christians, we live in Christ through faith and in the neighbor through love.”⁸⁵ Here Christ is our example. He emptied himself and took the form of a slave (Phil. 2:5-8) so that sinners can be free.

⁸² Ibid., 416.

⁸³ Ibid., 416.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 419.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 423.

Christ sets us free for serving our neighbors who are in need so that their life may be lifted up.

Freedom to Living the Righteous and Good Life

Luther valued good works and ethical life, but these elements do not save sinners. According to Luther, there are two kinds of righteousness: alien righteousness (passive righteousness) and proper righteousness (active righteousness). The alien righteousness is “the righteousness of another, instilled from without. This is the righteousness of Christ by which he justifies through faith, as it is written in 1 Corinthians 1[:30].”⁸⁶ Proper righteousness is the product, fruit, and consequence of alien righteousness.⁸⁷ This righteousness is “a reflection of and response to that alien righteousness that has been received as a gift.”⁸⁸ In proper righteousness, “genuine good works might flourish.”⁸⁹ This kind of righteousness bears the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23). This righteousness also follows the example of Christ (1 Pet. 2:21; Phil. 2:5f) and is transformed into his likeness (2 Cor. 3:18).⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Ibid., 119.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 121.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 119.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 121.

In addition to righteousness, Luther also mentions three types of good life.⁹¹ The first type of good life is limited to time and place. Religious leaders who preach and teach do the right things, but only to be seen. Luther points out that different clothes or dresses of priests, monks, nuns, bishops and all clergy, including ceremonies and various occasions, are all for outward appearance only.⁹²

The second type of good life is performed out of fear, disgrace, punishment, hell, avoiding pain, or out of seeking reward. It is not out of their own inner desire, willingness, and gladness. There is no joy and gladness in doing good works. The true motive and will are absent because it is service under compulsion, necessity, and duress. The above two kinds of good works and ethical life are not pleasing to God. God desires good works to be done willingly and with gladness (2 Cor. 9:7).⁹³

The third type of good life is controlled by the Holy Spirit. When people kneel in grace before God and deny their own ability to do good works, God regenerates their lives and imparts the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit then bears the fruit of a pure, free, cheerful, glad, and loving heart. They perform every good work with joy and love which are not bound by time and place.⁹⁴ This type of good life is all above because the genuine Christian life is not just pious and external good works, but the life that lives out inner faith that makes a man a new creature, converts him, changes his conduct, and leads him

⁹¹ Ibid., 132.

⁹² Ibid., 132-33.

⁹³ Ibid., 135.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 136.

altogether in a new manner and character of life. The Christian good life is the life grounded in Christ's righteousness which is bestowed to us.

Luther's opponents never tired of asserting that Luther opposed good works, and they exaggerated him as a fomenter of libertinism. They also set a suspicion that Luther preached cheap grace. In contrast, Luther asserted, "Grace is not cheap; it leads to good works."⁹⁵ In Luther's view, good works are absolutely necessary but do not save. For Luther, good works are just the fruits of faith.⁹⁶ Luther never opposed good works in Christian life. But he did oppose claiming good works as a means of salvation. In *Freedom of a Christian*, Luther clearly distinguished the role of faith and good works in Christian spirituality. This chapter proves that Luther never neglected ethical life or Christian values. Nor did he consider God's grace as cheap grace when he asserted justification by faith alone. Luther asserts that believers are justified by grace through faith alone in order to bear good fruit through Christian values. This is the foundation of Christian spirituality.

⁹⁵ Mark Ellingsen, *Luther's Legacy: Reforming Reformation Theology for the 21st Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 219.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 218-219.

CHAPTER 5

THE WORKS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

Christian spirituality and the work of the Holy Spirit are inseparable. The Spirit is the life-giver and sanctifier. Without the work of the Spirit, no one can come to faith and live out faith in Christ. The Spirit creates faith in us and enables us to perceive the truth. As the inner person, we are born of the Spirit (Jn. 3:5-6, 8). Moreover, sanctification is also the work of the Spirit. Then, both our inner and outer person always need the Spirit's presence and work in our lives so that we may live dynamically for Christ, witness to others, and live in Christian victory. Therefore, there can be no authentic Christian spirituality without the presence and work of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is essential in Christian spirituality. However, unfortunately, many Chin Christians are lack of knowledge about the work of the Spirit because of lack of studying, teaching and preaching about the work of the Spirit in the church. As a result, this chapter attempts to examine the works of the Spirit in Christian spirituality.

During an annual Church Bible Conference held on March 11-12, 2016, this writer was teaching "The Holy Spirit and His Works" and asked, "Who is the Holy Spirit? Have you ever experienced the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit in your life?" Expecting a few responses, most kept quiet while others had a puzzled look. The writer then realized the subject of the Holy Spirit was not taught much in the church.

Although the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is foundational in the Christian faith, many Chin Baptist pastors do not preach or teach it much.

Lois Malcolm writes, “We leave experiences of the Spirit to *other* people – enthusiasts, charismatics, and mystics.”¹ As a result, many Chin Baptists learn and practice the presence of the Spirit from Pentecostals, with a heavy emphasis on dancing, speaking in tongues, prophesying, and healing. The Pentecostal teaching about the Spirit is deficient. Therefore, Chin Christians need to study the biblical teaching of about the Holy Spirit. This chapter will briefly discuss the works of the Holy Spirit in Christian spirituality.

The doctrine of the Holy Spirit is the foundation and source of Christian spirituality because the Holy Spirit creates faith, gives life, and is constantly at work in the Christian’s life. Malcolm conveys very clear characteristics of experiencing the presence of the Holy Spirit. She writes,

[W]e experience the energizing force—the vitality—that transforms us. We discover that the Spirit imbues every moment of our lives with God’s inexhaustible life. We discover that every moment can be lived with the newness and freshness of that life. We discover gifts we never thoughts we had. We discover a fierce desire for truth—a hunger for justice and righteousness—that affects all our relationships and activities. We no longer are able to look at ourselves or other people in the same way.²

This chapter examines the works of the Spirit in creating faith, giving life, and indwelling, sealing, sanctifying, encouraging, empowering, renewing, and transforming

¹ Lois Malcolm, *Holy Spirit: Creative Power in Our Lives* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2009), 9.

² *Ibid.*, 10.

believers. The Holy Spirit also gives spiritual gifts, creates love and hope, and bears the fruits of the Spirit. This chapter also includes Martin Luther's arguments against the spiritualists who claimed that God spoke directly to his people through the Holy Spirit by means of visions and dreams rather than through the Scriptures.

The Spirit Creates Faith

When claiming that we are justified by grace through faith alone, questions can be raised: Does one, by his or her nature without God, have the ability to come to faith or response to the call of God? Is faith an effort of human ability or the work of the Spirit concerning our salvation? Without the divine initiative or work of the Holy Spirit, no one can respond to the call of God through Jesus Christ. No one can come to faith unless the Spirit draws or urges him to come to salvation in Jesus Christ (John 6:44-47). The Holy Spirit is the agent who bestows God's gift of faith to believers (cf. John 16:7-11; Titus 3:4-7, Eph. 2:8-9). Jesus promised his disciples to send the Spirit to guide them "into all truth" (Jn. 16:13). Here, the Spirit takes the role of convicting people of their sins and their need for Jesus Christ as their Savior. The Spirit is the agent who creates faith in Christ which leads to eternal life. Eternal life is received by faith (Jn. 3:16; 2 Cor. 3:6). Thus, the Spirit is the life-giver.

In the story of creation in Genesis 1, the Spirit of God is involved in the creation process. Karl Barth emphasized the "The Holy Ghost as Creator" in his book *The Holy Ghost and the Christian Life*.³ God then created human beings, Adam and Eve, in His

³ Karl Barth, *The Holy Ghost and the Christian Life* (London: Fredrick Muller Limited, 1938).

own image (Gen. 1:27). Unfortunately, Adam and Eve who was created in God's image fell into sin and were separated from God. Barth said,

Man's being in the image of God only becomes actual fact when the Holy Ghost comes on the spot on man's behalf. This likeness to God is, therefore, not, and will not be, a property of the human spirit created, but it is and remains the free work of the Creator upon His creature: a work only to be understood as grace, and never to be comprehended by man.⁴

People are separated from God because of sin. God knows that people, by their own efforts, are not able to return to Him, but God provides a way through His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, who died for the sins of the world. Sinners need the energizing force of the Spirit so that the heart can be awakened to the unconditional love of God in Jesus Christ. Luther said, "Love is infused into the heart through the Holy Spirit."⁵ According to Regin Prenter, the work of the Holy Spirit is "to infuse into the heart the true love of God so that obedience to the command of the law is brought about not by fear of punishment but because of free and happy love to God."⁶ Only through the work of the Spirit, sinners are able to respond to God's love and come to faith in Jesus Christ. Prenter continued, "Faith is the gift of the Spirit. Faith is created when God who is hidden in the Word and in the signs of revelation becomes experience, power and reality in us so that our whole life becomes centered in his presence."⁷ By the work of the Spirit, faith becomes a reality in our life.

