

Theologizing Tlawmngaihna in Mizo Culture for National Integrity

Lalnuntluangi^{#1}

[#] *Research Scholar, Faculty of Theological and Religious Studies*

[#] *Martin Luther Christian University, Shillong, India*

Abstract— Theologizing *Tlawmngaihna*, the Mizo code of ethics, can serve tribal Mizos to realise their beautiful cultural heritage as God given and use it for a good purpose. Although Christianity is often seen as making the Mizo Christians neglecting their ethnic cultural heritage and even their nation, reclaiming their incredible *tlawmngaihna*, which is a continuation of God's love and service will make the Mizos better citizens and better Christians. Appropriate understanding and integrating culture and its relationship to Christianity within the Church is hoped to have positive and lasting impact among the Mizo tribal Christians in their lives and service for nation building. The Church in Mizoram has great role in preserving culture and nation building. If only the Church in Mizoram, as a great influencer, takes up the importance of preserving the rich cultural heritages like *Tlawmngaihna*, then majority of the Mizos will readily embrace their culture stronger and thereof participate actively in nation building activities.

Keywords— *Tlawmngaihna*, Theologizing, Nation Building, Mizo tribal Christian, Cultural heritage

I. INTRODUCTION

Christianity came to Mizoram in 1894 with the coming of two Welsh missionaries. But it was only in 1899 that the first two Mizos were converted and baptised [1]. Today, most Mizos are Christians. Christianity impacts and transforms the Mizo culture in many ways. One of such is in the Mizo code of ethics, called *Tlawmngaihna*. This paper attempts to analyze the impact of Christian message on the idea of *tlawmngaihna* and discuss whether Christianity makes Mizo more *tlawmngai* [2]/more Mizo or less *tlawmngai*/less Mizo. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to re-interpret *tlawmngaihna* through the eyes of a Mizo Christian or to construct a theology of *tlawmngaihna* as a basis for becoming better Mizo tribal Christian citizens, who uphold the principles of national integrity.

II. THE CONCEPT OF TLAWMNGAIHNA IN MIZO CULTURE

Mizo culture is basically a service-oriented society, driven by the underlying *Tlawmngaihna*. In our tryst to understand and re-interpret *tlawmngaihna*, this paper shall look at the Mizo village system-community centred lifestyle and Zawlbuk as a backdrop where *tlawmngaihna* is an integral part of it. The paper shall then evaluate *tlawmngaihna* from its meaning, how it originates, what does it mean for the Mizo in the past and the present condition.

A. *The Mizo Village System*

The important characteristic feature of Mizo culture is living together in villages or what the Mizos call, *Khua*. Each *khua* is divided into different quarters called *Veng*. In the past, each village was known by the name of its chief. The main features in any *Khua* apart from the villagers themselves were the presence of the *Lal* (Chief), and the *Lal In* (Chief house), *Zawlbuk* (bachelor's dormitory), the council of advisers called *Upa* who were selected by the *Lal's* direct appointments, *puithiam* (priest) and a *thirdeng* (blacksmith). To the villagers, their *khua* was their world and lives revolve around their *khua*. The village was a closely knit and everyone knew each other. Everyone should be careful not to commit any form of blunder for fear of shame and societal ostracism.

1) *Community Centred Lifestyle*: Since the Mizos' way of living was a community centred lifestyle. It might not be wrong in asserting that there was no individual life. The songs, dances were for common singing and dancing in a group. There were no private festivities and celebrations. There was an intense mutual interaction among the people. There was harmony, mutual dependence and common ownership of the land, forest, and others. The well-being of every family, every individual depended heavily on the service rendered by other families and individuals. People needed each other. Under a system called *hnatlang* (the collective voluntary services) the villagers were expected to contribute labour for the welfare of the community [3]. Harvesting, construction of inter-village paths, water points and other voluntary services were all rendered by the people under the banner of *tlawmngaihna*.

2) *Zawlbuk, Bachelor's Dormitory*: The *Zawlbuk* is a large barrack where all the unmarried men from adolescence onwards spent the night and most of their time together in the past. *Zawlbuk* was situated opposite the chief's house. *Zawlbuk* was a service-oriented institution in two ways. It is a strong labour force ever ready for service of the community. The location is essential to provide the chief with easy access for errands or any emergency concerning the welfare of the village [4], or any other service in the village. The *Zawlbuk* is constructed and maintained by *hnatlang* of the men of the *Veng* or *Khua*. In *Zawlbuk* the youth learned about their culture, traditions, music, and dance to prepare themselves for life. So, the *Zawlbuk* stood as the centre of culture, organisation and administration of the whole Mizo community [5]. The *Zawlbuk* also served to develop social cohesion and strong village loyalty [6]. It produced responsible adult members of the society, in other words, men of *tlawmngaihna*, "a precis of the whole Mizo traditional discipline of life" [7].

