Buddhist-Christian Dialogue: A Way Toward Peaceful Co-Existence in Myanmar

This research focuses on Buddhist-Christian dialogue in Myanmar. The author explores if the initiative for interfaith encounter can help or hinder peaceful co-existence in his country. The close relationship of Christians in Myanmar to the colonial British rulership in the 19th and 20th century can be seen as an impeding factor for today’s relationship between Buddhists and Christians. Reconciliation and forgiveness can only be approached by revisiting the historical memories and by providing detailed information on the conditions of Christian and Buddhist co-existence in the past. A major part of the research are interviews held with Buddhists and Christians in Myanmar questioning their knowledge about each other and evaluating their willingness to a better mutual understanding and to dialogue.

Ciin Sian Khai, Baptist pastor in Myanmar, graduated B.Theol. at Zomi Theological College, Falam/Myanmar, B.A. (History) at Dagon University, Yangon/Myanmar, M.Div. at Myanmar Institute of Theology, Yangon/Myanmar, and M.Theol. at the Protestant Theological University, Kampen/Netherlands. For his contribution on Buddhist-Christian dialogue in Myanmar, the Faculty of the Humanities – Dept. of Protestant Theology at the University of Hamburg conferred a doctorate to Rev. Khai.
Buddhist-Christian Dialogue: A Way Toward Peaceful Co-Existence in Myanmar
To

My beloved Parents

Pi Vial Sial Cing

&

Pu Thang Za Gin

Whose *maha metta-karuna*

I could never ever return
Preface

It is a great joy to me to write a preface for this book which is the doctoral dissertation of Ciin Sian Khai submitted to the Department of Protestant Theology of Hamburg University in summer term 2015. Dr. Khai finished his theological doctorate on 9 July 2015. I was privileged to supervise his research on Christian-Buddhist dialogue in Myanmar during the years of his studies in Hamburg and learned very much about the missionary and political history, culture, Christianity, Buddhism, religious relations, and the vision to religious and political peace of his country. Myanmar became very close to me even though I have so far not been to the country. Moreover, Dr. Khai was a person not only of scholarly diligence but also of a subtle sense of humour and was a great enrichment to the community of the Academy of Mission. I wish him and his family all the best for the private future and academic career.

Hamburg, July 2015

Ulrich Dehn
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INTRODUCTION

Myanmar is known as a land of pagodas. Buddhism is the pre-dominant religion in the country. However, I grew up in the Chin state of Myanmar in which more than 80 percent of the people are adherents of Christianity.¹ Therefore, the Chin state is regarded as a Christian state; specifically the place where I grew up has only Christian community though a small number of followers of primal religion known as Dawibiakna in the local language were there before. The understanding of Christianity among the Christians in my homeplace is predominantly exclusivist, referring to John 14:6, which states that only those who believe in Jesus Christ can be saved eternally. These Christians actively participate in converting non-Christians into Christianity. As a result, the whole community converted to Christianity. Being of an exclusivist mindset and pastoring a Baptist Church there, I also actively and enthusiastically participated in preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ to non-Christians in order to convert them into Christianity. In short, my understanding of Christian mission at that time was only to convert non-Christians into Christianity, but apparently it was not a holistic mission. In June 2000, I continued studying in the Master of Divinity program at Myanmar Institute of Theology (MIT), Yangon where there is a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural milieu. There, I got to learn not only Christian theology, but also Hindu, Buddhist and Islamic theologies. My studies at MIT led me to seriously consider the need for in-depth study on the gospel and culture as Myanmar is religiously, ethnically and culturally diverse. From that time onward, I am of the opinion that dialogue can be a common meeting point with people of different faiths and ideologies in the country.

From 1988 to 2010, a military regime ruled Myanmar.² In order to win the support of the majority Buddhists, the regime promoted Buddhist mission among non-Buddhists because there was the opinion that if non-Buddhists converted to Buddhism there would be unity and peace in the country. Thus, the target of the regime was converting particularly ethnic minority Christians, who had been adherents of Christianity for many years, into Buddhism. To persuade Christians, the regime “tried to lure Christians into becoming Buddhists by offering them


exemption from forced labour as well as food allowances or money. The authorities offered rice and money to new Buddhists who converted from Christianity, particularly in Tamu Township of Sagaing Division. During the military rule in Myanmar, Christians were persecuted in a variety of ways, particularly those Christians who are in the “Chin state and Sagaing division” as well as “in Karen and Karenni states.” Churches were burned down and pastors were arrested. Moreover, some churches could not have peaceful worship services as the Tatmadaw disrupted the service and some members were taken as porters while worshipping in the church. During this period there were many rules and restrictions to the churches in Myanmar. Since 1994, applications for permission to construct new church buildings have been denied while Buddhist pagodas and shrines are arising in many places in the country. Further, it was not easy for Christians to get promoted “to high-ranking positions in government service, particularly in the army” because they were seen as supporters of colonial British rule.

It was on July 20, 2003 when I went to the church in Yangon where I usually attended Sunday worship service at 10:00 am. It was closed as no one was allowed to attend the worship service. However, this was not the case with all churches in the city. Then, I asked the person who was taking care of the church. He replied to me, “Authorities came and said that no one can worship here. If we fail to follow their instruction and disobey, we have to face the consequences. That is why the Church is closed today.” During the period of military rule in Myanmar, Christians in the provinces as well as in the cities had been bothered in several ways. This leads one to consider several questions: Why is there no religious freedom in the country? Why didn't the government allow Christians to build churches in Myanmar while Buddhist pagodas were constantly constructed in the whole country with financial support from the government? Why is there such a thing like favored and non-favored religions in the country? Was this dislike toward Christians because of any misdeeds which Christians had committed in the past?

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4 Ibid.

5 The word Tatmadaw comes from a Bamar word which means Myanmar Armed Forces / Myanmar Army.


7 Many churches, but not all, in Yangon were closed on Sunday during the military junta, particularly between 2000 and 2003, for they were not allowed to celebrate worship service in their churches.

8 Christina Fink, *Living Silence, Burma under Military Rule*, 222.
toward their Buddhist neighbors? Is there any possibility to bridge the gap between Buddhists and Christians in Myanmar as to avoid discrimination, and leading toward peaceful co-existence? Through which channel could Christians in Myanmar show that they are good neighbors toward their Buddhist neighbors? The above questions led me to consider the need for Buddhist-Christian dialogue, and yet it is a great challenge in the context of Myanmar. Thus, the question is: “Is Buddhist-Christian dialogue in Myanmar a barrier to community or a bearer of peaceful co-existence in the country?” With the above questions in mind, I am motivated to do this research in order to uncover the hindrances and the possibilities for Buddhist-Christian dialogue in search of peaceful co-existence in the country.

Previous Research on Buddhist-Christian Dialogue in Myanmar

Buddhist-Christian dialogue in Myanmar is at an introductory level. This is because the majority of Christians in Myanmar thought that dialogue with people of other faiths implied unfaithfulness to Christianity. In other words, they are afraid of losing their identity and belief in God while Buddhists in Myanmar are not interested in other religions. Further, Buddhists in Myanmar are confident enough in Buddhism for fulfilling their needs in their present as well as in next life, saying that “my religion is good for me and your religion is good for you.” In addition, some Buddhists and Christians are still in the process of initiating Buddhist-Christian dialogue. Thus, books and articles written on Buddhist-Christian dialogue in Myanmar are still very limited. Below is a brief overview of previous research contributing to Buddhist-Christian dialogue in Myanmar.


The author, Myint Maung, a Bamar Buddhist converted to Christianity, did his Ph.D studies in Buddhist philosophy, *Abhidhamma*, at Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi in India. Due to the political climate of the 1970s in Myanmar, he could not renew his Myanmar passport for six years in India. As a result, he not only gave up his Myanmar citizenship, but also became a stateless person and finally

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9 Interview with Saw Hlaing Bwa, professor of Science and Theology at Myanmar Institute of Theology, Yangon on March 5, 2012 in Yangon.
migrated to Canada. In his book cited above, Myint Maung explores the “concept of reality in Buddhist-Christian dialogue,” saying that “reality as a concept is a contradiction in terms” since “there is no reality because it cannot be defined. If there is no reality, then we are not real.” His contribution is the ambivalence of self and no-self in Buddhism and Christianity, mentioning that the paradoxical concept of \textit{anatta} which is eternalism as well as nihilism. Thus, he says that “the doctrines of \textit{anatta} and \textit{Nibbana} are essentially related to each other.” However, he compares the doctrines of \textit{anatta} and \textit{Nibbana}, adding that “the \textit{anatta} doctrine necessarily denies that \textit{Nibbana}, the ultimate destiny of man, is a positive state,” and it is “the \textit{anatta} doctrine which has to be denied.” While Christians believe in “soul” or “self,” Buddhist believe in “no-soul” or “no-self” (\textit{anatta}), which might be the problem and challenge for contemporary Buddhist-Christian dialogue. Moreover, the problem of Buddhist participation in interfaith dialogue, he stresses, is due to the concept of \textit{paramattha-dhamma}, which means the teachings of the Buddha are ultimate stating that “Buddha discovered the ultimate reality and his teachings is the ultimate truth.”


Samuel Ngun Ling is a Myanmar systematic theologian and currently the President of Myanmar Institute of Theology, Insein, Yangon. He contributes to the impossibility and possibility of Buddhist-Christian dialogue in Myanmar, stating that as Myanmar Buddhists believe that there is no personal form of God, there is a contrast with God in Christianity, who is a person, creator, and a father. He goes on to say that there are two levels with regard to the name of God in Bamar language. At the first level, the Bamar addressing of “\textit{Hpa-yah}” (God) means the visible images of Buddha, the pagodas and monks. At the second level, when they say “\textit{Hpa-yah},” this can also be the Ultimate Reality beyond the level of visible objects. With regard to the possibility of Buddhist-Christian dialogue, he explores the similarities of the Buddhist five moral precepts known as \textit{Panca Sila} and Christian Decalogue. Here the concepts of violence and non-violence in Buddhism

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10 Myint Maung, \textit{To Motherland With Love} (Yangon: Association of Dhamma Research Center and ATEM, 2004).
11 Ibid., 64.
12 Ibid., 176.
13 Ibid., 81.
and Christianity along with militarism and violence in the context of Myanmar are emphasized.\textsuperscript{15}


La Seng Dingrin, formerly a member of faculty of Myanmar Institute of Theology and currently an adjunct professor of the Eastern University and the Union University of California, explores the concept of “\textit{anatta}” which can mutually enrich in Buddhist-Christian dialogue in today’s Myanmar. \textit{Anatta} (self-negation) in Buddhism is “transformation of a self from a self-centered self into a self-less self” which relates to a Christian belief to “not place too much emphasis on self-love.”\textsuperscript{16} With regard to the concept of “\textit{anatta}” in Buddhism and Christianity, La Seng Dingrin writes:

Buddhism and Christianity seem mutually exclusive to each other in terms of their ‘religio-ethical’ application of self-negation. While Buddhism seems to speak of self-negation as the total giving up of a false notion of all forms of self, Christianity speaks of saving the self in service to other individuals: a human for others and the Church for others. Here a Christian may say that the term ‘self-negation’ is taken only as a symbol, not literal destruction of a self.\textsuperscript{17}


Mary Dun was formerly the Principle of the Myanmar Institute of Christian Theology and lecturer of Myanmar Institute of Theology, Insein, Yangon. In this article, Mary Dun mentioned the need for a paradigm shift in Christian mission as the past model of mission strategy, which was evangelizing and converting people of other faiths into Christianity, is no longer appropriate in the country. Her argument for the starting point of dialogue is to make genuine friendship, describing that “Christians must approach Buddhists only in terms of affection

\begin{footnotesize}
\bibitem{15} Ibid., 81-82.
\bibitem{17} Ibid., 103.
\end{footnotesize}
and respect if they want to develop a genuine friendship.”¹⁸ In genuine friendship, she said that there is trust, confidence and willingness in “sharing the other person’s joy and sorrow without seeking self-interest, helping the other without seeking any reward or intruding oneself upon the other.”¹⁹ Viewing the daily lives of the poor in Myanmar, her argument for Buddhist-Christian dialogue in the country is that it should be based on Buddhist compassion and Christian love since Buddha and Jesus “helped to care for the sick and the needy.” Additionally, she highlighted the health and ecological crisis in the country as important issues for Buddhist-Christian dialogue.²⁰


U Kyaw Than, the associate general secretary of the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF) from 1950 to 1956 and currently faculty member of Mahidol University, College of Religious Studies, Thailand, contributed the concept of man in Buddhism and Christianity and raised question like “what is man?” quoted from the ancient Psalmist’s question to God.²¹ He went on to say that “we deal with the question of man not because we want to suggest that man is the centre of the universe or the key to its understanding. But, at least, in the cosmic drama in which we all participate whether we are Marxist, Buddhist, or Christian, we find man as a significant member of the dramatic caste and in whom we all share and experience something in common ourselves…”²² His argument was the ambivalence of Buddhist perspective of human beings as pessimism as well as optimism, saying that “Buddhist view of man is pessimistic, for to be man is seen as being involved in misery, impermanence and non-entity.” At the same time, he stressed that human nature is optimistic “to mould one's own Kamma for attainment of Nibbana or Buddhahood” which leads human beings “to practice good deeds for one's fellowmen in society and nation.”²³ He argued that in contrast to the Buddhist concept of deed, “Christian action in community, state and nation

¹⁹ Ibid.
²⁰ Ibid., 59.
²² Ibid., 27.
²³ Ibid., 28.
is not expression of social diakonia to secure merit but proclamation of the new Age that in Christ is already upon us and the world at large."


U Pe Maung Tin was the first Myanmar professor who was appointed at Rangoon College in 1912. For Buddhist-Christian encounters to be mutual enriching, Pe Maung Tin emphasized certain factors, such as, Buddhist and Christian ideas of Selflessness, Buddhist meditation and Christian prayer, *Nirvana* and the Kingdom of Heaven, Buddhist *metta* and Christian charity, anthropology in Buddhism and Christianity. Further, he stated the need of knowing Buddhist terminology, particularly for Christian preachers and he proposed to study Pali and Buddhism in order to avoid intellectual dishonesty in preaching and discussing religious matters with Buddhists.

As stated above, the previous research on Buddhist-Christian dialogue in Myanmar so far was based on the paradoxical concept of *anatta* which is externalism as well as nihilism, the five precepts (*Panca Sila*) in Buddhism and Decalogue in Christianity in discussing violent and non-violent action, human being in Buddhism and Christianity, Buddhist *metta* and Christian charity, and a comparison between *Nirvana* and Kingdom of Heaven. Furthermore, the need for religious cooperation on social and ecological concerns was also explored. In this research, my proposal for Buddhist-Christian dialogue in search of peaceful co-existence in Myanmar is based on the concept of “Buddhist *metta* and Christian *agape*” known as “self-sacrificial love” or “unconditional love.” Such love is not passive, but active without expecting anything in return.

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24 Ibid., 29.
27 Ibid., 41.
Privileges in the Research

From 2006-2007, I did the program of Master of Theology in Cross-Cultural Theology at the Protestant Theological University, Kampen in the Netherlands. Since then, the challenge of securing religious and human rights in Myanmar and barriers to initiating Buddhist-Christian dialogue have been my primary concerns. Moreover, it has been a privilege to undertake this project, especially due to the circumstances of working in Myanmar, a multi-cultural and multi-religious society in which intercultural and interreligious encounter is the reality. Majority of Buddhists and Christians in Myanmar are exclusive toward each other in terms of belief, doctrine and tradition. Thus, dialogue between religions in Myanmar seeking to remove suspicion and misunderstanding and bring mutual trust and understanding in establishing a peaceful society is a great challenge.

Moreover, several books on ethnology, history, politics and religions related to Myanmar, are not available in the country itself. However, they are available in libraries like the Asian-African Institute (AAI) at Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Hamburg (SUB), and the Evangelisches Missionswerk in Deutschland (EMW) Library. In addition, the research is based on the Academy of Mission as well as the Academy of World Religions at the University of Hamburg where I am privileged to increase my knowledge in this particular field with the helpful guidance of expert and competent professors.

Additionally, I am particularly privileged to experience German academic scientific approaches to this research field, wherein critical and analytical thought as well as freedom of expression are standards, which is not the case in Myanmar. Besides, the relationship between professors and students in Germany is totally different from my own context. The “guru-bhikhu” / master-disciple sort of relationship is not the norm, rather, professors, mentors and students communicate, discuss and work together as colleagues in a way that makes me feel at home and opens my thought in a critical and confident manner.

Methodology of the Dissertation

The research is primarily concerned with Buddhist-Christian dialogue and its scope is limited to the Myanmar context. In exploring Buddhist-Christian dialogue, the research adopted a historical method to collect facts from the past. This is because I feel that it is necessary for Myanmar Christians in general and Christian theologians in particular, to have thorough knowledge about “their Bible and their
history.” In my opinion they are too fast to judge others without looking back on their past encounters with Buddhists.

To understand the complex relationship between religion and peace, the available resources from libraries, online articles, oral reports and software/internet, relating to religion(s) - especially, Buddhism, Christianity in Myanmar and religious conflicts in particular which delay peace in the society are analyzed in order to unveil Buddhist-Christian points of convergence for peace in the country. The following is a socio-political and religio-cultural study to support a viable Buddhist-Christian dialogue toward peaceful co-existence in Myanmar.

Additionally, the research is based on two types of materials: unpublished and published sources. The unpublished sources are the records which I have collected from oral reports and software/internet. In addition, personal interviews, lecture notes and class discussions are also included in the unpublished sources. The published sources are collection of materials that I have collected in the past and also materials from the library of AAI, EMW and SUB. Moreover, to understand the depth of Buddhist-Christian relations, in their similarities and differences, empirical research was conducted in Myanmar. When I was doing empirical research in Myanmar, it was impossible to interview people who are at the margin in every sphere of life because by approaching them for an interview there creates possible suspicion of being an agent of the organizations which are against the quasi-civilian government. Therefore, the empirical research which I conducted has limited representation of subjects with subsequent limitations in research findings.

### Structure of the Dissertation

The research is divided into six chapters, namely: a socio-political and religio-cultural feature of Myanmar today, historical studies on Buddhist-Christian relations, empirical research, a systematic approach to Buddhist-Christian

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29 It was conducted in Myanmar from January to March 2012. The tool applied in the research is through personal interview method with outlined questionnaires. Four Buddhists and four Christians were selected for personal interview. From Christian community interview was undertaken to Dr. Saw Hlaing Bwa, Dr. C. Thang Za Tuan, Saya Daniel Zau Nan, Sayama Moe Moe Nyunt and from Buddhist community Dr. Than Aung, Dr. Buddhist A. P., Dr. Tin Hlaing and U Dhmmapati were interviewed from January to March, 2012, in Myanmar.
dialogue, hindrances to Buddhist-Christian dialogue and the possibility of Buddhist-Christian dialogue in search of peace in the country. Though the direction of every chapter looks different from one another and appears to have no connection to one another, in reality, all chapters are interrelated and interdependent. Thus, one can comprehend the relationship of each chapter after reading all the chapters.

As mentioned above, chapter one examines the socio-political and religio-cultural features of independent Myanmar, giving information to the readers to easily gather a picture of the situation of Myanmar socially, politically, religiously and culturally. In this chapter the focus is the relations between the central government and ethnic nationalities and their consequences for Myanmar today.

In the second chapter, I first concentrate on the arrival of Buddhism in the country and its historical transformation, and then I focus on the arrival of Christian missions such as Catholic and Protestant missions and the factors of colonialism. Further, this chapter explores the historical encounter between Buddhists and Christians in Myanmar; whereas Buddhist-Christian relations before, during and after colonial period in the country are considered in order to advance toward initiating Buddhist-Christian dialogue. The chapter describes that Buddhist-Christian dialogue in Myanmar is essential as historical memory still plays a crucial role in daily life. This is because the present perceptions of both parties are the reflections from their past experiences: “the victims always have a better memory than the wrongdoers.” Additionally, the attitude of Buddhists and Christians toward people of different faiths is mentioned in this chapter as both religions have missionary zeal to convert one another.

The third chapter is the result of empirical studies which I did in Myanmar from January to March 2012. In this chapter, Buddhists’ perceptions of Christians as well as Christians’ perceptions of Buddhists, including their misunderstandings, their views on Buddhist-Christian dialogue and their opinions for peaceful coexistence in the country are taken into consideration. Based on empirical research, this chapter mentions the need for Buddhist-Christian dialogue to have mutual trust, respect and recognition, leading toward forgiveness and reconciliation. Moreover, the chapter describes the need to focus on social problems such as education, health, human rights, ecological and political issues in Buddhist-Christian dialogue. Only this way can a dialogue of life and dialogue of action take place.

In the fourth chapter, first and foremost, a theoretical approach to Buddhist-Christian dialogue in Myanmar in which Catholic approach to people of other faiths, particularly Nostra Aetate is re-examined. As seen in empirical studies, genuine dialogue based on social concern is badly needed. Thus, I particularly propose to use Catholic models of dialogue which are dialogue of life and dialogue of action as these models of dialogue can pave a way to make common people participate in the search for freedom and human rights in Myanmar. Apart from dialogue of life and action, dialogue of theological exchange is taken into account because without the support of theologies or religious teachings genuine interfaith dialogue cannot be implemented properly. Further, the need for dialogue among theologically-trained people is explored as Buddhist monks and nuns, as well as Christian pastors and priests play crucial role in Myanmar society. The second level of analyzing systematic approaches to dialogue incorporates the ecumenical perspective on dialogue, namely WCC’s approach not only encompasses peace, justice and human rights, but also ecological justice for the integrity of God’s creation. Further, a “kingdom-centered approach” to interfaith dialogue provided by Pau F. Knitter is given importance. His focus on human and ecological sufferings is highly relevant to the situation that Myanmar is currently facing. Besides, in search of liberation from human and ecological suffering, the joint action provided by Leonard Swidler is explored since the sufferings being faced today in Myanmar are too big to carry for only one religion or one organization. Moreover, though Raimundo Panikkar’s approach to dialogue aims for the religiously invisible unity of people of different faiths, the present research applies his approach to the Myanmar context in search of visible harmony or visible unity of people of different faiths for peaceful co-existence in the country.

Though Buddhist-Christian dialogue in Myanmar is mandatory, it is a great challenge because dialogue can also be barrier to both communities due to historical incidents. Thus, chapter five explores some reasons which hinder Buddhist-Christian dialogue. Firstly, the legacy of colonial Christian mission which supported and gave preferential treatment to Christians alone is considered. Additionally, when the majority Buddhists came into power after independence, there was Buddhist resurgence among the people which led to ethno-nationalism. The chapter explains how Buddhism was made as the state religion of the country and the consequences of this. In addition, theories and concepts which hamper healthy dialogue are emphasized. For example, plural society theory, and the concept of equal treatment, which Aung San called Bamar-ta-kyat-shan-ta-kyat political concept among the people, is of great significance. The possible starting point for respect and recognition leading to equality of all citizens under the law regardless of sex, race and religion is also studied. Further, the reasons why the ethnic minority groups in search of unity, equality and peace in the country have
been fighting the central government since Myanmar's independence in 1948 are examined.

Having a common vision for peace in Myanmar is crucial. Therefore, chapter six explores the understanding of peace in Myanmar which is the focus of Myanmar Buddhists’ and Christians’ understandings of peace. Further, chapter six unveils Buddhist-Christian points of convergence for interfaith dialogue in which both parties can actively participate in search of peace and harmony through their respective religious teachings. In seeking peace through Buddhist-Christian dialogue, *metta* / loving-kindness, *karuna* / compassion, *ahimsa* / non-violence are taken into account as core teachings of Buddhism and Christianity. Buddhist *metta* and Christian *agape* are the respective terms for self-sacrificial love or unconditional love, and those are emphasized in Buddhist-Christian dialogue. As *metta* / *agape* is not passive but active, seeking the benefits of human beings, the research explores how “self-sacrificial love” or “unconditional love” is exercised for the sake of reconciliation between Buddhists and Christians in Myanmar. Additionally, this chapter gives proposes how to initiate Buddhist-Christian dialogue and how to create an atmosphere in which a healthy dialogue can be carried out.

Finally, the research concludes with a brief summary of the dissertation followed by ten theses for establishing a peaceful society.
CHAPTER 1
A BRIEF SURVEY ON THE SOCIO-POLITICAL AND RELIGIO-CULTURAL FEATURES OF MYANMAR

1.1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is to inform readers of the present socio-political and religio-cultural situation in Myanmar for a better understanding of the subject of this research. Of course, this introduction can only give a brief overview and cannot enter in a very detailed analysis of the reality of the nation of Myanmar. The socio-political and religio-cultural context of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar is a complicated one. After the colonial period, starting from 1948, the military ruling party - the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) took power. The SLORC changed the official name Burma to Myanmar on June 19, 1989. See also John G. Dale, Free Burma, Transnational Legal Action and Corporate Accountability (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), xiv. In this research, the official name Burma is used as it is, if references are before the change of the official name in 1989 and at the same time Burmese is used whenever the people of the country as a whole are referred to. Bamars is used whenever the Burmans, the ethnic majority groups in the country is referred to. The country covers the total land area of 261,228 sq. miles (667,000 sq. km) stretching 1,275 miles (2,051 km) from north to south, and 582 miles (936 km) from east to west. See Myanmar: Facts and Figures (Yangon: Ministry of Information, Union of Myanmar, 2002), 1. In Myanmar, historically there are several political systems. They are such as, Monarchy (until 1885), Colonialism (1885-1948), Parliamentary Democracy (1948-1962), Socialist Regime (1962-1988), Military Regime (1988-2010) and Quasi-civilian Government (2010 to present) forming once again a parliamentary democracy. See Cf. Josef Silverstein, Burma Military Rule and the Politics of Stagnation (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1977). Generally, Myanmar society consists of diverse ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious groups. They represent 135 ethnic groups of which two thirds of the total population belong to the majority Bamar ethnic group who adhere Buddhism as their main religion. The second ethnic groups are from the ethnic minority communities like Kachin, Chin and...
there are 135 different ethnic groups living together in the present Republic of the Union of Myanmar. These ethnic nationalities had their own territory, religion, culture and language before the British annexed the whole of Myanmar in 1885. However, with the annexation of the British, the whole country was divided into two territories: Frontier Areas and Burma Proper. Later, when Myanmar gained independence in 1948, these two territories became a country known as the Union of Burma (now Myanmar) through the leadership of Aung San, the so-called father of the independence of Myanmar. Understanding the social, political, religious and cultural history of the Republic of the Union Myanmar becomes imperative to understand the present socio-political and religio-cultural situation. Therefore, this chapter will explore a brief survey on the socio-political as well as religio-cultural history of Myanmar since 1948.

1.2. SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXT OF MYANMAR

In exploring the socio-political context of Myanmar, one must focus on the socio-political conflicts between the central government and ethnic nationalities after Independence from the British. Post-independence Myanmar has four political systems, namely, Parliamentary Democracy (1948-1961), Socialist Regime (1962-1988), Military Regime (1988-2010) and Disciplined Democracy (2010- Present). Myanmar society represents various ethnic groups and, as per a recent assessment of different dialects, there are around 135 ethnic groups. Major ethnic groups include the Kachin, Kayah, Karen, Chin, Mon, Bamar, Rakhine and Shan. Before the colonial period (1885-1948), these ethnic groups had their own territories and had their own leaders. In this regard, Lian Uk, a Chin politician, has stated: “The territories of the Chin, Kachin, Shan, Kayah, Kayin and other indigenous nationalities of the Union had never had been under the rule of the successive kings of Burma, (sic) nor were they ever an integral part of Burma before the


British annexation.” In line with Lian Uk, Zapai Zau Lat, former Old Testament Professor at the Myanmar Institute of Theology asserts:

These minority groups were never under the rule of the Burmese kings nor were they under the influence of Burmese culture and religion in ancient times. They lived in remote hilly regions beyond the reach of the Burmese kings’ authority and were living as independent mini-states... However, when the British conquered the Burmese kingdom of central Burma, other territories outside of the Burmese kingdom, which were occupied by ethnic minority groups also annexed, one after another... Under British rule, these minority groups were separated from the administration of ‘Burma Proper’ and were put under the ‘Burma Frontier Administration’ with their local ‘Customary Laws’ intact... They never regarded themselves as subordinates to the Burmans nor did they regard their territories as a part of 'Burma'.

While Frontier Areas were administered by local leaders under the British administration, the Burma Proper followed the British colonial pattern. Though people in the Burma Proper, particularly the Bamars, were struggling for liberation from the British, people from the Frontier Areas like the Chin, Kachin and Shan enjoyed being under British administration. During British rule, Aung San organized a conference on February 12, 1947 at the town of Panglong in the southern Shan state in order to establish the Union of Burma, together with twenty-three Chin, Kachin and Shan representatives. At this conference, Aung San and the ethnic representatives signed an agreement known as the “Panglong Agreement.” This conference was organized at that time because the British would not consider giving independence to the whole of Myanmar without representation

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36 Lapai Zau Lat, “The Rights and the Roles of Ethnic Minorities in Myanmar: Kachin Ethnic Perspective,” in Engagement, Vol. 3 (December 2004), 63-64. British divided Myanmar into two territories: “Ministerial Burma” or “Burma Proper” and the “Frontier areas.” The ‘Frontier areas’ includes the territory of Shans, the Karens, Kayahs, Kachins, Chins, Nagas and Was, consisting more than forty percent of the country. In the Frontier areas, the local rulers or Chief enjoyed considerable autonomy since they were separated from Burma proper which was a part of India. See Mary Callahan, “Myanmar’s Perpetual Junta: Solving the Riddle of the Tatmadaw’s Long Reign,” in New Left Review 60 (2009), 32. See also Donald M. Seekins, Burma and Japan Since 1940 (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2007), 9.


38 Ibid., 75.
of Hill tribes who were under the British Frontier Area administration. On January 4, 1948 Myanmar regained independence from the British.

During the colonial period the British employed Chin, Kachin and Karen ethnic groups as soldiers and policemen to keep order among the Bamars though the Bamars were not recruited into the colonial army from 1887 to 1937. As a consequence, war broke out between the Bamars and minority ethnic groups upon independence. Seeing the ethnic political development as a continuation of colonial rule, the majority of the Bamar nationalists regarded ethnic minorities as a threat to Bamar's authority. Moreover, the Chin, Kachin and Karen Christian communities were regarded as traitors of the country for they had a close relationship with the western Christian missionaries. Additionally, the British ‘divide-and-rule policy’ paved the way for ‘national disunity’ leading to ethnic conflicts – an endemic civil war in the country. In other words, there has been no “national unity” in the independent Myanmar.

Soon after Myanmar became a sovereign country, ethnic groups such as the Karens, the Shans, the Kachins, the Rakhines and Mons were fighting for their respective autonomy and continue to do so today. For instance, tension and conflict started between the Karen National Union (KNU) and the central government when the third KNU congress, led by Saw Ba U Gyi, demanded a Karen State in March 1948 and it failed to materialize as per their demands. Further violence continued to escalate when the U Nu government formed a new military force known as sitwundan which attacked a Karen church in Palaw in the Mergui district on the eve of Christmas in 1948 killing eighty unarmed Karen and burning down the Baptist Mission school. It seems that the Myanmar government believed

42 Ibid., 27.
43 Ibid., 45.
47 Michael Fredholm, *Burma, Ethnicity and Insurgency*, 100.
that “the leaders of the rebellious Karen National Union were for the most part Baptist Christians and the outbreak started in the three mission centres.”\textsuperscript{48} In the 1950s, the Myanmar government encountered ethnic conflicts, particularly “with the Karen ethnic group and the communist party.”\textsuperscript{49}

On September 26, 1959, U Nu, the first Prime Minister of Myanmar, won a landslide victory in the parliamentary elections and he made Buddhism the state religion of Myanmar in 1961.\textsuperscript{50} As a result, several oppositions arose in the Union of Myanmar, particularly from the Christian and Muslim minorities, which subsequently led to religious conflicts. Mandating the religion of Buddhism to be the national religion and identifying a country with a particular religion alone became intolerable for others and this created havoc in the Myanmar society. For instance, ethnic Kachin Christians formed the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) on February 5, 1961 and formed armed insurgencies against the government\textsuperscript{51} that continues to this day.

In 1962, General Ne Win seized power from the government and introduced the “Burmese Way to Socialism” and practiced only one party system in the country. The Ne Win government put many political leaders, journalists, intellectuals, monks, and counterrevolutionary officers into prison without trial. Moreover, the government abolished “freedom of speech and the press and all other constitutional liberties.”\textsuperscript{52} Therefore, ethnic groups from the Karens, Kachins, Kayahs, and Mons were fiercely fighting against the central government.\textsuperscript{53} To this, Melford E. Spiro, an American anthropologist, stated that “Rebel groups and armies have not only been a constant threat to the power and stability of the central government. In some areas, villages have lived under two governments: the central government during the day and a rebel army at night.”\textsuperscript{54} With regard to ethnic conflicts in Myanmar, Aung San Suu Kyi, the opposition leader and the

\textsuperscript{48} John F. Candy, A History of Modern Myanmar (New York: Cornell University, 1958), 596.
\textsuperscript{49} San Thwin, Deforestation Analysis in Eastern and Western Myanmar (Göttingen: Culvillier Verlag, 2003), 31.
\textsuperscript{50} Jan Pluvier, South-East Asia from Colonialism to Independence (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), 204-205.
\textsuperscript{53} Michael Fredholm, Burma, Ethnicity and Insurgency, 112.
\textsuperscript{54} Melford E. Spiro, Anthropological Other Or Burmese Brother?, 191.
President of the National League for Democracy (NLD) and the 1990 Nobel Peace Prize winner, asserts:

The government, largely dominated by ethnic Burmans, has faced armed insurgencies from all the other major ethnic groups in these intervening years. The State Law and Order Restoration Council, which assumed power in 1988, has succeeded in negotiating ceasefire agreements with all but one of these ethnic rebel forces. But such ceasefires have yet to be transformed into lasting peace based on mutually acceptable settlement of political differences. To this day the country remains deeply unstable and volatile.\(^5\)

Civil war between the government and ethnic minorities still continues to this day, especially in the frontier areas of the ethnic nationalities. This is because there is no trust between the government and ethnic minorities in the country. In this regard, Suu Kyi goes on to say that, “The greatest obstacle in the way of peace and progress for Burma is a lack of trust: trust between the government and the people, between different ethnic groups, between the military and civilian forces. Trust is a precious commodity that is easily lost, but hard indeed to take root.”\(^5\)

Further, due to ethnic conflicts the Tatmadaw has forcibly displaced large numbers of people particularly in the areas occupied by ethnic minorities. This is because those civilians who are in the battleground are suspected of supporting the insurgent groups with food, funds, recruits and intelligence.\(^5\) Following forced displacement the Tatmadaw, during counter-insurgency campaigns, practiced “severe abuses, including extrajudicial killings; rape; looting; and widespread destruction of fields, property, and livelihoods.”\(^5\) As a result, the Tatmadaw, as an institution, is regarded “as the enemy” in the areas of these ethnic peoples.\(^5\) In addition, Mary J. Dittion, senior lecturer in health management at the University of New England, Australia, asserts the following on displacement in Myanmar:

When there is fighting between the Tatmadaw and the ethnic insurgencies, the strategies that the Tatmadaw applied is ‘the forced relocation of

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\(^5\) Ibid., x.


\(^5\) Ibid., 184.

\(^5\) Ibid.
villagers, internal displacements, child and forced labour, the destruction of food supplies and the burning of houses and villages.60

There continue to be human rights violations in Myanmar particularly in the remote areas of ethnic minorities. When there is a counter-insurgency campaign between the Tatmadaw and the insurgent groups, the local people are forced to porter for the Tatmadaw. The worst events of the counterinsurgency campaign were the “severe human rights abuses, including arbitrary killings, rape, and forced portering for the army.”61

Moreover, the villagers were forced to build houses for the Tamadaw in the army camp. Forced labor and other compulsory contributions and activities for the Tatmadaw were common, “particularly in remote areas inhabited by ethnic minority groups.”62 The Tatmadaw was recorded as having “one of the most notorious human rights records, using extensive violence against non-combatants and forcing them, to act as porters and human minesweeper in the combat zones.”63 Though the above statement is dated by more than a decade, tension and ethnic conflict is ongoing between the Myanmar Tatmadaw and Non-state Armed Groups (NSAGs), particularly in the Kachin state and Shan state of Myanmar.64 Since tension and conflict between the government and ethnic minorities continues, especially in the frontier areas of the ethnic minorities,65 there is no trust between the central government and ethnic minorities in the country. While saying that the civil war is between the government and the ethnic minorities, it should be noted that it is also between Buddhists and Christians as well as


61 Ibid., 7. From April 1999 to May 2001, I was working as a Church Associate Pastor at Tuimang village, Chin State of Myanmar. As the Tatmadaw had counterinsurgency campaigns, the villagers including myself were forced to carry the properties and foods of the Tatmadaw since there is no proper transportation there. Some villagers who could not carry the foods or properties of the Tatmadaw were often beaten or kicked. There was no human values and human dignity in such situations.


between Buddhists and Buddhists. Myanmar, at this political transition period toward the so-called democracy, is in dire need to restore peace in the country.

1.3. RELIGIO-CULTURAL CONTEXT

Originally, all the indigenous people of Myanmar were *Nat* worshippers. However, they changed their religion from *Nat* worship to other faiths. Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Nat worship are the official religions of Myanmar. Religious identity is always identified with national identity in the country. Thus, Buddhism is strongly linked with a national identity for the Bamar, Shan and Rakhine ethnic people, while Christianity is linked with the Chin, Kachin, Nagas and Karen, Islam with Indian-Burmese and Bangali (Rohingya). Most Muslims and Hindus in Myanmar belong to the Indian minority who came along with the British during the colonial period (1885-1948). Further, since the Sino-Myanmar diplomatic relations began in the early sixth century, Confucianism, traditional Chinese religion came to the country with the migrants. Theravada Buddhism is the dominant religion among the majority Bamar ethnic group as well as among the Shan and Mon ethnic minorities of the eastern and southern region. At the same time, Christianity is the dominant religion among the Kachin ethnic group of the northern region and the Chin (Zo) ethnic group of the western region. Further, Christianity is also practiced widely in the Kayin (Karen) and Kayah (Karenni) ethnic groups of the southern and eastern regions. Islam is widely practiced in the Rakhine (Arakan) state.

Myanmar, with a population of more than 50 million, is surrounded by Theravada Buddhism both socio-politically and religio-culturally, with 89.3% of the population being Buddhist, 5.6% Christians, 3.8% Muslims, 0.5% Hindus, about 0.2% adhere to

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primal religion (animism). In Myanmar, religion plays a very important role in society, for religion creates social identity. In this regard, Georg Noack asserts: “Among the most salient aspects of identity in Myanmar are ethnicity and religion – most often Buddhist religion. Every new contact will be asked which people he belongs to and what religion he professes.”

Culturally, most of the ethnic groups in Myanmar share the same cultural pattern. U Kyaw Than, a Myanmar writer, stated:

> Culturally Sanskrit and racially Mongolian, the Burman draws on the traditions of India on the one hand and the physical traits of the people of China on the other. The fusion of the influences from these two great neighbors is evident even in the daily dress of the Burmese male and females. The upper jacket is an adaptation of Chinese dress while the lower skirt is that of an Indian.

In addition, as Myanmar is a multi-ethnic country, so is it also multi-linguistic. During colonial period (1885-1948) English was *lingua franca* and also it was the language of the dominant group. However, since the independence of Myanmar in 1948, Bamar language is used as a *lingua franca*. Though Bamar language is the official language of post-colonial Myanmar, the ethnic minority groups maintain their own languages through literature and religion as not to lose their cultural and ethnic identity.

Moreover, Buddhism is regarded as a fundamental ingredient of Bamar identity. With regards to the relationship of Buddhism to the Bamars, Melford E. Spiro, an American anthropologist, stated, “to be a Burman is to be a Buddhist...Without Buddhism there could be no Burma.” As Buddhism has become the key element of Bamar identity, Christianity is regarded as the socio-political and religio-

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71 Myanmar: Facts and Figures (Yangon: Ministry of Information, Union of Myanmar, 2002), 4-5.
72 Georg Noack, Local Traditions, Global Modernities, 211.
75 Simon Pau Khan En, Nat Worship, 368.
76 Melford E. Spiro, Anthropological Other or Burmese Brother? 19.
cultural identity of some indigenous ethnic nationalities, particularly Chin, Kachin, Naga and Kayin.

Interestingly, Christianity has been growing both in the rural and urban areas of Myanmar. Therefore, there are several sorts of political restrictions and religious discriminations that were imposed, particularly between 1988 and 2010 when military regime ruled the country. Because of the rising fear of the growth of Christianity in the country, the government has attempted to divide the majority ethnic Christian groups. For instance, the army offered soldiers 6,000 kyats worth of rice to marry a Christian Karenni woman aiming to weaken the ethnic group and destroy the culture and religion of the Karenni, which is Christianity.78

Further, it is claimed that the military junta sent hundreds of Buddhist missionaries to the Chin state to convert Chin Christians to Buddhism. Those who became Buddhists were rewarded with privileges, such as extra rice supplies, opportunities to study in good schools as well as exemption from forced labor. Additionally, on January 3, 2005, the Myanmar Tatmadaw troops pulled down a 15 meter-high cross built by Chin Christians on a hillside in Matupi, in the Chin state of northwestern Myanmar. When the Tatmadaw sought to spread Buddhism in the ethnic areas, they often forced Christian villagers to construct Buddhist pagodas in the place of the Christian cross. The regime discriminated against members of religious minority religions.79

In addition, children from Christian families who lived in remote areas of the country were taken from their parents, saying that they would be given a good education. In reality, they were placed into monasteries to become novice monks. Further, the Tatmadaw engaged in kidnapping children to enlist them in the army. Due to fear of the growing number of those joining rebel forces, the Tatmadaw tried to expand by using children because of a population shortage. Reportedly these children suffered beatings and brainwashing, starvation, and were often left for dead if they could not keep up with the army.80 Moreover, the worst thing that the Tatmadaw did was raping women from ethnic minorities, particularly during their counter-insurgence because rape is used “as weapon of war and oppression.”81 Two Kachin Christian graduate young women named Maran Lu Ra and Tangbau Hkawn Nan Tsin, who worked “as volunteer teachers” sent by Kachin Baptist Convention (KBC) “for rural village children in Shabuk-Kaunghka in Shan

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78 Ciin Sian Khai, Rediscovering Religious Human Rights in Myanmar, 43.
79 Ibid.
80 Ibid.
state, Burma (Myanmar) were raped and killed by Burmese soldiers on 19 January, 2015. The attack is thought to come in revenge for renewed fighting between the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and the Burmese Army."82

Further, Myanmar, in the midst of the political transition from military rule to the so-called democratic form of government, experiences a lot of religious conflicts among people of different faiths. This was particularly the case between Buddhists and Muslims in Rakhine state, the western part of Myanmar in October 2012, and in central Myanmar in 2012, and between Buddhists and Christians in the northern part of Myanmar, Kachin and Northern Shan state. These conflicts resulted in the loss of hundreds of lives and thousands of houses being demolished. As a result, many people are displaced, particularly in the Rakhine state because of Buddhist-Muslim conflicts. It is claimed that more than 237 have been killed in this religious conflict and more than 140,000 have been displaced. Of these, Muslims in the Rakhine state are the majority.83

Moreover, Christians are denied ranks beyond that of Major in the army and also cannot hold a position as a head of a department in the civil service.84 In this respect, non-Buddhists are treated as second-class citizens, and this is one of the worst kinds of oppression and discrimination. Thus, non-Buddhists in Myanmar feel that they are discriminated against and deprived of their rights. As the government discriminates against the other religious minorities, a healthy relationship between the people of Myanmar is lacking. Thus, the ethnic, religious and cultural divide has become more intense in the present scenario. In fact, being a multi-religious country Myanmar needs a space in which all religions are equally treated and accommodated.

1.4. CONCLUSION

By analyzing the socio-political and religio-cultural situation, one can sum up that there has been no peace in Myanmar since regaining independence from Britain in 1948. While acknowledging that ethnic conflicts and war are between the Tatmadaw and the ethnic nationalities, it should be noted that it is also between Buddhists and Christians as well as between Buddhists and Buddhists. Though conflicts also take place between Buddhists and Buddhists, the focus for interfaith

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84 Ciin Sian Khai, Rediscovering Religious Human Rights in Myanmar, 28-30.
dialogue in this research is dialogue between Buddhists and Christians. As understanding the historical background of Buddhist-Christian encounters is essential, the present study attempts to find out a way in which both parties can construct a bridge to fill the gap between them through studying their relations. Thus, the next chapter will explore Buddhist-Christian relations before, during and after the colonial period in Myanmar as to find a way to initiate Buddhist-Christian dialogue, seeking forgiveness and reconciliation, leading to peaceful co-existence in the country.
CHAPTER 2
BUDDHIST-CHRISTIAN RELATIONS
IN MYANMAR: A HISTORICAL
OVERVIEW

2.1. INTRODUCTION
The aim of this chapter is to provide a brief history of Buddhist-Christian relations in Myanmar. In studying Buddhist-Christian relations, firstly, the paper will explore the arrival of Buddha \textit{Sasana} in the country according to legendary as well as historical tradition, the growth of Theravada Buddhism, and the co-existence of Theravada tradition with Nat worship. Secondly, the arrival of the Christian mission - both Catholic mission and Protestant mission - will be described. Additionally, the interaction between Christian missionaries and the Bamar kings, the close relations between the Christian mission and colonialism, and how Christianity was perceived by the local people will be outlined. In addition, Buddhist-Christian relations in Myanmar before, during and after the colonial period will be emphasized in order to provide information for authentic Buddhist-Christian dialogue in the country in search of mutual trust, mutual respect and mutual growth toward a peaceful co-existence. The approach for this chapter is historical and descriptive.

2.2. THE ADVENT OF BUDDHISM IN MYANMAR
Exploring the arrival of Buddhism in Myanmar is a complicated enterprise as there are \textit{legendary} and \textit{historical} traditions which developed in dealing with the advent of Buddhism in Myanmar.\textsuperscript{86} Legends, oral histories, as well as written records of


\textsuperscript{86} Simon Pau Khan En, \textit{Nat Worship}, 369.
stone inscriptions, palm leaf inscriptions, folding paper ink writings and court chronicles, serve as sources which provide an array of answers to such a search. The historical records, which are available in various forms, play a distinctive role in answering several queries such as when and how Theravada Buddhism came to Myanmar and by whom the Sasana was brought to Myanmar.87

### 2.2.1. LEGENDARY TRADITION

In legendary tradition, it is mentioned that Gautama Buddha himself visited Myanmar during his lifetime.88 Additionally, legendary tradition claims that there were two merchant brothers, namely, Tapussa and Bhalika. They travelled from Suvannabhumi89 to Majjhimadesa90 along with 500 caravans, on business. Upon arrival at Majjhima, they met with the enlightened one called “Buddha.” These merchant brothers worshipped him, and upon their request, Buddha removed eight hairs from his head and gave them to the two.91 After that, Tapussa and Bhalika returned to Pokhharavati and built a pagoda in which eight hairs of the Buddha were believed to be enshrined.92 Today it is renowned as the “Shwe Dagone Pagoda” located in Yangon and has become one of the wonders of the world. It is, therefore, generally claimed that Tapussa and Bhalika initiated Buddhism in Myanmar land shortly after Gautama experienced enlightenment.93 In this regard, Sushil K. Naidu, an Indian writer on South Asian History, asserts, “This legend is mentioned in the Shwedagon stone inscription, set up by King Dhammazedi (A.D. 1472 - 1492) of Hanthawaddy Kingdom. You can still see and read the inscribed

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89 Suvanabhumi is identified with Taikkala in the Bilin Township of the Thaton district, Mon State, Myanmar. A Pali word, Suvannabhumi means “Golden Land,” which is a term coined by the ancient Indians which refers broadly to Lower Burma, Lower Thailand, Lower Malay Peninsula, and the Sumatra. However, it is generally accepted to refer more specifically to Lower Burma. See Kanai Lai Hazra, *History of Theravada Buddhism in South-East Asia* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1982), 58.

90 A Pali word “Majjhima” which means “Middle Land,” Majjhimadesa is central India, known as the birthplace of noble men and also it was the birthplace of Buddhism. See http://www.palikanon.com/english/


In the same way, Aye Myint, Professor of International Theravada Buddhist Missionary University, Yangon, refers to *Sasanavamsa*, stating that before the death of Buddha, his teachings were already introduced in Myanmar. Moreover, he says that Sasanavamsa mentions that the arrival of Buddha’s hair relics in Ukkala (Yangon) took place “soon after the Buddha’s enlightenment.” As a consequence, he notes: “The Shwe Dagon Pagoda stands as the monument of that event. So, Myanmar people believe that Buddhism started to flourish in Myanmar, at least in the lower Myanmar, from the time of the Buddha.”

Further, Naidu states that “the visit of the Buddha to Thaton and Shwesettaw” was also recorded not only “in the Mon and Myanmar oral tradition,” but also in the Arakanese tradition, saying that Buddha visited “Arakanese kings and left behind an image of himself for them to worship.” Naidu goes on to say that the “Kelasa Taung inscription at Taungzun in the Thaton District” gives evidence that Buddha visited Thaton. There, Buddha and his disciples were warmly welcomed. In addition, Buddha and his 500 disciples came to Shwesettaw in Minbu township of the region of Magway division in which “a monastery built of sandal wood was offered to the Buddha to reside.”

Additionally, Than Tun, a Myanmar historian, supports the plausibility of the legendary theory with the help of *Sasanavamsa of Pannasami*, saying that “according to the Sasanavamsa of Pannasami written in 1861, it was Lower Burma, known as Rammanna, which received the religion first. Perhaps it dates back to the very lifetime of Buddha.” Even though weak in historical evidence, Simon Pau

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95 During the reign of King Mindon in Myanmar in 1867, the Fifth Buddhist Council was held in Mandalay and there a chronicle was written in Pali by a pongyi, Pannasama which is known as *Sasanavamsa*. See Sushil K. Naidu, *Buddhism in Myanmar*, 3.

96 Lecture Handout given by Aye Myint, International Theravada Buddhist Missionary University, Yangon at Mooler Hall, Myanmar Institute of Theology, on November 8, 2008, 2.


98 Ibid., xii.

99 Than Tun, *Essays on the History and Buddhism of Burma* ed. Paul Strachan (Whiting Bay: Kiscadale Publications, 1988), 23. Moreover, in his book, *Buddhism in Myanmar*, Naidu says that the Mon and the Bamar tradition claimed that the Buddha visited to Thaton and Shwesettaw. Further, the Arakanese believed that “the Buddha visited their king and left behind an image of himself for them to worship. Modern historiography will, of course, dismiss these stories as fabrications made out of national pride, as the Myanmar had not even arrived in the region at the time of the Buddha.” See Suschil K. Naidu, *Buddhism in Myanmar*, 3.
Khan En, a Myanmar theologian and ethnologist, says that legendary tradition continues to influence Myanmar Buddhists as they are “proud of the antiquity of Myanmar Buddhism and its direct roots in Gautama Buddha.”

Scholars like Simon Pau Khan En critically argue that “the visit of Gautama Buddha to Myanmar during his lifetime is a legendary rather than a historical fact as there is no historical evidence to prove it.” In line with Simon Pau Khan En, Naidu says, “This does not prove that the visits really took place, but it seems a more palatable explanation of the existence of these accounts than simply putting them down to historical afterthought of Buddhist people eager to connect itself with the origins of their religion.”

### 2.2.2. HISTORICAL TRADITION

There is debate among scholars over whether Buddhism arrived in Myanmar from a historical perspective. Some scholars argue that the form of Buddhism which initially arrived in Myanmar was Mahayana Buddhism, but not Theravada Buddhism. Historical tradition points to the arrival of Theravada Buddhism in Suvannabhumi. It was first brought by missionaries who were sent by King Asoka, an Indian Buddhist emperor, to nine different neighboring regions to propagate the *Sasana*. Missionization took place after the third Buddhist Council held under King Asoka’s supervision. The Council was held at Asokarama monastery in the city of Pataliputta in 308 BCE. There, five *arahats* were sent to Suvannabhumi led by venerable Sona Thera and venerable Uttara Thera. According to Taw Sein Ko, a Superintendent of Burma Archaeological Survey during the colonial period in Myanmar, Buddhist missionaries were sent out by King Asoka to his neighboring countries was in the year 246 BCE. Moreover, Naidu asserts that the third  

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100 S. Pau Khan En, *Nat Worship*, 370.

101 Ibid.


103 The word “arahat” derived from Sanskrit which means “a saint of one of the highest ranks.”


105 Taw Sein Ko, *Burmese Sketches*, Vol. I (Rangoon: British Burma Press, 1913), 41. Than Tun, a Myanmar historian, recorded that it was in 235 BCE, while a Superintendent of Burma Archaeological Survey during the colonial period, Taw Sein Ko, had 246 BCE as the year that Buddhist missionaries were sent out to the neighboring countries by King
Buddhist Council was held in 232 BCE and Emperor Asoka sent experienced teachers to the neighboring countries to spread the teachings of Buddha. Furthermore, Naidu refers to Mahavamsa, a Sinhalese chronicle, saying that Asoka sent forth missionaries to different parts of his neighboring countries. Among them, Sona Thera and Uttara Thera were sent to Suvanabhumi. There, both of them chose “the Brahmajala Sutta” in order to convert the inhabitants of Suvanabhumi. In this regard, F. E. Trotman, asserts:

> From a council held at Patna, Buddhist missionaries are said to have been sent to many lands, Asoka’s own son, Mahinda to Ceylon and Sona and Uttara to Suvarna-Bhumi. The relics of one of these missionaries, Majjhima, who was sent to the central Himalayas, have been found under the Sanchi Tope, a Pagoda in Central India and bear witness to the general fact of these missionary journeys.

In addition, scholars like E. Sarkisyanz, former Professor of Political Science at the South Asian Institute of Heidelberg University, stated that “according to the tradition of the Mons, who were to transmit Theravada Buddhism from Ceylon to the Burmese, the high destinies of their center Pegu were foretold by the Buddha himself... The legendary traditions of the Mons derived their Buddhism also from subsequent missionaries sent by India’s ideal Buddhist emperor Ashoka in 241 B.C.”

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107 Emperor Asoka sent, according to Mahavamsa, the thera Majjhantika to Kasmira and Gandhara, the thera Mahadeva to Mahisamandala, the thera Rakkhita to Vanavasa, the thera Dhamarkkhita to Aparantaka, the thera Mahadhammrakkhita to Maharattha, the thera Maharakkhita to Yona, the thera Majjhima to Himalaya, and the thera Uttara and the thera Sone to Suvanabhumi. According to the Sasanavamsa, Naidu says that “Kasimira and Gandhara is the right bank of the Indus River south of Kabul; Mahisamandala is Andhra; Vanavasa is the region around Prome (in present Myanmar); Yona, the country of the Shan tribes; and Suannabhumi is Thaton (in present Myanmar).” For detail information, see Suschil K. Naidu, *Buddhism in Myanmar*, 8.
To the contrary, scholars like Taw Sein Ko stress that “the form of Buddhism first introduced in Myanmar proper was that of Mahayana or Northern School, as the Buddhist Scripture when first introduced were written in Sanskrit, which is the language of the Northern School.”111 As the above terms used in the Burmese and Mandarin languages are connected, Naidu opines that “Buddhism should have been borrowed by Burma from China and her translations from Sanskrit, rather than from Ceylon and her Pali literature and this circumstance alone is convincing proof that the Burmese are indebted to the Chinese for a good portion of their knowledge of Buddhism.”112 Further, Naidu mentions that archaeological evidence found in “Sri Kestra, Beithano and Hanlin,” which were Pyu city kingdoms, show that Mahayana and Theravada Buddhism co-existed side by side. In these cities, the Mahayana Buddhist type of figures and statues, such as Lokanatha deva (Bodhista), Vishnu and Lashmi Devi were excavated.113 Additionally, the Mahayana type of Buddhism arrived in Bagan from the northern land with Hindu Brahmanism.114 As “the sacred language of Buddhism, whether of the Northern or Tantric school, was Sanskrit,” the Sanskrit form of certain words is written on the terra-cotta tablets found in Bagan. Thus, it is claimed that before Theravada Buddhism arrived in Bagan, Mahayana Buddhism, or Tantric Buddhism, already existed as some inscriptions in Bagan were written in Sanskrit. Further, in the Buddhist books of Myanmar there are Sanskrit forms of certain words.115

In the eleventh century, King Anawrahta took Tipitaka from Thaton and adopted Theravada Buddhism in his kingdom.116 Nihar-Ranjan Ray, an Indian writer, describes that Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism “seem to have lived side by side till at last the Theravada tradition” was promoted by King Anawrahta and was given preferential treatment with the support of the throne since the eleventh

111 In line with Taw Sein Ko, Naidu says that Buddhism arrived in Myanmar from China. He goes on saying, “In Mandarin, Buddha is called ‘Fo-yeh,’ but the older pronunciation is ‘Fu-ya’ which, in Burmese, assumes the form ‘Phu-ya,’ now pronounced ‘Pha-ya.’… The earliest Burmese inscription, where the word ‘Phu-ya’ occurs, is dated about 1139 A.D., but according to Edkins, ‘Fu-ya’ came into use about 561A.D. In Burmese, ‘Pu-to’ means an image of Buddha or a religious building commonly known as a Pagoda; and the corresponding Chinese word is ‘Fu-tu.’ A monastery is called a ‘Vihara’ in Pali, and ‘Kyaung’ in Burmese… In Mandarin, the corresponding word is ‘Kung’.” See Suschil K. Naidu, *Buddhism in Myanmar*, xxiv.


113 Ibid., xiv.

114 Ibid., xv.

115 Ibid., xxi.

century in Myanmar. Since Mahayana and Theravada coexisted during the reign of King Anawrahta, “the Theravada of Burma came to absorb some of the elements of its sister faith, and some of the gods of Mahayana pantheon, e.g. Maitreya, were even adopted by the Theravadins.” Thus, Mahayana and Theravada forms of Buddhism in Myanmar were not always distinguishable.

In this respect, it appears there are no clear cut differences between Mahayana and Theravada Buddhism. This is due to the influence of Mahayana Buddhism, which had flourished along with Theravada Buddhism during the reign of King Anawrahta in the eleventh century CE.

Though there is a debate among scholars on the first arrival of Buddhism in Myanmar, I am of the opinion that Theravada Buddhism first arrived to the Mon people from India and from Sri Lanka. At the same time, Mahayana Buddhism probably was initially introduced from China to the Bamars of Myanmar. However, Theravada Buddhism has flourished in Myanmar particularly among the Bamar people from the time of King Anawrahta in the eleventh century. It flourished because King Anawrahta captured Thaton, the capital of Mon kingdom and took away the Tipitaka from Thaton to Bagan in 1057 CE. With that Tipitaka, Shin Arahan propagated Theravada Buddhism throughout the kingdom of Bagan.

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118 Ibid. Emphasis added.

119 It is believed that the “Pyus” were the first who settled in Upper Myanmar. However, they were gradually assimilated by the Bamar people particularly from the time of Bagan Empire in the eleventh century. See Thant Myint-U, *The River of Lost Footsteps - Histories of Burma* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006), 51-52.

120 Michael Fredholm, *Burma, Ethnicity and Insurgency*, 22. In 1044 CE, King Anawrahta founded Bagan dynasty known was the first Myanmar dynasty. During his reign, Shin Arahan, a Mon monk from Thaton, introduced the Theravada doctrine to him. As Anawrahta accepted Theravada Buddhism, he appointed Shin Arahan to be the primate, first rank of his kingdom. See also Donald Eugene Smith, *Religion and Politics in Burma* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), 12-13. Further, in order to obtain the Pali Tipitaka from Thathon, Anawrahta was urged many times by Arahan. Thus, Anawrahta asked Manuha, the king of Thaton to give him the Tipitaka. Manuha did not only accept the request, but also said Anawrahta's subjects “the barbarians.” See Maung Htin Aung, *A History of Burma* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1967), 32. Anawrahta first took the initiative to bring and preserve the Tipitaka from Suvannabhumi, Thaton and Sri Lanka. See also Nandamalabhivamsa, *Fundamental Abhidhamma* (Sagaing Hills: Center for Buddhist Studies, 2005), 13. However, the encounter between Anawrahta and Manuha led to war among them. As a result, Anawrahta’s armies destroyed the royal city of the Mons, and all the monks, 30 000 captives, and thirty-two white elephants laden with relics and scriptures were carried off to Bagan. See Donald Eugene Smith. *Religion and Politics in Burma*, 12-13.
Thus, Bagan became the center of religion (Buddhism) and culture (Bamar).\textsuperscript{121} In this regard, Naidu asserts that Theravada Buddhism has continuously been growing “only after Myanmar received Tipitaka.”\textsuperscript{122} Moreover, as the first great temple builder, Anawrahta made Bagan the center of Theravadian learning and at the same time, he invited scholars from Mon land, Sri Lanka and especially from India.\textsuperscript{123}

In addition, King Anawrahta purified his religion (Buddhism) as it was mixed with Nat worship, an amalgamation of Mahayana Buddhism and Tantric, or magical Buddhism.\textsuperscript{124} Regarding the purification of Buddhism by Anawrahta, Simon Pau Khan En asserts:

> From its arrival to the time of King Anawrahta, Buddhism in Myanmar was far from pure, if we still insist on using the word “pure” in its strict sense. Maung Htin Aung stated that before Anawratha (1044 CE) made Theravada Buddhism a national religion, Buddhism was an amalgam of Mahayana Buddhism, Tantric or magical Buddhism and Nat Worship. All the different cults were given an artificial unity by the fact that they were under the patronage of the Ari monks who had some acquaintance with the Buddhist scriptures, gloried in the name of Buddha, and wore dark-brown robes and conical hats. But they also presided over the Nat festivals at which hundreds of animals were sacrificed.\textsuperscript{125}

Even today Myanmar Buddhists are indebted to King Anawrahta for what he had done for his people. For them, commitment to Buddhism is faithfulness to loyal citizenship, religious legacies, and cultural heritage.\textsuperscript{126} Thus, Buddhism and Bamar culture intermingle such that one could learn Buddhism from the Bamar culture and the Bamar culture from Buddhism. For instance, it is interesting to note that when the Buddhists, especially the villagers, meet each other, the main topic of their conversation is mostly Buddhism. Therefore, Buddhism is regarded as a fundamental aspect of Bamar identity. Regarding the relations between Buddhism


\textsuperscript{122} Suschil K. Naidu, xi.

\textsuperscript{123} Maung Htin Aung, \textit{A History of Burma}, 36.

\textsuperscript{124} Helmuth von Glasenapp, \textit{Der Buddhismus} (Berlin: Atlantis – Verlag, 1936), 151.


\textsuperscript{126} San Lian, “Christian Understanding of Theravada Buddhism,” in \textit{Missio Dei}, Vol. 3 (October 2009), 161.
and Bamar people, Melford E. Spiro, an American anthropologist asserts that “to be a Burman is to be a Buddhist...Without Buddhism there could be no Burma.”

According to E. Michael Mendelson, Rockefeller grant holder in 1958 for research on religion and politics in Myanmar, there are six different Buddhist groups, which he calls sects in Myanmar. They are the Thudhma sect, Weluwun sect, Hngetwin sect, Shwegyin sect, Dwaya sect and Pakokko sect. However, Prof. Aye Myint says that presently there are nine monastic sects legally recognized in Myanmar. They are as follows: Suddhama sect, Shwegyin sect, Mahadvara-nikaya sect, Muladvara-nikaya sect, Anauk-chaung Dvara sect, Veluvan sect, Hnget-twin sect, Ganavimutti-kuto sect, and Mahayin sect. He further says that “all the members of Samgha residing in the Union of Myanmar live harmoniously under the guidance and leadership of the State Samgha Maha-nayaka Committee – the sole supreme Samgha Organization in Myanmar. This state Samgha Maha-nayaka Committee represents different schools and sects of all samgha organization.”

