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II. HISTORICAL THEOLOGY

HEAVENLY CITIZENSHIP: A CONCEPT FOR UNION AND AN IDENTITY MARKER FOR MIZO CHRISTIANS

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ABSTRACT. Paul, as it is well known, was a citizen of the Roman Empire and he wrote these words about citizenship to a young congregation in a Hellenistic city. The Greek word „in Philippians 3:20" he uses here is translated differently as "conservation" (KJV), as "home" and as "citizenship" in the New American Standard (NAS) translation. So, Christian citizenship is in heaven - not on earth. It is from there Christians expect their Lord and savior to come. Yet, while living on earth and waiting until He comes and while being part of the larger human community each and every one is a member of political unit, a nation or a state or a tribe.

The knowledge of the heavenly citizenship gives Christians an indication where to hope for true citizenship and gives at the same time a clear indication to distinguish between "heavenly" affairs and their allegiance to worldly powers on earth.

During the initial period of the history of Christianity in Mizoram in order to differentiate one's new identity was the conviction and the declaration that one is now *Pathian mi* (God's people) and *vanram mi* (heavenly citizen). This significant concept and understanding of what it means for the Mizo to be Christian is reflected prominently in Mizo indigenous hymns and gospel songs as well as in the preaching of the Gospel, where it is declared that one is no longer a citizen of this "earthly world" (*he lei ram mi*), but of the "heavenly world" (*van ram mi*).

This paper attempts to highlight the significance of the concept of heavenly citizenship as an identity marker in the construction of an identity and in fostering a union, sense of being a people—Mizo—a homogenous political unit as a reaction to imposed foreign British rule and the western missionaries in the later part of the 19th century. While the focus of the paper is on the concept of "heavenly citizenship" the Mizo's encounter with the British colonial ruler and Christianity will be highlighted in order to place the development of the concept in its historical contexts for a better understanding.

Keywords: Mizo, Christianity, Union, Identity, British colonialism

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"For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ."
Philippians 3:20

Paul, as is well known, was a citizen of the Roman Empire and he wrote these words about citizenship to a young congregation in a Hellenistic city. The Greek word he uses here is translated differently as "conservation" in the KJV, as "home" and as "citizenship" in the New American Standard (NAS) translation. So, Christian citizenship is in heaven—not on earth. It is from there that Christians expect their Lord and Saviour to come. Yet, while living on earth and waiting until He comes and while being part of the larger human community, each and every one is a member of political unit, a nation or a state or a tribe.

The knowledge of this heavenly citizenship gives Christians an indication where and in which community to hope for true citizenship and gives at the same time a clear indication to distinguish between "heavenly" affairs and the allegiance to worldly powers on earth. During the initial period of the history of Christianity in Mizoram[1] in order to differentiate one's new identity was the conviction and the declaration that one is now *Pathian mi* (God's people) and *vanram mi* (a heavenly citizen). This significant concept and understanding of what it means for the Mizo to be Christian and to which community to belong is reflected prominently in Mizo indigenous hymns and gospel songs as well as in the preaching of the Gospel, where it is declared that one is no longer a citizen of this "earthly world" (*he lei ram mi*), but of the "heavenly world" (*vanram mi*).

This paper attempts to highlight the impact of the theological concept of "heavenly citizenship" in the construction of a faith identity which in turn fostered a sense of being one people—the Mizo. Reformed theology was thus a major factor for the development of a union of the Mizo, both as a Christian community within a majority non-Christian world, and as a separate political body, first in a colonial and nowadays in the national setting of India. Hence, the

[1] The Church in Mizoram in North East India has roots in both Calvinist theology and the Methodist Revivals of England. The first missionary to visit Mizoram was Rev. William Williams a young Presbyterian missionary who arrived in Aizawl on March 20th 1891and remained there till April 17th. On January 1894 the Baptists J.H. Lorrain and F.W. Savidge came to Aizawl under the Arthington Aborigine Mission and worked there for almost four years. Then on August 30th 1897 Rev. D.E. Jones of the Welsh Presbyterian Mission (then known as The Calvinistic Methodist Foreign Mission) arrived in Aizawl and in 1898 was joined by Rev. Edwin Rowlands. These two missionaries had the whole of Mizoram as their field of service till the coming of the Baptist Missionary Society which took over the South Mizo Hills and started work in 1903. Within a few years the whole of Mizoram was Christianized and today all but a few who claim to be Jews are Christians.

