

**A Critical Reading of 2008 Myanmar Constitution on the Rights and Freedom  
of Minority Christians and other Religions**

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## **Introduction**

Freedom of religion is recognized as fundamental human rights. This right includes the freedom to have or adopt a religion, the freedom to change one's religion without being persecuted and the freedom to practice and manifest one's religion. A person's identity and their interaction with others are very frequently influenced by their particular religious beliefs. The threats to religious freedom are real around the world, though they take a variety of forms. Widespread and grievous violations of this freedom affect the stability, security and development of many states and severely impact upon the daily lives of individuals, families and communities, especially on their peaceful coexistence and the overall wellbeing of society.<sup>1</sup>

In Myanmar, military government has systematically committed a crime against humanity which is religious persecution, ethnic cleansing, massive human right violation and political oppression – for the sake of national security. Although 2008 constitution express about religious freedom, Christianity and other religions do not get equal right of religious freedom in Myanmar. Buddhism is known as state religion so that they try to oppress others. Although we already understood that Buddhism is special preference in Myanmar, many monks and Buddhists do not get religious freedom in Buddhist country. They are persecuted in many ways while they practice the essence of Buddha teaching in their lives. It means there is no religious freedom in Myanmar. The government violate the universal declaration of religious freedom which stated by the General Assembly of the United Nations.

Based on these facts this paper will mainly present 2008 constitution of religious freedom and then the critique on 2008 constitution of religious freedom will be discuss. The status of different religions in Myanmar, the history of religious freedom in Myanmar, the threat of Christianity and other religions in Myanmar, the danger of the authentic Buddhist will be present in this paper. After that it will give theological reflection for religion freedom in Myanmar.

## **The status of different religions in Myanmar**

According to official statistics, almost 89.3 percent of the population practice Buddhism, 5.6 percent practice Christianity, and 3.8 percent practice Islam, 0.5 percent by Hinduism and Animalism by 0.2 percent of the population.<sup>2</sup> Myanmar has a population of 54 million (2009 est.), which profess Theravada Buddhism (roughly 48 million), Christianity (1.65 million Baptists and 550,000 Roman Catholics), Islam (2.2 million), Hinduism (550,000), and the remaining consists of Mahayana Buddhism, Vajrayana Buddhism and Animism. Buddhist

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<sup>1</sup> Commission of the churches on International Affairs Study Report. *Freedom of Religion and Rights of Religious Minorities*. (Switzerland: World Council of Churches Publications, 2013), 2.

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Information, Union of Myanmar, *Myanmar: Facts and Figures 2002* (March 2002), 4-5.

monks, including novices, number more than 400,000 and depend on the laity for their material needs, including clothing and daily donations of food.<sup>3</sup>

## **2008 Constitution of Religious Freedom**

Article 34. Every citizen is equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess and practice religion subject to public order, morality or health and to the other provisions of this Constitution.<sup>4</sup>

Article 354. Every citizen shall be at liberty in the exercise of the following rights, if not contrary to the laws, enacted for Union security, prevalence of law and order, community peace and tranquility or public order and morality:

(a) to express and publish freely their convictions and opinions;

(b) to assemble peacefully without arms and holding procession;

(c) to form associations and organizations;

(d) to develop their language, literature, culture they cherish, religion they profess, and customs without prejudice to the relations between one national race and another or among national races and to other faiths.<sup>5</sup>

### **Equal Protection of Religions**

Article 348. The Union shall not discriminate any citizen of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, based on race, birth, religion, official position, status, culture, sex and wealth.

### **Establishment of Religions**

Article 361. The Union recognizes special position of Buddhism as the faith professed by the great majority of the citizens of the Union.

Article 362. The Union also recognizes Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Animism as the religions existing in the Union at the day of the coming into operation of this Constitution.

Article 363. The Union may assist and protect the religions it recognizes to its utmost.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Freedom of Religious in Burma.