Ever since the time of Anawratha, Buddhism has been deeply rooted in the land of Myanmar, and the people have been influenced by Buddhist teachings. For them, to become an authentic Bamar is to be a Buddhist. In other words, since Buddhism has taken central place in the daily lives of the Bamar people, it has undoubtedly become a part of their culture. Thus, Buddhism and the Bamar culture are integrally related and the Bamar culture can be best known only by delving deep into Buddhism and its tradition. Besides, as already stated above, Mahayana and Theravada Buddhism co-existed in Myanmar during the early period of King Anawrahta in Myanmar. However, today, Myanmar is known as a Theravada Buddhist country. Thus, the reasons for the fading of Mahayana Buddhism which had co-existed with Theravada Buddhism in Myanmar in the eleventh century interestingly remains to be investigated.

129 Lecture given by Prof. Aye Myint, International Theravada Buddhist Missionary University, Yangon at Mooler Hall, Myanmar Institute of Theology, on November 8, 2008, 3-8.
130 Ibid., 9.
2.2.3. THE DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF MYANMAR BUDDHISM

The primal religion of Myanmar was Nat Worship. In the 11th century, King Anawrahta suppressed Nat Worship with the motive to introduce Theravada Buddhism in his kingdom. Myanmar kings promoted Theravada Buddhism from the time of King Anawrahta, with the intent to achieve a higher rebirth in life, and freedom from the cycle of birth and death together. In order to maintain their rule, kings depended on the threat of force, though they believed that their high positions were the result of meritorious deeds that they had done in their past lives. Further, King Anawrahta not only set up the thirty-seven Nat images in a cave to signify that their powers had been contained, but he also set them up at the platform of Shwezigone pagoda located in Bagan. The images of Nats were gathered from different Nat shrines in various parts of Myanmar. With regard to the prohibition of Nat worship by King Anawrahta, Simon Pau Khan En states:

Until the reign of King Anawrahta, Nat Worship was centralized in Mt. Popa as the abode of the national Nat, Min Mahagiri. When Anawrahta suppressed Nat Worship, it was decentralized from Mt. Popa to various houses. Those houses became the center of Nat Worship, as Nat shrines were set up side-by-side with the worship of Buddha. In other words, the center of Nat worship was shifted from Mt. Popa to Bahma houses.

Though the subjects of Anawrahta removed their Nat shrines from the public scene for fear of the king, they kept them secret in their houses. This indicates that their fear of Nats was much greater than the fear of the king. Therefore, the image of Buddha and Nat shrines co-existed side by side in every typical Bamar house. In this regard, Simon Pau Khan En comments:

Both Nat and Buddha were existing side by side as the people feared Nat for their present lives and worshipped Buddha for their next lives. In every

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131 The word Nat derived from a Bamar word which is visible spiritual being(s) and it can also be literally interpreted as “lord.” Those who worship Nat(s) are called Nat worshippers. According to Bamar Nat worshippers, there are thirty-seven Nats. See Maung Htin Aung, Folk Elements in Burmese Buddhism, Oxford University Press, London, 1962, 2-3.

132 Christina Fink. Living Silence: Burma under Military Rule, 16.

133 Simon Pau Khan En, Nat Worship, 388.

134 Ibid., 394.

135 Ibid., 393.
typical Bamar Buddhist house, one can observe that there is a Nat shrine at the corner of the house and Buddha shrine on the other corner.\footnote{S. Pau Khan En, “Theological Reflection on Nat Worship,” in \textit{Engagement}, Vol. 7 (December, 2006), 60.}

Therefore, one might say that Myanmar Buddhism is unique because it is mixed with Nat worship in certain parts. Further, Josef Silverstein observed in 1977 that “as practiced by the people in Burma, Buddhism includes local beliefs and rituals that give its local character and meaning.”\footnote{Josef Silverstein, \textit{Burma: Military Rule and Politics of Stagnation}, 8.} Additionally, there is still “belief in spirits, magic, astrology, fortune-telling, and other remnants of pre-Buddhist beliefs” which have a crucial impact on daily life in Myanmar.\footnote{Michael Fredholm, \textit{Burma, Ethnicity and Insurgency}, 15.} In this regard, Maung Htin Aung, a Myanmar writer in the fields of history, anthropology and literature, as well as one of the rectors of Yangon University, asserted as follows:

With the passing of time people came to forget the pre-Buddhist and primitive origins of their folk beliefs in alchemy, astrology, and Nats, and learned to accept them as part of their Buddhism, just as they thought that the pre-Buddhist belief in the transmigration of souls was a doctrine of Theravada Buddhism. Thus at the present time many Burmese in rural and primitive areas the majority still consult their astrologer and make their offerings to the Nats, without ceasing to be good Buddhists.\footnote{Maung Htin Aung, \textit{Folk Elements in Burmese Buddhism} (Rangoon: Buddha Sasana Council Press, 1959), 4.}

The above statement shows that the Bamar people accepted Buddhism without abandoning their pre-Buddhist beliefs, such as Nat worship, magic, and astrology. This evidence leads to the following questions: As the majority of the population in Myanmar who accepted Buddhism without completely abandoning their pre-Buddhist beliefs, can Myanmar Buddhists accept Christianity without ceasing to be good Buddhists? Or can Myanmar Christians accept Buddhism without ceasing to be good Christians? Can it be possible to be both Buddhist and Christian in Myanmar? Do Christians also continue worshipping Nat or completely abandon the practice of Nat worship?
2.3. THE ARRIVAL OF CHRISTIANITY IN MYANMAR

As already stated above, the Mon people had contacted with the Buddhist Indian emperor Ashoka in the third century CE.\(^{140}\) In 1057 CE, Anawrahta invaded Thaton, the then capital of Mon kingdom, and moved large numbers of Mon scholars and monks back to his capital, Bagan.\(^{141}\) Among the captives, it is believed that there were some Indian Christian artists who had previously settled in Thaton. There are two paintings in Bagan: a fresco of a cross in the cave temple of King Kyansitthar (1084-1113 CE), and a painting, similar to "The Last Supper" in Gubyauk-gyi Temple, which was found at the historic site, Myinkabar. These paintings are believed to be done by Indian Christian artists who would be among the craftsmen taken by King Anawrahta in 1057. Therefore, one can say that Christians had set foot in the land of Myanmar as early as in the eleventh century.\(^{142}\) Further, the Mongol armies, along with Nestorian Christians, invaded Bagan in 1287 CE and destroyed the first Bamar Empire founded by King Anawrahta.\(^{143}\)

In his book, “Old Burma,” U Myo Min, a famous Myanmar journalist and writer (1910-1995), describes that Italian Christian traders – Hieronimo de Santo and his friend, Hieronimo Adorno,\(^{144}\) visited Pegu, the then commercial city of Myanmar, for business purposes in 1496. Unfortunately, as they were engaged in business with the local people in Pegu, Hieronimo Adorno passed away and was buried “in a ruined church.”\(^{145}\) And yet, the first recorded existence of permanent Christian communities in Myanmar was as early as the sixteenth century when the European traders came.\(^{146}\) Alongside these references to a Christian presence in Myanmar since the eleventh century onwards, a closer look at Christian mission history in

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\(^{140}\) Michael Fredholm, *Burma, Ethnicity and Insurgency*, 19.


Chapter 2 – Buddhist-Christian Relations – A Historical Overview

Myanmar points to the work of Catholic and Protestant missions in establishing Christian communities in Myanmar.

2.3.1. CATHOLIC MISSION

In 1505, Ludovico di Varthema visited Myanmar from Italy. Upon returning to Italy, he summarized his experiences in Myanmar, saying that the king of Pegu had 1,000,000 troops with one hundred elephants. Among the king’s command in Pegu, he notes, some of the king’s soldiers were Christians and nearly 1,000 Christians served on his court. Thus, it is believed that through his writings Catholic missionaries initially came to Myanmar from Italy.¹⁴⁷ Further, in 1554, Catholic priests from Portugal arrived in Myanmar to serve Portuguese soldiers, traders and adventurers. Yet, since these priests were not warmly welcomed, they left Myanmar three years after having served the Portuguese community in the country.¹⁴⁸ Further, Fr. Pierre Bonfer, a French Franciscan Catholic missionary arrived in Thanlyin in 1555. Though he tried to evangelize the Mon, the local people in Thanlyin, his effort were unsuccessful. As a consequence, he left the country two years later in 1557.¹⁴⁹

Subsequently, Filipe de Britto, from Portugal, started ruling Thanlyin in 1559. During the reign of Filipe de Britto many Jesuit missionaries arrived in Thanlyin and there were many people who converted to Christianity including Natshinnaung (1578-1619), an eminent poet and the ruler of Taungoo.¹⁵⁰ He was the first Bamar king who converted to Christianity and was baptized.¹⁵¹ Furthermore, many Portuguese came to Myanmar since the mid-16th century for business purposes and to evangelize the local people. In 1603, Filipe de Britto became king of Thanlyin. During his reign, de Britto invited two Jesuit missionaries to his capital city to evangelize the local people. Many of the Portuguese who came to Myanmar in the mid-16th century were mercenaries and

¹⁵⁰ S. Pau Khan En, Handout for lecture on, Challenges and Opportunities for the Churches in Myanmar, delivered at Theology under the Bho tree Seminar, July 2007.
soldiers and they fought against the Bamars together with the king of Arakanese.152 Annaukpetlun-min, one of the Bamar kings of Ava, captured Thanlyin in 1613 and de Britto was executed. Moreover, the Bamar king allowed the captive Portuguese soldiers to settle in six villages between Chindwin and Mu River, in the central and northern regions of Myanmar. These captive Portuguese were known as "Bayingyis," which means "Europeans."153 The Bayingyis Christians got married with local women and they served as loyal soldiers and gunners for the Bamar kings.154

Additionally, Roman Catholic pioneer missionaries from the Society of Foreign Missions at Paris arrived in Pegu in 1692. For the local people in Thanlyin, the memory of destructive Portuguese soldiers was still in mind. Thus, when the French Catholic missionaries arrived, they were arrested and stripped naked, so as to be killed by mosquitoes and insects bites. Their bodies were thrown into the Pegu River.155 Though missionary persecution was severe in the country, Christian missionaries were sent to Myanmar to take care of Bayingyi communities. The Patriarch of Alexandria sent two priests, Vittoni and Calehi, to Myanmar and they arrived in Thanlyin in 1720. Interestingly, during this period, the Bamar king, Taninganwe (1714-1783), was tolerant of people of other faiths. As a result, Vittoni and Calehi were allowed to build churches and preach the Gospel. Moreover, Calehi built a church in Pegu and a chapel in Ava, the capital of Bamars at that time.156 As the status of mission was raised in 1741, Pope Benedict XIV appointed Father Pio Gallizia to be the bishop and vicar general of Yangon.157 Apart from building churches, the Catholics established schools and a theological seminary in Myanmar. Though they built a church and a college at Monla in 1770, they finally moved them to Yangon. It is claimed that before the Protestant missionaries came to Myanmar, the Roman Catholic Church had three thousand members with two churches in Yangon.158 However, William D. Hackett, argues that the Roman Catholic mission in Myanmar was not successful because the Myanmar Buddhists, and their kings, rejected a new religion. Hackett states that that those

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154 William D. Hackett, “Burma,” in Church in Asia, 123.
156 Desai W. S., A Pegent of Burmese History, 235.
157 Ibid.
158 W. C. B. Purser, Christian Missions in Burma, 89.
who embraced Christianity were regarded as traitors of the king and the country. As tension between the king and Catholic missionaries increased, Father Gallizia and two Barnabite priests were put to death in 1746. Ten years later, Bishop Nereni was also murdered. Due to the intolerance of Buddhist monks and the prejudice of the Bamar court, the local people were hesitant to convert into Christianity, particularly before the Protestant mission arrived in Myanmar.159

Adoniram Judson, a Protestant missionary with the American Baptist, arrived in Myanmar and heard of the brutal persecutions that early Catholic converts brutally encountered.160 The most interesting and outstanding achievement by Catholic missionaries before Protestant missionaries arrived in Myanmar was their translation of literary works into the Myanmar language. It began with the Congregation of Propaganda, the first Myanmar book; a language primer and an exposition of Christian doctrines in 1775, a prayer book and a catechism in 1785.161 From that time to the present, Catholic missions continues in Myanmar.

2.3.2. PROTESTANT MISSION

In 1807, the first Protestant missionaries, namely, James Chater and Richard Mardon of the English Baptists, arrived in Yangon from India to investigate the possibility of mission work.162 After having arrived in Yangon, both of them found that regarding religious matters, the Bamar king seemed to be tolerant as long as no one tried to convert his subjects to Christianity. Moreover, they were warmly welcomed by the Roman Catholic mission and were shown great respect, politeness and hospitality.163 After some time, Felix Carey, son of William Carey,164

159 William D. Hackett, “Burma,” in Church in Asia, 123.

160 Regarding the persecution which a Bamar Buddhist convert to Catholicism faced in 1806, Purser wrote: “He was tortured continually until his body was little else but one livid wound... At every blow the sufferer pronounced the name of Christ. When he was at the point of death under the hands of his tormentors, some persons, who pitied his case, went to the Emperor, with a statement that he was a madman, and knew not what he was about; on which the Emperor gave orders for his release. The Portuguese took him away, concealed him until he was able to move, then sent him privately in a boat to Rangoon and then shipped to Bengal, where he finished his days.” W. C. B. Purser, Christian Mission in Burma, 92.


joined Mardon and Chater. However, in a few months, Mardon left Yangon because of the civil war and his own poor health. Chater continued on for another four years. During his four year stay in Myanmar, Chater translated the Gospel of Matthew into the Bamar language. After four years of missionary work in Myanmar, Chater left for Sri Lanka.\textsuperscript{163} Although two of his co-workers left, Felix Carey faithfully remained at the mission for a few more years. However, he abandoned his missionary work in 1814 and started working for King Bodawpaya at Ava.\textsuperscript{166} While working for the King, he met with a great misfortune at sea on his way to Ava, where he lost all of his possessions as well as his family in 1817.\textsuperscript{167} As there was nothing left for him and no hope to live in the country, he was severely depressed and finally left Myanmar.\textsuperscript{168}

Three years before Carey’s incident at sea, Adoniram Judson and his wife Ann Judson, of the American Baptist missionaries, arrived in Yangon on July 13, 1813. In Yangon, Carey received the Judsons, and later, when Carey decided to work in the service of the government in Ava, he handed this Baptist mission work over to Adoniram Judson in 1813.\textsuperscript{169} Apart from Baptist mission, there were other mainline churches' missionaries who arrived in Myanmar along with colonialism in the beginning of the nineteenth century, namely, the Anglican mission,\textsuperscript{170} the

\textsuperscript{164} William Carey (1761-1834), an English Baptist missionary working in India, was one of the founders of the Baptist Missionary Society and was known as father of modern mission.

\textsuperscript{165} Francis Wayland, \textit{A Memoir of the Life and Labours of the Rev. Adoniram Judson}, Vol.1, 158.


\textsuperscript{168} Francis Wayland, \textit{A Memoir of Adoniram Judson}, 170


\textsuperscript{170} During the first Anglo-Burmese war (1824-1826), the British chaplains carried out the Anglican Mission (The Church of the Province of Myanmar Mission) in Myanmar. After the war, these chaplains were sent to Moulmein and Sittwe in order to take care of the spiritual needs of the people as the East India Company had their main offices there. In 1844, St. Mark Catheral was built in Sittwe and this is the first Church of the Province of Myanmar. Further, Cockey, a layman and an Eurasian student from Bishop College, Calcutta, was sent for promoting education in Moulmein in 1854. Later, he was ordained and became the first official Anglican missionary to Myanmar. See Frank Lomax, “Anglican Church," in \textit{A Dictionary of Asian Christianity}, ed. Scott W. Sunquist (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 27. For more information, see W. C. B. Purser, \textit{Christian Missions in Burma}, 107-139.
Methodist mission,\textsuperscript{171} the Presbyterian mission,\textsuperscript{172} the German Leipziger mission,\textsuperscript{173} and the Assemblies of God mission.\textsuperscript{174} U Myo Chit, the Senior Pastor of Evangel Church (Assemblies of God) says that there has been a Pentecostal movement in Myanmar since 1920, starting from China. In 1966, the Myanmar government expelled all foreign missionaries from Myanmar. Thus, the Assemblies of God church in Myanmar was handed down to indigenous Christians.\textsuperscript{175} Apart from the

\textsuperscript{171} There are two kinds of Methodist Mission in Myanmar: the American Episcopal Methodist Mission known as Lower Myanmar Methodist and the Wesleyan Methodist Mission or Upper Myanmar Methodist. In 1879, James M. Thoburn and F. E. Goodwin of the American Episcopal Methodist Mission came from Calcutta to Yangon to begin evangelical work with the help of 60 members of foreign merchants. These missionaries founded the first Methodist English Church in Yangon in 1880. In the Lower Myanmar Methodist Church, the members are Bamar, Chinese and Indians. See Lal Pan Lianna, “Methodism,” in \textit{A Dictionary of Asian Christianity}, ed. Scott W. Sunquist, 542. With regard to Upper Methodist Mission, it is recorded that Joseph H. Bateson arrived in Myanmar in 1886 after the third Anglo-Burmese war (1885) in order to take care of the spiritual needs of the British armies. In the following year, W. Ripley Winston and J M. Brown arrived Yangon. Seeing that the American Episcopal Methodist Church had already existed in Yangon, they moved to Mandalay in Upper Myanmar. Among the members of the Upper Methodist Church, the majority are Mizo Chins. See B. H. Goh, \textit{Sparks of Grace: The Story of Methodism in Asia} (Singapore: Oxford Graphic Printers Ptc. Ltd., 2003), 90. See also Awn Sien Mung Thang and Mang Lam Ngaih Mang, “A Brief History of Upper Myanmar Methodist Church,” a paper presented to M.Div. & M.T.S Students of MIT, Yangon, on January 24, 2003.

\textsuperscript{172} Though Presbyterianism was introduced in Myanmar by the British soldiers and traders after Second Anglo-Burmese war (1852-1853), the first Presbyterian Church was founded in 1876. Formerly, the name of the church was called “The Church of St. Andrew Yangon.” However, since the members of the church belonged to the largest congregation of the Scots, it was renamed as “Scot's Kirk.” For more information refer to Kawl Thang Vuta, “A Brief History of the Planting and Growth of the Church in Burma” (Pasadena: D. Miss. Dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, June 1983), 101.


\textsuperscript{174} Leonard Bolton, the first Assemblies of God missionary to Myanmar, came from England in 1924, continued his mission trip to China without founding the Church in Myanmar. See Kawl Thang Vuta, “A Brief History of the Planting and Growth of the Church in Burma,” 204. However, U Myo Chit, former General Secretary of Assemblies of God in Myanmar, argues that Pentecostal Movement already started in Myanmar in 1920 from China. See Myo Chit, “Beginning of Pentecostalism in USA and the Formative Years of the Assemblies of God,” a lecture presented to M.Div. & M.T.S. Students of Myanmar Institute of Theology, August 28, 2003.

\textsuperscript{175} A lecture handout by Rev. U Myo Chit on August 28, 2003 at M. Div. Final Year Class, MIT, Yangon.
above denominations, there are also other Christian denominations in the country, such as, Salvation Army, Church of Christ, Seventh Day Adventist, United Pentecostal Church, Church of God of Prophecy, Full Gospel Assembly, Christian Reformed Church, and the Mara Evangelical Church. The Burma Christian Council was founded in 1949, one year after the founding of the World Council of Churches (WCC). Burma Christian Council became Burma Council of Churches in 1972. When the Myanmar government changed the name of the country from Burma to Myanmar in 1989, the Burma Council of Churches became the Myanmar Council of Churches.\textsuperscript{176} The above mentioned churches, except for the Salvation Army and Mara Evangelical Church, so far, have not joined the Myanmar Council of Churches which is the ecumenical body affiliated with the World Council of Churches.

\section*{2.4. THE HISTORY OF MYANMAR IN THE LIGHT OF BUDDHIST-CHRISTIAN RELATIONS}

In attempting to understand the conditions for interfaith dialogue in Myanmar, one cannot negate the history of the country. Experiences in the past play a major role in contemporary Myanmar Buddhist-Christian relations. To diagnose and rectify the past misdeeds may, in a significant way, heal the wounds of the past and contribute towards a meaningful dialogue. Thus, this section concentrates on identifying the experiences by which the people of Myanmar were traumatized in this competing inter-religious encounter. In concentrating on Buddhist-Christian relations, the consideration can be divided into three periods: before the colonial period (until 1885), during the colonial period (1885-1948) and after the colonial period (from 1948 to present).

\subsection*{2.4.1. BEFORE COLONIAL PERIOD (until 1885)}

In the Buddhist-Christian relations before the colonial period, there was a certain tolerance among people of different faiths on religious matters. However, it is also recorded that tensions, persecutions and even fighting and killing among Buddhists and Christians occurred. For example, when Philip de Brito\textsuperscript{177} became

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\item[\textsuperscript{177}]In his book, \textit{History of Burma}, Arthur P. Phayre notes Burmese-Portuguese relations from the beginning of the fifteenth century. De Brito, a Portuguese adventurer,
the ruler of Thanlyin, there he invited Catholic missionaries for business reasons, as well as for propagating the gospel to the local people. Instead of supporting the local people, he destroyed many of Buddhist religio-cultural elements, including pagodas, in order to introduce Christianity, and forced his subjects to embrace Christianity. Removing and destroying the religio-cultural practices of the local people was the primary aim and objective of Christian missionaries at that time, as local culture and religions were perceived as being against Christianity. Moreover, de Britto not only robbed and misused sacred items, which were exposed in the so-called Shwedagon pagoda, but also destroyed many Buddhist pagodas in the delta area as well as in Thanlyin. He took gold from these pagodas and often sold it to the pilgrims.

During de Britto's reign in Thanlyin, there were domestic wars in Myanmar and the Bamar's domestic enemies were Mon, Shan, and Rakhine. Many of the Portuguese who came to Myanmar in the mid sixteenth century were mercenaries and soldiers who fought against the Bamars together with the king of Rakhine. Further, the Roman Catholic Fathers actively participated in political activities against Bamars.

In general, it is claimed that Bamars' kings were tolerant to foreigners in religious matters until they found that their subjects were converted from Buddhism to other religions. Therefore, at that time the Muslims and the Catholic priests practiced their faith freely and openly in Myanmar. A crucial date within this

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became the ruler of Thanlyin in 1599. However, he was executed by King Anaukpetlun in 1613. For detailed information, refer to Arthur P. Phayre, *History of Burma* (Bangkok: White Orchid, 2002).

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182 In Myanmar, there are eight major ethnic groups: Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, Chin, Mon, Bamar, Rakhine and Shan. See Michael Fredholm, *Burma, Ethnicity and Insurgency*, 108. See also Moe Moe Nyunt, “Burmese Reactions to Christianity,” 114.
183 Ibid., 115.
184 Ibid., 116.
time of more or less peaceful religious coexistence is June 27, 1819, when Maung Naw, a young man, was introduced into Christian faith through Adoniram Judson and applied for baptism. The news of the conversion of Maung Naw quickly spread in the whole Yangon area. For fear of the possible consequences due to Maung Naw's conversion into Christianity, Judson travelled to Ava, the then capital of Bamar, to request the king's approval for preaching the gospel. He arrived there on January 25, 1820. While Judson was before the King in Ava, Maung Zar, a minister in the palace, read the petition of Judson and presented it to the King. In his interaction with King Bagyidaw, Judson introduced the Christian God: “There is one Being who exists eternally; who is exempt from sickness, old age, and death; who was and is, and will be, without beginning and without end. Besides this, a true God, there is no other God.” After having heard Judson's
claim regarding the superiority of the Christian God, King Bagyidaw got angry and he rejected the petition for free gospel proclamation. Moreover, the missionaries were told to leave the palace as soon as possible. Since the missionaries were not favored by the emperor, everyone felt free to mistreat them. Therefore, for them there was no alternative except returning to Yangon. 192 In this regard, Mikael Gravers asserts:

They (American Baptist missionaries) did not receive permission to convert Burmans and had no success until the intervention of the British. King Bagyidaw would not allow conversion because the Baptists demanded a total break with Buddhist thought, not just with ceremonies and the monks' and Buddha's teachings but also with cosmology and ontology themselves. 193

Though the King Bagyidaw did not approve the petition of Judson asking for free proclamation of the gospel in Myanmar, it was impossible for him to prevent the conversion of many people. For example, conversions took place in the remote area among the Karen people, particularly Sagaw Karen living in the Irrawaddy delta. 194

Further, after returning to Yangon, Judson worked in cooperation with Dr. Jonathan Price, a medical doctor. Interestingly, the news of Dr. Price's medical expertise was so widespread in the community that it was conveyed even to the emperor in Ava. Thus, the emperor summoned Dr. Price to appear at the royal court at Ava. 195 Judson utilized that opportunity and went to Ava along with Dr. Price on August 28, 1822. The travelling expense was covered by King Bagyidaw, the Bamar king at that time. 196 Due to Dr. Price's medical expertise, the king, prince and princess enjoyed the regular visits of Judson and Price at the palace. As a result, Judson benefitted from this opportunity to establish a friendship with the royal family at the royal court in Ava. 197 In Ava, Judson started building their home

192 Ibid., 111.
193 Mikael Gravers, Nationalism as Political Paranoia in Burma, 20.
194 Ibid., 22.
on January 23, 1824. Judson preached the Gospel, while his wife, Ann Judson, started a school for girls. From time to time the King even invited Judson and his wife to celebrate royal festivals. At such festivals, Judson had the opportunity to meet viceroys and other high officials.

In the mean time, the Anglo-Burmese war broke out on May 23, 1824. Consequently, many English who were in Ava were arrested and put into prison. After staying eleven months in Ava, and six months at Aungbinle prison, Judson and Dr. Price suffered unspeakable despair. At that time, it is claimed that the popularity of Dr. Price at Ava court weakened and all the white foreigners were seen as spies and conspirators.

During the first Anglo-Burmese war (1824-26), the British invaded the Shwedagon Pagoda. The victory of the British in the war brought many changes into the existing social realities of the people in Myanmar. For example, traditionally, everyone in Myanmar had to remove his or her footwear when entering religious areas in the pagoda. The British soldiers, on the other hands, showed disrespect toward the beliefs of the people and entered into the holy place in the pagodas wearing their footwear. In this regard, Georg Noack has asserted:

When the British colonized the country, they abolished the monarchy, withdrew official support for Buddhism and thereby usurped not only power, but the order of the world as a Buddhist 'cosmic-ontological political


200 Ibid.

201 Ibid., 118.


203 With the Treaty of Yandapo, the first Anglo-Burmese war ended on February 24, 1826. In this treaty, Adoniram Judson took active part as an interpreter since there were language barriers. See Helen G. Trager, *Burma Through Alien Eyes, Missionary Views of the Burmese in the Nineteenth Century*, 7.

204 Mikael Gravers, *Nationalism as Political Paranoia in Burma*, 8-9. In many cases, Western missionaries and European rulers could not completely comprehend the sensitivities of local cultural practices. For instance, there was a socio-cultural controversy during the colonial period regarding the use of footwear in the vicinity of Buddhist religious sites. In Bamar culture, everybody was supposed to take off his or her footwear at the entrance outside the door of the pagoda – Buddhist temple. However, the British and the other Europeans who did not pursue such practices showed no respect to the Buddhists’ edifices. See Fred R. von der Mehden, *Religion and Nationalism in Southeast Asia* (Madison: The University of Wiscosin Press, 1968), 166-167.
unity.’ British conquerors literally trampled the Buddhist religion with their boots by entering pagodas, wearing military footwear and turning the pagodas into army barracks.\(^{205}\)

Further, since the active linking of colonial power and administration along with Christian mission took place from the time of Adoniram Judson,\(^{206}\) today it is difficult to ascertain the authenticity of Adoniram Judson interpretations in the Treaty of Yandabo. This is because Judson sent a letter to Colonel Benson, the governor-general of Myanmar on July 18, 1838. He asserted the following: “To be successful in the Christian mission among the Burmese people, the best way is to occupy their land.”\(^{207}\) In other words, Christian mission and colonial hegemonic power joined hands in order to conquer and rule the people in Myanmar. This also seems to be the conviction of Judson. In fact, in the name of propagating the gospel freely, the American Baptist missionaries sought the help of the colonial British imperialistic movement to influence the native people.\(^{208}\)

The Second Anglo-Burmese war broke out in 1852. As they did during the First Anglo-Burmese war, the British not only continued wearing their shoes when they entered monasteries and pagodas, but also attacked and destroyed the fortified pagodas which stood as symbols for Buddhism and kingship. Moreover, the British soldiers turned pagodas and Buddhist statues upside down for their own gold and silver.\(^{209}\) Further, during the Second Anglo-Burmese war some missionaries and Christian Karen took active part against the Bamars. In this regard, Mikael Gravers notes:

> When the British invaded the kingdom in 1852, which was an event brought about in part by intrigues created by some missionaries, the Christian Karen aided the army, killing or capturing many Burmans. The Burmans took revenge by burning many of the Christian villages and crucifying a Karen pastor. Such events prefaced a religious war – an important part of the colonialisation process. Thus religion was brought into politics as something irretrievably connected with ethnic-national identity, and which had to be protected through the use of violence...Missionaries disrupted Buddhist ceremonies by arrogantly undermining the monk’s authority and


\(^{207}\) Moe Moe Nyunt, “Burmese Reactions to Christianity,” 117.


entering into arguments with them, while Christians were abducted and their villages were ransacked.  

Moreover, a Karen “min laung” (king in the making) organized a rebellious movement against the British in the Bassein areas in the Irrawadsdy Delta in 1856. Moreover, Karen Buddhists built a pagoda on the top of a mountain symbolizing the end of foreign control. In Bago, a royal city in the country, there was a vision that the Karen would rule according to “dhamma and the cosmological principles.” As the news of the rebellion was widespread, not only Karen Buddhists but also some Kayah and Shan in the Salween area joined the rebellion. The Karen Buddhists and their allies attacked the British as well as Karen Christians who supported the British.  

In 1867, in order to avoid future war, King Mindon signed a commercial treaty with the British. Furthermore, he supported an Anglican mission setting up a new school outside his palace walls. He also permitted J. E. Marks, an Anglican missionary, to educate his own sons. On October 11th, 1868, it is reported that King Mindon said to J. E. Marks: “Do not think me an enemy to your religion... If people, when you have taught them, enter into your belief, they have my full permission, and if my own sons under your instruction wish to become Christians, I will let them do so.” This assertion of the king could lead to the conclusion that King Mindon tried to establish religious tolerance in Myanmar during his reign.

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210 Ibid., 22-23. During the Second Anglo-Burmese war Christians in Myanmar were active in providing information and guiding British troops. As a result, they were identified as somebody who “not simply broke with Burman culture and religion – they were disloyal citizens of the Buddhist kingdom of Burma.” Moreover, Bamar Christians were put outside of the society and they lost their identity by the time they converted from Buddhism to Christianity. See Mikael Gravers, Nationalism as Political Paranoia in Burma, 20-21.

211 Ibid., 23.

212 King Mindon (1808-1878) became King of Bamar one year after the Second Anglo-Burmese war had begun. Soon after becoming the King of Bamar, he negotiated with the British for peace and tried to get back Bago, the city which the Bamars lost in the war. However, his effort to get back the province of Bago was refused. See Latta Bharadwaja, History of Burma, Made Easy, 123.

213 As hatred of bloodshed, he was regarded as the last great king and the most devout patron of Buddhism in Myanmar Buddhist history. His incalculable works of merit, for instance, building many monasteries and pagodas, sponsoring thousand of monks and convening of the Fifth Great Buddhist Synod in 1871 is well documented in Myanmar history. See Thant Myint U, The Rivers of Lost Footsteps, Histories of Burma (New York: Douglas& McIntyre Ltd., 2006), 136.

The King accommodated space for all religions to exist in the country. In this regard, San No Thuan, a theological teacher in Myanmar, notes (referring to Vivian Ba):

The Burmese king gave permission to the Christian missionaries to freely preach and teach the gospel and to build Christian churches and schools ... when there were important discussions with the British, the Burmese king asked for help from the Catholic missionaries. In addition, the Catholic missionaries helped the Burmese king in developing relationships with the outside world.215

During Mindon's period the relationship between Bamar King and the missionaries was quite good. However, at that time, since there was no legal constitution, all authority was vested in the monarch and therefore, whatever the King ordered and said was final. On the other hand, no one had the authority to contradict the King. Further, Mindon had good personal relationships with Christian missionaries.216 In addition to Christianity, Mindon accommodated other faiths as well. For instance, he built a mosque in Mandalay for the Islamic community, and a guesthouse at Mecca for the convenience of Myanmar Muslim pilgrims.217 Judging from the above, one can regard Mindon as the most tolerant and liberal King to people of other faiths in the history of Myanmar.

The third Anglo-Burmese war took place in 1885, during the reign of King Thibaw. As a result, on November 28, 1885, the British dethroned Thibaw and sent him to

216 For instance, Mr. Kincaid and Dawson were American Baptist missionaries. Mr. Kincaid was invited by Mindon to visit Amarapura. When Mr. Kincaid met with Mindon, he received the king’s pleasing face, expressive of a thoughtful mind and kingly heart. Having favor before the King, before Kincaid departed from the palace, Mindon told him, “If you have any feelings of regard for me, come soon, come soon; and I will pay all your expenses.” Again in late 1885, Mindon invited Mr. Kincaid to stay with him in his capital. Therefore, Kincaid and Dawson left Pyay on January 24, 1856. When Kincaid and his family arrived in the royal city, the king warmly welcomed them. Moreover, Mindon strongly urged them to settle together with him in the royal city. See Maung Shwe Wa, Burma Baptist Chronicle, 194-196. In 1857, Mindon moved his capital from Amarapura to Mandalay. He was generous to Buddhists as well as to Christians. For instance, with his own money, Mindon built a school and church for the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (S.P.G Mission) at Mandalay. As he gave priority to education, he, for some time, sent his sons to an Anglican school. See also Edwin Rowlands, Burma History – Notes, 84-89.
Ratanagiri, India. Subsequently, from 1885, British colonial rule was in place in the country until Myanmar gained independence in 1948. After dethroning King Thibaw, the British renamed the palace in Mandalay as Fort Dufferin in 1886. Moreover, part of the palace in Mandalay, which was formerly a Buddhist monastery, became the Upper Burma Club for the British officers. The British were full of confidence that King Thibaw was already dethroned and the war was over. However, people in Lower Burma did not like the British policies as they did not defend and promote Buddhism. Likewise, people in Upper Burma were dissatisfied with the British for the abolition of the monarch. As a result, a revolt against the British occurred between 1886 and 1887. As for the Bamars, in fact, removing their king from his throne meant destroying their kingdom, religion and culture.

2.4.2. DURING COLONIAL PERIOD (1885-1948)

Christianity as a religion was introduced in Myanmar along with colonialism and western culture, while the cultural values of the local people were regarded as inferior. This is due to the perception of Christian missionaries where “Burman culture became synonymous with paganism and something less civilized, which was incompatible with Christian identity.” Moreover, missionaries, particularly Baptists, thought that “Burma was controlled by an idolatrous despotism and tyranny, which was an obstacle for salvation and civilization. As a result, they did not hide their intention to convert the whole world into disciples of Jesus.” However, Myanmar Buddhists refused Christianity because it was seen as a foreign and colonial religion. In this regard, William D. Hackett notes:

The Burmese Buddhists rejected the gospel because they are the majority, that they have an ethical humanitarian code for living supported by strong social approval, and that they have an ethnocentrism which has always

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218 Maung Htin Aung, A History of Burma, 240.
219 Mikael Gravers, Nationalism as Political Paranoia in Burma, 8-9.
221 Mikael Gravers, Nationalism as Political Paranoia in Burma, 9.
222 Simon Pau Khan En, Nat Worship, 15.
223 Mikael Gravers, Nationalism as Political Paranoia in Burma, 22.
224 Ibid., 21.
viewed foreign or non-Burmese way as less good than Burmese Buddhist ones.225

Further, as the teaching of Buddhism was based on the concept of non-violence, Buddhist monks’ participation in the rebellion during the colonial period was limited. Also the Sangha did not participate directly in the rebellion since the principle of non-violence was taught to be practiced in relationship with human beings and animals.226 In general, one can assume that the British colonial rule (1885-1948) weakened Buddhism.227 As stated above, after King Thibaw was dethroned from his palace and the royal support of Buddhism was banned, there was religious violence between Buddhists and Christians. Christian missionaries had access to weapons, were supported by the British, and were full of confidence, saying that “We are belligerent, God is with us, tyranny and Buddhism are a dying monster.”228 Importantly, these Buddhist-Christian tensions led to religious war. While Buddhists killed Christians and burned their villages, Mikael Graver asserts that “Christian Karen captured monks or delivered their heads for a reward of 25 rupees.”229 As a result, Buddhist monks actively participated in rebelling against the British especially after 1890.230

Further, as the influence of the monastic order in the Buddhist society declined, due to withdrawal of previously available royal protection and regular gifts from the royal court and officials, monks got actively involved in rebelling against the colonial rule. In this respect, E. Sarkisyanz asserts:

Monasteries became deserted because monks no longer received a livelihood. British policy was to withdraw state patronage from the Buddhist order. The institution of the Samgharaja, in recent times called Thathanabaing, the primate of Burma’s Buddhist Order was allowed to lapse after the British conquest. Thereby the individual monasteries were left economically and organizationally to their own devices. Monastic

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225 William D. Hackett, “Burma” in Church in Asia, 125.

226 Mikael Gravers, Nationalism as Political Paranoia in Burma, 9.

227 After occupying the whole country, the British eliminated all elements of the old regime which could have interrupted British control. Since the last Myanmar King, Thibaw, was taken away, there was no longer a king who would protect and promote Buddhism. See Donald E. Smith, Religion and Politics in Burma, 45.

228 Mikael Gravers, Nationalism as Political Paranoia in Burma, 23.

229 Ibid.

jurisdiction was virtually destroyed when a secular judge overruled it in 1891.231

During the colonial period monks who rebelled against the British were regarded as the defenders of the Bamar culture and the Buddhist teachings in society. Therefore, Buddhist monks' participation in the insurgency was of great significance. Yet, the British rewarded those who helped to capture the monks who led the rebellion. They especially rewarded the Christians in Myanmar who presented the heads of monks. In this regard, Mikael Gravers says:

Rewards were given for the capture of the monks leading the rebellion. The rebels' relatives were rounded up and interned. The colonial power used the Christian minority, amongst others the Christian Karen, to fight against the rebels. The Christians presented the heads of monks and pocketed the reward.232

Further, the British publicly hanged the Buddhist monk known as “the Pongyī of Mayanchaung,”233 who was part of the rebellion. Monks claimed that their active participation in the revolution and the political movement for independence was due to Christians' participation in colonial activities.234 In addition, after having invaded all of Myanmar in the nineteenth century, the British in Lower Myanmar substituted some Buddhist monastic schools into Christian missionary stations and Anglo-vernacular schools.235 Replacement of the Buddhist monastic schools with Christian mission schools during the colonial period was a painful experience for Buddhists in Myanmar.236 In this regard, Donald E. Smith asserted that the

231 E. Sarkisyanz, Buddhist Background of the Burmese Revolution, 110.
232 Mikael Gravers, Nationalism as Political Paranoia in Burma, 10.
234 Mikael Gravers, Nationalism as Political Paranoia in Burma, 11.
235 The monastic school was an institution in which social, cultural and religious life of Myanmar people were taught. Boys were sent to monastic schools when they were about eight years old to learn how to write and read. Moreover, in monastic schools the teachings of Buddha, Pali and prayers used in pagoda worship were also taught. See Donald Eugene Smith, Religion and Politics in Burma Religion (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1965), 57.
236 Maung Htin Aung, A History of Burma, 240. In response to Christian schools, the Sangha political organizations described the aim and purpose of their organization: 1) to promote national unity among the Burmans, 2) to substitute arbitration for litigation in the courts in minor civil and criminal cases, 3) to boycott foreign goods, 4) to promote
government's education policy “had ‘destroyed’ the indigenous system of monastic schools in order to replace it with a network of government and Christian missionary schools.” As the Bible and Christian doctrine classes were included in the mission school’s curriculum, it was required that every pupil regardless of their religious background, had to learn about Christianity. Though missionaries did not force Buddhist parents to send their children to Christian schools, if children wanted to go to Christian schools, they had to accept the fact that they had to be familiar with the Bible and Christian doctrines in order to get admission into one of these schools. Therefore, for Myanmar Buddhists, Christian missions and colonialism were seen as two faces of the same coin since promoting conversion to Christianity and civilizing the local people were the goals of missionary schools. As a consequence, the monastic schools lost their influence and the monks’ role in education became insignificant.

This resulted in an increased involvement of Buddhist monks in national politics though “the canonic Buddhism of the monastic community could not support war, not even a defensive war.” Due to fear of the extinction of Buddhism under colonial rule, monks played a crucial role in the independent movement. U Ottama was one of the first among the monks to be politically active in the 1920s, and as such he was particularly famous. Regarding U Ottama’s philosophy of non-violence and his perception on colonial policy, Mikael Gravers’ statement is worth noting:

> Though U Ottama was inspired by Gandhi’s strategy of non-violence and boycotts, he agitated for the implementation of this strategy, playing upon the fear of Buddhism would disappear under foreign rule. He pointed to the fact that taxes were used to finance Christian schools, whilst the monks lost prestige and were going through difficult times because of a diminution in abstinence from liquor and other intoxicants, and 5) to establish national schools. For more information, see Donald E. Smith, Religion and Politics in Myanmar, 101.

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237 Donald Eugene Smith, Religion and Politics in Burma, 91.
238 Ibid., 76.
239 Mikael Gravers, Nationalism as Political Paranoia in Burma, 29.
240 Donald E. Smith, Religion and Politics in Burma, 39.
the size of gifts in the form of food, clothing and money given to the monasteries.243

In 1903, the British reluctantly agreed to recognize the thananabaing,244 which is the appointment of the head of all the sects of Sangha, though they remained hostile to the non-Christians. At that time, the local Christian converts were comfortable under the protection of colonial power. They kept themselves aloof from any rebellion that was initiated against the British, yet actively participated in suppressing local uprisings against the British. For instance, by mobilizing the Christian Karens, the Baptist missionary, J. B. Vinton, assisted in the suppression of the local uprising against colonial authorities. In other words, Christian missionaries and local converts were loyal supporters of colonial British rule.245 Seeing a good opportunity to win converts, the Christian missionaries enthusiastically participated in the missionary enterprise. Churches began to expand and to grow in numbers in Myanmar. Though Christianity grew during this period, “the natives perceived Christianity as a violent religion that came along with colonial power established by guns and swords.”246

In 1906, the Young Men’s Buddhist Association (YMBA) was formed. The focus of this association was to keep the national language and spirit. Any yet, YMBA was later developed as a religio-political movement for independent struggle, known as General Council of Burmese Associations (GCBA).247 In this council, monks’ participation in the political movement for independence, especially after 1917,

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243 Mikael Gravers, Nationalism as Political Paranoia in Burma, 32.
244 The word “thananapaing” refers to the appointment of the head of all the sects of Sangha. Regarding “Thathanapaing” used in ecclesiastical structure of Buddhism in Myanmar, Donald E. Smith explains it as follows: “First, the hierarchy was fairly well organized; the king appointed the thananabaing, a kind of archbishop, who in turn appointed regional gainggyoks (bishops) and other ecclesiastical officials. But each monastic community exercised a large degree of autonomy and was composed of persons engaged in the highly individualistic quest for nibbana. Secondly, the thananabaing’s ecclesiastical authority to settle monastic property disputes, punish or expel disorderly monks, and generally maintain the discipline of the Sangha was enforced by government officers appointed by the king. However, great the moral authority and prestige of the thananabaing, it was the strong secular arm of the royal commissioners which made the system effective.” See Donald E. Smith, Religion and Politics in Burma, 43-44.
246 Ciin Sian Khai, Rediscovering Religious Human Rights in Myanmar, 38.
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was of great importance in the political history of Myanmar. U Ottama, the first politically active monk, asserted that linking Buddhism with freedom from British colonial rule, and gaining independence was to be the ultimate liberation of Nibbana. In this regard, U Ottama held a famous speech in 1921:

When Lord Buddha was alive, man had a predilection for Nirvana. There is nothing left now. The reason why it is so is because the government is English. Nirvana is release from cosmic slavery (the wheel of rebirth), but it cannot be attained by those who do not even enjoy earthly freedom. Pongyis pray for Nirvana but slaves can never obtain it, therefore they must pray for release from slavery in this life.

Furthermore, during the colonial period, there was confrontation not only between colonialists and local people, but also between the Christian and Buddhist school systems. In 1930, the Buddhist students, who studied at Cushing High School, Baptist Normal school in Yangon, and Methodist Boy’s High school in Mandalay, claimed that while attending Christian Bible classes was required for every student, Buddhist students were not given permission to go to Buddhist pagodas on special religious occasions. Thus, Buddhist nationalists regarded Christian mission as another force of colonial rule. In this respect, Samuel Ngun Ling says:

The Buddhist nationalist came then to look at Christian mission, especially its educational work, with suspicion as part of the White men’s 3Ms scheme (Merchant, Military and Mission) strongly backed up by the British government and Christian missionaries especially during the nationalist period in 1930s.

Moreover, under the Colonial British rule there was a clear division between the Christian ethnic minorities and the Bamar Buddhist majority. The missionaries


249 Donald Eugene Smith, Religion and Politics in Burma Religion, 96.


251 Ibid.
Chapter 2 – Buddhist-Christian Relations – A Historical Overview

gave special treatment to ethnic minorities, such as Chin, Kachin and Karen, who converted to Christianity. Thus, educational policy was one of the most important issues for Bamar nationalists as it had created a “division of labour along racial lines,” which led to disunity among the local people.252 With regard to the special privileges which Karen Christians were offered under British colonial rule, Mikael Gravers says: “The Karen played a comparatively prominent role within military, police and health services, and as teachers – especially the Christian Karen, who comprise approximately 15 per cent of the Karen population.”253 As a consequence, mutual suspicions and blame has continued between Buddhists and Christians in Myanmar. As U Pe Maung Tin, the first national professor of the Pali language at Yangon University, has asserted:

The Buddhist of Burma blames the Christian missionaries for causing as they say in Burmese, the division of blood among Burmans. A Burman is synonymous with a Buddhist, and so when a Burman turns Christian he is looked upon with suspicion: He is pro-British, pro-American, a traitor to Burma…254

Christianity impacted the lives of many, particularly those belonging to the various ethnic groups in Myanmar such as the Chin, Kachin, and Karen ethnic groups.255 These ethnic Myanmar Christians were used as an instrument for guiding British troops in war zones. For instance, the ethnic Karen troops actively participated in the Saya San Rebellion of 1930-1932.256 In return, Bamars attacked Karen troops as well as the Karen community, so much so that Karen communities seriously

253 Ibid., 27.
256 Saya San was an ex-Buddhist monk and a member of the Young Men Buddhist Association (YMBA) and also a local member of Buddhist organization under the leadership of General Council of Buddhist Association (GCBA). Due to economic crisis and religious resistance by the colonial rule, Saya San acted as a symbol of a future leader. He believed that he “would re-establish the order of Dhamma in the universe and prepare for the coming of the next Buddha.” For that purpose, he thought that first and foremost “foreigners and non-Buddhists must be driven from the land.” With this concept in mind, Saya San started rebelling against British colonial rule and non-Buddhist religions, known as the “Saya San Rebellion.” For more information, see Mikael Gravers, *Nationalism as Political Paranoia in Burma*, 33-36. See Donald E. Smith, *Religion and Politics in Burma*, 107. See also Martin Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*, 44.
Chapter 2 – Buddhist-Christian Relations – A Historical Overview

2.4.3. AFTER COLONIAL PERIOD (1948 – Present)

Though Buddhism was the expression of nationalism in the struggle for independence during the colonial period, the leader at that time, Aung San, Myanmar’s father of independence, believed that all religions should be treated equally in the political milieu of Myanmar. In this regard, in 1946, he declared the necessity of separating politics and religion at the Anti-facist People's Freedom League (AFPFL) convention, saying: “We must draw a clear line between politics and religion, because the two are not one and the same thing. If we mix religion with politics, then we offend the spirit of religion itself.” Further, there was a 111-member committee who drafted a Constitution for Myanmar in May 1947. While drafting of the Constitution was in progress, U Ba Choe, one of the committee members, proposed the constitutional recognition of Buddhism as the

259 San C. Po, C. B. E., *Burman and the Karens* (London: Paternoster Row, 1928), 39. According to San C. Po, the Kayins are not ashamed or afraid to proclaim that the missionaries are their ‘Mother’ under the protection of the British Government whom they rightly call their ‘Father.’ As Christianity has played a prominent role in the general progress of the Karens, it has three things interconnected - Christianity, education and civilization. See San C. Po, C. B. E., *Burman and the Karens*, 58-60.
260 Ibid., 26.
262 Donald E. Smith, *Religion and Politics in Burma*, 118.
state religion of Myanmar. Aung San rejected the proposal as he wanted Myanmar to be a secular state. On May 23, 1947, the AFPFL drafted a Constitutional article regarding religious issues: “The Union shall observe neutrality in religious matters. It may, however, extend material or other assistance to religious institutions.”

For the sake of the people of Myanmar, Aung San and six of the most competent leaders were assassinated on July 19, 1947. As a result, Aung San's emphasis on religious equity was disregarded. When Myanmar regained independence on January 4, 1948, U Nu became the first Prime Minister of Myanmar.

Ever since the declaration of independence from Britain, an immediate desire for nationalism arose and the people began reclaiming their identity, especially from the Bamar educated leaders. The resurgence of Buddhism was at its peak and was popularized as the innate religious heritage that also solely provided socio-cultural values to Myanmar. Hla Bu, the first Myanmar national who became the principal of Judson College, a constituent of the university, points out:

Only when Burma won independence and was free to work out her own destination, its Buddhists leaders started a movement to restore to Buddhism the pre-eminent position it occupied under the Burmese kings. When Burma's constitution was being hammered out, attempt was made by some influential monks and laymen to revive the role of government as 'promoter of faith' by pressing for making Buddhism the State religion.

The New Constitution of independent Myanmar, drafted by U Chan Htun, the Attorney General at the time, states the following in Section 21 on state-religion relations:

1. The state recognizes the special position of Buddhism as the faith professed by the great majority of citizens of the Union.

2. The state also recognizes Islam, Christianity, Hinduism and animism as some of the religions existing in the Union at the date of the coming into operation of this Constitution.

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263 Ibid., 230-231.
264 Ciin Sian Khai, Rediscovering Religious Human Rights in Myanmar, 39.
265 Michael Fredholm, Burma, Ethnicity and Insurgency, 43.
267 Donald E. Smith, Religion and Politics in Burma, 231.
Since the 1947 constitution recognized Buddhism to be given preferential treatment, minority religious groups, such as Muslims, Christians and Hindus felt that they were marginalized. Regarding human rights and freedom during U Nu’s Parliamentary Democracy Period (1948-1962), Samuel Ngun Ling notes:

During this short democratic period, freedom of worship, freedom of speech, and freedom of the press were fully in operation. U Nu made it clear that all religions were given equal rights to profess. In his address given to a conference of the Burma Baptist Convention in October 1954, U Nu strongly urged the Baptist leaders of the Christian community and the leaders of the Union that he would entrust them with an assignment to practice forbearance taught by Lord Buddha and by Jesus Christ, and to work for religious harmony and for the increasing stability of the Union.268

Though U Nu urged Christian leaders to practice the teaching of Lord Buddha and Jesus Christ for peace and harmony in the country,269 he eventually tried to rule the country according to Buddhist concepts and philosophies as Myanmar nationalists asserted that “Christianity had failed to bring peace to the world.”270 In 1960, the third general election after independence was held in Myanmar. It was called the Clean Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League (CAFPL) and was led by U Nu. U Nu, with a shrewd political agenda, campaigned and promised the people that if his party won the election, he would make Buddhism the state religion of Myanmar.271 On the other hand, U Nu and his party used religion as a political tool for obtaining favor from their fellow citizens who were, and still are, predominantly Buddhists.272 In 1960 U Nu’s party won the election and consequently implemented his pledge by making Buddhism the state religion of Myanmar in 1961. The State religion bills were published on August 1, 1961. According to the Constitution (Third Amendment) Bill, Section 21(A) describes: “Buddhism being the religion professed by the great majority of the citizens of the Union shall be the State Religion.”273

269 Ibid.
270 Donald E. Smith, Religion and Politics in Burma, 123.
271 U Nu, U NU Saturday’s Son (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1976), 204.
273 The Constitution Bill Section 21A describes that as Buddhism was the state religion of the Union, the Union government shall – a) promote and maintain Buddhism for its welfare and advancement in its three aspects, namely, pariyatti sasana (study of the
Making Buddhism the State religion of Myanmar led to tensions between the Buddhist community and the religious minorities, particularly from Christian and Muslim minority groups. Due to religious tensions, the Kachin Christians formed the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) in 1962\(^{274}\) that fought, and continues to fight against the national government to the present. Moreover, there were boycotts from adherents of Islam, Christianity and Hinduism who thought that making Buddhism the state religion of the country “would create two classes of citizens – first-class Buddhist citizens and second-class non-Buddhist citizens.”\(^{275}\) They further mentioned that though the rights of non-Buddhists were protected by law, non-discrimination in terms of economic, social, political and religious matters would be impossible. Thus, there were opposing views even among the parliamentarians who were non-Buddhists and religious leaders.\(^{276}\) Though the Roman Catholic Church in Myanmar did not mind that Buddhism was proclaimed the state religion of Myanmar, the Burma Christian Council (now Myanmar Council of Churches) opposed the government’s move, stating that “The council is deeply grieved because the concept of a state religion is diametrically opposed to the modern democratic ideal of separation between religion and the state.”\(^{277}\) Moreover, Chin and the Kachin Christians as well as animists “bitterly opposed the government’s move” for they regarded making Buddhism the state religion “as another form of Burmese cultural and political domination.”\(^{278}\) In this atmosphere of political uncertainty, racial conflicts, violence and religious discrimination, General Ne Win came into power through a coup d’état and brought the country under his military rule on March 2, 1962.\(^{279}\)

Further, since the anti-colonial sentiment of nationalist movements translated into a stance severely critical of western neo-colonialism, in which Christian mission continued to be seen as a remnant of post colonialism, Christian missionary schools, hospitals, and properties were all nationalized in 1965. This was done by the new revolutionary government under General Ne Win and additionally, all

\(^{274}\) Ibid., 281.

\(^{275}\) Ibid., 248.

\(^{276}\) Ibid.

\(^{277}\) Ibid., 249.

\(^{278}\) Ibid., 250.

\(^{279}\) Simon Pau Khan En, Nat Worship, 375.
foreign missionaries were expelled from Myanmar in 1966. In addition, the socialist regime led by General Ne Win drafted a new constitution in 1973 but it did not include the statement highlighting Buddhism as the state religion. With regard to religious freedom during Socialist Regime, Samuel Ngun Ling points out that though there was freedom of worship and preaching, it was “only within the compound of the Church.” He goes on saying that Christian publications were limited in circulation and, at the same time, “Christian Bibles in different ethnic languages were not allowed to print in the country.” As a result, he says, Christian Bibles were printed outside Myanmar, for instance, in “India, China, Hong Kong and Malaysia.”

After three decades of Socialist Regime in Myanmar, there were nationwide demonstrations to remove the Socialist regime and to claim a democratic government in the country. As the country was nearing a state of anarchy under the Tatmadaw, the Myanmar Army seized power and set up “the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC)” in August 1988. Under the new regime, Christian’s participation in national politics became more and more limited. The military regime apparently gave special treatment to Buddhism. In light of this opportunity, there was a new Buddhist movement called the “Buddhist Taungtan Tatana.” In respect to this movement during the military regime, Samuel Ngun Ling remarks:

The only aim of this movement was to convert all ethnic Christians especially the Baptist back to Buddhists to make the whole Burma a Buddhist land. To help fulfill this master plan, the military government tried to use various possible means and available human resources. Many Christian children and parents from poor family backgrounds were openly persuaded, for instance, to become Buddhists by promising them to be

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283 Ibid.


286 The motive of Buddhist Taungtan Tatana (Buddhist Mission to the Hill People) supported by the military regime was to win the support of the majority Bamars and to promote Buddhism among non-Buddhists as it is believed that if the ethnic non-Buddhist minorities converted to Buddhism, there would be more unity among the Myanmar people. See Christina Fink, *Living Silence, Burma under Military Rule*, 222-223.
provided with needed food, children education, jobs and so on. Such is a situation where the Baptists and Buddhists in Burma have so often encountered each other, ending some time in tension and confrontation.\(^{287}\)

Further, since Buddhist monks and missionaries were supported by SLORC, they could freely propagate Buddhism to the areas of ethnic Christians. Christian missionaries, on the other hand, who tried to preach the Gospel to Buddhists were oppressed, arrested and put into prison, particularly in the state of Rakhine.\(^{288}\) Additionally, Christina Fink, an American anthropologist and the editor of BurmaNet News, says with regard to lack of religious human rights during the military rule in Myanmar:

The authorities in the Ministry of Religious Affairs even battled the Myanmar Council of Churches over terminology and graduation attire. A member of the Myanmar Christian Council, which represents twelve Protestant denominations, explained some of the challenges they faced in the mid 1990s. Lt. General Myo Nyunt, the Minister of Religious Affairs at the time, informed the council that they could no longer use the word “thoukdankyan” for “Proverbs,” even though it had been used since the first translation of the Bible into Burmese more than one hundred years ago. Lt. General Myo Nyunt did not want them to use this word because Buddhists used it in their doctrinal texts.\(^{289}\)

In addition, there was discrimination based on religion and ethnicity during the military rule. As Christians and ethnic minorities were not trusted by the military regime based on their historical experiences, it was difficult for them “to rise to high-ranking positions in government service, particularly in the army.”\(^{290}\) Thus, there was an insurrection of minority ethnic groups fighting for their freedom and their territories. On the one side insurgency was carried out by the Christian minority ethnic groups, and on the other side there was resurgence of Buddhists. This created frequent political demonstrations and socio-religious conflicts in the society.\(^{291}\) Concerning the relationship between Buddhists and Christians in

\(^{287}\) Samuel Ngun Ling, “Baptists and Buddhist in Burma Part II,” 17.

\(^{288}\) Ibid.

\(^{289}\) Christina Fink, *Living Silence, Burma under Military Rule*, 222-223.

\(^{290}\) Ibid.

Myanmar after the colonial period, Tun Aung Chain, a retired professor of history department at Yangon University, asserts:

“In the postcolonial order, together with the increasing emphasis on Buddhism as a mark of national identity and the alignment of Buddhism with state authority, the gulf between Christianity and Buddhism widened and the Christian Church, as a minority Church, has been thrown on the defensive, unable to devise and initiate a strategy for the closing of the gulf.”\(^{292}\)

In other words, it becomes more difficult to initiate a religious dialogue as both groups strive to project the superiority of their religion. Religion here is used to achieve political gains. For many years, Buddhism has been the well-guarded and state sponsored religion of successive authorities. There is also an increasing missionary consciousness among them as even the government supports some aggressive propagation of the Sasana by Buddhist monks. Their motive is to make it compulsory that to be a Bamar is to be a Buddhist.\(^{293}\) Such an environment highlights some of the difficulties in initiating genuine dialogue. Today the churches in Myanmar are left with the task of educating and helping the people imagine and experience a more peaceful society through dialogue between both religious parties in the country.

From 1988 to 2010, Myanmar was ruled by a military government. At that time, there was no regard for human rights, freedom of speech, nor freedom of thought in Myanmar. That is why people kept silent on religious matters. However, elections were held on November 9, 2010 and the military-backed party (USDP) won by a landslide. From that time onwards, a quasi-civilian government rules the country. As a result, the present political situation of Myanmar looks different from that of 2009 as people are more aware of their rights and freedoms. Myanmar, at present, is in a transition of moving toward a free and democratic society. There are still religious conflicts, especially between Buddhists and Muslims in the Rakhine State, and between Buddhists and Christians in the Kachin state of Myanmar. Therefore, religious harmony should be a major concern for this transition because Myanmar is a multi-religious society in which people of different beliefs have to live together side by side.


2.5. CONCLUSION

After having analyzed Buddhist-Christian relations from pre-colonial to post-colonial period in Myanmar, one can conclude that history impacts the present Myanmar's socio-political and religio-cultural relations. Due to the close relationship between colonialism and Christian missions, Christianity in Myanmar has been, and continues to be, perceived as a political tool for the expansion of western culture and colonial power. Deeds from the past continue to shape the lives of many in Myanmar, especially in their perception of Christianity. Some Buddhists in Myanmar continue to perceive Christians as unfaithful citizens due to historical events, thus hindering mutual trust. In addition, what is obvious in the above study is that both Myanmar Buddhists and Christians are actively engaged in missionary activities, which inevitably lead to tension and conflict. With this in mind, I am motivated to find a potential bridge that could cross the 'mutual suspicion' gap between Buddhists and Christians, with the hope of peaceful co-existence in the country. For this purpose, I did my empirical research in Myanmar from January to March 2012 to hear personal stories concerning the Buddhist-Christian encounter. Thus, the perceptions of Buddhists and Christians for peaceful co-existence in Myanmar are explored in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 3
VOICES ON BUDDHIST-CHRISTIAN ENCOUNTER IN MYANMAR

3.1. INTRODUCTION

As already mentioned, Myanmar is a multi-ethnic community in which people of different faiths live together. Since people of different faiths and ethnic communities cohabit in the country, it is practically impossible to live isolated from each other. Though Myanmar Buddhists and Christians mix, they do not have fundamental togetherness. However, in many dimensions they get along as humans and the crises that they experience as human beings are the same.

The use of religion for gaining political power plays a crucial role in Myanmar society that slows down societal development in the country. Due to the conflict-filled history between Buddhists and Christians, there are growing suspicions, misconceptions, hatred, ethno-nationalism, and lack of co-operation between the two parties. Furthermore, Buddhists and Christians have widely different worldviews and religious beliefs. For instance, referring to one of many doctrinal differences, Christians believe in God as a personal being, while there is no concept of God as a personal being in the tradition of Theravada Buddhism. Another gap between Buddhists and Christians is concerning various privileges in the country. As an example, Buddhists claim that ethnic minority groups including Christians in Myanmar were privileged politically and economically during colonial period (1885-1948) under British colonial rule. But, the Christian group states that Buddhists are now given special positions in the government service since the post colonial period (1948 till present).

