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All Authors	Kyaw Swe Nyunt
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## **THE ARRIVAL OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC MISSION IN KACHIN STATE**

Kyaw Swe Nyunt\*

### **Abstract**

This paper is the study of the **The Arrival of Roman Catholic Mission in Kachin State**. The Catholic Christian missionary work in Kachin ethnic group had begun by French Missions. By doing so, the educational systems among the Kachins were raised by the Catholic Missionaries. Hence, it is clear that Christian Catholic Mission could uplift the status of religion, education, social life of the Kachin people since its beginning, the missionaries trained the local Christians to be self-reliant. Because of the literary improvement brought by the Christian missions, the social status of the Kachin ethnic had developed.

### **Introduction**

This paper points out that the Catholic missionaries who dared to go to the remote areas had a high degree of motivation, particularly highlighting their goals and altitudes towards the minority ethnic groups. The first Christian Missionaries began to arrive in Myanmar in early 15th century. The earliest Catholic priest was sent from the French Franciscan sect. The first Bishop for Roman Catholic Mission was Galligia. All Catholic missionaries were already determined to lead the Kachin people from Animism into a vital Christian faith, and to help plant churches that would raise the living standard of the Kachin ethnic groups. The mission works among the Kachin was given much emphasis despite the fact that the numerical strength of Catholic became significant. The Catholic Mission paid much attention to it and assigned missionaries to various remote areas even though the number of Kachin Christians in the field stations was usually apart

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\* Doctor, Lecturer, History Department, Myitkyina University.

from rural areas especially Bamaw district. As a missionary strategy, a priority had to be given to the people of undeveloped areas.

Many term papers have been done on the politics, socio – economic and administration of the different periods of Myanmar. However, nobody has been put to write regarding the Christian missions in especially Kachin society. Therefore, I would like to aim to write the arrival of the Roman Catholic mission in Kachin state. This paper is an attempt to fulfill the gap by using the reference books.

The Kachin State is the northernmost state of Myanmar. It is bordered by China to the north and east, Shan state to the south and Sagaing division and India to the west. It lies between north latitude 23° 27' and 28° 25' longitude 96° 0' and 98° 44'. The area of Kachin state is 89,041 km (34,379 sqmil). The capital of the state is Myitkyina. Other important town includes Bamaw. The majority of the state's 1.2 million inhabitants are region to other ethnic groups including jinghpaw, Rawang, Lisu, Zaiwa, Lhaowo, Lachyit, Burma, Shan and a small number of other ethnic. One of them, the main religion of Kachin society is the Christianity (Protestant and Roman Catholic).

The France prelate, Bishop Paul Bigandet of Rangoon first visited to Bamaw in 1856 and 1865. He started Christian mission in Kachin State. Father Biet of the Foreign Mission Society of Paris came to Bamaw in 1872 upon Bigandet's encouragement. Father Lyet arrived in 1873 and Father Lecomte in 1874. The first Kachin convert, Ma Naw, was baptized in 1881. The outstanding missionaries were Father Cadoux, Father Gilhodes and Father Herr.<sup>1</sup> They concentrated their efforts mainly among the Kachin tribal people whose belief in spirits made them more open to the Gospel message.

Father Biet could teach the princes to get some knowledge of education to at Mandalay Palace. According to Mindon's permission, Father Biet and Father Lyet went to Kachin State to start their missionaries. Then, they choose a new mission field in Sama area which was 26 miles away from the east of Bamaw. Because of physical illness, Father Lyet went back to Mandalay to get treatment for his health. Therefore, Father Lecomte joined Father Cadoux and came to Bamaw as a missionary. And then,

Father Lecomte and Father Biet went back again to Sama area where Father Biet had already been. While those missionaries were in Sama mission field, Father Jeanjot came to join them. Father Jeanjot suffered from Malaria. Because of this disease, he died at Bhamo in 1876.<sup>2</sup>

Later, Father Foure arrived to work the missionaries in Bamaw. Similarly, Father Lecomte and Cadoux reached for forming a new mission field to search with the gospel to the northern part of Bamaw. As they stepped forward in itinerary, they arrived at a village called Sha-U. And some of the village chiefs came to become interested in Christianity. So when the two Catholic missionaries left the village, those village chiefs went along with them in order to learn more about the Christianity. In 1877; they built a house for Catholic missionaries to make use for worshipping and staying. Thus the Roman Catholic missions have the starting ground of mission at Sha-U village. In the same year, they extended the mission field in Kam Lang village which was six miles away from Sha-U and located in the east of Bamaw.<sup>3</sup>