⁴ Ibid., 9.

⁵ Regin Prenter, *Spiritus Creator*, trans. John M. Jensen (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1953), 3.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 289.

Romans 10:17 says, “Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ” (NIV). However, not all recipients who heard the message of Christ’s salvation have been touched by the gospel of salvation. John says, “He [Jesus] came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God” (Jn. 1:11-12). John records that not all who encountered Jesus believed in him, but only some. In the story of mass conversion at Pentecost recorded in Acts 2, only when God poured out His Spirit to the people, they were able to receive the message preached by Peter. Without the work of the Holy Spirit, no one can come to faith in the gospel of salvation. Only the Spirit can create faith and give eternal life. In salvation, faith cannot be attained through human efforts. It is the work of God through the Spirit. The Spirit enables people to believe in the Gospel and empowers believers to serve God’s purposes in the world.

The Spirit Dwells in and Seals Believers

The heart of humans was once the sweet home of God, the indwelling place of the Holy Spirit. However, because of sin, the heart was polluted and the Divine Resident went. The heart, once the temple of the Holy One was destroyed. The heart became the dwelling place of all sin. The heart needed to be recreated and restored. Only the power of the Holy Spirit can recreate and repair the polluted heart. Through the powerful work of the Holy Spirit, when we are justified in Jesus Christ by grace through faith, the Holy Spirit immediately dwells in our heart. This is what John meant when he said, “born of the Spirit” (3:5, 8). When we were born of the Spirit (Jn. 1:12), the Spirit enters into and

dwells in us, and makes us the temple of God simultaneously (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19; Rom. 8:9; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:22).⁸

Due to the triumphal entry of the Spirit in us, darkness, enmity, pollution, and death are replaced by light, love, holiness, and life.⁹ The Spirit does not dwell in us like “a stagnant pool,” but like an ‘ever-living fountain’ (Jn. 4:14; 7:38-39) that plays at all seasons of the year, in heat and cold, and in all external circumstances of weather, whether foul or fair, wet or dry.”¹⁰ According to Octavius Winslow, the indwelling of the Spirit in believers produces,

The hungering and the thirsting for righteousness, the rising of the heart in filial love to God, the sweet submission to His sovereign will, the longing for more knowledge of Christ, the constant struggling with the law of sin, the mourning over the indwelling principle of sin; all this is above and far beyond nature. It is the fruit, the precious fruit, of the indwelling Spirit.¹¹

The Holy Spirit dwells in believers and also seals them (2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13; 4:30). Every believer is sealed by the Holy Spirit at the time of his salvation. By sealing the believer, “the Spirit witnesses to the believer that he is born of God.”¹² Sealing means the affirmation that the believer “becomes actually an ‘heir of God, and a joint heir with Christ,’ and enters into the family as an adopted child.”¹³ Other significant factors of sealing by the Spirit, according to Warren W. Wiersbe, are finished transaction,

⁸Octavius Winslow, *The Work of the Holy Spirit: An Experimental and Practical View* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1972), 96.

⁹ Ibid., 97.

¹⁰ Ibid., 99.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., 139.

¹³ Ibid., 143.

ownership, security and protection, and authenticity. When a legal document is mailed, it is stamped with the official seal to signify the completion of the transaction. This sealing also implies ownership. Likewise, God has purchased believers through Christ to be His own (1 Cor. 6:19-20). Believers are safe under the protection of God. Sealing also implies security and protection. As a signature on a letter attests to the genuineness of the document, a seal signifies authenticity. The mark of being children of God by our lips, religious activities, or our good works, but the witness of the Spirit (Rom. 8:9).¹⁴

The Spirit Sanctifies the Believers

A very important work of the Spirit is to sanctify or make believers holy (2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:2). The Triune God alone is holy. Jurgen Moltmann writes, “God alone is holy—only God and nothing else. Holiness is exclusively an attribute of God’s.”¹⁵ Since God is holy, God requires believers to be holy. The Bible reads, “Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy” (Lev. 19:2; 20:26; 1 Pet. 1:15-16). If the Triune God alone is holy, can believers really be holy? If not, what does it mean to make believers holy? To make believers holy does not mean that they become holy through their own nature. According to Luther, believers are “made holy by an alien holiness, through Christ, by the holiness of mercy.”¹⁶ For Moltmann, it means that the believers are made God’s own

¹⁴ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: The New Testament* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2007), 587-88.

¹⁵ Jurgen Moltmann, *The Source of Life: The Holy Spirit and the Theology of Life* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 44.

¹⁶ Mark Ellingsen, *Luther’s Legacy: Reforming Reformation Theology for the 21st Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 217.

possession and participate in God's nature so that they correspond to him.¹⁷ Being sanctified or made holy means belonging to God and set apart for God's use. Believers who were once strangers are now admitted and accepted to be members of God's family and to live a life of obedience in following God's will. For the sanctified Christians, following God's will is imperative. Moltmann explains the meaning of sanctification by saying,

For Christians, sanctification means the discipleship of Jesus and an inward coming alive in God's Spirit. The Beatitudes and the requirements of the Sermon on the Mount are orientation points for life in sanctification. These are not arbitrary stipulations. Life in sanctification has to do with a kind of simultaneity with Christ, and this fellowship with Christ has to do with realizing the image of God from our own human side.¹⁸

Merrill F. Unger examines sanctification in three aspects: positional, experiential, and ultimate. The positional sanctification is the believer's new position before God through grace by faith in Christ. It depends only upon one's union with and position in Christ. Due to union with Christ, all believers are "saints" and are "sanctified" (Acts 20:32; 1 Cor. 1:2; 6:11; Heb. 10:10, 14; Jude 3). The experiential sanctification is the inner experience of being regenerated and sanctified by the Spirit through faith. In other words, this phase of sanctification is one's experientially conviction of being reckoned holy or righteous in Christ (Rom. 6:1-11). The ultimate sanctification is glorification or complete conformity to Christ at His coming (1 John 3:1-3; Rom. 8:29-30; Jude 24, 25).¹⁹

¹⁷ Ibid., 45.

¹⁸ Ibid., 48.

¹⁹ Merrill F. Unger, *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, eds. R. K. Harrison (Chicago: Moody Publisher, 2006), "Sanctification, Entire."

Moltmann also considers sanctification of life as “an ethic of reverence for life.”²⁰ Reverence for life is the essence of holiness. Sanctification of life produces a healthy living and a happy life. For instance, if a person smokes, drinks and pollutes the environment, it means the person does not revere life because those habits damage life. In a broader sense, the word “holy” and “whole” are closely connected. Thus, the sanctification of life can bring healing of life as a whole.²¹ The Spirit gives life and awakens our vitality, in living fully.²² The Spirit as Sanctifier is at work bringing healing in the abundant life that Jesus gives (John 10:10).

The Spirit Encourages, Empowers, and Renews Believers

Although Christians have been justified and sanctified in Christ by grace through faith and through the divine power of the Holy Spirit, they are not perfect. Believers must resist sin and temptation, and continue to struggle while being a witness for Christ in this world. Therefore, believers need encouragement, empowerment, and renewal. The Spirit takes the role of encouraging, empowering, renewing believers to “resist temptation and to live the righteous, fruitful life Christ intends for his followers (Rom. 8:13-14; Gal. 5:16-23; see, too, Titus 2:11-14).”²³ Moltmann pictures the Holy Spirit as “vitalizing energy.”²⁴ Moltmann continues to write, “We have called the energies of the Spirit which

²⁰ Moltmann, *The Source of Life*, 49.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 49-52.

²² *Ibid.*, 53.

²³ Geoffrion, *One Step at a Time*, 219.

²⁴ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 195.

charismatically experience, vitalizing energies, because they bring us to life. Since human life always becomes living only through love, we can, with great caution, call this divine energy an eroticizing energy.”²⁵ Jesus identified the Spirit with “rivers of living water” (Jn. 7:37-39), which means that the Spirit nourishes, renews, and empowers believers. It is crucial for believers is to be open to the Spirit and to keep in step with the Spirit’s leading (Rom. 8:6; Gal. 5:24-25) in order to be encouraged, strengthened and renewed.²⁶

The Spirit Transforms Believers’ Emotional Lives

Paul teaches, “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Rom. 12:2). As human beings, believers have emotional problems such as anger, guilt, and anxiety in daily life. These negative emotions cause us to behave in ungodly ways and destroy the spiritual life. We essentially need the help of the Spirit to transform, renew, and strengthen our emotions by the transforming power of the Spirit, so that we will be able “to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will” (Rom. 12:2) and create life-building emotions such as peace and joy.