B. *Tlawmngaihna*

Tlawmngaihna is a Mizo code of ethics, a part and parcel of the Mizo culture, a moral force behind their lives and activities, creating them uniquely Mizos. The English word, 'altruism' perhaps be the closest to the core meaning of *tlawmngaihna*. Mizo culture is basically a service-oriented society, driven by this underlying *tlawmngaihna*. *Tlawmngaihna* is powerful and transformative. This section will discuss in detail the concept of *tlawmngaihna*.

1) *Meaning of Tlawmngaihna*: There are many attempts to explain *tlawmngaihna*. J.H.Lorrain in his *Dictionary of Lushai Language* explains *tlawmngaihna* as –

1. to be self-sacrificing, unselfish, self-denying, persevering, stoical, stout-hearted, plucky, brave, firm, independent, loath to lose one's good reputation, prestige, too proud or self-respecting to give in, etc;
2. to persevere, to endure patiently, to make light of personal injuries, to dislike making a fuss about anything;
3. to put one's own inclination on one side and do things which one would rather not do, with the object either of keeping up one's disappointing another etc;
4. to do whatever the occasion demands no matter how distasteful or inconvenient it may be to oneself or to one's own inclinations;
5. to refuse to give in, give way, or be conquered;
6. not to like to refuse a request, to do a thing because one does not like to refuse or because one wishes to please others;
7. to act pluckily or show a brave front [8].

Tlawmngaihna to a Mizo stands for a compelling moral force which finds expression in self-sacrifice for the service of others [9]. In Mizo culture, everyone is required to be courteous and considerate in relation to others and be prepared to help, irrespective of one's inconvenience, under all circumstances [10]. *Tlawmngaihna* embraces various types of activities and manifests itself in various forms which can be summed up as "Group over self" [11]. It can be an individual effort as well as a group effort.

2) *Origin of Tlawmngaihna*: Vanlalchhuanawma, a Mizo theologian, seems to be right when he says that the principles of *tlawmngaihna* "grew out of dynamic interaction of relational forces within the community-based society of the Mizos" [12]. In the past, respect for elders, fear of the unseen forces, fear of death because of the objectionable social behavior, fear of shame seem to be the prominent driving forces behind *tlawmngaihna*. Nowadays, it is the fear of shame, not having people to render service when one needs them, to get a good name and recognition appear to be the underlying reasons. *Tlawmngaihna* has almost turn out to be a social obligation and we seem to have now a *pseudo-tlawmngaihna* (just for name and fame) among Mizos. H.T.Sangliana, a Mizo politician known for his *tlawmngaihna* among the Mizos argues therefore that, "a true *tlawmngaihna* must spring out from a true, clean mind and heart, to help others without any interior motive wherever we are" [13]. Sadly, the true spirit of *tlawmngaihna* seems to be disappearing among the Mizos now. Therefore, it is imperative to sustain *tlawmngaihna* in the Mizo culture as it is imperative even in upholding the principles of unity and diversity in the nation.

3) *Tlawmngaihna at the Heart of a Mizo*: For the Mizos, *tlawmngaihna* is the most valuable and beautiful value. Sangliana rightly points out, "[*Tlawmngaihna*] is our most beautiful system, our treasured possession, our best practise, our most valuable asset wherever we are, either on earth or in heaven" [14]. Rokunga (1914-1969), a re-known traditional composer, through his song, *Tlawmngaihna Hlu* (meaning Precious *Tlawmngaihna*) succinctly conveys what *tlawmngaihna* means to Mizos and how the fading *tlawmngaihna* needs to be perpetuated among the Mizos. The English translation of the song goes like this-

1. Our hill, our land green and beautiful-
Tlawmngaihna flower is blooming.
More than gold or diamond,
This flower is more precious.
O precious *Tlawmngaihna*, O Flower of life
In our lofty and beautiful land,

Thousand years might pass,
Be ever present without dying.

2. I will honour your name-
I will call you, 'Beautiful life of Mizo.'
Your sweet aroma that's in the air
Will reach every land, every corner.
3. During the era of our ancestral-
Your face used to shine like a sun.
The beauty of our land, our culture,
It is now withered away like a leaf.
4. In our world of new era-
Come and bloom beautifully again.
To beautify our talent, our intelligence
Be ever alive in our hearts.