[http://wikipedia.org/wiki/Freedom\\_of\\_religion\\_in\\_Burma#mw.navigation](http://wikipedia.org/wiki/Freedom_of_religion_in_Burma#mw.navigation). (accessed October 12, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> *Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar* (2008). (Yangon: Printing and Publishing Enterprise, Ministry of Information, 2010), 9.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

## History of religious freedom in Myanmar

Before King Anawyahtar, *A ye gyi* were dominated in Pagan period. At King Anawyahtar (1044-1077) reign, the first Burmese monarchy was established and adopted Theravada Buddhism as a state religion. King Min Don (AD 1221-1240) also emphasized for the expand of the Buddhism. At his reign the fifth Buddhist council was held in Mandalay to 1838AD.<sup>7</sup>

But religion has been a sensitive issue since its parliamentary democracy of the late 1948s until today. However, since independence, successive governments, both civilian and military, have supported and associated themselves conspicuously with Buddhism. Most famous of all would be the first prime minister of independent Myanmar, U Nu. In 1961 the Government's push to make Buddhism the state religion failed due to protests by religious minorities.<sup>8</sup> Although they do not have a chance to announce Buddhism as a state religion, they practice it legally. The third prime minister Mahn Win Maung needs to convert to Buddhism to be a prime minister.<sup>9</sup>

The new Socialist Constitution proposed in 1973 and confirmed in 1974 provided freedom of religion within the bounds of the law, guaranteeing all citizens non-discriminated principles on grounds of religion.<sup>10</sup> After the 1974 Socialist constitution was suspended in 1988, constitutional protection of religious freedom has not existed, after the bloody suppression of the 8888 Uprising. The authorities generally permitted most adherents of registered religious groups to worship as they choose; however, the government imposed restrictions on certain religious activities and is accused of abusing the right to freedom of religion.<sup>11</sup>

## Threat to Christianity and other religions

Since the 1960s Christian and Islamic groups have had difficulty importing religious literature into the country. All publications, religious and secular, remain subjected to control and censorship. It is illegal to import translations of the Bible in indigenous languages. Officials have occasionally allowed local printing or photocopying of limited copies of religious materials, including the Qur'an (with the notation that they were for internal use only) in indigenous languages without prior approval by government censors.<sup>12</sup>

The religious minority groups were occasionally used for forced labor to serve the military regime. In some cases forced labor was used to destroy mosques, churches or graveyards in order to build Buddhist pagodas. Sometimes these Buddhist pagodas would even be built

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<sup>7</sup> Maung Htin Aung, *A History of Burma* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), 240.

<sup>8</sup> D.E Smilt, *Religion and Politics in Burma* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1965), 22.

<sup>9</sup> Violent Kyaw, Principal of Pu Mya San Bible School. Yangon. 7 July, 2013.

<sup>10</sup> Trevor O Ling, "Religious Minorities in Burman in the Contemporary Period," in *Ethnic Conflicts in Buddhist Societies: Sri Lanka, Thailand and Burma*, eds. K.M. de Silva, Pensri duke, Ellen S. Goldberg and Nathan Katz (London: Orinter Publishers, 1988), 173.

<sup>11</sup> Freedom of Religion in Burma.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freedom\\_of\\_religion\\_in\\_Burma#mw.navigation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freedom_of_religion_in_Burma#mw.navigation). (accessed October 10, 2013).

<sup>12</sup> Freedom of Religion in Burma

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freedom\\_of\\_religion\\_in\\_Burma#mw.navigation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freedom_of_religion_in_Burma#mw.navigation). (accessed October 10, 2013).

using forced labor in areas with a low Buddhist population even though, the Religious Affairs Ministry claims to only allow the construction of religious monuments in situations that “depends upon the population of the location.” In many cases, Christians and Muslims were eventually able to obtain the necessary permits to build, but only when the groups in question had paid bribes to the authorities. At other times, church or mosque leaders were given informal permission to commence construction, only to have State Peace and Development Council authorities change their mind and destroy the buildings after they had been completed.

