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LEGACY OF HAU LIAN KHAM (1944-1995):
A REVIVALIST, EQUIPPER, AND TRANSFORMER
FOR THE ZOMI-CHIN PEOPLE OF MYANMAR

Chin Khua Khai

Although small and often unnoticed, Myanmar has had its share of great leaders. The late Reverend Hau Lian Kham, often referred to as the “John Wesley” of Zomi (Chin) because of the similar characters and patterns seen in his leadership, is a noted pastor-evangelist and teacher among the evangelical Pentecostal believers in Myanmar. From the early 1970s until his death in 1995, he was the key figure and leader of a renewal movement among the Zomis. The renewal began on a small scale in the early 1970s and has spread throughout the region to many parts of the country through evangelism and cross-cultural mission efforts.¹ It has resulted in the planting of new churches in both rural and urban regions and to the establishment of leadership training schools. Kham has left his legacy as a revivalist, equipper, and transformer.

1. A Brief Story of His Life

Kham’s legacy in Zomis began against the backdrop of a predominantly nominal Christian atmosphere.² The Zomi is a major

¹ Chin Khua Khai, “Myanmar Mission Boards and Agencies,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, ed. A. Scott Moreau (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), pp. 667-68.

² The Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization describes a nominal Christian as one who would call him/herself a Christian but has no authentic commitment to Christ based on personal faith. See Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, *The Thailand Report on Christian Witness to Nominal Christians Among Protestants*, Lausanne Occasional Paper No. 23 (Wheaton, IL: Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 1980), p. 5.

ethnic group in Myanmar occupying the northwestern region. They are 2.2% of countries estimated population of 49 million in the year 2000.³ Christianity has been a dominant religious practice among the Zomis for half a century.

The Zomis received Christian faith through the efforts of missionaries. American Baptist missionaries first introduced the Christian faith to them early in the 1900s.⁴ Other missions such as the Methodists (1925), Catholics (1934), Anglicans (1934), Seventh-Day Adventists (1954), Presbyterians (1956), and Pentecostals (that is, Assemblies of God, 1960s) arrived as well. When missionaries were expelled from the country in the 1960s, more than half of the Zomi population had become professed Christians. At this stage, there existed among the Zomis Christians a moral laxity and a lack of salvation knowledge.⁵

Out of this background, Kham arose as a giant of faith who launched the renewal movement in 1973. On November 24, 1944, he was the sixth of eight children born to devout Christian parents in Ngennung-Tedim, Chin State, Myanmar. Upon graduating from high school, he began serving as the hadmaster of Zomi Baptist Academy, a primary school, in his native town of Tedim from 1963 to 1965.

Though poverty has always been a roadblock to education for the Zomis, Kham found a way to pursue his secular education as well as theological education. He attended night classes at Workers College on a work-study program, receiving a Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) degree in 1968. He then enrolled in Myanmar Institute of Theology, Insein, Yangon and received a Bachelor of Religious Education (B.R.E.) degree in 1971.

Upon completion of his studies, he decided to return to Tedim to engage in full time ministry. Indeed, temptations prevailed when relatives asserted he was making an undesirable career choice due to the poor

³ Sein Tin, *Central Statistical Year Book of Myanmar 1995* (Yangon, Myanmar: Central Statistical Organization, 1995), pp. 26-7. This statistics does not include the Asho-Chin (plain Chin), Mizos and Zomis in India and Bangladesh.

⁴ Robert G. Johnson has documented in detail the work of the American Baptist missions among the Zomis. Robert G. Johnson, *History of American Baptist Chin Mission*, 2 vols. (Valley Forge, PA: Robert G. Johnson, 1988).

⁵ I briefly discussed in my dissertation mission works among the Zomis and argued why the churches fall into a nominal state. Chin Khua Khai, "Dynamics of Renewal: A Historical Movement among the Zomi (Chin) in Myanmar" (a Ph.D dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1999), pp. 128-65.

income ministers receive. After a strong prayer, he made a lasting decision to serve the Lord alone.

Kham's ministry went through enormous changes, which better equipped him for kingdom service. He was first installed as the senior pastor of Cope Memorial Baptist Church (April 1971 to 1974) in Tedim, receiving his ordination credentials on February 25, 1973. He went on to become a leader of the Evangelical Baptist Conference (EBC) and the senior pastor of Tedim's Evangelical Baptist Church (1975-1976) when Cope Memorial Baptist Church dismissed him from membership because of his promotion of the renewal movement. Eventually, he became a Pentecostal minister (1977-1996) because of his new experience with the empowerment of the Holy Spirit and a larger vision of the kingdom's mission. Regarding his joining the Assemblies of God of Myanmar, he once stated, "We must keep a large vision of the whole country, even the whole world, for the evangelization while starting the work at the local area."⁶ In 1979 Kham became the founding principal of Evangel Bible College in Yangon, the capital city of Myanmar, serving in this capacity as well as teaching until his death on December 29, 1995. During this time, he also held the position of the senior pastor of Grace Assembly of God Church. Kham was the general secretary of the Assemblies of God of Myanmar for a period. This position was relinquished when he was sent to the Philippines for graduate studies in 1987.