To a Mizo, *tlawmngaihna* is a flower, which is more precious than gold or diamond. It is a flower of life, a beautiful life of Mizo. Its sweet aroma is in the air reaching every land and every corner. Rokunga also compares *tlawmngaihna* as a sun that shines, and refers to it as the beauty of the Mizo land, the Mizo culture. He connects *tlawmngaihna* with nature and pleads for *tlawmngaihna* to bloom again.

4) *Tlawmngaihna, the Code behind Service*: The spirit of *tlawmngaihna* has been predominant in the Mizo society right from the pre-Christian culture until now. However, this important value among the Mizos seems to slowly fade away. Lalnithanga, a prominent Mizo statesman who retired as an Indian Administrative Service officer, observed that "with the inroad of materialism in the face of economic development and prosperity, the spirit of [*tlawmngaihna*] is dying out" [15]. Mizo Christians tend to leave *tlawmngaihna* at the hands of Young Mizo Association (YMA) [16]. Rokunga rightly summons for *tlawmngaihna* to come and bloom beautifully again. Among the Mizo tribal Christians, the need to call back and rediscover and practice *tlawmngaihna* in the culture is greater than ever.

Having said the above, it is interesting to note that the spirit of *tlawmngaihna* is seen more in villages where the society is more closely knit than in cities where due to the multifarious nature of professions, the society cannot be as close as in the villages. People are now more independent and without need of other's assistance. Many people are losing this beautiful virtue now. *Tlawmngaihna*, 'a beautiful life of Mizo' which used to shine like a sun, as Rokunga laments, is now slowly vanishing from the Mizo culture. Sangliana laments over this and calls those who do not practise *tlawmngaihna* fake Mizos, who are not sure about their identity as a Mizo [17]. Vanlalchhuanawma also remarks, "When a person is said to be un-Mizo, it means that he/she is lacking in *tlawmngaihna* and there can hardly be any remark more insulting to the people concerned" [18]. So, it seems that if a person is less *tlawmngai*, he is considered to be less Mizo as well, which would be anathema to any normal Mizo.

In the midst of COVID-19 pandemic world, there is a story of one Mizo *tlawmngai* boy called Raphael AVL Malchhanhima, whose friend by the name of Vivian Remsanga (23 years) died of heart attack in Chennai, in the South India. Along with the two Tamil ambulance drivers, Raphael travelled through six Indian states, covering 3,345 kilometres in almost 85 hours. Raphael forewent his own life, his peace and comfort, risking his life with drivers he did not even know, to bring his friend home to Mizoram during India's complete lockdown. There was no food shop opened on the way. The Mizoram Chief Minister acknowledged this Mizo *tlawmngai* Raphael in his tweets, "Thank you from the bottom of our hearts! You've just shown what every Mizo heartbeat means when it comes to the term '[*Tlawmngaihna*]'!" in his tweet [19]. Zoramthanga also added in his tweet that Raphael and the two ambulance drivers are the "real life heroes" [20].

In spite of people like Raphael, it is very disheartening to learn that this beautiful aspect of Mizo culture, *tlawmngaihna* is dying down among many Mizos, as lamented earlier. The Mizo Christian community now needs to have a closer look at this concept which makes Mizos unique and distinct in their own-the very culture of Mizo. There is exigency to reclaim *tlawmngaihna* and it is the Christians' role to let *tlawmngaihna* bloom gloriously again. Although the YMA [21] tries their best to perpetuate *tlawmngaihna*, the church could do much more in preserving *tlawmngaihna*. God created Mizos as Mizos with their intrinsic culture and with a purpose. They are accountable for helping Mizo to be more Mizo as created by God. Mizo tribal Christians need to have this very code of Mizo ethics and be more *tlawmngai* as disciples of Christ. It is time to theologise *tlawmngaihna*, as part of the Mizo faith and practice. *Tlawmngai* Mizo tribal Christians can then play important roles towards national integrity and nation building.

III. THE CONCEPT OF LOVE AND SERVICE IN THE BIBLE

Mizo Christians need to see the parallel of *tlawmngaihna* from the Bible, by looking at the concept of love and service in the Bible as a biblical context to bring to bear a theology of *tlawmngaihna*. There are similarities between the concept of *tlawmngaihna* and the Christian concept of love and service. In fact, it affirms Mizo *tlawmngaihna* in many ways as we shall see in this section.