Anger is an emotional reaction when a person is interrupted, threatened, injured, or simply frustrated. The Bible encourages us not to let our anger lead to sin (Eph. 4:26-27). The Spirit helps transform our angry feelings and accept others’ frailties as God accepts us with all of our inadequacies. W. Curry Mavis writes, “The Holy Spirit aids the Christian to diminish his impulses to anger by helping him to become forgiving of others

²⁵ Ibid., 196.

²⁶ Geoffrion, *One Step at a Time*, 219.

because he himself has been forgiven by God.”²⁷ The Spirit enables us to have joy, a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22), instead of anger in life’s frustrating situations.

Believers experience guilt. Repressed guilt becomes a source of anxiety and fear that produce unhappiness, loneliness, and insecurity. The Spirit helps us transform our feeling of guilt to forgiveness. The Spirit gives us inner confidence of divine forgiveness that produces inner peace and a sense of freedom from condemnation (Rom. 5:1; 8:1). The Spirit removes the fear of condemnation and helps us realize that we belong to God’s family (Rom. 8:15-16).²⁸ Through the work of the Spirit, we continue to be forgiven which compels us to give thanks to God.

Believers, especially low-income families, are anxious about even their basic needs such as food, clothes, and bills, and constantly worry about their future. Mavis defines anxiety this way, “Anxiety is an emotional state in which we have exaggerated fears of being overwhelmed by a danger, losing a cherished value, or failing to achieve an objective.”²⁹ Anxiety can hinder Christian effectiveness, faith, and spiritual vitality. It can also weaken our faith and relationship with God. Jesus encourages us, “Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear” (Matt. 6:25). Paul teaches us, “Do not be anxious about anything” (Phil. 4:6). Peter encouraged the persecuted Christians to “Cast all your anxiety on him [God] because he

²⁷ W. Curry Mavis, *The Holy Spirit in the Christian Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1977), 16.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 30.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 37.

cares you” (1 Pet. 5:7).³⁰ Here, it is easier to say than to do. But the Spirit can help us to put our trust in God and transform our anxiety to trusting in God. The Spirit takes the role of transforming our feeling of anger, guilt, and anxiety to feelings of joy and peace.

The Holy Spirit Gives Spiritual Gifts

The Spirit gives different spiritual gifts to each believer for the growth of the church and well-being of the community. When Paul speaks of spiritual gifts, he indicates his attention to the source of the gifts, the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:4, 11), the receiver of the gift, “to each one” (1 Cor. 12:7), and the purpose of the gifts, “for the common good” and the service of God (1 Cor. 12:6-7). According to Paul, every believer has at least one spiritual gift (1 Cor. 12:7, 11). Although there are several members in a church, every believer is “a part of the body of Christ” (1 Cor. 12:27) and “belongs to all the others” (Rom. 12:5). Each member of the body of Christ is essential in the church (1 Cor. 12:22-23). Spiritual gifts are given to each one for accomplishing the divine purpose and the glory of God.

The gifts of the Spirit can be examined in two categories: permanent and temporary. The gifts of teaching, ministering, administrating, evangelizing, pastoring (Eph. 4:11), giving, mercy, and faith are considered as the permanent spiritual gifts because they are eternally essential elements in Christian churches. Without these gifts, no church can be a healthy and living church. The spiritual gifts of prophecy, miracle,

³⁰ Ibid., 38.

healing, speaking in tongues, interpreting tongues, and discerning spirits can be viewed as the temporary spiritual gifts because these gifts are not always necessary in the church.

Many Chin Christians are exalting minor or temporary gifts over major or permanent gifts. Paul exhorts Corinthian Christians who were exalting minor gifts, “Now eagerly desire the greater gifts” (1 Cor. 12:31), that is, love (1 Cor. 13). Paul also encouraged the Corinthians and said, “Since you are eager for gifts of the Spirit, try to excel in those that build up the church” (1 Cor. 14:12). All spiritual gifts must be used out of pure love for building up the church. Love is the greatest of all spiritual gifts.

The Spirit Creates Love and Hope

Ephesians 2:10 reminds us, “For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works.” The Bible states, “Let all that you do be done in love” (1 Cor. 16:14). Love is the central criteria for all good works. 1 Corinthians 13:13 reads, “And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love.” Galatians 5:6 reads, “faith expressing through love.” Jesus commands us to love one another (Jn. 13:34-35; 15:12, 17), to love our neighbor as ourselves (Matt. 22:39; Mk. 12:31; Lk. 10: 27), and even our enemies (Matt. 5:44; Lk. 6:27). To love the lovely is very easy, but to love the unlovely is very difficult. Indeed, Jesus teaches us not to love only those who love us (Matt. 5:46; Lk. 6:32) and not to be good to only those who are good to us (Lk. 6:33). Without love, we seek God in vain. 1 John 4:8 states, “Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.” 1 John 4:16 reminds us, “Those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.” No believer can practice love unless the Holy Spirit

instills love. Leonardo Boff describes the Spirit as “the unfailing source of love.”³¹ The Spirit enables believers to love others regardless of their color, class, position, and ethnicity and nationality. The Spirit drives us to increasingly love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength (Deut. 6:5; Matt. 22:37) and to love our neighbors as ourselves (Matt. 22:39; Gal. 5:14; Lev. 19:18).

Believers face many kinds of suffering, difficulty, and affliction in life. Sometimes, life is a series of problems. In such circumstances, it is very important for us to develop trust and hope through suffering and difficulties (Rom. 5:3-5; James 1:2-4). According to Geoffrion, “suffering tested the genuineness of faith and implied that the testing made one’s faith more vibrant (1 Pet. 1:7).”³² Hopelessness can drive a person to suicide. Therefore, we essentially need the strengthening of the Spirit so we may discover “a living hope.” Peter comforted the persecuted Christians, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you” (1 Pet. 1:3). The Spirit creates not only hope of worldly blessings but also heavenly or spiritual blessings in Christ (Eph. 1:3). When the Spirit creates a living hope in our heart and enables us to put our trust in God, we experience inner joy and peace in our life (Rom. 15:13). For the human person is “saint at the same time sinner” in this mortal life, no man can always feel joy and peace. But joy and peace here imply an inner satisfaction and

³¹ Leonard Boff, *Come, Holy Spirit: Inner Fire, Give of Life, and Comforter of the Poor*, trans. Margaret Wilde (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2015), 171.

³² Geoffrion, *One Step at a Time*, 220.

sufficiency that do not depend on outward circumstances for happiness. This is what the God offers those who trust Him.

The Spirit Bears the Fruits of the Spirit

Life born anew of the Spirit is expected to “grow out of the vitality and fertility of the Spirit, as fruits grow on the tree.”³³ In Galatians 5, Paul describes two kinds of fruit: the fruit of the flesh and the Spirit. Paul lists fifteen damaging fruits of the flesh: “sexual immorality, impurity, and debauchery, idolatry and witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy, drunkenness, orgies” (Gal. 5:19-21). Believers are commanded to “walk by the Spirit” so that the lusts of the flesh goes unfulfilled (Gal. 5:16). Paul knows that failing to walk by the Spirit will immediately result in spiritual failure. Therefore, Paul urges us to keep walking by the Spirit. “Walking by the Spirit” is surrendering our desires of the flesh and opening ourselves to the Spirit, allowing the power of the Spirit to work in us and to control us.

In contrast to the fruits of the flesh, Paul counts nine fruits of the Spirit: “love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Gal. 5:22-23). These characteristics are produced by the Holy Spirit, not by the mere moral discipline or living by the law. Paul says, “Against such things there is no law” (Gal. 5:23). According to Boff, these fruits of the Spirit are “human virtues, which come into action when we live them in full awareness that the Spirit is working in us, guiding

³³ Boff, *Come, Holy Spirit*, 179.

our actions.”³⁴ For Paul, believers are “those who belong to Christ [and who] have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (Gal. 5:24). Paul concludes, “Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit” (Gal. 5:25).

Martin Luther and the Spiritualists (“Enthusiasts”)

There was an opposing group to Martin Luther regarding the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. They were called the “New Prophets” or “Schwärmer,” a conventicle movement from Zwickau, Wittenberg at the end of 1521 under the leadership of Thomas Muntzer and Andreas Carlstadt, once good friends with Luther. Luther noted them as “proud spirits” who claimed “to speak with the Divine Majesty as with a cobbler’s apprentice.”³⁵ Luther observed that the “new prophets” produced “a sign to attest to the outpouring of the Spirit: in both cases there had to be some external indication that accompanied God’s pronouncement.”³⁶ In other words, they asserted that God spoke directly to people and revealed his will through the Holy Spirit by means of visions and dreams. They boasted that they received the Spirit apart from and prior to hearing the Word of God. Their reliance on the direct voice of God through the Spirit led them to reject Scripture as the authority and reject the sacraments as a means of grace. They also rejected infant baptism.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Amy Nelson Burnett, “Luther and the Schwärmer,” *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther’s Theology*, eds. Robert Kolb, Irene Dingel, and L’ubomir Batka (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 513.

³⁶ Ibid., 514.