Kham received a Master of Divinity (M.Div.) degree from Asia Pacific Theological Seminary (APTS), Baquio, Philippines in 1991, a Master of Theology (Th.M.) degree from Asia Graduate Theological Seminary (AGTS), Manila, Philippines in 1994, and was a candidate for the Doctor of Ministry (D. Min.) degree at AGTS.

Kham's premature death was a great loss not only to his family, friends and relatives, but also to the body of Christ in Myanmar. He was the prospective leader of the whole evangelical-Pentecostal body in Myanmar. His remaining family members include his wife Mary Hau Lun Cing who also had reached candidate of D.Min. status at AGTS, and three daughters, Cing Lam Dim, Man San Lun, and Cing Lian Ciin. At the writing of this article, with the help of her daughters, Mary carries on the Kham's ministries as the acting principal of Evangel Bible College and as by serving as the senior pastor of Grace Assembly of God Church.

⁶ Forthcoming Chin Khua Khai, *The Cross Amidst Pagodas* (Baguio, Philippines: APTS Press).

2. Early Theological Paradigm Changes

Being raised in a pious family, Kham was a committed Christian since childhood. God-fearing in attitude, obedience, sincerity, friendliness, and humility were revealing marks in his life. He was a Bible lover, active churchgoer, and even a choirmaster. He was a genius in widespread reading, especially of Christian books. More than anything, he had a strong desire to serve the Lord as a full-time minister from his youth.

Two prominent experiences proved revolutionary in Kham's faith journey. He, like Timothy in the Bible, had a strong faith in Christ though he did not know the exact time of his rebirth. However, a paradigm shift of faith took place in him sometime in 1970 when he accepted the Bible as the infallible word of God. This conviction came by his reading of an article in a *Decision* magazine in which Billy Graham stated his acceptance by faith of the whole Bible as the word of God. This, in fact, was opposite to the teachings at the theological institute that Kham was attending at the time.⁷ The theology he had received at the institute led him to confusion, as it questioned the authority and inspiration of the scripture. He attributed his overcoming the theological dilemma to the work of the Holy Spirit.⁸ As a result, he asserted the authority and sufficiency of the Bible for faith and practice.

Another experience had caused him to pursue renewal. Being a newly ordained minister, he paid home visits to church members once a week. He soon discovered the church members were nominal and weak in their faith, having little knowledge about the salvation of Christ, lacking real commitment. This discovery led to a turning point in his ministry, for he felt compelled to preach and teach the people about the gospel of the salvation of Jesus Christ in order to help bring renewal to the church. This was his prayer, "These people must hear the gospel and repent and come to the cross of Christ. God, help me and use me."⁹

⁷ Myanmar Institute of Theology (formerly known as Burma Institute of Theology), Insein, Yangon is the largest theological school in Myanmar. It has been largely influenced by the teachings of theological liberalism since the 1960's. "The Church in Myanmar," in *Church in Asia Today: Challenges And Opportunities Today*, ed. Saphir Arthyal (Singapore: Asia Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 1996), pp. 349-60.

⁸ Hau L. Kham, "My Testimony" (unpublished manuscript, 1994), p. 7.

⁹ Hau L. Kham, Personal Diary, June 25, 1971.

3. Serving with Multiple Gifts

Kham was a gifted preacher. His preaching was persuasive, forceful, and biblical. When preaching, he always referred to the authority of the word of God, often stating, “The Bible says....” His frequent use of body movement gave him the title, “The Action Preacher.” With all of these qualities, his method was a breakthrough for contemporary preaching.

Kham was gifted in teaching. From the very beginning of his pastoral ministry, he taught the Bible and Bible doctrine from the evangelical perspective which was contrary to contemporary teaching in the vicinity. The people were amazed at his new teachings. Consequently, church attendance doubled for the first time since the death of the former pastor of his church in 1965. News about his ministry spread so quickly that the unchurched in the town and visitors from rural villages were persuaded to attend the worship services and his Bible classes.