A. Love Commandment

The Old Testament (OT) has the concept of service and contains the commandment to love one's neighbor (Lev. 19:8). This seems to be the basis of Christian service. At the beginning of the OT stands a God who loves and elects the Israelites and the God who creates facts through direct action in nature and with his people in particular [22]. God's mandate for the Israelites is "to love God with all their heart, with all their soul, with all their strength, and with all their mind and to love their neighbor as themselves" (Deut. 6: 5; Lev. 19:18). The Israelites should always express this love to God in their daily lives and in all activities [23]. Parents are to instruct their children so that the whole welfare in the land from the present to their future will continue to obey God's commandment of love. God also commands the Israelites to love their neighbors and the aliens who are living among them as themselves (Lev. 19:34; Deut. 10:19).

In the New Testament (NT), love seems to be one of the central ideas which express the whole content of the Christian faith (Jn. 3: 16). Love is the essence of the Gospel teaching. Jesus reinforces the love commandment when he says, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Mt. 22: 34-40; Mk. 12: 28-31; Lk. 10: 27-28). As much as a Christian loves himself/herself, he/she should love the neighbor which is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices (Mk. 12:33). The fulfillment of the second law is considered as the fulfillment and concrete realization of the first commandment. This is how Jesus demonstrates his love to fulfill the first law, "for it is in loving the neighbor for whom we have seen that we express our participation in love for God whom we have not seen (1 Jn. 4: 20)" [24]. The neighbor could be anyone who needs help and service, it could be the outcasts (Lk. 10: 29-37).

The target of love and service knows no boundaries in the Bible. Jesus goes on to the extent that the disciples should love even their enemies (Mt. 5: 44; Lk. 6:27, 35), not just loving one another. Jesus shows the full extent of his love to the disciples by washing their feet (Jn. 13). Jesus also mentions, "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends" (Jn. 15: 13). This is how God demonstrates his love for us, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Rom. 5: 8).

Paul "characterizes love for one's neighbor as love for one's brother [or sister] in the faith (Gal. 5: 6)" [25]. To the Corinthians, Paul says that if he has no love, he is nothing. He goes on defining love by saying, "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres" (1 Cor. 13: 4-7). Paul also says that love binds the people of God all together in perfect unity (Col. 3: 14). Love of one's brother or sister derives from God's love, and without love for one's brother or sister, there can be no relationship with God [26]. The degree of one's love for God will be evident in their love for others. Jesus' love requires his followers to lay down their lives for others (1 Jn. 3: 16). This teaching on love sounds familiar to a Mizo, as they already have similar concepts in their culture even right from their pre-Christian era.

B. God Calls the Christians to Serve

A Christian is not merely given the concept of service but called by God, for a specific mission. God takes the initiative and the Christian responds. In the OT, service seems to be the call for Israelites to God. “Fear the LORD your God, serve him only and take your oaths in his name” (Deut. 6:13). Service to God is to be done with faithfulness (Jos. 24: 14). There are various persons who are called by God for specific tasks as well. For example, Moses was called to lead the Israelites out of Egypt (Exo. 3-4); Gideon was called to save the Israelites out from the Medianites (Judg. 6: 11-24) and Jeremiah too got the call to proclaim the prophetic word with power and effectiveness (Jer. 1:4-19).

The NT meaning of service, *diakoneo*, is derived from the person of Jesus and his Gospel [27]. It becomes a term denoting loving action for brother or sister and neighbor, which in turn is derived from divine love, and describes the outworking of *koinonia* (fellowship) [28]. God calls and sent Jesus by the Father for the service of humanity, to reveal and give life to people. Jesus served his disciples as “a demonstration of the love of God, and of humanity as God willed it” [29]. Jesus says to his disciples that he is one among them who serves (Mt. 20: 28). He also declares that he did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mt. 20: 28; Mk. 10: 45). This summons to service becomes binding because it stands the sacrifice of Jesus, giving his life to many. Jesus in turn calls the disciples and apostles to serve others and to preach the Good News to others (Mt. 4: 18-22; Lk. 10: 1-12). Anyone giving food to the hungry, shelter to the homeless, clothing to the naked, or visiting the sick and imprisoned is serving Christ himself (Mt. 25: 35-40). Various women served Jesus on earth, and it will not be forgotten (Mk. 14: 9) and they served out of their means (Lk. 8: 3). Paul was called in a special way to be the instrument for spreading the Good News of salvation to the Gentiles (Acts 9: 15). Paul also talks about serving one another in love (Gal. 5: 13) and to serve wholeheartedly (Eph. 6: 7, 8). Peter also mentions that everyone should serve with the gift God has given him (1 Pet. 4: 10). Again, the teaching on service is not new in the Mizos’ ears. It rather affirms and confirms their valuable *Tlawmngaihna*, the seed of love and service which is already existed in their culture.