In order to have a clearer picture on Buddhist-Christian relations, their perception towards each other, and possibilities for dialogue between them, I have undertaken an empirical study in Myanmar from January to March 2012. The tool


295 Cf. Christina Fink, Living Silence, Burma under Military Rule, 14.
applied in the research is the personal interview method with outlined questionnaires. Four Buddhists and four Christians were selected for personal interviews. As Myanmar is still very much in transition politically, some, especially those who had little education, did not understand my intent and suspected that I was a spy. Therefore, I could not interview people from this group. This is one of the regrettable limitations that I experienced in my field research. The questions I addressed to my partners were the followings. The same questions were given to each interviewee, and they are as follows:

**For Buddhists:**

1. How do you see Christianity?
2. How do you regard Christians in Myanmar in the past and today?
3. Was there ever any misunderstanding between Buddhists and Christians in the past? If yes, when and what were the main points of those misunderstandings?
4. Do you think that Buddhist-Christian dialogue in Myanmar is necessary? If yes, what is the purpose and primary concern for Buddhist-Christian dialogue? If no, why?
5. Many people say that Buddhism is a religion of non-violence (*ahimsa*) and compassion? Do you agree with that? What are your perspectives and experiences regarding Buddhism?
6. Many people see Christianity as a religion of violence and colonialism. In Myanmar, there are some people who see Christians as pro-western and pro-colonialism. What are your experiences and views on that?
7. Have you ever read the Bible? Which aspect of Christianity was the greatest challenge for you at first? Can you tell me how it is important?
8. Can you suggest an encounter between Buddhists and Christians that would lead to better mutual understanding and respect in Myanmar?
9. Have you ever had dialogue with Christians before? If yes, how does the dialogue affect your religious life and thought? If no, why is this not a concern for you?
10. What factors are to be avoided in relationship between Buddhists and Christians in the Myanmar context?
11. Have you ever come across any hindrances for Buddhists and Christians to work and contribute together for the betterment of the

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296 Interviews were taken from representatives of both the Christian and Buddhist communities. Those interviewed on the Christian side were: Dr. Saw Hlaing Bwa, Dr. C. Thang Za Tuan, Saya Daniel Zau Nan, Sayama Moe Moe Nyunt; from the Buddhist community Dr. Than Aung (pseudonym), Dr. Buddhist A.P. (pseudonym), Dr. Tin Hlaing and U Dhmmapati were interviewed from January to March, 2012, in Myanmar.
Chapter 3 – Voices on Buddhist-Christian Encounter

Myanmar society? What are your suggestions to overcome them if there are any?

12. Some Myanmar Christians say that they are faithful citizens of the country? Do you agree? Give your comments.

13. Can you suggest how best Christians in Myanmar could demonstrate that they are faithful and loyal citizens of the country?

14. What are the challenges for peaceful co-existence in Myanmar?

15. In what ways can Buddhists and Christians in Myanmar build mutual understanding and better relationships?

16. In furthering dialogue between Buddhists and Christians in Myanmar, what would be the most effective and feasible approach?

For Christians:

1. How do you see Buddhism?

2. How do you regard Buddhists in Myanmar in the past and today?

3. Was there ever any misunderstanding between Buddhists and Christians in the past? If so, when and what were the main points of those misunderstandings?

4. Do you think Buddhist-Christian dialogue in Myanmar is necessary? If yes, what is the purpose and primary concern for Buddhist-Christian dialogue? If no, why do you disapprove?

5. Many people said that Buddhism is a religion of non-violence (ahimsa) and compassion? Do you agree with that? What are your perspectives and experiences regarding Buddhism?

6. Many people see Christianity as a religion of violence and colonialism. In Myanmar, there are some people who see Christians as pro-western and pro-colonialism. What are your experiences and views on that?

7. Have you ever read the Tipitaka? Which aspect of Buddhism was the greatest challenge for you at first?

8. Can you suggest an encounter between Buddhists and Christians that would lead to a better mutual understanding and respect in the Myanmar society?

9. Have you ever had dialogue with Buddhists before? If yes, how does the dialogue affect your religious life and thought? If no, why is this not a concern for you?

10. What factors are to be avoided in relationship between Buddhists and Christians in the Myanmar context?

11. Have you ever come across any hindrances for Buddhists and Christians to work and contribute together for the betterment of the Myanmar society? If yes, what are your suggestions to overcome them?
12. Some Myanmar Buddhists say that Christianity is an alien religion. Do you agree? Give your comments.
13. Can you suggest how best the Christians in Myanmar could demonstrate that they are faithful and loyal citizens of the country?
14. What are the challenges for Peaceful Coexistence in Myanmar?
15. In what ways can Buddhists and Christians in Myanmar build mutual understanding and better relationships?
16. In furthering dialogue between Buddhists and Christians in Myanmar, what would be the most effective and feasible approach?

The interviews were conducted in Burmese as all of my interviewees are fluent in Burmese irrespective of their different ethnic backgrounds. I recorded their voices and translated them into English. The transcripts of the interviews are found in Appendix I and II. In this chapter, an attempt is made to describe the content text of the interviews. In re-writing the interviews, I have tried to present a clear picture on how Buddhist interviewees see Christianity, Myanmar Christians and the Christian mission, and vice versa how the Christian interviewees see Buddhism, Myanmar Buddhists and the Buddhist mission. Further, examination of their opinions of the reasons for Buddhist-Christian tensions in the country, their point of view for Buddhist-Christian dialogue, and their perspectives on a peaceful co-existence was carried out. After having re-written the texts, I analyzed and interpreted them based on categories such as Buddhist perceptions on Christianity, Christian perceptions on Buddhism, their points of tension, their perspectives for Buddhist-Christian dialogue, and the outlook for peaceful co-existence in the society of Myanmar today. I chose the above topic because I feel it is necessary to know how Buddhists and Christians perceive each other, how they understand the reasons for their tension, if they think that Buddhist-Christian dialogue is necessary, and peaceful co-existence can be foreseen in the country in order to initiate Buddhist-Christian dialogue.

3.2. SUMMARY AND CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE INTERVIEWS

In summary of the interviews, I tried to clarify the perceptions of Buddhist interviewees on the one hand (on Christianity in Myanmar, their point of view on Buddhist-Christian tensions, their point of view on Buddhist-Christian dialogue and peaceful co-existence) and, on the other hand, the Christian point of view (on Buddhism in Myanmar, their perspectives on Buddhist-Christian tensions, their
views on Buddhist-Christian dialogue and peaceful co-existence in the country). Further, in order to throw more light on their perception towards each other’s religion, I will present my own analysis of the interviews and will divide it into two sub-points: First, Buddhist perception on Christianity followed by Christian perception on Buddhism.

3.2.1. THE PERCEPTIONS OF BUDDHIST INTERVIEWEES

In this section, I summarize the views of Buddhists towards Christianity, Christian mission and Christians in Myanmar and make an attempt to analyze Buddhist-Christian tensions. Further, I explore the Buddhist interviewees’ perceptions of Buddhist-Christian dialogue in Myanmar. Personal information of Buddhist interviewees can be seen in Appendix.

3.2.1.1. Buddhists Point of View on Christianity in Myanmar

a) Narration of the interviews

To explore Buddhist interviewees’ point of view on Christianity in Myanmar, I will describe how my interview partners perceived Christianity, Myanmar Christians and Christian missions. Than Aung, for example, states: “Christianity, as well, is a good religion.” He goes on to say: “It makes people feel peaceful, become righteous.” Tin Hlaing regards Christianity as “a respectable religion.” Buddhist A. P. asserts that: “There are times when people are in trouble with daily needs, especially due to lack of food for survival.” In this case, he says that “religion, actually, is the one that helped people to solve their problems. Christianity attracts people who are in need and tries to establish an organization.” He further says that “since every religion has its own technique of solving people’s problems, for me, Christianity as well has applied its own method.” Dhmmmapati, before talking about his views on Christianity, says that in every matter, there is “the right conduct and the wrong conduct as well as the right choice and the wrong choice.” He goes on stating that “everyone has the right to choose as he or she likes. However, in the matter of religion, if a person chooses wrongly, he / she will suffer not only in his / her present life but also in the next life.” Moreover, he says choosing religion is similar to married couples as it is not reversible once they are married. Thus, he stresses that “making the right choice before conducting anything is crucial.” Regarding his views on Christianity, he mentions that “personally, I don't really have any comment about Christianity.”
Concerning his views on Myanmar Christians, Tin Hlaing states that “in the past, Christians appear to be privileged, better educated, relatively well off. At present, they have become equal with others, but I think they are (i.e. those who have lived under the British) missing the good old days.” Buddhist A. P. mentions that “Myanmar Christians are not learning or trying to understand their religion by studying religious literatures.” Moreover, he says that Myanmar Christians “rely on the name of their religion” and take pride in it though they spend only a little time reading their Scriptures and meditating on them. In this regard, he says that “it is not true that one has just to be a member or follower in his/her religion.” Along similar lines, Buddhist A. P. observes that most of the Myanmar Christians are nominal Christians, adding that approximately seven out of ten Christians in Myanmar would be nominal Christians while “the remaining three persons have a chance to study and they can do something which is spiritually good for them when they have time.” Therefore, he mentions that it is necessary for “Christians in Myanmar to value the precious stuff (the Bible) they have and apply it correctly in their daily lives.” At this point, he says that “the method of application is core for Myanmar Christians.” In sum, Buddhist A. P. is of the opinion that Myanmar Christians are responsible “to share with others” the knowledge “they have and make others understand their religion.”

Subsequently, in his point of view on Christian mission, Than Aung says that the colonial British period brought three “M”s to Myanmar: “merchant, money and missionary.” In this situation, he asserts that some Christian missionaries made use of their religion and supported the British colonial empire. Moreover, Buddhist A. P says that “most of the world religions are rooted in Asia; Buddhism originated in India and Christianity in Israel” although Christianity arrived in Myanmar from western countries. He regarded the 16th and 17th century Christian mission work as positive since Portuguese Christian missionaries at that time focused on social services, for instance, education and health. Among Christian missionaries, he particularly appreciated Christian missionaries from Portugal and Italy, who focused more on the benefit of local people than the benefit of their own religion. In this regard, he says that the Portuguese and Italian Christians had “an ideal

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297 A nominal Christian for Buddhist A. P. is one who says he / she is a Christian but does not read the Bible properly, does not practice what is written in the Bible and does not pray to God. In other words, a nominal Christian for him is one who calls himself / herself Christian in name only.

298 It is claimed that Portuguese and Italian missionaries had access to the royal Court of Myanmar because of their medical skills. Among missionaries, Fr. Luigi Grondona was famous as he served as a royal physician and he “entered into relations with the Buddhist monks.” See Tun Aung Chain, “Buddhist-Christian Encounter in Myanmar,” in Engagement, Vol. 1, 5.
missionary work for the present time” in Myanmar. 299 Unlike those missionaries, who came to Myanmar in the 16th century, he says that missionaries nowadays focus more on quantity rather than the essence of the gospel and beneficial actions for their own religious community. According to him, Christianity was paired with colonialism as westerners used religion as a tool to control the people of Myanmar because as a controlling method it was more powerful than any other methods. Though many people regarded Christianity as a colonial religion in the past, according to him, it is difficult to say that Christianity is still regarded as a religion of colonialism because nowadays, in most cases, it is very much combined with positive actions for other people. He goes on to say that while doing mission work, it is crucial not to insult other religions. Further, Dhmmmapati says that it is very common for poor people in Myanmar to overestimate Westerners. This is because Westerners are richer, more educated and more powerful than they are. He further says that “such perception makes people easily get influenced, particularly in religion, by what they think as high and dependable.” Though three of the interviewees shared their point of view on Christian mission work in Myanmar, Tin Hlaing was hesitant to mention his view on Myanmar Christians, saying that “I do not share the view,” referring to the belief that Christianity is a religion of violence and colonialism and Myanmar Christians are pro-western and pro-colonialism.

b) Brief analysis of the interviews

From the perception of Buddhist interviewees on Christianity, Christian mission work and Christians in Myanmar, I would like to point out three facts. Firstly, two of the interviewees agree that Christianity is a respectable religion and that it can be a source in establishing peace within and outside Christian community. The other two interviewees consider Christianity as just an organization which came into Myanmar, as an agency, to rescue people who are in crisis by means of providing proper food and shelter. In short, for them, Christianity is a kind of art which tackles human problems. It seems that their knowledge about Christianity is limited to a means which offers help for human physical needs, but not spiritual and ethical needs.

Secondly, since Christianity came to Myanmar along with colonialism, one of the interviewees (Than Aung) is still of the opinion that Christian mission work is

299 W. C. B. Purser, a Christian missionary in Yangon, noted that “the educational and social work of the Roman Catholics is beyond praise. St. Paul’s school, Rangoon, is one of the largest and best-equipped boy’s school in the East, and is staffed by the ‘Teaching Brothers,’ who are trained lay teachers and give their labour free.” See W. C. B. Purser, Christian Missions in Burma, 93.
another force of colonialism. On the other hand, Christianity in Myanmar, for him, is similar to the two faces of the same coin which is colonialism and Christian mission work. However, he finds the 16th century Christian missionaries, particularly, Portuguese and Italians, impressive and recognizes them as authentic missionaries due to the positive actions taken for all local people regardless of race, sex and religion. In spite of this positive image of the 16th century Christian missionaries, it seems that today’s Christian mission work in Myanmar, as a whole, is seen as negative. The general impression is that today Christian missionaries only act for the benefit of their own religious community. As a result, it is presumable that Christian mission work in Myanmar nowadays is unacceptable to the Buddhist interview partners.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that most of the Buddhist interviewees hesitated to openly share their point of view on Christians in Myanmar. In this regard, one could say that they were avoiding criticism as it seems they were afraid of being misunderstood if they spoke frankly. In other words, it seems that the Buddhist interviewees avoided controversial issues. Thus, one has to ask whether this observation has to do with a particular mentality or religious attitude of Bamar Buddhists or whether it is rooted in a certain suspicion toward this kind of question as it is a hot issue in today’s Myanmar context.

3.2.1.2. Buddhist-Christian Tensions: Buddhist Interviewees’ Perception

a) Narration of the interviews

As an answer to my questions concerning tensions between Christians and Buddhists, Than Aung says that “Buddhists and Christians lived peacefully side by side” in Myanmar in the past. He, however, goes on to say that “due to certain people who make use of religion as an instrument for political power, there are some misunderstandings between the two religions.” But in his view religion itself is not the source of tension and conflict, but rather “it actually helps people to live harmoniously.” Explaining the tensions that nevertheless exist between the adherents of different religions, he stresses that “persuading other people into one’s own belief is the origin of conflicts.” The helping hand of Christian missionaries in Myanmar was often misunderstood as an act of religiously persuading others in order to convert them into Christianity. Accordingly, Than Aung asserts that some Myanmar Buddhists “misunderstood Christian missionaries who introduced their religion through social activities,” though they should have seen the motivation of the Christians and agree that “it is acceptable if a person in trouble is given a helping hand.”
To underline the misunderstandings that easily hinder the relationship between Buddhists and Christians in Myanmar, he mentions an interesting example from recent history: “The most obvious incident due to misunderstanding between Buddhists and Christians was among the Karen National Union (KNU) which is one of the organizations of the Karen people in Myanmar.” He explains that in KNU “there were Buddhists as well as Christians fighting side by side for the liberation of their own people and their land. However, religious dissimilarity makes Karen Buddhists to be separated from their own ethnic group, KNU, and formed Democratic Karen Buddhist Association in 1994.”

The awareness and importance of religious difference thus led to tension and conflict among the Karen people. Ethnic unity and togetherness was destroyed by religious matters.

Another story concerning the tensions between Buddhists and Christians in Myanmar was mentioned by Buddhist A. P. He remembered an incident in 1936 known as Kyaukkwin ayaydawpon in the local language. It “started with a couple who belonged to different religions (Buddhism and Christianity).” The couple had an argument between them regarding religious issues, and this “became a very big issue.” Finally they decided to call the religious leaders of the country for help. According to Buddhist A. P, it is told that the couple advertised in the newspapers saying that “they will follow the decision of the religious leaders from both sides.” Finally, the religious leaders from both sides came together on the initiative of this couple. The story goes that “about 700 Christian representatives but only one monk, who represented the Buddhists and some of his followers, were present.”

Even though the Christians represented the majority in this competition, their answers and insights could not convince the couple. At the end of the day, the one Buddhist monk and his followers won the challenge. As it was agreed initially that the couple, and the whole audience of the contest, would follow the winning party (i.e in this case the winning religion), 700 Christians converted to Buddhism.

Buddhist A. P tries to explain the inferiority of the Christians with the “insufficient studies in their respective Scriptures.” But he also concludes that there is too much reliance on the written tradition instead of listening to the guidance of the heart, essentially bringing scripture and life experience together. Regarding this occasion and applying it to todays Christians, Pannasiha drew the following conclusion that “most Christians were purely relying on literature but not the feelings of their hearts.” Coming back to the story of 1936, Buddhist A. P admits, with a smile, that though more than 700 Christians converted into Buddhism, all of them “reconverted into Christianity very soon” because “their inner soul was not truly committed to Buddhism.”

300 Mikael Gravers, Nationalism as Political Paranoia in Burma, 87.
Dhmmapati gives a doctrinal explanation for the root cause of tensions between Buddhists and Christians in Myanmar. He asserts that tensions are “due to one sidedness and negligence of what is good and what is bad.” He says that the main cause of tensions and conflicts in the country is “not knowing the consequences of their respective religious conduct.” Seemingly, people underestimate the impact and effectiveness of the exercise of their religion. Mutual respect and sensitivity could hence avoid conflicts and tensions. Interestingly, Tin Hlaing says that there is no tension and conflict between Buddhists and Christians in Myanmar.

b) Brief analysis of the interviews

In summarizing the aspect of tensions between Buddhists and Christians in Myanmar from a Buddhist perspective, there are five major points. Though the Buddhist interviewees mainly agreed that there were tensions between Buddhists and Christians in Myanmar from the beginning of their coexistence, they did not mention serious conflicts of today. However, the fact that the story came up about the courageous couple, who made the religious representatives expose their convictions, shows how present in mind the tensions are between both religions.

Another recent event that was remembered and mentioned in one of the interviews is the conflict within the Karen National Union (KNU). In this case the religious matter divided the one people of the Karen. Instead of fighting together against an oppressive government, they continued to fight against each other, on the basis of differences in their religion. It ultimately weakened the goal of the organization and created more bloodshed within the community. This happened in the 1990s and thus, one cannot deny that tensions between Buddhists and Christians are also a phenomenon of very recent developments.

Another interesting point is the common opinion of all interviewees that religion by itself is not the problem. The interviewees agreed that the very essence of religious teachings and religious convictions should help people to live harmoniously. The interview partners also agreed upon the gap between the ideal of the religion and its reality. Tensions escalate when people try to gain popularity and control over others through religious means.

A third point the interview partners referred to is the missing mutual interest of Buddhists and Christians. The lack of interest about other's religion makes people ignorant about others’ convictions and beliefs. For example, my interview partners mentioned the fact that, in their opinion, Buddhists often consider only the social activities of the Christians as the identity of their faith. As Christianity came along with the social work of the missionaries, Christianity is still seen as a
humanitarian NGO. With this view in mind, they ignore the religious fundamentals of Christianity.

It is worth mentioning that one of the Buddhist interviewees denied any tension between Buddhists and Christians. One could accept this as his personal point of view, but it could also be rooted in a strong hesitation of publicly admitting any conflict or causing conflict by naming tensions. I evaluate this voice as proof that to share a critical point of view is still not widely done in today's Myanmar.

3.2.1.3. Buddhists Point of View for Buddhist-Christian Dialogue

a) Narration of the interviews

Concerning Buddhist-Christian dialogue in Myanmar, Than Aung says that it is necessary to have “dialogue for the harmony among different religions” in Myanmar. He is deeply convinced of the necessity of dialogue, but he also underlines the precondition to overcome an “egoistic approach in discussion in order to establish harmony between each other.” For him, it is important to consider the level from which dialogue should be initiated. He suggests differentiating two levels of needed dialogue. The first level is the contact among religious leaders. This should embrace the discussion of religious content. The second level is the contact of social welfare groups. Here, common aim of the different religions for humanity and development can be coordinated. He further comes to the fundamental precondition of dialogue: “Respecting and recognizing each other is a crucial factor.”

Tin Hlaing also supports this positive attitude towards dialogue. He says dialogue is important because both Buddhists and Christians should learn about each other’s faith. Dialogue can intensify the knowledge for each other and foster tolerance. Dialogue is hence an educational program.

A more skeptical opinion comes from U Dhmmapati. He states that though Buddhist-Christian dialogue is important due to one-sidedness301 “it is not quite easy to initiate dialogue and try to get mutual understanding between Christians and Buddhists.” Thus, he is of the opinion that official and group dialogue is less

301 When using the word, “one-sidedness,” it seems that U Dhmmapati wanted to say one who says his/her own religion alone is the only true religion and other religion are false religions. In other words, it is an exclusive approach toward other religions and cultures.
possible than personal dialogue though “there will be a higher chance if attempts are made at a personal level.”

Being asked about dialogue between Buddhists and Christians, Buddhist A. P uses the term “interfaith dialogue” in his answer. Be believes that such a dialogue is necessary for peaceful and harmonious co-existence in Myanmar. Using the term “interfaith dialogue,” he indicates a certain quality that the dialogue should reach. He says, “It is necessary to get along with people who are followers of other religions. Isolating one religion from others may cause misunderstanding, hatred and finally, separation from people of other faiths.” Therefore, he says that it is necessary to have dialogue among religions in order to establish a common platform to act for all the people in Myanmar regardless of race, sex and religion. Further, he expresses that since every religion is based on loving-kindness and compassion, human beings can avoid being violent by practicing the teachings of their own religion in their daily lives. Furthermore, Buddhist A. P tries to integrate the question of dialogue in a wider horizon. He opposes mixing religion and politics, saying that while religion is based on love and passion, politics is based on sex, family and society as a whole. In politics, he says, until and unless there is no powerful voice, there is no support.

Illustrating the character of religion and its advocacy for the voiceless, Buddhist A. P uses the analogy of a patient and his doctor. He makes the comparison asserting that “though a patient does not raise voice, doctors treat him / her and give him / her medicine. Likewise, as religion is based on love and compassion, religion supports human beings though there is no voice.” Additionally, Buddhist A. P says that Buddhist-Christian dialogue is necessary for “social welfare which includes education and healthcare sectors.” Consequently, he is of the opinion that “it is not necessary to dialogue on politics and democracy among religions.”

Than Aung is of the opinion that every religion has the right to be different in beliefs and concepts, adding that “it is important not to argue.” As an example, he mentions that “it is not necessary to question and argue upon the reason why the thumb is shorter in length compared to the rest of the fingers.” Further, he says that there are barriers between Buddhists and Christians and therefore “it is necessary to cut down the ego that we have and set a common ground to accommodate everyone.” However, he says that “it is not so easy to gain common understanding among those who have different interests.” Thus, he is of the opinion that it is crucial to initiate dialogue based on personal interest. Furthermore, he stresses that mutual respect and recognition among Buddhists and Christians are the first steps toward “a joint effort” for the benefit of the community.
Tin Hlaing shares an optimistic view on dialogue. He is of the opinion that there is no hindrance for Buddhist-Christian dialogue. He goes on saying that both Buddhists and Christians have to avoid “trying to convert one’s faith.” For him, tolerance and mutual acceptance is essential for understanding. He even suggests that Myanmar Christians should not keep away from participating in Bamar Buddhist festivals like *Ahlu Katein*, which is more social than religious, so as to have better relationships with their Buddhist neighbors.

U Dhmmapati names three major preconditions for an authentic Buddhist-Christian dialogue in Myanmar: 1. avoiding racism, 2. avoiding religious one-sidedness, and 3. avoiding self-centeredness. Thus, he asserts that starting dialogue on social matters, rather than religious matters, is of great importance.

Buddhist A. P believes that it is necessary to “value and respect each other without bias” because staying with one’s own beliefs and interests will hamper the Buddhist-Christian dialogue. He goes on to say that “valuing and respecting people, including their interests, their thoughts, their work, etc. is the key” for a healthy and genuine dialogue because “without personal value and respect to one another, religious traffic will not be flowing smoothly causing traffic jam among each other.” In addition, Buddhist A. P puts the individual response at the center of his reflection. He states that “removing pride and being humble when approaching other people is essential.” In order to initiate Buddhist-Christian dialogue, he is of the opinion being interested in the person in the first place, rather than the religion of that person, is of great importance because “person always comes first before religion arises.” On top of that, he says that Buddhist-Christian dialogue is necessary for religious cooperation as “both Buddhists and Christians can do for public awareness in terms of ecological crisis” in Myanmar. With regard to the ecological crisis in Myanmar, he mentions that “many of the origins of potential ecological crisis such as air pollution, water pollution, threat to environmental safety, are egoistic business people.” Thus, he says that, through dialogue Buddhists and Christians should “educate and encourage the public to live eco-friendly lifestyle.” Looking for cooperation on ecological issues is similar to Tin Hlaing’s claim that it is important “to find out areas of cooperation for social service, education, healthcare, disaster relief etc.” Also, Than Aung would support the view of Buddhist A. P that a good personal encounter is the starting point for a healthy dialogue. But, interestingly, as a summary of his opinion, Buddhist A. P asserts that in Buddhist-Christian dialogue, social welfare, which includes education and healthcare, should be given priority.
b) Brief analysis of the interviews

The dialogue between Buddhists and Christians is the heart of this research. The voices of these four Buddhist representatives are very important for the outcome of my reflections. As the first step, I will highlight their main assertions and these will also play an eminent role in my further investigation.

All of the Buddhist interviewees agree that Buddhist-Christian dialogue in Myanmar is necessary for peace and harmony. However, they believe that avoiding an “egocentric approach” in dialogue and establishing a common platform for religious cooperation in order to act for the benefit of all people is of great significance.

Further, they are of the notion that for authentic Buddhist-Christian dialogue, the first step must be initiated through a personal encounter, cultivating authentic friendships, leading to greater mutual understanding and mutual trust. This is because human beings always come first before religion. Three of interviewees have experienced a personal encounter with the people of other faiths including Christians. However, their experience is limited to the personal level. The interest in personal relationship, rather than the interest in others’ religion, is the center of Buddhist-Christian encounter for them.

Interestingly, two of the interview partners are of the opinion that it is possible to live peacefully in the society of Myanmar if one keeps social matters and religious matters separate. In line with this statement, one of the interviewee asserts that “it is not necessary to dialogue on politics and democracy among religions.” Based on the above statements, one can conclude that their understanding of religion and society is dichotomous. The question is: Can dialogue be restrained to social matter? Are there any social matters, which are not part of politics and democracy? As one cannot totally separate social issues from religious issues, it seems that it is central to carefully look into the connection between religion and society.

According to the interview partners, in Buddhist-Christian dialogue, the emphasis should be based on social issues, education, healthcare, disaster relief and ecological concerns rather than religious beliefs and traditions. This is because emphasizing social concerns for the benefit of all people in the country can construct a bridge for Buddhists and Christians for joint action. In short, what almost all of the Buddhists interview partners stated was that one must start Buddhist-Christian dialogue on social matters and to avoid religious questions which automatically might cause conflicting views.
3.2.1.4. Buddhists Point of View for Peaceful Co-existence

a) Narration of the interviews

As already stated in chapter one, Myanmar is a multi-cultural and multi-religious society in which 135 different ethnic groups live together. For peaceful co-existence in the country, Dhmmapati says that “one should not say that this is my land, my place, my religion and so on.” He goes on to mention that though “egoism definitely exists in the political and social field, it is not appropriate for the religious field.” However, he realizes that “not only religion but also the social and economic situation of Myanmar is largely depending on politics.” Thus, for him, political stability is of great importance for peace because “without being peaceful in the country, it is not possible to see improvements in the religious field.” On the other hand, political instabilities, more or less, have a negative influence on the religious sector and therefore, he says that “peace in the nation is core to religious activities.” In other words, for him, religious peace depends on political tranquility. Moreover, he continues to say that “seeing others with love, passion and kindness is necessary to understand one another and to establish a peaceful relationship.”

Before reflecting on peaceful co-existence, Than Aung says that “firstly, it is necessary to have a distinction between the state (the rulers) and religion.” This is because “religion is the one in which many people devote their trust and belief but the ruler is the one who governs the people. The way the ruler rules the country depends greatly on how well he / she is applying his / her religious concepts to the people.” Moreover, he says that “escalation of one’s mind power, according to the teaching of Buddha, is to love people, to be kind on them, to be happy when someone is successful and to neglect when other people can’t accept you and your goodwill. Forgiveness is the highest level of mind power.” In addition, Than Aung is of the opinion that Christians in Myanmar should not isolate themselves from people of other faiths. He states they need “to care for others and develop cooperative ideas to have good fellowship with others.” He goes on to say that Myanmar Christians “need to emphasize on social work to clear the black image of the past.”

Moreover, Buddhist A. P distinguishes the concept of uniformity and unity. He says that “during General Aung San’s time while Burma was struggling for independence from the British Empire, certain races and religions were not willing to unite each other. So, there was no unity at all.” He goes on to say that “unity among all religions is crucial while Myanmar is transforming into a democratic country” because “everyone must be in the front line without holding anything
back so that the country can head up to democracy.”

Further, he says that “one has to know that religious teachings are one of the essential factors for pursuing peace, particularly among diverse ethnic and religious groups in Myanmar.” When saying religious teachings, he refers to “all religions existing predominantly in Myanmar, namely Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, Islam and even primal religions embraced by tribal groups.” This is because, he says, “unnecessary conflicts happen when someone takes his / her religious belief as religious fanaticism by imposing it onto his / her neighbors.” He continues asserting that ethno-nationalism creates violence and conflict in Myanmar hindering peaceful coexistence. That is why he is convinced that “since Myanmar is a multi-cultural, multi-religious and multi-ethnic country, unity is essential. There can be no peace, without unity, at the same time there can be no unity without peace.” According to him, “unity itself has three qualities: 1) forgiveness (Khama), 2) tolerance (Khanti), 3) forgetting each other’s mistakes and wrong doings (Anunnyata).” In considering peaceful co-existence in Myanmar, he stresses that “no matter how diverse we may be, as long as these three qualities exist in the community, no doubt there will be peace in our country.” He goes on to say that “forgiveness is taught at different levels in all religions. Tolerance should also be a virtue of every citizen of Myanmar. To struggle against violence in Myanmar, political dialogue between parties, national unity and integration of ethnic minorities are badly needed.” In addition, he mentions that “religion should not be taken as a source of violence, but rather as a resource for peace.”

In addition, he says that “all the faith-adherents are obliged to follow the rule and commandment of their respective religious teachings as peace is the ultimate goal of all religions.” Though peace is differently termed, he says that “all religions are searching for it in their own ways.” He goes on to state that “to build a lasting peace in our community, religious teachings in Buddhism like metta (love) and karuna (compassion) should be practiced in the life of all people.” Moreover, he says that “building peace through practicing our religious teachings and involving in social activities is a must in Myanmar.” Further, he asserts that former Myanmar kings applied the Buddhist concept of metta and karuna by inviting “Christian missionaries to work together with them in the areas of health and education.” He further mentions that “if someone really has metta as a quality of life, he / she will

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302 Since Independence in 1948, there have been conflicts and tensions in Myanmar, particularly between the central government and ethnic nationalities as well as the military government and the civilians. There is no unity at all. In Myanmar at this political transition of moving to the so-called democracy, it seems as if Ashin Pannasiha wanted all the Myanmar people to forget their misunderstandings and wrongdoings and to forgive each other in building a peaceful country displaying the light of unity in diversity.
have a sharing life with others by which all communities in Myanmar will live together as human beings as well as neighbors” because *metta* is the only attitude that can provide forgiveness of one's wrongdoings and mistakes. Additionally, he states that “*metta* is the only component that can join all communities into one body” leading to unity and peaceful co-existence in Myanmar.

**b) Brief analysis of the interviews**

Regarding questions on peaceful co-existence in the society of Myanmar, three out of four interviewees talked about their perceptions though one avoided to share his views on it. Firstly, I would like to point out that showing loving-kindness (*metta*) and compassion toward others and forgiving others' wrongdoings are the first steps toward peaceful co-existence. This is because loving-kindness (*metta*) and compassion (*karuna*) are the only attitudes which can forgive each other’s mistakes and wrongdoings, and can join all diverse communities into one body.

Another point is that stabilizing the political situation of the country is of great importance for peace because social, religious and economic situations depend mainly on its political stability. All interview partners agreed that tensions and conflicts in the country are due to political instability. One of the reasons for political instability in Myanmar is because of ethno-nationalism which creates conflicts and violence. Avoiding ethno-nationalism and keeping away from religious fanaticism is indispensible for peaceful co-existence.

It is worth noting that though Myanmar is a multi-cultural, multi-religious and multi-ethnic community, one of interview partners made a critical comment for peaceful co-existence, saying that as long as the Myanmar people practice forgiveness (*khama*), tolerance (*khanti*), and forgetting each other's mistakes and wrongdoings (*anunnyata*) in their daily lives, there is no doubt that they can live side by side peacefully.

### 3.2.2. THE PERCEPTIONS OF CHRISTIAN INTERVIEWEES

The next step of the approach is listening to the Christian voices: how they describe Buddhism, how they see tensions, what they think about dialogue and peaceful coexistence. Again I will first describe the assertions of my four interviewees to the respective topic (a) and give a brief analysis of the interviews (b). Personal information of Christian interviewees is mentioned in the appendix.
3.2.2.1. Myanmar Christian Interviewees’ Point of View on Buddhism in Myanmar

Firstly, I will refer to the Christian interviewees’ point of view on Buddhism, Myanmar Buddhists, and the Buddhist mission known as Taungtan Tatana in Myanmar. Thang Za Tuan thinks that “Buddhism is a rather scientific religion based on cause and effect relationship.” He further says that Buddhism “emphasizes that the secret of life is brotherly love (metta) and compassion (karuna).” He further says that “indeed, the world’s woes are due to selfishness.” The overcoming of selfishness is the central teaching of every religion. Interestingly, Thang Za Tuan remembers the Buddhist concept of the ‘Eight-fold Path’ instead of referring to a Christian concept. He is convinced that selfishness “can be erased by the system of the ‘Eight-fold Path’.”

Further, Saw Hlaing Bwa states that “Buddhism is one of the religions in the world” and he accepts that “Buddhism is a religion which is sufficient for itself.” He goes on saying that every action in Buddhism is “based on the four noble truths, trying to leave positive impacts on others.” Additionally, Moe Moe Nyunt is of the opinion that “basically, the nature and the teachings in both Buddhism and Christianity are the same.”

According to Daniel Zau Nan, “basically, both Buddhism and Christianity have strengths as well as weaknesses.” He further says: “According to my knowledge, Buddhism as a religion itself is a nonviolent one but when people don’t apply the teachings appropriately in their lives, there is some visible violence among them. However, the authentic, genuine Buddhism is nonviolent.”

With regards to Myanmar Buddhists, Saw Hlaing Bwa notes that “the majority of Buddhists in Myanmar are still clinging to animism, Nat worship, which is analogue to Buddhism.” However, he says: “For true Buddhists, they believe that Nat worship is not necessary for them as long as they follow the instructions of Buddha.” Moreover, he mentions that “Buddhism, purely, is a nonviolent religion which tries to gain inner peace through meditation and seeks to distribute it to society.” However, he goes on to say that “There were some Buddhists who practiced violent action in order to get power and authority” in the history of

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303 Buddhist Eightfold Paths are “right understanding, right thinking, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration.” See also Sitagu Sayadaw Ashin Nanissara, Selected Speeches Delivered by Sitagu Sayadaw (Yangon: Sitagu International Buddhist Academy, 2012), 55.

304 In Buddhism, there are four noble truths which are “the noble truth of suffering, the noble truth of the cause or origin of suffering, the noble truth of the cessation of suffering and the noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering.” See also Sitagu Sayadaw Ashin Nanissara, Selected Speeches Delivered by Sitagu Sayadaw, 112.
Myanmar. He states that violent action “actually comes from those who exploit religion such as government, politician, businessmen, etc.” Further, Saw Hlaing Bwa stresses that both Buddhists and Christians are “making use of their religion for their self-interest, economy and power.” Thus, he says that it is really inappropriate. In addition, he asserts that “being conservative, being exploited by local government, and minimal exposure to the outside world causes difficulties for Buddhists to understand and accept other religions.” In this regard, he mentions the necessity of having exposure to other religions and cultures, saying that “some of the monks who study Buddhism in foreign countries become open in relationship with others, while laymen who only hear the monks’ teaching are still in a conservative world.”

Further, Moe Moe Nyunt states that “Buddhists are also God’s creatures” though “they are still unaware of their creator and also don’t have any contact with him yet.” One can call her position an inclusive view. Besides, she says that “traditionally, Buddhist mission was conducted by monks, but the believers were not going to the monastery regularly to worship and listen to the teaching of the monks.” Though the nature of Buddhism in Myanmar was nominal many years back, she says that “there are some changes among the Buddhists nowadays.” She continued saying that “Buddhism in Myanmar, nowadays, has changed a lot and becomes more contextualized.” Moreover, she asserts that “surprisingly, there are trainings and song practices for youths and children despite singing is not their usual practice in religious activities.”

Daniel Zau Nan accepts that the teachings of all religions are good. The actual problems lie on the concepts and practices of the people who believe in that religion. In short, he states that “overall, it is not the problem of the religion but the problem actually lies on the followers of that religion.”

Thang Za Tuan expresses that since Buddhism came to Myanmar around the 1st century C.E, along with the art of Indian civilization, worship, and customs, “devoted Myanmar Buddhists are really well cultured.”

Furthermore, at the present moment, Saw Hlaing Bwa says that “many Buddhists are getting more and more engaged in social activities.” For Buddhists, he says, these social actions are regarded as doing mission which is for the betterment and development of the people.” He goes on stating that “in fact, the true meaning of

305 According to Moe Moe Nyunt, a majority of Myanmar Buddhists do not understand anything about their religion, although they are under the name of that religion because of their parents and ancestors. Therefore, she regarded such people as nominal Buddhists.
mission in Buddhism is to live according to the instructions of Buddha in daily living.” On the other hand, the true meaning of mission in Buddhism, he says, is “to help people change their attitude and behavior in order to have a better life, not to change from one religion to another.” Buddhist monks in Myanmar, he says, engage in social work and according to them “there is no discrimination regardless of religion, race and sex. It is not necessary to convert into Buddhism; we are just doing our mission for the benefit of the people.” However, he points out that “there are some Buddhists who do mission among ethnic minorities and Christians in order to convert them into Buddhism.” In these cases, he stresses that Buddhists “have to change their mission attitudes” because the word, Tatana in Buddhism is payayeh a sung amah naih ti si chin, which literally means standing firmly in the teaching of God. In short, he asserts that the word “Tatana” in Buddhism is “not to convert others from one religion to another but just to follow the teaching of Lord Buddha.” This is because, he says, “the teaching of Buddha is not to kill others but to love others.” He, therefore, says that “doing mission means to help people live according to the teaching of Lord Buddha.”

From the point of view of Christian interview partners on Buddhism, it has been pointed out that Buddhism is a scientific religion based on cause and effect theories. While there is a clear concept of God who creates the universe in Christian belief, Buddhists do not acknowledge a creator, which is entirely different from Christians understanding of God.

Another important point in the interviews with Christians is that Buddhism is a non-violent religion that has profound teachings such as the four noble truths and the Eight-fold Path. As the core teaching of Buddhism is to have love (metta) and to show compassion (karuna) toward others, all of Christian interviewees appreciated Buddhism. To them, it is essential to respect and acknowledge the core experience as well as the uniqueness of Buddhism as it is ethically not justified to assume that Christian belief alone is true.

Interestingly, two of the interview partners underlined that Buddhism by itself is a non-violent and peaceful religion. However, they stress that problems and conflicts arise when people take religion as a tool for their own selfish motives and political power. According to the above statement, it seems that in Myanmar there are some people from a Buddhist background who made use of their religion as a tool for the backbone of their political interest.

Another point worth noting is that one of the interview partners did not appreciate Buddhist Taungthan Tatana which means Buddhist mission to the hill

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306 Daniel Zau Nan.
people of Myanmar. He points out that some Buddhists do mission work among ethnic minorities and Christians in order to convert them into Buddhism. It seems important to him that avoiding trying to convert Christians, who have embraced Christianity for many years, into Buddhism is of great significance for peaceful co-existence.

3.2.2.2. Buddhist-Christian Tensions: Christian Interviewees’ Perception

a). Narration of the interviews

Regarding reasons of Buddhist-Christian tensions in Myanmar, Daniel Zau Nan says that as Christianity came to Myanmar along with colonialism, during the colonial period “the majority of the schools and hospitals were run by Christian missionaries.” To put it another way, Christian missionaries and the colonial British worked together particularly in the field of education and health. As a result, he says, both Christians and people of other faiths “had to study in Christian mission schools.” He goes on saying, “based on those situations and literature review, we can see that many people in Myanmar, especially the Buddhists, assume Christianity as a foreign religion and also Christians are viewed as unfaithful to the country.” While Daniel Zau Nan is viewing the tension between Buddhists and Christians in Myanmar as arising from the cooperation of colonialism and Christian mission, Moe Moe Nyunt is of another opinion. She states that the Buddhist-Christian tension in Myanmar is “because of cultural difference” within the community of Myanmar people.

Further, Moe Moe Nyunt continues to say that “the culture of Buddhists and that of Christians used to clash in many places.” She gives an example: “It is not a problem for Christian pastors to go for fishing and slaughter animals, but for Buddhists, they assume that killing and slaughtering animals is sinful. Long ago, there was a Christian missionary in a remote area of central Myanmar. One day, he went for fishing nearby his house. When the villagers saw him, they regarded him as sinful and they didn't respect him anymore. They didn't even want to listen to his words and teachings.” This example shows that having a different relationship and attitude toward nature and animals was one of the root causes of historic tensions between Buddhists and Christians. Interestingly, this was not mentioned by the Buddhists themselves who experience the killing of animals as a repugnant behavior.

Moreover, Thang Za Tuan is of the opinion that since the time of Adoniram Judson in 1813, Christian “missionaries were always suspected as spy.” However, he says
that there was no serious conflict between Buddhists and Christians before 1961. He goes on asserting that “only when Buddhism was prescribed as the national religion of Myanmar in 1961, the Kachin Nationals went underground till today in protest” against the central government.

Saw Hlaing Bwa, in contrast, asserts that “most of the Christians in Myanmar belong to ethnic minorities and most of the Buddhists are part of the Bamar ethnic majority, historically, there are conflicts between these two groups.” He goes on to say that “when colonialism was introduced in Myanmar, missionaries who came along with the British colony helped ethnic minorities regain their identity.” However, he says that “from the Bamars’ point of view, ethnic minorities were made use by the British colony” to maintain control over the majority Bamar ethnic group. In reality, he says, “Christianity and colonialism are two different things. Colonialism is an economic factor which comes with the political interest but not with theological interest.” However, he goes on saying that since colonialism came to Myanmar along with Christianity, for the majority of the local people, colonialism and Christian missions are like two faces of the same coin. Thus, for Saw Hlaing Bwa, it is necessary “to eliminate the western image of Christianity and elaborate Burmese / Asian image of Christianity.”

b) Brief analysis of the interviews

All Christian interview partners agree that Buddhists and Christians in Myanmar have never lived in one accord. In analyzing Christian interviewees’ perceptions on Buddhist-Christian tensions in Myanmar, I will call attention to four points.

The first point of Buddhist-Christian tension in Myanmar is due to the collaboration of colonialists and Christian missionaries. Christians in Myanmar benefitted from colonial support and they were given high positions in government service during the colonial period. It seems that while Myanmar Buddhists were fighting for independence from Britain, Christians in Myanmar were enjoying the support they received from the colonial government. That is why some Buddhists even to this day regard Christians in Myanmar as unfaithful citizens of the country. Thus, the task for Christians in Myanmar today is to prove that they are faithful and loyal citizens of the country through their selfless service for the benefit of all.

The second point of Buddhist-Christian tension is due to cultural differences. I am of the opinion that cultural differences are religiously rooted. As Buddhism came from India to Myanmar, most of Myanmar Buddhists follow eastern culture, specifically Indian culture including lifestyle, clothing, and so on. Similarly, since Christianity was introduced in Myanmar through westerners, Christians in
Myanmar, in general, and Christians in ethnic minority areas in particular, adopt a western style of dressing such as wearing trousers, suit, and necktie, especially during a worship service or religious meeting. Furthermore, western culture has influenced most of the religious practices as well. Based on the above factors, one can conclude that cultural and lifestyle differences between Buddhists and Christians in Myanmar are included in the point of tensions.

The third point Christian interviewees refer to regarding Buddhist-Christian tension is the religious favoritism shown by the ruling government. For Christian interview partners, they keenly remember the fact that Buddhism was made the state religion in 1961. In other words, Christian interviewees were fully aware that the central government gave preferential treatment to certain religious communities in the country. However, Buddhism is no longer the state religion.

Another important point that came out of the interviews is the need for expanding the Myanmar image of Christianity. A westernized image of Christianity not only adds to Buddhist-Christian tension and misunderstanding, but it is simply no longer relevant to its context. To put it another way, Christians in Myanmar need a theology which reflects Myanmar history, culture and way of life because a westernized imposed theology is no longer practical, popular, and powerful in the post independent Myanmar.

3.2.2.3. Christian Point of View for Buddhist-Christian Dialogue

a). Narration of the interviews

Saw Hlaing Bwa asserts that “the wounded past history in Myanmar, definitely, is not healed yet” and therefore “people are mentally traumatized due to their past experiences.” Thus, he says that political as well as religious dialogue in Myanmar must take place in order to find “common rights, common existence, common survival, common values and common goals” for peaceful co-existence. Further, though interfaith dialogue is essentially important for him, Saw Hlaing Bwa says that “dialogue among religions is still at an introductory level.” At present, the goal of dialogue for some Christians in Myanmar, he says, is “targeting to convert” people of other faiths into Christianity. As a consequence, he asserts that “some of the Buddhist religious leaders point out the ideas of some Christian evangelists which they consider as an insult to their religion.” In view of the desperate need of Buddhist-Christian dialogue, he says, “we are having dialogue sessions with Buddhists at academic and ethical level. We set up a theme such as peace and love and we discuss different views with other religious leaders.” Judging from his past
experiences on dialogue sessions in Myanmar, he mentions that “there is no true religious dialogue” between Buddhists and Christians so far. He goes on saying that “they are merely at the state of debates where both parties argue with each other on who is right and who is wrong.” In reality, he says, “the aim of dialogue among different religions is to learn and understand each other.” Further, he mentions that “Myanmar Institute of Theology (MIT) and International Theravada Buddhist University (ITBU) are targeting to have academic level of conceptual dialogue.” Since “building up peace, reconciliation, justice and sustainable society” in the country is essential, he asserts that Buddhist-Christian dialogue is crucial because religious dialogue can help the people of Myanmar to “overcome the conflict-filled past and head towards a peaceful tomorrow.”

Further, Moe Moe Nyunt says that “spending more time to understand another’s culture and listening to the concerns is necessary before initiating dialogue” because “sometimes most of the Christians are too eager to talk” about their interest and would forget to listen to what the other party is sharing. Besides, she says, “in some occasions, certain Christians would take the side of their religion rather than their own country and their people.” That is why Myanmar Christians are seen as unfaithful to their country and viewed with suspicion.

Thang Za Tuan expresses that Buddhist-Christian dialogue is “necessary for a better mutual understanding and to discard suspicion that may exist.” In Buddhist-Christian dialogue, the most important aspect for him is “the concept of love, mutual understanding, respect and acceptance.” This is because, he says, “dialogue will surely promote better mutual understanding and respect, dispelling ill-will, prejudice and discrimination.”

According to Daniel Zau Nan, Buddhist-Christian dialogue in Myanmar is necessary. However, he says that in dialogue there must be common goals set by both Buddhists and Christians. He states, “step by step setting of common goals and principles for intervention based on the context is necessary.” He goes on to say that Buddhist-Christian dialogue builds mutual trust and mutual understanding so that people of different faiths in Myanmar can work together for “stability, peace and development.”

Saw Hlaing Bwa asserts that “dialogue should be initiated based on the existing issues / problems” because “problems / issues are not limited only to a certain group of people, particularly in this age of globalization.” He goes on to say that “everyone has to harmoniously participate in solving global problems through genuine dialogue where mutual trust and understanding are established.” Furthermore, he says that “everyone needs to collaborate with each other, broaden the scope of perspective and work out for the solution of the problems.” Thus, he
says that it is necessary “to come up with a Christian approach, Buddhist approach, Muslims approach and so on.” He also mentions that Christians were keeping themselves away from their Buddhist neighbors in the past, but now they urgently need to establish mutual relationship with their Buddhist fellows through personal encounters as this will lead them to a deepened trust and understanding. Further, Saw Hlaing Bwa is of the opinion that “hot and critical issues should be discussed when there is genuine friendship among each other.” He goes on saying that though there are different possible approaches to dialogue, there can also be different hindrances. In this regard, he says that discrimination among different races of the country is “a political factor that hampers collaboration among religions” in Myanmar. Moreover, he says that it is necessary for Buddhists and Christians to remove their doctrinal hindrances and reach out to the community to work hand in hand with people of other faiths. This is because “if Myanmar Buddhists and Christians are engaging in doctrinal issues, they will miss out on the fact that they are there to benefit others.” Further, he says that “the root cause of the clashes among different religions is due to lack of mutual trust and mutual understanding among them.” In addition, he believes that “in Buddhist-Christian dialogue in Myanmar, the main focus should be on human rights issues, ethnic issues, ecological issues and social issues such as health and education.”

In this line Moe Moe Nyunt is of the opinion that the “personal encounter is the most crucial tool in establishing mutual understanding between each other” and “respecting the others’ culture is the most important thing for a healthy dialogue.” She further mentions that both Buddhists and Christians “can work hand in hand in social welfare activities” for the benefit of their own society.

According to Daniel Zau Nan, a “personal encounter is a basic factor in dialogue.” Though having personal encounters is not easy to apply in each and every situation, he says that “some people in society are practicing it in their daily lives without realizing.” He further says: “Traditionally, the people in Myanmar, 99 out of 100, keep in mind that there is no means of establishing mutual understanding and respect among religions.” As a result, he says, interfaith dialogue is “allergic for some” particularly among ethnic minority Christians. However, presently, he is of the opinion that “collaboration between Buddhists and Christians is initiated mainly by Christians.” In the Myanmar context, he asserts that a “Social approach and need-based approach to dialogue will be effective for current situation.” Additionally, he states that “day to day social relationship is a very basic social engagement in our social life as human beings. From that level of engagement, we can escalate to a higher level such as having dialogue about individual beliefs and so on.”
Chapter 3 – Voices on Buddhist-Christian Encounter

Thang Za Tuan proposes a “win-win approach on common grounds” for Buddhist-Christian dialogue in which “friendly and warm relationship” can be established. Further, Saw Hlaing Bwa asserts that “the wounded past history in Myanmar, definitely, is not healed yet” and therefore “people are mentally traumatized due to their past experiences.” Thus, he says, “It is not enough to have only political dialogue” for peace and reconciliation in the country. He goes on to say that “interfaith dialogue” must take place to find “common rights, common existence, common survival, common values and common goals” for peaceful co-existence in Myanmar. Though Saw Hlaing Bwa asserts that interfaith dialogue is really important in Myanmar, he says that “dialogue among religions is still at an introductory level.” At present, the goal of dialogue for some Christians in Myanmar, he says, is “targeting to convert” people of other faiths into Christianity. As a consequence, “some of the Buddhist religious leaders point out the ideas of some Christian evangelists which they consider as an insult to their religion.”

b) Brief analysis of the interviews

All of the Christian interviewees perceive that Buddhist-Christian dialogue is mandatory for peace. However, they are of the notion that political as well as interfaith dialogue is necessary in order to find common rights, common values and common goals in search of peaceful co-existence. They all believe that having healthy and frequent social encounters will lead to a deeper mutual understanding and respect which will also dispel ill-will, prejudice, and discrimination. Though initiating dialogue is not an easy task, many in the society are already in dialogue at the societal level unknowingly. They learn about each other through their behavior and life style exhibited in daily life.

Interestingly, in line with Buddhist interview partners, three Christian interviewees also believe that in Buddhist-Christian dialogue, the personal encounter is the most crucial aspect for establishing mutual understanding and trust between Buddhists and Christians. Two Christian interview partners have experienced personal encounters with Buddhists on a personal level and two of them have taken part in interfaith dialogue on religious doctrines, traditions and concepts.

Another interesting point Christian interviewees made is that Buddhist-Christian dialogue is essential for religious cooperation for the benefit of all people in the

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307 For example, some Christian evangelists preach that Jesus Christ is the only savior and God. But many people have different Gods and they worship idols. They are praying and bowing down before idols. How can those idols hear their prayers? Apart from Christian God, there is no other true God. Non-Christians are idol worshippers. As God is a jealous God, we shall not have other gods and shall not bow down before idols. Otherwise, we will surely be punished on the day of judgment.
country regardless of sex, race and religion. Starting from the level of a personal encounter, both Buddhists and Christians can work hand in hand to overcome the problems faced by society such as HIV/AIDS, ecological crises, poverty, human rights, health, and fair distribution of resources which will bring them together to peaceful co-existence.

3.2.2.4. Christian Point of View for Peaceful Co-existence

a) Narration of the interviews

As already stated in Chapter one, there has been no peace in Myanmar, particularly between the central government and the ethnic armed groups, as well as among people of different faiths. In this regard, Saw Hlaing Bwa mentions that due to "power struggle in Myanmar ... there is conflict." He goes on to say that “in order to overcome conflict and civil war in Myanmar, political dialogue as well as religious dialogue is essential.” Moreover, since Myanmar is religiously and ethnically plural, he proposes that “a federal system of governance” is of great importance for peaceful co-existence. “Without accepting our diversity, federal system of governance cannot be established and at the same time people cannot live side by side with peace and harmony in the country.” Further, for peaceful co-existence, he says, forgiveness and reconciliation among the Myanmar people is necessary because “the wounded past history of Myanmar is not healed yet.” At the same time, he mentions that “without reconciliation, it is not possible to kick off federal system; it will rather break the county into pieces.” Thus, in this case, he says, “both parties (ethnic majority which is Bamar and the ethnic minorities, such as Kachin, Kaya, Karen, Chin, Mon, Chan and Rakhine) need to make certain conceptual changes.” Additionally, he mentions the need of nurturing “the concept of equity among different ethnic groups.” Thus, for peaceful co-existence in Myanmar, he believes that finding solutions by means of political as well as religious approaches are necessary.

Daniel Zau Nan urges the religious parties not to “underestimate religion and practices of others.” This is a significant step for peaceful co-existence. In this sense he says that “we should not say, my religion is good, your religion is idol and it is bad.” He concretizes his opinion by addressing the evangelical groups in the country: “Insulting Buddhist’s beliefs and practices” must be avoided particularly in doing evangelical work. Further, he stresses that “we have to avoid saying such thing as, if you do not believe in Jesus Christ, you must go to hell. If you want to get eternal life, you have to convert to Christianity.” In short, for
Daniel Zau Nan, insulting and underestimating others’ belief and practices are the
obstacles for peaceful co-existence.

Moe Moe Nyunt reflects in her statement that “Christians are considered as second
class citizens” in Myanmar due to government policy. She further mentions that
“even though Christians want to take part in defense activities of the country, they
don’t have a chance to do so because they are seen as unfaithful” and they are not
trusted as good citizens. She gives an example, stating that the Myanmar
government has a policy not to give minister position to Christians. In turn,
Christians also are not keen to do their part since they are not given a chance.”
Further, she says that there is a need for contextualizing Christianity in Myanmar
in order to abolish the social stigma of Myanmar Christians as unfaithful and as
betrayers of the country. In this regard, she asserts, “the need of contextualization
is not only in songs and music but also in many practices such as sitting on the
floor, quiet meditation time, etc.” It seems that she is quite aware of the need of
applying contextual theology so that others can better understand what Christians
in Myanmar are doing. In addition, she mentions that “love and humbleness is the
core for everything.” According to Moe Moe Nyunt, “respecting and recognizing
one another is the key for peaceful co-existence in Myanmar.” With this, she shows
a very different evaluation of the situation and the needed reactions to it. On the
one hand, getting more contextualized is a request for the Christian tradition, but
also tolerance and respect is required from both sides - Buddhists as well as
Christians - to build a peaceful co-existence.

Thang Za Tuan is of the opinion that developing positive thinking and a
wholesome vision is the starting point for Christians to be accepted as faithful
citizens. For Christians, this would mean, according to Thang Zu Tuan, submitting
to the government authorities and trying to be effective and useful in nation
building. From a more doctrinal point of view, he says “By trying to be a good
Buddhist and a good Christian in our respective religion, following the ‘Golden
Rule,’ which is in the Bible and in the Buddhist beatitudes as well” is also a way for
peaceful co-existence in the country. He goes on to say that practicing the
“sermon on the mount” for Christians and “the eightfold path” and “the five

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308 “The Beatitudes” also known as Sermon on the Mount states: “Blessed are the poor in
spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will
be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those
who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful,
for they will receive mercy. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children
of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the
kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter
all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward
“Five Precepts” in the Dhammapada for Buddhists are pathways for peaceful co-existence among Buddhists and Christians.

b) Brief analysis of the interviews

The perspective of Christian interviewees on peaceful co-existence in Myanmar can be summarized in four points. The first point stresses the possibility of reconciliation within the people of Myanmar. As the wounds of the past are not yet healed, one of the interview partners is of the opinion that finding reconciliation among different ethnic and religious groups by ways and means of religion as well as political dialogue is of great importance for peaceful co-existence. The question remains, how can religious efforts contribute to mutual acknowledgement, a process of forgiveness, reconciliation and healing of memories? I will come to this important question in my later considerations. But in the interviews the position was stated: Where there is no forgiveness, there can be no reconciliation. Where there is no reconciliation, there can be no peace among the people of Myanmar.

The second more political point concerns the political system in Myanmar and the impact of it on a peaceful situation. It is important to accept democracy since Myanmar is a religiously and ethnically plural society leading to federal system of governance. One of the interviewees perceives that until and unless the government of Myanmar practice federal system of governance there can be no peaceful co-existence as some of ethnic minorities are fighting for federal system of governance in which they can practice their rights in their territories.

The third point one of the interview partners referred to is developing positive attitudes toward others, trying to be a useful person in nation building and trying to be a good Buddhist as well as a good Christian, which will play a pivotal role for peaceful co-existence in Myanmar.

Interestingly, one of the interview partners mentions the need of “submitting to the government authorities.” This idea probably comes from reading Romans 13:1-7. However, it is necessary to re-interpret the text as it is an appropriate text particularly for the present situation of Myanmar. Similar to his statement, many Christians in Myanmar admit that they are supposed to obey the authorities and

is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” Matthew 5:3-11.

Five Precepts in Buddhism called Panca Sila: to refrain from destroying living creatures, to refrain from taking that which is not given, to refrain from sexual misconduct, to refrain from incorrect speech, to refrain from intoxicants which lead to carelessness. See http://rsdforum.proboards.com/thread/2113 (Access on August 29, 2014).
submit to them as God ordains government authorities. The question is: To what extent Christians should submit to the authorities in a state where there are human rights violations, socio-economic exploitations and discriminations on the basis of racial, social, cultural and religious background?

Finally, one of the interviewees opines that for peaceful co-existence in the country it is necessary not to underestimate the religion and practices of others as well as not to insult other's belief and practices. In short, one can summarize that respecting and valuing other's religion and practices, cultivating loving-kindness and showing compassion toward others is the key for mutual understanding and trust leading to peaceful co-existence.

3.3. FINDINGS

Most of the Christian interviewees appreciated Buddhist teachings on how to love and show compassion to others. However, it has also come to a realization that Buddhism emphasizes on cause and effect theories and does not acknowledge a creator which is different from Christian understanding. It is also reminded that a value judgment on other religions without a thorough knowledge will continue to distort peace. Interviewees from the Buddhist community were skeptical in their attitude toward Christians. It seems that they retain their authentic opinion. In Myanmar this has a special term called “anade” which literally means “hurting or to hurt” others. In other words, someone who feels “anade” is afraid of being misunderstood and does not want to hurt others by saying what he or she has in mind. This can be one of the hindrances to authentic Buddhist-Christian dialogue in Myanmar.

Even though there were conflicts between Buddhists and Christians in the past, initially the aggression came mostly from Christian side analogue with colonialists dominating over the Buddhists. But, on the other side, violent activities also took place and misunderstanding escalated when Buddhism was declared as the state religion of Myanmar in 1961. Thus, it is found that in Myanmar, there are some people who make use of their religion for their own self interest and political power. Though Buddhism and Christianity are non-violent in nature, some Buddhists and Christians put violent actions into practice in order to get power and authority.310 Thus, it is found that the gap existed in past history of Myanmar.

310 As already stated above, though members of KNU and DKBA belong to Kayin ethnic community, they were fighting against each other for their own political power and authority particularly in the Kayin State of Myanmar.
is not healed yet. As a result, there is no peaceful co-existence in the nations. In order to live side by side peacefully in Myanmar, forgiveness and reconciliation is indispensable. Moreover, federal system of governance is of great significance for lasting peace in the country. However, without reconciliation, if federal system of governance is formed, there would be splits among the people and Myanmar may be divided into pieces. Until and unless Myanmar practices a federal system, there will be no peace and harmony in the country because Myanmar is a plural society where there are different people, cultures, languages and religions. Therefore, the unity that Myanmar need is not uniformity, but unity in diversity. Through political as well as religious dialogue, the Myanmar people can overcome conflict-filled past and head towards a peaceful tomorrow.

All interviewees have perceived that dialogue can be an ideal means to restore peace in the country as well as in all the spheres of life. An environment should be created where the concerns of both parties are taken seriously and a space where each party listens to others’ aspirations attentively. Conflict-filled past histories can be rectified through reconciliation. The primarily concern for dialogue should be for mutual enrichment or fecundation rather than victory over the other religion. In dialogue, one must avoid the motive to convert others but rather uphold mutual trust, mutual understanding and respect by denying suspicion. In order to achieve a lasting co-operation, there should be a willingness to accept each other's weaknesses and a heart to learn from one another. The primary objective of dialogue is to rectify the mistakes done by both parties in the past and also to reconcile by healing the conflict-filled past histories. It is also pointed out clearly that dialogue can enrich each other’s understanding on the concepts like, love, sin / ignorance and salvation. Three out of four Christian interviewees have stated that dialogue can be initiated not only on the basis of religion but it should incorporate political, economic and several social concerns. It must take place not only at the elite religious, political or educational level but also at the stages of daily lives of ordinary people.

Moreover, it is unveiled that there is mistrust and suspicion amidst the Buddhist and Christian community in Myanmar. Thus, it is greatly important that both Myanmar Buddhists and Christians build up mutual trust which has been missing among them due to political reasons throughout history. On top of that, it is observed that Buddhist-Christian Dialogue in Myanmar is badly needed in order to change people's mindset on Christianity as an extension of colonialism. Though Buddhist-Christian dialogue is crucial for mutual trust, some Buddhists regarded interfaith dialogue as another force of Christian mission.

Though many people in Myanmar assumed Christianity as a new form of colonization, it is observed that through selfless service for all people in Myanmar,
Myanmar Christians can cover up the bad image of colonial Christianity. In this way, people can distinguish between Christian mission and colonialism. Moreover, Christian mission for social service particularly in the field of education and health for all those who are in need are appreciated. In doing mission, insulting other religions and forced conversion method of mission must be avoided. Otherwise, it will bring conflicts and violence in society. Further, it is also found that interfaith dialogue is not only necessary in the country but also imperative to build up a peaceful society. It is found that though Myanmar is a multi-cultural, multi-religious and multi-ethnic country, unity is possible, if love (metta), compassion (karuna), forgiveness (khama), and tolerance (khanti) exist in the community as Buddha taught. Further, it is revealed that both Myanmar Buddhists and Christians are actively participating in the missionary enterprise to help people change their attitude and behavior in order to have a better life. The idea is not to change from one religion to another as mission is not to convert people but to promote and to empower people for getting a better life. However, there are some Buddhists who try to convert ethnic minority Christians who have embraced Christianity into Buddhism, while there are some Christians who do mission in order to convert Buddhists into Christianity. In this case, it is necessary for both to change their mission attitudes for creating a peaceful community.