Moreover, Kham was gifted in music, art, and literature. He conducted the church choir every Sunday, performed in and directed dramas on special occasions such as Christmas. The drama, “Life of Jesus,” attracted not only the town dwellers, but also people from the villages nearby. His first publication was a small handbook, *Khasiangtho Ngeina Nam Lite* [The Four Spiritual Laws], published and distributed in March 1973. He translated the books of Jeremiah and Jonah into the Tedim language for the Tedim Bible. Another work of his was the book *Upna Laigil* [The Essence of Faith] which was an evangelical position on Bible doctrine.¹⁰ Besides these publications, he wrote several articles and helped revise a local hymnal.

4. Revivalist

Kham was the pioneer leader of the renewal movement among the Zomis. A “burden for souls” was his motivating factor. He was convinced that soul winning was the most important task under heaven. Referring to the scripture in Luke 16:25, he asserted that a soul is more precious than the whole universe; to win a soul is more important than to gain the whole universe, and to help a soul being saved is the most precious task in the sight of God.¹¹ Thus, to promote and bring renewal¹²

¹⁰ Khai, “Dynamics of Renewal,” pp. 178, 205.

¹¹ Chin K. Khai, Personal Sermon Note, 1973.

within the church and to seek souls outside the church was the most urgent call of his pastoral ministry.

Kham believed that prayer is a key to renewal.¹³ He and his supporters learned from historical evidences and personal witnesses that renewal often takes place when the people of God pray and seek him. They soon promoted individual and group prayer meetings for renewal.

Believing an open-air crusade would be the most appropriate strategy to reach the common people, the revivalist and his supporters launched a week-long crusade on April 30, 1973. They raised a bamboo pulpit on a football field where he preached seven nights about the salvation of Christ. This pioneer crusade was characterized by breakthroughs, a charismatic-style singing of revival choruses, a style in preaching the message that had direct implication upon the hearers, the altar call for repentance and acceptance of Christ, and face-to-face discussion of the personal assurance of salvation. These types of events marked a new breakthrough in ministry.

Furthermore, the revivalist learned to trust in the Holy Spirit. He acknowledged the dimension and crucial work of the Holy Spirit in bringing renewal. This factor prevailed as he surrendered himself by kneeling and crying to the Lord for the conversion of sinners, praying all night on the second day of the crusade.¹⁴ Preaching aggressively and persuasively for the first two nights did not draw a single sinner to the Lord. However, surrendering and trusting in the Holy Spirit made the difference. A young man by the name Kham Lian Khup turned and stepped forward in the altar call and accepted Christ as his Savior and Lord on the third night.¹⁵ The bold decision of this young man was a breakthrough that encouraged many to do the same in the days that followed. Converts were added every day.

Eventually, the pioneer crusade was the recognized launching pad of the renewal movement. The word "born again" became a catchword

¹² The term "renewal" has been defined in several ways. What I mean by "renewal" and "renewal movement" here is an inward experience of a spiritual dynamic that involves a new, deeper experience of God's transcendence and holiness, of grace and forgiveness, coupled with a new dimension in worship and a reaching out in mission (Khai, "Dynamics of Renewal," p. 4).

¹³ Kham, Personal Diary, January 27, 1973. Referred in Khai, "Dynamics of Renewal," pp. 180-81.

¹⁴ Kham, Personal Diary, May 2, 1973

¹⁵ Publication Committee, *EBC Taangthu: History of the Evangelical Baptist Conference* (in Tedim-Chin) (Tedim, Myanmar: EBC Church, 1990), p. 29.

throughout the renewal movement. The born-again believers spread the gospel by preaching, teaching, and counseling. Repentance for sins, confession of Christ as Savior and Lord, baptism in water as a witness of discipleship, studying the Bible, praying, and sharing the word of God were phenomenon indicative of this renewal.

Kham, along with his itinerant gospel team, continued to make gospel tours throughout the countryside during the years of 1973 to 1979. His motto became, "To bring as many people as possible to Christ in the shortest possible time."¹⁶ He conducted gospel crusades from town to town and from village to village. Like revivalist John Wesley of England in the eighteenth century,¹⁷ he traveled hundreds and thousands of miles on foot to spread the good news of Jesus Christ. His brother Gin Za Lian, like Charles Wesley, was a gifted musician throughout this renewal period. The two brothers worked hand in hand preaching and singing. During the next ten years, Kham would also preach the gospel to several other people groups throughout the country.

5. Leadership Equipper

Not a lone star, Kham trained up other effective leaders for servicing in the Kingdom of God. Teaching Sunday School was a regular ministry. His gospel crusades were two pronged: preaching and teaching the word of God. He also conducted Bible seminars every year, attended by believers from all the countryside.