C. Mizo Christians’ Response to God’s Call for Service

The Mizo concept of *tlawmngaihna* based on one’s clan, tribe, or village is challenged by the Good News of Jesus Christ. This is a challenge to widen the Mizos’ horizon not just among themselves but to go beyond and include every creation in their love and service. Today, many Mizos respond to God’s love and service. In fact, according to Patrick Johnstone, “Mizoram is one of the most active Christian states in the world...Mizo missionaries in India and beyond number over two thousand—one of the highest sending statistics in the world” [30].

However, the questions remain, has Christianity change the attitude to *Tlawmngaihna*? How does the biblical concept of service affect their *tlawmngaihna*? Are the Mizo tribal Christians more culturally conscious Mizo or less Mizo not bothering about their God-given culture when they become Christians?

IV. TLAWMNGAIHNA WITH BIBLICAL LOVE AND SERVICE

This article dealt with both the concept of *tlawmngaihna* and the biblical context-love and service. This section shall expand a Mizo idea of *tlawmngaihna* with biblical idea of love and service. The concept of biblical love and service is not a strange thing to the Mizos, as noted earlier. In Mizo culture they understand biblical love and service better because they already have a familiar concept. Or in other words, they can assume that *tlawmngaihna* is a vehicle to understand the concept of love and service in the Bible. By expanding the idea of *tlawmngaihna* in the light of the Scripture, there is hope to redeem the Mizo beautiful cultural heritage where *tlawmngaihna* is the fundamental component. *Tlawmngaihna* is a preparatory asset to open the people to the Christian principles of life. It truly conforms to the highest

moral requirements laid down in the Bible. The systematic moral code of the Bible appeared more compatible with the traditional code of *tlawmngaihna*.

Christ's teaching does not take away the value of *tlawmngaihna* in Mizo culture, instead it enriches *tlawmngaihna* in many ways. Christianity and its contribution enrich the Mizo cultural heritage, *Tlawmngaihna* for one. This is the testimony of Mizo tribal Christians as one tribal confirms when he says about the consequence of Christianity, "Our claim is that Christianity is not spoiling our tribal self-hood, as is sometimes alleged. When we become Christians, we do not get detribalised. Instead of Christ's teaching taking away anything of value from our tribal life, it is enriching it in many ways" [31]. Christianity does not spoil the Mizo self-hood. Again, Christ's teaching affirms and confirms the Mizo's valuable *tlawmngaihna*. *Tlawmngaihna* is the seed of love and service already existed in Mizo culture. It is helpful here to quote K. Thanzauva, a Mizo theologian, when he talks about Christ as the embodiment of *tlawmngaihna*:

If Jesus Christ is the expression and embodiment of God's love, the incarnation, the ministry and the cross of Jesus Christ may be perceived as paramount act of *tlawmngaihna*. This may provide a basis for a Christological understanding of *tlawmngaihna*. The mythical heroes of the Mizo people were neither warriors nor powerful chiefs but the *tlawmngai* persons who laid down their lives for the service of the community. Jesus Christ might thus be seen as the embodiment of *tlawmngaihna*, who transcends the tribal *tlawmngaihna*. Jesus is the *tlawmngai* par excellence [32].

In the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, we see the perfect description of what *tlawmngaihna* means to Mizos. The biblical concept of love and service we have seen earlier make so much sense in Mizo cultural eyes and language because of *tlawmngaihna* which is already existed amongst them. We shall now therefore propose a concept of *tlawmngaihna* in the light of the Bible, or in other words, a theology of *tlawmngaihna*.

V. TOWARD A THEOLOGY OF TLAWMNGAIHNA

Tlawmngaihna appears to be a message of Christ hidden in the Mizo culture. Under this point we shall attempt to re-interpret *tlawmngaihna* from the Christian perspective as a theology of *tlawmngaihna*. Theology of *tlawmngaihna* might mean—love in action to reciprocate God's love, a transformed idea of service in obedience to God's command, a discipleship as a Mizo community, a vehicle for the kingdom of God.

A. *Tlawmngaihna* is Love in Action to Reciprocate God's Love

Tlawmngaihna is often compared with the love passage of Paul to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 13: 4-7. *Tlawmngaihna* is patient, *tlawmngaihna* is kind. *Tlawmngaihna* does not envy, *tlawmngaihna* does not boast, it is not proud. *Tlawmngaihna* is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. *Tlawmngaihna* does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. *Tlawmngaihna* always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. It is interesting to note how *tlawmngaihna* fits the Christian love. *Tlawmngaihna* is a self-giving love. As Sangliana asserts, "we cannot measure its depth, its length, its height, its width and its value" [33]. *Tlawmngaihna* is praxis of love. There are several Mizo *pasaltha* [34] like Taitesena, Khuangchera, Zampuimanga, Chawngbawla, Vanapa and others who are said to lay down their lives for the cause of *tlawmngaihna*. Sangzuala Pa compares the humility and patience of Vanapa, the early model of *tlawmngaihna*, with those of Christ [35]. In his opinion, Sangzuala Pa expresses that *tlawmngaihna* would best express what it means "if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also...love your enemies and pray for those who

persecute you” (Mt. 5:39, 40). Such love is seen in the life of Jesus who has laid down his love for his creation.