Further, in Buddhist-Christian dialogue it is found that personal encounter approach is essential as this approach will promote mutual understanding and will dispel ill-will, prejudice and discrimination. Thus, it is an ideal to initiate dialogue at first on personal or friendship level as a good personal relationship is the beginning for doctrinal dialogue. If love and compassion is taken as a basis in dialogue, it will lead people to a better understanding even in difficult doctrinal issues and limitations. Openness to accept each other's limitations, overcoming self-pride and respecting others' culture, is needed in such a dialogue. A commitment to delve into the true teaching of each religion which principally teaches love, compassion and humility, can overcome hindrances in Buddhist-Christian relations in Myanmar. Moreover, an authentic Buddhist-Christian dialogue can take place only when there is mutual trust, mutual respect and mutual recognition among the dialogue partners. Besides, a peaceful co-existence takes place when people know their respective religious teachings properly such

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311 Most of Myanmar Christians are enthusiastic in mission work. Their understanding of Christian mission is to convert people of other faiths into Christianity. Particularly, Christians in Myanmar who belong to Pentecostal Churches are actively involved in converting people of other faiths into Christianity for they say that preaching the Gospel to all nations and making all people disciples of Jesus Christ is the last command of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior and this last command must be our first concern.
as Sermon on the Mount for Christians and the Eightfold Path and the Five Precepts in the *Dhammapada* for Buddhists.

### 3.4. CONCLUSION

Perceptions drawn from the interviewees clearly indicate that for the starting point of Buddhist-Christian dialogue in Myanmar, one has to seriously consider on human rights, peace, social problems such as poverty, healthcare, education, overcoming ecological crisis and its impact on human society such as famine, diseases, violence, ethnic discrimination and so on. As human and ecological sufferings of Myanmar is too huge to solve for only one religious group or one ethnic group, joint actions of people of different faiths in the country is desperately needed. On the background of these interviews, I will come to a systematic approach to Buddhist-Christian dialogue in Myanmar for religious cooperation in searching for the liberation of human beings and their environment from sufferings.
4.1. INTRODUCTION

In approaching interfaith dialogue theoretically, the subject can be divided into three sections. The first section will address dialogue in the Catholic tradition. The focus is on the Vatican II approach to interfaith dialogue based on the text of Nostra Aetate. Another interesting document is the declaration of the Assembly of the Secretariat for Non-Christians held in 1984 reflecting on mission and dialogue as well as Catholic models of dialogue.

Further, interfaith dialogue in the World Council of Churches (WCC) is explored in the second section wherein attitudes of the WCC to other religions will be presented. The 1977 document on “Dialogue in Community” and the text of the “Baar Statement” published in 1990 on interfaith dialogue are two main statements of the ecumenical movement on this issue. Another voice on how the WCC approaches religious plurality was documented in 2003. Finally, the reflection of interfaith dialogue in the 10th General Assembly of the WCC in Busan 2013 will be addressed.

Following the reflection on the position of the Catholic church and the WCC’s approach to interfaith dialogue, I will present three selected scholars, Paul F. Knitter, Leonard Swidler and Raimundo Panikkar and their theoretical approaches to interfaith dialogue. These three were chosen because their contributions are relevant for dialogue between Buddhists and Christians in Myanmar. In the final conclusion, I will summarize the outcome of the different voices presented in this chapter for my further research.
4.2. INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE IN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

In this chapter I would like to highlight two documents from the Roman Catholic tradition. The first document was formulated during the second Vatican Council (1962-65) and the second document is the result of the Assembly of the Secretary for Non-Christian relations, which was held in 1984.

The second Vatican Council was the most important event in Catholicism in the 20th century. It opened the church to our modern world following the logic of “aggiornamento.” The second Vatican Council dedicated one prominent reflection on interreligious dialogue in the document Nostra Aetate (In our time). These first words, “Nostra Aetate,” indicate fully the intention of the document. The fathers of the council wanted to adjust their theological understanding of the relationship between religion and modern times. As the document points out: Great modifications changed the landscape by which the Roman Catholic church was surrounded. The first article of Nostra Aetate (NA) describes these circumstances, in which “mankind is being drawn closer together, and the ties between different people are becoming stronger.”

The second Vatican council was the starting point for a series of reflections on interreligious dialogue. Pope Paul VI (pontificate from 1963 to 1978) had instituted the Secretariat for Non-Christians during the council. One of its main publications in the following decades was the “The Attitude of the Church Towards the Followers of Other Religions: Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission” from 1984. This document refers, 20 years after Nostra Aetate, to “the rapid changes in the world” as it states in its second article. The reflection in 1984 views mission and dialogue as two sides of the same theological issue. For my work, in relation to dialogue this document is quite relevant.

312 NA1: “… genus humanum … unitur et necessitudines inter varios populos augentur.” (Latin version here and further quoted from: Heinrich Denzinger, Kompendium der Glaubensbekennenisse und kirchlichen Lehrentscheidungen, Freiburg im Breisgau et aliter 1999).

Chapter 4 – Theoretical Approach to Buddhist-Christian Dialogue

4.2.1. NOSTRA AETATE

Vatican II, with its focus on opening up the church, was automatically confronted by questions of dialogue, both dialogue with other churches and also with other religions. The entry point for the interreligious dialogue was the theological question surrounding Israel. Pope John XXIII, whose pontificate lasted from 1958 to 1963, was especially interested in the Judeo-Christian dialogue. His purpose was to clarify the relation to the Jews, viewing the holocaust and the wounds provoked by Christian nations. Pope John XXIII wanted a declaration to be formulated. The presence of representatives of other nations during the Council, especially the Arabic observers, contested the exclusivity of a Jewish-Christian dialogue. This influenced the attitude and decision of the council which is the context in which Nostra Aetate is to be seen.

Nostra Aetate is one of the most referenced texts of the council. It played a great role in deepening the theological questions that the council addressed. Though the text is very short – it is just composed in five brief divisions – the fundamentals for further interreligious dialogue is covered.

The first paragraph of Nostra Aetate points out the necessity for interreligious awareness in a globalized world and also the necessity of the church to promote unity and love among people. Theologically it emphasizes that humanity comes from one origin (and we read here a strong emphasis on a theology of creation), and that humanity has a common destiny (which represents the eschatological perspective). The various questions that conclude the first passage of Nostra Aetate show that humankind is facing many matters and that these are to be resolved together.

The second paragraph describes the understanding of truth in Catholic theology. Even though the main argument comes from John 14:6 (Christ is the way, the truth, and the life), the authors of the text can find “a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men.” They underline the very closeness to other monotheistic religions saying that some came “to the recognition of a Supreme Being.” About Buddhism Nostra Aetate states, that “in its various forms, (Buddhism) realizes the radical insufficiency of this changeable world; it teaches a way by which men, in a devout and confident spirit, may be able either to acquire the state of perfect liberation, or attain, by their own efforts or through higher help, supreme

\[314\] NA 2: “...radium illius Veritatis, quae illuminat omnes homines...”

\[315\] NA 2: “Summi Numinis.”
They conclude with the call for “dialogue and collaboration.” Christian mission is here understood as a movement to “recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral” that are within other religions.

The third passage deals exclusively with relation to Muslims. *Nostra Aetate* wants to initiate reconciliation so that Muslims and Christians can better know and understand each other, including the united fight for justice, peace and freedom.

In the fourth and longest part, *Nostra Aetate* comes to the topic that was initially the main preoccupation of the fathers of the council: the Jewish-Christian dialogue and ever-lasting connectedness.

The closing idea comes back to the foundation of any relationship between religions in the fact that every person is made in the image of God. And they come to the conclusion that “to the mind of Christ, any discrimination against men or harassment of them because of their race, color, condition of life, or religion” is foreign.

The fathers of the council proclaimed a differentiated picture of interreligious enterprises of the church. The most urgent and obvious need is to find a continuity with the people of Israel, who suffered from Christian aggression and exclusiveness, and who are the chosen people (with reference to Romans 9).

Another special relationship connects Christianity and Islam: Muslims know Jesus and Mary and they have values that can be appreciated.

The fathers of the council see in Buddhism a way “to overcome the restlessness of people’s hearts by outlining a program of life covering doctrine, moral precepts and sacred rites.” *Nostra Aetate* concedes that “true and holy” elements and “a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines” are present in Buddhism and Hinduism. In conclusion, the Council proclaims that

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316 NA 2: “In Buddhismo secundum varias eius formas radicalis insufficientia mundi huius mutabilis agnoscitur et via docetur qua homines, animo devote et confidente, sive statum perfectae liberationis acquirere, sive, vel propriis conatibus vel superiore auxilio innixi, ad summam illuminationem pertingere valeant.”

317 NA 2: “per colloquia et collaborationem.”

318 NA 2: “illa bona spiritualia et moralia ... agnoscant, servent et promoteant.”

319 NA 5: “Ecclesia igitur quamvis hominum discriminationem aut vexationem stirpis vel coloris, condicionis vel religionis causa factam tamquam a Christi mente alienam reprobat.”

320 NA2: “…inquietudini cordis hominum variis modis occurrere nituntur proponendo vias, doctrinas scilicet ac praecpta vitae, necnon ritus sacros.”
there is “a ray of that truth which enlightens all men and women” in these religions.

Of course this appreciation of Buddhism through the Catholic voice can only see part of the truth and salvation in Buddhism and mission work is still necessary to bring Buddhists to a full understanding of God. But this text overrides all former attempts to devalue and demonize Buddhism and Hinduism. It is an invitation to dialogue and consider deeply the tradition of the other. It is a call for deep understanding of a foreign religion and a warning against any kind of disregard and contemptuousness.

For my approach to Buddhist-Christian dialogue in Myanmar, this fundamental text of the Catholic tradition is a milestone and a change of paradigm in how to view the other. I think that it is worth mentioning this great step of the Catholic Church at the beginning of my systematic reflection on dialogue, because Nostra Aetate gave answers and formulated a deep appreciation for other religions that many evangelical churches, even to this day, have not come to.

4.2.2. THE ATTITUDE OF THE CHURCH TOWARD PEOPLE OF OTHER RELIGIONS: REFLECTIONS AND ORIENTATIONS ON DIALOGUE AND MISSION (1984)

After 20 years of Vatican II, the Secretariat for Non-Christians of the Catholic Church was renamed in 1984 to the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID), stressing that interreligious dialogue as well as proclaiming Christ who is the way, the truth and the life, is the duty of the Church. At the plenary assembly of 1984, the Secretariat evaluated “the Church's attitudes toward other believers, and especially on the relationship which exists between dialogue and mission.” Further, the Secretariat stated that though “the evangelizing mission of the Church is single,” it is a “complex and articulated reality,” indicating that the primary elements of evangelizing are “presence and witness; commitment to social development and human liberation; liturgical life, prayer and contemplation;


interreligious dialogue; and finally, proclamation and catechesis.” Moreover, the Secretariat reflected the connection between mission and dialogue which are “both oriented towards the communication of salvific truth.”

While dialogue is an activity of the Church, mission is also the other activity. Both are essential for the identity of the Church, but they must be separated. The Catholic Church made this very clear even up to recent documents like Gaudium Evangelii by Pope Francis. Since Vatican II, the Catholic Church has not only been engaging in dialogue with the WCC for promoting Christian unity and for enhancing collaboration particularly on “issues of common interest,” but it has also been emphasizing the importance of dialogue for love and peace with people of other faiths. As mission is about empowering people for a better life, rather than trying to convert someone to another religion, active participation in interfaith dialogue is of great importance as dialogue does not devalue mission.

On May 10, 1984, the Secretariat for Non-Christians of the Catholic Church outlined four models of dialogue: dialogue of life, dialogue of action, dialogue of theological exchange, and dialogue of religious experience. As these models of dialogue include every sphere of life, they will be relevant to Buddhist-Christian dialogue in Myanmar where religio-cultural, as well as socio-political, problems need special attention. Thus, these four models of dialogue are explored in the research.

The dialogue of life is a dialogue in which people can share their joys, sorrows, dreams, visions as well as their daily problems, difficulties and hardships. Moreover, dialogue of life takes place where people try to live together with others in an open and friendly spirit. With regard to this model of dialogue, Pope John Paul II says: “the dialogue between ordinary believers, a harmonious and constructive sharing in the situation of daily contacts. This is truly a basic form of dialogue, and one which lays the foundation for other more specialized

324 Ibid.
encounter.” As this so-called dialogue of life focuses on respecting each other, people of different faiths witness to one another in their daily lives which can portray their spiritual and human values. Moreover, as people of different faiths live according to their respective human and spiritual values in order to build a better society, dialogue of life is of great significance in a society for knowing, understanding, respecting and recognizing each other as neighbors, co-pilgrims and fellow citizens. The dialogue of life takes openness, friendliness and humbleness into consideration for harmony in community.

The *dialogue of action* is described in the text as a dialogue where Christians and people of other faiths cooperate with each other for “the development and liberation of people.” As the dialogue of action emphasizes the cooperation of people of different faiths, the goal of dialogue is for the liberation of humans from social, economic and political oppression. Moreover, the common values and goals of religions, justice, peace and the integrity of creation, are taken seriously into consideration when people of different faiths confront the problems of the world together. In the dialogue of action, the focus is on “the experience of pain, the reality of injustice and oppression.” Therefore, dialogue of action is essential for all in order to be liberated from social and ecological sufferings.

The *dialogue of theological exchange* is a dialogue in which specialists seek to appreciate one another's doctrines, beliefs, concepts and spiritual values as it seeks to deepen understanding among each other. In this dialogue, specialists of different faiths meet each other and exchange their views from the point of their

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331 Edmund Chia, *Towards a Theology of Dialogue, Schillebeeckx's Method as Bridge between Vatican's Dominus Iesus and Asia’s FABC Theology* (Bangkok: Edmund Chia, 2003), 252,


own theological perspectives. Since a common appreciation of each other's views can be reached in this dialogue, prejudice and misconceptions toward one another can also happen. This kind of dialogue is found especially among those who are theologically trained. Thus, Edmund Chia, a Malaysian Catholic theologian, says that since this type of dialogue happens mostly in academic settings, it is “the task of those who have specific knowledge of theology and especially comparative theology” because it “addresses all areas of religion.”

The **dialogue of religious experience** is where believers meet and share their religious traditions and their spiritual life, particularly through prayer and contemplation in a search for God or Absolute. In this dialogue, each dialogue partner shares his or her religious experience. This kind of dialogue takes place particularly when believers pray or worship together even though they are people of different faiths. For many Christians, dialogue of religious experience is a controversial issue as they may question “whether it is possible to participate in the spiritual life of their neighbors without compromising their own faith.”

Further, when there is deeper spiritual connection among dialogue partners, dialogue of religious experience “becomes the main source for the individual’s commitment to social change, peace work, and taking the risks to confront one’s own evil.” Further, though it is possible to participate in common worship and prayer, “saying a common prayer is out of the question.” And yet, being together to pray for peace is necessary as all human beings need peace for survival.

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341 Ibid.
4.2.3. EVALUATION

Having studied dialogue in the Catholic tradition after Vatican II, I outline five important observations. The first refers to the text of *Nostra Aetate* (NA) which mentions that the task of the Church is not to convert people of other faiths into Christianity but to promote unity and love among all human beings (NA 1). This text shows us that for authentic dialogue to take place, it is crucial to avoid the concept of converting people of other faiths into one’s own beliefs and traditions while doing interfaith dialogue.

The second important point the text of NA refers to is the “truth” which “enlightens all men” (NA 2). It seems that the text recognizes the presence of truth in other world religions and states that the “Catholic Church rejects nothing which is true and holy in these religions.” One can summarize that the text constructs a bridge between the Catholic Church and people of other faiths in unity and love. One of the remarkable attitudes of the Catholic Church from Vatican II is its openness both to non-Catholic Christians and to people of other faiths, which leads the way for constructive dialogue.

The third point is that the text of NA urges all “to forget the past and to work together” for mutual understanding (NA 3). Though one can argue that it is possible to forgive each other, to me it seems practically infeasible to forget our wounded past. Therefore, since one cannot forget his or her past, forgiveness among one another is of great importance to promote a constructive dialogue. This is because there can be no authentic dialogue without forgiveness among each other. Dialogue, without forgiveness, will lead to suspicion among the dialogue partners. Where there is suspicion, there can be no constructive dialogue which has the potential to bring people together to work for the benefit of all.

Another interesting point, which the text of NA refers to, is the brotherhood of all human beings and their equality before God since all are created in the image of God (NA 5). To put it another way, the text talks about human rights and the equality of all human beings regardless of sex, color and religion, a perspective the world needs today in order to live in peace and harmony.

Interestingly, the text categorizes four forms of dialogue which are of great importance in approaching interfaith dialogue. Of all these, I would like to particularly draw attention toward the dialogue of life and dialogue of action which focus on religious cooperation for the liberation of human beings from social, economic and political exploitation. Therefore, this type of dialogue is essential for the present context of Myanmar. However, the dialogue of theological
exchange and the dialogue of religious experience are not absent and I am aware that they are no less important.

### 4.3. DIALOGUE IN THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES (WCC)

In researching the matter of interfaith dialogue in the theological work of the WCC, the following is investigated: attitudes of WCC towards other religions from 1948 onwards, the reasons for dialogue documented in 1977, the Baar Statement on Dialogue in 1990, and the WCC’s approach to religious plurality in 2003. Further, as the term “interfaith” and “interreligious” dialogue is interchangeably used in WCC’s letters, *excursus* on this term will be explored. Subsequently, observation will be made on interfaith dialogue as a topic in the 10th General Assembly of the WCC in Busan, Republic of Korea in 2013.

#### 4.3.1. ATTITUDES OF WCC TOWARD OTHER RELIGIONS

Interreligious relationships have been taking place among Protestant churches since 1910. In 1910, the World Missionary Conference was held in Edinburgh and the conference addressed the question of how Christians understand and relate to other religious traditions and how missionary messages relate to people of other faiths.\(^{342}\) To explore the attitudes of the WCC toward people of other faiths, I will divide it into three periods: 1948 to 1961, 1961 to 1971 and 1971 to the present.

##### 4.3.1.1. The First Period – Missionary Approach (1948 to 1961)

In 1948, 147 churches, largely Protestant and predominantly from Europe and North America, came together in Amsterdam and formed the WCC.\(^{343}\) In 1948, WCC’s view of other religions was exclusive, declaring that Christians were

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responsible to preach the gospel to all people and to convert them into Christianity. They based this thought on the belief that Jesus was the only way to the Father (Jn. 14:6) and his last command (Matt. 28:18-20) was to be the first concern of Christian mission. As a result, the WCC declared this command to proclaim the gospel to the entire world in their first, second, and third assemblies, spanning the years 1948 – 1961. At the third WCC Assembly in 1961, the International Missionary Council (IMC), which turned its attention to Christian relations to other faiths at that time, was integrated into the WCC. Since nationalism arose after World War II in the newly independent countries in Asia and Africa, Paul Devanandan, an Indian theologian who was one of the pioneers in interfaith dialogue in India, in his address to this assembly “challenged the churches to take seriously the experience of the younger churches in the newly independent countries, where they had to work and struggle together with people of other different faiths particularly in nation-building.” As a result, the WCC did not only take the experience of the younger churches seriously, but also struggled with people of other faiths in nation-building particularly in the peacemaking process because “in Jesus Christ, peace is made between God and man... peace is secured between man and his neighbor so that mankind, saved from divisive self-destruction, discover the secret fellowship in true community.”

4.3.1.2. The Second Period (1961-1971)

Interfaith dialogue became a controversial issue among WCC member churches before 1971 because some church leaders thought that it would lead Christians to syncretism, meaning the mixture of different religions. After the WCC Assembly held in Uppsala in 1968, Stanley J. Samartha of India was assigned by the WCC Commission on World Mission and Evangelism to study intensively “The Word of God and the Living Faiths of Men.” As a consequence, WCC invited Hindus,

347 Ibid.
348 Ibid.
Buddhists, and Muslims to attend the first multi-faith dialogue held in Ajaltoun, Lebanon in 1970. Two months after the dialogue in Lebanon, a WCC consultation “evaluated theologically the experience of dialogue in Ajaltoun” and wrote a report to WCC Central Committee meeting in Addis Abeba in 1971. It affirmed that dialogue “is inevitable because everywhere in the world Christians are now living in pluralistic societies. It is urgent because all men are under common pressures in the search for justice, peace and a hopeful future.” Seeing the necessity of engaging in interfaith dialogue, the Central Committee created a new sub-unit on “Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideology” in Addis Abeba. Stanley J. Samartha became the first director in the unit of Interreligious Dialogue of WCC. Samartha asserts that rejecting the exclusive model and accepting the pluralistic model of approaching other faiths was of great significance because human beings live in a global community and they share “the ambiguities of history and the mystery of life.”

4.3.1.3. The Third Period (1971 and onwards)

In 1971, WCC changed its position toward people of other religions as well as its own terminology from “non-Christian religions” to “People of Living Faiths.” Though WCC realized the necessity of dialogue with people of other faiths, the very concept of interreligious encounter was not clearly confirmed until 1977. In the Fifth Assembly of WCC, which took place in Nairobi in 1975, five representatives from other faiths were invited as special guests and they took part in the discussions of the section on “Seeking Community.” In the plenary discussion on the issue of dialogue, there was a disagreement within the representatives of the Churches concerning fear of syncretism. Interestingly, most of those at the Assembly who favored interfaith dialogue were participants from

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351 Ibid.
356 Ibid.
Asia who lived in a plural society. However, those who were skeptical about dialogue were mainly from the western world because, for them, “dialogue would be a threat to Christian mission and evangelism.” After having discussed the issue of church relations and dialogue with people of other faiths, WCC published a statement under the title “Seeking Community” on the need for dialogue in the Assembly in Nairobi:

> We believe that in addition to listening to one another, we need to know what people of other faiths and no faith are saying about Jesus Christ and his followers. While we cannot agree on whether or how Christ is present in other religions, we do believe that God has not left himself without witness in any generation or any society. Nor can we exclude the possibility that God speaks to Christians from outside the Church. While we oppose any form of syncretism, we affirm the necessity for dialogue with men and women of other faiths and ideologies as a means of mutual understanding and practical cooperation.

This statement, however, was attacked by the mission constituency from Europe within the Assembly for fear of syncretism. Due to the disagreement on dialogue among churches, the Nairobi Assembly realized the urgent need to clarify not only the issues of syncretism, indigenization, and culture, but also the nature, purpose and limits of interfaith dialogue. Therefore, WCC organized a consultation on “Dialogue in Community” in Chiang Mai in 1977, saying that “dialogue is neither a betrayal of mission nor a ‘secret weapon’ of proselytism but a way in which Jesus Christ can be confessed in the world today.” As a result, WCC published a statement on interfaith dialogue under the title of “Dialogue in Community:"

> We see dialogue, therefore, as a fundamental part of our Christian service within community. In dialogue we actively respond to the command ‘to love God and your neighbor as yourself.” As an expression of our love, our

358 Antonio Barbosa da Silva, Is There A New Imbalance In Jewish-Christian Relations?, 52.
engagement in dialogue testifies to the love we have experienced in Christ. It is our joyful affirmation of life against chaos, and our participation with all who are allies of life in seeking the provisional goals of a better human community.\(^{362}\)

In addition, during the second consultation in Chiang Mai in 1979, WCC developed “Guidelines on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies” and adopted it during the WCC Central Committee meeting held in Jamaica in 1979, affirming that “to enter into dialogue requires an opening of the mind and heart to others. It is undertaking which requires risk as well as a deep sense of vocation.”\(^{363}\) Additionally, as the Chiang Mai consultation clarified the issues of syncretism, relativism and Christian mission, it enabled the Dialogue Subunit of the WCC to continue its mandate that “the Churches need to face in order to make theological sense of their life with neighbors of other religious traditions.”\(^{364}\) Further, since the WCC’s Eighth Assembly held in Harare in 1998 created a wider participation of people of other faiths, an office on interreligious relations of WCC “deal with issues such as education, health, indigenous people, international relations, and youth.” Moreover, the WCC’s office on interreligious relations and the Roman Catholic Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue has further developed their collaboration.\(^{365}\) From the formation of the Sub-unit of WCC on Interreligious Dialogue in 1971, WCC has been actively engaging in dialogue with people of other faiths until the Tenth WCC Assembly in Busan, 2013.\(^{366}\)


\(^{364}\) S. Wesley Ariarajah, 185. See also David E. Jenkins, “Nairobi and the Truly Ecumenical: Contribution to a Discussion about the Subsequent Tasks of the WCC,” in *The Ecumenical Review* 27, 3 (1976), 281.


4.3.2. WCC’S REASONS FOR DIALOGUE

The very important consultation on interfaith dialogue in Chiang Mai, Thailand in April 1977 was already mentioned. There were 85 participants from Protestant, Orthodox and Roman Catholic from 36 countries who came together. This consultation published a statement with regards to “reasons for dialogue” with four articles under the title of “Dialogue in Community.”

The first article describes the term “dialogue in community.” It says that dialogue takes place at all levels in the community in which partners are living together side by side. Moreover, the term “dialogue in community” has “two related categories.” The first category indicates that as Christians live together with people of other faiths and ideologies in actual community, they need to build up their relationship with people of other faiths in searching for mutual understanding and mutual human care, particularly in the social, political, and ecological problems of modern life. The second category describes the engagement of the WCC in dialogue with people of other faiths in a wider global community wherein “peace and justice may be more fully realized.” As dialogue in community is for “a process of mutual empowerment,” it is necessary that “partners in dialogue should be empowered to join in a common pursuit of justice, peace and constructive action for the good of all people.”

The second article expresses that mere talking, chatting, giving and receiving information is not yet considered dialogue. Instead dialogue occurs beyond our everyday relationship with others which involves a deeper encounter. Dialogue crosses the boundary of “faith, ideology and culture” despite the partners not sharing common ideology “on important central aspects of life.” Recognizing dialogue as a welcoming process, the statement shows the need for dialogue in helping Christians “not to disfigure the image” of people of other faiths and ideologies, but to build mutual trust and respect on the basis of each other’s identity. Since mutual trust and respect is important for a constructive dialogue,

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368 Ibid., 143.
369 Ibid., 144.
371 S. J. Samartha, *Faiths in the midst of faiths*, 144.
372 Ibid.
it describes that dialogue partners must build trust and confidence and refrain from proselytism.\textsuperscript{373}

The third article states that dialogue is an essential part of “Christian service within community.”\textsuperscript{374} Christians are not to be served but to serve the community as Jesus came into the world not to be served but to serve (Mk. 10:45). It also describes that Christians are supposed to show others the love of God which they have experienced through Jesus Christ in responding the command which is to love God and their neighbors as they love themselves. To love others means to serve them. Giving service to others is the lifestyle of Jesus Christ. While rejecting “any idea of ‘dialogue in community’ as a secret weapon,” the statement approves dialogue in community as a means for serving community together with people of other faiths.\textsuperscript{375}

The fourth article views dialogue as giving of witness.\textsuperscript{376} As Christians enter into dialogue with their commitment to Jesus Christ, the relationship of dialogue gives them the opportunity for authentic witness. Thus, while confessing Jesus Christ in the world today, the statement describes that Christians “come not as manipulators but as genuine fellow-pilgrims” in dialogue with people of other faiths.\textsuperscript{377} In addition, it describes that “Christians need to open themselves to the witness of others” through their faithful deeds, selfless service and non-violence.\textsuperscript{378}

\section*{4.3.3. BAAR STATEMENT}

Under the headship of WCC’s sub-unit on dialogue, a four-year study program on “My Neighbor’s Faith and Mine – Theological Discoveries through Interfaith Dialogue” was carried out in which Orthodox, Protestant and Roman Catholic traditions participated. In January 1990, after having discussed on “the significance of religious plurality, Christology, and the issues in understanding the

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\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{373} Ecumenical Considerations for Dialogue and Relations with People of Other Religions, 10.
\item \textsuperscript{374} S. J. Samartha, \textit{Faiths in the midst of faiths}, 144.
\item \textsuperscript{375} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{376} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{377} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{378} Ecumenical Considerations for Dialogue and Relations with People of Other Religions, 8.
\end{itemize}
activity of the Spirit in the world,” the members of this consultation published a statement on interfaith dialogue known as the Baar Statement.379 It states:

Interreligious dialogue is therefore a ‘two-way street’. Christians must enter into it in a spirit of openness, prepared to receive from others, while on their part; they give witness of their own faith. Authentic dialogue opens both partners to a deeper conversation to the God who speaks to each through the other... We feel called to allow the practice of interreligious dialogue to transform the way in which we do theology. We need to move toward a dialogical theology in which the praxis of dialogue together with that of human liberation will constitute a true locus theologicus, i.e. both the source of and basis for theological work.380

The Baar statement shows the need of being open-minded and preparing something to receive and to give reciprocally in dialogue with others. In short, dialogue means not only receiving something from others but also giving to them. Through a more open and deeper dialogue, people can enrich each other so that they can actively participate together in the struggle of the poor, the oppressed and the marginalized for peace, justice and equality in the society. As many are crying for liberation from human suffering, our mother earth is also groaning for ecological well-being. Therefore, by practicing an authentic dialogue together, human beings and the environment shall be liberated from their sufferings.

4.3.4. WCC’S APPROACH TO RELIGIOUS PLURALITY

In 2003, WCC revisited the text of 1979 “Guidelines on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies” and renamed this document, “Ecumenical Considerations for Dialogue and Relations with People of Other Religions.”381 The WCC’s consideration on interfaith dialogue in 2003 is divided into four sections, namely, 1) interreligious relations and dialogue today, 2) approaching religious

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379 This is because the consultation took place in Baar, near Zurich, Switzerland. This statement was accepted at the 7th WCC assembly in Canberra in February 1991.


381 In 2003, WCC renamed the 1979 Guidelines on Dialogue as “Ecumenical Considerations for Dialogue and Relations with People of Other Religions.” The occasion to come back to interreligious issues was an evaluation of 30 years of dialogue experiences.
plurality, 3) guiding principles and 4) some practical considerations. However, I will explore WCC’s approach to religious plurality as Myanmar is a religiously plural society. This approach seems to be of great significance in relating with people of other faiths in the context of Myanmar.

In the text of WCC’s approach to religious plurality, it is described that all human beings experience their “common humanity” before God, asserting that “God is the God of all nations (Ex.19:5-6).” It goes on to say that “God is the creator and sustainer of all creation.” As God created the earth, all that is in it and those who live in it belong to God. Thus, the statement describes that the intention of God is to restore all creation “to the fullness.”

It also affirms that “Christians must be aware of the ambiguities of religious expression” in relating with people of other faiths for “God is not without witness among any people or at any time.” Further, it states that Christians approach people of other faiths through interreligious dialogue and relations as their witness and commitment to their faith, not only affirming that God is “creator and sustainer of all creation,” but also holding that “the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ” is both for them and for the world because the Holy Spirit renews their lives and leads them “into all truth.” Furthermore, the statement asserts that in spite of the difficulty for many Christians to relate with people of other religious traditions, as they believe that the Spirit of God is at work in ways beyond their understanding, they try to uncover that the Spirit is present “where there is ‘love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control’ (Gal. 5:22-23).” It also says that “Christians need to open themselves to the witness of others” not only in words and in faithful works, but also “in selfless service and in commitment to love and non-violence.”

**Excursus: Interfaith and Interreligious dialogue**

The debate on interreligious dialogue sometimes appears as interfaith dialogue. It is helpful to discern here, where the term interfaith and where the term interreligious is used and what are the intentions and theological implications of

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383 Ibid.

384 Ibid.

385 Ibid., 334.
each. With regards to interreligious and interfaith dialogue, there are different perspectives and definitions. Samuel Ngun Ling, a Myanmar theologian, says that interreligious dialogue is “a reciprocal yet convincing communication between persons of different faiths” because “the term ‘inter’ comes from the Greek word ἔντερον which means “between, among, in the midst and reciprocal ... the word ‘inter-religious’ bears the meaning of what happens between persons of different religious faiths.”  Further, Aasulv Lande, a Swedish theologian, says that interreligious dialogue is “a conscious process, in which deliberate efforts toward understanding the religiously ‘other’ or ‘strange’ are implied.” Volker Küster, professor of theology at the University of Mainz, says “strictly speaking, interreligious dialogue does not take place between religions, but between the believers of different religious systems.” He, therefore, says that the term “inter-faith” is “a more adequate description of the relations in inter-religious dialogue.”

Interfaith dialogue, according to Gerard Hall, associate professor of theology at Australian Catholic University, is “always interpersonal dialogue, that is, the meeting of persons who believe, not the meeting of belief systems. Although this may appear to be splitting hairs, it is most important to emphasize that it is only the dialogue between persons, not between systems or beliefs.” He goes on to say that “interfaith” dialogue is based on “faith” but not on belief. For Hall, 

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389 Ibid.


391 Gerard Hall refers to Raimundo Panikkar’s distinction between “faiths” and “belief,” stating that “faith is integral to our humanity,” which object is not belief, but “the ever inexhaustible mystery beyond the reach of objective knowledge.” See Raimundo Panikkar, *Intrareligious Dialogue* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), 41-48). Further, Panikkar says that “There are only one faith and many beliefs. Beliefs are precisely the different expressions of faith. Faith saves and cannot be put into words. It belongs to orthopraxy not to orthodoxy. It is more on the side of myth than of logos, though it participates in the two being the work of the spirit. Beliefs are culturally bounded. They are dependent on particular cultures and yet have a constitutive claim to transcend them.” See also Raimundo Panikkar, “Interfaith Dialogue,” in *Report of the Consultation*
interfaith dialogue is developing “a world of shared meaning” and “shared action” among those who enter dialogue. In interfaith dialogue, moreover, the dialogue partners “witness to the truth of their own faith as well as being open to a new experience of truth in the encounter.” Though different scholars have different concepts of “interfaith” and “interreligious” dialogue, many being in line with Küester and Hall, the term “interfaith” seems to be more appropriate to me in this research. As the primary purpose of the research is to investigate possibilities for Buddhist-Christian dialogue that would aim toward peaceful co-existence in Myanmar. Such is a dialogue between believers – Buddhists and Christians. I, therefore, will use the term “interfaith” dialogue in this research.

4.3.5. INTERFAITH DIALOGUE AS A TOPIC IN THE 10th WCC GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Seeing that WCC has been actively engaged in dialogue with people of other faiths, notably since 1971, it goes on advocating “for peace and understanding between faiths in this religiously plural world” and exploring “together the love of God and the love of neighbors in their respective contexts.” The activity of WCC on interfaith dialogue has resulted in relations of growing trust with people of other faiths, especially in fostering justice and peace in areas of conflict. As dialogue and cooperation with people of other faiths invites Christians to reflect on their own faith, WCC realized the need to continue its work on self-understanding in the midst of other religions, as Christian self-understanding leads them in journeying together with others on the way to justice and peace. As seen in the 10th General Assembly of WCC in Busan, interfaith dialogue and cooperation became an important topic, particularly in ecumenical conversation among Muslims, Buddhists, Jews, Hindus, and Christians “in fostering peace and harmony” among them. These religious leaders poured water into one common vessel, in the so-called Madang, which is a traditional center of Korean family and community life

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on Interreligious Dialogue with Special Reference to World Peace (Kyoto: NCC Center for the Study of Japanese Religions, 1970), 47.


for discussion, celebration and fellowship, symbolizing that water is for "cleansing, justice, and peace." Moreover, pouring water together in a common vessel represented that they committed and worked together for unity which leads to world peace. Besides, since Christians live side by side with people of other faiths in a global community, interfaith dialogue and cooperation is necessary for their healing and survival because standing alone will not achieve the goal for world peace, justice and integrity of creation. In sharing the earth with people of other faiths, Christians' constructive dialogue and cooperation with other faiths is vital in establishing peace together in a global community.

4.3.6. EVALUATION

From 1948 to 1961, WCC’s approach to other world religions was exclusivist; converting people of other faiths to Christianity was the task of the Church. In short, WCC’s approach to other religions during this period was the missionary approach and interfaith dialogue was a controversial issue because some church leaders thought that dialogue would be a hindrance to Christian mission and evangelism. It seems that the majority of church leaders at that time thought that Christianity is the only true religion and the influence of the concept of the colonial Christ was still prevalent. However, after 1961 many countries achieved independence and regained their own authority and power. As a consequence, the colonial Christ was apparently no longer influential and powerful, particularly in newly independent countries with dominant non-Christian religions. It appears that WCC saw some challenges in those independent states and countries, especially in the social, political and economic issues of the modern world. Seeing the challenges in newly independent countries, WCC realized the need for interfaith dialogue with people of other faiths and adopted the ideologies targeting mutual understanding and cooperation in order that Christians could live side by side in a community with people of other faiths.

Further, WCC changed its position toward other religions, refrained from proselytizing and started engaging in dialogue with people of other faiths to build up mutual trust and respect. This is because WCC saw dialogue as a fundamental part of Christian service within community as one can respond to the command of Jesus Christ which is to love God and to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. On the other hand, it looks like WCC’s approach to people of other faiths is inclusive since the revelation of God is seen among all human beings.

Interestingly, in interfaith dialogue WCC and people of other faiths dealt with issues on education, health, peace, justice and integrity of creation for healing and
survival of human beings and our mother earth because working one religious
group or nation alone is impossible to achieve the stated goals. Issue-oriented
dialogue among religions is of urgent need, particularly in the context of Myanmar
wherein education, health, human rights, peace and justice are in bad need of
development.

In addition, as Myanmar is a religiously plural society, WCC’s approach to religious
plurality seems to be of great significance in relating with people of other faiths in
the context of Myanmar. In line with the Catholic Church, WCC accepts the truth of
common humanity before God as all human beings are created in the image of
God, meaning, all are equal before God. Accepting the common humanity, WCC
condemns discrimination based on sex, color and religion. Apart from it, WCC
declared that Christians must be aware that “God is not without witness among
any people or at any time.” One can say that the revelation of God is seen not
only in Christianity but also in people of other faiths and ideologies at any time as
well. As God is the God of all human beings, Christians in Myanmar should
recognize people of other faiths as co-pilgrims and need to witness their faith
through selfless service and non-violent action toward all sentient beings.

4.4. SELECTED SCHOLARS’ APPROACH TO
INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

Though many scholars have articulated their own theoretical approach to dialogue
and have been engaged in interfaith dialogue, I selected three scholars in this
research: Paul F. Knitter, Leonard Swidler and Raimundo Panikkar. In his approach
to interfaith dialogue, Knitter develops a liberation-centered or soteriocentric
approach and this is fundamental to my further reflection on the dialogue between
Buddhists and Christians in Myanmar. As Swidler’s approach to interfaith dialogue
is based on “joint action” of all religions for peace, justice and human rights, this
approach seems to be in line with the one I am aiming for. Further, I take the
opportunity to reflect on Panikkar’s “dialogical dialogue” in dialogue between
Buddhists and Christians for religious harmony since religious harmony is central
peace and prosperity also in Myanmar.

396 “Interreligious Dialogue,” in Ecumenical Visions for the 21st Century, A Reader for
Theological Education, ed. Melisande Lorke and Dietrich Werner (Geneva: World Council
of Churches, 2013), 333.
4.4.1. PAUL F. KNITTER

Paul F. Knitter was born in February 1939 in Chicago. Currently, he is the Paul Tillich Professor of Theology at Union Theological Seminary, New York. He joined the Divine Word Missionaries in 1958 because he wanted to convert people of other faiths to Christianity. In short, his approach to people of other faiths was exclusivist at that time. In September 1962, he arrived in Rome to continue his theological studies at the Pontifical Gregorian University. In the process of the Second Vatican Council, Pope John XXIII tried to recognize other cultures and religions, as previously noted and to this end the “Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions” was drafted. While the Council Fathers were meeting, Knitter took courses at the Gregorianum. In 1965 he met Karl Rahner who was a visiting professor at Gregorianum, whose teaching on the inclusivist approach to other religions was a challenge for him. As a result, Knitter changed his exclusivist approach to other religions and turned his interest toward the theology of religions.

Further, while working on his dissertation at the Philipps-University of Marburg, Knitter met a devout Muslim, namely, Rahim from Pakistan who majored in chemistry and was a devout Muslim who prayed five times a day. His relationship with Rahim and his engagement in actual dialogue with Hindu and Buddhist practitioners led him to write *No Other Name?* in 1985. Knitter says that the Divine Mystery we know in Jesus is greater than the reality and message of Jesus. As other religions may also have their own valid views on Mystery and truth, Knitter asserts that “truth will no longer be identified by its ability to exclude or absorb others. Rather, what is true will reveal itself mainly by its ability to relate to other expressions of truth and to grow through these relationships: truth is defined not by exclusion but by relation ... If it cannot relate, its quality of truth must be open to question.” He, thus, says that for Christians it is not necessary to say whether the normative revelation of Jesus Christ fulfills other religions or not, but to witness “how they believe this truth can make a difference.

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399 Ibid., 6.

400 Ibid., 6-8.

in the lives of all peoples, without making any judgments.” 402 Additionally, Knitter says that “when one knows that Jesus is truly savior, one does not know that he is the only savior. One's experience is limited and has not been able to take in the experiences and messages of all other so-called saviors or religious figures. But if Christians do not or cannot know that Jesus is the only savior, neither do they have to know this in order to be committed to this Jesus. The experiences of Jesus that enabled them to say ‘truly’ enables them to keep following him.” 403

In addition, in his article entitled, “Toward a Liberation Theology of Religions” published in 1987, Knitter says that when and if there is a liberation movement in order to overcome social evil, the active participation of all religions is required. 404 Moreover, he was of the opinion that liberation should take root not only in Latin America but also in Asia, whereas people experience poverty and live together as a community of different faiths. 405 He continued saying that a “religion that does not address, as a primary concern, the poverty and oppression that infest our world is not authentic religion.” 406 In other words, interfaith dialogue is of great importance for a liberation movement, for this movement ought to eradicate suffering and oppression. In dialogue between religions, he says that the focus should be based on the poor, the oppressed and the marginalized. 407 In addition, though “common ground” between religions is said to be of great help for interfaith dialogue, Knitter opines that “common context” is more important for interfaith dialogue for he says that “there is nothing that can be truly declared ‘common’ to all religions.” 408 409 As there is no common ground to all religions, Knitter says, “a good neighbor policy” is of great importance because “religions are to be good neighbors to each other.”

In addition, in his article “Toward a Liberation Theology of Religions,” Knitter goes on to say that without a preferential option for the poor, the oppressed and the marginalized, “the truth that we may know is, at best, incomplete, deficient, and

402 Ibid., 205.
403 Paul F. Knitter, Jesus and the Other Names, 72-73.
405 Ibid.
406 Ibid., 180.
407 Ibid., 181.
409 Ibid., 183.
dangerous.” Thus, Knitter says that all religions must act together with and for the oppressed; praying and meditating together only is not enough. He goes on to say that “if religious persons first spend time acting together in order to relieve eco-human suffering, they will be able more successfully to talk together about their religious experiences and beliefs.” Due to common human and ecological suffering, he goes on to say that a “soteriocentric” approach in interfaith dialogue is more appropriate than a “theocentric approach” because this approach will not only create solidarity among different faiths, but also “provide motivation and commitment for the task of interreligious conversation.”

On top of that, Knitter’s preferential approach in religious dialogue is a “globally responsible” and “correlational dialogue of religions” because this approach will seek not only social justice but also eco-human justice as well. Since dialogue alone is incomplete among religions, a responsible model of dialogue is of great importance as a concern for human and ecological suffering. When a “correlational” model of dialogue is applied, he says, it will promote genuine dialogical relationships among people of different faiths because in this model of dialogue there will be no religious hierarchy. In other words, this model of dialogue will lead toward openness among persons of different faiths. While the goal of globally responsible dialogue of religions has a concern for promoting human beings and planetary well-being, a liberative dialogue of religions calls attention to liberating from the suffering of human beings and the earth. As seeking eco-human justice and well-being is the responsibility of all religions and nations, Knitter realized the need of shifting his approach of religions from an

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411 Ibid., 187.
412 Paul F. Knitter, Introducing Theology of Religions, 139.
413 In soteriocentric approach to dialogue, Knitter says that “we begin not with conversations about doctrine or ritual, nor even with prayer or meditation; rather, we begin with some form of liberative praxis.” He further says that “liberative praxis means identifying with and learning from the struggling poor; it recognizes what has been called the “hermeneutical privilege” or the “epistemological priority” of the struggling poor…” See in Paul F. Knitter, “Interreligious Dialogue: What? Why? Who?” in Death or Dialogue? From the Age of Monologue to the Age of Dialogue, ed. Leonard Swidler, John B Cobb Jr. and others (London: SCM Press, 1990), 34.
414 Paul F. Knitter, One Earth Many Religions, 17.
415 Ibid., 79.
416 Ibid., 15-16.
417 Paul F. Knitter, One Earth, Many Religions, 35-36.
ecclesiocentric, christocentric and theocentric to a kingdom-centric or soteriocentric (or liberationcentered) approach. He asserts:

In order to serve and promote that kingdom, we want to dialogue and work with others and be open to the possibility that there are other teachers and liberators and saviors who can help us understand and work for that kingdom in ways as yet beyond our hearing or imagination.

While describing liberation centered approach on dialogue, Knitter refers to liberation from physical suffering, liberation from socio-economic oppression and liberation from ecological disaster. He goes on stating that “if the need for socio-economic, nuclear, ecological liberation is the ‘common human experience’ painfully present to all religions, if in light of this experience representatives of the different religious traditions are looking into their individual soteriologies and realizing that they have a liberating message to announce to the world, then we can indeed claim that the religions today are standing on a common ground on which they can construct a more fruitful dialogue.” Moreover, in his book, Without Buddha I Could not be a Christian, Knitter constructs a dialogue between Buddhism and Christianity on Nirvana and God. Further, he explores the role of Jesus Christ and Gautama the Buddha as teacher and savior through a dialogue.

418 Regarding soteriocentric approach in dialogue, Knitter says that this approach, “it seems, is less prone to ideological abuse, for it does not impose its own views of God or the Ultimate on other traditions... A soteriocentric approach to other faiths also seems to be more faithful to the data of comparative religions, for although the religions of the world contain a divergent variety of models for the Ultimate-theistic, metatheistic, polytheistic, and atheistic- the common thrust, however, remains soteriological, the concern of most religions being liberation rather than speculation about a hypothetical divine liberator.” See Paul F. Knitter, “Toward a Liberation Theology of Religions,” 190.

419 Ibid., 197.


421 Ibid., 30.


423 Knitter compares the role of Jesus Christ and Gautama Buddha as teacher and savior. He says that Theravadin Buddhists accept that Buddha is a teacher. Moreover, he says that though the life and message of Buddha were different from Jesus, Buddha “transforms the lives of his followers. To be transformed in a way in which one gains peace for oneself and shares it with others is to be saved.” He goes on to say that “in Jesus' preaching of the gospel, as in Buddha's announcing of the Dharma, they were not just teaching truth that engaged and filled in the mind; it was truth, that, as it passed
In his Buddhist-Christian dialogue, Knitter also focuses on Christian prayer and Buddhist meditation in which both can learn from and share with and can finally enrich each other. Since Buddhist meditation promotes prajna or wisdom and karuna or compassion, Knitter opines that Buddhism can offer Christians many different meditative methods. For example, Vipassana meditation is known as insight meditation or wisdom-filled meditation, and metta meditation, which is loving-kindness to all living beings. Being a theologian and social activist, Knitter shares the importance of the relation of meditation to action for peace. As meditation alone is not enough, he says, it must go along with action. Moreover, Knitter constructs a dialogue on Buddhist karuna and Christian agape while exploring the possibility of becoming “religious double-belonging.”

From Knitter's approach to religion and interfaith dialogue, I would like to highlight four points: 1) equality of all religions 2) common context of human beings, 3) focusing on eco-human well-being, and 4) a soteriocentric approach or liberation-centered approach to interfaith dialogue.

The first point Knitter refers to is the equality of all religions. To him, all the religions seem to have their own views of truth which “will no longer be identified by its ability to exclude or absorb others.” In this sense there is no normative revelation of God through Jesus Christ as God revealed to all human beings. Moreover, it seems that Knitter does not accept Jesus Christ as the only true savior. This means that, for him, there are many saviors and out of them Jesus is one of the true saviors. In short, it is obvious that, for Knitter, all religions are true and equal. For example, as Jesus Christ is unique for Christians, so is Krishna for Hindus and Buddha for Buddhists. Accepting this concept is to recognize the equality of all religions and to respect that one’s own religious beliefs and traditions are of great significance as they are points of contact for constructive interfaith dialogue.

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424 Ibid., 145.
425 Ibid., 149.
426 Ibid., 173.
427 Ibid., 205.
428 Ibid., 213.
The second point Knitter referred to is the “common context” of human beings though some theologians opine that the “common ground” among religions is first and foremost a great help and significance for dialogue. Knitter stressed the fact that “there is nothing that can be truly declared common to all religions.” So, he prefers to look first at “common context” for interfaith dialogue and observes that “a good neighbor policy” is essential as “religions are to be good neighbors to each other.” Since human beings have common context in which the poor, the oppressed and the marginalized co-exist side by side, for Knitter, giving preferential option for them is one of the keys to success in interfaith dialogue. It is important to draw attention to “common context,” in which the poor, the oppressed and the marginalized are suffering so much either directly or indirectly due to their political and economic exploitation by selfish and greedy people. Religious cooperation through interfaith dialogue is of great importance for this process of raising awareness.

The third interesting point of focus in interfaith dialogue which Knitter proposed is “eco-human well-being.” For Knitter, the criterion of the authenticity of a religion is that of promoting “eco-human well-being,” because according to him, “a religion that does not promote eco-human well-being is not from God.” In other words, a dialogue which does not focus on human and ecological suffering is not an authentic interfaith dialogue and such interfaith dialogue is not considered to be coming from God. One might conclude that Knitter did not separate spiritual and physical well-being of human beings. However, to him, both of the issues are equally important. Further, it appears that Knitter absolutely realizes the need for the interdependence of human beings and their environment, as it is clearly seen in his concern for eco-human well-beings in interfaith dialogue. It shows us that a person who engages in interfaith dialogue cannot ignore his/her physical or earthly life while struggling for his/her spiritual life.

Another interesting point of Knitter’s approach to interfaith dialogue is the “soteriocentric approach,” as one cannot escape from common human and

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430 Ibid., 183.

431 In soteriocentric approach to dialogue, Knitter says that “we begin not with conversations about doctrine or ritual, nor even with prayer or meditation; rather, we begin with some form of liberative praxis.” He further says that “liberative praxis means identifying with and learning from the struggling poor; it recognizes what has been called the “hermeneutical privilege” or the “epistemological priority” of the struggling poor...” See in Paul F. Knitter, “Interreligious Dialogue: What? Why? Who?” in *Death or Dialogue? From the Age of Monologue to the Age of Dialogue*, ed. Leonard Swidler, John B Cobb Jr. and others, 34.
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ecological sufferings. This is because “if religious persons first spend time acting together in order to relieve eco-human suffering, they will be able more successfully to talk together about their religious experiences and beliefs.” This statement shows us that collaboration of religions for eco-human well-being has a great impact on constructive interfaith dialogues. The more people work together for the benefit of their own community, the more they get a better chance for better relationships and friendships. These can lead to interfaith dialogue in search of mutual understanding and mutual respect for peace and harmony in their community. Further, Knitter states that a soteriocentric or liberation-centered approach to interfaith dialogue is vitally important in today’s context. This approach seems to be able to embrace all religions in searching for the liberation of human beings and their environment from sufferings.

Though Knitter interchangeably uses the term “soteriocentric” and “liberation-centered” approach to dialogue, in this research I will use the term “liberation-centered approach” to dialogue as applying this approach implies the immanent liberation, but not eschatological liberation. Since a liberation-centered approach to dialogue is based on the liberation of people from poverty, oppression and marginalization, as well as on the liberation of our mother earth from exploitation, the concern of this approach is for human and ecological well-being. I, therefore, in this research, would like to apply Knitter’s “liberation centered approach” in dialogue between Buddhists and Christians in Myanmar so that there can be more possible ways and means for all sentient beings to be liberated from their sufferings.

4.4.2. LEONARD SWIDLER

Leonard Swidler was born in 1928 in Sioux City, Iowa. His father was a Ukrainian Jew who came to USA when he was 15. His mother belonged to the Irish-American Catholic tradition. Swidler was a Professor of Interreligious Dialogue and Catholic Thought at Temple University. Further, he is the editor and cofounder of the Journal of Ecumenical Studies as well as a member of the Buddhist-Christian Theological Encounter. First of all, Swidler tries to describe dialogue in a very general way. Dialogue, for him, is a “conversation between two or more persons with differing views, the primary purpose of which is for each participant to learn

432 Paul F. Knitter, Introducing Theology of Religions, 139.

from the other so that both can change and grow.” He continued saying that by entering into dialogue, “we can learn, change and grow,” but we do not force the other party to change. As dialogue is not debate, dialogue partners must listen to each other as openly as possible, he says, because listening openly and carefully will lead dialogue partners to understand each other’s position. He goes on to say that people thought that their own religion alone was the truth historically and therefore they wanted to extend the truth they had. Simply speaking, people were ready to teach others the truth they had, but they did not get themselves ready to learn from others. As a result, dialogue became confrontation, argument, debate or convert-making in the past. However, Swidler says that dialogue today is not to teach others, but to learn from others. As Swidler has dedicated his life to interfaith dialogue, he hypothesizes rules or preconditions for dialogue known as Dialogue Decalogue:

1. The primary purpose of dialogue is to learn, that is, to change and grow in the perception and understanding of reality and then to act accordingly.

2. Interreligious, interideological dialogue must be a two-sided project—within each religious and ideological community and between religious and ideological communities.

3. Each participant must come to the dialogue with complete honesty and sincerity; each participant must assume the same complete honesty and sincerity in the other partners.

4. In interreligious, interideological dialogue we must not compare our ideals with our partner’s practice.

5. Each participant must define her- or himself; the side interpreted must be able to recognize itself in the interpretation.

6. Each participant must come to the dialogue with no hard-and-fast assumptions as to where the points of disagreement lie.

7. Dialogue can take place only between equals.

8. Dialogue can take place only on the basis of mutual trust.


435 Ibid.

9. As we enter into interreligious, interideological dialogue we must learn to be at least minimally self-critical of both ourselves and our religious or ideological tradition.

10. Each participant eventually must attempt to experience the partner’s religion or ideology "from within."\(^{437}\)

In addition, the goal of dialogue for Swidler is “for each side to learn, and change accordingly.”\(^{438}\) Moreover, he says that while in dialogue the partners first and foremost have to seek what they have in common, and at the same time what are their differences.\(^{439}\) This is because learning “the commonalities and differences” among each other will make, he says, the dialogue partners closer in their “thought, feeling and action on the basis of common features.”\(^{440}\) However, in dialogue, according to Swidler, “the most difficult points of differences should not be tackled.” Instead, commonalities which will build “mutual trust between the partners” should firstly be dealt with “for without mutual trust there will be no dialogue.” He further says that “sincerity and honesty” is of great significance for mutual trust because without sincerity and honesty among dialogue partners, “there will be no trust.”\(^{441}\)

On top of that, in order to develop mutual trust among dialogue partners, Swidler proposes three areas of dialogue, namely, cognitive, active and spiritual. Out of them, the most attractive area of dialogue, for him, is the spiritual area because he says that “all meet together on a high level of unity with the Ultimate Reality, no matter how it is described.” Furthermore, as each religion has a different way to reach God on whom all are centered, he says, “such interpretation of religion is called theocentric.” However, since a theocentric approach is impossible in dialogue with non-theists, “this would exclude not only atheistic humanists and Marxists, but also nontheistic Theravada Buddhists, who do not deny the existence of God but rather understand ultimate reality in a non-theistic, non-personal manner.”\(^{442}\) In this regard, he is of the opinion that the spiritual area of dialogue


\(^{439}\) Ibid., 63.

\(^{440}\) Ibid., 64.

\(^{441}\) Ibid., 65.

\(^{442}\) Ibid., 66.
with non-theists and theists is possible if the focus is “to speak of the search for ultimate meaning in life, for ‘salvation,’ as what all humans have in common.” Thus, in line with Paul F. Knitter, Swidler prefers a soteriocentric approach in dialogue rather than theocentric approach as the focus is based on the salvation of all human beings. Regarding the word “salvation”, he mentions that “salvation’ comes from the root ‘sao’ in Greek and ‘salus’ in Latin, meaning wholeness, health or wellbeing.

Moreover, he says that the active area of dialogue needs to take place “in the fundamental way on the underlying principles for action which motivate each tradition.” As many similarities and differences will be found in the active area of dialogue, “particular ethical matters, such as sexual ethics, social ethics, ecological ethics and medical ethics, can become the focus of interreligious dialogue” for joint action “in the concrete circumstances.” Moreover, as joint action on the concrete problems will be more effective than individual actions, cooperation of many different religions and ideologies on social action, such as, “peace, hunger, discrimination, social justice, defense of human rights” is of great importance because joint action “will break down barriers between religions and ideologies.”

He further argues that interreligious and interideological dialogue “that does not eventually lead to action will end up hypocritical and hence ineffective.”

As the cognitive area of dialogue is practically unlimited, he says that “the less difficult topics be chosen first and the more difficult later.” He goes on saying that while some groups start to discuss on some concrete matters and issues, other groups start with more fundamental matters for, he says, it is necessary for every dialogue group to creatively start with their “own inner instinct and interests.” Moreover, Swidler says that the cognitive area of dialogue “must not

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443 Ibid.
444 Ibid.
445 Ibid., 72.
446 Ibid., 67.
447 Ibid.
449 Ibid.
451 Ibid.
be isolated from the active and spiritual areas” because “interreligious and interideological dialogue need to work together to create a 'universal systematic reflection (theology) of religion-ideology'.

Upon describing a universal theology of religion-ideology, he indicates “all the insights of a faith or ideology that attempts to explain the meaning of life and how to live accordingly – whether that includes the notion of Theos or not.”

In addition, Swidler says that there must be a distinction between intra-Christian, intra-Jewish, intra-Muslim dialogue etc. and Buddhist-Christian, Hindu-Muslim, Jewish-Hindu dialogue. This is because though the goal of the former is for unity but not uniformity, he says, the goal of the latter is “to know oneself ever more profoundly, to know the other ever more authentically, to live ever more fully accordingly.”

He also says that as our dialogue partners can “serve as mirrors for us,” we can better know our religion and ideology “through interreligious, interideological dialogue.”

Learning to know our partners, he says that we realize our commonalities and differences and our true differences will be of two types: contradictory and complementary. He, therefore, says that “our true differences in the contradictory category” must not be easily and quickly placed.

He further says that as all religions and ideologies try to live accordingly, their attempt is to explain the meaning of human life. Seeing doctrines and customs which are hostile to human life are regarded as contradictory, he says, doctrines favoring “human rights” must be regarded as complementary for interreligious and interideological dialogue.

As the world we live in is come of age, he says, human beings are responsible to protect their environment from being destroyed and meanwhile, they need to promote the survival and well-being of sentient beings. He goes on stating that our central concern in dialogue must be on human rights because “without human rights... there can be no human responsibilities.”

From the point of view of Leonard Swidler with regard to interfaith dialogue, I would like to call attention to three main points. Firstly, Swidler says that though

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453 Ibid., 19.

454 Ibid., 26.

455 Ibid.

456 Ibid., 27.

457 Ibid., 28.

people do not want to learn from others, they are ready to teach what they believe in and what they hold as presumptions. In fact, he says dialogue is not to teach others but to learn from others. Since the goal of dialogue is not just to reach an agreement but to understand each other's worldviews, ideas, traditions, and doctrines, etc., first and foremost, it is necessary for the partners to learn, but not to teach. In dialogue, each partner must come to learn from each other as the primary purpose of dialogue is to learn from one another so that both can change and grow.

An important point Swidler refers to is that in initiating dialogue, one should not start from the most difficult points, but with one’s own interest and with what dialogue partners have in common. However, learning commonalities and differences of each other is of great importance. For instance, in dialogue between Buddhists and Christians in Myanmar, if one start from a doctrinal issue, such as the doctrine of God, it will raise a problem for dialogue since the concept of God as a personal being is not accepted in Theravada Buddhism. Therefore, instead of doctrinal dialogue, one should start on common issue, such as human rights, ecological crisis, etc., so that both religions can participate in a discussion leading to a healthy dialogue. Moreover, there are complementary and contradictory categories in dialogue. Focusing on human rights, for instance, is regarded as complementary, while religious doctrines and traditions which are hostile to human beings are regarded as contradictory in dialogue.

Interestingly, Swidler suggests that sexual ethics, social ethics, ecological and medical ethics are to be the focus in interreligious dialogue leading to joint action. In line with Knitter, Swidler also believes that a soteriocentric approach is more practical than a theocentric approach in dialogue as this approach is based on the salvation of all human beings, leading to eco-human well-being. Aside from that, a theocentric approach in dialogue is not possible, particularly when having dialogue with non-thesistic Theravada Buddhists. Thus, one can summarize that when doing dialogue between Christians and Theravada Buddhists in Myanmar the soteriocentric approach to dialogue is more applicable than the theocentric approach. Further, Swidler’s approach to interfaith dialogue is very much concentrated on “joint action” of people of different faiths for peace, social and ecological justice, and human rights for he thinks that “joint action” will break down barriers between people of different faiths, leading a fulfilled human life. In the context of Myanmar, I opine that soteriocentric approach is appropriate in interfaith dialogue between Buddhists and Christians. However, the question is: How can Myanmar Buddhists and Christians initiate “joint action” in the country?
4.4.3. RAIMUNDO PANIKKAR

Raimundo Panikkar was born in Barcelona (1918 - 2010). His father was an Indian Hindu and his mother a Spanish Catholic. From his childhood, he adopted, cultivated and spoke of Hindu-Catholic traditions. As a result, he spent his whole life carrying out an “in-depth investigation into the different human traditions.” As he had three doctorate degrees in philosophy, science and theology, his approach to religions was interdisciplinary. Having two traditions, Panikkar tried to find a common ground between Hinduism and Christianity for he says that “there is a living presence of Christ in Hinduism.” Moreover, he says that “Christ is not only at the end but also at the beginning. Christ is not only the ontological goal of Hinduism but also its true inspirer, and his grace is the leading, though hidden, force pushing it towards its full disclosure.” Panikkar states that “the Christian, in recognizing, believing, and loving Christ as the central symbol of Life and Ultimate Truth, is being drawn towards the selfsame Mystery that attracts all other human beings who are seeking to overcome their own present conditions.”

Therefore, dialogue is important for Panikkar as it can produce “mutual fecundation.” In dialogue with others, he says, “our most urgent duty would be not to interfere with others, not to convert them or even to borrow from them, but to deepen our own respective traditions.” Moreover, he says that “be a better Christian, a better Marxist, a better Hindu and you will find unexpected riches and also points of contact with other people’s ways.” As dialogue is to learn from others, Panikkar says that “we must eliminate any apologetics if we really want to meet a person from another religious tradition.” Though dialogue is important, Panikkar says that dialogue is to learn from the other and it does not seek “to win

462 Ibid., ix-x.
466 Ibid., 62.
over the other or to come to a total agreement or a universal religion.”\textsuperscript{467} The ideal of interreligious dialogue for him is “communication in order to bridge the gulfs of mutual ignorance and misunderstandings between the different cultures of the world, letting them speak and speak out their own insights.”\textsuperscript{468} With regards to genuine religious encounter, Panikkar says:

A religious dialogue must first of all be an authentic \textit{dialogue}, without superiority, preconceptions, hidden motives or convictions on either side... Secondly, religious dialogue must be genuinely \textit{religious}, not merely an exchange of doctrines or intellectual opinions. And so it runs the risk of modifying my ideas, my most personal horizons, the very framework of my life. Religious dialogue is not a salon entertainment.\textsuperscript{469}

In exploring Panikkar's approach to dialogue, I will focus on his “intrareligious dialogue” and “dialogical dialogue.” Panikkar says that as “interreligious dialogue is a religious imperative and a historical duty,” it is necessary to prepare properly.\textsuperscript{470} However, he goes on to say that “we often hear more talk about interreligious dialogue than actual dialogue.” Seeing such dialogue, he creates a new terminology, “\textit{intrareligious}” dialogue, which is, he says, “an inner dialogue within myself, an encounter in the depth of my personal religiousness, having met another religious experience on that very intimate level.”\textsuperscript{471} Moreover, he continued stating that “if interreligious dialogue is to be real dialogue, an intrareligious dialogue must accompany it, i.e., it must begin with my question myself and the relativity of my beliefs (which does not mean their relativism), accepting the challenge of a change, a conversion and the risk of upsetting my traditional patterns.”\textsuperscript{472} Thus, he asserts that no one can simply enter into “the arena of genuine religious dialogue without such a self-critical attitude.”\textsuperscript{473} In dialogue, he says, the meeting point is “not neutral dialectical arena that leaves both of us untouched, but a self that besides being myself is also shared by the other.”\textsuperscript{474}


\textsuperscript{468} Raimundo Panikkar, \textit{Intrareligious Dialogue}, xxvii.