Opposing their belief, “Luther asserted that spirits must be tested by Scripture and that they would say nothing which contradicted the Bible.”³⁷ For Luther, In 1525, Luther wrote a treatise entitled *Against the Heavenly Prophets in the Matter of Images and Sacraments* that opposed the idea of Zwickau Prophets, and especially Andreas Carlstadt.³⁸ In his treatise, Luther asserted,

Now when God sends forth his holy gospel he deals with us in a twofold manner, first outwardly, then inwardly. Outwardly he deals with us through the oral word of the gospel and through material signs, that is, baptism and the sacrament of the altar. Inwardly he deals with us through the Holy Spirit, faith, and other gifts. But whatever their measure or order the outward factors should and must proceed. The inward experience follows and is effected by the outward. God has determined to give the inward to no one except through the outward. For he wants to give no one the Spirit or faith outside of the outward Word and sign instituted by him.³⁹

Luther also clarified the order of the Holy Spirit’s working by stating,

In the first place, before all works and things, one hears the Word of God, in which the Spirit punishes the world on account of sin, John 16[:8]. If sin is recognized, then one hears of the grace of Christ. The Spirit comes [once again] in the same Word and gives faith, where and to whom he will. After that the killing [of the old Adam] takes place, and the cross, and the works of love.⁴⁰

³⁷ J. D. Weaver, “Zwickau Prophets,” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed., Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984), 1203.

³⁸ Andreas Carlstadt was a “Wittenberg preacher, professor, and Luther’s doctoral adviser, who originally allied himself with Luther but was then attracted to mystical and spiritualizing ideas and ended up contending that Christ was not physically present in the Lord’s Supper.” See, Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luther’s Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*, trans. Thomas H. Trapp (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 246.

³⁹ Martin Luther, *Luther’s Work*, Vol. 40, 146.

⁴⁰ Bayer, *Martin Luther’s Theology*, 247.

Luther stubbornly asserted that “the Spirit comes only in the Word of the gospel as the one who brings Christ, and thus brings life and blessedness.”⁴¹ Luther condemned the “new prophets” who placed the inspiration of the Holy Spirit before and outside of the external means of Word and sacraments. In contrast them, Luther defended that “God gives the Holy Spirit only through these external means.”⁴² Luther claimed Scripture alone.

Before the scriptures were written, God revealed His will to his men and prophets. They then prophesied what God had revealed to them through oral tradition. Today we have the Bible, the written Word of God. The psalmist says, “Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path” (Ps. 119:105). Through faith in Christ, the Spirit guides us “into all the truth” and tell us “what is yet to come” (Jn. 16:13, NIV). Therefore, the external word of God and the internal movement of the Spirit must be in cooperation.

For many Chin Christians, the work of the Holy Spirit consists of dancing and rolling, shouting “Halleluiah,” singing, speaking and praying in unknown tongues, healing, and getting visions or dreams as the spiritualists did. Luther disagreed with the “heavenly prophets,” or spiritualists, and pronounced, “Dr. Karlstadt and his spirits replace the highest with the lowest, the best with the least, the first with the last.”⁴³ Some Chin Christians place priority the second roles rather than the first. Some Chin Christians

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Burnett, “Luther and the Schwärmer,” 514.

⁴³ Luther, *Luther's Work*, Vol. 40, 83.

also overlook the essential works of the Spirit such as creating faith, giving life, sealing believers, sanctifying, encouraging, empowering, renewing and transforming believers and the fruits of the Holy Spirit, and exalt temporary spiritual gifts. The Spirit also transforms anger, guilt, and anxiety to joy and peace, and creating love and hope in an individual's life and in the community. Bearing the fruit of the Spirit are precisely the major works of the Holy Spirit in Christian spirituality. We are to discern the works of the Holy Spirit according to the Bible rather than visions and dreams. The Holy Spirit who dwells in us is the one who leads us "into all truth" (John 16:13).

CHAPTER 6

APPLICATION: DISCIPLINES FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

In chapter 4 and 5, we examined, according to Luther, how someone becomes righteous, free, and truly Christian, that is, a spiritual, new, and inner person by faith in Christ through the work of the Spirit, and how the Spirit continues to work in a Christian life. Then, we also examined that even though the inner person is fully and completely justified in the Spirit through faith or is “a completely free lord of all, subject to none,” the outer person or physical or flesh nature remains in this mortal life on earth. Since a believer is a saint at the same time a sinner, the inner person immediately offends a contrary will in its own flesh as Paul said, “For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me” (Rom. 7:22-23). Therefore, to live out faith in daily life, for Luther, the mind and body must be trained or disciplined by means of fasting, prayer, constant and concentrated textual study, and other labors, and mastered by the Spirit so that both the inner and outer person may grow up in serving God joyfully and with boundless love as “a completely dutiful servant to all, subject to all.” Although the Holy Spirit helps us convince of the truth found in Jesus Christ and Scripture, renews our hearts and minds, provides reliable guidance on our spiritual journey, and empowers us to overcome our resistance to God, the Spirit usually does not force us to obey. For practical Christian living, just having Christ in our hearts and possessing the Spirit are

deficient. We must do something.¹ This chapter considers some reliable disciplines that allow the Spirit to work in us and through us, and help us grow in spiritual life.

The spiritual life is that which is growing deeper in Christlikeness. To grow in Christlikeness, spiritual disciplines must be exercised under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Spiritual disciplines are not actions of earning salvation, but of growth in salvation (1 Pet. 2:2). Spiritual disciplines keep believers growing in “the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18). According to Richard J. Foster, spiritual disciplines are “the *means* God uses for producing in us the needed transformation of heart and mind and soul.”² In this chapter, “we,” “us,” and “our,” refers to believers in Christ.

Technological devices such as laptops, iPads, smartphones, and social media tempt and distract us endlessly. Our heart, mind, spirit, and body are to be renewed every day. Foster states, “Distraction is *the* primary spiritual problem in contemporary culture. Frankly, when we are perpetually distracted, we are unable to discern the *Kal Yahweh*, the voice of the Lord.”³ Foster suggests three spiritual disciplines: the inward, the outward, and the corporate disciplines as “inner resources to replace deep, destructive

¹ Timothy C. Geoffrion, *Saying Yes to God: How to Keep in Step with the Spirit* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2017), 6.

² Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, Special Anniversary Edition (New York: HarperOne, 2018), xv.

³ *Ibid.*, x.

habits of thoughts with even deeper, life-giving habits of mind and heart and spirit.”⁴ This chapter basically follows Foster’s *Celebration of Discipline*.

The Inward Disciplines for Spiritual Growth

Believers are struggling to free from soul-crushing thoughts and deeds every day and to experience the joy-filled life. Inward disciplines such as prayer, reading the Bible, studying spiritual writings, videos and songs help us to struggle against the “old Adam” inside ourselves and to foster spiritual strength. These disciplines strengthen us to stand firm in our faith in the midst of suffering and temptations while living by the Spirit, walking by the Spirit and keeping in step with the Spirit (Gal. 5:16, 25).

Prayer

Prayer is the key discipline for spiritual growth. What is prayer? How do we pray? What should we pray for? Why do we need to pray? When do we pray? The Bible answers all these questions which will be addressed in this chapter. Our primary task is to pray wholeheartedly to God even though we do not know the answer or do not know how to pray. Paul said, “We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans” (Rom. 8:26). Constant praying leads us to know more about prayer according to the Bible. Prayer is a central part of spiritual growth both individually and collectively.

⁴ Ibid., xiii.

Technologically speaking, prayer is like Wi-Fi that connects between God and us. That connection turns us from ourselves and toward God. Prayer also builds intimacy with God. Meditation on God's love, mercy and goodness is a kind of prayer also. John Macquarrie defined prayer as thinking, which for him includes four kinds of thinking: passionate thinking, compassionate thinking, responsible thinking, and thankful thinking.⁵ The passionate thinking is thinking that "enters feelingly into the world and knows itself deeply involved in all that goes on there."⁶ Compassionate thinking means "we go out from ourselves, we stand alongside the other, we try to share his feelings and aspirations. . . . Prayer is not, as is sometimes alleged, a flight or an escape from reality. It is a dwelling with reality in the sense of a compassionate confrontation in thought with human beings in their actual situations."⁷ Responsible thinking is a mindset that translates to taking care of others. This is a prayer of commitment.⁸ Macquarrie writes, "Mature prayer strengthens and deepens responsibility and gives a clearer vision of the tasks that have to be done."⁹ Thankful thinking means "the lifting up of our hearts in thanksgiving for whatever is good in the creation and for whatever promises of something still better are held out to us."¹⁰ Macquarrie tries to explain that if we deeply think about God and about others, it is a kind of prayer.

⁵ John Macquarrie, *Paths in Spirituality* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 25.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 28-29.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 29.