The Mizos has been practising God’s love in action in the name of *tlawmngaihna* right before Christianity entered Mizoram. Thanzauva is right in saying, “*Tlawmngaihna* is the hidden Gospel written in the hearts of the Mizo even before we embraced Christianity” [36]. More so now, the Mizos have every reason as Mizo Christians to reciprocate God’s love by being *tlawmngai*. This can be extended to their own lives, their homes, society, towards strangers and even non-Mizo living in Mizoram especially whom the Mizos call, *vai* [37], to whom the Mizos usually are biased and harsh. *Tlawmngaihna* will also have impact on the participation in community events especially *hnatlang* and other activities like the different Mizo festivals. In that case, Christian *tlawmngaihna* makes Mizos more Mizos, as one of the indigenous tribes which makes India’s beautiful diverse citizens.

B. Tlawmngaihna is a Transformed Idea of Service in Obedience to God’s Command

As Mizo Christians today, they perform their service for others as servants of God. They also realize that in Christianity the concept of service is not just an important aspect of the Christian message, but something that is intimately tied up with the very essence of being Christian. It is an obedience to God’s commands to serve. The basis of service for others is now rooted and guided by the commandment of Jesus Christ. Christian service is called forth not by the situation but by the Lord, or rather, it is called forth by God’s word in the face of any situation. In fact, the scope of the service must go even beyond their own culture and extending beyond their family, tribe, and race. The Mizos must enculturate the message of love and service to make it find a home in Mizo hearts and allow the Christian teachings transform their *tlawmngaihna*. Christ and his teachings can assist them to make this happen as they have seen transformations taken place among the Mizos since Christianity came to Mizoram. Donna Strom rightly confirms, “Christ could give the power and wisdom to attain the ideal of *tlawmngaihna*” [38]. She goes on to the extent that Mizo ideal of *tlawmngaihna* had become attainable through Christ [39]. Indeed, *tlawmngaihna* is a transformed idea of Christian service in Mizo culture.

It is observed that many members in the YMA have lost their chief ingredient, *tlawmngaihna*. Sangliana notices that in *hnatlang* occasion, some members started to have the mindset of certain laborer. Sangliana compares the *hnatlang* rendered by the church youth and the YMA members (which includes anyone, not necessarily be believer Christians). In his observation he finds out that the Church youth do their job better with better result during *hnatlang* [40]. It seems that the teaching of the Bible regarding service has a great impact on the Christian youth and make them more *tlawmngai*. Practically the concept of service affirms *Tlawmngaihna* in Mizo culture.

C. Tlawmngaihna is a Discipleship for the Mizo Community

In Mizo culture today they do not have Chieftainship and *Zawlbuk* anymore. Chieftainship is already replaced by the village council and *Zawlbuk* by the church or school. The church now is where the Mizos learn how to live as individuals and a group, as disciples of the Lord, imparting in them a Christian outlook. The church as one of the instruments of *tlawmngaihna* should be able to teach her members what *tlawmngaihna* is all about as Christians now. The church can act as a catalyst to revive, renew, and impart *tlawmngaihna* that is fading away in Mizo culture by bringing this virtue which is already familiar to them. For the very reason that there are similarities between the concept of *tlawmngaihna* and Christian discipleship.

For the Mizo people, discipleship is nothing but *tlawmngaihna* [41]. At the heart of Mizo is service for others. Following Christ means serving others. The disciples of Jesus are the *tlawmngai* people. However,

in the Mizo Bible translation there is no such word like *tlawmngaihna* surprisingly. There is no preaching about *tlawmngaihna* in the church as well. Love and service in the Bible could have greater meaning and impact had the word *tlawmngaihna* is used. It would make the Mizo understand what it means to follow Christ better. This would solve the problem of a high nominalism among the Mizo Christians today.