\textsuperscript{469} Ibid., 50.

\textsuperscript{470} Ibid., 40.

\textsuperscript{471} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{472} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{473} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{474} Ibid., 41.
Moreover, intrareligious dialogue for Panikkar is more than information sharing. His commitment and emphasis in dialogue is for growth.\textsuperscript{475}

In addition, for Panikkar, dialogue is important because it “seeks truth by trusting the other just as dialectics pursues truth by trusting the order of things, the value of reason and weighty arguments. Dialectics is the optimism of reason; dialogue is the optimism of the heart. Dialectics believes it can approach truth by relying on the objective consistency of ideas. Dialogue believes it can advance along the way to truth by relying on the subjective consistency of the dialogical partners. Dialogue does not seek primarily to be duo-logue, a duet of two logoi, which would still be dialectical; but a dia-logos, a piercing of the logos to attain a truth that transcends it.”\textsuperscript{476} Dialectical dialogue is different from what Panikkar has termed “dialogical dialogue.” In this regard, Frank Whaling explains the difference between dialectical dialogue and dialogical dialogue:

The dialectical dialogue is a dialogue about objects which interestingly enough, the English language calls ‘subject -matter.’ The dialogical dialogue, on the other hand, is a dialogue among subjects aiming at being a dialogue about subjects. They want to dialogue not about something, but they dialogue themselves. In short, if all thinking is dialogue, not all dialogue is dialogical. The dialogical dialogue is not so much about opinions as about those who have such opinions and eventually not about you, but about me to you. To dialogue about opinions, doctrines, views, the dialectical dialogue is indispensable. In the dialogical dialogue the partner is not an object or a subject merely putting forth some objective thoughts to be discussed, but a you, a real you and not in it. It must deal with you, and not merely with your thought. And of course, vice-versa, you yourself are a source of understanding.\textsuperscript{477}

For Panikkar, “dialogical dialogue” is important because this dialogue recognizes our differences and commonalities leading to mutual understanding. He further says that dialogical dialogue “does not merely look for new sources of information, but leads to a deeper understanding of the other and of oneself. We are all learning to welcome light and criticism, even when it comes from foreign

\textsuperscript{475} http://www.adyanonline.net/pluginfile.php/1065/mod_resource/content/0/Papers_Conference/Panel_4_-Akram_Khoury.pdf (Access on May 21, 2014).


shores."\textsuperscript{478} Panikkar further says that “this type of dialogue is not only a religious endeavor for the participants, it is a genuine \textit{locus theologicus}.\textsuperscript{479} As no one can ignore the other nowadays, learning other religions is important for “the religions of others - our neighbors - become a religious question for us, for our religion.”\textsuperscript{480} In addition, he says that “any dialogue - including the religious one - depends on the cultural setting of the partners. To overlook the cultural differences that give rise to different religious beliefs is to court unavoidable misunderstandings.”\textsuperscript{481} He, therefore, stresses that “religious dialogue must be genuinely religious, not merely an exchange of doctrines or intellectual opinion... Dialogue must proceed from the depths of my religious attitude to these same depths in my partner.”\textsuperscript{482} In addition, Panikkar asserts that our dialogue must be religious or sacred events. He regarded authentic interreligious dialogue as a religious encounter in faith, hope and love and explains this as follows:\textsuperscript{483}

By \textit{faith} I mean an attitude that transcends the simple data and the dogmatic formulations of the different confessions as well; that attitude that reaches an understanding even when words and concepts differ because it pierces them, as it were, goes deep down to that realm that is the religious realm par excellence. We do not discuss systems but realities and the way in which these realities manifest themselves so that they also make sense for our partner.

By \textit{hope} I understand that attitude which, hoping against all hope, is unconscious adherences, but also over all kinds of purely profane views and into the heart of the dialogue, as if urged from above to perform a sacred duty.

By \textit{love}, finally, I mean that impulse, that force impelling us to our fellow-beings and leading us to discover in them what is lacking in us. To be sure, real love does not aim for victory in the encounter. It longs the common recognition of the truth, without blotting out the differences as muting the various melodies in the single polyphonic symphony.\textsuperscript{484}

\textsuperscript{478} Raimundo Panikkar, \textit{The Intrareligious Dialogue}, 32.
\textsuperscript{479} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{480} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{481} Ibid., 36.
\textsuperscript{482} Ibid., 50
\textsuperscript{483} Ibid., 69.
\textsuperscript{484} Ibid., 35.
On top of that, as “religion has been probably the place where the worst human passions and the most dangerous human attitudes have occurred,” Panikkar says, “religion is the locus where the highest peaks of the human experiences have been reached and where the most sublime quality of human life has been unfolded.”\(^{485}\)

As for the meaning of life and the universe which are “not just on an intellectual plane, but on an existential and vital level”, he says, “religion is, in the last instance, a dimension of human life.”\(^{486}\) Thus, harmony among religions is of great importance for human life and the universe. In this regards, Panikkar attempts to seek common ground among religions. At the same time he states that “comparative religion, on its ultimate level, is not possible, because we do not have any neutral platform outside every tradition whence comparisons may be drawn.”\(^{487}\) Though we cannot compare religions, he says, we can *imparare* religions, “that is learn from the other, opening ourselves from our own standpoint to a dialogical dialogue that does not seek to win or to convince, but to search together from our different vantage point.”\(^{488}\)

Panikkar stresses that harmony among religions is important for human life because it “implies a constitutive polarity, which cannot be superseded dialectically.” He takes music as an example for harmony, saying that “there is no harmonical accord if there is no plurality of sounds, or if those sounds coalesce in one single note. Neither many nor one, but concord, harmony.”\(^{489}\) Further, though “invisible harmony”\(^{490}\) is important for Panikkar, in this research, the emphasis will be on how to find out conditions that can lead to visible harmony among people of different faiths, particularly among Buddhist and Christians in Myanmar.

Evaluating the approach of Panikkar to dialogue, I would like to focus on four points. Firstly, the goal of interfaith dialogue for Panikkar is for mutual growth. What Panikkar wanted to stress is that having interfaith dialogue is for a Christian, “to be a better Christian,” and for a Hindu and a Buddhist to be a better Hindu and a better Buddhist as well. As dialogue is not to convert our dialogue partner to our


\(^{486}\) Ibid.

\(^{487}\) Ibid.

\(^{488}\) Ibid., 141.

\(^{489}\) Ibid., 145.

own beliefs and traditions, it is not also to get a total agreement. In line with Swidler, Panikkar says that dialogue is not to teach others, but to learn. As dialogue is to deepen our own respective beliefs and traditions, through interfaith dialogue one can construct a bridge in order to relate and fill up “the gulfs of mutual ignorance and misunderstanding” among people of different faiths so that people can mutually grow in their respective traditions.

The second important point Panikkar referred to is the need of “intrareligious dialogue” to be accompanied with interfaith dialogue as it is an inner dialogue within oneself and an encounter in the depth of one’s personal religiousness. In short, the personal religious experience of dialogue partners is of great importance for genuine interfaith dialogue, since it is necessary to question oneself or one’s belief as one cannot just go through an authentic dialogue without having a self-critical approach.

Another crucial point Panikkar proposed for dialogue is “dialogical dialogue.” He distinguishes two aspects of dialogue: dialectical and dialogical. While dialectical dialogue occurs at the level of doctrines, dialogical dialogue takes place at the level of human beings. For Panikkar, dialogical dialogue is pivotal as interfaith dialogue happens between human beings.

Interestingly, Panikkar pointed out that harmony among religions is indispensable as religion is a dimension of human life. The term harmony arises from music and it describes the process of playing or singing two or more different notes at the same time to form chords. Usually it produces sounds which are pleasing to hear, and so the term is also used in a non-musical sense to describe people or a system of working together in a pleasing way. Based on what Panikkar said, religion plays a crucial and important role in the lives of human beings. It guides people to the path of honesty, integrity, and high moral standards. But a closer look at history reveals that religion has been misused by many people for their own vested interests. Religious intolerance has created many problems in society. Millions of people have been killed in riots and many people are discriminated against every day in the name of religion. Religious harmony is brought about with the realization that the goal of all religions is the same – a search for the truth. When we realize this, then we can foster an attitude of dialogue and mutual exchange of ideologies rather than imposing our beliefs on others. We can create religious harmony by integrating closely with people of different faiths in dialogue, not interfering in the religious matters of other people and opposing any attempt to misuse religion in creating disharmony in our society. Religious harmony holds center stage for peace and prosperity of the multi-religious and multi-cultural society of Myanmar. Thus, in order to make a harmonious society possible, interfaith dialogue is necessary as religion plays a crucial and important role in the
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lives of the people of Myanmar. For this reason, “dialogical dialogue” as suggested by Panikkar seems to be meaningful for the context of Myanmar.

4.5. PROPOSED APPROACH TO BUDDHIST-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE

After having researched the different approaches to interfaith dialogue by the Catholic Church, the WCC and the three selected scholars, now I come to the application of Buddhist-Christian dialogue to the context of Myanmar. Based on my empirical studies, I find that political as well as religious dialogues between Buddhists and Christians are necessary to head towards peaceful co-existence in the country, as both practice violent action for gaining power and authority. It is ironical since both Buddhism and Christianity are the religions of non-violence. Further, the question is: How can Buddhists and Christians in Myanmar have an authentic dialogue under the present scenario of mistrust or mutual suspicion? It poses a crucial challenge since building friendships and mutual trust between Buddhists and Christians is a precondition for genuine dialogue. Again, the question is: How can friendship be initiated and mutual trust be built between Buddhists and Christians? Experiences from empirical studies, as seen in some of my interview partners proposed a “personal encounter approach” for building friendships and mutual trust, leading to Buddhist-Christian dialogue in Myanmar. Moreover, since human and ecological suffering is the common context of Myanmar, my interview partners propose that for starting Buddhist-Christian dialogue in the country, it is first and foremost necessary to seriously consider the issues of human rights, peace, social problems such as education, health, poverty and ecological crisis. This shows us that the primary concern for Buddhist-Christian dialogue in Myanmar at the moment is not doctrinal issues but social concerns and common interests for the benefit of all, regardless of race and religion. In this regard, religious cooperation or joint action of all religions in the country is urgently needed in searching for the liberation of human beings and their environment from sufferings. Thus, in approaching dialogue between Buddhists and Christians in Myanmar, I will use the “interpersonal approach, contextual approach and cooperative approach.”

Interpersonal: There is a Bamar saying: Pokku-khinhmah-taya-myin, pokku= person, khinhmah= if you have a good relation, taya= religion, myin= see. This saying can be translated as: “If you have a good relation with someone whose religion is different from you, you will see his or her religion positively.” This means that a personal relationship is more important than knowledge of the
other's religion in Myanmar. In this regard, I am of the same opinion with Samuel Ngun Ling, a Myanmar theologian, when he says “in Myanmar culture, person to person relationship is more important than knowledge of religions. One’s relation to a person plays a greater role in dialogue or conversation with that person than one’s knowledge of the other’s religious belief.” Thus, in consideration of the above fact, the term “interpersonal approach,” which Wilfred Cantwell Smith, a Canadian scholar of comparative religion has called “person-centered approach” to dialogue, can be applied in dialogue between Buddhists and Christians.

Contextual: Further, my second proposal for approaching dialogue is the “contextual approach.” In October 2002, I was studying the program of Master of Divinity at the Myanmar Institute of Theology and took a course on Buddhism. For my writing assignment, I went to Sitagu International Buddhist Academy situated in Yangon. At that time I was not aware what the appropriate attire for that place was. Myanmar Christians are culturally influenced by Westerners in terms of attire and religious practices which causes them to appear totally different from the Buddhists. Like many Christians in Myanmar, I wore trousers and shoes when I went there to do some surveys on Buddhism. Though I took off my shoes at the entrance of the Academy, like the Buddhists, I felt as if something was not right as I approached the people there. I totally felt that I was in a foreign land. All of them were in the Myanmar traditional clothing which are longyi and taih-pone for males and yin-phone blouse and longyi for females. In fact, there I felt that nobody was friendly to me. Two weeks later, I told one of my friends who grew up in a Buddhist community about my experience and asked why nobody was friendly to me at the Academy. He asked me a return question, saying that “what did you wear, when you were there?” I answered him as it was. And he said “this is the

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493 For instance, when I was in Bochum taking German Language Course in 2009, I met Moa Taw, a Bamar Buddhist and a medical doctor from Myanmar who was doing research on Humanitarian Assistance at the University of Ruhr. On June 27, I started talking with him and we shared our experiences in a foreign land. From that time onwards, he became my Buddhist dialogue partner and no matter where he is, till today our friendly relationship is going on. Another example is that I have a dialogue partner, named Sengsolin, a Laos Buddhist, doing doctoral studies specializing in Laos Buddhism at the University of Hamburg. I share my experiences, worldviews, concepts and sometimes my belief and traditions with him. At the same time, I learn from him about his worldviews, his concepts, traditions, behaviors and his life in Lao as well. We both learn and share with each other as dialogue partners. Such learning from and sharing with each other can be qualified to term “dialogical dialogue,” if I borrow the word of Panikkar.
reason why nobody talked to you. You need to know the context of the people whom you visited." Again in January 2012, I went to the same Academy to do some interviews for my empirical research. Having my past experience in mind, I dressed like a Myanmar Buddhist. I wore a white shirt along with a “longyi”\textsuperscript{494} and “saungkauh” which is a kind of sandal in Myanmar. My experiences in the Academy were totally different from my experience in 2002. As a result, I could have a good conversation with the education director of the Academy as well as with some members of staff there. Based on the above experiences, a “contextual approach” to dialogue between Buddhists and Christians in Myanmar seems to be fruitful and meaningful.

**Cooperative:** My third proposed approach to dialogue is the “cooperative approach.” As Myanmar Buddhists and Christians are living in the common context, it is impossible for them to deny their common problems such as poverty, social, economic, ecological and political crisis in the country. Since human and ecological sufferings are a common context and common cause of problems in Myanmar, the people need to be liberated from those problems. As human and ecological problems in Myanmar are too big to solve for only one group of people or organization, religious cooperation of all religions in the country is mandatory for human and ecological well beings. In this regard, the “cooperative approach” to dialogue between Buddhists and Christians in Myanmar for “cooperative action” seems to be of great significance for the well-being of human beings and their environment.

### 4.6. CONCLUSION

As the discussion of the present chapter has revealed, both the views of the Catholic Church and the WCC on interfaith dialogue is not to convert people of other faiths into Christianity but to promote love, peace and unity among people of different religions as both accept that truth, goodness and holiness are also found in other religions. Further, both of them accept that all human beings are created in the image of God and therefore equal before God. It is seen that both Catholic and Protestant churches have been engaging in dialogue with people of other faiths for unity, reconciliation, justice, peace and integration of creation. Moreover, in the context of the WCC, interfaith dialogue is regarded as Christian witness to other faiths through faithful deeds, selfless service and non-violence.

\textsuperscript{494} A *longyi* is a sheet of cloth widely worn in Myanmar and it is worn around the waist, running to the feet.
Also in the Baar Statement of the WCC, the liberation of human beings and our mother earth from their suffering is taken seriously into account. Similar to the Baar statement on human liberation, Paul F. Knitter stresses that in interfaith dialogue, the preferential option for the poor, the oppressed and marginalized must be given priority. Similar to Knitter, Swidler views that a “joint action” approach to dialogue is necessary in interfaith dialogue because he thinks that this approach is for the health and wellbeing of human beings and our mother earth. Additionally, Swidler proposes the dialogue decalogue for preconditions of interfaith dialogue and “mutual trust” between dialogue partners is necessary. Swidler stresses that human rights must be regarded as a complementary for interreligious and interideological dialogue for without human rights there can be no human responsibility. Though Panikkar did not clarify his approach on interfaith dialogue like Knitter and Swidler, he proposes “dialogical dialogue” to bridge the gulfs of mutual ignorance and misunderstanding among people of different faiths, for he accepts that dialogical dialogue recognizes the differences and commonalties of people of different faiths, which will lead to “mutual fecundation.”

Furthermore, after having proposed three approaches to interfaith dialogue in Myanmar; it is necessary to find a way in which Buddhist-Christian dialogue can take place. While there are possibilities for Buddhist-Christian dialogue in Myanmar, there are also hindrances. Thus, it is essential to initially explore the hindrances to Buddhist-Christian dialogue before delving into the possibilities of dialogue between the two. The next chapter, therefore, is dedicated to looking into the hindrances for Buddhist-Christian dialogue in Myanmar, while the following chapter will investigate the possibilities of Buddhist-Christian dialogue for peaceful co-existence in the country.
CHAPTER 5
HINDRANCES TO BUDDHIST-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE IN MYANMAR

5.1. INTRODUCTION

Genuine dialogue can have manifold results. It brings people together to a common vision and goal. It serves to overcome one’s ignorance toward another’s beliefs and practices, and it paves the way for understanding, recognition, respect and acceptance. Dialogue lays the foundation for people of warring religions to acknowledge their differences and provides an opportunity to affirm and enrich one another. It is an opportunity to grow in peace, denouncing injustice and inequality in a society. To initiate a genuine dialogue between Buddhists and Christians is necessary, and yet it is a great challenge in the context of Myanmar.

This chapter will cover some of the major hindrances to the dialogue initiatives. If someone asks me, “why are there hindrances to Buddhist-Christian dialogue in Myanmar?” My answer would be, “because there is no trust between them.” If there is no trust among those in dialogue, there is no way for genuine dialogue to take place. Subsequently, the next question is: “Why is there a lack of trust between Buddhists and Christians in the country?” In order to answer these questions, as a dialogue initiator, it is necessary to analyze and address the past misdeeds done by Buddhists and Christians in Myanmar so that the root causes of hindrances for Buddhist-Christian dialogue can be discovered. The first section is an attempt to reflect on the past history in which Christianity, as a mighty religion, was sown in the land of Myanmar with the support of colonial power. It is an attempt to unveil the misapprehension of Christianity by others which continue to hinder any meaningful dialogue. It is followed by an analysis on how the ideology of amalgamating ethno-nationalism with a particular religion, and identifying Myanmar with one religion, hinders further dialogue initiatives. The third section will investigate how the resurgence of Buddhism in Myanmar endangers the dialogue process followed by a study on the attitudes of Christians in Myanmar toward Buddhists. An examination will be made in the following section reflecting on the theories such as the plural society theory, anade theory and the bamar-ta-kyat-shan-ta-kyat political concept. In the last section insurgency initiated by
Chapter 5 – Hindrances to Buddhist-Christian Dialogue

various ethnic groups is considered as one of the causes for the widened gap between Buddhists and Christians followed by concluding observations.

5.2. THE LEGACY OF COLONIAL CHRISTIAN MISSION

As already stated in chapter two, Christianity came to Myanmar along with colonialism and it destroyed the Bamar culture and religion. This caused division between ethnic minorities and the dominant Bamar in the country during the colonial period in Myanmar. Moreover, there existed forms of discrimination based on religions particularly between Christians and Buddhists.

The three major wars were fought between the British colonial empire and the Burmese king. During the first Anglo-Burmese war, Adoniram Judson worked as an interpreter especially on the treaty of Yandapo, a treaty between the British and the Burmese king. Subsequently, the second Anglo-Burmese war broke out in 1852 and culminated with the third Anglo-Burmese war in 1885-1886. As a consequence of the third war, the British colonialists deported King Thibaw, the last Burmese king, to India in 1885.

One can presume that the triumph of colonial power in Myanmar meant the decline of Buddhism at that point in history as the British government stopped defending and promoting Buddhism. Additionally, the British rulers introduced western institutions, cultures and values which caused the partial secularization of Myanmar as “the number of English and Anglo-vernacular schools” did not concentrate on righteous behavior like the traditional education system in

495 Simon Pau Khan En, Nat Worship, 8.
496 The negative conception of the missionaries concerning local culture and religion can be seen in the work of a Portuguese adventurer, Philip de Brito, who destroyed many of the Burmese Buddhist religio-cultural elements. Instead of supporting the local people, Philip de Brito destroyed many pagodas and forced his subjects to embrace Christianity. In other words, removing and destroying the existing religio-cultural practices of the local people was the first thing the missionaries did. See F. E. Trotman, Burman, A Short Study of Its People and Religion, 97.
497 Helen G. Trager, Burma through alien eyes, Missionary views of the Burmese in the Nineteenth Century, 7.
498 Michael Fredholm, Burma, Ethnicity and Insurgency, 23-24.
499 See Donald E. Smith, Religion and Politics in Burma, 45.
500 Ibid., 39.
monastic schools did. Moreover, the British removed local chieftains and weakened the Buddhist order. As a result, there was a continual uprising of violence between the colonial police force and the local people.\textsuperscript{501} As a result, Buddhist monks increasingly joined the national political movement which caused a nationalistic fervor in Myanmar. Thus, the national political movement was largely compromised of one ethnicity rather than multiple ethnicities.\textsuperscript{502} To underline the above statement, there is a common Myanmar Buddhist saying: “to be an authentic Burman is to be a Buddhist.”\textsuperscript{503} As a consequence, there were complex interactions between the Buddhists and the non-Buddhists.\textsuperscript{504} With regard to the effect of colonialism in Myanmar, Josef Silverstein asserts:

More important was the effect of colonial rule on Buddhism, which lay at the heart of Burma’s culture. With the displacement of the king and religious council, the Buddhist religion lost the patronage of the government and the discipline of the sangha. In and around the urban areas, secular schools displaced those run by the monks, and monks thus lost one of their most important social functions. Having lost a central source of discipline and one of their principal occupations, many monks assumed a new role – that of political leaders – filling the void created by the colonial government’s displacement of the traditionally hereditary leaders.\textsuperscript{505}

During the colonial period, Christians were supported by the British as “the colonial regime allowed missionaries to establish schools and hospitals throughout the country, including the hill areas, providing hill people with much appreciated access to education and health care.”\textsuperscript{506} Further, the British protected the ethnic minorities from the domination of the Bamar. The ethnic minorities, such as Chins, Kachins and Shans, who occupied 45% of the country’s total land area, were “administered under the direct authority of the governor separately from the rest of Burma.”\textsuperscript{507} As ethnic minorities were favored, the anger and hatred

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{501} Ibid., 13.
\item \textsuperscript{502} David Brown, \textit{The State and Ethnic Politics in Southeast Asia}, 33-37.
\item \textsuperscript{503} Samuel Ngun Ling, “Ethnicity, Religion and Theology in Asia,” 6.
\item \textsuperscript{504} Ciin Sian Khai, \textit{Rediscovering Religious Human Rights in Myanmar}, 1.
\item \textsuperscript{505} Josef Silverstein, \textit{Burma: Military Rule and Politics of Stagnation}, 24.
\item \textsuperscript{506} Christina Fink, \textit{Living Silence, Burma under Military Rule}, 18.
\item \textsuperscript{507} Josef Silverstein, \textit{Burma: Military Rule and Politics of Stagnation}, 15.
\end{itemize}
of the ethnic Bamar groups toward the ethnic nationalities had increased. To this, Mikael Graver asserts that “the Christian participation is certainly an element in the explanation of many monks’ active participation in the rebellion.”

Moreover, there was division between the dominant Bamars and the ethnic Christian minorities during the colonial period particularly from 1887 to 1937. As the British took Chin, Kachin and Kayin ethnic groups for soldiers and policemen “to keep order among the Burmans,” this led to anger and hatred of Bamars toward the British and the ethnic minorities. Thus, upon gaining independence in 1948, civil war broke out between the Bamars and the minority ethnic groups “which continues in various forms and manners.” Further, while the Bamars fought together along with the Japanese during World War II, the Kayins fought for the British in Myanmar. Thus, the Bamar army, known as the Burma Independent Army (BIA), killed several Kayin Christians in the Papun and Myang Mya areas. As a result, mutual trust between the Bamar and Kayin had been destroyed and tension mounted between the two parties leading to conflicts and civil war upon independence. The civil war between the central government and the ethnic minorities, which had started upon independence from the British, has been going on until the present moment, especially in the frontier areas of the ethnic minorities. This is because there is no trust between the central government and the ethnic minorities in the country.

Since there is no trust among each other, suspicion is dominant everywhere in the country. Concerning suspicion particularly between Buddhists and Christians in Myanmar, U Pe Maung pointed out the following:

The Buddhist of Burma blames the Christian missionaries for causing as they say in Burmese, the division of blood among Burmans. A Burman is

508 Christiana Fink, Living Silence, Burma under Military Rule, 22. For instance, the ethnic Kayin troops actively participated in the suppression of rebellions against colonial rule in Lower Burma in 1886 and in the Saya San rebellion of 1930-1932. See Martin Smith, Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity, 44.

509 Mikael Gravers, Nationalism As Political Paranoia in Burma, 11.

510 Michael Fredholm, Burma: Ethnicity and Insurgency, 24.

511 Since the Kayins contacted with the fallen British Force 136, they were suspected that they would start a rebellion against the Japanese the help of British because more than 12 000 Kayins received weapons. In fear of uprising against the Japanese rule, more than 1 000 Kayins were murdered by the Japanese soldiers and the BIA. These incidents led to lack of trust among the Bamars and the ethnic nationalities particularly the Kayins. See Mikael Gravers, Nationalism as Political Paranoia in Burma, 43.

synonymous with a Buddhist, and so when a Burman turns Christian he is
looked upon with suspicion: He is pro-British, pro-American, a traitor to
Burma...

On the one hand, the majority of the Bamar nationalists were of the notion that
ethnic political developments in Myanmar are the continuation of colonial rule,
which is a threat for them. On the other hand, the ethnic Christian minority
groups in the country continue to acknowledge the contribution made by the
western missionaries through introducing education, and establishing hospitals
and churches which bettered their living standards. In other words, they are
indebted to the British and western missionaries for their education, their
organization, their outlook, and their progress. These are appreciatively
recognized. Christian mission work during the colonial period in Myanmar
impacted the lives of many, particularly those of the various ethnic groups such as
the Chin, Kachin and Kayin. Therefore, for the Buddhists, the Christian mission
involvement is hand in hand with colonization and therefore Christians in
Myanmar are suspected as pro-western, pro-colonialist and betrayers of the
country. Further, cooperation of the British and Christians in Myanmar from the
beginning of eighteenth century created a doubt which persists, that Christians in
Myanmar are agents of the colonial power. In this regard, Simon Pau Khan En
points out:

Due to the close relationship of the early missionaries with the colonialists,
some Buddhists identified Christian missionaries with colonialists and
understood Christian mission as another force of colonization. This stigma
is branded on Christianity as a legacy of the missionary era.

Even today some Buddhists in Myanmar assume that the close relationship
between colonialism and Christian mission work is responsible for the downfall of

514 Michael Fredholm. Burma: Ethnicity and Insurgency, 27.
515 San C. Po C. B. E., Burman and The Karens, 39.
516 Martin Smith, Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity, 44. Further, Martin Smith
says that Christians in Myanmar, particularly the Kayins are not ashamed and not afraid
to proclaim that the Christian missionaries from the West are their “Mother” while they
call the British government who protected them “their Father.” As Christianity has
played a prominent role in the general progress of the Kayins and other ethnic
minorities, Christianity, Education and Civilization are seen as interconnected by them.
Martin Smith, Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity, 58-60.
517 Simon Pau Khan En, Nat Worship, 9.
Buddhism and therefore consider Christians as religious invaders. Often Christianity is perceived as a political tool responsible for the expansion of western culture and colonial power. This perception continues to dominate the mindset and action of the Myanmar people and hinders a genuine Buddhist-Christian dialogue. Based on my personal experiences while researching in Myanmar, there is still suspicion between Buddhists and Christians, an unfortunate legacy of the close relationship between Colonialism and Christian mission work. This lack of trust between Buddhists and Christians makes interfaith dialogue a tough task since genuine dialogue is impossible without mutual trust among the dialogue partners.

5.3. THE EMERGENCE OF ETHNO-NATIONALISM

Another factor responsible for impeding a meaningful interfaith dialogue is the rise of ethno-nationalistic fervor as “nationalist sentiment is based on the group consciousness of ‘what we are’ and ‘what we are not’.” Speaking from a Myanmar perspective, ethno-nationalism is nationalism in which different ethnic groups in Myanmar have the concept of “what we are” and “what we are not.” Looking back to the history of Myanmar, one could say that there has been an endless political struggle among the diverse nationalities in Myanmar since the eleventh century CE.

In 1044, King Anawratha set up the Bagan dynasty and was known as the founder of the first Burmese empire. Starting with only a confederation of small villages, Anawratha conquered the neighboring territories of the Irrawaddy valley. In 1057, he captured Thaton, the Mon kingdom, and brought back the Mon king and thousands of skilled people into his captivity. The kingdom of Bagan flourished

518 In his book, *Religion and Politics in Burma*, Donald E. Smith explains concerning traditional Bamar nationalism. He goes on to say that since the eleventh century CE the Bamar “consolidated their military and political supremacy over the other ethnic groups inhabiting the area.” Further, in the traditional Bamar nationalism, Buddhism was one of the most important key figures since “the king was revered as the chief promoter of the faith and indeed as a future Buddha.” Since the eleventh century, Buddhism has become “an expression of the Burmese national identity as understood by the Burmese themselves.” Even in modern time in Myanmar, a saying, “To be a Burman is to be a Buddhist” is frequently repeated. – See Donald E. Smith, *Religion and Politics in Burma*, 81-83.

519 Josef Silverstein says that the politically endless struggle among the nationalities took place particularly among the nation of Bamar, the Shan and the Mon. – See Josef Silverstein, *Burma: Military Rule and the Politics of Stagnation*, 4.
well into the thirteenth century.\textsuperscript{520} Anawratha could bring many different tribes into a single nation.\textsuperscript{521} However, in 1287 the kingdom was totally destroyed and terminated by the Shan and the armies of Kublai Khan, the Nestorian soldiers coming from China.\textsuperscript{522} The rule of Shan extended to larger areas and the Bamar kings were forced to pay tribute to the Shan. The Shans established their kingdom even in the Lower Myanmar, in Martaban. Meanwhile, Tabinshehti of Toungoo, a Bamar dynasty, had himself consecrated as king of Bamar in 1546 and Pegu became his capital.\textsuperscript{523} In 1551, Bayinnaung, the successor of Tabinshehti, took power from the Shan and he is renowned in Myanmar history as the founder of the Second Bamar Empire.\textsuperscript{524} During the Second Bamar Empire, western merchants, adventurers and Christian missionaries came to Myanmar for business purposes as well as for propagating the gospel to the local people. In order to destroy the Second Bamar Empire, the Mon, Shan and Rakhine fought against the Bamars.\textsuperscript{525} Further, with the support of the Roman Catholic Fathers, especially by means of providing equipments for war from France, the Second Bamar Empire was destroyed by the Mons, Siamese, and Shans in 1752.\textsuperscript{526} In 1759, Alaungpaya from the Moksobo village seized power again from the Mon and the Shan, driving out the British and French armies.\textsuperscript{527} Further, Alaungpaya extended his territory to Manipur, Assam, Rakhine, the Mon kingdom of Pegu and the Siamese Kingdom of Ayutthaya. After gaining these territories, Alaungpaya established the Third Bamar

\textsuperscript{520} Michael Fredholm, \textit{Burma, Ethnicity and Insurgency}, 22.
\textsuperscript{521} Moe Moe Nyunt, “Burmese Reactions to Christianity,” 109.
\textsuperscript{522} Ibid., 113. After the fall of Bagan dynasty, the first Burmese empire fell into small States under Shan rulers. In 1300 China sent many armies to assist Kyawswa, son of Narathihapate, the then ruler of Bagan, and they controlled Pinya and Sagaing. However, since the chief interest of China was confined for trade, the Chinese control of Burma gradually disappeared. As a consequence, Pinya and Sagaing became the capitals under Shan rulers. See also Edwin Rowlands, \textit{Burma History - Notes for High School Final} (Rangoon: American Baptist Mission Press, 1937), 27.
\textsuperscript{523} Michael Fredholm, \textit{Burma, Ethnicity and Insurgency}, 22. Contrary to Michael Fredholm, Josef Silverstein says that the Second Bamar Empire began in 1486 and lasted until 1752. During the Second Bamar Empire, the Shans were completely subdued by the Bamars. See Josef Silverstein, \textit{Burma: Military Rule and the Politics of Stagnation}, 5.
\textsuperscript{524} Edwin Rowlands, \textit{Burma History - Notes for High School Final}, 27.
\textsuperscript{525} Moe Moe Nyunt, \textit{Burmese Reactions to Christianity}, 114.
\textsuperscript{526} Ibid., 116.
Empire, which lasted until the British annexed the whole of Myanmar and King Thibaw, the last Bamar King who was dethroned in 1885.528

As already mentioned in chapter two, British colonialism weakened Buddhism in Myanmar as the Bamar kings’ role, which was to be patrons of Buddhism, was no longer applicable under the colonial rule. Due to the negligence of Buddhism by the colonial rule, Bamar nationalists, through “a strong Buddhist religious background,” started a resistance movement against the British.529 As ethnic minorities enjoyed colonial rule, as previously stated, the Buddhists opposed the British rule. The formation of the Young Men’s Buddhist Association (YMBA)530 in 1906 is evidence of this opposition. As Buddhist Sangha deteriorated under British domination, the YMBA became the popular choice among Bamar students. In the early 1920s, many Buddhist monks argued that the colonial government corrupted Buddhist’s minds and therefore, for them, it seemed to be impossible to reach Nibbana, which is the ultimate goal of Buddhism. The YMBA passed a resolution in 1917 condemning marriages between Bamar women and foreigners531 and it continues to this day, considering those who marry foreigners as traitors of the Bamars as well as traitors of Buddhism.532

528 Pamaree Surakiat, “The Changing Nature of Conflict between Burma and Siam as seen from the Growth and Development of Burmese States from the 16th to the 19th Centuries,” in Asia Research Institute (March 2006), 8. After dethroning King Thibaw in Mandalay 1885, the British felt confident that the war was over. But intense resentment in Lower Myanmar over British policies led to open revolt between 1886 and 1887, while in Upper Burma dissatisfaction caused by the abolition of the monarchy created anti-colonial movements. Anti-colonialism in Burma expressed itself initially through guerilla resistance to British annexation, and even after 1890 resistance movements continued to disturb the peace. By the time guerrilla resistance was brought under control by the British, Bamar patriots began to search for new ways to express their spirit of national pride. See Angelene Naw, Aung San and the Struggle for Burmese Independence, 13.


530 Due to fear of the loss of Bamar Identity, YMBA was founded in 1906 for preserving and propagating Buddhism, for making the Bamars “aware of their heritage and to preserve their shrines from violations by non-Buddhists.” Though YMBA was at the outset for religious purpose, later it became a political organization known as General Council of Burmese Associations. See Josef Silverstein, Burma, Military Rule and the Politics of Stagnation, 24-25.

531 Michael Fredholm, Burma, Ethnicity and Insurgency, 28.

532 In Myanmar, there is the 969 movement – a movement of Buddhist nationalism, which is organized and aggressive to non-Buddhists particularly towards Muslims. See http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Asia-Pacific/2013/0520/In-Myanmar-a-movement-for-Muslim-and-Buddhist-tolerance (Access on September 14, 2013).
Further, in May 1930 at the Yangon University, Ba Thaung formed the *Dobama Asiayone*, which means “we Bamars Association,” and its membership consisted of students and young intellectuals. This association initiated several movements and distinguished themselves through their patriotic songs and speeches, as well as addressing each other as “Thakin,” meaning “lord” or “master”. In other words, it was an affirmation and encouragement that they are the real rulers of the country rather than the British. The movement initiated by Dobama was an ultranationalistic movement whose slogan was “Race, language, and religion.” As World War II broke out in Europe in September 1939, Myanmar nationalists steadily gained momentum and expected to gain independence from Britain. Thus, the Myanmar nationalist movement launched a vigorous nationwide campaign proclaiming and demanding their freedom. *Dobama Asiayone* and other political leaders joined with students, peasants, and workers organizations in demanding independence. The British retaliated by arresting nationalist leaders on charges of sedition and other political crimes. During this time, some politically radical monks claimed that it is impossible to achieve *nibbana* in a nation dominated by a Christian administration. Thus, they believed that only by participating in the anti-colonialist movement could they preserve Buddhist doctrine and practice. In this regard, Donald E. Smith stated:

> The Burmese people cannot think a nationality apart from religion that they hold, for it is Buddhism which wielded the Burmese together and the idea of nationhood owes its inception to Buddhism.

In other words the spirit of nationalism was amalgamated with a particular religion and claims that a nation can be defined only by Buddhism. For Buddhist nationalists, Buddhism becomes the only impetus for nationalism. To this, Simon Pau Khan En points out: “The spirit of nationalism leads some Buddhists to think that the Christians are betrayers of the nation simply because they denounced Buddhism which is thought to be the impetus for nationalism.” As a result, in Myanmar society there exists tension between the majority group belonging to Buddhism and the minority group representing Christians. The situation became

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533 The title ‘Thakin’ was previously used only when addressing the colonial rulers, the British.


536 Ibid., 14.

537 Donald Eugene Smith, *Religion and Politics in Burma*, 82.

more complicated as some ethnic groups initiated insurgency movements, claiming for their liberty and identity. Thus, John F. Cady, an American historian, had already observed in 1958, that as “the leaders of the rebellious Karen National Union were from the Baptist Christians and the outbreak started in three mission centers, the Burmese government tend to blame the American missionaries and dub the uprising of the Baptist rebellion.”539 Interestingly, Mikael Gravers says with regard to the difference between Nationalism of today’s Myanmar and the nationalism of the anti-colonial struggle:

The Nationalism of today’s Burma differs from the nationalism of the anti-colonial struggle, as well as from the nationalism of 1947 immediately before independence, when ethnicism began to determine the future. In the 1940s nationalism meant liberation from a foreign colonizer; since independence, nationalism has become a remedy for preserving a union as one unitary state. The present nationalism does not anticipate freedom since that has become a fearful expression of imminent division and the collapse of the union. Whereas the nationalism of 1947 was an anticipation of modernity including democracy, the nationalism of today signifies endless autocracy and corporate modernity in the SLORC (State Law and Order Restoration Council) model, while some of the ethnic movements envisage democracy and federalism.540

Moreover, Christina Fink says that “many Burman leaders saw themselves as superior to the minorities and did not want to give in to their demand.”541 She goes on saying that, thus, “most Burman politicians continued to oppose increased political autonomy for the ethnic minorities.”542 In this respect, Donald E Smith asserts:

The Burmese had a fierce of national pride which enabled them to look with contempt upon other peoples, Mons, Shans, Kachins, Karens, Indian and Chinese alike. A distinctive language, a common ethnic identity, some degree of political centralization, a shared history, a territorial base, the

540 Mikael Gravers, Nationalism as Political Paranoia in Burma, 129.
541 Christina Fink, Living Silence in Myanmar, Burma under Military Rule, 22.
542 Ibid., 23.
proximity of different and frequently hostile peoples, all contributed to the development of traditional Burmese nationalism.\textsuperscript{543}

Further, Ba Maw, a Bamar and prime minister during the Japanese occupation, states that “the Burmese as a rule show a big-race mentality in their dealings with the smaller native races; they find it hard to forget their long historical domination over those races.”\textsuperscript{544} In addition, concerning the cause of nationalism in Myanmar, Mikael Gravers comments:

Religion and violence combined as a representation of colonial subjugation. This violence in the broad sense of the word is both the destruction of life and property by force and the act of intervention using the freedom of some to deprive others of their freedom and identity. The memory of the historical experience from the colonial ‘pacification’ is crucial to an analysis of the present nationalism.\textsuperscript{545}

While the Bamar nationalists tried to bring “the past in the present in their imagined community,” the ethnic nationalities, particularly the Karen Christians, “built an image community with the white brother and his white man’s burden” which separated them from the Bamar context.\textsuperscript{546} Further, while the Bamar nationalists are trying to take control of the country from the central government, ethnic nationalities are struggling for federalism in order to regain their own freedom and autonomy.\textsuperscript{547} As a result, there is struggle among ethnic nationalities which leads to ethno-nationalism among the Myanmar people.

Since Myanmar gained Independence in 1948, the Bamar language is used as lingua franca. Furthermore, the ethnic minority groups maintain their own languages through literature and religions like Nat worship and Christianity because they don’t want to lose their cultural and ethnic identity.\textsuperscript{548} Therefore,

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{543} Donald E. Smith, \textit{Religion and Politics in Burma}, 82.
  \item \textsuperscript{544} Ba Maw, \textit{Breakthrough in Burma, Memoirs of a Revolution}, 1939-1946 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1968), 196.
  \item \textsuperscript{545} Mikael Gravers, \textit{Nationalism As Political Paranoia in Burma}, 12.
  \item \textsuperscript{546} Ibid., 79. Mikael Gravers says that the Christian Karens regarded “the British as father figures, providing law and order, whilst the motherly American missionaries helped them rediscover their lost religion and God.” See Mikael Gravers, \textit{Nationalism As Political Paranoia in Burma}, 78.
  \item \textsuperscript{547} Ibid., 129.
  \item \textsuperscript{548} Simon Pau Khan En, \textit{Nat Worship}, 368.
\end{itemize}
religion plays an ultimately important role in the Myanmar society as it is interlinked with people’s social identity. In this regard, Georg Noack, a German anthropologist, asserts:

Among the most salient aspects of identity in Myanmar are ethnicity and religion—most often Buddhist religion. Every new contact will be asked which people he belongs to and what religion he professes.549

Therefore, when it is claimed “to be an authentic Bamar is to be a Buddhist,” non-Buddhists are excluded. As a result, Buddhism became the core element of the Bamar identity550 while Christianity is regarded as the socio-political and religiocultural identity of some indigenous ethnic minorities in Myanmar. In addition, Islam and Hinduism is the identity of Indians who live generally in the cities in the country.551 Therefore, there is a complex interaction between the religion of ethnic minorities, which is mostly Christianity and the majority religion, Buddhism.552 While the government was building monasteries in the regions of ethnic minorities, “Christian Chin, Kachin and Karen villagers were often prohibited from conducting their religious ceremonies, and Christian Chin children are said to have been taken to Buddhist monasteries in Rangoon. Such acts leave little hope for forgiving and forgetting ethnic struggles of the past.”553 Regarding the gulf between Christians and Buddhists in Myanmar, Tun Aung Chain observes:

In the postcolonial order, together with the increasing emphasis on Buddhism as a mark of national identity and the alignment of Buddhism with state authority, the gulf between Christianity and Buddhism widened and the Christian Church, as a minority Church, has been thrown on the defensive, unable to devise and initiate a strategy for the closing of the gulf.554

In other words, it is getting tougher to initiate a religious dialogue as both groups strive to make their religion to be on the top. Religion here is used to achieve political gains. Since there is an integration of religious and political freedom in

553 Mikael Gravers, *Nationalism as Political Paranoia in Burma*, 110.
the ideology of nationalism it creates an unfavorable situation for initiating a meaningful dialogue between Christians and Buddhists in Myanmar.

5.4. THE RESURGENCE OF BUDDHISM

Ever since the declaration of Myanmar's independence from Great Britain there arose an immediate desire for reclaiming the sovereignty, especially in the case of the Bamar educated leaders. The British colonial rule destroyed the authority of the Bamar monarchs and weakened their religious role which was to defend and promote Buddhism. Attorney General Chan Htoon, who played a prominent role in the Buddhist revival movement, explains the Bamar reaction after the British had left, saying that it was necessary “to restore Buddhism to its rightful place, the place of honor and patronage which it held under the Burmese kings.”

U Nu, the first prime minister of the independent Myanmar in 1947-58 and 1960-62, was a devoted Buddhist, accepting that Buddhism and the Sangha should participate directly “in the exercise of political power” as the Sanghas and nationalists fought together against colonial rule. Further, the Sangha and the army fought against “communism, foreign influence and ethnic divisiveness” as soon as Myanmar regained independence. In November 1947, U Nu and nine other Buddhists founded “Buddha Sasana Nuggaha Ahpwe” (BSNA). This organization aimed “to work for the progress, expansion, and stability of Buddhism, to help in the progress of pariyatti which is the learning of theory or doctrine of Dhamma and patipatti which means putting the theory of Buddha Dhamma into practice, to set up a great building for Tipitaka known as Pitaka taik where the Buddhist scriptures could be enshrined.” Moreover, the aim of this BSNA was to promote the Burma Hill Tracts Buddhist Mission, known as Taung Than Tatana (TTA) for bringing “unity and cooperation between the people of the Plains and the People of the Hills.” As there has been a revival among the Myanmar Buddhists, particularly since independence, Myanmar Buddhists have a strong missionary zeal to spread Dhamma mainly to the areas of hill people in Myanmar as Buddha sent his monks to spread the Dhamma by commanding:

555 Donald E. Smith, Religion and Politics in Burma, 148.
556 Mikael Gravers, Nationalism as Political Paranoia in Burma, 53.
557 E. Michael Mendelson, Sangha and State in Burma, ed. John P. Ferguson, 265.
558 Ibid., 267.
Go forth, O Bhikkhus, for the good of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the good, benefit, and happiness of gods and men. Let not two go by one way: Preach, O Bhikkhus, the Dhamma, excellent in the beginning, excelling in the Middle, excellent in the end, both in the spirit and in the letter. Proclaim the Holy Life, altogether perfect and pure. (Vinaya Pitaka. IV: 28)

Further, the Myanmar government led by U Nu founded the “Ministry of Religious Affairs” in 1950 in order to play a significant role for promoting Buddhism in the country, hoping that promoting Buddhism “would provide national ideals and values” as well as “restore wholesome ethical standards to political life”559 to lead to everlasting peace in Myanmar.560 In short, U Nu intertwined his religious deep feelings with the politics of Myanmar. Thus, Christina Fink says that U Nu established himself “as the patron of Buddhism in much the same way that Burmese kings had in the past.”561 Further, the Buddha Sasana Council (BSC) was founded in 1950 and the aims of this council were: “1) to repair pagodas and encourage the study of doctrine and meditation, 2) to publish and distribute Buddhist literature, and 3) to send for missions.”562

In 1952, Buddha Sasana Council (BSC) started promoting missionary work for the hill people of Myanmar as well as for the non-Buddhists who are in other countries

559 Mikael Gravers, Nationalism as Political Paranoia in Burma, 53.

560 E. Michael Mendelson, Sangha and State in Burma, 269.

561 Christina Fink, Living Silence in Myanmar, Burma under Military Rule, 26. During the reign of U Nu in Myanmar in 1947-58, the Myanmar government sponsored the Sixth Great Buddhist Council which took place from May 1954 to May 1956. At the close of the council, proclaiming Buddhism the state religion of Myanmar was proposed and it was the most important issue for the 1960 Parliamentary elections. In August 1961, Buddhism became the state religion of Myanmar. See Donald E. Smith, Religion and Politics in Burma, 117.

562 U Hla Bu asserts with regards to the significant event of Buddhist resurgence: The BSC’s “first act was to organize and convene the Sixth Buddhist Synod to mark the 2500 years of Buddha’s Sasana which was attended at its inauguration by Buddhist royalty and leaders from all over the world and which went on for two years from 1954 to 1956.” U Hla Bu further says that “the BSC repaired old pagodas and built new ones. The International Institute for Advanced Buddhist Studies was developed and supported by government. Likewise Pali University was established for training monks particularly for foreign missionary enterprise... Missions to Burma’s hill tribes as well as to India and the West are being undertaken and encouraged.” See U Hla Bu, “The Nature (Significance) of Resurgence of Buddhism in Burma,” in Consultation on Buddhist-Christian Encounter (Colombo: the Christian Institute of Buddhist Studies, 1961), 4-8.
for their conversion into Buddhism. As the aim of the BSC was for “the spreading of the Dhamma” inside and outside Myanmar, it tried to send missionaries inside Myanmar as well as abroad with confidence. Thus, BSC developed Buddhist centers for learning as well as for translating “the Pali scriptures into good Burmese so that the man in the street could really understand what Buddhism was about” and this is the task of every Buddhist. In this regard, a prominent Myanmar Buddhist monk, Ashin Thittila Aggamahapandita asserts:

The task of each and every Buddhist is first to make the Buddha-Dhamma a living reality, by studying it and practicing it in everyday life... Secondly, a Buddhist's task is to spread the pure Buddha-Dhamma, or to help the Sangha who devote their whole lives to the study, practice and spreading of the pure Dhamma - which is excellent in the beginning, in the middle and in the end. Thereby we become helpers of humanity and messengers of peace and happiness.

In addition, BSC established Buddhist mission schools “in the Chin Hills, Naga Hills, Kachin Hills, and other non-Buddhist areas.” Learning from the model of Christian mission in the nineteenth century in Myanmar, the BSC firstly started establishing “a monastery, then monastic or lay schools, with accompanying distribution of clothes and medicine.” Further, it is claimed that the BSC sent sixty-five monks to preach the Dhamma to the hill people of Myanmar in 1951. In the same year, more than 52,000 people embraced Buddhism and over 4,000 people were given education. According to BSC’s 1956 report, there were 95 mission centers in Myanmar with 95 Buddhist missionaries who taught the Bamar language and literature to the hill people of Myanmar. As Myanmar Buddhists are full of confidence in Buddhism for their liberation, they are not interested in other religions though they wanted to propagate Buddhism to the non-Buddhists. Regarding the confidence of Burmese Buddhists in their faith, Winston L. King, professor emeritus at Vanderbilt University, asserted:

... I fully realized the depth of the polite but total disinterest in Christianity on the part of nearly all of my Burmese Buddhists friends, and the reason

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564 Ibid., 269.
567 Ibid.
for it was their absolute confidence that Buddhism embodied the ultimate and perfect religious truth so that there was no need to be interested in or concerned about anything else in the way of religion.\footnote{568}

In 1960 the third general election was held in Myanmar. It was the Clean Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (CAFPL), now renamed the Pyidaungsu or Union Party, led by U Nu with a shrewd political agenda, campaigned and promised to the people that if their party won the election, they would make Buddhism the state religion of Myanmar.\footnote{569} U Nu and his party used religion as a political tool for obtaining favor from his fellow citizens who were, and still are, predominantly Buddhists.\footnote{570} Since U Nu’s Party won the general election, as he promised, Buddhism became the state religion of Myanmar in 1960.\footnote{571} As a result of making Buddhism the state religion, there were boycotts from adherents of Islam, Christianity and Hinduism, even among the parliamentarians who were non-Buddhists and religious leaders. It created an atmosphere of political uncertainty, and provoked racial conflicts with violence. Viewing the possible consequences, General Ne Win seized power in March 1962, with a motive to control the political situation of Myanmar.\footnote{572} From 1962 to 1988, the country was ruled by the Socialist regime.\footnote{573} The socialist regime restructured Theravada Buddhism. In this regard, Simon Pau Khan En says:

One of the most remarkable activities of the Socialist regime was the restructuring and renovation of classical Theravada Buddhism. The multifaceted Buddhist groups were officially categorized into nine denominations (\textit{gaing}), and all the rights and powers of the Buddhist monks were centralized under three categories at the national level, called Central Sangha Council. Each Buddhist monk was registered at the central organization, and the organizations of Buddhist \textit{sanghas} were formed at different levels in the country. This restructuring of Buddhist organization

in Myanmar had a great impact on the history of the country as it became a kind of reformation of Buddhism.574

For many years Buddhism has been the well-guarded and state-sponsored religion of successive authorities and there is an increasing missionary consciousness among them where even the government is supporting aggressive evangelization by Buddhist monks. Their motive is to make it compulsory, such that to be a Bamar is to be a Buddhist, and vice versa.575 Besides, in order to divide their oppositions, the generals, particularly from 1988 to 2010, had relied on propaganda, stating that the non-Bamars as well as non-Buddhists were given special opportunities during colonial period in Myanmar. Further, for the stability of their rule, the generals tried to persuade majority Buddhists and monks who supported the concept of “Bamar as a Buddhist nation.”576 As a result, though Buddhism is no longer the official state religion of Myanmar since 1974, it has been the backbone of Myanmar political life. In this respect, Samuel Ngun Ling notes:

Historically speaking, Buddhism in Myanmar, especially in the post-colonial period, may be called a resurgent Buddhism because of its closer and stronger connections with the transitory socio-political powers. Why was and is this Buddhism resurgent? The answer is because of its compartmentalized socio-political roles and power, since the colonial period up to the present, in a chain of Burmese nationalist, socialist and militarist political movements.577

In addition, the government supports Buddhism, especially for Buddhist mission to the hill tribes with the national budget. Since the government emphasizes only Buddhism, it automatically discriminates against other religions. This religious favoritism has been occurring since Myanmar gained independence. As a result, one must first convert to Buddhism in order to be promoted as a high-ranking military officer in Myanmar.578 Georg Noack says with regard to the military-backed

574 Ibid.
575 La Sen Dingrin, “A Study of David J. Bosh’s Theology of Mission and its Reading into a Myanmar Context,” 44.
576 Christina Fink, Living Silence in Myanmar, Burma under Military Rule, 250.
577 Samuel Ngun Ling, Communicating Christ in Myanmar, 12.
party known as Union Solidarity and Development Party’s (USDP) attitudes toward other religions:

Government have used Buddhist authority or ‘Buddhification’ to rally national sentiments among the general population, to foster an ideological Buddhist nationalism to integrate primarily Christian and animist ... ethnic minorities into the administration of the nation-state, and to force non-Buddhists to convert to Buddhism.579

Moreover, Myanmar Buddhists feel insecure especially after the blowing up of the Buddha statues in Bamiyan, Afghanistan.580 As a consequence, Myanmar Buddhists’ violence against Muslims has markedly increased. Many of Myanmar Buddhists view Myanmar Muslims as a threat to their religion and culture as Muslims can marry many Myanmar women as they want. Aside from that, Muslims make it compulsory for the man or the woman who marry them to convert to Islam.581 In Myanmar, those who are non-Buddhists encounter problems since the national culture was equated with Buddhism throughout the twentieth century. As Buddhism plays an ultimate role in national politics, the successive governments’ support Buddhist missions with the state budget. On top of that, the government practices discrimination among Buddhists and non-Buddhists: Christians and Muslims.582 Such an environment explains the difficulties to initiate a genuine Buddhist-Christian dialogue. Today the churches in Myanmar are left with a greater task to educate the people about the possibilities of conceiving and experiencing a more peaceful society through dialogue between the religious parties in the country.

5.5. HOLIER-THAN-THOU ATTITUDES OF MYANMAR CHRISTIANS

Attitude plays a very crucial role in individual life as well as in society, especially when establishing a healthy relationship. Seeing oneself as being in a superior

579 Ibid., 219. See also, J. Schober, “Buddhism Violence and the State in Burma (Myanmar) and Sri Lanka,” in Disrupting Violence: Religion and Conflict in South and Southeast Asia, eds. L. Candy and S. Simon (Oxon: Routledge, 2006), 54-55.

580 It is claimed that some Myanmar Buddhists are of the opinion that religious and ethnic minorities in Myanmar could act in a similar way.

581 Georg Noack, Local Traditions, Global Modernities, 244.

582 Ibid., 218.
position or situation hampers in-depth and genuine rapport with others. Likewise, a triumphal attitude towards one’s own religion leads to a degrading attitude towards the other religions. In Myanmar, the majority of Christians are still holding the view that Christianity is holier than any other world religions. Therefore, Christians in Myanmar regard other religions as untrue and unholy.

This seems to be due to the influence of the nineteenth century model of Christian mission which was to convert people of other faiths into Christianity as adherents of other religions were seen as hell-bound people or the lost who would encounter with the final judgment of God. In the history of the Catholic Church in Myanmar, some Catholic fathers were given permission to preach Christianity in Bamar kingdom in the seventeenth century. However, when the holier-than-thou attitude of Christians was introduced in Myanmar, the Bamar kings rejected the preaching of Christianity in their kingdom. At that time, the missionaries assumed that the local culture was inferior to western culture and they condemned all the cultural elements of the local people. As a result, missionaries

583 Before I studied Theology of religions at the Myanmar Institute of Theology, my attitude toward other religions was quite negative. In short, I could not appreciate other religions. At that time, non-Christian religions, for me, were false religions. Thus, I refused to share food and utensils with my neighbors who were not in the same religion with me as I believed that it is sinful and unethical as a Christian if I eat the food which was previously offered to some other god. In line with this attitude, the majority of the Christians in Myanmar are conservative and they conceive non-Christians as heathens. However, though many of the Christians in Myanmar are exclusive toward other religions, Myanmar Theologians Fellowship declared in 1997 that the “exclusive model is no longer supportive and applicable for Myanmar in doing theology and mission.” See Simon Pau Khan En, “Theological Issues in Dialogue,” in Engagement, Vol. 6 (June 2006), 16.

584 Edmund Za Bik, “Universal Salvation in the Context of Interfaith Dialogue in Myanmar,” in Ecumenical Resources for Dialogue between Christians and Neighbors of Other Faiths in Myanmar, ed. Samuel Ngun Ling (Yangon: Judson Research Center, 2004), 41

585 Adoniram Judson, the first American Baptist missionary to Myanmar, introduced superior Christian faith to King Bagyidaw, the then Bamar king by saying: “There is one Being who exists eternally; who is exempt from sickness, old age, and death; who was and is, and will be, without beginning and without end. Besides this, a true God, there is no other God. See Moe Moe Nyunt, A Pneumatological Response To the Burmese Nat-Worship (Yangon: Myanmar Institute of Theology, 2010), 69. Quoted from Courtney Anderson, To the Golden Shore: The Life of Adoniram Judson (Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1956), 196. Further, the missionaries believed that they were introducing their superior Christian faith to the Burmese. Moreover, they saw Theravada Buddhism as atheism and a pessimistic religion which denied the existence of God. For instance, Adoniram Judson argued that the religion of Gautama was false and that the Buddhist scriptures were fictitious. See also Samuel Ngun Ling, “Communicating God and Christ in Myanmar,” in RAYS, MIT Journal of Theology, Vol. 4 (February 2003), 89.

586 Moe Moe Nyunt, A Pneumatological Response To the Burmese Nat-Worship, 69.
in Myanmar were regarded as destroyers of indigenous culture and religion. More damaging for Myanmar Christianity was the instilling of the opinion that the western-oriented way of life was supreme and right, which firmly defined and shaped the attitudes of Christians in Myanmar. As a consequence, many Christians in Myanmar looked down on the Myanmar cultural values as undeveloped, uncivilized and related to demonic power. In this regard, Moe Moe Nyunt, a Myanmar Methodist missiologist, comments:

For the Christians, Christianity is the truth and the best of all religions and the Christian God is the only and true God, but it is questionable for the Burmese who know the Dhamma, the way of salvation taught by Buddha, and who experience their lords’ (spirit-nats’) presence in their daily lives.

Further, Moe Moe Nyunt points out that the slow growth of Christianity among the Bamar is not due to their rootedness in Buddhism but rather the superior attitude of Christian missionaries. That attitude was inherited by converted Christians in Myanmar as they looked down on “non-Christian religions and cultures as part of Satan’s work and hence condemned their superstitious religious practices as worthless.” Such a 'holier than thou attitude' in the mindset of the Christians hinders interfaith dialogue in Myanmar because such arrogance does not provide space for other religious traditions.

In addition, from the very early time of contact between local people and visitors, travelers, adventurers, traders etc. from the West, there is an impression in local people’s mind that everything that is from the West is greater and superior to the East. Thus, many failed to understand the importance of their traditional socio-cultural values. Missionaries contributed to this failure, because they considered the local culture and religion to be evil and anti-Christian. In this respect, the statement of Simon Pau Khan En is worth quoting:

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589 Ibid., 70.


The missionaries thus imposed the western culture(s) to all converts and they supplanted the indigenous culture with the western culture(s). Becoming a Christian at this period has been identical with becoming a westerner, totally abandoning one's root. The names, the dress, language, life-style, were all changed into western way. Christian mission at this time was understood as cultural imperialism. 

Simon Pau Khan En further says: “When the missionaries first came to Myanmar, they could not see the cultural values inherent in the culture of the people. They thought that it was inferior to western culture and so they tried to condemn all the cultural elements.” Without realizing the importance of all these, many still hold onto that and take pride in themselves that their Christian religion is the ultimate one; only through their religion an individual can experience liberation and salvation. In Myanmar church history it is commonly discovered that spirituality is grounded more on the observation of micro-ethics, such as abstention from alcohol and cigarettes, regular church attendance, Bible recitation, saying grace before meal, avoidance of raveling on Sundays and avoiding buying and selling things or doing business on Sundays, and other elements of Christian lifestyle. There is a limitation in the very understanding of spirituality, because spirituality is limited only to such micro-ethical observances, which do not give room for a more comprehensive understanding. Further, though Christians in Myanmar are small in number, compared to the whole population of the country, they have a spiritual superiority complex over other religions.

This is because when Christian missionaries presented the gospel in Myanmar, they instilled the concept that Christianity was superior to other world religions in the country. With regard to the attitudes of Christians in Myanmar toward other faiths, Edmund Za Bik, Professor Emeritus of Systematic Theology and Philosophy at Myanmar Institute of Theology, observes:

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594 Simon Pau Khan En, Nat Worship, 10.


596 In his book, Nat Worship, Simon Pau Khan En says that one of the “complex of Christians in Myanmar is spiritual superiority… The spiritual superiority complex is defective in the life and mission of the churches for it cannot incarnate a ‘suffering servant’ type of Christology. Instead, it incarnates a crusading Christ and produces the theologia gloria, not theologia crucis.” See Simon Pau Khan En, Nat Worship, 12.
The chief obstacle to any meaningful inter-faith dialogue in Myanmar, to the best of my observation, has been and still is the Christian's unhealthy self-righteous holier-than-thou pietism and attitude toward non-Christians who are disdainfully looked upon as a bunch of hell-bound, godless people. This regrettable and un-Christian – like attitude is rooted more or less in a narrow understanding of the meaning of being a Christian, or what it takes to be a true Christian, so to speak.597

For the churches of Myanmar, who are conservative and narrow-minded toward other religions, “Christianity still remains unique, absolute and even superior to” other religions of the country.598 Thus, there is a competition conceiving ‘truth claims’ in Myanmar and Christians are considered to be very active in such activity. Many Christians in Myanmar regard their Buddhist neighbors as sinners and bound for hell. Thus, it is impossible for them to engage in dialogue with Buddhists as it would mean “unfaithfulness to Christianity.”599 In a world of religious plurality this attitude of Christians invites further misunderstanding and violent conflicts between religious communities. Their superior attitude and practice of judging and degrading others becomes a barrier for undertaking a meaningful Buddhist-Christian dialogue in Myanmar as Buddhists are unnecessarily viewed as religiously unholy people. As long as this attitude and ideology continues it would be meaningless to take engage in genuine Buddhist-Christian dialogue in Myanmar.