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Mizo case is an example of how Christian faith, reformed theology and politics interacted in a colonial setting resulting not necessarily in unity, but in a union which has been defined both in religious and political terms.

In these unifying processes, Mizo consciousness can be termed as "evolving identities"—a process of re-inventing, re-formulation of identity based on a wide range of markers such as "name change," "places of origin," "common language," "one faith" etc. These "evolving identities" were a way of navigating between the "imposed identities" by the foreign British rule and the offers of the western missionaries in the later part of the 19th century for a "self-construction" or "self-definition," e.g. a reinterpretation of the Christian message within the cultural and political system of the Mizo by themselves. While the focus of the paper is on the concept of "heavenly citizenship" the Mizo's encounter with the British colonial ruler and Christianity will be highlighted in order to place the development of the concept in its historical contexts and for a better understanding of how it led to a union of a people.

Reimagining and reconstruction of Mizo identity under the British colonial rule

The people of Mizoram[2] known as the Mizo are of mongoloid origin. According to ethnographic accounts, the population of Mizoram is made up of succeeding waves of migrants who are thought to have come from China into the Chin-Myanmar region during the middle of the 16th century and then into the area of the present state of Mizoram in the 17th century. All those identifying themselves as Mizo share a belief of a common origin depicted in a folktale in which the ancestors of the Mizo emerged out of a place called *Sinlung* (also referred to as *Chhinlung*.[3] There is a suggestion that *Sinlung/Chhinlung* actually refers to a Chinese city in the Szechwon province of China, though the historicity of this belief cannot be proven.

The first significant contact the British had with the Mizo, were with the Sailo chiefs of the Lusei tribe who by 1810 had gained military power and was ruling over the areas which today falls within Mizoram.[4] This contact came in

[2] Mizoram has an area of 21, 087 square kilometers, and straddles the Tropic of Cancer. The southern half of the state is wedged between Bangladesh and Myanmar and the northern half is bordered by the other northeast Indian states of Tripura, Manipur and Assam.

[3] F.K. Lehman, *The Structure of Chin Society* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1963), 18; J. Shakespeare, *The Lushai kuki Clans*, reprint 1975 (London: Macmillan & Co., 1912), 2-6.

[4] A.G. McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis* (London: Luzac & Co., 1949), 35-37.

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the form of a military expedition (1871-2) directed against the Sailo chiefs.[5] From then on the Mizo came to be known as Lushai a derivative of the word Lusei, even though the majority of the Mizo inhabiting the district did not belong to the Lusei tribe.[6] The British divided Mizoram into North and South Lushai Hills and placed them under Assam and Bengal respectively. In1898 with the amalgamation of the two, the territory was organized into the unified Lushai Hills district in 1898 and was brought under the Chief Commissioner of Assam.[7] Colonial administrators had given priority to end the constant village feuds and violence, and to ensure peace and order in the district. In 1927 customary codes and practices of various tribes were also collected and compiled for usage in the whole district.[8] All these administrative measures of the colonial rulers had the effect of engendering greater interaction and commonness among different tribes living in different autonomous villages within the boundaries of the Lushai Hills district.

With the help of Christian missionaries Colonial administrators had contributed towards the popularization of education in the Lushai Hills which was a great success.[9] As soon as they arrived the missionaries immediately set

[5] Much before the expeditions of 1871-72 the Mizo had several encounters with the British while raiding the bordering territories under the British. After one such raid in 1850 the British for the first time entered Mizoram to subdue the raiding Mizo burning down 800 Mizo villages. After this there was some sort of peace. In 1870 a formal agreement was made between Suakpuiliana, a Sailo chief and the British, in which Suakpuiliana was recognized as having powers and authority over other Mizo chiefs, probably because he was considered to be the most powerful chiefs among the Mizo at that time, and the Mizo were to stop raiding the British territories. When the British started extending their tea garden into the areas considered by the Mizo as their land, they resumed their raids in British territories, which resulted in the expedition of 1871-72 which eventually led to the total subjugation of the Mizo. For more details see C. Nunthara, *Mizoram: Society and Polity* (New Delhi: Indus Publishing Company, 1996), 50-55.