Prayer expresses our dependence on God for all things. In prayer, we speak to God and God listens to us. In meditation, God speaks to us and we listen to God. Thus, prayer is speaking to God as well as listening to God's voice. Prayer is also submitting and surrendering to God and allowing God to control and lead. In the example of Jesus, Jesus submits His will to the Father, saying, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will" (Matt. 26:39). In prayer, we must submit our desire, will, thought, mind, and heart to God and allow Him to work in us and through us. Prayer includes thanksgiving, praise, confession, and petition to God as well.

The motive of prayer and what we pray for are essentially important. The Bible reminds us, "When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures" (James 4:3). Prayer is not asking God to do all our will. Rather, prayer is seeking God's will and following it. The primary purpose of prayer is that God's will be done. Jesus teaches his disciples what they should pray for in the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-14, Luke 11:2-4). For Martin Luther, the Lord's Prayer is a prayer for seeking God's glory in all things, God's reign within us, God's will, forgiveness, deliverance from all evil, assurance of being heard, and trusting God.¹¹

Why is prayer necessary? It is God's requirement. In some passages of the Bible, the verb form of "pray" is used as an imperative form such as "Pray to the Lord" (Jer. 29:7), "pray for those who persecute you" (Matt. 5:44), "Pray that you will not fall" (Lk. 22:40), "pray in the Spirit on all occasions" (Eph. 6:18), and "Pray continually" (1 Thess.

¹¹ Herbert F. Brokering, ed., *Martin Luther's Prayer* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017), 23-26.

5:17). Spiritual fathers whom God greatly used were praying persons. For instance, Martin Luther spent three hours daily in prayer. John Wesley devoted two hours daily to prayer. Adoniram Judson, the first American Baptist missionary to Myanmar, prayed seven times a day beginning at dawn; then at nine, twelve, three, six, nine, and midnight.¹²

The Bible records the time of day, places, postures, and manner of prayer. The time of prayer stated in the Bible is in the morning (Ps. 5:1-3; Mark 1:35), in the evening (“to meditate:” Gen. 24:63, NIV), at fixed times (Ps. 55:17; Dan. 6:10), and always (Lk. 18:1; Rom. 1:10; 1 Thess. 5:17). The possible places of prayer are in secret (Matt. 6:6), in bed (Ps. 63:6), in a family setting (Acts 10:1-2), in the battlefield (Jos. 10:12-14), by the riverside (Acts 16:13), in the temple (2 Kings 19:4), in the church (Acts 4:23-24, 31), or anywhere (1 Tim. 2:8). The postures of prayer are standing (1 Kings 8:22; Neh. 9:4-5), sitting (1 Chron. 17:16; Lk. 10:13), kneeling (Ezr. 9:5; Dan. 6:10; Acts 20:36), bowing down (Ex. 34:8; Ps. 5:7; 95:6), lying on the ground (2 Sam. 12:16; Matt. 26:39), and lifting up hands (Ps. 28:2; Is. 1:15; 1 Tim. 2:8). The Bible also tells us the manner of prayer; alone silently (1Sam. 1:18), loudly (Eze. 11:13), with two or three (Matt. 18:19), and in a larger group (Ps. 35:18).¹³

Sometimes our prayers are not answered. However, the Bible encourages us to keep praying (Rom. 12:12; 1 Thess. 5:16-18). In 1844, George Muller began praying for the salvation of five unbelievers. After eighteen months of praying daily, one came to

¹² Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 34.

¹³ Kenneth L. Barker, ed., *NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 2286.

faith in Christ. Muller thanked God and continued to pray for the other four. Five years later, the second one came to Christ. He thanked God again and continued to pray for the other three. Six years passed and the third one came to Christ. He again thanked God and continued to pray for the remaining two until he died. He had prayed for them for fifty-two years. After Muller's death, the remaining two did not come to Christ.¹⁴

Reading the Bible

The Bible plays a vital role in spiritual growth. We read it, meditate on it, study it to understand, and apply it to our daily life. What is the Bible and why is reading the Bible necessary for spiritual growth? The Greek word *biblion* used for the English word "Bible" simply means "book." However, in ordinary conversation, the word usually refers to one particular book, the Bible.

The Bible itself reveals the power of God's Word. God's Word has the power to create (Ps. 33:6-9; Heb. 11:3; 2 Pet. 3:5), to sustain all of the creation (Ps. 147:15-18; Heb. 1:3), to heal (Ps. 107:20; Matt. 8:8), to judge our hearts (Heb. 4:12), to give us new birth (James 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:23); lead us to faith (Rom. 10:17), save us (2 Tim. 3:15), make us holy (Eph. 5:26), and help fight against Satan (Eph. 6:17; Rev. 19:13-15). The Bible is also reliable and trustworthy (2Sam. 7:28; Ps. 111:7-8), true (1 Kings 17:24; Jn. 17:17), flawless (Pr. 30:5), alive and active (Heb. 4:12), eternal (Ps. 119:89; Is. 40:8), enduring (Is. 40:8; Matt. 5:18; 24:35; Jn. 10:35), and will not return empty (Is. 55:11). Therefore, we must hear (Is. 1:10, Jer. 7:1-2; Rom. 10:17), understand (Matt. 13:23), accept (Mark

¹⁴ Ron Prorise, *Preaching Illustrations from Church History* (The Woodlands, TX: Kress Biblical Resources, 2016), 157-8.

4:20; Acts 2:41; 1 Thess. 2:13), hide it in our hearts (Ps. 119:11), retain (Lk. 8:15), trust (Ps. 119:42), hope (Ps. 119:74, 81, 114; 130:5), obey (Ps. 119:17, 67; James 1:22-24) and preach (Acts 8:4). The Bible must dwell among us (Col. 3:16), and we must live according to it (Ps. 119:9) and handle it correctly (2 Tim. 2:15). The Bible portrays the Word of God as lamp and light (Ps. 119:105), rain-producing fruit (Is. 55:10-11), consuming fire (Jer. 5:14), destroying hammer (Jer. 23:29), seed (Matt. 4:14), and sword (Eph. 6:17; Heb. 4:12).¹⁵

John Wycliffe, who translated the Bible into English and brought its light and life to England first writes, “Holy Scripture is the faultless, most true, most perfect, and most holy law of God, which is the duty to all men to learn, to know, to defend, and to observe, inasmuch as they are bound to serve the Lord in accordance with it, under the promises of an eternal reward.”¹⁶ The Bohemian reformer John Huss also testified and found Scriptures to be “the gold of wisdom, the silver of eloquence, the germs of virtue, lavishly poured forth in heavenly grace.”¹⁷ Martin Luther, the sixteenth century church reformer, wrote, “The word of God brings life, truth, light, peace, righteousness, salvation, joy, liberty, wisdom, power, grace, glory and every other blessing

¹⁵ Barker, ed., *NIV Study Bible*, 2321.

¹⁶ Prosis, *Preaching Illustrations from Church History*, 28.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

imaginable”¹⁸ Craig R. Koester describes the Bible as “a source of inspiration and personal guidance, a source of truth and authority, a literary classic, and more.”¹⁹

Koester also mentions the reason we should read the Bible. The Bible is able to lead people to faith in Christ as St. Augustine suddenly converted to Christ by reading Romans 13:14. He writes, “A physician will give a frank diagnosis of a disease to prepare a patient for treatment. In the same way, the Bible gives a candid judgment on human sin to help hold sin in check and prepare for God’s life-giving grace.”²⁰ Another reason for reading the Bible is that it is “an authoritative book” and “it was inspired by God” (2Tim. 3:16).²¹ The Bible is the authoritative book for faith and life.

While considering the biblical and historical significance, the Bible must be read and studied every day with prayer under the guidance of the Spirit. To study the Bible more effectively, we can consult with our pastors and make good use of Bible commentaries, Study Bibles, and other biblical writings. However, the primary source of knowing the true message of the Bible is the revelation which comes through the Holy Spirit. The Bible also demands careful interpretation. We must then apply what we have read and understood into our daily life. Reading and applying the Bible nourishes and nurtures our mind, soul, and spirit. Our mind and heart need to be filled daily with God’s word so we may be able to grow in grace and to fight against temptations. Since the Bible

¹⁸ Lull, *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*, 405.

¹⁹ Craig R. Koester, *A Beginner’s Guide to Reading the Bible* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1991), 10.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

²¹ *Ibid.*

reveals the unconditional love, grace, and mercy of God to us, the more we read it, the more we feel God's love. Experiencing God's love and goodness grants us peace and joy in our life. The spirit of praise to God takes place in our heart. The Bible gives shape and directions to our lives.

Study

The purpose of this discipline is the inner transformation that produces new life-giving habits. Paul teaches us that we are transformed through the renewal of the mind (Rom. 12:2). The mind can also be renewed by study. What does study mean? According to Foster, "Study is a specific kind of experience in which through careful attention to reality the mind is enabled to move in a certain direction."²² What are the benefits of studying? Studying can turn our mind and thoughts to what we are studying. Studying helps us concentrate and pay deep attention to the Bible. Studying enables us to understand what is being read and helps keep the focus on God and respond in obedience. God instructed the Israelites to write the words of God on gates and doorposts and bind them to their wrists as a visible reminder to keep God in their hearts and mind (Deut. 11:18-21). Foster states, "The purpose of this instruction is to direct the mind repeatedly and regularly toward certain modes of thought about God and human relationships."²³

What should we examine for spiritual growth? Foster suggests two "books" to be studied: verbal and nonverbal. The verbal study refers to learning from books, lectures,

²² Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 63.