5.6. PLURAL SOCIETY THEORY

As already mentioned in previous chapters, Myanmar is religiously, culturally and ethnically plural. After having worked for more than twenty years in Myanmar as a British colonial administrator of Indian Civil Service (ICS), J. S. Furnivall commented with regards to the societal form and structure of Myanmar, declaring it a “plural society.”600 According to Furnivall, before the British ruled Myanmar,


598 Samuel Ngun Ling, Communicating Christ in Myanmar, 196.

599 Simon Pau Khan En, Nat Worship, 271.

600 Hock Guan Lee, “Furnivall’s Plural Society and Leach’s Political Systems of Highland Burma,” in SOJOURN: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia 24/1 (2009), 32-46. From 1920 to 1923 J. S. Furnivall worked in Myanmar as British colonial administrator of
people were never organized territorially under native rule. However, he further described that people were classified along quasi-feudal lines according to race and occupation, based on personal authority. In association with the societal form and structure of Myanmar, Furnivall’s statement is worth mentioning here:

Each group holds by its own religion, its own culture and language, its own ideas and ways. As individuals they meet, but only in the marketplace in buying and selling. There is a plural society, with different sections of the community living side by side, but separately, within the same political unit. Even in the economic sphere there is division of labour along racial lines.

Viewing the societal form and structure of Myanmar the British colonial system benefitted from the plural society to implement what is known as the policy of “divide and rule.” Such implementation encouraged the people to develop an exclusive attitude rather than affirming inclusivity and learning from one another and accepting each other. In this regard, Mikael Graver points out: “The pluralist society concept of colonial Burma made ethnicity into a segregation force that hampers any models not based exclusively on cultural differences.”


602 Ibid., 304.

603 Mikael Gravers, Nationalism as Political Paranoia in Burma, 7. Gravers says that “the colonial power established its hegemony with an inbuilt doomsday prophecy: when the colonial union model disintegrates, everything collapses into chaos. It is precisely this fear which has fuelled the last thirty years of military rule. This model contained an acknowledgement of cultural differences, due to different stages on the evolutionary ladder, leading necessarily to a division of labour based on race.” See Ibid., 28.

604 Ibid., 79.
words, racial, ethnic, religious, social and economic differences and contradictions were developed more strongly under colonial rule than during the pre-colonial period in the country. Thus, there was discrimination between the local society and the colonialisit society in a common context since "the local society and culture were rendered subordinate to a common division of labour." As a result, during the colonial period (1885-1948) in Myanmar, Indians were given special priority granting “special seats in the elected assembly” under the 1935 constitution. Moreover, the British gave reserved seats for Kayins who lived among the Bamars. On various spheres of life, the British protected the ethnic minorities from the dominant Bamars. As stated earlier, ethnic minorities, such as Chins, Kachins and Kayins were given high rank in the army while the Bamars were excluded from its ranks. Further, the British policy of “divide and rule” created separate ethno-political communities within the plural society of Myanmar as well as “ethno-linguistic nation, political state and homeland territory” which has led to bitter conflicts and civil war, particularly in the post-colonial period in the country.

Moreover, as a plural society is a society in which different cultures and religions mix but do not enjoy fundamental togetherness, Furnivall continued saying that “there are no standards common to all sections of the community.” However, he

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605 Ibid., 7. With regard to division of labour during colonial period in Myanmar, Gravers further notes: “The pluralistic model's division of labour was also reflected in class relations. The middle class were dominated by Indians, while prominent Burman political leaders in the 1930s were often dependent on Indian political financial backing of their political ventures. These leaders were usually lawyers and rarely independent businessmen. In addition, the Indians were interested in allying themselves with Burman politicians in order to assure their influence in banking and trade circles.” See Mikael Gravers, Nationalism as Political Paranoia in Burma, 28.

606 Josef Silverstein, Burma Military Rule and the Politics of Stagnation, 15-16.


608 Ibid., 217. “Looking into the realities today one of the most important aspects of identity formation in the modern era has been the construction of ethno-national territories, which translate socio-political heritage into a geographic and political landscape. There is tremendous upsurge in their claims for a pure ethnic homeland. In Myanmar such ethnicity and territoriality has had bloody inter and intra-national history, over the past two centuries. The identification of ethnicity with a particular territory has resulted highly unrealistic territorial claims, such as the KNU’s demands for control of nearly half the country, in the late 1940s. Claims to territory are closely linked to issues of statehood and citizenship. A person can be Karen or a member of any of the 135 national races, and at the same time a citizen of Myanmar. This recognition of pluralism – in principle at least – is a key feature of Myanmar politics.” See Ibid., 218.
asserted, what all have in common in a plural society is “the economic factor, and the only test that all apply in common is the test of cheapness.” Thus, Furnivall stated that the only common meeting ground available to the various cultures and people of different faiths is at the marketplace in a plural society since all are similar in their economic wants though they differ culturally and religiously. Even though Furnivall realized the structure of plural society, his theory and analysis on Myanmar society does not indicate any possibilities for initiating a dialogue which can, over time, overcome their differences, thereby making the distinctiveness a source for mutual enrichments and dialogue. As stated above, Myanmar society is diverse and has several ethnic and racial groups who have their own distinctive culture, language, religion and worldview. Therefore, when the plurality in its existence fails to affirm its advantages and acknowledge each other as a source for mutual benefit, then hatred and enmity towards one another hinders genuine interfaith dialogue among people of different faiths in Myanmar.

5.7. ANADE THEORY

As already stated in my empirical studies, there is the feeling of “Anade” which hindered my ability to know what my interview partners had in mind on my questions. Then, what is “Anade”? In studying the concept of “Anade,” I am indebted to Sarah M. Bekker who had researched the concept of “Anade.” The Bamar word Anade comes from two words: “A” means the strength or power that a human or an animal possesses and “nade” means hurting or to hurt. Sarah M. Bekker says that the concept of Anade covers “a wide range of feelings and behaviors, varying somewhat from person to person, but generally characterized by a feeling of constraint that prevented an individual from behaving in a way

609 J. S. Furnivall, Colonial Policy and Practice, 310.
610 Ibid., 304.
which might offend or psychologically hurt another person.” 612 For instance, many Myanmar people do not like to lose face before their superior or inferior. This means that frankness, openness, criticism, and demands are made within a limited range and expressed neither publicly nor privately when these are considered to have an effect on inter-personal relationships. 613

In interpersonal relations, Anade functions in a positive as well as a negative way, particularly in the relationship between family members. Positively, she says that Anade functions when family members consider seriously on one another’s feelings which “make a warm and affectionate atmosphere in the family.” However, on the negative side, she further mentions that “Anade does serve to reduce communication among family members in certain ways.” 614 Bekker goes on saying that “the concern of Anade is first and foremost for the psychological welfare of the other person.” With family members, she says that “Anade is felt as concern.” 615

Further, in a personal relationship the meaning of Anade changes based on social status. For instance, if the two interacting persons do not have the same status, “Anade will be felt on the part of the lower status person as respect and deference, causing him to curb spontaneous behavior and observe proprieties of speech, dress, and general decorum.” 616 However, in the same status of the two interacting persons, she says, “Anade will be felt as empathy, sympathy, sensitivity to one another's needs, and as a pressure for sharing moods, activities, and possessions.” 617 Regarding the concept of Anade, Sarah M. Bekkers defines:

614 Here Bekker gives an example by saying: “A person may live with four or five other family members in one room and yet not know and not attempt to know their private griefs or worries. This is not because he is unconcerned – but because it will make it easier for all if each one shows only his happy, sociable, active side. Because happiness is also a matter of pride, one must pretend not to notice when he sees his brother unhappy; if his brother knows his unhappiness is observed, it will thereby be increased… Anade, then, as a feeling for other peoples’ sensitivities, is operative in families or between friends who are living together, even when anade as part of etiquette is eliminated.” See Sarah M. Bekker, “The Concept of Anade,” 25.
615 Ibid., 27.
616 Ibid., 21.
617 Ibid.
Anade is most typically felt as a restraint on self-assertiveness. It inhibits behavior and requires action to be taken indirectly or through the agency of a third person. In all its many meanings, anade requires that the interest of the other person be put above one’s own. One is anade to speak out, whether to state a preference or to make a criticism. One is anade to do what he wants to do when the action might hurt someone or be construed as designed to hurt. Anade in these cases is felt as a preventive measure by which disruptions to the social relationship are avoided. This is its commonest function in casual or formal relationships.618

Besides, the social structure of Myanmar is a hierarchical structure. For example, there is a hierarchical relation between monks and lay people, between teachers and students, between senior and junior persons. In these relations, monks, teachers and senior persons are “expected to be heeded by” lay people, students and junior persons.619 In this regard, Christina Fink says: “When people in Burma

618 Sarah M. Bekker, “The Concept of Anade,” 20-21. According to Bekker, there are seven major elements of Anade: “1) observance of respectful behavior, especially as related to age; using proper language and modes of address, 2) inability to express self-assertive needs or to resist social pressure which requires one to take part in unwanted social activities, 3) desire not to impose on others, not to be a nuisance or inconvenience to others, especially those who are not intimates; timidity, 4) control and fear of aggression by self and others, both inadvertent physical aggression and verbal aggression; avoidance of ridiculing, shaming, causing loss of face, or criticizing in a face-to-face situation, 5) observation of properties of behavior as formally defined by situation or status; observing proper forms in giving and receiving hospitality; observing sex taboos to conform with social expectations as to proper behavior between the sexes, 6) maintenance of balance of obligations; being aware of obligations to family, neighbors, and friends; feeling distressed when unable to fulfill obligations to a benefactor; feeling hesitant to accept favors from a stranger which cannot be returned, 7) sensitivity to others’ needs; empathy, with desire to make friends or family members happy; compassion or pity for those in need, with stress on sharing. See Sarah M. Bekker, “The Concept of Anade,” 21.

619 Cf. Christina Fink, Living Silence in Myanmar, Burma under Military Rule, 15. After having studied over five years in Germany I started to love German culture which is open, frank, critical and independent. It seems that there is no such feeling of “Anade” in German’s mindset. Generally speaking, for them, yes is yes, no is no. They are free to say, “yes” as well as to say “no.” In other words, for them, it seems that there is no hidden agenda. However, for Myanmar people, sometimes, yes may be no in reality and at the same time, no may be “yes” in reality. For Myanmar people, more or less, there is a hidden agenda behind their talking as they are “Anade” to say something to others, if they thought that their words might hurt someone. Thus, many people are hesitant to tell the truth or to tell what they have in mind, for they are afraid that their thoughts might be offensive to someone or they might be judged or punished if they tell the truth they know. As I had the feeling of “Anade” too much in the past years, my
meet each other for the first time, they immediately try to determine whether the other person is above or below them in status. This is primarily determined by age, but also by other factors such as wealth and place of employment."\textsuperscript{620}

Further, feelings of *Anade* are used to “justify silence and inaction” particularly in a political context. For example, in the military service, junior officers “are hesitant to report bad news” to senior officers for “they felt it wasn't their place to speak up.” Instead of reporting bad news, junior officers keep silent for they are too “*Anade*” to say something to their senior officers. Thus, junior officers always simply wait for the order from their senior officers and work according to the order they received.\textsuperscript{621} In short, the objective of *Anade* is to maintain smooth relations by considering others' feelings and refraining from saying anything upsetting.\textsuperscript{622}

My empirical research involved interviewing four Buddhists and four Christians were interviewed with regards to their perceptions on Buddhism and Myanmar Buddhists, and Christianity and Myanmar Christians. Due to having feelings of “*Anade*” when I raised questions like their opinions on Myanmar Christians as well as Myanmar Buddhists, though they had something to say in mind, they were hesitant and resistant to answer my questions frankly. In short, they are avoiding sensitive issues and questions as they were afraid to be misunderstood or to be criticized by others. Furthermore, since I am a Christian, one of my Buddhist interviewees felt too *Anade* as he thought his words might make me unhappy and causes misunderstandings. Therefore, he did not speak his mind when talking about his opinion on Myanmar Christians. In addition, *Anade* can also hinder a genuine dialogue because the truth can be hidden behind the dialogue due to too much “*Anade*” among the dialogue partners. In other words, feeling unable to share and discuss both good and bad due to *anade* obstructs the authenticity of relationships with my professor and friends didn’t seem to be so smooth for I assumed that what I say or do would negatively affect our relationship. Therefore, I remained neutral in relationship and tried not to hurt others by not having a depth relationship with them. As a result, nobody loved me and at the same time nobody favored me. I did not have close friends and also did not have enemies who hated me. On the other hand, having too much “*Anade*” created an unpleasant relationship with my professors and friends for it seems that, for them, I think I was superficial and was not interested in them. By evaluating my experiences in Germany, I realized that too much “*Anade*” still influence my thinking and way of life particularly in relationship with others. And this becomes one of the hindrances, for me, to have a good relationship and dialogue with others.

\textsuperscript{620} Christina Fink, *Living Silence in Myanmar, Burma under Military Rule*, 120.

\textsuperscript{621} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{622} Ibid.
dialogue and this is one of the hindrances to Buddhist-Christian dialogue in Myanmar.

5.8. **BAMAR-TA-KYAT-SHAN-TA-KYAT POLITICAL CONCEPT**

As already explored in chapter one, Myanmar society represents various ethnic groups and, based on the assessment made as per their differences in dialects, there are around 135 ethnic groups. It was in the year 1946 when general Aung San and the fighters for Myanmar’s freedom sought complete independence from British Labour Prime Minister Clement Attlee. The British consented to his plea with the condition that they must include each representation of hill tribes people who were under the British Frontier Area Administration. With this motive in mind the Bamar leaders turned their attention to the ethnic minority groups in order to achieve their goal of gaining independence from the larger British Burma. Aung San went to the territories of ethnic nationalities in the country in order to convince them to establish the Union of Burma by saying “Bamar-ta-kyat-shan-ta-kyat.” Regarding the concept of Bamar-ta-kyat-shan-ta-kyat political theory, Lapai Zau Lat describes:

The meaning of *bamar-ta-kyat-shan-ta-kyat* is: when a Burman from the low land receives one *Kyat* (i.e., a unit of Burmese currency), then a person from

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623 In reflection of the above statement, Bamar is the name of the dominant ethnic group in Myanmar and Shan is also the name of one of the ethnic nationalities in the country. Further, *Kyat* is the name of the currency of Myanmar. *Bamar-ta-kyat-shan-ta-kyat* is an affirmation adopted by all the representative of the people in Union of Myanmar guarantees their rights of equal opportunity and affirmation of identity in all spheres of life. In short, equal opportunity was assured to all while Myanmar was at the formative stage for her independence.

624 Michael Fredholm, *Burma, Ethnicity and Insurgency*, 108. Generally, Myanmar society consists of diverse ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious groups. They represent around 135 ethnic groups of which two thirds of the total population belonging to the majority *Bamar ethnic group* who adhere Buddhism as their main religion. The second ethnic groups are from the ethnic minority communities like the *Kachin, Chin and Karen*, who were first converted to Christianity and continue to adhere it as their religion. See Samuel Ngun Ling, “Ethnicity, Religion and Theology in Asia: An Exploration from the Myanmar Context,” in *Ethnicity, Religion and Theology: A Consultation on Ethnic Minorities in the Mekong Region*, ed. Hanns Hoerschelmann, 5.

ethnic minority groups like a Shan will also receive one Kyat. In short, every minority group would receive equal treatment with the majority Burman counterparts."

With the sincere persuasion of General Aung San, the ethnic nationalities - Chin, Kachin and Shan - leaders agreed to accept independence from the British along with the Bamars by signing a treaty called “Panglong Agreement” on February 12, 1947 at the town of Panglong in Southern Shan State, Myanmar. Unfortunately, before Myanmar gained independence from the British, General Aung San and five other members of the Executive Council were assassinated on July 19, 1947. As a result, Aung San’s promise which was “to cooperate on the political freedom of internal administration amongst the minorities” and “to secure cultural and democratic rights for the ethnic groups” became insignificant for ethnic minorities. On September 24, 1947, the new constitution of Myanmar was adopted, though the representatives from some ethnic minorities were absent. According to the new constitution, Shan State and Kayah State were “reserved the rights of secession after ten years of trial period.” However, the other minority groups such as the Karen, Mon, Chin and Rakhine were excluded from any secession.

Aung San advocated the principle of “unity in diversity,” which the Panglong Conference also affirmed. This would have assured Bamar-ta-kyat-shan-ta-kyat. However, despite all efforts made by the ethnic minorities towards the formation of the Union, the principle of unity in diversity could not be implemented in the end. After gaining independence from the British on January 4, 1948, when the

626 Ibid., 66. Among ethnic nationalities Shans, Kachins, and Chins agreed to join hands with Bamars in building the Union because they thought that their autonomy would remain politically, financially or socially. And yet, while these ethnic nationalities joined the Union, other minorities, such as, Kayins, Mons, and Rakhines “remained uncommitted.” See Josef Silverstein, *Burma: Military Rule and Politics of Stagnation*, 19.

627 Ibid.


629 Michael Fredholm, *Burma, Ethnicity and Insurgency*, 41.

630 Mikael Gravers, *Nationalism as Political Paranoia in Burma*, 49.

631 Kayin, Kayah, Mon, and Rakhine representatives did not participate in the meetings for drafting the new constitution of Myanmar. Further, representatives from Frontier Areas, such as, Pa-O, Wa and Lahu could not also take part in the meetings. Thus, since upon Independence “the spirit of Panglong” seems not play significant role in the politics of Myanmar. See Michael Fredholm, *Burma, Ethnicity and Insurgency*, 40.

newly formed Union did not work out according to Panglong Treaty, ethnic minorities started uprising against the central government. Moreover, in the 1961 parliament meeting, Shan leaders made a proposal to form a federal state in accordance with the spirit of Panglong. As federal state types of Union were on the agenda, due to fear of national disunity, General Ne Win seized power from the then Prime Minister U Nu on March 2, 1962, which terminated the democratic form of government. U Ne Win’s policy ignored and erased the mutual trust, which Aung San had planted in the hearts of the minorities with great effort at the Panglong conference. As a consequence, instead of ‘mutual trust’, there is ‘distrust’ between the ethnic minorities and the central government which is predominantly of the bamar ethnicity. Therefore, an unannounced ‘civil war’ has continued for many decades in Myanmar, especially in the homelands of the ethnic nationalities.634

Due to the power struggle between ethnic nationalities and the central government, there still is fighting in the country which creates hatred and enmity toward each other. In other words, the failure to implement Bamar-ta-kyat-shan-ta-kyat, a political concept advocated by the pioneering leaders widens the gap between people of different ethnic groups based on race and religion. This creates an unfavorable atmosphere and thus, hampers an authentic Buddhist-Christian dialogue in Myanmar.

5.9. UPSURGE OF ETHNIC INSURGENCY

As seen in chapter two, Christian ethnic minority groups were given special treatment, both politically and economically, during the colonial period. Moreover, the British ‘divide-and-rule policy’ used for over 100 years has paved the way to the outbreak of insurrections as soon as Myanmar gained her independence. During the years of struggle for independence, a variety of conflicting ideologies and concepts had proliferated. This eventually caused the disintegration of national unity and solidarity.635 With all kinds of ethnic, political, and economic developments seen as a continuation of colonial rule, the majority of the Bamar

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635 LT-Col Hla Min, *Political Situation of Myanmar and Its Role in the Region*, 5.
nationalists regarded ethnic minorities as a threat to Bamar’s authority. As a consequence, massive conflicts arose between the ethnic Bamar, the dominant ethnic group, and minority ethnic groups upon independence. While Bamars regarded other ethnic nationalities as a threat, the ethnic nationalities feel insecure as well as disintegrated in their homeland. The ethnic nationalities are fighting in great hope for their own territory in which they could have self-determination. There are eight major ethnic groups in the country and out of them, seven ethnic groups under which there are sub-groups who have their own national army fighting against the central government, which the Bamar dominant government, securing their own autonomy and power. Due to the increasing ethnic insurgency, violent conflicts often take place between the army of ethnic nationalities and the Tatmadaw, resulting in disruptions of peace and tranquility in the post-colonial Myanmar. The continuity of conflicts and fighting between the two counterparts caused growing suspicion, failing to establish trust. This has become one of the root causes of the failure for initiating a successful Buddhist-Christian dialogue.

5.10. CONCLUSION

In studying the factors hindering Buddhist-Christian dialogue in Myanmar, it is obvious that the wounded history of Myanmar, which is yet to heal, has been one of the barriers. On the other hand, the negative side of Myanmar’s history still

636 Michael Fredholm, *Burma, Ethnicity and Insurgency*, 27.
637 Ibid., 24.
639 LT-Col Hla Min, *Political Situation of Myanmar and Its Role in the Region*, 12. Regarding arms insurrection, Melford E. Spiro notes: “The history of post independence Burma has been a history of political insurrection. Rebel groups and armies have not only been a constant threat to the power and stability of the central government, but, often indistinguishable from marauding bands of dacoits, or armed robbers, they have also ravaged the countryside, killing and plundering in the villages. In some areas, including the one in which I worked, villages have lived under two governments, each with its system of taxation and control: the central government during the day and a rebel army at night.” See Melford E. Spiro, *Anthropological Other or Burmese Brother?* 191.
remains in the mindset of the people. Moreover, there still is the concept of “us” and “them” among people of different nationalities and faiths, leading to discrimination. As a result, the diversity of languages, cultures and religions in Myanmar causes a problem for socio-political relations as well as creating religio-cultural tensions. As a majority of Christians in Myanmar have holier-than-thou attitudes, Buddhists in Myanmar also have full confidence in their religion. Therefore, both have a strong missionary zeal: both the mission of Dhamma to the non-Buddhists and the mission of Jesus Christ to the non-Christians in the country. Amidst many factors hindering Buddhist-Christian dialogue in Myanmar, both parties need to seek the possibility of dialogue among themselves in the search for peaceful co-existence in society. Thus, the possibility of Buddhist-Christian dialogue in Myanmar will be examined in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 6

BUDDHIST-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE: 
IN SEARCH OF PEACE IN MYANMAR

6.1. INTRODUCTION

Amidst obstacles to Buddhist-Christian dialogue in Myanmar, there are also possibilities for initiating dialogue between them in the country based on common context and common religious elements as a means for building peace. In using the word “peace,” which has many different meanings, I refer to the Bamar word “nyeinchanyay” which is known by all ethnic nationalities in the country. At the outset, the understanding of peace or nyeinchanyay, in Myanmar today followed by Myanmar Buddhist and Christian perspectives on peace is explored. Secondly, Buddhist-Christian points of convergence for nyeinchanyay in which metta / loving-kindness, karuna / compassion, and ahimsa / non-violence are taken into consideration for initiating dialogue among them. Assessing the causes of conflicts, violence and war between Buddhists and Christians, as well as the central government and ethnic nationalities since 1948, the concept of “self-sacrificial love” in the two traditions is explored. This level of dialogue between the two traditions will be helpful in transforming a conflict-filled society into a peaceful society. This chapter will conclude with practical tips on ways to initiate Buddhist-Christian dialogue.

6.2. THE UNDERSTANDING OF PEACE IN MYANMAR TODAY

What a specific people understand when they talk about peace depends significantly on the word that is used to express this very precious quality of coexistence. What the English language calls “peace” is often associated with “Shalom” in the Judeo-Christian tradition. In Myanmar, the equivalent of peace in the Bamar language is “nyeinchanyay.” As “peace” can have many meanings, so, too, can the term “nyeinchanyay” in Myanmar. It is interesting to review some of these different understandings and definitions of nyeinchanyay. According to the
Tongdot English-Tedim Chin Dictionary, the English word “peace” is translated into the Zomi language as “daihna / tranquility, lungnopna / happiness and joy, lungmuanna /assurance, kilenma / free from enmity.” Sayadaw U Kaw Thala, a Buddhist monk of the Sanpyah Sasana Monastery, Mayangone, Yangon, defined the word “nyeinchanyay” in the Bamar language as a combination of two words, “nyein” and “chan” which strongly reflects the meaning of peace in the Bamar context. The word “yay” is a suffix to form the two words into a noun form. The meaning of “nyein” is, lacking, extinction, no longer existing or disappearance. What is lacking, or no longer existing, or disappearing? Hatred, confrontation, provocation, conflicts and violence are disappearing or are no longer in place. Extinction of all these things means “nyein.” The meaning of “chan” is that as all hatred and conflicts have ceased, one has gained happiness and serenity in mind and body which is called nyeinchanyay.

There has been civil war between the Myanmar army, known as Tatmadaw, and the Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs) since 1948 when Myanmar gained independence from Britain. Many people in Myanmar thought that if the civil war, which was taking place between Tatmadaw and NSAGs, stopped, there would be peace in the country. To put it in another way, it seems that the Myanmar peoples’ understanding of nyeinchanyay is to stop fighting one another and make ceasefire agreement. However, the question is: would it be possible just to say there is peace in Myanmar if the Tatmadaw and NSAGs cease fighting each other? Is the act of signing a ceasefire agreement alone enough for peace and harmony in the country? In 1990, the Tatmadaw and certain groups of the NSAGs, but not all, signed a ceasefire agreement. However, this agreement was not effective for a long time as fighting between the two parties started again, particularly in the northern and northeast part of Myanmar. Then, how could “nyeinchanyay” be understood in Myanmar? How can a lasting peace be built in the country?

Further, since the beginning of 2010, the word “nyeinchanyay” has become a part of the daily talk of Myanmar people as the quasi-civilian government emphasizes it to those who are hungry for peace after having experienced much political
havoc in the country. Starting from March 2011, the military back-up party, known as the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), led by President Thein Sein “took office to lead a nominally civilian government.” In view of the desperate need for peace in the country, the government of Thein Sein has been active in the peace process. Their conviction was that a nationwide ceasefire agreement between the government and the NSAGs could lead the Myanmar people to nyechin anyay. As nyechin anyay is of primary significance, particularly at the point of a political transition in Myanmar from military rule to the so-called democratic government, the Thein Sein government was interested in a ceasefire agreement with the NSAGs. Interestingly, while the government was actively participating in initiating peace in order to gain trust from the NSAGs, the Tatmadaw continued attacking some of the NSAGs and thus hindered the peacemaking process in the country. As a result, the NSAGs were suspicious of the government and questioned whether the government was really interested in making peace in the country?

Moreover, stakeholders from different racial groups, as well as the NSAGs, are of the opinion that the meaning of “nyechin anyay” is not just having a ceasefire agreement. Therefore, for them, it is imperative to start a political dialogue.

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647 For detailed information refer to Charles Petrie and Ashley South, “Mapping of Myanmar Peacebuilding Civil Society,” This paper was produced as background for the Civil Society Dialogue Network (CSDN) meeting entitled ‘Supporting Myanmar’s Evolving Peace Processes: What Roles for Civil Society and the EU?’ which took place in Brussels (March 7, 2013), 5.

648 Ashley South says that “the problem in Myanmar is not primarily a failing or weak state that needs to be strengthened or fixed, but rather an urgent need to re-imagine and negotiate state-society relations – and in particular mend relationships between the Burman majority and ethnic nationality communities.” See Ashley South, “Inside the peace process,” 4. See also Ashley South, “Armed Groups and Political Legitimacy,” in The Myanmar Times (June 23, 2014), 1.

between the government and the NSAGs, as well as stakeholders, for lasting peace in the country. Further, they stress that the federal form of government is of great significance in Myanmar for peace and unity. Otherwise, there can be no mutual trust and understanding. The situation will continue to lead to conflicts and wars, eventhough there is a ceasefire agreement among them. In this regard, Ashley South, a senior advisor to the Myanmar Peace Support Initiative (MPSI), comments: “To achieve lasting peace, ceasefires agreed between the government and armed ethnic groups must be extended to include participation from a range of stakeholders … Without a political settlement, the current rounds of ceasefires are unlikely to be sustainable.” However, President Thein Sein says that in order to start political dialogue the NSAGs first and foremost have to submit their arms to the government. To the contrary, ethnic armed groups stress that only after a genuine political dialogue can an armed struggle be reduced as there is no trust in the government by the ethnic groups. Acknowledging the fact that there is no mutual trust or understanding between the government and the ethnic armed groups, as well as different stakeholders, the Myanmar Peace Center (MPC) attempts to have “social reconciliation and cohesiveness” among diverse groups so that mutual understanding and trust can be built among them leading to nyeinchanyay. Still, the question is: What is genuine nyeinchanyay? With regard to “nyeinchanyay,” Aung San Suu Kyi, Nobel Peace Prize Winner in 1990, whose political position is for democracy, human rights and equality for all regardless of

652 http://www.myanmarpeace.org/programs/peace_dialogue (Access on November 11, 2014). Further, as the ethnic nationalities asked to form Federal Union, the main government peace negotiator, Minister Aung Min says that “a federal system, one of the key demands of the ethnic armed groups is something that the government is willing to accept yet the military has not indicated any such acceptance.” Though the government promises many things, it is hard to change without the consent of the Tatmadaw, “which is still the most powerful institution in Burma.” The influence of Tatmadaw on Myanmar Politics is clarified in the speech of Min Aung Hlaing, the Commander-in-chief in November 2013: “We made peace agreements, but that doesn’t mean we are afraid to fight. We are afraid of no one. There is no insurgent group we cannot fight or dare not to fight.” See “Tension, Discord and Insecurity: The State of Burma/Myanmar’s Peace Process,” in Burma Partnership, Strengthening Cooperation for a free Burma (October, 2014), 4.
sex, race and religion, notes her position on peace in her speech in front of the Nobel Peace Committee in Oslo, Norway, on October 13, 2013:654

My attitude to peace is rather based on the Burmese definition of peace – It really means removing all the negative factors that destroy peace in this world. So, peace does not mean just putting an end to violence or to war, but to all other factors that threaten peace, such as discrimination, such as inequality, poverty.655

The above statement says that Suu Kyi’s view on peace is to end violence and war as well as to avoid the factors that can lead to conflicts and instabilities which are discrimination between races, genders, and religions. Moreover, Thant Myint-U, a special advisor to the Myanmar Peace Negotiation Centre, said the following in regard to peace negotiation in a lecture delivered on February 24, 2014 at the University of Chicago:

All sides (the government and the NSAGs) are now working towards what we call, what we are going to call national ceasefire agreement which is actually much more than a ceasefire, it will include not only the details agreements about monitoring about aid into these areas, but also the structure of peace talks ahead. If that is signed in agreement of in the coming weeks, then we will reach the first time since 1962 to comprehensive political dialogue on the future of these areas and the constitution amendment might be necessary for peace.656

Than Myint-U’s lecture shows that it is necessary to amend the 2008 Constitution of Myanmar for peace. Further, a nationwide ceasefire agreement, federal system of governance, and social reconciliation which peace negotiators attempt to

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654 Aung San Suu Kyi was offered “Nobel Peace Prize” in 1990 and yet she could not go to Oslo, Norway to receive her award as she was under house arrest at that time. See Aung San Suu Kyi, Freedom From Fear and Other Writings, xxviii.


656 A lecture presented by Thant Myint-U at the Paulson Institute of the University of Chicago, February 24, 2014. In his lecture, Thant Myint-U says in Myanmar political psyche Myanmar is economically behind compare to India, China, Cambodia and Bangladesh. Moreover, though the heart land of Myanmar was economically more important than the frontier areas, nowadays, frontier areas become significant especially for economic and business purposes. Thus, peace in the frontier areas is of great significance between the government and NSAGs for the economic development of Myanmar.
implement, are of great importance for lasting peace. Moreover, it is crucial to keep in mind that peace is “a national issue affecting all sectors of society—not just something concerning ethnic, political, and military elites and the government and Burmese Army... Lasting peace must also address the underlying social-economic and political grievances and aspirations of ethnic communities.” 657 In addition, when war breaks out between the government and the ethnic nationalities, one has to note that it is not only between Buddhists and Christians, but also between Buddhists and Buddhists which hinder peace and tranquility in the country. Since Buddhism and Christianity are peace-loving religions, exploring the Buddhist and Christian perspectives on nyeinchanyay in Myanmar is of urgent need to investigate further roads to a peaceful co-existence.

6.2.1. NYEINCHANYAY: A MYANMAR BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE

Myanmar Buddhists believe there are two types of peace: inner peace and outer peace. Thus, the Buddhist understanding of peace primarily focuses on inner peace which can lead to outer or world peace. In other words, there can be no world peace without peace of mind in individual human beings. In this regard, Ashin Nyanissara, commonly known as Sitagu Sayadaw, one of the most prominent Buddhist monks in Myanmar, asserts:

If religious leaders can make each individual peaceful and kind, it can in turn create a peaceful and harmonious society at national level. Once peace is achieved at a national level, it will definitely lead to mutual understanding, friendship among nations and world peace. That is why the starting point for world peace is the individual who should try to have inner peace and outer calm by means of spiritual practice. 658

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658 Ashin Nyanissara, Selected Speeches Delivered by Sitagu Sayadaw, 173. As inner peace is necessary for outer peace or world peace, Sitagu Sayadaw stresses the need of spiritual awakening. As the world today is “full of chaos, miseries, war-weariness and violence,” he encouraged Buddhist leaders “to bring peace and harmony” as he believed that “genuine peace and happiness amongst mankind could be established through a sincere religious awaking and harmony.” He also asserts that since most modern people’s mentalities are lacking loving-kindness, compassion,” there is no peace and harmony in the world community. Thus, for him, spiritual renaissance is of great importance in making genuine peace. http://www.buddhistchannel. tv/index.php?id=51,407,0,0,1,0#. VFeRuTTF-YA (Access on November 3, 2014).
Further, he goes on to say that the instability of each individual is the starting point of conflict which often “paves the way for tensions and wars.” Thus, individual peace is crucial for outer peace. For Sitagu Sayadaw, having inner peace within the individual is “the starting point to move forward to world peace.” Thus, he states that in order to gain inner peace, practicing “Dhamma” individually, which are the teachings of Buddha, is of great significance as individual peace can be achieved only through practicing Dhamma individually. Further, Ashin Thittila says that “to establish lasting peace and happiness, a genuine religious, spiritual awakening is absolutely necessary.” Though the awakening is in place, energy is required to maintain it. He goes on to say that “what is of importance is not mere faith, rituals and ceremonies in religion, but lives of compassion, love and reason and justice based on the moral, spiritual principles of religion.” Apart from that, Sitagu Sayadaw is of the opinion that “the teaching of religions is not merely to be preserved in the books, nor is it a subject to be studied from a historical or literary standpoint. Actually, it is to be learned, and put into practice in the course of one’s daily life” for peace. In line with Sitagu Sayadaw, Buddhist A. P. observes the significance of religious teachings for peaceful co-existence in Myanmar:

First and foremost, one has to know that religious teachings are one of the essential factors for pursuing peace, particularly among diverse ethnic groups of Myanmar. When saying religious teachings, it means all religions existing predominantly in Myanmar namely Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, Islam and even primal religions embraced by tribal groups. When it comes to religious matters, mutual understanding and mutual acceptance among the adherents is really significant for building peace. In Myanmar, establishing peace is primarily important as it is the principal foundation for nation building. Religions should not be taken as a source of violence but rather as a resource for peace. Building a community of

659 Ashin Nyanissara, Selected Speeches Delivered by Sitagu Sayadaw, 215.
660 Ibid., 199. With regard to the significance of practicing meditation for inner peace, Sitagu Sayadaw asserts that “one who practices meditation achieves inner peace and calm which make him a tolerant and compassionate person” because through meditation one can remove his or her “mental defilement by concentrated mind.” See also Ashin Nyanissara, Selected Speeches Delivered by Sitagu Sayadaw, 177.
661 Ashin Thittila, Essential Themes of Buddhist Lectures, 216.
662 Ashin Nyanissara, Selected Speeches Delivered by Sitagu Sayadaw, 233.
unity among diverse ethnic groups in Myanmar is a tough task but it is a task worth doing to rebuild a new Myanmar nation on this earth.\textsuperscript{663}

Further, an ecological and societal peace is included in outer or world peace. A common prayer of the Buddhist tradition of Myanmar says: \textit{Asih, anauk, taung, myauk hma shihdaw, tattawa a paung doh, bayyan khatteng, ngeinchan kyabar say}. Translation: May all sentient beings – both human beings and animals – who are in the east, the west, the south and the north be free from danger, may peace be with you, and may you be free from enmity and oppression. In short, they are praying for the well-being, peace, and harmony of all sentient beings. It seems to me that they are well aware of the interdependency and interrelatedness of human beings, animals, and all living things. Regarding societal and ecological peace in Myanmar, Sitagu Sayadaw notes that it is imperative to learn to live together peacefully with human beings and nature. He states that “forgiving and forgetting the mistakes of each other” is also necessary in order to live in peace. He says that it is necessary to have the attitude of ‘Live and let live’ in interstate relationship for peace as the “spirit of peaceful co-existence will make our world a beautiful and worthy place to live in.”\textsuperscript{664} In addition, he believes that the Ten Perfections\textsuperscript{665} in Buddhism are of great importance for “a leader in religion or politics” because they are “the way to peace and harmony.” Further, he mentions that living together peacefully and harmoniously with all nations is the teaching of Buddha.\textsuperscript{666}

With regard to societal peace, Sayadaw U Kaw Thala, a Buddhist monk of the Sanpyah Sasana Monastery, Mayangone, Yangon, asserts that during the time of Buddha on earth, he was active in peacemaking and also encouraged his followers to make peace and harmony. Further, he says that Buddha praised those who were engaged in peace building.\textsuperscript{667} One of the prominent teachings of Buddha regarding peace is the following: “Do not look far, do not look near, there can be no peace if

\textsuperscript{663} In my personal interview (see the appendix of this volume), Buddhist A.P. expresses his opinion for peace building in Myanmar among people of different faiths and ethnic groups.

\textsuperscript{664} Ibid., 268.

\textsuperscript{665} Ten Perfections (paramis) in Theravada Buddhism, according to Ashin Nyanissara, are dana/generosity, sila/discipline, nekkhama/renunciation, panna/wisdom, viriya/endevor, khanti/patience, sacca/truth, adhitthana/resolution, metta/loving kindness, upakkha/equanimity. See Ashin Nyanissara, \textit{Selected Speeches Delivered by Sitagu Sayadaw}, 269-270.

\textsuperscript{666} Ibid., 271.

there is revenge, and there can be peace without revenge to enemies.” Moreover, he says that it is possible to live without enemies and it is precious to live without enemies among those who have enemies. As the message of Buddha is peace and harmony, U Kaw Thala stresses that for those who are struggling for peace building, it is vital to keep the teaching of Buddha on peace in mind. All these are, he says, outer peace according to Lord Buddha. Thus, according to U Kaw Thala, that is how one should approach peacemaking in the society. He further says that Buddha was not just talking about peace, but he also resolved tensions and conflicts in his place and region during his lifetime. Further, as Buddha was the one who solved conflicts and tensions in his society, Sitagu Sayadaw says that only the teachings of Buddha “can heal the wounds of mankind, which are self-inflicted and are rooted in lust, anger and delusion.” In addition, he goes on to say that Buddha “emphasized that tolerance and forgiveness are the best ways to harmony” while un-forgiveness and intolerance are the hindrances to peace and harmony in society. For Sitagu Sayadaw, the message of the Buddha, which is absolute tolerance, is of great significance as it is the foundation of peace. As

The teaching of Lord Buddha with regard to peace and harmony was practiced in the history of Myanmar. Sayadaw U Kaw Thala describes that in the thirteenth century, during the reign of King Naratihapate (1256-1287) in Bagan, war broke out between Mongols and Bamars. Due to fear of Mongol soldiers, Naratihapate left Bagan and settled in Hle-yieh region near to present Pyay. At that time, he asserts, no one protected the people and their properties in Bagan. Thus, people in Bagan kingdom were in hopeless situation. In view of the desperate need of help and having full of compassion to the local people in Bagan, Shin Dita Pamaukkha (Disapramok), a Buddhist monk, went to Beijing to meet King Kobalaing Khan for peace negotiation between the Bamars and Mongols. When Shin Dihta Pamaukkha met Mongol King, he said that “a gardener is the one who waters his trees and flowers for their survival. It is vividly understood that he has no intention to do things which is disadvantageous to his own plants. In the case of Bamar king, he does not mean to prejudice the wellbeing of the people. If Bagan is been destroyed at this point of time, it will also adversely affect the mission of Buddha/Buddha sasana.” Due to the words of Shin Dhta Pamaukkha, the Mongol soldiers stopped attacking Bagan and the people in Bagan escaped from fear of the Mongols. In short, one can understand the work of Shin Dita Pamaukkha during the thirteenth century in Myanmar as the attempt for outer peace for community and society. See Sayadaw U Kaw Thala, “Ngeinchanyay Hohngien Hneh Buddha Bata a Myin,” 33-34.

Ashin Nyanissara, Selected Speeches Delivered by Sitagu Sayadaw, 267. Sitagu Sayadaw describes that the teachings of Buddha which are the only way to peace and harmony of the world known as “four sublime living (Brahma-vihara), namely: loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic-joy, and equanimity.”

Ibid.

Ibid., 271.

Ibid., 277.
building common ground for living together in peace is an urgent need in today’s context of Myanmar, collaboration of people of different faiths and ethnic groups in the country working together toward peace is essential. In journeying together toward peace, the spirit of fellowship is necessary as one of the major causes of conflict is a “lack of active fellowship.” Thus, a spirit of fellowship among people of different faiths is essential. In this regard, Ashin Thittila notes:

The peace which we all desire, peace in our hearts and in our minds, peace between neighbours and among nations, is not a miracle which is God's task to perform, it can only come about as a result of reconstruction of thought, feeling and action by means of the spirit of fellowship, and such is the duty of all mankind.

Further, Ashin Thittila stresses the need of the real spirit of fellowship through religion as “religion is an education of the heart with a view to refining” the nature of human beings. He goes on to say that religion is “not merely theory but practice” because, for him, “no doctrine is of any value unless and until it is applied.” In addition, he says that it is necessary to realize the interdependence of all life and living things. He further says that “without recognition of the oneness of the world in all aspects, spiritual as well as social, economic and political, there will never be peace.” Further, he says that in promoting the spirit of fellowship among people of different faiths, forgetting our selfish attitude, or the “I,” “in the service of all” is essential in leading human beings to peace. This avoiding of self-centeredness in the service of all, regardless of sex, race and religion, is of great value for peace. In this regard, the perception of Than Aung is worth mentioning:

673 Ibid., 281.
674 Ashin Thittila, Essential Themes of Buddhist Lectures, 56.
675 Ibid., 57.
676 Ibid., 58.
677 Ibid., 59.
678 Ibid., 65.
679 Since self-centeredness is one of the causes for conflicts and tensions, Ashin Thittila states that Buddhist children particularly who are in the monasteries in Myanmar are taught to avoid egocentrism and to live a good and peaceful life by saying: “Dear children, rejoice! You can all be Buddhas in the making ... Do not think that you are living just for your own sake, your life should be for the good of others as well. A tree bears fruit, a cow gives milk, a stream runs its course, as a result of which others benefit ... Do not give trouble to other less fortunate fellow children. Harm not your poor dumb brothers and sisters, put yourselves in the position of others and try to identify
It is necessary to cut down the ego that we have and set a common ground to accommodate everyone. It is necessary for everyone to be careful with this factor... challenges do exist especially during political transitional period of Myanmar but having a strong channel either socio-cultural or socio-religious to keep balance to the situation is the utmost importance one in our country.680

In addition, Mehn Tin Mon, an advisor to the Ministry of Religious Affairs and President of the Buddha Sasana Center, Thanlyin asserts that the foundation of peace is based on the five moral precepts in Buddhism known as the *Panca Sila*. They are as follows: abstaining from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, alcohol and drug consumption. He further says that the Buddhist concept of *Panca Sila* is “also included in the ten commandments of Christianity and Islam.”681 Thus, he is of the opinion that if Buddhists and Christians as well as Muslims “observe these five moral precepts diligently,” peace can be established in the world leading to a happy and prosperous world community.682 Additionally, in establishing a peaceful community in Myanmar, the role of religion is of great significance. In this regard, Buddhist A. P. asserts:

We, all the faith-adherents are obliged to follow the rule and commandment of our religious teachings as peace is the ultimate goal of all religions. Though peace is differently termed, all religions are searching for it in different ways. To build a lasting peace in our community, religious teachings in Buddhism like *metta*/love and *karuna*/compassion should be practiced in the life of all people...Building peace through practicing our religious teachings and involving in social activities is a must in Myanmar...Since Buddhism is a religion of non-violence and peace, the Myanmar kings invited Christian missionaries to work together in the areas of health and education. Further, former Myanmar kings applied the Buddhist concept of *metta*/love and peace.683

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680 Than Aung’s view.
682 Ibid., 11.
683 In line with Dr. Anonymous, U Dhmmapati is of the opinion that “seeing others with love, compassion and kindness is necessary to understand one another and to establish a peaceful relationship.” Thus, he further says that “basically, love and kindness need to
6.2.2. NYEINCHANYAY: A MYANMAR CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

Myanmar Christians share different perspectives on the concept of nyeinchanyay. Generally, Myanmar Protestant churches can be divided into two groups: ecumenical and evangelical. While evangelical churches mainly focus their mission on “the saved” and “the lost,” ecumenical churches focus on “the oppressed” and “the oppressor.”684 In short, one of the main concerns of ecumenical churches is living together in peace and harmony with people of other faiths in Myanmar. Thus, one of the main concerns for them in the country is peace and justice. The Myanmar Council of Churches, a member of the World Council of Churches, started initiating reconciliation and peace building in the country.685 Smith Ngul Za Thawng, former General Secretary of the Myanmar Council of Churches (MCC), states that as Jesus Christ is our peace “who reconciled us to God and with each other, proclaiming peace a new relationship (one new humanity) between those who had been separated by alienation and hostility (Eph. 2:14-17).”686 It is essential to cultivate “a culture of peace” which calls “for a global, moral, ethical transformation – creation of a new praxis of passive co-existence to active co-existence according to the mind and model of Christ.”687

While some Christian leaders are focusing on peace, justice and reconciliation in the country, some of the evangelical pastors preach that the coming of Jesus Christ into the world was not to establish peace. They refer to Jesus who said: “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword” (Matt. 10:34). Further, these evangelical preachers quote what Jesus said: “Do you think that I came to give peace in the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division!” (Lk. 12:51). Further, Dam Suan Mung, founder and pastor of Full...
Gospel Assembly in Yangon, Myanmar, always uses the Hebrew word “םוֹלשָׁ” (shalom) as the common greeting to his congregation. Though the Hebrew word “Shalom” can be translated in many different ways, it seems that his understanding of “shalom” means personal health, well-being and peace. It is heard in his sermons as well since his preaching is normally based on ideas of prosperity and well-being of human beings, the so-called “prosperity Gospel.” When saying “shalom” to his members, it seems that he wishes his congregations to live in peace as well as to have well-being in their daily lives. In other words, his understanding of “shalom” can be interpreted as prosperity and well-being.

In addition, Maung Maung Yin, Vice-president of the Myanmar Institute of Theology describes that peace does not mean the “absence of conflict.” He goes on to say that as a Christian community it is necessary “to be a community of people at peace with one another in truth.” Moreover, he mentions that as peacemaking is the virtue of a Christian community, the church has to “confront and challenge the false peace of the world which is too often built more on power than truth.” Since it is necessary for the church, as a peacemaking community, to offer peace to the world, finding “the habits of peace whose absence so often makes violence” is of great importance. Otherwise, he says, the world has “to use violence as the means to achieve faulty solutions.”

Since Myanmar is a country of complexity, Saw Hlaing Bwa says it is necessary “to establish a Christian approach, Muslim approach, Buddhist approach for peace” in Myanmar society. He goes on to say that the conflicts of the past in Myanmar still have impact on today’s society “and at the same time it is related with power and hegemony.” Thus, for peaceful and harmonious co-existence in Myanmar it is essential “to have mutual understanding between religions, races so that we can establish a union in which people can live peacefully.” Further, he underlines that “all Myanmar people cannot be Buddhists.” Vice versa, he stresses that “not all the people in the country can be Christians.” He, therefore, mentions that it is necessary to live in unity which is not uniformity, but unity in diversity “because Myanmar is a pluralistic society where there is diversity in culture, language and religion.” In order to build peace in Myanmar, he is of the opinion that practicing a “federal system of governance” is of great importance. Moreover, he believes that “until and unless Myanmar practices federal system, there will be no peace and harmony in the country.” In addition, Saw Hlaing Bwa states that the peace which

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689 Ibid.
690 Ibid., 53.
is to be achieved is “the anthropocentric peace” as well as “the peace of the whole creation.” In this regard, he mentions:

The whole creation is groaning and waiting for the days of peace, which is its redemption. The assurance about the possibility of peace in the vision of the new heavens and new earth in Isaiah 65:17-23 is the peace that is to be happened within the range of our history. Its scope transcends the humanity and reaches the entire eco-system and has to do with a just world order, where there is no more injustice and exploitation, no more hostility and hatred, grief and sorrow... It is a peaceful state of well-being (Shalom) in which the rightful existence of all is acknowledged, respected and guaranteed. It is a state of mutual complementarities in which all the differences peacefully co-exist and mutually enrich each other.  

Further, since the peace is not only anthropocentric but also ecological peace, Saw Hlaing Bwas points out that “our journey to peace is not exclusively the Christian journey.” From his point of view, making Biblical reflections alone on peace is not enough. Experiences and contributions of people of other faiths must also be taken into account in peace building as “this is the journey of all the faithful who are committed to peace.” In line with Saw Hlaing Bwa, Daniel K. Zau Nan is of the opinion that since “peace is not limited only in Christianity,” people of different faiths and ideologies are also “called for working hand in hand for the peace of the world today.” Though peace has many levels, the deepest level in terms of peace for him is “peace of heart and mind” which is the starting point for world peace.

As already stated, not only the government but also Christian organizations are active in peace building in the country at the present moment. It is said that the Kachin Baptist Women have been actively involved in peacebuilding in the country, particularly “through their Bible studies, sermons, poems and artwork.” Though the government and Christian organizations are active in the peace process, building peace in the country is still at a very early stage. In this regard, the former principal of the Myanmar Institute of Theology, Anna May Say Pa asserts: “There can be no genuine peace in our land (Myanmar) until there is justice and human

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692 Ibid., 6.
693 Ibid.
rights for all, including women’s rights." She continued stating that peace is “the equitable distribution of resources (so that) everyone will have a chance to live an abundant life.” Judging from Anna May Say Pa’s statement one can conclude that currently there is no equal sharing and distributing of resources existing in Myanmar. Moreover, she shares the opinion of her theological students, with respect to peace in the country, in the following:

Though we say ‘peace, peace,’ yet if the rich and the powerful gain wealth at the expense of the poor, there is no genuine peace. Though we say ‘peace, peace,’ if judges and officials continue to take bribes and are corrupted, there is no genuine peace. Though we say ‘peace, peace,’ and women are devalued as human beings, there is no genuine peace. Though we say ‘peace, peace,’ if children die from malnutrition and disease, there is no genuine peace. Though we say ‘peace, peace,’ and people cannot freely express their opinions, there is no genuine peace.

The above statement shows that socio-economic injustice, corruption, human rights violations, women inequality, poverty, and the lack of the freedom of speech are all regarded as the source of conflicts and wars threatening peace in Myanmar. Additionally, being disrespectful and the lack of recognition among each other hamper the Myanmar people from living side by side peacefully. Thus, Moe Moe Nyunt stresses that it is necessary to respect and recognize one another as this is “the key for peaceful co-existence in Myanmar.” Further, Thang Za Tuan is of the opinion that embracing “the principles of love and compassion” are of great significance for living together in peace between Buddhists and Christians in Myanmar. In line with Thang Za Tuan, Saw Hlaing Bwa is of the same opinion, saying that “love is the ultimate concern in all world religions to bring the world into peace. Without love, there will be no peace.”

696 Every year, Myanmar Institute of Theology (MIT), Insein, Yangon has MIT Day of Prayer. This quotation was a liturgical chant for MIT Day of Prayer, 1998 and quoted in Anna May Say Pa, “Birthing an Asian Feminist Theology in the Face of the Dragon: A Burmese Perspective,” 17-18.
697 Moe Moe Nyunt’s view for peace.
698 Thang Za Tuan’s views for peace.
6.2.3. BUDDHIST-CHRISTIAN POINTS OF CONVERGENCE FOR NYEINCHANYAY

In search of peace, both Buddhists and Christians are of the opinion that individual peace, or peace of heart and mind, is the starting point for world peace as outer peace is impossible without peace in the individual life. For individual peace, Buddhists accept that practicing the “dhamma” is pivotal as it will lead to individual peace. Moreover, Christians accept Jesus Christ himself as their own peace. Thus, both parties accept that practicing religious teachings are the foundation of individual peace leading to world peace. Further, imitating the lives of Buddha and Jesus Christ, and practicing their teachings, is of great value for peace as both of them taught tolerance, forgiveness and reconciliation in order to live peacefully with others. Based on the current situation in Myanmar, tolerance and forgiveness leading to reconciliation is necessary. Without reconciliation between Buddhists and Christians there will be no peace in the country. However, the question is: “How can reconciliation be initiated among them?”

Moreover, both Buddha and Jesus had love and compassion for human beings as well as for animals and all living things. They displayed the fullness of love and compassion to all living beings. Additionally, both of them were ready to offer what they had to the needy. In Buddhism, dana / giving is one of the ten duties for Buddhists. In Christianity, it is believed that through giving his life to human beings, Jesus is regarded as the one who made peace and reconciliation between God and human beings. Avoiding egocentrism, which is the beginning of dukkha / sufferings, and practicing dana / giving to the poor, the needy and the oppressed, is of great value for peace. Dana / giving is not only about sharing money and possessions, but is also about sharing power and authority to the powerless, the oppressed and the marginalized in society.

In addition, violent action toward any sentient beings is not condoned in the teachings of Gautama Buddha and Jesus Christ and this is the starting point for peace for human beings and their environment. Panca Sila and the second part of the Decalogue as a non-violent way in search of peace among living beings are also of great significance to explore. Buddhists and Christians are encouraged

700 Cf. David Tracy, Dialogue With The Other, The Inter-religious Dialogue (Louvain: Peeters Press, 1990), 81.
701 Digha Nikaya 1:1:8.
702 Matthews 5:39; 26:52.
to practice five moral precepts and the second part of the Decalogue, which can lead human beings and their environment into a peaceful and harmonious atmosphere. Both Buddha and Jesus taught that having metta / love and karuna / compassion toward sentient beings is of great virtue and avoiding violent action is the beginning of peace and harmony in the world. Thus, cultivating metta / love, karuna / compassion, and practicing ahimsa / a non-violent approach to solving conflicts are crucial for building a peaceful society in Myanmar.

6.3. SELF-SACRIFICIAL LOVE: A COMMON ELEMENT FOR BUDDHIST-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE

As already observed in chapter three, most of the interviewees are of the same opinion, stating that Buddhist-Christian dialogue in Myanmar is necessary. However, in Buddhist-Christian dialogue, they said, the primary focus should not be based on doctrines, beliefs and traditions, but on human rights, peace, as well as social concerns, such as, education and healthcare. Additionally, they mentioned that overcoming the ecological crisis and eradicating poverty are of great value to be given priority to in interfaith dialogue for religious cooperation. To put it in another way, they are of the opinion that in Buddhist-Christian dialogue the emphasis must be on a person to person basis, but not on the religion of those persons. It seems that they are fully aware that the liberation of the Myanmar people from social and ecological sufferings is of urgent need. In this regard, though I share a similar perceptive, I am also of the opinion that religious teachings of Buddhism and Christianity are essential for finding points of convergence in search of peace in the country. Thus, after having explored Buddhist-Christian possible points of convergence for peace in Myanmar, I would like to point out “self-sacrificial love,” which is known as “metta” in a Buddhist term and “agape” in a Christian term, as a common element for Buddhist-Christian dialogue in Myanmar since “love bears all things.” Firstly, this section will explore Buddhist metta and Christian agape in order to construct a bridge for dialogue between them so that both traditions can better appreciate and relate to each other potentially paving the way for peaceful co-existence in the country. Secondly, the inseparability of metta / agape and karuna / compassion, which are

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two sides of the same coin, will be explored. Finally, how the power of *metta* / *agape* can bring forgiveness leading to reconciliation for peaceful co-existence in the country will be investigated.

### 6.3.1. BUDDHIST METTA

A Pali word “*metta*” is translated in English as friendliness, loving-kindness, and goodwill. Ashin Thittila, a prominent Buddhist monk in Myanmar, is not comfortable with translating the Pali word, “*metta*” into English a “love” because “the word love has been defined in many ways in English language.” He further says that when the word ‘love’ is used, there can be different concepts and interpretations behind. Thus, for him, the Pali word “*metta*” has no full equivalent in English as it is much more than an ordinary, sensual, and sentimental kind of love. He, however, further says that though there is no equivalent English word for *metta*, when it is translated as loving kindness, this is “not the ordinary, sensual, emotional, sentimental kind of love.” In this regard, Elizabeth J. Harris, president of the European Network of Buddhist-Christian Studies, asserts that the word “compassion” was more preferable than “love” for a Buddhist woman whom she talked with in Sri Lanka “because it was not linked to possessiveness or craving.”

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709 Ashin Thittila, *Essential Themes of Buddhist Lectures*, 81.

710 Ibid., 82. Ashin Thittila says that though there is no equivalent English word to metta, when it is translated as loving-kindness, this is “not the ordinary, sensual, emotional, sentimental kind of love.”

711 Elizabeth J. Harris, *Buddhism For a Violent World, A Christian Reflection* (London: Epworth Press, 2010), 72. Harris describes what her English-speaking Buddhist friend has said with respect to the use of the word “love”: “Love isn’t a word that should be used in connection with the dhamma... It speaks of lust or attachment. It implies choosing certain people above others and being partial. It can involve violence and the wish to possess. Some of us have stopped using the word “with love” at the end of letters. We say “with metta.” Further, Harris says that “For a Christian, the word ‘love’ is usually seen as inherently positive... In one-to-one relationships, it can also be possessive and manipulative, if one partner, through ‘love’ seek to curb the freedom of the other. The Greek language needed at least three words for the concept – agape, philia, eros.”
Further, different scholars define the word “metta” in different ways. Walpola Rahula, a Sri Lankan Buddhist scholar, defined metta as “extending unlimited, universal love and good-will to all living beings without any kind of discrimination, just as a mother loves her only child.” According to Lord Buddha, genuine metta is: “Just as a mother would protect her only child at the risk of her own life, even so, cultivate a boundless heart towards all beings. Let your thoughts of boundless love pervade the whole world.” Thus, Ashin Thittila states that as a Buddhist, it is not necessary to have a new ideology for peace because the teaching of Buddha on metta “is good enough to create anything noble, anything grand to make peace and happiness at home, in society and in the world.” Then, what is this metta? Ashin Thittila defines metta as:

The Pali word Metta means literally – ‘friendliness’ – also love without a desire to possess but with a desire to help, to sacrifice self-interest for the welfare and well-being of humanity. This love is without any selection or exclusion. If you select a few good friends and exclude unpleasant persons, then you have not got a good grasp of this Metta.

The above statement clearly defines that to love means to sacrifice for the well-being of all and not to discriminate between friends and foes. Additionally, as Buddha is full of metta, Ashin Thittila stresses that wherever necessary he is “always ready to sacrifice his own life” for the benefit of all sentient beings. To

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713 Sutta Nipata, 149-150.
714 Ashin Thittila, *Essential Themes of Buddhist Lectures*, 83.
715 Ibid., 82. Ashin Thittila states that Buddhist metta is different from Christian love. He takes the book of Luke as an example, saying that “the Christian Bible ‘Goodwill’ is supposed to be very good” as it is seen in the message of the angels “when the child Christ was born.” He continued saying that when the child Christ was born, the angels “gave a message of goodwill to the world, ‘Peace on earth to men of goodwill.” For him, the message of the angels which was peace on earth is not to all people but only to men of goodwill. He goes on saying that Buddhist metta is much deeper than goodwill. According to the teaching of Buddha, metta has two aspects: negative and positive aspect. The negative explanation of metta is adosa which means absence of hatred and hostility. However, he says that the absence of hatred and hostility alone is not enough. He further explains that “not to do evil is very good, but it is only a negative aspect – to do good is the positive aspect. So also Metta has its positive aspect.” Thus, one can conclude that Ashin Thittila’s views on Buddhist metta must not be passive but active aspect which is to do good for self and others as well.
716 Ibid., 69.
put it in another way, the Buddhist understanding of *metta* is a self-sacrificial love which is comparable to *agape* love in the Christian term. He goes on to say that *metta* is “not a mere feeling, but implies the doing of charitable deeds.” Moreover, he says that “*metta* is not simply brotherly feeling, but active benevolence, a love which expresses and fulfils itself in lively solicitude and active ministry to the welfare of fellow beings.”717 In addition, Sitagu Sayadaw mentions that *metta* “treats both the good and the bad equally without making any discrimination”718 because “it embraces the loved one just as he or she is beauty or beast.”719 He, thus, says that it is necessary to have “*metta* “to those who are well disposed or ill disposed toward us... just as the water extends its coolness equally alike to both the wicked and virtuous.” He goes on to say that it is, thus, necessary to “develop thoughts of friendliness to friend and foe alike.”720 Would it be possible to have the same attitude toward friends and foes without any discrimination? In this regard, Perry Schmidt-Leukel, professor of religions at the University of Münster, stresses that “as long as love is discriminative, as long as one loves the one and hates the other, attachment is involved: The one is loved because of the benefit deriving from him or her, and the other is rejected because of the opposite – so that there is attachment in both its positive and negative modes. But even this discriminating, differentiating love can have a liberating aspect if and inasmuch a genuine element of selfless caring is present in it.”721 Perry Schmidt-Leukel further says: “True loving-kindness which accompanies detachment will 1) be selfless, i.e. concerned with the benefit of the other and not one’s own; and 2) it will be non-differentiating, that is, it is directed towards friend and foe alike.”722 Regarding metta, the explanation of Buddha in the Metta Sutta is worth mentioning here:

As a mother, even at the risk of her own life, protects her child, her only child, so let a man cultivate goodwill without measure among all beings. Let him cultivate goodwill without measure towards the whole world, above, below, all around, unstunted, unmixed with any feeling of different or opposing interests. Let him remain steadfastly in this state of mind all the

722 Ibid.
while he is awake, whether he be standing, walking, sitting or lying down. This state of heart is the best in the world.\textsuperscript{723}

Furthermore, he mentions that if one has genuine \textit{metta}, he or she can do not only almost everything which benefits all creatures, but also “can radiate a noble, grand peace.” He further asserts that “it is this \textit{metta} that attempts to break away all barriers which separate beings one from the other.”\textsuperscript{724} Further, he asserts that before he died, Buddha had placed the ideal which is “mutual service … to help each other, bear each other’s burdens.”\textsuperscript{725} In addition, Ashin Thittila explains that though metta is “generally taken to exist in connection with other people,” in reality, it is “love for self.” However, this metta is not “a selfish love,” it is a love for self as the self comes first. This is because, he says, “when we meditate on love, we meditate on love of self first.”\textsuperscript{726} Thus, he continued asserting that by having pure \textit{metta}, which is first and foremost for “self,” it is possible to diminish “selfish tendencies, hatred, and anger.” This means that no one can share with

\textsuperscript{723} Ashin Thittila,\textit{ Essential Themes of Buddhist Lectures}, 66. Further, Ashin Thittila goes on saying that “The love of a mother who has only one child is the example chosen by the Buddha. Imagine a mother’s love; when a child is hungry she is watching carefully to feed it before it asks her for it. When the child is in danger, she will risk her own life. Thus in every way she helps her child. Therefore, the Buddha asks us to love all beings as a mother loves her only child. If we can do it even up to a certain extent, I think the world will be a different place happier and more peaceful…We are asked to be loving towards all beings as a mother loves her only child. Therefore, Metta must go hand in hand with helpfulness, with willingness and a spirit of sacrifice for the welfare of other beings.” See Ashin Thittila,\textit{ Essential Themes of Buddhist Lectures}, 84-85.

\textsuperscript{724} Ibid., 85.

\textsuperscript{725} Ibid., 86. Ashin Thittila further describes that in the Nikaya, there are three modes of conduct instructed by Buddha: Buddhaththa Cariya, Natattha Cariya, and Lokattha Cariya. The first mode of conduct is “Buddhattha Cariya” which “is striving for self-development so that one may attain happiness, self-culture and self-realization.” The second mode of conduct is “Natattha Cariya” which means “working for the benefit of one’s relatives and friends.” The third mode of conduct is “Lokattha Cariya” which means “working for the benefit of the whole world without making any distinction as regards caste, colour or creed.”