D. Tlawmngaihna is a Vehicle for the Kingdom of God

The *tlawmngai* Mizos are living for the cause of the kingdom of God. The attributes of *tlawmngaihna* seen before—to persevere, to endure patiently, to make light of personal injuries, to dislike making a fuss about anything, to put one’s own inclination on one side and do things which one would rather not do, to do whatever the occasion demands no matter how distasteful or inconvenient it may be to oneself or to one’s own inclinations and others are the essential qualities for missionaries. In other words, *tlawmngaihna* is the essential quality for missionaries. It is an instrument for building the kingdom of God. It is the same *tlawmngaihna* that forces the Mizo for sharing the Gospel to others. Vanlalchuanawma observes that the spirit of *tlawmngaihna* has great influence on the early Mizo Christian about sharing the newfound joy with their neighbors. He says, “[it] was the *tlawmngai* people, both men and women, who formed themselves into groups of *Zinrual* [a group of travellers] and *Fangrual* [a group of visitors] to voluntarily accomplish the task of evangelising the land” [42]. It is also said of the commitment of the Mizo missionaries working with the Council of World Mission (CWM) in the Pacific Island. During the communal clash and riots happened in Samoa some years ago, the Mizo missionaries were the ones who did not leave the place but stayed back to comfort the native people while many other missionaries fled to safe places [43]. This incident paves the way for many other Mizo missionaries under CWM that today there are many Mizo missionaries now. It seems that the reason behind those missionaries is *tlawmngaihna*. *Tlawmngaihna* makes Mizo possess the kingdom principles which results in building and extending the kingdom of God on earth. *Tlawmngaihna* is a vehicle for the kingdom of God and to be good citizens.

VI. TOWARD EXPRESSING THEOLOGY OF TLAWMNGAIHNA

Rendering services to others, being *tlawmngai* is not just an abstract action but it should be a concrete expression of love and service for God and others. The message of *tlawmngaihna* should touch people’s lives and make them more *tlawmngai*. This paper have touched upon some areas but here is a list of areas for a proof of what love and service means for Christians and as a sign of transformation of the Mizo concept of *tlawmngaihna*. Following points are few ways of expressing a theology of *tlawmngaihna*-

1. Use *tlawmngaihna* in Christian vocabulary and refer Jesus as a *tlawmngai* model;
2. Preach *tlawmngaihna* in the church;
3. Teach *tlawmngaihna* at home;
4. Help others in times of danger (e.g., accidents, fire, other natural calamity, etc...);
5. Sharing food;
6. Helping and comforting the sick, the wounded, the grieved or the very young and old;
7. Sharing what we have with neighbors;
8. Sharing knowledge in terms of educational and medical services;
9. Practice *tlawmngaihna* everywhere;
10. Take part in the cultural programs as a committed *tlawmngai*.
11. Be accommodative with strangers or non-Mizos living in Mizoram with proper guidelines for their safety and comfort.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

This paper attempted to re-interpret the concept of *tlawmngaihna*, love and service, analyzing the impact of Christian message on it. It has looked at *tlawmngaihna* in the light of love and service in the Bible and offered a theology of *tlawmngaihna*. To conclude, we can assert that *tlawmngaihna*, without a doubt, will dynamically give a new inspiration to Mizo Christians in the path of love in action, in obedience to God’s commands, in discipleship, in the witnessing and mission work for the establishment of God’s kingdom. Thus, a theology of *tlawmngaihna* would surely serve the need of contemporary Mizo society in revamping the fading *tlawmngaihna*. Otherwise *tlawmngaihna* will soon become just a myth for

the future generation which will be the worst thing that can happen to the Mizo culture. Embracing *tlawmngaihna* will thus make Mizos more rooted in their God given cultural heritage, contributing to national integrity, and uniting the citizens of India, as the Mizos live a life of love and service towards everyone.