Burmanization here implies the notion of one race, one language, and one religion – Burman, Burmese and Buddhism.<sup>13</sup> ‘Buddha Bata, Myanmar Lumyo’ meaning, ‘To be Myanmar is to be Buddhist’ is used by the junta to justify their actions and this ideology remains at the centre of the State Peace and Development Council’s political philosophy.<sup>14</sup>

### **Peril to Christianity**

Christian Chin from western Burma are denied religious freedom and face coercion to convert to Buddhism as a result of state policy, according to a new report by the Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO). The 160-page report, entitled “‘*Threats to Our Existence*’: Persecution of Ethnic Chin Christians in Burma”<sup>15</sup> draws on more than 100 in-depth interviews conducted over the past two years. The report exposes a decades-long pattern of religious freedom violations that persist today, and documents other serious human rights abuses.

The report reveals ongoing violations of religious freedom in Burma’s Chin State under the new government led by President Thein Sein, including violations of the right to freedom of religious assembly; coercion to convert to Buddhism, the religion of the majority ethnic Burman population; and the destruction of Christian crosses in Chin State. President Thein Sein’s government claims that religious freedom is protected by law but in reality Buddhism is treated as the de-facto state religion.

At Na Ta La School, (Na Ta La is the Burmese acronym for the Progress of the Border Areas and National Races Development Affairs Program). Chin students are prevented from practicing Christianity while at the schools and have been coerced to convert to Buddhism, primarily via the threat of military conscription. Students are often forced to shave their heads and wear monks’ or nuns’ robes, CHRO said.<sup>16</sup>

The Human Rights Watch (HRW) documents the restriction on freedom of assembly and worship, the arrest of pastors, the destruction of the Christian churches, censorship on Christian

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<sup>13</sup> Lap Yan Kung, “Love Your Enemies: A Theology for Aliens in Their Native land: The Chin in Myanmar,” in *Studies in World Christianity* (Edinburg: Edinburg University Press, 2009), 88.

<sup>14</sup> Annual Report of the United State Commission on International Religious Freedom 2011 (Section on Burma) 28, April, 2011.

<sup>15</sup> Threats to our Existence: Precaution of Ethnic Chin Christians in Burma.  
<http://www.burmapartnership.org/2012/09/threats-to-our-existence-persecution-of-ethnic-chin-christians-in-burma>. (accessed December 4, 2013).

<sup>16</sup> Chin Human rights Organization: Ethnic Chin Christians from Burma Denied Religious Freedom, Coerced to Convert to Buddhism. September 5, 2012. <http://www.burmapartnership.org/tag/chin-human-rights-organization/>.

literature and publications, discrimination against chin Christians, coerced conversion, the destruction of crosses and others. In the chin state, where the people are 95 percent Christian, crosses- displayed by the people on mountain tops and roadsides as a symbol of their faith – are routinely destroyed, and people are forced to build Buddhist pagodas in their places.<sup>17</sup>

According to the CHRO, many priests were killed before 2004.<sup>18</sup> Many more were arrested and tortured for celebrating the Christian Centennial Celebration at Thangtlang, western Burma.<sup>19</sup> According to a 2012 report by Tomas Quintana, the United Nations special reporter on human rights in Myanmar, other forms of oppression aimed at Kachin and Chin Christians included “restrictions on the building of places of worship, destruction of religious venues and artifacts and the policy of coerced conversions to Buddhism”.<sup>20</sup>

Authorities in the Rangoon area closed several house churches because they did not have proper authorization to hold religious meetings. Other Rangoon home churches remained operational only after paying bribes to local officials. On October 1, 2006, the Agape Zomi Baptist Church, with more than 1,000 members, had to stop its weekly services at Asia Plaza Hotel in Rangoon. On August 19, 2006, government officials prohibited a Baptist church in Rangoon from conducting a literacy workshop for its youth. In February 2006 Insein Township authorities also ordered a Chin evangelist to stop holding worship services in his house church in Aung San ward. In November 2005 authorities in Insein Township, Rangoon, pressured evangelical Christians of the 20-year-old Phawkkan Evangelical Church to sign "no worship" agreements.<sup>21</sup>