[6] The Mizo had earlier been referred to as "Kuki," a Bengali term for hill dweller. In this paper I will be using the term Lusei to refer to the tribe called by the British as Lushai.

[7] The Lushai Hills were acquired by military conquest and no formal proclamation annexing them to any province of British India was issued till 1895 when the declaration to annex it to Assam was made. Till then it had been considered as "Foreign Territory under British supervision." In 1896 the Lushai Hills officially was annexed to Assam with Major J. Shakespear as the first Superintendent of Lushai Hills. For more details see J. Zorema, *Indirect Rule in Mizoram 1890-1954 (The Bureaucracy and the Chiefs)* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2007), 47 -50.

[8] N. E. Parry, who was the superintendent of the Lushai Hills from 1924 to 1928, collected and compiled the practices and customs practiced by the various Mizo tribes and produced a monogram as N.E. Parry, *Lushai Custom; A Monograph on Lushai Customs and Ceremonies,* (Shillong: Government Press, 1928). Parry's book later with some modification was developed into a Mizo Customary Law and published in 1957.

[9] Today Mizoram with a population of about 1,091,014 ranks as the second highest in India in literacy rate with 91.58 %.

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about standardizing the language by devising a primer and developing its dictionary. They chose the Duhlian dialect which was the dialect of the dominant Lusei tribe. The Bible and hymn books were translated into the Duhlian dialect, popularizing this language all over the region and developed it as the *lingua franca* for all the Mizo.[10]

Education resulted in the emergence of a new class in Mizo society—educated Mizo Christians and opened up opportunities for paid employment. The impact and changes education brought about in terms of social changes was felt the most around the administrative center of Aizawl, inhabited by the Lusei, and also other tribes such as the Hmar, the Ralte and others. The Lusei being the dominant tribe, wishing to cling on to the traditional privileges and authority were initially hostile towards education and other changes that the missionaries introduced. They considered them as threats to their own traditional hold on society, whereas the others, especially the Hmar and the Ralte who were considered as commoners welcomed the opportunities and changes. Thus the Hmar and the Ralte emerged as the new class. Growing in self-awareness they started questioning the traditional powers and authority of the chiefs and strive towards democracy.[11]

In 1946 the leaders of the non-Lusei tribes formed the Mizo Commoner's Union (MCU) the first political party in Mizoram.[12] In 1947 the name was changed to Mizo union (MU) to include the Lusei. For the non-Lusei along with the contest for power against the Lusei chiefs was the hope of the incorporation of bordering areas in Manipur and Tripura inhabited by other non-Lusei sub-tribes into the existing Lushai Hills district. This led to a process of constructing the Mizo identity and a pan-Mizo project, calling for a "Greater Mizoram." Central to public support that such attempts met was the term "Mizo" itself, which was acceptable to all the tribes because of its neutrality having no link to any ethnic elements.

Interestingly in this process "Mizo"—meaning a person of the hills to signify the general population of the Hills—being a neutral category was promoted to an ethnic one because the agents of this move created a Mizo union complete with its own cultural symbols around the myth of common ancestry, including adopting the Duhlian language as the common language. Adopting the Duhlian dialect—a Lusei cultural symbol—already accepted by the different tribes was a significant way of contesting the Lusei power. The Duhlian dialect had

[10] This was despite the fact that the majorities of the inhabitants of the Hills were not of the Lusei tribe and did not speak the Duhlian language. This is a case where the language and the identity of the few powerful subsumed those of the less powerful majorities.

[11] For more details see A.G. McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis*, 203-207.

[12] J. Shakespear, *The Lushai kuki Clans*, xiv.

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over time and also under the influence of the missionaries' choice of it as the language of the new union in Christ, connected the different tribes and clans living within the Lushai Hills as well as those outside the official geographical boundary.