²³ *Ibid.*, 64.

and other spiritual writings. The nonverbal field of study refers to observing the world of nature and making the observation of events and actions.²⁴ Regarding the verbal field of study, the first and foremost important book we are to study is the Bible because it is the Word of the living God which gives life. Jesus said, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4; Deut. 8:3). When we read and study the Bible, “we come to the Scripture to be changed, not to amass information.”²⁵ We study each book of the Bible to grasp what the author wants to say, not what we want him to say. We are to be compelled by the intent of the author. When we study the Bible, we have to desire “life-transforming truth, not just good feelings.”²⁶ Along with the Bible, other spiritual books, writings, songs, and movies are essential to spiritual growth. Study of the nonverbal finds the goodness of God through creatures, our fellow people and life experiences. This study is learning from nature and other people while not condemning or judging the world and others.²⁷

The Outward Disciplines of Spiritual Growth

As Christian spirituality concerns both the inner reality and outer appearance of life, we have to grow both inwardly and outwardly. The purpose of all inward spiritual disciplines is for outward expressions. We now move to consider outward disciplines for spiritual growth.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., 69.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., 75.

Simplicity

In this present age, there is a deep desire for bigger, better, faster and more advanced things. The desire for material possessions, status, and position take places in the hearts of many Christians today. The desire for worldly things bring anxiety, stress, fear, and hinders growth to spiritual life. Paul reminds us, “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs” (1Tim. 6:10). Therefore, to be closer and joyful to God every day, both the inward and outward simplicity are essential. Foster says, “Simplicity is an inward reality that results in an outward lifestyle.”²⁸ He observes that “contemporary culture lacks both the inward reality and the outward lifestyle of simplicity.”²⁹ Simplicity is freedom from duplicity, self-indulgence or life of luxury, greed (cf. Eph. 5:5; 1 Cor. 5:11) and covetousness. Simplicity helps us to serve God as our master rather than materials things or money.

The Bible reminds us “No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money” (Lk. 16:13). “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, . . . but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven” (Matt. 6:19, 21). “Sell your possessions and give to the poor” (Lk. 12:33). “Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction” (1Tim. 6:9). “Not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, . . .

²⁸ Ibid., 79.

²⁹ Ibid., 80.

but to put their hope in God. . . . Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share” (1Tim. 6:17-18). “Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have” (Heb. 13:5). “You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight” (James 4:2). These are passages which teach Christian simplicity.

Regarding simplicity, one may raise a question: what is the difference between asceticism and simplicity? Foster writes, “Asceticism finds no place for a ‘land flowing with milk and honey.’ Simplicity rejoices in this gracious provision from the hand of God. Asceticism finds contentment only when it is abased. Simplicity knows contentment in both abasement and abounding (Phil. 4:12).”³⁰ He continues to define simplicity saying, “Simplicity is the only thing that sufficiently reorients our lives so that possessions can be genuinely enjoyed without destroying us. . . . Simplicity sets us free to receive the provision of God as a gift that is not ours to keep and can be freely shared with others.”³¹

Simplicity is not only an inner reality. It is to be seen in outward expression. Foster also suggests ten controlling principles for the outward expression of simplicity. First, buy things for their usefulness rather than their status, including houses, vehicles and clothes. Second, reject anything that is producing an addiction in you. Third, develop a habit of giving things away. Fourth, refuse to be propagandized by the custodians of modern gadgetry. Fifth, learn to enjoy things without owning them. Sixth, develop a

³⁰ Ibid., 84.

³¹ Ibid., 84-85.

deeper appreciation for the creation. Seventh, look with a healthy skepticism at all “buy now, pay later” schemes. Eighth, obey Jesus’ instructions about plain, honest speech (cf. Matt. 5:37). Ninth, reject anything that breeds the oppression of others. Tenth, shun anything that distracts you from seeking first the kingdom of God.³²

Solitude

Here, solitude refers to a state of mind and heart that is free from loneliness and fear through spending times alone silently at a lonely place for inner fulfillment. What is the difference between loneliness and solitude? Foster explains that “Loneliness is inner emptiness. Solitude is inner fulfillment.”³³ Solitude precisely is being away from people or society, and having an intimate relationship with God. Moreover, inward solitude without outward manifestations is not true biblical solitude. Inward solitude always has outward manifestations.

To go into a deeper relationship with God it is wise to retreat to a lonely place to study the Bible and pray. A silent time and place are essential in conforming our mind and heart to God. It can be done at a prayer house, church or even our own house before the family awakens. The Gospels tell us that “Jesus lived in inward ‘heart solitude’” (Matt. 4:1-11; 14:23; 17:1-9; 26:36-46; Mark 1:35; 6:31; Lk. 5:16; 6:12).³⁴ In solitude, silence is essentially important. However, simply refraining from talking and absence of speech or voices, without a heart listening to God, is not silence. The purpose of silence

³² Ibid., 90-95.

³³ Ibid., 96.

³⁴ Ibid., 97.

is to listen and hear the voice of God. In solitude, we speak less and listen more to God. The more we listen to more we hear God.

Submission

Submission should not be destructive, but constructive. Submission is not to be abused because abusing the discipline of submission can put people into bondage. The purpose of submission is not to put people into bondage and death, but to realize a greater good and to bring freedom and life to people. When Paul and Peter call upon wives to submit themselves to their own husband (Eph. 5:22; 1Pet. 3:1), and call people to submit to the state or the governing authorities (Rom. 13:1; 1 Pet. 2:13-14), they do not mean to submit to other people equal to God. Their purpose is to show respect and build a peaceful life within Christian family and community. On the other hand, when the authorities are failing to provide justice for all and were abusing their authority, Paul and Peter insist that the wrong to be righted (Acts 16:37) and to obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29). We need wisdom in what to submit to and what not to submit to. The Holy Spirit helps us discern that. We need to first submit to the Holy Spirit who is the accurate discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.³⁵

To whom and to what will we submit? Foster provides seven acts of submission. The first is submission to the Triune God. Submission to God refers to yielding and surrendering our body, mind, and spirit into the hands of God to use for His purposes. The first words of the morning and the last words of the night should be submission to

³⁵ Ibid., 120-121.

God. The second act of submission is to Scripture. Submission to Scripture involves submitting ourselves to hear, receive, and obey the Word of God. The third act of submission is to our family. The primary deed of submission to family is a commitment to listen to the other family members and a willingness to share. The fourth act of submission is to our neighbors and those we meet in the course of our daily life. Submission to neighbors includes helping each other, performing acts of kindness, and sharing food and tools. The fifth act of submission is to the believing community, the body of Christ, namely the church. Submission to church refers to serving the church voluntarily and wholeheartedly. We cannot do everything, but we can contribute and do a few things under the leadership of the pastors and leaders. The sixth act of submission is to the broken and despised. The responsibility of this submission is to be with and to help the widows, orphans, poor and the helpless. The seventh act of submission is to the world. We are responsible for our environment. Submission to the world means to live as a responsible member of an increasing irresponsible world.³⁶

Service

Service and submission are interchangeably related and key for spiritual growth. When Jesus gathered his disciples for the Last Supper, they were having trouble deciding who was the greatest and the least. Perhaps none of them wanted to be considered the least. For the disciples, the people who washed feet were the least. In contrast to their view, Jesus took a towel and a basin and washed the feet of his disciples and redefined greatness. Then, he called them to the way of service, saying, “Now that I, your Lord and

³⁶ Ibid., 122-123.

Teacher, have washed one another's feet you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you" (Jn. 13:14-15). Foster writes, "As the cross is the sign of submission, so the towel is the sign of service."³⁷ In the sight of Jesus, what people consider the least can be the greatest act of service. Jesus teaches us not to be a hypocrite in service when praying and fasting (Matt. 6:1-16). In genuine Christian service, authority and position are not the greatest. The greatest service in the sight of God are hidden services (Matt. 6:1-4) and voluntary services with humility. Jesus said, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve" (Mark 10:45).

There are two kinds of service: self-righteous service and true service. Self-righteous service requires external rewards, seeks people's appreciation and acknowledgments and applause. True service does not seek people's appreciation but only cares about God's approval. True service does not delight in certain advantages, but solely on service. True service is service out of love coupled with patience and humility regardless of authority, position, and reward. "Service is not a list of things that we do, though in it we discover things to do. It is not a code of ethics, but a way of living."³⁸ In the story of the good Samaritan (Lk. 10:30-37), we see the spirit of self-righteous service versus true service. According to Samuel Ngun Ling, the Priest and Levite asked themselves, "If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?" The Samaritan reversed that question and asked himself, "If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to

³⁷ Ibid., 126.