Father Cadoux and Father Lecomte carried on the mission work in Sha-U and Kam Lang villages. In the same year, Father Lecomte built up a house for teaching and for Fathers. And then, they widely continued the gospel to the neighboring villages. In 1877, Bishop Bourdom from Mandalay Diocese came to Sha-U village. In September 1877, Father Cadoux and Lecomte went to Bamaw to be checked for medical treatment. While they were being checked for their health, Father Haillez and Father Laurent went to reinforce the mission work. Father Lyet who went to Hongkong for medical check up came back and joined them. In the same year six missionaries out of ten from Mandalay mission went to Bamaw.<sup>4</sup>

As Bishop Bourdom, the chief of Mandalay Diocese was sick, he returned to France. Therefore, the responsibility of Diocese has been taken over by Father Lecomte. That is why; Father Lyet and Father Laurent took over the responsibility of the Sama mission field. As Father Laurent became seriously sick, Father Lyet was left alone at Sama mission field. Due to vacant of missionaries for this mission area, Father Cadoux and Father Foure worked out of to act their missionaries for a new place. Thus, they travelled to the north of Bamaw. When they arrived at a place

called Myit Sone (river junction) 200 miles away from the north of Bamaw. They ministered to a group of people called Lho Vo, one of the Kachin tribes, who lived in the east of the Kachin State where May Kha river flows. Since this Lho Vo tribe had been well rooted in their own belief of spirits, they did not give up their belief easily. Therefore, the two missionaries went back to Sha-U. In return journey, Father Lyet died in 1878. Bishop Bourdom went back to France with medical leave, came back again to Mandalay along with him was Father Simon. Father Lecomte from Mandalay went to Bamaw. Soon after he arrived at Bamaw, Father Lecomte became seriously sick and then he died of malaria disease.<sup>5</sup>

Father Hailley and Father Simon arrived to continue the mission work in Bamaw. Father Cadoux and Father Foure also took over the responsibilities of Sha-U village's missionaries. But they could not win a single person to believe in Christian faith. So Father Cadoux established a new village for Catholic Christians near Sha-U village. It was known as Nam Pan Village. But only four families came to settle there, and there were no adequate people to establish a new village. Therefore, Father Cadoux also went back to Bamaw on 12 January 1881<sup>6</sup>.

Though Catholic missionaries had been trying to convert the Kachins for many years, not even a single Kachin came to be converted. For nine years later, a Kachin man from Jinghpaw tribe called Ma Naw, came to be converted as a Roman Catholic Christian as the very first Kachin convert. In August of the same year, Father Hailley died at Shwe Kyina village, and his dead body was buried in Bamaw.<sup>7</sup> After his death, only Father Cadoux and Simon were left in Bamaw to continue the mission work. Since Father Simon shifted to Mandalay, in November 1882, Father Percot took over in charge of mission for Bamaw. As Father Cadoux persuaded well the people of Bamaw, gradually not Kachins but some of Shans and Myanmar were also converted. So Father Cadoux took the task to translate Roman Catholic Prayer book into Shan language. Other mission works including translating works were done within 1882-1883, and they continued to spread the Christian mission.<sup>8</sup> Because the Third Anglo-Myanmar War broke out in 1885; all the missionaries went back to Mandalay. Only after two years later in 1887, Father Cadoux and

Percot returned to Bamaw. Father Cadoux settled down at Shwe Kyina village.<sup>9</sup>

At the end of 1891, Father Cadoux who had gone to Franch with medical leave returned to Bamaw. He could carry the mandate his best to continue in Bamaw. In 1892, he baptized thirty-three people as Roman Catholic Christians. Such great numbers of conversion took place only after sixteen years of Father Cadoux's arrival.<sup>10</sup>

In 1893, Father Accarion was added to the missionary band in Bamaw as a new member. So Father Cadoux entrusted him all the responsibilities of Bamaw mission, and then he looked for a new field. Father Cadoux established a new village called Datkala and gathered different converted families to stay there. Since he suffered from illness, he came down to Bamaw, and died there.<sup>11</sup>

At the end of the year 1893, Father Ruppin arrived at Bamaw as a new member of missionaries. Father Ruppin and Father Accarion stayed at Naingkaba, and studied Shan and Kachin languages. After one month stay at Naingkaba, Father Ruppin returned to Mandalay for his health. In 1894, Father Bernard came to help Father Accarion. In May, 1894, Father Accarion became sick and was taken from Naingkaba to Bamaw. Meanwhile Father Bernard who was in Bamaw also became sick and died there.<sup>12</sup>

In 1900, Father Gilhodes came to Bamaw. He took the responsibilities of the mission at Bamaw, Nanhlaing and Naingkaba. Previously, Father Accarion could minister the people of hilly places around Bamaw. As a result, he established a new village giving the name Tunhong which was 30 miles away from Bamaw.<sup>13</sup>