The leadership in that evolving identity process used the pre-colonial seeds of Mizo commonness and the integrating thrust of colonial state- making in the Lushai Hills to their political advantage. By the time the British left the district, they had ended the feuds and fights among the hill people. This promoted greater interaction between different tribes inhabiting the district and led to the spread of some sort of corporate feeling. With defined and fixed boundaries, colonial rule also contributed to the process of accommodation and compromise between communities. Colonial rule also facilitated the entry of Christian missionaries, who promoted the spread of Christianity all over the district, further consolidating the benefits of commonness. These developments had the effect of concretizing commonness and a feeling of being in a union. Union is here used to indicate a political and cultural union though this does not exclude internal struggles for influence, power and the claim to define the indicators for the commonness.

Christianity and the Mizo

As has been highlighted one of the important indicators for the described commonness which could lead to a union was taken from the field of Christian faith. With politics being mainly identified with the British rule and in the absence of indigenous political concepts, it was with the growing influence of Christianity and the already quoted concept of "heavenly citizenship" that contributed to an imagined and self-constructed identity of the Mizo in the presented scenario. This concept while being able to address the traditional pre-Christian communal aspirations is also a reaction against the threat perceived to come from outside.

Even though the British followed the policy of maintaining the *status quo* and disturbing the way of life as little as possible, they nevertheless, had a tremendous effect on the entire life of the Mizo. The division of their territory, loss of autonomy, and the disruption of their traditional way of life seriously shook the religious, social and economic foundations of the society, and introduced a totally new value system that affected the world view of the Mizo and introduced them to a new lifestyle. Some of these changes were drastic. They included the disruption of certain cultural values and practices, and the creation of a cultural void.[13]

[13] F. Hrangkhuma, "The Mizos: A People Transformed by the Gospel," in Rosaimliana Tochhawng, K. Lalrinmawia & L.H. Rawsea, eds., *Ground Works for Tribal Theology in the Mizo Context* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2007), 5.

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It was precisely at this moment when the imposition of the British administration was turning the traditional world upside down, that the missionaries came with the Gospel, filling in the vacuum and cultural void created by this alien rule.[14] Protestant Christianity itself was gradually modified as a result of its insertion into a Mizo world-view. The form of Christianity, that had resulted in Mizoram with its emphasis on the triumph of Jesus bringing with it spiritual power and liberation to believers, cuts across all denominations.

The efforts of Christian missionaries to develop a *lingua franca* and promote education among the inhabitants contributed to their acquiring support from the populace. They gained converts to the faith and in combination with other factors; Christianity began to spread among the people. Starting with small numbers, churches began to record a phenomenal growth in members. From our point of view, the crucial fact was that Christianity was spreading throughout the region. Though different churches contributed to this spread, and were localized and geographically concentrated, institutional linkages between different church organizations prevented denominational conflicts. On the whole, missionaries contributed to the development of a common language and a state-wide religious faith. These developments have contributed to the integration of the Mizo society.

The Mizo learned from the missionaries a kind of "customized-localized Gospel" which proved to be very successful. Many of the old beliefs were now reinterpreted in the light of the Gospel so that the Mizo could better understand its message. For instance, because Mizo, like many non-western peoples, did not have any equivalent in their indigenous system of the Christian concept of sin, they struggled to understand this message of Jesus Christ as one who atoned for sin. They were instead better able to understand the concept of a Saviour conquering the powers of darkness and death and liberating them of these. Though the Mizo did not have the concept of a chief evil spirit, Satan was translated as *ramhuai lalpa* which literally means "lord or chief of the evil spirits." In this regard the missionaries reported that the Mizo were "fond of hearing that Jesus Christ has conquered the Devil and Death … And often people come to us to tell them about Jesus."[15]

Not only was Jesus presented as the conqueror and liberator from the devil and the demons but also as the one who guarantees *Pialral* (a future paradisiacal state of ease and abundance that the missionaries treated as the Mizo equivalent of the Christian idea of heaven). The missionaries taught that all those who believed in Jesus Christ were assured of going to *Pialral* after death. The story of the love of God, Jesus' death on the cross as a sacrifice to

[14] Ibid., 6.
[15] Ibid., 4.