³⁸ Ibid., 134.

him?”³⁹ Serving others, the church, and community out of love brings great joy. True service is a necessity for spiritual growth.

The Corporate Disciplines for Spiritual Growth

The inward and outward disciplines are more a private matter of spiritual growth. The corporate disciplines deal with personal spiritual growth through relating to and participating in the spiritual exercises of community or church including confession, worship, guidance, and celebration.

Confession

The discipline of confession can be considered as both personal and corporate because we confess before God as well as before our fellow Christians. Godly people in the Bible confess their sin before God. For instance, Aaron (Num. 12:11), David (2Sam. 12:13; Ps. 32:5; 38:18; 51:1-5), Nehemiah (Neh. 1:6-7), Isaiah (Isa. 6:5), and Peter (Lk. 5:8). Even after being justified and saved by faith in Christ, we daily commit sins by eyes, mind and heart, and deeds in the sight of God. Due to our daily sins, we have to have daily confession of sin before God. Confessing our sins daily before God is an essential spiritual discipline. By confession of sin before God, we receive God’s mercy (Ps. 28:13), God’s forgiveness (Ps. 32:5; 1Jhn. 1:9), healing (James 5:16), and we are justified (Lk. 18:13-14) and become purified (1Jhn. 1:9). Confession of sin is necessary to be saved (Matt. 10:32-33; Rom. 10:9-10).

³⁹ Samuel Ngun Ling, “A Bible Study on Compassion,” in *Myanmar Institute of Theology Annual Magazine*, September 2012, 169-170.

The discipline of confession deeply contemplates God's heart of desiring to give and to forgive sinners through the vicarious suffering of Jesus Christ on the cross. God's unconditional love brought Jesus to the cross. When a sinner realize that the vicarious suffering of Jesus could actually absorb all the evil of humanity and so heal it, forgive it, redeem it, the sinner comes to confess and testifies God's love before God and fellow believers. No genuine confession can be made without experiencing God's grace in the heart. Genuine confession is a result of experiencing or feeling God's grace and love in our heart. When they accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord, the early Christians confessed "Jesus is Lord" (Jhn. 20:28; Rom. 10:9; 1Cor. 12:3; Phil. 2:11), "Jesus is the Messiah" (Matt. 16:16; Jhn. 20:31; Acts 17:2-3, 1Jhn. 2:22) even in the midst of persecution because of their faith in Christ.

The genuine confession helps the believer to grow into "the knowledge of the Son of God" (Eph. 4:13). Mutual confession among believers strengthens us and gives us joy in our spiritual journey because we know God the Father stands ready to forgive, embrace and welcome us back like the father of the prodigal son (Lk. 15:20). When we remember our confession of sin or faith before our fellow believers, we have a determination and desire to avoid sin.⁴⁰

Worship

The word "worship" is very familiar to all of us. However, many Christians may not understand what biblical worship really is. Some think of worship as a duty to the

⁴⁰ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 143-151.

church. Worship is a not duty to church, but to God. Worship is our glad response to the divine initiative. Foster defines worship, “To worship is to experience Reality, to touch life. It is to know, to feel, to experience the resurrected Christ in the midst of the gathered community.”⁴¹ In worship, we give praise, thanks, and adoration to God for what He has done for us. According to John Stott, “To worship is to ‘glory in God’s holy name.’”⁴² He goes on to say, “Worship without holiness was hateful to God.”⁴³ Michael L. Lindwall reminds us that “People often seem to imagine that worship is entertainment [seeking to please people], therapy [to make one ‘feel better’], education [teaching and learning] or some blending of the three.”⁴⁴ Lindwall continues, “Worship doesn’t really have a ‘purpose’ in the utilitarian sense of these three categories. Maybe worship is a glorious and transforming waste of time. At its most profound, worship is nothing but a deliberate and repeated activity in which we are called to turn away from self and turn toward God.”⁴⁵ In worship, our heart and thought must turn toward God.

In worship, the *how* is more important than the *where*. In the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman, the woman raises the issue of where people ought to worship. In contrast, Jesus focuses more on how and whom we worship. Jesus replies, “believe me, a time is coming to when you will worship the Father neither on this

⁴¹ Ibid., 158.

⁴² John Stott, *The Living Church: Convictions of a Lifelong Pastor* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2007), 35.

⁴³ Ibid., 45.

⁴⁴ Michael L. Lindwall, *The Christian Life: A Geography of God* (Louisville: Geneva Press, 2001), 58.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

mountain nor in Jerusalem” (Jn. 4:21). It is possible to worship God in vain. Through the prophet Isaiah, the Lord says, “These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is based on merely human rules they have been taught” (Is. 29:13). Jesus also quotes Isaiah in Matthew 15:8. The issue is not where, but how.⁴⁶ In worship, God seeks those who worship Him “in the Spirit and truth” (Jn. 4:23). Jesus said, “God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and truth” (Jn. 4:24). According to Craig S. Keener, “worship in the Spirit” means “worship empowered by the Spirit.”⁴⁷ He continues to explain, “we may understand ‘Spirit and truth’ as a stylistic variant of the later and clarifying phrase, ‘the Spirit of truth’ (Jn 14:17; 15:26; 16:13).”⁴⁸ For Keener, the linkage of the Spirit and truth that John emphasizes is “the importance of divine inspiration in the worship activity.”⁴⁹ In worship, the presence of the Holy Spirit in each worshiper’s heart and in each activity is essential. Whom we worship is nothing but God. Therefore, all activities such as praying, singing, giving, and reading in worship must center on God.

Guidance

⁴⁶ John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah Book, 2011), 81.

⁴⁷ Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 615.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 618.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

The Holy Spirit is our guide. The knowledge of the direct, active and immediate leading of the Spirit is essentially needed for spiritual growth. Many Christians are individually experiencing a deep and profound presence of the Spirit in their lives. However, it is also important to experience the guidance of the Spirit together as “corporate guidance” in an organic and functional sense and not in an organizational sense. The Spirit does guide the individual richly and profoundly as well as groups of people and can instruct the individual through the group experience. In the history of Israel as recorded in the Bible, God led them out of bondage as a people. God called Moses as their mediator. After Moses, God used the prophets as mediators. As mediators, the prophets were to hear God’s word and to deliver it to the people. The responsibility of the people was to listen to the prophets.⁵⁰

The journey of the people of Israel can be considered as an example of the corporate leading of the Spirit today. Hearing of God’s words were not only a benefit to Moses and the prophets, but for the well-being of the people also. The early church lived in community under the rulership of the Spirit (Acts 4:32-33). They worshiped, prayed and fasted together (Acts 2:44-47). As believers experience the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit, they must use that experience for the growth of all members of the church.

⁵⁰ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 175-176.

Celebration

Celebration is a joyous festivity. In the Old Testament, the greatest celebration among the people of Israel commanded by God was the celebration of Jubilee. In the time of Jubilee, debts were canceled, slaves were released, properties were returned to owners and everyone refrained from planting crops. It was a celebration of the gracious provision of God. God could be trusted to provide what was needed (Lev. 25:21). Chin Christians celebrate many Jubilees such as Tin Jubilee, Silver Jubilee, Golden Jubilee, Diamond Jubilee and Centenary, Christmas, Easter, New Year, and more. All celebrations must depend on God's gracious provision so that our celebration brings joy into life, which is part of the fruit of the Spirit. Nehemiah said, "the joy of the LORD is your strength" (Neh. 8:10). Celebration is characterized by a sense of joy and thanksgiving. We celebrate God's goodness and blessings to us and not our own goodness and efforts. Celebration without the spirit of thanksgiving to God is just a deed of hypocrites, but a joyous celebration gives strength to life.⁵¹

Celebration is followed by obedience to God. A woman said to Jesus, "Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you." Jesus replied, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it" (Lk. 11:27-28). Celebration and joy without the spirit of obedience to God is not a genuine celebration. Going to church, singing songs and praying in church cannot bring genuine joy. Foster comments, "Without obedience

⁵¹ Ibid., 190-191.

joy is hollow and artificial. . . In the spiritual life, only one thing will produce genuine joy, and that is obedience.”⁵²

Celebration is also characterized by service to others. Celebration is not for our popularity. It is not to show off our abilities, properties and wealth. The significance of Jubilee (canceling debts, releasing slaves, liberating the oppressed, bringing good news to the poor) is service to others, especially the needy. Celebration is sharing blessing to others by trusting in God’s ability to provide for our needs. In other words, service to others is a celebration of God’s goodness. Therefore, celebration is to be done with a sense of service.

When serving others, celebration is done with the sense of joy to God. It keeps us from taking ourselves too serious seriously. It helps us relax and enjoy the good things on earth and spurs us to do good things for others. The more we celebrate, the more we enjoy. Celebration benefits both ourselves and to the people of God and is considered a corporate spiritual discipline.