In 1901, another Catholic missionary, Father Delort arrived at Bamaw. He studied Shan language and served in Bamaw on behalf of Father Gilhodes who had moved to Tunhong village. For Father Gilhodes took care of the mission work at Tunhong, Father Accarion could put the effort to gather the people of Nanhlaing and Naingkaba and continued the mission among them. In 1902, with the help of Father Delort, Father Accarion could set up a new village naming Namtheung. It was located 20 miles away from the northeast of Bamaw. In the same year, Gauri Kachin tribe who lived six miles away from the north of Tunhong village invited Father Gilhodes. So Father Gilhodes stayed with them at Hkudung

village, and continued the mission work. In 1902, another missionary, Father Juery came to Bamaw, and studied Kachin (Jinghpaw) language. As he ministered in the area of southern Bamaw, he also organized to form a new village named "Maria" for Catholic Christians. Later in 1908, this village was no longer standing as a village.<sup>14</sup>

Father Gilhodes somehow took over the missionary responsibilities of both Hkudung and Tunhong villages. When Father Faucheux came to Bamaw in 1903, Tunhong was given to be under his care. But later in 1904, Tunhong was made as an outpost, and those two missionaries worked together. At that time, Father Accarion became ill and went back to France for medical care. For almost four years he was under medical treatment, and then came back to Bamaw and putting all his efforts for the kachin people. And in the year 1904, Father Roche and Delort joined together and worked the mission of the lord. And as a result of their, best efforts, two hundred and fifty people were baptized and came to stand as the Catholic Christians. In 1906, Father Delort passed away. Then Father Roche, Father Faucheux and Father Jeury from Mahtang village joined together, as a team and worked for Mission works. And in 1904 Father Roche went back to France on medical leave. So a new missionary, Father Allord, came in place of him.<sup>15</sup>

With their undaunted effect they could at last established a first Catholic mission school in 1907 at Hkudung. They had to face with much trouble in the midst of shortage of teachers; Father Juery had to go back for medical treatment in 1909. In his place, Father Louis from Shwebo was appointed. When Father Juery recovered from his illness, he came back and placed Father Louis Lafon at Mahtang village, and he settled at Lamaibang village. After three years service of Father Lafon at Mahtang, he died in peace. Father Percot came in place of him.<sup>16</sup>

Father Roche who had taken a medical leave and gone back to France, also came back to Bhamo in 1910. On his arrival, he continued Shan mission which had been planted by Father Cadoux. Later Faucheux also joined him. Due to the First World War, missionaries from France could not come during 1912-1914.<sup>17</sup>

In 1914, Bishop Faulquier from Mandalay Diocese sent two Kayin teachers to Catholic mission school at Hkudung. Then,

Father Juery opened another Catholic mission school at Lamaibang. In 1915, Father Roche went down to Mandalay for medical treatment. In 1918, Father Faucheux passed away. In 1922 Father Roche came to Bamaw. On his arrival, Roche persisted on doing all the mission works over there. And he instituted schools, an orphanage home, an old age home, churches and an abbey at Nanhlaing. After his arrival in Bamaw for six years, they baptized 450 Catholic members and 350 observers to the Christianity.<sup>18</sup>

It was in 1923, the first Catholic nunnery school was opened at Hkudung village run by French Catholic nuns. A school at Bamaw was not much improving up till 1919, and it was because of Father Allord pressured too much on the missionary activities. But in 1925, Father paquet came to help the school, and also added new school buildings. Thus, the mission at Prang Hkudung village was well established and mission school at Sinlunkaba village which was in the southeast of Prang Hkudung.<sup>19</sup>

Roman Catholic mission came to the Kachins, and it lasted wide for about sixty years. After these long years of mission mandate, French Catholic Fathers found difficult to handle the whole range of mission field. In 1936, St. Columbian fathers were requested to help them. It was the reason Msgr. Patrick U Sher, Rev. Bernard Way, Rev. James Stuart, Rev. Daniel Cooney, Rev. Thomas Walsh, Rev. Thomas Murphy, Rev. William Kehoe and Rev. Denis Mcalindon: altogether eight missionaries came to the Kachin State. Then six of St. Columbian Fathers and other ten missionaries came to continue the mission in Kachin State.<sup>20</sup> It was the reason that the missionary task was handed over from foreign Mission Society of Paris to St. Columbian Fathers. As they continued the mission in Myitkyina district, including triangle area, they could start beginning at Kaji Htu village also. Then, they put stress on secular schools. Moreover, they opened a Bible school for Catholic ministers in 1940.<sup>21</sup>