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save and redeem humans, and Jesus' resurrection as a victory over death itself was presented as an answer to the two most significant questions for the Mizos, namely, "How can I be liberated from the power of the evil spirits or forces around me?" and "How can I attain the passage to *Pialral*?"[16]

Pialral—a destination which was elusive for most of the Mizo[17]—was democratized and access to it was opened up for all those who embraced Christianity and had faith in the liberating work of *Pathian* through the sacrificial act on the Cross and in the Resurrection. This resulted in all the different Mizo tribes who had their own separate *sakhua*[18] to accept Christianity as their religion thus creating a union of different tribes under Christian *sakhua* and a shift in their consciousness resulting in collectively assuming a common or shared identity of "heavenly citizens." With that understanding of being united came, however, a system of exclusion and compartmentalization resulting in a pronounced sense of "us" and "them," of the redeemed (heavenly citizens) and the unredeemed (those who are doomed for eternal punishment).

This operated at the beginning within the indigenous communities. Christianity and the new understanding of heavenly citizenship with Christ as the Lord disrupted and questioned the religious and social and political unity of the Mizo tribes. Like the early Christians in Rome, the first new Mizo converts were separated from the traditional social life and its activities. In some villages they were persecuted by the Mizo chiefs.[19] Traditional Mizo society was based

[16] F. Hrangkhuma, *Christianity in India; Search for Liberation and Identity* (Delhi: CMS/ISPCK, 1998), 286, 287.

[17] The passage to *Pialral* was not obtained by a life of virtue while on earth, but through to the performance of sacrifices and the killing of men and certain prescribed animals. Such acts conferred on a person the respected title of *Thangchhuah.* Thus, *Pialral* was meant for those few who had attained this exceptional status of *Thangchhuah.* The status of *Thangchhuah* could be obtained in two ways. First, one could attain it by giving a series of sacrificial public feasts (*in lama thangchhuah*) with *Khuangchawi* as the final one.[17] The other means was by killing several prescribed wild animals and also men who are considered enemies (*ram lama thangchhuah*). *Mitthi Khua*, on the other hand, was for the souls of ordinary people where they would continue to work and toil forever. The Report of the Lushai Hills, 1901-1902, in *Reports of the Foreign Mission of the Presbyterian Church of Wales on Mizoram 1894-1957*, complied by K. Thanzauva (Aizawl: Synod Literature and Publication Boards, 1997), 15.

[18] The *Sakhua* was the family or clan god. The term "clan" here is used to describe a group of blood-related people speaking the same dialect within a larger tribe. When the sacrifices were made, only the nearest relatives of the clan might share in the feast that followed. It was therefore, a sort of fellowship meal of the clan with their *Sakhua*. For more details on Mizo *sakhua* see Zairema, "The Mizos and their Religions," in *Towards a Tribal Theology: The Mizo Perspective*, edited by K. Thanzauva (Jorhat: Mizoram Theological Conference, 1989).

[19] Young people were beaten by their parents and the Chiefs and the Elders took active part in beating new converts in public. Christian families were driven out of their homes - the favorite time being the new moon when the nights were pitch dark and raining. Some were driven out of the village and their properties confiscated.

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on community which was a close-knit society. The missionaries' prohibition of Christians from participating in social activities of the village such as in festivals, drinking any kind of rice-beer, singing the traditional Mizo songs and its tunes, taking part in traditional dances and participating in the sacrifices, disrupted this close-knit communitarian life. So when a Christian abstained from any of the above activities related to the community life, he or she became alienated from the rest of the community.

On the other hand, the role of Christianity is not so clear-cut so as to simply say that the introduction of Christianity brought about conflict and alienation of the Mizo Christians from the rest of the community because within a span of twenty years almost all the Mizo became Christians and Mizoram became a predominantly Christian state. This changed the dynamics of the relationship between the early converts and the rest of the community that was prevalent when Christianity was first introduced into Mizoram.

The two realms—a Reformed interpretation

Christians of all times and in all places have been challenged to clarify further the relation between their heavenly citizenship and their allegiance to the law and the politics of the community they live in which was quoted from Philippians. The Mizo have inherited the distinction of the two realms from the missionaries who were rooted in the Reformed/Presbyterian tradition. The basic question which this distinction generates is on the one hand about the relation of the realm of God's grace to the worldly order and on the other hand about the relation of the laws and regulations in church to those of the worldly community.