This chapter does not include the sense that God is rewarding our good life and works because this writer concerns the sense that we usually do good works and live good life because of the hearts that experience the greatness of God’s grace and love and put our trust in God, not because of the hearts that expect God’s rewards upon our goodness alone. We do good works in compliance to God out of spontaneous love rather than expectation of reward. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego obey and serve God, not

⁵² Ibid., 192.

because of expecting God's reward upon their faithfulness. They said to the king, Nebuchadnezzar, "If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up" (Dan. 3:17-18). If we do good works and live godly life in the sense of rewarding upon our goodness, our good works and life can be considered as self-righteousness that Luther opposed. This writer agrees with Timothy C.

Geoffrion's work,

As Spirit-led people, we will be fully engaged in life, inwardly living on our knees in humble gratitude for God's mercy and grace, and outwardly standing tall, drawing strength from Christ and God's call on our lives. We will move forward to serve confidently and fruitfully, not because of our self-generated worthiness or greatness, but because of the power of the Holy Spirit who ironically works in and through ordinary sinners saved by grace to bring good into the world.⁵³

We believe and trust in God's promise to reward those who serve Him and do good works as working for the Lord. The Bible says, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving" (Col. 3:23-24).

Regarding the process of spiritual growth, Chin Christians mainly focus on prayer and fasting, reading the Bible, and worship. The discipline of studying the Bible and other spiritual writings is rarely taught and practiced. Only a few Chin churches have a well-organized Bible study program which meets on a different day at the church for an

⁵³ Geoffrion, *Saying Yes to God*, 7.

hour or longer. Chin churches who do not have a well-organized Bible study program include “Adult Sunday School” during their Sunday worship service for 15 minutes. The study of the Bible is an essentially important discipline for spiritual growth so more Bible study programs are needed. Chin Christians mainly emphasize inward spiritual disciplines. The outward disciplines (simplicity, solitude, submission, and service) and corporate disciplines (confession, worship, guidance, and celebration) are just as important and need to be practiced as well. Spiritual growth in study and practice must include the inward, outward and corporate disciplines in tandem with individual and communal matters.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

There are four primary issues which hinder Chin churches from growing fully into authentic Christian spirituality. The first issue is the lack of biblical and theological soundly teaching on true Christian spirituality. As a result, many Chin Christians perceive Christian spirituality as actively singing, dancing, clapping or raising hands, saying “Hallelujah, Amen,” or shouting with strong emotions while worshiping God. They also consider a spiritual person as possessing healing powers and the ability to speak in unknown tongues. They favor the emotional state more than the ethical life. Human beings are emotional creatures and emotion is also a significant part of spiritual life. However, the two important questions we have to ask are: How are we to respond to our emotion and feelings? Can they be trusted as a guide for spirituality? Our emotion can either honor God or displease God. A main reason for the Fall of Adam and Eve was fulfilling their burning desire (emotion) to eat when God commanded them not to eat. Expression of emotions can be sinful (cf. Eph. 4:26, 31). Paying attention to our feelings is important, but on the other hand, we should not do things on feelings alone. Emotion and feelings are given to energize our behavior and enrich our lives in the ways God intended. True Christian spirituality is not merely emotional expressions in the worship service, but the quality of daily life serving God and others out of love.

The second issue is the lack of teaching Martin Luther’s theology on Christian ethical life as described in the *Freedom of a Christian*. Many Chin Christians highly

emphasize “justification by faith.” But they minimize the role and the importance of the ethical life in service to neighbors and the needy. This helps people to consider “it is no matter whatever I do because I cannot lose my salvation again.” It is not biblical teaching. As a result, some pastors especially Baptist pastors highly teach ethical life and minimize God’s mercy, grace, love, justification, and forgiveness. Pastors who extremely emphasize ethical life and good works are dubbed as “piangthar lo pastor” (nonbeing born again pastor), and whose teachings help Christians fall into nominal Christians, which refer to those who are very active in church ministries, but who have no personal experience of God’s saving grace or are not being born again (piangthar lo). Chin Churches need biblical and theological soundly to reconnect grace and faith and work. The Bible teaches us, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s handiworks, created in Christ Jesus to do good work, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Eph. 2:8-10). Luther stood on this biblical teaching. Luther stressed both faith and works. For Luther, when faith is “active in love,” it compels us to do good works for God’s glory. True Christian spirituality is active in ministries that glorifies God. True Christian spirituality is living out faith in Christ in daily living.

The third issue is the lack of teaching the works of the Holy Spirit, especially among Baptist Churches. As a result, many Baptists are influenced by the Pentecostal view that places a heavy emphasis on the gifts of healing, prophesying, or performing miracles along with singing, praying and speaking in tongues. This Pentecostal view of the work of the Holy Spirit in believers is deficient. In the Bible, there are many more works of the Holy Spirit among believers such as creating faith, giving life, sealing

believers, sanctifying, encouraging or comforting, empowering, renewing, and transforming believers. Moreover, the work of the Spirit cannot be confined. True Christian spirituality is yielding to the Spirit, walking in the Spirit (Gal. 5:16), living by the Spirit and keeping in step with the Spirit (Gal. 5:24), and being led by the Spirit.

What does it mean to walk in the Spirit, to live by the Spirit, to keep in step with the Spirit and to be led by the Spirit? Do they mean the same thing or differ? Richard N. Longenecker see all of them as synonymous. He writes, “The expression ζῶμεν πνεύματι (“we live by the Spirit”) has not been used by Paul before in Galatians but is synonymous with such expressions already used as πνεύματι περιπατεῖτε (“walk” or “live by the Spirit”) of v 16 and πνεύματι ἄγεσθε (“be led by the Spirit”) of v 18.”¹ According to Longenecker, “keep in step with” has its basic meaning “be in line with” or “agree with,” and by “be in a line” or “keep in step” with the Spirit, “Paul is asking those who claim to live by the Spirit to evidence that fact by a lifestyle controlled by the Spirit.”² “Keep in step with the Spirit” is an emphasis on Christian ethics or life, which is produced by the work of the Spirit. Paul never views the ethical activity of the believer apart from the Spirit’s work and apart from the believer’s active expression of his or her faith as genuine Christian living.³ According to Warren W. Wiersbe, “Walk in the Spirit” means “keep in

¹ Richard N. Longenecker, “Galatians,” *Word Biblical Commentary*, Vol. 41 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), *The Works of the Flesh and the Fruit of the Spirit (5:19-26)*, Kindle.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

step with the Spirit’—not to run ahead and not to lag behind. This involves the Word, prayer, worship, praise, and fellowship with God’s people.”⁴

Timothy C. Geoffrion considers to “live by the Spirit” and “keep in step with the Spirit” as a little bit different. “Living by the Spirit” is the new senses of experiencing the forgiveness of sins, knowing that “God takes away our guilt and shame,” becoming “convinced that we truly belong to God and in the family of God,” coming “to love Jesus and follow him,” desiring to “stop sinning,” and feeling more strength and power to live for God” in our deep heart.⁵ In other works, “living by the Spirit” is the experience of being born again, or, being born of the Spirit (Jn. 3:1-8), or the new life in Christ.⁶ To “walk in the Spirit” or to “keep in step with the Spirit” is living out all these experiences or senses and keeping growing and living fruitful lives in Christ’s service. Geoffrion writes, “When Paul said, ‘Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit,’ he was shifting from what God does for us to what we must do in response to the presence of Christ and the Spirit in our lives.”⁷ The spiritual disciplines mentioned in chapter five will be helpful in getting step with the Spirit and keeping in step with the Spirit.

The fourth issue is the lack of teaching the spiritual disciplines. Many Chin Christians mainly focus on prayer, fasting, reading the Bible, and worship. These are

⁴ Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary*, 576.

⁵ Geoffrion, *Saying Yes to God*, 4.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

commendable, however, there are many more spiritual disciplines that can be taught and practiced to grow in “fully mature in Christ” (Col. 1:28; Eph. 4:13). True Christian spirituality practices the inward disciplines (prayer, reading the Bible, study), outward disciplines (simplicity, solitude, submission, service), and corporate disciplines (confession, worship, guidance and celebration).

Regarding these four primary issues, what can be done to bring Chin churches back to biblical standards of Christian spirituality that is God honoring? Pastors and leaders need to study, preach and teach on the subject of Christian spirituality, including the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, especially the works of the Spirit in Christian life. Pastors and leaders need to model Christian spirituality. Church members need to commit to growing in their Bible knowledge and practice. Church members, pastors and leaders alike need to boldly share the Good News of Jesus Christ and grow in their personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Discipleship needs to be ongoing. Pastors and leaders need to mentor leaders of all ages and send them out after being trained. More well-organized Bible study needs to be conducted on Sunday and during the week. There needs to be a call to prayer for unity among Christians. When these are done in the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit, joy and gratitude to God will be inexpressible.

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