Kham renovated the pattern of leadership by emphasizing lay witnessing. Like John Wesley, he motivated, challenged, equipped, and mobilized believers to carry out the work of the ministry. Prioritizing the evangelistic mandate, he emphasized witnessing and winning souls as the greatest call of believers. Their greatest accomplishment would come by fulfilling that call. He often elaborated the urgency of the call, the doom of people who never hear the gospel, the reward of obeying the call, and the consequences of disobedience. He explained *agape* as God's kind of love, which meant loving others in the way God loves sinners who are doomed to eternal judgment. He also taught about how to witness, live a righteous and spirit-filled life, and how to build the body of Christ. As a result of his efforts, lay witnessing became the most dynamic factor of

¹⁶ Kham, Personal Diary, January 18, 1995.

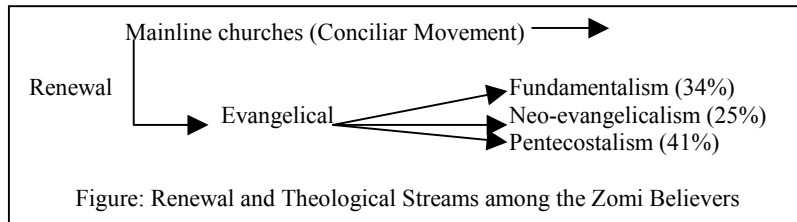
¹⁷ W. H. Fitchett, *Wesley and His Century: A Study in Spiritual Forces* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1906), p. 16.

spreading the renewal throughout the country during the last three decades of his life (1970s-1990s).¹⁸

As stated earlier, Kham began teaching at the Evangel Bible College, serving as the founding principal as well. In fact, this call was not a new challenge for him. He had long acknowledged the need to build armies for the Lord with deeper biblical knowledge. Sensing the need to multiply himself by training leaders, he decided to take over the teaching role at the Bible school. Today, the school's graduates are ministering the mission of the kingdom of God in different capacities all over the country.

6. Transformer

One final legacy to be noted here is that of the transformational changes within the church and in the culture that resulted from the renewal. Kham's own rediscovery and subsequent preaching on key issues such as the Bible as the inspired word of God, the lukewarm nature of the church, the dispensation of law and grace, the atoning work of Christ, justification by faith alone, and other teachings laid the foundation of evangelical Pentecostal beliefs and practices. As a result, Evangelicalism (Fundamentalism and Neo-evangelicalism) and Pentecostalism emerged like a strong river among the born-again Zomi Christians. Half the Christian population label themselves Evangelical/Pentecostals today.¹⁹ The following figure shows the percentage of their attachments:



¹⁸ Khai, "Dynamics of Renewal," pp. 245-46.

¹⁹ Khai, "Dynamics of Renewal," pp. 92, 298.

Kham's pattern of preaching became a favorite model for young preachers. His messages were grounded not in mere knowledge but in sound biblical and theological teaching built upon solid theological terms in which Christ is the subject. He interpreted scripture passages from the root meaning and then adapted it to the local situation. He also drew examples from local contexts and biographical stories to support the message. He was an expert in coining and applying popular words and phrases in his preaching. Most often, he contextualized the husk and kept the kernel of the gospel unchanged. His method is a combination of the "translation model" and "adaptation model" of contextualization.²⁰

Moreover, the messages have facilitated a Christ-centered worldview among believers. They saw God not only as sovereign and transcendent but also as immanent. They recognized secular things as temporary and spiritual things as eternal. They accepted Christ as Savior, Lord and King. Therefore, many believers chose to serve Christ rather than the world. Believers also gained positive self-images, liberating them from the low self-images of an inferiority complex.

Furthermore, the renewal has had a great social impact among the Zomis such that transformational changes occurred in the cultural subsystems.²¹ God was seen as the reservoir of blessings. Therefore thanksgiving celebrations toward God for blessings and success were and still are common phenomena in the communities today. Families give their children Christian names in order to express appreciation and acknowledgment of what He has done in a person's life. Yet another outcome of the renewal is that the need to take the cultural mandate is more recognized among evangelical Pentecostal believers today than ever before. Churches and individual believers continue to establish orphanages, open private clinics, donate relief funds and take on social responsibilities in their communities.

With all these patterns and characters of the renewal, many believers in Myanmar have regarded Kham as a great revivalist, a great leadership equipper, and a great transformer whose legacy will speak to many generations to come. He could say as Paul did, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (2 Tim 4:6 NIV).

²⁰ Dean S. Gilliland, "Contextualization Models," in *The Word Among Us: Contextualizing Theology for Mission Today*, ed. Dean S. Gilliland (Dallas, TX: Word, 1989), pp. 313-17.

²¹ Khai, "Dynamics of Renewal," pp. 354-62.