The Mizo being indigenous peoples agreed from their tradition to a close connection between the order in the church and the order outside of the church. From their earlier tradition it was a small step to accept almost an overlapping of the laws of the faith community and the laws of the community at large. The Mizo had adopted the distinction between the two realms in a colonial setting. Because of the closeness of these two realms among them, the "heavenly citizenship" which had been proclaimed to them mainly by Welsh Presbyterians and British Baptists at the end of the nineteenth century was interpreted as offering freedom and a basis from which they could contest the British claim to be "their" subjects—to a certain degree. Hence, to them the British colonial powers represented the earthly powers and requested the Mizo's political allegiance. The Mizo applied the distinction between the two realms now not so much by drawing a dividing line between church and the Christian community on the one hand and the political arena and decision making among them on the other hand: They used it to distinguish between them as Christians and their "masters."

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The way they constructed their identity and the distinction between them as (indigenous) Christians and the British "masters" created for them the chance to interpret the Christian faith from within their tribal identity and structures and– so to say– to "baptize" the indigenous way of living, especially the strong egalitarian and community oriented way of living that blended well with the ideal of forming a Christian community "with one accord" (Acts 1:14). For the Mizo their new identity as "heavenly citizenship" also blended well with their understanding and ideal of a communitarian life as tribal Christians–and became thus a position from which they found themselves in opposition to the earthly colonial powers even though these presented themselves as Christian powers.

In the traditional Mizo culture the chief and his elders functioned as the village court to take decisions that affected the whole community and also decided all kinds of disputes. The functional empowerment of the village council was founded on the principle that the interests of the unified community would supersede those of an individual. The tribal understanding of living has lent itself to understand "heavenly citizenship" in its communitarian dimension, as being part of the decision making processes in opposition to developing an understanding of being a "citizen," e.g. being an individual claiming rights from a government. The well-being of the community superseded an individual's rights and claims. Mizo society had its own "customary laws" concerning social offences, including offences against persons, against animals, against property, against marriage and divorce which were used to administer the community. These customary laws were precedence and convention laid down by their ancestors with the objective of maintaining internal unity and peaceful living. The Chief continued to be the guardian of the customary laws even after the British Government annexed Mizoram and a chief who did not respect the customary laws would soon get disowned by the people.[20]

The "customary laws" were not so rigid as to preclude any freedom. The spirit of *Tlawnngaihna*[21] certainly presupposed the possibility and even

[20] A. Ray, *Mizoram Dynamics of Change* (Calcutta: Pearl Publishers, 1982), 86. For more details on Mizo Customary laws see N.E. Parry, *Lushai Custom; A Monograph on Lushai Customs and Ceremonies,* Reprint 1988, (Aizawl: tribal Research Institute, 1928).

[21] *Tlawmngaihna* is the underlying principle of life or philosophy that provides the basis for the communitarian lives of Mizo even today. There is no equivalent word in English to translate the term *tlawmngaihna*. It can be considered as the vital principle that binds Mizo society together as a community. It can be understood as a code of conduct of life and goodness. For the Mizo, every good deed, the virtue of selflessness, kindness and love is based on *tlawmngaihna.* This code of life that is *tlawmngaihna* is not necessarily considered to be, and indeed transcends, religious values. This code lies at the very centre of the Mizos' understanding of their being, as the core essence of their lives and thoughts. To not have this code embedded in one's being or living is considered as alien or un-Mizo-like. *Tlawmngaihna* embraces various types of human qualities and activities and manifests itself in various forms and aspects of community life which can be summed up as "community over self" wherein self-sacrifice for the need of others is the spontaneous outcome.

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individual decision making as a contribution to the welfare of the community, as long as individual's decision or rights were exercised on the basis of *Tlawmngaihna*[22] which took into account the well-being of the community and others before oneself it was respected.

India as a cosmos of cultures and communities

Today, the people in North East India (NEI) are not under a foreign colonial rule. After India got its independence from the British in 1947 the Lushai Hills was a district in Assam. On January 1972 it was officially declared a Union territory under the name Mizoram and in 1986 it became the 23rd state of India. So it is a part of India and under its constitution and in theory they enjoy all the rights and freedom of Indian citizenship. It is obvious that most of the peoples of NEI belong to tribal societies, where each tribal community even today has its own customs and traditional laws and peculiar ways of decision making. In states like Mizoram tribal identity and culture has over the last two centuries been reformulated in the Christian faith.