During Second World War in 1942, Japanese army captured St. Columbian fathers to stop doing mission work. During this time, Fathers James Stuart and Father Mcalindan were left at Kaji Htu village, and then escaped to Putao. When the British alliance entered again into the land, they had to start all over again. When the Second World War ended in 1945, the Catholic

missionaries re-entered again to the land and continued their mission. Father John Howe also arrived in the same year. Furthermore, in 1947, missionaries' nuns came and initiated schools for boys and girls in Myitkyina.<sup>22</sup>



Columbian Father Bernard Way instructs Kachin boys in Burma in how to sing Gregorian chants

New parishes and schools were opened. By the end of 1952, the number of baptized Catholics had grown to 7,000 with an additional 5,000 catechumens. Six years later, there were 13,000 Catholics and about 7,000 catechumens, 19 brick and wooden churches, a number of clinics and a school system. As the number of Catholics grew, more and more catechists were trained. Many resided in widely scattered out-villages. The priests, too, were spread over a wider territory; 13 in one-man parishes. In 1960, the Prefecture of Bamaw became a diocese and the newly ordained bishop became bishop of Myitkyina, the capital of the Kachin State.

The '60s saw the insurrection of the Kachin Independence Army that sought to create an independent Kachin State. In 1965, the government nationalized all the mission schools. The parishes continued to maintain the boarding section of the two high schools as hostels for boys and girls from the hills and provided many vocations for the priesthood and religious life. The following year missionaries who had entered Burma after 1948 were forced to leave the country. This left 21 Columbian priests and no Columbian Sisters.

Realizing that their days in Burma were numbered, the Columbians devoted their energies to the formation of local priests, Sisters, catechists and lay leaders. In this way, they hoped to leave a self-reliant Church when they were forced to leave. In 1977, the diocese was handed over to Bishop Zingtung Grawng, the first Kachin to be ordained a priest. When the Columbians withdrew from Burma in 1979, Bishop Grawng, not yet 40 years old, had a dozen Kachin priests, some 40 Sisters from two congregations and a very active laity.<sup>23</sup>

In conclusion, the arrival of Roman Catholic mission took the form of the relations with hilly tribes and westerners existed during the Konbaung period. The westerner intercourse with Northern Myanmar began with commercial relations and then missionaries began to propagate Christianity in a Bamaw area.

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#### End Notes

<sup>1</sup> Brothers Zingtung Grawng and Nauhkum Naw, *Jinghpaw Mungdaw hta kahlawlik Hpung nna de hpang ai*, Toungoo, Catholic Press, 1961, p.8 (hereafter; Grawng and Naw, 1961)

<sup>2</sup> Herman G. Tegenfeldt, *A Century of Growth: The Kachin Baptist Church of Burma*, Pasadena, William Carey Library, 1974, p.86 (hereafter; Tegenfeldt, 1974).

<sup>3</sup> M Kum Hpng, *The Anglican Mission to the Kachin*, B.D. thesis, M.I.T., 1967, P. 18 (hereafter; Kum Hpng, 1967).

<sup>4</sup> Jangma Paul, *Catholic Mission to the Kachin*, B.D. thesis, M.I.T., 1972, p.16 (hereafter ; Paul, 1752)

<sup>5</sup> Grawng and Naw, 1961, pp. 15-18.

<sup>6</sup> Paul, 1752, p. 18.

<sup>7</sup> Tegenfeldt, 1974, p. 267.

<sup>8</sup> Grawng and Naw, 1961, p. 22-23.

<sup>9</sup> Paul, 1752, pp. 18-19.

<sup>10</sup> Tegenfeldt, 1974, pp. 269-70.

<sup>11</sup> Tegenfeldt, 1974, p. 270.

<sup>12</sup> Paul, 1752, p. 20.

<sup>13</sup> Major Seminary, *The History of the Church in Myanmar*, p. 33

<sup>14</sup> Grawng and Naw, 1961, pp. 35-37.

<sup>15</sup> Paul, 1752, pp. 20-21.

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- <sup>16</sup> Grang and Naw, 1961, pp. 39-40.  
<sup>17</sup> Father Leo, *Chyoi pra ai catholic Nawku Hpung a htik Labau*, Myitkyina, Jinghpaw Kasa Press, p. 80.  
<sup>18</sup> Leo, p. 97.  
<sup>19</sup> Paul, 1752 pp. 21-22.  
<sup>20</sup> Paul Grawng, Catholic Mission, "*Columban Golden Jubilee*", Myitkyina: Jinghpaw Kasa Press, 1987, p. 5.  
<sup>21</sup> Tegenfeldt, 1974, 272.  
<sup>22</sup> Tegenfeldt, 1974, 272  
<sup>23</sup> <http://www.columban.org/content/view/23/23>

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1. Brothers Zingtung Grawng and Nauhkum Naw, *Jinghpaw Mungdaw hta kahlawlik Hpung nna de hpang ai*, Toungoo, Catholic Press, 1961
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