REFERENCES

- [1] J. Meirion Lloyd, *History of the Church in Mizoram: Harvest in the Hills* (Aizawl: Synod, 1991), Preface.
- [2] *Tlawmngai* is a person who possess *tlawmngaihna*.
- [3] S.K. Sharma and Usha Sharma (eds), *Discovery of North-East India*. Vol. 8. Mizoram (Delhi: Mittal, 1995), 100- 101.
- [4] Vanlalchhuanawma, *Christianity and Subaltern Culture: Revival Movement as a Cultural Response to Westernisation in Mizoram* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2006), 54.
- [5] Vanlalchhuanawma, *Christianity and Subaltern Culture*, 55.
- [6] Donna Strom, *Wind through the Bamboo: The Story of Transformed Mizos* (Madras: ELS, 1983), 27.
- [7] Vanlalchhuanawma, *Christianity and Subaltern Culture*, 55.
- [8] J.H. Lorrain, *Dictionary of the Lushai Language* (Calcutta: Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1940), 513.
- [9] P. Lalnithanga, *States of Our Own Series: Mizoram* (Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1997), 43.
- [10] Lalnithanga, *States of Our Own Series: Mizoram*, 40.
- [11] Sangliana, Headmaster of Mizo High School as quoted in J. Meirion Lloyd, *History of the Church in Mizoram*, 4.
- [12] Vanlalchhuanawma, *Christianity and Subaltern Culture*, 56.
- [13] H.T. Sangliana, "Tlawmngaihna leh YMA," http://lelte.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=art... in <http://lelte.net/> (accessed on 9 March, 2023). trans.
- [14] Sangliana, "Tlawmngaihna leh YMA."
- [15] Lalnithanga, *States of Our Own Series: Mizoram*, 40.
- [16] The YMA as a substitute for the Zawlbuk was originally designed to be a component of the institutional church (Vanlalchhuanawma, *Christianity and Subaltern Culture*, 377). But today YMA is a separate entity, registered in the government as a NGO. All the Mizos once crossed adolescence are YMA members. YMA is supposed to be a *tlawmngai* association, who is responsible for maintaining Mizo culture-be it dance, stories, song or other practices. Even the continuance of *tlawmngaihna* is mainly in their hands. It is observed that there seem to exist a disparity between active YMA member and church youth member. We often hear comments like, "Nangni YMA ho" (you YMA people) or "Nangni KTP ho" (you church youth, KTP, people).
- [17] Sangliana, "Tlawmngaihna leh YMA." trans.
- [18] Vanlalchhuanawma, *Christianity and Subaltern Culture*, 60.
- [19] Zoramthanga, "Thank You from the Bottom of Our Hearts! You've Just Shown What Every Mizo Heartbeat Means When It Comes to the Term 'Tlawmngaihna'!" Twitter. April 28, 2020.
- [20] Zoramthanga, "Thank You."
- [21] YMA was formed on June 15, 1935 as Young Lushai Association initiated by Rev. David Edward, a Welsh missionary to Mizo, with three specific aims: 1. to develop community life, 2. to make good use of leisure, and 3. to safeguard Christian character. Even today YMA is the most prominent forum for the expression and exercise of the spirit of *tlawmngaihna* (Donna Strom, *Wind through the Bamboo*, 64).
- [22] W. Gunther and H.G. Link, "Love," *NIDNTT* 540.
- [23] John E. Hamlin, *A Guide to Deuteronomy* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1998), 51.
- [24] Myron S. Augsburger, *Matthew* in Lloyd J. Ogilvie (ed.), *The Communicator's Commentary* (Texas: Word, 1982), 258.
- [25] Gunther and Link, "Love," 545.
- [26] Gunther and Link, "Love," 546.
- [27] K. Hess, "Serve, Deacon, Worship," *NIDNTT* vol. 3. 547.
- [28] Hess, "Serve, Deacon, Worship," 547.
- [29] Hess, "Serve, Deacon, Worship," 547.
- [30] Patrick Johnstone and others, *Operation World: 21st Century Edition* (UK: Paternoster/US, 2001), 330.
- [31] M.M.Thomas and Richard W. Taylor (eds.), *Tribal Awakening* (Bangalore: CISRS, 1965), 48.
- [32] K. Thanzauva, *Theology of Community: Tribal Theology in the Making* (Aizawl: Mizo Theological Conference, 1997), 129.
- [33] Sangliana, "Tlawmngaihna leh YMA."

- [34] In Mizo society *Pasaltha* was and is an extra-ordinary person who used to sacrifice their life for the welfare of the community, a champion figure, respected leader and played a vital role in the village administration and community well-being. Lalmachhuana, "Pasaltha Christology" in <http://www.mizoworldconcern.com/Portals/801/articles/Pasaltha%20Christology%20Mizo.pdf> (accessed 8 September 2022).
- [35] Sangzuala Pa, "Tlawmngaihna," in *Meichher* (Aizawl: March, 1983), 4.
- [36] Thanzauva, *Theology of Community*, 128.
- [37] *Vai* is the Mizo way of calling outsiders mainly the non-tribals in and outside Mizoram. It conveys negative connotation, unfortunately.
- [38] Strom, *Wind through the Bamboo*, 47.
- [39] Strom, *Wind Through the Bamboo*, 70.
- [40] Sangliana, "Tlawmngaihna leh YMA."
- [41] Thanzauva, *Theology of Community*, 132.
- [42] Vanlalchhuanawma, *Christianity and Subaltern Culture*, 311.
- [43] This story is narrated to me by my friend who is also one of the missionaries working there in the Pacific Islands.