So how did the sense of union founded on the identity marker of a heavenly citizenship work in the larger Indian Union founded on a secular understanding of citizenship? According to the Indian Constitution citizenship is a legal status of an individual, independent of ethnicity, descent or religion. It is conceived as a legal and political status defined by a collection of privileges and rights and responsibilities of an individual. It is important to remember that this understanding of citizenship in the Indian constitution has a link in part to its colonial past and in a complex way to western democratic traditions. In the West, citizenship is the result of a historical development in which Christianity has played a decisive role. It has inherited concepts of citizenship from the Greek and especially from the Roman world to which Paul gives evidence in the quoted verse from Philippians. In turn Western concepts of personhood and individual subjects are deeply influenced by such Christian concepts and have over the centuries spread to other regions of the globe.

[22] An example of *Tlamwngaihna* where individuals or group of individuals forfeit their rights for the well-being of who they consider to be weaker and less powerful for them can be highlighted in the customs that was followed when Mizo children went to pick wild fruits or catch crabs or fish in the streams. Each boy would have his own bag or container to carry the fruit or crabs or fish he caught; but when it was time to go home, they would put all they caught in one big pile and divide it equally, after which they would ask the youngest among them to choose his share first while the eldest took the last remaining portion. Sometimes, when the foraging was not successful and the amount they procured was too little to be divided, they would give all they procured to the youngest. On their way home the eldest would bring up the rear and they would walk home slowly according to the pace of the youngest and weakest who was in the lead. B. Lalthangliana, *Culture and Folklore of Mizoram* (New Delhi: Director, Publications Divisions, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Goverment of India, 2005), 128-129.

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These concepts have found their way and helped to form the political conceptions of government and institutions in India independently of its ultimately Christian origins. They thus have inculturated into democratic procedures which should secure rights and the dignity of everyone in a nation in which the absolute majority were and are non-Christians. "India," on the other hand, is a cosmos of cultures, languages, peoples and ethnic groups and of religious communities, including Christians. At several point there is a close link between religiously and culturally defined communities and rights or laws (e.g. family and inheritance laws). The constitution itself names communities such as the scheduled castes, the scheduled tribes, and other backward classes, who have historically been discriminated and are in a disadvantaged and marginalized position. The constitution provides provisions for them to secure their rights as equal members and citizens of India.

Despite such provisions in the constitution, these communities are today still discriminated and marginalized in several instances. If in many cases individuals are denied the constitutional rights by larger sections of the Indian society on the basis of their being born into these marginalized communities, it is understandable that these seem to react in relation to their communal identity and not so much as individuals. They try to fight for their constitutional rights but primarily starting from a communal basis because these rights are denied to them because they are a part of such communities.

As the case of the Mizo, they seem to tend, in that situation, to develop a concept of "citizenship" which is much more pronounced in its communal dimension and by highlighting the shared cultural and religious identity because that is the basis of the discrimination they experience.

This situation brings the Christian Mizo into a strange and complex situation within the Indian society. They are citizens of India and thus enjoy in principle all rights as well as share the responsibilities of members of the Indian nation. These political concepts, communicated through and influenced by a complicated history from Western Christianity are now claimed independently from that history as political rights in a predominantly non-Christian society.

The Mizo on the other hand have accepted Christianity from within their indigenous culture and are deeply influenced by the Christian faith including the concept of a heavenly citizenship which in turn has contributed to developing in the New Testament a notion of being a Christian and a member of a political unity. Yet, as this paper argues, their Christian background has led them to develop an understanding of citizenship on earth which differs from the one of the Indian constitution. Through their own history they have not developed a concept of a political citizenship of individuals but of a culturally informed community membership, the sense of being in union against the rest.

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Conclusion

In the specific context of the Mizo identity, "difference" is seen as both being imposed and produced historically as well as discursively.[23] Difference can be utilized as an expression of agency in the creation of identity. The differentiating practices created by "other" have been politicized and used by the Mizo themselves in ascribing an identity to themselves based on differences.

It is important to note that it was not only the introduction of Christianity by the missionaries that brought about a shift in the Mizo's understanding of their identity, life and world views. The primary factor for change was the British administration. Both had played an important role in effecting changes in the Mizo's life and world views and in the consciousness and construction of their identities.