\textsuperscript{726} Ashin Thittila,\textit{ Essential Themes of Buddhist Lectures}, 87. He explains regarding true metta meditation, saying that “first you fill yourself with love mentally. ‘May I be well and happy.’ After a while you extend it to all others, saying mentally, ‘May all beings of the Universe be well and happy.’ Mean it and feel it. Also try to see that the world is filled with your love, with a great desire that they may be happy, a desire as such a mother has for her only child.” See also Ashin Thittila,\textit{ Essential Themes of Buddhist Lectures}, 89.
others what he or she does not have. On the other hand, after having possessed metta, one can only share it to others. He goes on to say that “to love the self means to be free from selfishness, hatred, anger, etc. Therefore, to clear ourselves from these undesirable feelings we must love ourselves” because “self-love comes first” in Buddhism. In addition, since “Buddhism always is a method of dealing with ourselves,” he stresses that “it is self-help” because Buddha said that “if a person cannot help himself well, he cannot help others as well.” In line with Ashin Thittila, Peter Harvey, professor of Buddhist Studies at the University of Sunderland and co-founder of the UK Association for Buddhist Studies, is of the same view, emphasizing that one has to examine and accept oneself first before spreading loving-kindness to others. In that case, what is this loving kindness? Loving kindness, according to Peter Harvey, is “the aspiration for the true happiness of any, and ultimately all, sentient beings, for all these are like oneself in liking happiness and disliking pain. It is the antidote to hatred and fear, and is to be distinguished from sentimentality.” Further, once loving-kindness is experienced towards a hostile person, it is then radiated towards all living beings in all directions, whereby “radiating” becomes not just a metaphor, but is a mental force that can directly affect others. Peter Harvey further mentions that metta can be practiced in daily life by avoidance of anger toward every living being, and creation as well. It seems that Buddhist metta is not limited to human beings, but to all living beings. In this regard, Mahasi Sayadaw, one of the most prominent Myanmar Buddhist monks, asserts:

All sentient beings desire happiness and not suffering. If you wish them well and happy, their desire will be fulfilled. Then they will feel that you have brought them under the cool shade of a tree. So, whatever you do, do it with loving-kindness, whatever you speak, speak with loving-kindness and

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727 Ibid., 87. Ashin Thittila gives an example, saying that “supposing you have no money how can you send even a few small coins? So meditation on love is to be started within ourselves. You may say that we love ourselves. If you can say that you love yourselves, can you harm yourselves by having angry/evil thoughts within yourselves? If you love a person will you do harm to him? No. To love the self means to be free from selfishness, hatred, anger, etc.”


730 Peter Harvey, An Introduction to Buddhist Ethic, 104.

731 Ibid., 108.
whatever you think, think with loving-kindness all for the sake of happiness for others.\textsuperscript{732}

Since the concept of metta is for the happiness and well-being of all sentient beings, it is widely practiced particularly in the movement of democracy and human rights in Myanmar. In this regard, Aung San Suu Kyi stresses that visualizing “a democratic Burma” is “to contribute towards the happiness and well-being of the people” as “metta is the core of our movement, a desire to bring relief to human beings.”\textsuperscript{733} She further says that at the core of the democratic movement in Myanmar is metta,\textsuperscript{734} which is not passive, but active for “doing something about the situation by bringing whatever relief you can to those who need it the most, by caring for them, by doing what you can do to help others.”\textsuperscript{735}

In addition, Aung Than Lin, a Bamar Buddhist who converted to Christianity, asserts that as metta is the pure form of love, it can bring peace and prosperity to all sentient beings.\textsuperscript{736} He further says that since ‘metta’ can be interpreted as a wish for the peace and well-being of others, when it is cultivated, one does not look at the weaknesses or faults of others, but rather considers how to help others for their well-being. For him, having metta means having an optimistic view toward others even when one is verbally or bodily insulted. He further says that when one has an optimistic view of the virtue of others, one continues endeavoring for their welfare. As a result, he says, wherever there is metta / love, there is forgiveness and reconciliation,\textsuperscript{737} which is of urgent need today in the conflict-filled Myanmar society.

\textbf{6.3.2. CHRISTIAN AGAPE}

As stated earlier, for some Buddhists like Ashin Thittila and the Buddhist woman whom Elizabeth Harris met in Sri Lanka, the term “love” is unsatisfactory to use

\textsuperscript{732} Mahasi Sayadaw, \textit{To Nibbana Via: The Noble Eightfold Path} (Yangon: Buddha Sasana Organization, 1980), 64.

\textsuperscript{733} Aung San Suu Kyi, \textit{The Voice of Hope: Conversation with Alan Clements} (New York: Penguin, 1997), 134.

\textsuperscript{734} Ibid., 122.

\textsuperscript{735} Ibid., 17-18.


\textsuperscript{737} Ibid.
related to “Dhamma” as it can be interpreted in so many different ways. However, in Christianity using the word “love” is not a problem at all. In the Bible, it is written that the first and greatest commandment is to love God with all our hearts, and with all our souls, and with all our minds. And the second is to love our neighbors as we love ourselves.\(^{738}\) Winston L. King, thus, says that “in the New Testament love is described as the highest and most comprehensive of all Christian virtues.”\(^{739}\) Further, he distinguishes Christian love as a unitary quality of life, personal, and mutuality of relationship.\(^{740}\)

Firstly, in exploring Christian love as having a unitary quality of life, he describes the three kinds of love in the New Testament distinguished by their respective Greek words: *eros* meaning “ordinary human erotic and possessive love,” *philia*, which means “love between equals and friends,” and *agape*, which implies God’s love towards all creatures.\(^{741}\) Since all three kinds of love in Greek are translated as “love” in English, it sometimes causes “ambiguity in its interpretation and expression.” He goes on to say that “the love of God does not war against the love of man; physically expressed love is not entirely unrelated to spiritual love.” Thus, he describes that the Christian understanding of love is “a continuum that stretches from the highest to the lowest form (agape to eros) and back again in some kind of unity.”\(^{742}\)

Secondly, he describes Christian love as personal. This means that in Christianity there is a concept of God being in relationship with humans. He, therefore, says that it is necessary for Christians to confess “his conception of love is anthropomorphic, drawn from his experience of other persons.”\(^{743}\) Since the context of interpersonal love is of great significance, he asserts that “Christian

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740 Ibid., 65.
741 Ibid., 66. Regarding the word “love” in Greek, Lynn A. De Silva Lynn, the late Sri Lanka Methodist theologian, categorized four types of love, saying that “love” “finds expression in a hierarchy of qualities: in *epithumia* – the desire for sensual fulfillment; in *eros* – the passion for reunion with the good, the true and the beautiful; in *philia* – the drive for mutual relationship between persons; and in *agape* – the all-embracing and self-transcending quality of love.” See Lynn A. De Silva, *The Problem of the Self in Buddhism and Christianity* (Colombo: The Study Centre for Religion and Society, 1975), 154.
742 Ibid., 66.
743 Ibid., 69.
love prefers the direct person-to-person fellowship and individually directed helpfulness.”

Thirdly, he regarded Christian love as “a mutuality of relationship” since “mutuality comprises give-and-take, the give-and-take peculiar to genuine interpersonal relationships.” He continued explaining that “there is both give and take - and that what is returned is not necessarily the same as what is given.” Moreover, having a concept of mutuality “between man and inanimate nature” is difficult because, he says, “there is no person-to-person encounter.” Apart from that, he stresses that there is a problem in society as people are of different social status. However, he is of the opinion that rejoicing in “the expression of fellowship, gratitude, and good will as integral parts of the personal exchange that love calls forth” is of great significance for mutuality of relationship in society. Additionally, Saw Hlaing Bwa, professor of Science and Theology at the Myanmar Institute of Theology, says that though there are different types of love, the highest form of love which the Christian tradition adopted is “agape” which is not only “self-sacrificial love” but also “an unconditional love for others in spite of their character flaws and weakness.” Moreover, he says that the agape type of love is “a difficult love for human beings” as it is a self-sacrificial love and an unconditional love of God’s toward his creation. Thus, he says that only overcoming selfishness and unconditionally helping those who are in need are the ways to achieve the agape type of love.

Further, Lynn A. De Silva, the late Sri Lankan theologian, stated that “Love is not merely an emotion, but a moving dynamic power of life. It is the dynamic self-affirming of life” which “includes all dimensions of life.” Since love is related to all dimension of life, loving all sentient beings is vitally important for peace and harmony. Then, how can we love others? To this, Paul F. Knitter says that “to love is to move out of self, to empty self, and connect with others. Love is this emptying, connecting, energy that in its power originates new connections and new life.” He goes on to say: “We first have to act like God in caring for others

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744 Ibid., 70.
745 Ibid.
746 Ibid., 71.
748 Ibid., 66.
before we can really think about God.” 751 In this regard, Jesus Christ said to his disciples: “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you.” 752 For Jesus, self-sacrificing life for others is the greatest love and this was his commandment to his disciples. In addition, in the first letter of Corinthians, St. Paul wrote the following about love:

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 753

This scriptural text describes the characteristics of love which lovers have to bear because love bears kindness and patience. Paul F. Knitter stresses the point that “If lovers force each other, they are not really loving each other. Lovers refrain from coercion, even when it hurts.” 754 Moreover, Jesus told his disciples to love not only God but also their neighbors as well as even their enemies. In the Gospel according to St. Luke, Jesus said:

But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. 755

The text describes that one has to not only love to his / her enemies but also benefit those who hate him / her and pray for those who persecute him / her.

751 Ibid., 45.
752 John 15:12-14.
753 I Corinthians 13:4-7.
755 Luke 6:27-30. Also in Gospel according to St. Matthew, Jesus said: “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?” (Matt 5:43-47).
Would it be possible to love our enemies and to pray for them? In the Myanmar context, who are the enemies of Buddhists and who are the enemies of Christians? Would it be possible to ask Myanmar Buddhists to love Christians who had worked together with western Christian missionaries and British colonialists, who cruelly persecuted their forefathers and destroyed their culture and religion? Likewise, would it be possible to ask Myanmar Christians to love their Buddhist neighbors, especially Myanmar soldiers who killed their family members, who raped their mothers or sisters in front of them? Regarding the above questions, I am of the same opinion as Agnete Holm, consultant with the Dialogue on Danmission, Denmark, who says to love our neighbors is "the only way" for peace because "true peace comes from love, forgiveness and reconciliation."756

The above text describes that loving others is imperative because "if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us." (I John 4:12). Further, in the first epistle of John, St. John affirms that God himself is love, saying that "God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them... There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment... Those who say, ‘I love God,’ and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also."757 Then, the question is: Who are our brothers and sisters and who are our neighbors in the context of Myanmar? In the Myanmar context, loving neighbors mean respecting and recognizing other cultures and religions.758 To put it in another way, respecting the religion and culture of others is of great importance in the search for peaceful co-existence in Myanmar. Thus, Myanmar Christians' commitment to love God and to love neighbors is essential because "love for others and respect for their rights and dignity"759 are necessary for peaceful co-existence.

Furthermore, Aloysius Pieris, a Sri Lankan Jesuit priest, says that "love and service are two sides of the same coin. The invitation to love God with all one's heart and mind in Deuteronomy 6:5 is repeated in Joshua 22:5 as a call to 'serve' God with

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758 Samuel Ngun Ling, Communicating Christ in Myanmar, 197.
all one's heart and one's mind.”

If we believe that God is love and that creation is the expression of this love, but then immediately add that God did not have to create, it sounds like God did not have to express his love. But what kind of a love is that? A love that can just exist, without finding expression? Is there such a love? Can we imagine a person being full of love but never showing it, or putting it into action? ... A love that doesn't need to be expressed just doesn't make sense - or it's a bit sick.

The above text highlights that love without action is meaningless. If one has love, one has to put that love into action because love which does not go together with action is like a tree which bears no fruit. This means that love and action are inseparable.

Exploring Buddhist metta and Christian agape love has proved that the Buddhist and Christian concept of self-sacrificial love is similar in nature. However, Buddhist metta is metta to self first and then extends to others, while the imperative of Christian love is to love others first as we love ourselves. To love others means to control our selfishness. To put it in another way, to love others means to consider for others’ affairs which is the starting point to living a Christian life.

Further, the opposite of metta is hatred. Buddha and Jesus Christ taught how to overcome hatred. In the Dhammapada of the Buddhist Tipitaka, Buddha said: “Hatreds do not ever cease in this world by hating, but by love: this is an eternal truth. Overcome anger by love, overcome evil by good... Overcome the miser by giving, overcome the liar by truth.” Likewise, the book of Romans in the Bible describes: “Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” Thus, as followers of the teachings of Buddha and Jesus Christ, the people of Myanmar have to cultivate the spirit of ‘metta / love’ and practice it in their daily lives in order to create a better atmosphere among fellow citizens. Until and

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762 Dhammapada 1.5 & 17.3.

763 Romans 12:10-21.
unless people practice ‘metta / love’ there can be no mutual respect and positive assessment of the “other” in the country. This is essential for individual dignity and a concern for every citizen of Myanmar. It is a challenge that the Buddhists and Christians should confront through dialogue, a dialogue in daily life and a dialogue of action, in which the adherents of Buddhism and Christianity can collaborate to break down all barriers of suspicion which hinder trust and instead seek to affirm one another. As Buddhists and Christians live together in a common context, they need one another because if one religious group has a problem this will affect another religious group as well. If a Buddhist says “I do not need you” to a Christian, or the same attitude is imposed between a Christian and a Muslim, there will be a very limited possibility to initiate peaceful coexistence in the community. All the people in Myanmar should share the same concern on this issue because if one of the religious groups is affected, the other group will also suffer.  

Thus, they need to learn how to love one another and bear each other’s burdens to become a community of love for they are “bound alike by the bonds of humanity.”

Moreover, if there is a socio-economic and socio-political situation like Myanmar, neutrality is impossible for Buddhists and Christians because Buddhist metta and Christian agape is not passive but active, which has the power to change even “the hearts of the oppressors,” and bring about hope and a way for real social transformation. To this, Paul F. Knitter points out that “If there is any chance that hatred will be appeased and that our enemies will be turned into our brothers and sisters, it will be “by love” only if we “love our enemies.” He goes on to say that the Buddha and Jesus realized “the best ‘weapon’ for changing the hearts of our oppressor or enemies is to love them.” Further, only loving our enemies and praying for those who abuse us will change the hearts of our enemies and oppressors and “only in this way will liberation come not just for the oppressed but also for the oppressors.” In addition, as love motivates for social change especially in the struggle for liberation, it brings unity and solidarity to remove the evil society. In this regard, Jose Miguez Bonino, an Argentinean Methodist minister and one of the pioneers of Latin American liberation theology, asserts that “Love means a solidarity lived in the conflictive situations created by the struggle of the

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765 Ashin Thittila, Essential Themes of Buddhist Lectures, 58.
767 Ibid.
This means that Myanmar Buddhists and Christians have to love their neighbors since loving neighbors will help them to transform the evil society into a just society. Additionally, love is powerful and can bring people together in struggle for liberation from social and ecological sufferings. Thus, acknowledging the reality of socio-political and religio-cultural conflicts and removing its root causes by metta / love is of urgent need for the Myanmar people, particularly at this political transition from a military rule to a civilian government. Since it is impossible to separate metta / love and service, Myanmar Buddhists and Christians have to look back over their own history and cultivate the spirit of metta / love to transform their attitudes from selfishness to selfless service for the benefit of all regardless of race, sex and religion.

In addition, as metta / love is essential for peace, where there is love, there is karuna / compassion which is “the genuine desire to help others who are suffering or in distress” without expecting anything in return. On the other hand, karuna / compassion is “the desire to remove suffering from people.” As compassion is feeling for others and feeling with others, what Buddha said with regard to compassion is as follows: “If you do not tend one another, then who is there to tend to you? Whoever would tend to me, he should tend to the sick.” Further, “Buddha helps outcasts (Thag 12.2), lepers (Ud 5.3) and the courtesan like Ambapali (Digha Nikaya 16: Maha-parinibbana Sutta).” The noble message of the Buddha with regard to loving-kindness and compassion is to practice “not only to kings, princes, nobles and millionaires but also to the poor, lonely and needy.”

Similarly, Jesus not only helps outcasts, lepers (Lk. 17: 11-19), sinful women like Mary Magdalene or Mary of Bethany (Lk. 7:36-50), but also heals the sick (Matt. 14:14; 20:30-34) as well as feeds the poor and the hungry (Mk. 6: 34; Lk. 9:59). It is necessary for both traditions to keep in mind that both Buddha and Jesus never neglected the sick, the poor, the outcast, the marginalized and the hungry. Since both of them showed the fullness of love and compassion toward such people, so too, should people of both traditions in Myanmar, through life and actions, show...
love and compassion to the needy and the marginalized. However, Maha Ghosannanda argues that exercising compassion without wisdom is quite dangerous, saying that “It is better to have a wise enemy than a foolish friend.”

This means that having a good friend without wisdom is more dangerous than having a wise enemy because compassion without wisdom can cause suffering. To put it another way, compassion and wisdom must go together hand in hand. Immitating the compassion which Buddha and Jesus showed for the sick, the poor, the oppressed and the outcast will be of great significance in the search for peace in Myanmar since compassion and love cannot be separated.

Additionally, where there is love and compassion, there is forgiveness. For instance, Jesus loved those who persecuted him and prayed for them, saying that “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.” It seems that Jesus was full of love and compassion toward those who crucified him. He realized that their hostility made them suffer as they were dominated by hatred, jealousy and anger. Further, as Jesus had love and compassion, he had the power to forgive those who persecuted him. Furthermore, the love of Jesus Christ is a self-sacrificing love (agape love) for the sake of all in order to remove sin, hatred and violence. Jesus overcomes hatred with love, evil with good and violence with forgiveness. Through the self-sacrificing love of Jesus Christ on the cross, God forgives human beings for their sins and the broken relationship of human beings with him is reconciled by Jesus Christ. In other words, through the love of Jesus and the forgiveness of the Father, the broken relationship of human beings with God is reconciled. Apart from the Christian tradition, there is another example regarding the practice of love which brings forgiveness in the Buddhist tradition which happened during the life time of Buddha.

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773 Maha Ghosananda, *Step by Step: Meditations on Wisdom and Compassion*, ed. Jane Sharada Mahoney and Philip Edmonds (Berkely, Calif.: Parallax Press, 1993), 34-35. Maha Ghosananda gives an example regarding the importance of developing compassion and wisdom equally, saying that “There was a farmer who went into the forest with his friend to gather wood. When the farmer struck a tree with his axe, he disturbed a beehive, and a swarm of angry bees flew out and began stinging him. The farmer's friend was filled with compassion. He grabbed his axe and killed the bees with swift, mighty blows. Unfortunately, he also killed the farmer.”

774 Luke 23:34.


777 Cf. Ephesians 2:14-17.

778 During the life time of Gautama, the Buddha, there was a female lay disciple named Uttara, who married with Sumana, a non-Buddhist. One day, Uttara told her father, saying that she was not happy staying at her husband’s house because she was not able
forgiveness and reconciliation happening among the Bamar and Karen ethnic nationalities in the history of Myanmar particularly during World War II.\textsuperscript{779}

\textsuperscript{779} In line with the above story, there was an incident between Karen and Bamar which is similar to the contemporary issues in Myanmar at present. In 1942, the Bamar Independent leaders along with the Japanese brutally fought the Karens who supported Allied Forces particularly in Myaungmya District in Delta region which caused innocent people to suffer as well as deepened racial resentment between them. Two years later, both the Bamar and the Karen had to fight and expel Japanese from the land of Myanmar. Thus, the unity of them was of great importance for joining forces against the Japanese. Being the leader of Bamar, Aung San and the leader of Karen, Saw San Po Thin came to Yangon for talks and beginning reconciliation process between the two ethnic groups. One day, Aung San asked Saw San Po Thin the possibilities of cooperation between the Bamar and Karen as the Karen hated the Bamars so much due to the Delta incident in 1942. Saw San Po Thin’s suggestion was to invite Karen Leaders to Yangon and to apologize the misbehavior of Bamar leaders in Delta incident. As a result, Aung San invited Karen leaders to come to Yangon. In the meeting for reconciliation between the two groups, Bamar leaders expressed how much they regretted with the misbehaviors of their leaders during the incident. Moreover, in September 1944, Aung San toured the delta region for apologies for what his men had done on the Karens. As
In addition, based on the reflection of the past experiences between Buddhists and Christians, both Myanmar Buddhists and Christians have to ask each other for forgiveness in order to reconcile as Bishop Desmond Tutu said, there is “no future, without forgiveness.” Thus, forgiveness is urgently needed among Buddhist and Christian communities in order to reconcile and live peacefully together. However, the question is: How can Buddhists and Christians in Myanmar forgive each other and come to reconciliation? To this regard, Sallie B. King, professor of philosophy and religio at James Madison University, stressed that it is impossible “to tell people simply to forget what they have suffered.” Thus, she is of the opinion that connecting “truth and reconciliation” is necessary as “the reconciliation paradigm believes that what is needed is truth and acknowledgement of the wrongness of what was done.” She goes on to say that “people need to tell their story and be heard, they need to hear the truth, they need someone to accept responsibility, and they need some kind of reparations.” Therefore, both Buddhists and Christians have to revisit their past history in terms of forgiveness and reconciliation which took place among them particularly during World War II. Without forgiving one another today, there will be no future for them and their next generations to come. The path toward forgiveness and reconciliation in Myanmar will entail respecting, recognizing and accommodating one another as fellow pilgrims and fellow citizens. It will also need the cultivation and practice of Buddhist metta and Christian agape. Then, the question is: Are Buddhists and Christians in Myanmar ready and willing to offer the self-sacrificial love which Buddha and Jesus had and exercised toward others, in order to create forgiveness and reconciliation among them?

6.4. INITIATING BUDDHIST-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE

In this section, I will firstly explore questions including, who will participate in the dialogue? Secondly, which issues should the dialogue partners take into account in the context of Myanmar? Also, why is Buddhist-Christian dialogue necessary in the apologies of Aung San for forgiveness touched the hearts of the Karen people, it made reconciliation possible between the two groups. As a result, reconciliation between Bamar and Karen had continued so well by the ending part of 1944. See Angelene Naw, Aung San and the Struggle for Burmese Independence, 104-107.


781 Ibid.
6.4.1. BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN BUDDHISTS AND CHRISTIANS THROUGH DIALOGUE

It is claimed that Myanmar Buddhists are not really interested in other religions because they are confident enough in Buddhism for now and their next life.\(^{782}\) Moreover, it seems that they are confident in their power due to their political strength as well as the fact that they outnumber other religious groups. Many Christians in Myanmar at the present time have realized that interfaith dialogue is necessary in order to live peacefully with others in the country. Thus, being small in number, in terms of religion and ethnicity, the initiative of interfaith dialogue comes from Myanmar Christians particularly from theological seminaries run by ecumenical churches\(^{783}\) in search of mutual understanding and mutual respect for peace in the country.

The interfaith dialogue currently taking place in Myanmar is at the introductory level. The Buddhist-Christian dialogue has taken place among theologians as well religious leaders like pastors, priests, monks, nuns, and religious professors. The process has included sharing with each other and learning from each other in matters related to different religious doctrines, beliefs and traditions. These discussions have occurred at an academic level in conferences and seminars. Since religious leaders from both parties are theologically trained, dialogue of theological exchange is crucial in order to appreciate and respect each other's doctrines, beliefs and traditions.

Moreover, since religion and morality are interlinked with peace and harmony, morality needs to be grounded in religion because without the support of religious

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\(^{783}\) Though interfaith dialogue is regarded as unfaithfulness to Christ and Christianity for many Churches especially non-ecumenical churches in the country, ecumenical Churches are actively participated in interfaith dialogue as their concern is not only the lost and the saved, but also the oppressed and the oppressor. For example, the Myanmar Institute of Theology (MIT) and International Theravada Buddhist University (ITBU) organized Buddhist-Christian dialogue on October 30, 2013 at Myanmar Institute of theology campus focusing on “a better harmonious society.” Quoted from Email letter, sent by Dr. Dieter Hecker, a German visiting Professor of Ecumenics at the Myanmar Institute of Theology, Yangon, on November 14, 2013.
teachings there can be no genuine peace and harmony in the world. In other words, a theological dialogue is of great importance for peace since genuine interfaith dialogue cannot take place properly without the help of religious teachings. Through a “dialogue of theological exchange” one can compare between the Buddhist concept of metta and the Christian concept of agape, as well as the Buddhist concept of karuna and the Christian concept of compassion.

Apart from a Buddhist-Christian dialogue among theologians and religious leaders, it is necessary to initiate dialogue among different parties within religious groups. For instance, dialogue between adherents of religions who are influential in their respective places in society, in terms of political power, economic status and education, is important because though people in this level are not theologically trained, they are the ones who impact their communities in many realms of life. Moreover, the issue of power arises as “interreligious dialogue does not take place between religions, but between the believers of different religious systems.” Further, Buddhist-Christian dialogue among the people who are in the periphery is of great significance because people at this level can hardly understand another’s position nor value another’s identity. As a result, communal violence as well as misunderstanding can easily occur mainly among these groups. It is also the sole responsibility of the religious intellectuals those who are initiating the dialogue process, to educate the people on the margins of society, on how to co-exist peacefully.

Additionally, since the Myanmar Buddhists and Christians are living within a common context, their common problems such as human rights violations, poverty, and social and economic injustice should be given priority in the dialogue. In considering the future of Myanmar, Buddhists and Christians have to discuss the value of a democratic society which values human rights and dignity which are also the core teachings of both religions. Thus, it is pivotal for Buddhists and Christians to “come together on the basis of common human values” for a holistic development of their community. While doing interfaith dialogue on doctrines, beliefs and traditions, it is also possible to work toward social justice and peace because social and environment issues cannot be ignored in interfaith

dialogue. Hence, theological similarities and differences in a “dialogue of theological exchange,” as well as common problems faced within their shared context need to be dealt with during the process of a Buddhist-Christian dialogue in Myanmar. For this purpose, apart from the theologically trained people or religious leaders, active participation of lay people – members of each religion – in Buddhist-Christian dialogue is of urgent need to address the social and ecological problems faced in Myanmar today, as these issues cannot be handled by the central government or by the religious leaders alone.\(^{787}\)

Furthermore, while conducting interfaith dialogue one of the crucial questions that arises is: “What is the aim of Buddhist-Christian dialogue?” In this regard, the primary aim and objective of Buddhist-Christian dialogue is to deepen understanding and respect between the two with the hope that forgiveness and reconciliation could bridge the gap which was created by painful experiences in the past.\(^{788}\) Here, what one has to bear in mind is that though it is possible to “forgive the criminal,” it is impossible to forgive the crime one committed.\(^{789}\) Thus, it is important for Buddhists and Christians to take their wrongdoings as learning point so that similar mistakes will not be repeated in the future. The peace making journey\(^{790}\) demands joint action, cultivating love (\textit{metta}), compassion (\textit{karuna}), non-violence (\textit{ahimsa}) and generosity (\textit{dana}) toward co-travelers, as Buddhists and Christians move toward reconciliation. Additionally, since Myanmar Christians are

\(^{787}\) The above sentence might be strange for some people whose government had taken responsibility for the education and health of their fellow citizens. However, in Myanmar, there are many places or many villages that do not have public schools as well as hospitals. In such situation, religious organizations sent volunteer school teachers to teach the local children. Further, volunteer doctors as well as nurses are also sent to provide medical treatment to the local people regardless of sex, race and religion. Therefore, religious cooperation for social concern is of great significance in the present context of Myanmar as the government is still struggling to take care of all the people’s health and education that are in rural and urban areas.


\(^{790}\) For example, a couple – husband and wife are joining hands and walking together on the street towards their destination. If there is conflict, mistrust, and misunderstanding among them, joining hands and walking together will no longer be possible and at the same time, they wouldn't be able to achieve their goal. Likewise, if there are conflicts, there is disunity among co-travelers; they wouldn't be able to reach the desired destiny at the same time. In stating dialogue as journey together, it is necessary for the dialogue partners to have mutual trust, respect, recognition and understanding among each other. Otherwise, they would not be able to continue their dialogue as a journey together toward the same destination and at the same time the dialogue they initiate can be the starting point for conflicts and violence leading to war.
in the minority position in the conflict-filled society, the goal of Buddhist-Christian dialogue should be peaceful co-existence of adherents of both religions.

6.4.2. CREATING AN ATMOSPHERE FOR BUDDHIST-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE

Creating an atmosphere for Buddhist-Christian dialogue is essential. And yet, the question is: Where and how? As already stated in chapter four, my proposed to Buddhist-Christian dialogue, which is an “interpersonal approach,” would be of great help because adherents of a religion come before religion. Thus, building friendships as well as building trust among each other through interpersonal contact is of great significance for creating and initiating genuine interfaith dialogue. In this regard, after establishing a friendship and building trust among one another, one can create a space in which both parties can come and talk together. For instance, the International Buddhist Missionary University (IBMU), Yangon and the Myanmar Institute of Theology (MIT) have exchange programs as well as interfaith dialogue initiatives particularly led by the Judson Research Center of the Myanmar Institute of Theology. When dialogue takes place between IBMU and MIT, the focus so far has been based on the issues of peace, justice, human rights, and ecological concerns, as well as building a harmonious society. Apart from IBMU and MIT, other religious institutions in the country must also

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791 In 2009, when I was in Bochum taking German language course, I met Moa Taw, a Bamar Buddhist and a medical doctor from Myanmar who was doing research on Humanitarian Assistance at the University of Ruhr. On June 27, I started talking with him and we shared our experiences in a foreign land. From that time onwards, he became my Buddhist dialogue partner and no matter where he is, till today our friendly relationship is going on. As I have friendly relationship with Moe Taw, our respective families also have relationship. In short, if there is friendship, there is relationship and reciprocally if there is relationship, there is friendship as well. In January 2012, my family had thanksgiving service in Yangon and Moe Taw and his families were also invited. Through this meeting now he knows not only my family members but also some of my relatives who were present in that service. And he participated in a Christian celebration. Again in March 2013, Moe Taw's family had a feast service towards their old parents and my family was also invited. In this occasion, I came to know not only Moe Thaw’s family but also some of his relatives and friends. Along with strengthening our relationship, dialogue has been a medium of building relationship between our families. Through our personal relationship, we build a community in which Buddhists and Christians interact with each other.
make room for interfaith dialogue because “only through dialogue” it is possible to “go beyond dialogue.”

Further, a “contextual approach” to Buddhist-Christian dialogue is essential since understanding others’ cultures and traditions is of great value for a constructive interfaith dialogue. Moreover, it is necessary to realize the common problems faced by both parties in their common context. From my findings I note that in a Buddhist-Christian dialogue the main focus must be based on social concerns, such as, human rights violation, education, health and also ecological concerns. In this regard, in order to understand the context of Myanmar, I would like to recall some historical facts that happened within the last four decades. While under military dictatorship for many decades, a small number of people benefited while the majority remained extremely poor in all spheres of life. Though the country was once one of the richest and most developed countries in South East Asia, presently it has been downgraded to one of the ten poorest countries in the world. This is due to social injustice and financial mismanagements. Moreover, political instability, religious conflicts, economic crises, health problems, lack of human rights and illiteracy are all areas which need national attention. Military rule in Myanmar and the exploitation by the greedy have made the land barren and unproductive. Additionally, deforestation, misuse of the environment, and mining have caused an ecological crisis and drastic climate change. As a result, people in Myanmar have been facing natural disasters which cause damage to human lives and properties. Thus, it is essential to create a meeting place for Buddhists and Christians to work together on social concerns through community health programs, education, caring for orphans and the elderly, as well as addressing ecological concerns. By doing so, one can create an atmosphere in which Buddhists and Christians meet and have dialogue for the holistic development of their communities.

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794 For this reason, international organizations, for example, World Visions, World Concern, etc. come into Myanmar to serve the people regardless of their gender, race and religion. Further, staff members of these organizations are appointed from people of different religious groups in dealing with common issues. As a consequence, these organizations become a forum and at the same time the starting point for religious co-operation in the country. By doing so, it is possible to create an atmosphere for Buddhist-Christian dialogue through their cooperation in social work.

795 For creating a place for Buddhist-Christian meeting in Myanmar, one can imitate what Aloysius Pieris, a Sri Lanka Jesuit Priest, founded in 1974 known as “Tulana Research
other's traditions, beliefs and lifestyle, and broadens into pro-active shared action. The motive for such action is to cooperate with each other in order to liberate the poor, the oppressed, and the marginalized in society, as well as protect the environment. In other words, after having created an atmosphere which facilitates mutual interaction, collaboration of people from different faiths is essential in searching for ways to liberate people from their sufferings.796

In addition, since Myanmar is a home to several world religions, religious harmony797 is important for peaceful co-existence because religion plays a vital role in the daily living of people as it guides them to the path of honesty, integrity and high moral standards. And yet, a closer look at the history of Myanmar reveals that religion has been misused by many people for their own vested interest. Thus, interfaith dialogue for religious harmony is necessary as it is integral to peace and prosperity in the country. For this reason, exercising love, compassion and non-violence toward each other is essential in cultivating a culture of peaceful community. Further, developing harmony between different faith traditions, as well as between humanity and nature, is indispensable since nature and humans are interdependent and interrelated. Both Buddhism and Christianity have insight on how to care for humanity and the natural world. Thus, religiously selfless cooperation of people of different faiths in Myanmar regardless of sex, race and religion is urgently needed for the welfare of all sentient beings. In this regard, Myanmar Buddhists and Christians have to join hands with one another in solidarity and engage in social activities for the benefit of all. By doing so, there can be better mutual understanding, respect and recognition among each other which can lead to unity, harmony, and eventually the destination of peaceful co-existence in the country.

Centre." It is said that when there is a dialogue concerning the poor and the marginalized in the society, this center become a meeting place for interfaith dialogue as well as for worker's groups and for youth. See Kenneth Fleming, *Asian Christian Theologians in Dialogue with Buddhism*, 203.


797 The term harmony arises from music and it describes the process of playing or singing two or more different notes at the same time to form chords. Usually, it produces sounds which are pleasing to hear, and so the term is also used in a non-musical sense to describe people or a system working together in a pleasing way.


6.5. CONCLUSION

The above research has unveiled that there is no peace in Myanmar. When discussing Buddhist-Christian conflicts, one has to bear in mind that such conflicts are not among ordinary Buddhists and Christians, but between the Myanmar army and the armed groups of ethnic nationalities. However, when conflicts arise between them, it affects everyone, particularly in the areas of ethnic nationalities. The Myanmar army believes that they are protecting the sovereign power of the country while the ethnic armed groups view themselves, saying that they are fighting for their autonomy which they have lost since many years ago. In such a context, it is difficult to search for the truth as both parties believe they are right. In other words, it is not easy to make a decision on who is right and who is wrong. As a doctor cannot cure the patient without investigating and finding the reason for the sickness of the patient, both Buddhists and Christians cannot build up a peaceful society without searching for and finding a “common truth.” Thus, it is important to search for the “truth” which is common and acceptable for both parties. However, the question is: would it be possible to search for a “common truth” when there is a huge gap between the two parties in terms of religion as well as who is in control politically? Is the majority group, who has political power, willing to search for a “common truth”? Will they willingly share their power with the powerless? As the seed of paddy can only bear the fruit of paddy, the seeds of peace can only bear the fruit of peace. Thus, it is necessary for both parties to sow the seeds of peace in the soil of Myanmar so that they can reap the fruit of peace. In this regard, the crucial question is: How can both parties sow the seeds of peace in the soil of Myanmar for peaceful co-existence?

For Buddhists as well as Christians, one of the highest virtues is metta / agape which Buddha and Jesus had actively shown to the needy, the poor, the sick and the marginalized in the communities they lived in. In other words, practicing love and compassion is seen in the ideal attitudes of Buddha and Jesus. Thus, it is indispensable that these ideal attitudes in the actual lives of Buddha and of Jesus need to be practiced in the society of Myanmar as well. By showing love, compassion, care and concern to one another, as well as sharing power and resources of the country, people can feel safe and at home where kingdom values reign, such as, “peace, sharing, justice”798 which are badly needed in today’s Myanmar.

Furthermore, as the cause of human suffering in Myanmar is due to the greedy who wanted to control the power as well as the resources of the country, it is

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crucial for Buddhists and Christians to cultivate a practice of sharing what one has is a core concept in both Buddhism and Christianity, and entails action for the betterment of all. Being followers of the teachings of Buddha and Jesus, Myanmar Buddhists and Christians need to practice this self-sacrificial love by not overemphasizing one's own interest but by being considerate of others so that human beings, as well as their environment, can be liberated from suffering. In this regard, it is necessary for both parties to see the core values of each religious teaching in order to collaborate in transforming the conflict-filled society into a peaceful one. Ethnic reconciliation through the formation of a federal union, which shares power as well as resources in the country, would be an important step toward peace. Hence, since Buddhism and Christianity are the religions of peace, both parties have to seriously consider their role for the future of the country's socio-political and religio-cultural matters in building a peaceful and harmonious community through dialogue. In this regard, active participation of adherents of the religions, particularly religious leaders from both sides, is significant as they are the most influential persons in Buddhist and Christian communities in Myanmar. Putting oneself in another's shoe, prioritizing the interest of others' and giving space to others to grow are of great help in bridging the gap between the two. Additionally, Buddhists and Christians need to practice the concept of sharing in their day-to-day lives while living self-sacrificially, considering others, and corresponding to the Buddhist concept of *metta* and the Christian concept of *agape*. This is the only way to a peaceful co-existence in Myanmar.
CONCLUSION

In search of a peaceful co-existence among the Buddhist and the Christian community in Myanmar through dialogue, I first introduced the background of the research, the existing research on Buddhist-Christian dialogue, privileges and methodology of the dissertation along with structure of the research. Chapter one examined the socio-political and religio-cultural feature of Myanmar today. Chapter two, concerning Buddhist-Christian relations before, during and after the colonial period in Myanmar, determined that the past wounded history of Buddhist-Christian encounter has yet to be healed. In other words, the historical memory about the past still plays a crucial role in Buddhist-Christian relations as the present perceptions of both parties reflect the past, which leads to conflicts and war. Thus, this chapter considers the need for forgiveness and reconciliation between Buddhists and Christians in Myanmar, for them to reconsider their past experiences through authentic dialogue.

Moreover, genuine interfaith dialogue, which possibly can lead to forgiveness and reconciliation among Buddhists and Christians, cannot take place without trust between them. Thus, a discussion of the urgent need for initiating Buddhist-Christian dialogue in the country in order to build up mutual trust, respect and understanding is found in chapter three. However, it is observed through the empirical study that the primary focus on Buddhist-Christian dialogue should be based on social issues rather than doctrinal issues.

In the fourth chapter, I firstly examined a systematic approach to interfaith dialogue in which Catholic models of dialogue - dialogue of life and dialogue of action - are taken into account. This type of dialogue can enable common people to participate in search of human rights in Myanmar, building peace and justice. Besides, a dialogue involving theological exchange is of great value since the support of religious teachings and the role of monks, nuns and pastors or priests is crucial in Buddhist-Christian community. Further, I underlined the need of WCC’s approach to interfaith dialogue as the focus in dialogue is the concern of human beings as well as our mother earth in view of the integrity of God’s creation. Additionally, I discussed the relevance of Paul F. Knitter’s “kingdom-centered approach” for the liberation of human beings and their environment from suffering, and Leonard Swidler’s “joint action approach” for human rights. I also applied the approach of Raimundo Panikkar; namely, a dialogical dialogue in search of a “visible unity,” as relevant to Buddhist-Christian dialogue in Myanmar. In addition, the obstacles to Buddhist-Christian dialogue in Myanmar are found in
chapter five noting eight factors. Chapter five determined that national reconciliation is necessary for peace and harmony in the country.

The last chapter concluded that some of the Buddhist-Christian points of convergence for peace are *metta* / loving-kindness, *karuna* / compassion, *ahimsa* / non-violence. Of these, Buddhist *metta* and Christian *agape*, which are terms for "self-sacrificial love" or "unconditional love," are taken into consideration as such love is the only way to achieve forgiveness and reconciliation with the enemy. Finally, the research argues the concept that forgiveness and reconciliation between Buddhists and Christians that will bring peace to Myanmar can only be achieved through "self-sacrificial love," which avoids overemphasizing self-interest and self-benefit.

The present dissertation has shown that Buddhist-Christian relations in Myanmar have been uneasy since the colonial period in the country and the past wounded history still plays a role in all spheres of national life, which hinders peaceful coexistence. Therefore, the title of this dissertation is “Buddhist-Christian Dialogue: A Way toward Peaceful Co-existence in Myanmar.” The goal is to bridge the gap between Buddhists and Christians, with the aim of building a fearless and peaceful society. This can be achieved by means of Buddhist-Christian dialogue that can help overcome the fear, suspicion, tensions and conflicts that are the reality in Myanmar today. As Buddhism and Christianity are peace-loving religions, finding a way in which both parties can join their journey together toward peace, their shared destination, is significant. Therefore, the role played by Buddhists and Christians is pivotal in creating an atmosphere for peaceful co-existence as they inhabit the same country. To that end, the following theses are proposed.

**Thesis 1:** A precondition of interfaith dialogue is the reflection on one’s own religion as dialogue leads to a deeper reflection upon one’s own religion. Deepening one’s own religion helps to discern the religious, cultural, racial and ethnic aspects of one’s own identity. As seen in interviews, Buddhists see Myanmar Christians as nominal Christians who never meditate on God and never read their Scriptures. Likewise, Myanmar Christians see some of their Buddhist neighbors as those who are merely nominal Buddhists and do not even know the name of their Scripture, *Tipitaka*. Such statements lead to the consideration of the need for a proper teaching of the scriptural texts in both religious traditions and also demands for relevant interpretation which to be done through dialogue. Thus, in order for a genuine dialogue to take place between Buddhists and Christians in Myanmar, the proper understanding and knowledge of their own respective Scripture or religion is of great importance. As Pannikar said (see chapter four), Buddhist-Christian dialogue is for a Buddhist to be a better Buddhist as well as for a Christian to be a better Christian.
**Thesis 2:** Myanmar Christian theology should be contextualized since the picture of a "colonial Christ" is no longer adequate and acceptable in the country. Thus, the task of Christians in Myanmar is to dissociate western images of Christianity while embracing and creating a Myanmar image of Christianity based on Myanmar culture and tradition, answering theological questions according to the context of the country. In other words, Christianity should be Myanmar Christianity, in and through the teaching of Jesus Christ which means Christ needs to become a Myanmar Christ interpreted according to the context. The challenge here is to initiate a process of contextual interpretation to make the gospel relevant for Myanmar people. Moreover, proving Myanmar Christians as faithful and good citizens of the country demands contextual reinterpretation of the religious tenets. Being an authentic and truthful citizen can be proved by being there with the people and the country in time of need. Standing with the people not only in good times but also in the worst situations will build up trust, so that Christians in Myanmar can be regarded as *bona fide* citizens of the country. Then the negative perception of Christianity can be eradicated from the mindset of the Buddhist majority. Therefore, it is crucial for Christians in Myanmar to be acculturated in interfaith dialogue, as an acculturated dialogue can make their dialogue partners more open, so that they feel welcome and at ease. Through making Myanmar Christianity visible, Christians in Myanmar can overcome the conviction that “to be an authentic Bamar is to be a Buddhist.” At this point, mistrust between Buddhists and Christians can be removed and a genuine dialogue among them can take place, leading towards peaceful co-existence in the country.

**Thesis 3:** From mutual learning and sharing, Buddhists and Christians in Myanmar can take a look back at the history and learn from their past experience, discussing in an honest and open way so that mistakes made in the past will not be repeated in the future. Aside from that, mutual questioning is essential, as asking questions will give a better understanding of the other party’s situation because without proper understanding it is impossible to see one another as fellow-citizens, co-pilgrims on the way toward a peaceful community. Through mutual learning and sharing from past incidents, both parties can forgive each other, which will lead them to reconciliation so that suspicion and fear will no longer capture the mind of the people, causing conflicts and violence. For this reason, Christians in Myanmar have to ask their Buddhist neighbors for forgiveness for what Christians had done to them, particularly during the colonial period in Myanmar. Likewise, Myanmar Buddhists, particularly the Tatmadaw, must ask for forgiveness for the acts they have committed against Christians as well as ethnic minorities in the country, for forgiveness is the key to reconciliation. As an outcome, both parties will no longer feel suspicious and threatened; instead there will be a feeling of familiarity, equality and closeness between each other.
Thesis 4: Reconciliation is possible only after the three theses of identity building, making dialogue and being honest with the past are implemented. As seen in chapter two, the past wounded history of Buddhist-Christian relations in Myanmar has not been healed yet; historical memory still plays a crucial role in Buddhist-Christian relations today. In other words, the present perceptions of both parties reflect the past. Thus, forgiveness and reconciliation among Buddhists and Christians in Myanmar is crucial for healing their wounded memories. In this regard, the topics of forgiveness and reconciliation should be given priority in Buddhist-Christian dialogue in order to live peacefully in the country. Without forgiveness, there can be no reconciliation; at the same time, without reconciliation there can be no peace among Buddhist-Christian communities in the country.

Thesis 5: Separation of religion and state should be considered especially with a view to Buddhist-Christian dialogue in Myanmar whose multiple world religions are present. In this regard, General Aung San’s proposal, as seen in chapter five, with regard to the separation of state and religion which was raised prior to drafting the Constitution of Independent Myanmar in 1947, needs to be seriously reconsidered by both parties. For whenever there is political conflict, it is often influenced by a particular religion as there is a “favored” and “unfavored” religion by the government in the country. Thus, respecting, accepting and accommodating each other’s religion and cultivating tolerance toward one another become urgent needs. Here, the crucial question is: How could Aung San’s idea regarding the separation of state and religion be realized in Myanmar?

Thesis 6: Theologians and religious leaders beginning a dialogue is a good starting point, but it is only one step of the dialogue process. It has to be extended and organized at other levels. Thus, churches have to be involved and pastors have to have diversity and peace building training. This training should be part of the theological education of all pastors as they have great influence on many people. If theologians and religious leaders from both parties can come together and join hands, there is no doubt that society will also change. In other words, the adherents of Buddhism and Christianity in Myanmar are ready to listen to the voices of their religious leaders’ teachings rather than the voices of the authorities.

Additionally, lay people from both parties have to work together to address social, economic and political shortcomings because it is not possible to solve the problems on the social, economic, ecological, and political concerns as solutions necessitate active participation of individual citizens. Thus, to implement dialogue at all levels, the focus should be dialogue of life and dialogue of action, which could bring peace and justice among the people because people of different faiths and cultures co-exist in the country. Also, a dialogue of life and action encourages
the lay people to participate in the search for human rights in Myanmar. Furthermore, a dialogue of life and action should be initiated at all levels for the liberation of the poor, the oppressed and the marginalized in the society who seek equality, peace and justice. As the focus of these dialogue models are related to living together peacefully for the benefit of society, they could also create an atmosphere for mutual respect, mutual understanding, and mutual trust among the communities. Apart from a dialogue of life and action, a theological exchange between Buddhists and Christians is of great importance for peace because without the support of theologies or religious teachings, genuine interfaith dialogue cannot be achieved.

**Thesis 7:** Avoiding an egocentric approach in dialogue is essential. As religion can be the source for peace, it can also be the source of tension and conflict if both parties do not avoid an egocentric approach in dialogue. Thus, self-less service, or self-sacrificing life, like that of Mother Theresa and some Buddhist monks, should be practiced in order to avoid misunderstanding, which can cause tension and conflict. Through their work and actions, as well as their preaching and teaching, Myanmar Buddhists and Christians should not discriminate against another’s religion and culture. Letting go of the ego results in an acceptance of limitations in oneself and others, and opens a space for peace to exist in the midst of religiously diverse communities. Thus, by avoiding a dialogue with selfish interests there can be mutual trust, respect, and understanding among dialogue partners which will lead them toward peace.

**Thesis 8:** Myanmar is a plural society in which ethnic, political, cultural and religious division is the root cause of conflicts in the country. In other words, the ethnic and religious diversity in Myanmar causes a problem for socio-political relations as well as religio-cultural issues, because diverse concepts are hidden behind ethnicity and religion. As religion is intertwined with all aspects of life, a mutual approach of religious groups can have a positive impact on the socio-political and religio-cultural situation in the country. In this regard, the concept of unity in diversity can be helpful to both parties in search of peace in the country. Moreover, being a religiously plural society, religious pluralism should be a contested concept across national, political, and disciplinary contexts as there have been communal tensions among people for misusing religion as a tool for political power. Therefore, the question is: How can interfaith relations help the people of Myanmar be free from the misuse of religion and instead serve together as agents of healing and reconciliation for peace and harmony in society? Further, it is claimed that Buddhism and Christianity are peace-loving religions. In reality, there is no peace among Buddhist-Christian communities since the problem which creates conflicts is not the religion itself, but the people who practice those
religions. In short, religion is not a problem itself. Thus, in order to build a peaceful society and maintain peace, interfaith dialogue, as well as political dialogue, is necessary in Myanmar because political and social issues need to be solved politically and socially. Additionally, in Myanmar, there must be a “rule of law” in which everyone is treated equally under the law for lasting peace. As it is seen in interviews, interfaith dialogue, as well as political dialogue, is of urgent need in building a peaceful Myanmar in which the concept of unity in diversity is embraced and practiced.

**Thesis 9:** Dialogue is for all. A constructive dialogue leads to a healthy and long-lasting relationship between two individuals or communities. Depending on the quality of dialogue, there can be positive as well as negative outcome. Apart from Buddhists and Christians, there are people of different faiths living together in the same community in Myanmar. Thus, dialogue is necessary to build up a relationship among them which expresses mutual human care and concern because ethnic and religious conflicts have been lingering for many decades among people of different faiths. The tension between people of different faiths and, at times, the emerging violence demand a new approach for interfaith dialogue in order to create a vibrant community particularly in this age of political transition from a military dictatorship to a democratic form of government. Thus, the need for interfaith dialogue is imperative as mutual understanding, mutual respect and mutual recognition among different religious groups is the key for peace and harmony in the country.

**Thesis 10:** Christians are called to engage in good relationships with people of other faiths. Thus, Christian mission is not only to be understood as evangelization, but also emphasizes liberation in all dimensions of life. Therefore, Myanmar Christians need to reconsider their old model of mission work that emphasizes conversion only, and see the values of other religious attitudes and teachings in order to have a healthy dialogue since focusing solely on religious conversion hampers dialogue. As seen from the interviews, Buddhists and Christians in Myanmar have a missionary zeal to convert others into their own religion. Therefore, in order to start a successful dialogue they need to abandon their exclusive model of teaching and preaching. Additionally, viewing others only as objects of mission should be put to an end. For instance, while Myanmar Christians regard their Buddhists neighbors as the lost people, Myanmar Buddhists are trying to convert Myanmar Christians into Buddhism as they believe Buddhism is the only way for peace and national unity. This is because of religious and ethnic nationalism that sees minorities as a threat. As a result, there are tensions and even religious conflicts occurring among them. Thus, both need to change their missionary attitude and approach each other’s religion with respect,
acknowledging one another as co-pilgrims who seek together ultimate reality by one way or the other. Thus, when in dialogue, their main concern should not be to convert each other, but rather, to examine the commonalities in their search for truth. Attempting to convert the other destroys interfaith dialogue.

Aside from the above theses, since the scope of the study has been limited to finding out the way in which Buddhist-Christian dialogue can take place for the sake of peaceful co-existence in Myanmar, the present dissertation also raises some important questions which move beyond the scope of this research. These questions can be carried forward to subsequent research that can be beneficial to the Myanmar community as well as to the wider world community as a whole. Some of these pressing questions are:

1. What is a Myanmar Buddhist understanding of life, a theology of life so to speak?

2. What is social ethics in Myanmar Buddhism? Which issues related to gender, for instance, the concept of body, are important for a better life in Myanmar?

3. What possibilities does the Buddhist concept of public and social ethics provide for a better future of Myanmar? How can Buddhist social ethics be translated into a structural relationship with other people?

4. What are the consequences of Buddhist, as well as Christian, teachings on non-violence? How can the Buddhist and Christian concept of non-violence be practiced in modern society in which violent action is a present reality?
APPENDIX

I. INTERVIEWS WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF BUDDHISM

1.1. Field Research: Questions for Buddhist Interviewees

1. How do you see Christianity?
2. How do you regard Christians in Myanmar in the past and today?
3. Was there ever any misunderstanding between Buddhists and Christians in the past? If yes, when and what were the main points of those misunderstandings?
4. Do you think that Buddhist-Christian dialogue in Myanmar is necessary? If yes, what is the purpose and primary concern for Buddhist-Christian dialogue? If no, why?
5. Many people say that Buddhism is a religion of non-violence (*ahimsa*) and compassion? Do you agree with that? What are your perspectives and experiences regarding Buddhism?
6. Many people see Christianity as a religion of violence and colonialism. In Myanmar, there are some people who see Christians as pro-western and pro-colonialism. What are your experiences and views on that?
7. Have you ever read the Bible? Which aspect of Christianity was the greatest challenge for you at first? Can you tell me how it is important?
8. Can you suggest an encounter between Buddhists and Christians that would lead to better mutual understanding and respect in Myanmar?
9. Have you ever had dialogue with Christians before? If yes, how does the dialogue affect your religious life and thought? If no, why is this not a concern for you?
10. What factors are to be avoided in relationship between Buddhists and Christians in the Myanmar context?
11. Have you ever come across any hindrances for Buddhists and Christians to work and contribute together for the betterment of the Myanmar society? What are your suggestions to overcome them if there are any?
12. Some Myanmar Christians say that they are faithful citizens of the country? Do you agree? Give your comments.
13. Can you suggest how best Christians in Myanmar could demonstrate that they are faithful and loyal citizens of the country?
14. What are the challenges for peaceful co-existence in Myanmar?
15. In what ways can Buddhists and Christians in Myanmar build mutual understanding and better relationships?
16. In furthering dialogue between Buddhists and Christians in Myanmar, what would be the most effective and feasible approach?

1.2. Texts of Interviews with Representatives of Buddhism

1.2.1. Buddhist A.P.

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**Interview**

1. Firstly, we need to define “what is religion.” The reason why different religions arise is because of historical demand as well as the demand of human beings. There are times when people are in trouble with daily needs, especially due to lack of food for survival. Religion, actually, is the one that helped people solve their problems. Eating bread and drinking wine when there is a scarcity of food for everyone is extremely cost effective and also solves a great deal of problems. In that way, Christianity attracts people who are in need and try to establish an organization. Therefore, religion is a kind of art which tackles the problems of human beings. Since every religion has their own technique of solving people's problems, for me, Christianity as well is a method applied to do so.
2. Majority of the people value only those things which cost them so much while they disregard those they receive for free of charge. Likewise, they are not learning or trying to understand about their religion. Nowadays, they don't genuinely want to pray to God but they would rather rely on the name of their religion and taking pride of it instead. As I had mentioned earlier, difficulty in meeting basic human needs made them focus mainly on their daily needs resulting in lesser time to read. On top of that, even though those people who can afford more time to read can share their knowledge to those who have very little time, the latter hardly have time for it. In the end, they assume that being a Christian by the name is dutiful even though they don't fully understand what it actually is. But it is not true that one has just to be a member or follower in his/her religious organization. He needs to practice and intervene what is written in the Bible. This is happening in seven out of ten Christians in Myanmar. The remaining three persons have the chance to study and they can do something which is spiritually good for them when they have time. Therefore, it is good for the Christians in Myanmar to value the precious stuff they have and correctly apply in their lives. Method of application is core for them at this point. In sum, it is the responsibility of those who have knowledge to share with others what they have and make others understood about their religion. I have attended many churches also and participated in discussions about religion. Only very few Christians who are at the top level in their religion can ask questions which are truly meaningful and in depth to the religion. Most of the others just discuss about background history during the dialogues.

3. Conflicts between Christians and Buddhists did exist in Myanmar. Conflict called Kyaukwin ayaydawpon which happened during the time of General Aung San in 1936. It was started by a couple. Each of them believed in different religions (Buddhism and Christianity). It became a very big issue and finally they decided to follow the decision of the religious leaders from both sides. About 700 Christian representatives with only one monk who represented Buddhists and some of his followers were presented in that occasion. Both parties pointed out each other about the discrepancies in the teaching of Buddhism as well as Christianity. Some of the misunderstandings are due to insufficient studies in their respective Scriptures. I find that most of the Christians are purely relying on the literature but not the feelings in their hearts. Finally, Buddhists won and more than 700 Christians were converted to Buddhism. However, those people who converted into Buddhist reconverted into Christianity very soon. This is because their inner soul is not truly committed to Buddhism. In 2005,
when I was in India, there was a debate regarding literature between Muslims and Christians. Two Muslim religious leaders from India and some Christian leaders from the US were presented in that debate. The Muslims were able to answer all the questions asked by the Christians. Eventually, the Muslims quote a Bible verse saying that a true believer of Jesus will not die even though they take poison and gave one bottle of poison to the Christians. However, none of the Christians dared to drink the poison. So, all the Christians who participated in the debate converted to Islam. Based on the above issues, conflicts between Christianity and other religions did exist everywhere. In the Bible, there are about 300 temptations and also it has new versions every year. If each and every word is checked thoroughly, approximately 100 words are changed each year. As a result, there are deviations in the meaning of Bible from the original one which was written in Hebrew many years ago. Therefore, Christianity is in a more shakable position. Majority of them are focusing on the literature rather than things that benefit people.

4. As I have mentioned before, every religion is to benefit human beings. In order to benefit people, it must be based on love and compassion. However, politics is based on sex, family and society as a whole. In politics, especially democracy has minority, majority, rights and people's voice. Democracy acts upon people's voice but religion is totally different from it. Religion is based on loving kindness. Therefore, it is not necessary to have dialogue among religions in terms of democracy but a common platform should be established. Social welfare which includes education, healthcare sectors should be emphasized. For us, we already had a common platform. It is possible for dialogue among religions based on that platform but the concept is completely different from that of politics. Even in a fully democratic country like the US there still is some discrimination between the black and the white. Hence, it is not wrong to say that democracy is not a complete set of theory while religion is a complete one due to its basis of love and compassion. There are three main levels in defining human being. The first one is intrinsic level where people react based on their likes and dislikes. The second level is customary level. It is based on social rules which guide human beings for their actions. The third one is conscious level where people try on their own so that they will become successful in life and benefit their fellow people. Intrinsic level is controlled by customary level, and in turn, customary level is controlled by conscious level to shape the art of living. This is a more scientific-related truth and everyone should see from this point of view. Further, although a person was a criminal yesterday, he can be a good person today once he confesses the crimes he committed.
It is possible in religion since it is based on kindness towards human beings but it is not possible in politics. The record of crime will still be remaining even in a democratic country. Therefore, it is a hundred times better and much more effective to walk on religion which pivots loving kindness and compassion towards each other.

5. There are rules and regulations for everyone to abide as human beings. Likewise, we can see many good instructions in the Buddhist Tipitaka as well as in the Christian Bible. But people are not following the instructions given to them in practice. If human beings act according to the instructions in the Bible and Tipitaka, the world that we are living in will become a beautiful and livable place. Majority of the believers, both Christians and Buddhists, never read their scriptures thoroughly. They are doing what they like and acting as they please. They prioritize their ego and keep aside the instructions of their scriptures. It is similar to the one who is rich and another who is wise. Wealth always comes first when it is compared to wisdom. The rich can hire many wise people for them to work. It is a big mistake when ego is added in and given priority in life. Religion itself is complete but when it is paired with a bad person’s ego, it becomes a weapon. If the truth is covered with ego, there will be less benefit for others. Therefore, it is necessary to give way to the things that actually benefit others. Religion gives instruction and it is the responsibility of human beings to follow those instructions. Some people misunderstand that religion will bring them to heaven one day. However, the main point is to correctly apply the instructions given by religion in life.

6. Actually, most of the major religions are rooted in Asia. For example, Buddhism is from India while Christianity is from Israel, etc. So, it is not necessary to overestimate western countries and regard them as the origin of religions. When asked if Christianity is paired with colonialism, westerners did use religion as a tool to control people as it is more powerful than education and some other things. It is good if only the good instruction of the religion is given to people. Unlike the missionaries in ancient time who came to Myanmar, missionaries nowadays focus more on quantity rather than the essence of gospel and beneficial actions. It is unlikely for Christianity to be regarded as a religion of colonialism if it is combined with positive actions for other people. Moreover, it is very important not to insult other religions when trying to spread our own religion and providing systematic training in spreading gospel to missionaries is essential as well. The word “colony” is not as popular in Myanmar as in countries like Thailand, England, Cuba and Malaysia. However, in order to avoid such
accusation, missionaries must do their job systematically. Former missionaries from Portugal and France who focus more to benefit people are ideal for missionaries nowadays.

7. I have read Christian Bible. The perspective that I have when I read the Bible is like when we learn English poems. We have to find out what they want to say, what is the context, what is the feeling behind, what is the problem and what is the solution for the problem. In short, it is all about studying the nature of problems and difficulties arise among people, the solution for it as well as the feeling behind it. I don't merely study about the story, and the weak points but I focus on the context, the situation at the time and the ways and means of solving problems. Further, for me, it is important to distinguish the concept of uniformity and unity. There should be some uniformity in every religion. For Buddhists, monks are distinct from lay people by their robes but in some religions like Muslims, there is no proper differentiation in attire between religious leaders and the believers. Unity also is essential. During General Aung San's time while Burma was struggling for independence from British, certain races and religions are not willing to unite each other. So, there was no unity at all. For present moment, unity among all the religions is crucial while Myanmar is transforming into a democratic country. Everyone must be in the front line without holding back so that the country can head up to democracy. Both uniformity and unity among different religions are essential to work hand in hand.

8. In order to encounter with one another, we need to value and respect each other without bias. Sticking onto our own beliefs and interest and being superstitious will hamper our relationship with others. For example, Roman Catholics used to display virgin Mary’s picture which is precious for them in the church as well as at home. But for the Protestants, Jesus alone is the only savior and the holy one. However, it is not justice for the Protestants to say that putting pictures of Mary at home is similar to idol worship and only Jesus is the crucial one. Ideology, as such, prejudices our relationship with other faiths. Therefore, in sum, valuing and respecting people, including their interests, their thoughts, their work, etc. is the key to personal encounter for a better understanding and respect. Without personal value and respect to one another, religion traffic will not be flowing smoothly causing traffic jam among each other.

9. I have had dialogue with some Christians. For me, I will emphasize only on the person not the religion of that person I am having dialogue with others because person always comes first before religion arises.
10. It is necessary to get along with the people who are in other religions. Isolating yourself from them will cause separation and you will be more distant from them. While I was in India, I went to mosques and churches with my Muslim and Christian friends. The best is to avoid keeping distance from others but to try to be together with them and get along with them. Moreover, in relating with others it is necessary to avoid despising others’ behaviors in talking and acting. For example, the root cause of conflicts in Rakhine State was due to lack of personal respect among the people of different religion. Religion itself is not the factor that provokes conflicts but devaluing and not respecting others makes it happen.

11. There certainly are barriers between Christians and Buddhists. It is necessary not to repeat yourself that you are a Christian or Buddhist but to simply introduce yourself as who you are without mentioning about your religion first whenever you meet someone new. Naming yourself under certain religion in the first place will become a disturbance to your relationship with the other person whose religion is different from you. Regarding religious cooperation, both Buddhists and Christians can do for public awareness in terms of ecological crisis in our country. Many of the origins of potential ecological crisis such as air pollution, water pollution, threat to environmental safety are egoistic business people. Let’s take India as an example, until the present day most of the Indians use banana leaves as their eating utensils instead of modern crockery. That is a very simple way of living without affecting the environment. Indeed, people who do business producing disposable items for easy living are more responsible for ecological crisis than those who are in religious sector. All we can do is to educate and encourage public to live eco-friendly lifestyle.

12. Based on my experience, Christians used to neglect and most of the time refused to help Buddhists who are in trouble. Some even say that it is not necessary to help Buddhists. This behavior and attitude becomes a barrier for them to get along with Buddhists. Helping one’s fellow countryman is precious for the one who receives help. So, there should not be discrimination among people who are in different religion. It is very important to view each other as human beings without seeing his/her religion first.

13. Christians should not feel inferior to other people. They, as well, are standing as a group in our country. In order to eliminate such feelings among the Christians, it is necessary to educate people so that there will be
no discrimination among different religions. On top of that, limitation of relationship to one’s own community should be lessened and broadening the scope of relationship with other religions should be emphasized. In that way, mutual understanding can be established.

14. First and foremost, one has to know that religious teachings are one of the essential factors for pursuing peace particularly among diverse ethnic groups of Myanmar. When saying religious teachings, it means all religions existing predominantly in Myanmar namely Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, Islam and even primal religions embraced by tribal groups. When it comes to religious matters, mutual understanding and mutual acceptance among the adherents is really significant for building peace. In Myanmar, establishing peace is primarily important as it is the principal foundation for nation building. All religions today in Myanmar, except primal religion, are imported religion. Since they were imported and are living together in Myanmar, they have to accept each other as they are. Otherwise, there might be conflicts starting from religious fanatics.

Moreover, unnecessary conflicts happened when someone took his religious belief as religious fanaticism by imposing it onto his neighbors. At the same time, ethno-nationalism can also create violence and conflict in a peaceful community. Since Myanmar is multi-cultural, multi-religious and multi-ethnic country, unity is essential. There can be no peace, without unity, at the same time there can be no unity without peace. Unity itself has three qualities: 1) forgiveness (Kama), 2) tolerance (Kanti), 3) forgetting each other's mistakes and wrong doings (Anunnyata). Therefore, no matter how diverse we may be, as long as the three qualities exist in the community, no doubt there will be peace in our country.

If we really want a new Myanmar society, we, all the people of Myanmar, should forgive each other. Revenge may not establish a trusted and united community. In one sense, social issues and political issues are the impetus for building unity in Myanmar as we are equally facing these issues in the same country. Forgiveness is taught at different levels in all religions. Tolerance should also be possessed by every citizen of Myanmar. To struggle against violence in Myanmar, political dialogue between parties, national unity and integration of ethnic minorities are badly needed. Misinformation between religions and tribal people should be avoided so that peace and reconciliation could be established in Myanmar. Only then Myanmar society will be a society of unity by staying together, learning together and co-operating together. Religions should not be taken as a
source of violence but rather as a resource for peace. Building a community of unity among diverse ethnic groups in Myanmar is a tough task but it is a task worth-doing for rebuilding a new Myanmar nation on this earth.

Education, economic and other affairs will be taken care by respective ministries. However, if religion is to be involved in politics as part of it, those who are participating in religious activities must be in touch and work together with political leaders, government and so on. It is unforgettable to acknowledge and obtain permission from the authorities in whatever things are done for religious purpose. From a religious leader's standpoint, we cannot influence in political reforms. What we can do is just to mediate between the government and the people. We need to make known the people's needs, feelings and their status. In turn, we need to make people understand what are the government's policies and procedures like. As a moderator, we just need to narrow the gap between the government and the public. People who do not have full knowledge about religion are the most dangerous ones in society. Teaching with half knowledge will easily create misunderstandings finally leading towards shunting and diversity. Therefore, people with half knowledge are assumed as common evils who usually arise from individual own group.

Moreover, there are human rights in Buddhism. Human rights topic is better to discuss from political point of view. Discrimination by gender is not appropriate from the point of religion. There is no favoritism between male and female in religious view. Everyone has equal opportunity in terms of living according to Abidhama and human rights are fully protected. For instance, a person is caught red handed while he is trying to commit crime and when he quickly admits his mistake and regret of what he did. From religious perspective, he can be assumed that he has become a good person. However, from political perspective, he must undeniably be punished because of his action. So, there are discrepancies in viewing certain things that cannot actually merge from both political and religious points of view. In addition, human rights affairs depend solely on the government as religious teachings and practices has given freedom to everyone in pursuing their preferences of beliefs.

15. It is better not to label yourself under religion when building mutual understanding with other people who are in different religion and helping others. It is important to keep the fact in mind, “the right time, the right place and the right person”. Another important thing to gain mutual understanding is to know the quality of self/others and uplift the quality of
those who have potential by giving positive feedback. Jesus Christ was the moderator/mediator among the people who were in diverse societal background when he was on earth. Similarly, role of the monks in Myanmar as well is to mediate between different layers /levels of people such as the governing body and the people, the rich and the poor. We are willing to help people who are in need and also who are in trouble. The same intention applies even to the animals. We do not discriminate the animals that are from the monastery, the mosque, the Hindu temple and so on. We will treat them equally and see them as they are. Take as an example, when we see an old woman lying at the roadside crying for help, question such as "What is your religion" doesn't come first. We will definitely help her first no matter what religion she is. Therefore, in reality, religion is just a label in our day-to-day life. We need to keep that label aside in order to work for our people. When Jesus Christ was in Jerusalem, one of the things that he did was feeding those people who are starved and teaching the rich people to share what they have with the poor rather than he himself got paid from the people. Presently, most of the people in Myanmar have very limited health knowledge resulting in increasing number of health problems among them. For that reason, we build hospitals and clinics in many areas and treat their diseases free of charge regardless of their religious background. Specialist doctors are invited from abroad and requested to volunteer at the hospitals and clinics to meet healthcare needs of the people. Many of those volunteer doctors are Christians but they come here to work with the monks for the benefit of human beings. So, it is a kind of discrimination to label people based on their religion. We should rather see them as our fellow human beings. The reason behind all these humanity works is the loving kindness that we have towards others and not for the purpose of mission or missionary work in the first place.

Moreover, we, all the faith-adherents, are obliged to follow the rule and commandment of our religious teachings as peace is the ultimate goal of all religions. Though peace is differently termed, all religions are searching for it in different ways. To build a lasting peace in our community, religious teachings in Buddhism like *metta*(love) and *karuna*(compassion) should be practiced in the life of all people. On the other hand, all Myanmar citizens should engage in social activities like combating HIV/AIDS, promoting human dignity and gender balance, addressing human-trafficking, eradicating poverty and moral corruption, and dealing with environment crises like water scarcity, drought, and climate change. As a matter of fact, all human beings are assigned to take action on such social issues because we are obliged to make our society a better place. Building peace through
practicing our religious teachings and involving in social activities is a must in Myanmar. In order to have reconciliation and pursue peace, dialogue in terms of religion and politics is essential. Without having a proper dialogue for religious and political issues, trust among the communities will never be cultivated. After having political dialogue for trust building, mutual understanding will come true. After trusting and understanding each other, acceptance and recognition will become a practical reality.

Former Myanmar kings allowed all Christian missionaries to do Christian mission in Myanmar. Thus, Christian missionaries could preach the teaching of Jesus Christ and other social activities like building vernacular schools, hospitals, and so on, which were beneficial to the local people. Since Buddhism is a religion of non-violence and peace, the Myanmar Kings invited Christian missionaries to work together in the area of health and education. Further, former Myanmar kings applied the Buddhist concept of metta, love, and peace. Lord Buddha teaches us that we should love all people regardless of class, race, and gender, which is the primary foundation for cultivating a peaceful and a united community. That is the reason why every Buddhist resisted from any violence or conflict but wished to work for a united and peaceful community. Metta should be displayed by giving meritorious deeds to others by water libation, alms-giving, building a pagoda and sharing at the monastery. If someone really has metta as a quality of life, he will have a sharing life with others by which all communities in Myanmar will live together as human beings and neighbors. Metta is the only element that can forgive one's wrongdoings and mistake. Metta is the only religious factor that can accept one's wrong action. Metta is the only component that can join all communities into one body. Thus, metta society should be established so that all diverse communities in Myanmar will taste the sense of unity and lasting peace.

Furthermore, though we follow different names of religion, if we look at humanity, we see only humanness. We human beings need to develop the three qualities as follows, 1) forgiveness (Khama), 2) tolerance (Khanti), 3) forgetting each other's mistakes and wrong doings (Anunnyata). If we do not develop the above, we might be trying to pull down the pillars of peace and stability in the country that has consequences on politics, economics, religion, social and health.

16. Removing pride and being humble when approaching other people is essential. Try to see everything as beautiful and lovely creatures.
1.2.2. Tin Hlaing

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**Interview**

1. It is a respectable religion.

2. In the past, Christians appear to be privileged; better educated, relatively well off. At present, they have become equal with others, but I think they are (i.e. those who have lived under the British) missing the good old days.

3. No, not at all. Yes, I do. Both should learn the other faith.

4. Yes, I do. Both should learn the other faith.

5. Yes, I agree. Buddhism’s main theme is the awareness of impermanence; need to face hardship in living, and non-self (you don’t own/control yourself) in Myanmar *anissa, dukka, anatta*. The way to live is avoiding extremes (*A son hnapa shiang* in Burmese). These are taught in the very first and second discussion of the Buddhist, namely, the Dhammacekka Sutta and Anatta Lakkhana sutta.
6. I don’t share that view. True, some people see Christians as pro-westerner. As for being pro-colonialists, I don’t think there are many people who have known colonialism at all. It is long gone; people are not aware of it.

7. I have; a few times, here and there living up to the Ten Commandments is a challenge.

8. It is important for harmony in society.

9. Yes. No effect on my religious life and thought. I was educated in an Anglican Missionary School.

10. Trying to convert one’s faith, this must be avoided by both sides.

11. No. I haven’t known any hindrances.

12. Yes. I have known many Christians who served in the army, as well as those who worked in government.

13. Participating in Myanmar festivals. Christians tend to keep away from Myanmar event like Ahlu Katein, which are more social than religious.

14. No answer.

15. As in the answer to Q. 13.

16. To find out areas of cooperation for social service; education, healthcare, disaster relief etc.
1. Christianity, as well, is a good religion. It makes people feel peaceful, become righteous, and considerate.

2. No answer.

3. As far as I know, previously, Buddhists and Christians lived peacefully side by side in our country. However, due to certain people who make use of religion as an instrument, there are some misunderstandings between the two religions. Religion itself is not the source of problem. It actually helps people to live harmoniously. For example, nurses who are having the same goal to take care of the sick in a hospital can work harmoniously even though their beliefs in religion are different. But persuading other people into one’s own belief is the origin of conflicts. It is quite difficult for misunderstandings to arise between those people who have the same beliefs. Nevertheless, some people misunderstand Christian missionaries who introduced their religion through social activities. On the other hand, it is
acceptable that whoever in trouble should be given a helping hand. The most obvious incident due to misunderstanding between Buddhists and Christians was among the Karen National Union (KNU) which is one of the organizations of the Karen people in Myanmar. There are Buddhists as well as Christians among its members. They have the same goal of bringing freedom to their fellow Karen people and their land. However, many years later they were split into two: KNU and DKBA due to difference in religion. As a result, both parties become weakened and unable to perform so well like before causing delays in achieving their primary goal. That is the usual outcome of misunderstanding among religions.

4. We do need dialogue for the harmony of different religions in our country. But it is necessary to remove egoistic approach in discussion in order to establish harmony between each other. One of the important factors to consider at this point is the level where dialogue can be initiated. It can be started at the level of religious leaders, social welfare groups followed by the beginners. Respecting and recognizing each other also is a crucial factor for genuine dialogue.

5. It is necessary to have a distinction between state (the rulers) and religion. Religion is the one in which many people devote their trust and belief but the ruler is the one who governs the people. The way the ruler rules the country depends greatly on how well he/she is applying his/her religious concepts to the people. There are four stages in common: love, kindness, lack of jealousy and negligence. Escalation of one's mind power according to the teaching of Buddha is to love people, to be kind on them, to be happy when someone is successful and to neglect when other people can't accept you and your goodwill. Forgiveness is the highest level of mind power. Therefore, overall, Buddhism is a nonviolence religion.

6. When the British came to colonize and rule our country, they brought along 3Ms: merchant, money and missionary. In this situation, some people made use of religion (Christianity) and supported the ruler (colonial British) who colonized the country. Although politically a ruler can govern the country which he colonized, he combined some other sources so that he could absorb more of the country's resources and gain more power and control upon the people. Nevertheless, it all depends on how religion has been applied and the way it is applied in one's life will bring about how other people view his religion. All the teachings in every religion are mainly for our life skills in order for us to find a way to escape from the repetitive life cycle of human beings.
7. Though I have read part of the Bible such as some stories in the Bible, I didn't know much about it. Reading daily bread is a kind of autosuggestion and recharging of one's soul power. Sunday school sessions where children gather together and learn the importance of unity, teamwork and life skills are essential for them. That is a good idea for our society. Helping others by prayers and making them feel relief from their burden benefit many people even though there is different concept to Buddhism.

8. Personal encounter is important for establishing mutual understanding among each other based on the common ground that they shared together. Point of entry for initiating the mission to be accomplished is to be considered by the leaders.

9. Apart from day to day conversations with the Christians, I have never discussed about religious issues with them before. However, sometimes I accompany them when they go to church. Normally, I follow my friends in church just for social relationship with them rather than the interest in their religion. I meet and greet people with respect and in return, I receive love and respect from the people I meet in the church. All these things are part of my social life but not as my religious life.

10. Every religion has the right to be different in beliefs and concepts. It is important not to argue with those who have different beliefs with you. For instance, it is not necessary to question and argue upon the reason why the thumb is shorter in length compared to the rest of the fingers. Hence, try to gather the common things that we have and keep the dissimilarities aside to give positive impact on our society. Certain differences like concepts about life after death should be included based on personal interest.

11. Certainly, there are barriers between Buddhists and Christians in working together for the welfare of our country. It is necessary to cut down the ego that we have and set a common ground to accommodate everyone. It is necessary for everyone to be careful with this factor.

12. We can see from our history that influence through religion is much more effective and also have more controlling power upon people than that of politics. Some immature people got influenced by that tactic. However, that was left in the past. So, according to present situation in our country, it is best to focus on social welfare by helping people who are in need. Although majority of the organizations which rebel the government is Christians in
religion, their main reason for being against the government is not about religion. They can reunite anytime as soon as they can find the solution for the problem and their region will be peaceful.

13. All these matters are due to the policy makers of our country. Certain things are the consequences of the past carried to our present society. But it is not logical to keep reflecting the past on the present actions and movements. In my opinion, from the part of Christian society in Myanmar, it is necessary not to isolate yourself from other people. It is good to have unity among yourself but you need to care for others and develop cooperative ideas to have good fellowship with others. It is necessary for Myanmar Churches to emphasize on social work to clear the black image of the past. Channels for other people to participate in social welfare also should be opened. Everyone should take part in that activity. That is one of the methods to abolish the stigma that the Christians have before and also is a kind of loyalty to own land.

14. Everyone, either Buddhist or Christian, has to play our part in shaping our country along with the changing trend. Differences in religion are part of the challenges especially in disaster hit regions and conflict areas. Economic, religious and political problems arise when the political leader has problem with political ethic and bias towards certain group. However, there are times when some other activities such as social activities can overtake political issue. For instance, challenges do exist especially during political transitional period of Myanmar but having a strong channel either socio-cultural or socio-religious to keep balance to the situation is the utmost important one in our country.

15. New generation of today is responsible for it. Even though there was some misunderstandings among different people and religion in the past, a channel for social activities should be established and try to salvage the situation. Every one of us has to actively participate in reconstructing our country. On top of that, there must be someone who does the steering job in every activity in order to maintain harmony in the group without bias.

16. Social activities, currently, seem to be the most effective strategy to approach other people. However, it is not so easy to gain common understanding among those who have different interests. It is necessary to introduce mutual respect among each other in the first place and after that do something to benefit the community as a joint effort. As the ruling system is changing in Myanmar, the role of religious leaders in this newly
democratized country is of great significance. Religious leaders have to oversee and support the gaps in social affairs. Religious guidance is necessary in many aspects of the country.
1.2.4. U Dhmmapati

**Introduction (General Information)**

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**Interviews**

1. Every one of us has freedom and right to choose in the matters of religion. As we used to mention, human beings are here in the world choosing what they like and doing what they want. There definitely can be the right conduct and the wrong conduct as well as the right choice and the wrong choice in whatever they do. In regards to religion, all of us are devoted to our religion of choice in which we deeply believe. All these matters are not easily explainable. Some people choose to follow and worship what they think is the right religion and also what they believe through studying religious literature. Following or joining a particular religion is devoting whole life to that religion and God. This is similar to married couples. As in Myanmar context, it is not reversible once they are married. Therefore, making the right choice before conducting anything is crucial. Personally, I don't really have any comment about this issue. Everyone has the right to choose as they like. However, in the matter of religion, if a person chooses wrongly, he will suffer not only in his present life but also in the next life.

2. No answer.
3. All these matters are depending on the environment of the person. If you are grown up in Christian community, you surely will have believes similar to the Christians. This formula applies to the Muslims, Buddhists as well as other religions. The root of the problem between one religion and another is due to one sidedness and negligence of what is good and what is evil. If the person's heart is clean, he will definitely do good deeds in his life but for the one whose heart is not clean, it is undeniable that he will end his life doing bad things. The main cause of all these things is not knowing the consequences of their conduct.

4. It is not quite easy to have dialogue and try to get mutual understanding between Christians and Buddhists. There will be a higher chance to try personally through studying literature but it is less possible to have official and group dialogue.

5. It is not true to say that every Buddhist is able to follow the instructions of Buddha. Many of them are not abiding rules and commandments. There are only certain people who are living according to the teachings of Buddha showing loving kindness towards others. Hence, we cannot say that every Buddhist is always righteous, kind and truthful as a whole and it all depends on individuals.

6. It is usual for the people in Burma who are poor and lowly to overestimate the colonial Westerners who are rich, educated and powerful when they came to colonize Myanmar. Such perception makes people easily get influenced in terms of social particularly in religion by what they think as high and dependable. That is the reason why they are viewed as pro-westerners.

7. I have never read Bible before. Therefore, I cannot discuss and compare the two religions so much.

8. It is important to have mutual understanding between each other especially for those who are in different believe. Seeing others with love, passion and kindness is necessary to understand one another and to establish a peaceful relationship. Racism and religious one sidedness are barriers to establish mutual understanding. Basically, love and kindness need to dwell in everyone’s heart.

9. I have never had dialogue with Christians before. This is my first experience.
10. There will be some differences in social life for two people who are in different belief because religion has a more influencing effect on other sectors in everyday life. It is easy for the two people who are in the same belief to mix together as well as to understand each other. However, if social matter is viewed separately from religious matter, there is a greater possibility to co-exist and have a peaceful relationship no matter how different in religious concept.

11. This issue is more related to politics. So, it depends more on political leaders and their policies. I don’t have any comment regarding this matter.

12. From laymen point of view, it is natural for a person to love, protect and faithful to his own country. However, in religious aspect, self centeredness is viewed as improper. One should not say that this is my land, my place, my religion and so on. Egoism definitely is existed in political and social fields but it is not appropriate for religious field.

13. It is mostly important to have their own standpoint and contain themselves in their boundary. Attempts made to convert others into their religion will multiply the already existing misunderstandings and will hamper the purpose of proving themselves as faithful citizens.

14. Religion is much relying on politics. Not only religion but also social and economic situation is largely depending on country’s policies. Political instabilities will more or less impact on religious sector. Peace in the nation is core to religious activities. Without being peaceful in the country, it is not possible to see improvements in religious field.

15. It is not easy to gain mutual acceptance to each other's religion as long as there is one sidedness and self-centeredness. Moreover, difference in religious practices and cultures causes one person to be away from others because people of different nature are never easy to have unity or have the same spirit.

16. It is better to start the relationship with social matters rather than introducing religious matters at the initial phase. However, two people who are in different beliefs can never stand as one in the matters of religion although they can be together in social life.
2. INTERVIEWS WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF CHRISTIANITY

2.1. Field Research: Questions for Christian Interviewees

1. How do you see Buddhism?
2. How do you regard Buddhists in Myanmar in the past and today?
3. Was there ever any misunderstanding between Buddhists and Christians in the past? If so, when and what were the main points of those misunderstandings?
4. Do you think Buddhist-Christian dialogue in Myanmar is necessary? If yes, what is the purpose and primary concern for Buddhist-Christian dialogue? If no, why do you disapprove?
5. Many people said that Buddhism is a religion of non-violence (ahimsa) and compassion? Do you agree with that? What are your perspectives and experiences regarding Buddhism?
6. Many people see Christianity as a religion of violence and colonialism. In Myanmar, there are some people who see Christians as pro-western and pro-colonialism. What are your experiences and views on that?
7. Have you ever read the Tipitaka? Which aspect of Buddhism was the greatest challenge for you at first?
8. Can you suggest an encounter between Buddhists and Christians that would lead to a better mutual understanding and respect in the Myanmar society?
9. Have you ever had dialogue with Buddhists before? If yes, how does the dialogue affect your religious life and thought? If no, why is this not a concern for you?
10. What factors are to be avoided in relationship between Buddhists and Christians in the Myanmar context?
11. Have you ever come across any hindrances for Buddhists and Christians to work and contribute together for the betterment of the Myanmar society? If yes, what are your suggestions to overcome them?
12. Some Myanmar Buddhists say that Christianity is an alien religion. Do you agree? Give your comments.
13. Can you suggest how best the Christians in Myanmar could demonstrate that they are faithful and loyal citizens of the country?
14. What are the challenges for peaceful coexistence in Myanmar?
15. In what ways can Buddhists and Christians in Myanmar build mutual understanding and better relationships?
16. In furthering dialogue between Buddhists and Christians in Myanmar, what would be the most effective and feasible approach?
2.2. Texts of Interviews with Representatives of Christianity

2.2.1. Saw Hlaing Bwa

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Interview

1. Buddhism is one of the religions in the world. As a Christian, there can be differences in how we see other religions. For me, I take a pluralistic position and I believe that Buddhists also can achieve their goal (Nibbana) at last if they try hard according to the instructions of Buddha. Adherents of any religion are doing their best for the benefit while they live on earth as well as in the next life. Every action, not only in Christianity but also in Buddhism, is based on the four noble truths, trying to leave positive impacts on others. Megga, in Buddhism means being freed from earthy distractions and pursuing heavenly affairs. In my opinion, Buddhism is a religion which is sufficient for itself. Parts of a religion: culture, language etc. may not be perfect but other religions must respect and acknowledge their core experience as their uniqueness. This is an important point for peace and harmony among the religions. It is not ethically justified to assume that our
belief alone is truthful and acceptable. It rather exploits and oppresses others' belief. Therefore, personally I feel that it is better to approach other religions from a pluralist position.

2. In every religion, there are people who are true, authentic followers as well as those who are superficial. The majority of Buddhists in Myanmar are still clinging to animism, Nat worship, which is analogue with Buddhism. However, for true Buddhists, they believe that Nat worship is not necessary for them as long as they follow the instructions of Buddha. The worse thing is that in both Buddhism and Christianity, some people are making use of their religion for their self interest, economic and power which is extremely improper. In fact, judgment should be done on individual basis. Moreover, being conservative, being exploited by local government and minimal exposure to the outside world causes difficulties for Buddhists to understand and accept other religions. Even though some monks who study Buddhism in foreign countries become open in relationship with others, laymen who only hear the monks’ teaching are still in conservative world. So, we need to understand this fact and keep the relationship at ethical level but not the academic level.

3. Misunderstanding between Buddhist and Christian did exist in Myanmar. It occurred in different levels. The majority of misunderstandings happened due to the difference in system (faith system). Furthermore, our way of self-expression also can be a source of misunderstanding. Dialogue is important at this point to discuss and clarify the differences. For example, in Christianity, God is the creator but in the context of Buddhism, there is no creator. It is impossible to understand each other upon words and superficial expressions because our thought concept is different. Hence, we need to go beyond superficial expressions. Misunderstandings can arise either on doctrinal or historical level. Most of the Christians in Myanmar are ethnic minorities and most of the Buddhists are Bamar, ethnic majorities. Historically, there are conflicts between these two groups. When colonialism was introduced in Myanmar, missionaries who came along with the British colony helped ethnic minorities regain their identity. From the Bamar's point of view, ethnic minorities were made use by the colony. Based on historical conflict which brought about misunderstandings between Buddhists and Christians, Myanmar Christians need to take corrective actions on certain things. Since all these misunderstandings are rooted in political issues, it is essential to find out solutions by means of political approach and not by religious approach.
4. Dialogue is really important. In Myanmar, dialogue among religions is still in introductory level. Most of the Christians as well as Buddhists are not aware of the meaning of dialogue. Some people understand that dialogue is a mutual discussion rather than monologue where one way method is applied in communication. However, at present, the goal of dialogue has no difference from that of monologue. It merely is targeting to convert other people. That is not the genuine dialogue. In a genuine dialogue, there is mutual understanding, mutual sharing and mutual trust. We need to build up trust which has been missing among us due to political and some other reasons throughout our history. Dialogue must be a genuine, authentic and deep listening. There must be a will to learn from each other. The outcome/result of dialogue is to gain mutual recognition of significant differences. Some people used to find a common ground when they have dialogue with others. It is good to do so but it is not sufficient to find out and understand the enrichment of significant differences. Through common ground, we can establish friendship, mutual trust but truth can be found through differences. Dialogue, actually, is for mutual transformation and enrichment. The most important part of dialogue is to build up peace, reconciliation, justice, sustainable society. Although we are naming it as a religious dialogue, it is more crucial for our society/ life to overcome the conflict-filled past and head towards a peaceful tomorrow.

Reflecting the past dialogue sessions in Myanmar between Buddhists and Christians, there is no true religious dialogue between the two parties so far. They are merely at the state of debates where both parties argue each other on who is right and who is wrong. However, dialogue of life, on the other hand, is inevitable in our daily life. It has been taking place continuously in our day-to-day life. In some of the villages in rural area, there is some cooperation among the people of diverse religions (Buddhists, Christians and Islam, etc) for the benefit of the people in the village. These cooperative actions are done unconsciously and also they are based only on social affairs. Nevertheless, interfaith dialogue or conceptual dialogue, until today, has not yet evolved at any level.

Christians usually initiate interfaith dialogue in Myanmar. Positive feedbacks are received from other parties. But some of them do not fully understand the true meaning of dialogue bringing about misunderstandings among each other. Some of the Buddhist religious leaders point out the ideas of some Christian evangelists which they feel is an insult to their religion. In reality, the aim of dialogue among different religions is to learn to understand each other. At the moment, we, MIT (Myanmar Institute of Theology) and ITBU
(International Theravada Buddhist University) are targeting to have academic level conceptual dialogue. Since ITBU is under Ministry of Communication, right now, we are awaiting for the approval to hold academic level dialogue from it. To sum up, until today, almost all interfaith dialogues are started up by Christians and many positive feedbacks were received as well as changes in perspectives from other religions such as Buddhists, Islam and Hindus were seen as a result of dialogue sessions.

Dialogue should be initiated based on the existing issues/problems. Especially in this age of globalization, problems/issues are not limited only to certain group of people. It rather becomes the problems of everybody. So, everyone has to harmoniously participate in solving global problem through genuine dialogue where mutual trust and understanding are established. The arising issues in this world are very complicated as we are living in the world of complexity. As a result, it is not possible to tackle the problems one sided. Everyone needs to collaborate each other, broaden the scope of perspective and work out for the solution of the problems. We need to come up with Christian approach, Buddhist approach, Muslim approach and so on.

5. Buddhism, purely, is nonviolent which tries to gain inner peace through meditation and distribute it to the society. Violence actually came from those who exploit the religion such as government, politician, businessmen, etc. In every religion, there are two dimensions: liberative and oppressive dimension. We need to find out which is oppressive and which is liberative. For instance, in history, during crusade war between Muslims and Christians, they tried to beat each other and caused bloodshed. This is the oppressive dimension of religion. But for Jesus Christ, he resists the violence and sacrificed for others. This is the nonviolent sacrificial act of liberative dimension. During saffron revolution in Myanmar in 2007, the monks are resisting the violence approach from government and sacrificing themselves for their people. This is the non-violence means of resisting violence. Every religion is non-violent in nature but it turns to violence at some point of history. For example, some medias used to elaborate Islam as terrorists' religion although Islam is a religion of peace. It is not the whole picture/essence of Islam. Therefore, it is necessary to differentiate between the two dimensions. Moreover, there are non-religious factors: political, economical and nationalism that stimulate the religions to become violent.

6. Christianity and colonialism are two different things. But when they came into our country at the same time, many people had the impression that these two things are similar in nature. Therefore, we need to change people’s
mindset. Colonialism is an economic factor which comes with the political interest but not with theological interest. It is partly true to say that Christians are pro-westerners because the identity, literature and culture of ethnic minorities are constructed by Westerners. Similarly, for Bamar, majority in Myanmar, gain their true identity because of Buddhism from India. Hence, it is not possible to part Bamar from Buddhism and also impossible to separate ethnic minorities from Christianity. This is the reality. Nowadays, Christianity does not only exist in Western world but it becomes global. Therefore, we need to eliminate the Western image of Christianity and elaborate Burmese/Asian image. We need to contextualize and find out a theology which reflects our Myanmar culture.

7. I have read part of Tipitaka. My emphasis is on Abhidhamma, Buddhist philosophy. In Tipitaka, there are three main parts. Main challenges of Buddhism lie in Abhidhama. Christian evangelists, nowadays, are fighting against the Buddhists based on their superficial knowledge about Buddhism. This is a wrong method. We need to do in-depth study about the philosophy of Abhidhamma. It is very complex and scientific. This is the greatest challenge for the Christians. Same like Buddhism, we need to emphasize the teachings of Jesus Christ than doctrines. Constant changes can be seen in doctrines but what we need to focus is the teachings of Jesus Christ. Some people are merely focusing on the grace of Jesus. Therefore, we need to show the teachings of Jesus to others. Now, many Buddhists involve in social engagement. That is mission for the betterment and development of people. They do mission to help people change their attitude and behavior in order to have a better life, not to change from one religion to another. If we look at how Buddhist monks work, they say, there is no discrimination regardless of religion, race and sex. It is not necessary to convert into Buddhism; we are just doing our mission for the benefit of the people. However, there are some Buddhists who do mission among ethnic minorities and Christians in order to convert them into Buddhism. In this case, they have to change their mission attitudes. In fact, Tatana in Buddhism means, standing firmly in the teaching of Buddha - payayeh a sung amah naih ti si chin. Not to convert others from one religion to another but just to follow the teachings of Lord Buddha. In the teaching of Lord Buddha, there is nothing which is not good. The teaching of Buddha is not to kill others but to love others. So, doing mission means to help people to live according to the teaching of Lord Buddha. Mission is not to convert people but to promote and to empower people to live a godly life. Converting people of other faiths into Buddhism is not mission, it is colonialism.
In many countries, there are people who used religion as the backbone of their political power. Similarly in Myanmar, there were some Buddhists who made use of Buddhism for their self-interest, economic and political power, which is extremely improper. So, Buddhism in Myanmar has been used as the backbone of Myanmar political power. While most of the Christians in Myanmar are from ethnic minority backgrounds, the Bamar ethnic majority are Buddhists. Historically, there have been conflicts between ethnic Christian minorities and Bamar Buddhist majority during the colonial period of Myanmar especially because Christian missionaries who came along with the colonial British helped ethnic minorities regain their identity. From the Bamars' point of view, ethnic minorities were supporters of colonialism.

8. Personal encounter is very important for a better mutual understanding. Due to the teachings in Churches before, Christians are keeping themselves away from the Buddhists. Therefore, it is necessary to establish mutual relationship with each other. Personal relationship/ friendship is the basic step for doctrinal dialogues.

9. We are having dialogue sessions with Buddhists at academic and ethical level. We set up a theme such as peace, love and discuss the different views with other religious leaders. Responses from Buddhists were very good and they really participated in discussions because it was very seldom that Buddhists get a chance to involve in Christians' activities. From this year onwards we are trying to have an inter-university dialogue between Buddhist and Christian so that discussions can be conducted not only between religious leaders but also among the students. Nowadays, Buddhist monks are controlled and watched by the government. So, we need to be wise in whatever thing we do because of the limitation in freedom in our country.

10. There are differences and commonalities in every aspect. Initiating with common grounds will enhance relationship and pave the way to discuss about the differences. At the starting point, it is best to avoid the factors that negatively affect the relationship and mutual understanding. Difficult issues can't be avoided but we need to express them with love. Even though it is more systematic to start with an easy one before we proceed to a difficult one, personally I feel that it is better to sort things out at the beginning. However, we need to understand the situation and context. Hot and critical issues should be discussed when there is friendship among each other. There can be different approaches in dialogue. For me, I will choose process-thought approach. Nevertheless, it is important to know the person whom we are talking to. In my opinion, it is not possible to avoid doctrinal
issues but we need to watch out our usages when we have dialogue with other people.

11. There is no problem in society level to cooperate each other between Buddhist and Christian. In terms of hindrances, political factor is the only one that hinders the smooth relationship among religions. Buddhists usually involve actively in social activities because they assume that they are doing good deeds by getting themselves involved in social welfare activities. Only Christians have doctrines which hamper them to interact with people who have different beliefs. Therefore, we, Christians need to remove our doctrinal hindrances and reach out to the community to work hand in hand with others. Another thing is political hindrance. Discrimination among the different races of the country is a political factor that hampers collaboration among the religions. However, I believe that from 2012 onwards, there will be fewer political hindrances. Christians need to take this opportunity to work together with Buddhists in as many areas as possible because the holistic development of Myanmar is not only for the Buddhists but also for people of other faiths who are living in the country.

12. As I had mentioned earlier, self expression of the Christians is influenced by Western expression and we became strangers to the Buddhists. Therefore, we need to admit this fact and try to make them understand through dialogue. We need to make known of the Asian philosophy/ teachings of Christ from different perspectives. This is the beginning of our journey. To follow Jesus, we need to contextualize his teachings in our native land rather than adopting other people's doctrines.

13. We still have a lot of things to do in this part, theology in terms of interpretation, contextualization, hymns, architect, literature, culture and so on. In reality, we, ourselves as Christians, need to understand the concept of mission well. Mission doesn’t always mean to convert other people but to promote and empower people to live abundant life. To convert people of other religion is not a true mission. It rather is a colonialism/imperialism. At the present moment, Buddhists are getting more and more engaged in social activities. These actions are regarded as doing mission. Actions to benefit our fellow human beings, actions to help solve the problem of others are the processes of mission. However, the ultimate goal of Christians is to convert people of other faiths into Christianity. We need to change our concept of mission. Similarly, Buddhists also share the same concept of converting people into their religion (Buddhism) which is needed to be changed. In fact, the true meaning of mission in Buddhism is to live according to the
instructions of Buddha in daily living. There are a lot of good things to practice in the teachings of both Buddha and Jesus including being helpful to others when they are in need. Both Buddhists and Christian missionaries, actually, are helping people to live according to the teachings of Buddha and Jesus respectively. Therefore, there is no way for them to clash between them. Moreover, Myanmar Christians should show that they are faithful and loyal citizens of the country through their good work and self-less service for all people.

14. Not being permitted to involve in development activities of the country due to country's policy is the main challenge for both the Buddhists and Christians at this point. But I hope that there will be more chances given to us to take part in country-building activities. At this moment of time, even social activities organized by monks are controlled and set limitations in certain settings. For Christians, due to the doctrines to separate church and state affairs, even though we do social work within Christian community, we didn't involve much in political activities so far. In my opinion, it is necessary to get involved in those activities to build our country so that we can hear the voices of people. We introduced political theology in MIT (Myanmar Institute of Theology) from 2011 onwards for political engagement of the Christians.

Human beings have faith for the benefit of people. Also, religion is for the benefit of human beings. Why is there killing between people of other faiths? Why is there no harmony among religions? This is because of lack of interfaith dialogue. We are living in the world of complexity. Therefore, we need to establish a Christian approach, Muslim approach, Buddhist approach, for peace and tranquility in our society. It is sure that the problems of the past in Myanmar have not resolved completely and at the same time it is related with power and hegemony. So, there is power struggle in Myanmar and therefore there is conflict. In order to overcome conflict and civil war in Myanmar, political dialogue as well as religious dialogue is essential. As the past history of Myanmar is not healed, we desperately needed forgiveness and reconciliation. Without forgiveness, there can be no reconciliation. In order to reconcile each other, we need to discover the truth which is very complicated. We cannot do justice only for some ethnic people. We need a common truth which is acceptable for everyone. Since Myanmar is a pluralistic country, we need a federal system of governance in order to have peace, equality and justice. Therefore, to find political solution in democratic process, it is necessary to head towards establishing federal states. In a democratic process like in Myanmar, forgiveness and
reconciliation is a must. Without forgiveness, it is unlikely to reconcile each other. Without reconciliation, it is not possible to kick off federal system; it will rather break the county into pieces. In this case, both parties (ethnic majorities: Bamar and the ethnic minorities) need to make certain conceptual changes. It is necessary to nurture the concept of equity among different ethnic groups. Further, though we are diverse, we need to have mutual understanding between religions, races so that we can establish a union in which people can live peacefully. Until and unless Myanmar practice federal system, there will be no peace and harmony in the country because Myanmar is a pluralistic society where there is diversity in culture, language and religion. All Myanmar people cannot be Buddhists. Similarly, not all the people in the country can be Christians. Therefore, a unity that we need is not uniformity, but unity in diversity since Myanmar is a plural society. Without accepting our diversity, federal system of governance cannot be established and at the same time people cannot live side by side with peace and harmony in the country.

15. It will be best if there is no criticism, discrimination and blaming among the religions. Due to Christianity's influences, Buddhists as well, become less conservative, not only indulging themselves in meditation but also becoming more action oriented. As a result, chances to cooperate between the two religious groups are getting higher. On the other hand, the increasing political, racial and social unrests in our country have huge impact on religious sector. For example, crisis between Muslims and Buddhists has become more and more broaden nowadays, spreading in many regions of the country. Hence, religious leaders of different religions need to work hand in hand in order to educate the people and make them understand the concept of dialogue. MIT is now trying to intervene on this process, making arrangement to engage with Myanmar Peace Centre because interfaith cooperation is very important for gaining peace in the country.

Every human being in this world is religious being. Each of us has our own belief. In this case, there are two terms: religion and faith. Buddhism, Christianity, etc. are examples of religions and communism, humanism, etc are examples of different faiths. When the term “religion” is used, it appeared to be excluding other faiths. The purpose of both religion and faith groups are for the welfare/benefit of human beings not only in the present state but also in the future life. Hence, sharing the same goal/destination, it is impossible for different religious groups as well as faith groups to work together in a harmonious way. The root cause of the clashes among different religions is because they don’t have mutual trust, mutual understanding
among them. In turn, mutual understanding is not established because there is no communication/dialogue among them. Therefore, dialogue is crucial in forming harmony. Harmony, in fact, should not only be at the level of top leaders but also should be adopted at the grass root level.

Past history in Myanmar, definitely, is not healed yet. Because the approach is still through power, domination, influence resulting in power struggle causing conflicts in the nation. People are mentally traumatized due to their past experiences. Therefore, it is not enough to have only political dialogue. We should have interfaith dialogue. As long as we are elaborating complicated issues such as justice, human rights, it is difficult to gain reconciliation. We need to find out what are our common rights, common existence, common survival, common values, and common goals for reconciliation.

During military dictatorship in the past, if somebody happened to help the victims, that person was straight away accused as a rebel. However, nowadays, the civil government is inviting everyone to participate in helping the victims. So, there is a higher chance for churches and Buddhist organizations to work together in social activities. But it is vital not to practice exclusivism. At present, most of the war zones are in the areas of Christian ethnic minorities. Therefore, the Buddhists ethnic majorities should see them as their own ethnic brothers without discrimination. For cooperation between Buddhists and Christians in development process, one of the most effective strategies is to focus on social issues. If Myanmar Buddhists and Christians are engaging in doctrinal issues, they will miss out the fact that they are here to benefit others. In Buddhist-Christian dialogue in Myanmar, the main focus should be on human right issues such as poverty, child abuse, gender issues, ethnic issues and social issues such as health, education for they need to know that their work is for the people. It is not the responsibility of the government alone to tackle all these problems but the people in Myanmar society must participate as necessary. During the present Myanmar political transition period, Myanmar Christians need to remove their doctrinal hindrances and reach out to the community to work hand in hand with people of other faiths. However, due to colonial British divide and rule policy in Myanmar, there is still hatred and discriminations among the different races of the country. Discrimination among the different races of the country is a political factor that hampers collaboration among religions. The question is: “How to remove the political factors that hinders the smooth relationship among different religious groups in Myanmar?”
16. The most effective one is to focus on social issues. Doctrine is meant to understand each other. But final destination is to benefit society. For me, I don't divide social and religious affairs. Religion, in reality, is for peace and benefit of society. We need to know that our target is for the people. Further, issues oriented approaches such as, human rights, social issues, ethnic issues and ecological issues can be discussed in dialogue.
2.2.2. C. Thang Za Tuan

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Interview

1. Buddhism is a rather scientific religion based on cause and effect relationship. It emphasizes that the secret of life is brotherly love and compassion. The world’s woes are due to selfishness. This can be erased by a system known as the ‘Eight-fold Path’. There are right beliefs, right efforts, right thinking, right ideals, right deeds, right way of earning a living and right meditation.

2. Buddhism came to Myanmar (Burma) brought by Indians around 1st century A.D. together with the art of civilization, worships, custom etc. Devoted Buddhists are really well cultured. Many Buddhists shall practice nat (pagan) belief together with Buddhist doctrine in their daily lives. Buddhism is strongly rooted among the Bamars, Rakhine, Mons and Shan races in Myanmar, among the major eight races of Myanmar.
3. When Dr. Adoniram Judson arrived in 1813 A.D, he found it was not an easy task to convert a Buddhist to become a Christian. Missionaries were always looked upon as spy as on suspicion. No great misunderstanding or conflict occurred in the past. Only, when Buddhism was prescribed as the national religion in 1961, the Kachin Nationals went underground till today in protest.

4. Yes. A dialogue is necessary for better understanding and to discard suspicion that may exist. A primary ground is on the concept of love, sin, salvation and mutual understanding and acceptances.

5. Yes, I think Buddhism is primarily based on metta(love) and karuna(compassion). Though no religion is free from violence, Buddhism has the least everywhere in the world, as far as I would see in compare with after big religions of the world.

6. Probably the world's Crusade wars 1099, and 1396 and war in Christian countries had the impact that Christianity is a religion of violence to the ignorant majority of the world. Among the illiterate in Myanmar people used to label Christians as pro-westerners and pro-colonialists. This mistake is also fuelled by the dress of the nations with long pants and ties when they go to churches till today to deliver sermons and preaching.

7. Not really. I just read some selection and essentials on Buddhism. Attainment of Nirvana and the belief of endless life circles as in Hindu religion are the challenge to understand Buddhism and probably means to convince them Christian beliefs. Self salvation and endless life cycles shortly gripped their thought, life and activities/action.

8. “Friendship begets amity” goes a Burmese saying. Good and frequent encounter and dialogue will surely promote better mutual understanding and respect, dispelling ill-will prejudice and discrimination.

9. Not a dialogue but a friendly discussion with Buddhist sometimes. I tried to show by deeds the practicalness of Christianity to my office staffs. They accept the reality of Christianity though no one was converted but came to understand Christianity better in her true form and features.

10. Idol worship.
11. No hindrances encountered if we try to accept each other sincerely in our respective doctrine. Honestly both Buddhism and Christianity embrace the principles of love, compassion and humanity. Love only needs sincerity, fair dealings and humility in cooperation for practical living together in peace and harmony.

12. No. Both Buddhism and Christianity are alien religion coming from outside Myanmar.

13. By words and deeds in times of need. Promote family spirit and brotherhood. Attitudes towards one another. Discard all forms of pride and prejudice in all daily dealings.

14. Develop positive thinking, wholesome vision, submit to the governing authorities and try yourself to be effective and useful in nation building. In short, do your best, expect the best and try to accept nicely whatever befalls upon you.

15. By trying to be a good Buddhist and a good Christian in our respective religion. Following the “Golden Rule,” which is in the Bible and in the Buddhist beatitudes as well. As Christians live in a Buddhist nation or Buddhist dominated nation (89% Buddhist), they can have good relationship, they can build mutual understanding, leading harmonious living together in peace if both Buddhists and Christians are devotedly cling to the teachings of their respective religious leaders. Both teach non-violence, “sermon on the mount” for Christian and “the eightfold path” and “the five precepts” in the Dhammapada of Buddhist doctrine. Further, what we really need is meditation and spiritual guidance in our daily living for wisdom and discretion.

16. Win-win approach on common grounds. Be sincere, humble and honest with feelings of empathy and love. Be humane and not arrogant. Friendly and warm relationships (good rapport) be built first for ready acceptance. Begin with common beliefs and practices.
2.2.3. Moe Moe Nyunt

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Interview

1. Buddhists are also God's creatures. However, they are still unaware of their creator and also don't have any contact with him yet. Such situation can be seen not only among the Buddhists but also among other religions.

2. I think there are some changes among the Buddhists nowadays because many years back, the nature of Buddhism in Myanmar was nominal. Majority of the Buddhists did not understand anything about their religion although they are under the name of that religion because of their parents and ancestors. Traditionally, Buddhist mission was conducted by monks but the believers were not going to monastery regularly to worship and listen to the teaching of the monks. However, Buddhism, nowadays, has changed a lot and becomes more contextualized. It seems that they are doing research on Christians' approach in mission work and so they are imitating the activities in certain areas. Previously, even though worshiping Nat (animism) was part
or Buddhism, many people assume that Nat worship is not relevant to the belief of Buddhists in present days. Even in my relatives, my aunts always talked about the power and activities of Nat in the last time but nowadays, she used to mention about the teachings of monks in monastery. They, too, have trainings about Buddhism for laymen and professors from secular world are giving lectures in those trainings. Moreover, surprisingly, there are trainings and song practices for youths and children despite singing is not their usual practice in religious activities. Therefore, we can say that they are making many changes in order to be firm on their ground and also to avoid from being influenced by other religions especially Christianity. That is the resurgence of Buddhism. Slightly after the independence of Burma from British colony, there also was resurgence in Buddhism together with nationalism.

3. Misunderstanding between Buddhists and Christians has been existing through the years. The reason why is because of culture difference. The culture of Buddhists and that of Christian used to clash in many places. For example, it is not the problem for pastors to go for fishing and slaughter animals but for Buddhists, they assume that killing and slaughtering animals is sinful. Long ago there was a missionary in a remote area of central Myanmar. One day, he went for fishing nearby his house. When the villagers saw him, they regarded him as sinful and they didn't respect him anymore. They didn't even want to listen to his words and teachings. Therefore, it is important to understand the culture of the people you are going to meet. Just a small and simple matter can be a source of misunderstanding and disturbance in introducing the gospel.

4. It is essential to have dialogue rather than doing what we think is right. Small and personal dialogues in everyday life as well as group dialogues are necessary. Spending more time to understand others' culture and listening to their concern is necessary before initiating dialogue. Sometimes most of the Christians are too eager to talk about our own interest but forget to listen to the other party. Another thing is that we also need to have a clear standpoint when discussing things with others. We need to know what is inside us and what our belief is so that our status will be clear and will not be swayed when we have dialogue with others.

5. Basically, the nature and the teachings in both Buddhism and Christianity are the same. It is unlikely that Buddhism is totally free of violence. Likewise, Christianity is not a non violence, too. It depends on context and situation.
6. Even though Christianity was originally from eastern countries, it was conveyed to Myanmar from westerners. So, a lot of western cultures were brought together with Christianity and it was understood that Christians must follow practices of westerners and their culture. In some occasions, certain Christians side their religion than their own country and their people. Therefore, they used to be accused as unfaithful to their country. In order to get rid of these misunderstandings, showing love to the people and serving them with our best probably will change things.

7. As I am so satisfied with my Christian life with Jesus, none of the religions and teachings around me could persuade me. The respect that Buddhists paid to the monks and the elders is really challenging for me. According to the teachings in Bible, Christians also are taught to be respectful. But Christianity is mixed with Western culture which prioritizes human rights. Many people in Myanmar, especially Christians, are not able to differentiate between human rights and egoism leading to egoistic approach in the end.

8. Personal encounter is the most crucial tool in establishing mutual understanding between each other. For me, majority of my friends at school were Buddhists. So, I had to mix with them and we understood each other during our school days. In their opinion, we belong to hell in our next life. Same like them, we also think that they are going to hell after they died. Nevertheless, we could understand each other and had a good relationship without any big issue.

9. I have been mixing around with Buddhist friends throughout my life. Sometimes I even was influenced by their habits. I followed them to monastery at times for social reason.

10. Respecting others’ culture is the most important thing for a healthy relationship. For instance, refraining from eating beef if we are eating together with those who don't eat beef is a kind of showing respect to them. Understanding the culture and being humble enhance a smooth relationship as well as a successful dialogue with others.

11. For me, there is no barrier in relationship with Buddhists.

12. I accept the fact. It is considered that singing songs and playing guitar are culture of the Christians because of Western influence. But personally I feel that we can just sing hymns at church during worshiping God. The need of contextualization is not only in songs and music but also in many practices.
such as sitting on chairs/ on the floor, quiet meditation time etc. We need to contextualize all these things.

13. In my opinion, we can work hand in hand in social welfare activities. For example, HIV prevention and providing support to AIDS patients. We need to actively participate in some other activities with other people either regional or nation-wide activities especially in defensive activities of our nation. Take as an example, during saffron revolution, monks were leading the demonstration for democracy but Christian religious leaders were sitting back and watching the demonstrators. That is one of the reasons why people accuse Christian as unfaithful people. The problem in relationship starts when we isolate ourselves from others. Hence, Christians also should participate in activities done for the benefit of society.

14. Due to government policy in Myanmar, Christians are considered as second class citizens. Even though the Christians want to take part in defense activities of the country, they don’t have a chance to do so because they are seen as unfaithful and have no trust in them. For example, government has a policy not to give minister position to Christians. In turn, Christians also are not keen to do their part since they are not given a chance. Respecting and recognizing one another is the key for peaceful co-existence in Myanmar.

15. Love and humbleness is the core for everything. Buddhists also are not always having negative opinion about Christians. They assume that every religion is good but for those who had a bad history with Christians will have some negative thoughts about them.

16. We need to get ourselves ready so that we can take part in the activities when the opportunity comes to us.
2.2.4. Daniel Zau Nan

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Interview

1. For me, I don’t have much knowledge about the details of Buddhism. When I observe it through books, seminars and religious dialogues, generally I feel that teachings in every religion are good. However, the negative side of it is due to the concepts and practices of the people who believe in that religion. Basically, both Buddhism and Christianity have strengths as well as weaknesses. When viewing in terms of positive and negative consequences, it is much depending upon the followers of the religion.

2. As I have mentioned above, there can be concurrent existence of both good and bad aspects among Buddhists.

3. Misunderstanding between Buddhists and Christians did exist in the past. Christianity, actually, was introduced in Myanmar by Westerners and activities such as Christianization also were conducted. During that period, majority of the schools and hospitals were run by Christian missionaries.
So, not only Christians but also other people like Buddhists had to study in mission schools and so on. Based on those situations and literature review, we can see that many people in Myanmar especially the Buddhists assume Christianity as a foreign religion and also the Christians are viewed as unfaithful to the country. Likewise, from the Christians' point of view, Buddhism is just an instrument for some people and authorities to abuse others. Therefore, for some people who don't think about it critically probably believe that Buddhists are using a violence approach which is opposite to the teachings of Buddha.

4. It is necessary to have dialogue between Buddhists and Christians. In order to do so, common destinations need to be set by both parties. We can see dialogue from different perspectives. Leaders from different religions can also participate by having dialogue with each other in political reformation of our country into democracy. Currently, we are having dialogue sessions in the Myanmar Council of Churches. In those sessions, we avoid using words like “religion” and focus purely on social issues such as poverty and health. Step by step setting of common goals and principles for intervention based on the context is necessary.

5. I don't have personal experience regarding this matter. But, according to my knowledge, Buddhism as a religion itself is a nonviolent one but when people don't apply the teachings appropriately in their lives, there is some visible violence among them. However, the authentic, genuine Buddhism is nonviolent. Hence, overall, it is not the problem of the religion but the followers of that religion.

6. It was true that Christians were accused to be the people of British colony in the past and they were seen as unfaithful to the country. During the period of British rule in Myanmar, there was 3Ms (missionary, merchant, military) policy. At that time, military and missionary coexisted. It really happened and it is possible that Christians are accused of being unfaithful to their own country and their fellow people. This condition applies not only to Myanmar but also to some other Asian countries. We, as Christians, also need to differentiate things properly. In reality, we became Christians though we do not like their colonial policy and their actions.

7. For me, I have no knowledge about it and don’t see any particular challenge in Buddhism. But as a Christian in Myanmar, the first challenge is the number of Christians which is much smaller than that of other religions. Therefore, when we do missionary work, it must be conversion oriented and
help people to become qualified Christians. We must not do our evangelical work by exposing the drawbacks of other religions. The second challenge is that it is necessary to have dialogue so that all the religions in our country can work together for stability, peace and development of our country.

8. Personal encounter is a basic factor in a dialogue. It is not easy to apply this method in each and every situation. But in some situations, some people in society are practicing it in their daily lives without realizing.

9. I have never had dialogue with Buddhists in terms of religious matters because previously I lived in the environment where majority of the people are conservative Kachin Christians. However, based on my cumulative teaching experience in the Theological Institute and my personal observation through books, my understanding about Buddhism and dialogue among religions has broadened.

10. Most importantly, we need to classify it into two levels. In society level, we must refrain from underestimating the religion and practices of others. In short, we should not say, my religion is good, your religion is idol and it is bad etc. So, we should avoid insulting Buddhist’s beliefs and practices. In religious level, when we do evangelical work, we must totally avoid terms and behavior that insult other people’s beliefs even though there are literatures such as exclusive replacement model to convert others into Christianity. We have to avoid saying if you do not believe in Jesus Christ, you must go hell. If you want to get eternal life, you have to convert to Christianity. Indeed, we need to acknowledge and value their beliefs, culture and practices.

11. It is vitally important to change our concept we have upon each other meaning that we need to understand Buddhists are not our enemies and also Buddhists need to know that Christians are not their enemies. Although there is understanding in the religious leaders’ level, the majority of the people in society level are not aware of it. Both parties have to understand the necessity of collaboration and explanation should be given to those who do not understand about it.

12. Government policy is playing a vital role at this point. In the past, there was an attempt to convert Buddhism as a national religion in Myanmar. In the new constitution of present Myanmar, there also is a statement that Buddhism is the religion of the majority in the country and the rest of the religions are acknowledged as the religions within the country. I think it all
depends on the person’s own feeling and understanding. As I have mentioned earlier, Christianity was brought to Myanmar most obviously by colonial British. Therefore, this is the reason why people are saying that Christianity is a foreign and colonial religion. In reality, it is true enough that Christianity is a foreign religion, rooted among the Jews and finally spread to us. As long as there is understanding with others, Christianity as well is a part in reconstruction of our country.

13. In my opinion, it is not right to say that Christians are unfaithful citizens because though Christianity was brought into Myanmar by British colony, it has been almost 200 years since it was introduced in our country and there were no big issues that negatively affected the country so far. Therefore, Christians need to carry on with their good work to benefit the country. However, there is one thing to point out about the Christians, that is, Christians know so well about Jesus but they forget to follow his way and instructions. As long as we are good example to others and practically show our strong points to them, there shouldn't be any misunderstanding with them.

14. Before I answer this question, we need to practically consider the government’s view upon the role of religions in shaping the country. Presently, we can see many positive changes are taking place in our country. Many powerful countries in the world such as the US, EU countries are recognizing the changes in our country. As a result, the role of religions has become more and more important in many aspects of nation-building such as elimination of corruption in our land is to be based on religion. Most importantly it is the duty of religion to change the mentality of the people and produce morally and ethically perfect nationalities.

15. Traditionally, the people in Myanmar, 99 out of 100, keep in mind that there is no means of establishing mutual understanding and respect among religions. Even though having interfaith dialogue is interested among certain group of Christians, it is allergic for some especially in tribal groups to have dialogue with others. Proper and well arranged dialogue can be conducted for a better discussion of views and concepts. There can be dialogue in our daily lives but it is not so systematic and well organized.

16. In my opinion, presently, collaboration between Buddhists and Christians is initiating mainly by the Christians and this approach will have positive result if the Buddhists understand the need for dialogue with each other. I have presented in a seminar about “Overcoming suffering by social action”.

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Based on Myanmar context, approaches such as social approach, reality based or need based approach will be effective for current situation. Day to day social relationship is a very basic social engagement in our social life as human beings. From that level of engagement, we can escalate to a higher level such as having dialogue about individual beliefs and so on.
Map of Myanmar
MAP OF MYANMAR

United Nations Cartographic Section
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<td>AAI</td>
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<tr>
<td>ATEM</td>
<td>Association of Theological Education in Myanmar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIA</td>
<td>Burma Independent Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSC</td>
<td>Buddha Sasana Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSNA</td>
<td>Buddha Sasana Nuggaha Ahpwe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BTT</td>
<td>Buddhist Taungtan Tatana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAFPFL</td>
<td>Clean Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCA</td>
<td>Christian Conference of Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DKBA</td>
<td>Democratic Karen Buddhist Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELMC</td>
<td>Evangelical Lutheran Church in Myanmar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMW</td>
<td>Evangelisches Missionswerk in Deutschland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GCBA</td>
<td>General Council of Burmese Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IBMU</td>
<td>International Buddhist Missionary University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ITBU</td>
<td>International Theravada Buddhist University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JETRO</td>
<td>Japan External Trade Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KIA</td>
<td>Kachin Independent Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KNU</td>
<td>Karen National Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MCC</td>
<td>Myanmar Council of Churches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIT</td>
<td>Myanmar Institute of Theology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MPC</td>
<td>Myanmar Peace Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MPSI</td>
<td>Myanmar Peace Support Initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSAGs</td>
<td>Non-State Armed Groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NLD</td>
<td>National League for Democracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCID</td>
<td>Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLORC</td>
<td>State Law and Order Restoration Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUB</td>
<td>Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Hamburg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USDP</td>
<td>Union Solidarity and Development Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WCC</td>
<td>World Council of Churches</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## GLOSSARY OF FOREIGN WORDS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ahimsa</td>
<td>Pali</td>
<td>Non-violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anatta</td>
<td>Pali</td>
<td>Non-self (no-soul)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abhidhamma Pitaka</td>
<td>Pali</td>
<td>One section of Pali Canon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anunyyata</td>
<td>Pali</td>
<td>forgetting each other's mistake &amp; wrong doings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arahata</td>
<td>Sanskrit</td>
<td>Holy one, a saint of one of the highest ranks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhikkhu</td>
<td>Pali</td>
<td>Monk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhikkhuni</td>
<td>Pali</td>
<td>Nun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dana</td>
<td>Pali</td>
<td>Generosity, almsgiving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhamma</td>
<td>Pali</td>
<td>the teaching of Buddha, Truth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhammapada</td>
<td>Pali</td>
<td>a collection of the teachings of Buddha in Tipitaka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dosa</td>
<td>Pali</td>
<td>Hatred, anger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hpa-yah</td>
<td>Bamar</td>
<td>God, visible images of Buddha, pagodas and monks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamma</td>
<td>Pali</td>
<td>Merit, good deeds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karuna</td>
<td>Pali</td>
<td>Compassion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khama</td>
<td>Pali</td>
<td>Forgiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khanti</td>
<td>Pali</td>
<td>Tolerance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loba</td>
<td>Pali</td>
<td>Greediness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maha</td>
<td>Pali</td>
<td>Great</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metta</td>
<td>Pali</td>
<td>Loving-kindness, affection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ngeinchanzay</td>
<td>Bamar</td>
<td>Peace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nibbana</td>
<td>Pali</td>
<td>Final release from kammatic bondage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pali</td>
<td>Pali</td>
<td>Sacred scriptural language of Theravada Buddhism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panca Sila</td>
<td>Pali</td>
<td>Five precepts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paramattha-dhamma</td>
<td>Pali</td>
<td>the Ultimate teaching of Buddha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phongyi</td>
<td>Bamar</td>
<td>Monk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tatmadaw</td>
<td>Bamar</td>
<td>Myanmar Armed Forces / Myanmar Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thera</td>
<td>Pali</td>
<td>venerable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Pali</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santi</td>
<td>Pali</td>
<td>Peace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sasana</td>
<td>Pali</td>
<td>Religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sangha</td>
<td>Pali</td>
<td>monastic community of Buddhist monks and nuns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tipitaka</td>
<td>Pali</td>
<td>the Name of Buddhist Scripture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vinaya-pitaka</td>
<td>Pali</td>
<td>the rules for Buddhist monks and nuns in Tipitaka</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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INTERVIEWS

Buddhist A. P. (Pseudonym), a Buddhist monk belonging to the 'Bamar' community, which is the majority ethnic group living in Myanmar. He has been actively involved in Buddhist-Christian dialogue since 2003.

Daniel Zau Nan, a lecturer of missiology at Myanmar Institute of Theology, is from the Kachin ethnic community. Growing up in the Kachin Christian community, he did not have any contact with Buddhists before studying theology.

Moe Moe Nyunt is from the Bamar ethnic community and has been in contact with Buddhists since her childhood. As most of her friends are Buddhists, she used to go to pagodas and some Buddhist festivals.

Saw Hlaing Bwa, professor of theology and director of the Judson Research Center at Myanmar Institute of Theology, is from the Kayin ethnic community and has been in contact with Buddhists since 1991. He has initiated interfaith dialogue since 2000.

Than Aung (Pseudonym), a medical doctor, is also from the Bamar community. Since 1972 he has been communicating with Christians. During his youth, he went to a Christian church with his Christian friends. Simply speaking, his relationship with Christians is on a social and personal level.

Thang Za Tuan is from the Chin (Zomi) ethnic community and is a retired government officer as Deputy Director General, Education. He has had contact with Buddhists since 1956 and he has had dialogue with Buddhists on a personal level.
Tin Hlaing, a scientist and a retired university professor, is also from the Bamar ethnic community. As he was educated at Anglican Mission School in Myanmar, he has been in communication with Christians since 1961.

U Dhmmapati is a Buddhist monk as well as a lecturer in Buddhism from the Bamar community. Interestingly, I was the first Christian he had ever spoken with to date.
Buddhist-Christian Dialogue: A Way Toward Peaceful Co-Existence in Myanmar

This research focuses on Buddhist-Christian dialogue in Myanmar. The author explores if the initiative for interfaith encounter can help or hinder peaceful co-existence in his country. The close relationship of Christians in Myanmar to the colonial British rulership in the 19th and 20th century can be seen as an impeding factor for today’s relationship between Buddhists and Christians. Reconciliation and forgiveness can only be approached by revisiting the historical memories and by providing detailed information on the conditions of Christian and Buddhist co-existence in the past. A major part of the research are interviews held with Buddhists and Christians in Myanmar questioning their knowledge about each other and evaluating their willingness to a better mutual understanding and to dialogue.

Ciin Sian Khai, Baptist pastor in Myanmar, graduated B.Theol. at Zomi Theological College, Falam/Myanmar, B.A. (History) at Dagon University, Yangon/Myanmar, M.Div. at Myanmar Institute of Theology, Yangon/Myanmar, and M.Theol. at the Protestant Theological University, Kampen/Netherlands. For his contribution on Buddhist-Christian dialogue in Myanmar, the Faculty of the Humanities – Dept. of Protestant Theology at the University of Hamburg conferred a doctorate to Rev. Khai.

Ciin Sian Khai
Buddhist-Christian Dialogue: A Way Toward Peaceful Co-Existence in Myanmar