In the wake of the rereading of the process which led to the evolving identities on the basis of identity markers, this paper has highlighted the intricate relations of two concepts of Christian faith and the understanding of politics and law leading to different understanding of union. Western Christianity came with Mission and Colonialism and did influence eventually the concept of citizenship in India (its constitution). The Mizo's understanding of the Christian faith was a result of the encounter with Western missionaries but the Mizo accepted the Christian faith from within their culture and tribal identities. That has in turn influenced their understanding of politics, laws and ways of communal decision-making.

The "heavenly" citizenship of Christians comes in the Protestant tradition with the belief in justification by faith. That means that the heavenly citizenship and the ensuing unity is a gift from God and not something to be earned or achieved. It should be explored as the basis for a life in union, in dignity and solidarity and service. The motivation for striving for earthly and political citizenship should not be the wish for one's own rights alone. It should be the expression of a solidarity Christians express because they experienced God's solidarity with them in the first place. That should lead them to serving others and offering them solidarity which could lead to a this-worldly union. Through justification by faith, Christians become new creatures, free from the captivity of evil and are thus able to serve, amidst sin and evil, e.g. injustice and the refusal to acknowledge the dignity of others.

[23] Joy L. Pachuau has dealt extensively with this understanding in her book *Being Mizo: Identity and Belongings in Northeast India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014).

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For people with an uncertain past a Biblical theology of human origins and redemption provides for the possibility for a new beginning—one world, one race, one Gospel—, for an egalitarian understanding of all humanity created in the image of God, a body of people redeemed by Christ through faith now in the process of re-creation as the People of God for worship of God and service of humankind. "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." The new identity appropriated a world-view providing answers to pressing questions while maintaining continuity with the past. The move to seek Christian instruction and affiliation was taken by the people themselves.

Cultural affirmation, union and recovery of dignity, is only one side of the coin. As Lamin Sanneh notes, "Christianity triumphs by the relinquishing of Jerusalem or any fixed universal centre, be it geographical, linguistic or cultural, with the result that we have a proliferation of centres, languages and cultures within the Church. Christian ecumenism is a pluralism of the periphery with only God at the centre."[24]

On the downside of such a union with God in the centre as identity marker is in the Mizo case the dominance of the Church the worldly realm, not as the body of Christ but as a social organization. Religion saturates today all imaginable space and every aspects of life. On Sunday there are three services with other fellowship and prayer meetings in between. There is no time for anything else on Sundays and every evening of the week, except on Thursday and Friday, there is a church service. Almost every conversation is infused with the words "prayer," "sin" and "God." Crusades and revivals are common phenomena in Mizoram with charismatic preachers springing up in every locality. There is no dearth of such preachers. Any function official, or informal gatherings or activities are incomplete without a prayer. Mizoram resembles Calvin's vision of an ideal Geneva: the state obedient to the church, an unchallenged moral code universally applied.

What can be learned from the case of the Mizo? We can learn how Christian faith, reformed theology and politics interacted in a colonial setting resulting not necessarily in unity, but in a union which has been defined both in religious and political terms.

In that process we can identify a double ambivalence of the contribution of Christian faith to a union which forms a concrete body in this world. One is

[24] From an unpublished paper, "Mission and the Modern Imperative: Retrospect and Prospect, Charting a Course," Yale University (undated), cited by Robert Frykenberg, "Christianity in South India Since 1500: Historical Studies of Transcultural Interaction within Hindu-Muslim Environments." Dharma Deepika, December 1997, 3.

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the differing impact the Christian religion had on the identity construction of the Mizo as a union in faith over and against the indirect influence of the secularized split off of Christian religion on the formation of India as a secular state. The second is on the ambivalence of the positive influence on the identity and life practices in a region like Mizoram and the concomitant system of exclusion and compartmentalization; it naturally induces a pronounced sense of the redeemed and the unredeemed and of "us" and "them" in the world. The Mizo are a minority group of barely one million redeemed—heavenly citizens. Their union set in multicultural, all assimilating, Hindu-dominated India, this equation of religion with culture on both sides becomes a way of defining and magnifying their difference from a vast and imagined "other." At the end of a long process the evolving identities of heavenly citizenship and the concomitant union of a people turns -within the context of politics in a larger context- into a separate identity which may become exclusive.

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