### **Danger to other religions**

In August 2006 NaSaKa, the Government's border security force, ordered eight Rohingya Muslim communities in Rathedaung Township, Rakhine State to close their religious centers, including 5 mosques, 4 madrassahs, 18 moqtobs (pre-madrassahs), and 3 hafez khanas (Qur'an reciting centers). Later, local authorities allowed two madrassahs to reopen. NaSaKa ordered the closures because it stated that the institutions were not officially registered. According to Muslim sources, government officials have not allowed any madrassahs to register officially.

While the sharp increase in the level of anti-Muslim violence during the period covered by the previous report has abated, there were reports that restrictions on Muslim travel and worship countrywide have increased, especially since the fall of 2001. There are social tensions between the Buddhist majority and the Christian and Muslim minorities, largely due to colonial and contemporary government preferences. There is widespread prejudice against Muslims. A

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<sup>17</sup> Human Rights Watch, *The Chin People in Burma, Unsafe in Burma, Unprotected in India* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2009), 45-52.

<sup>18</sup> Salai Za Uk Ling & Salai Bawi Lian Mang, *Religious Persecution: A Campaign of Ethnocide Against Chin Christian in Burma* (Ottawa: Chin Human Rights Organization, 2004), 45-50.

<sup>19</sup> Kanbawza Win, "Are Christians Persecuted in Burma?," in *The Asia Journal of Theology*, 173.

<sup>20</sup> Annual report of the United State Commission on International Religious Freedom on Burma. 9 Dec, 2013.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, Freedom of Religion in Burma

sharp increase in anti-Muslim violence in 2001 significantly heightened tensions between the Buddhist and Muslim communities, as it had done in the past.<sup>22</sup>

One of the best examples of religious divide is the simmering tension between Muslims and Buddhists. In 2012, violence between Rakhine Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims in western Myanmar saw over a hundred killed, thousands of homes destroyed and displacing thousands of people. Though the physical violence has stopped, the tension still lingers. In May, the Rakhine state government announced an enforcement of a two-child policy on the Rohingya Muslims. It is a reinstatement of a policy implemented in two townships, Buthidaung and Maungdaw, by the then military government in its strategy to control the fast-growing Rohingya population.<sup>23</sup>

Authorities frequently refused to approve requests for gatherings to celebrate traditional Christian and Islamic holidays and restricted the number of Muslims that could gather in one place. For instance, in satellite towns surrounding Rangoon, Muslims are only allowed to gather for worship and religious training during the major Muslim holidays. In late 2006 a prominent Muslim religious organization planned to hold a golden jubilee in Mawlamyine, Mon State, to celebrate the founding of their organization. After they requested permission to hold the event, the local Division Commander, Brigadier General Thet Naing Win, called representatives of all non-Buddhist religious organizations in the area to a meeting. He informed them that permission would not be granted to hold any religious functions or ceremonies due to security reasons. The Muslim organization then altered its plans and held a low-profile ceremony to honor pilgrims who had been granted official permission by the Ministry of Religious Affairs to attend the Hajj.<sup>24</sup>

## **Priority to Buddhism in Myanmar**

The Ministry of Religious Affairs includes a Department for the Promotion and Propagation of Sasana (Buddhist teaching). State-controlled news media frequently depict government officials paying homage to Buddhist monks, making donations at pagodas throughout the country, officiating at ceremonies to open, improve, restore, or maintain pagodas, and organizing ostensibly voluntary "people's donations" of money, food, and uncompensated labor to build or refurbish Buddhist religious shrines throughout the country. State-owned newspapers routinely feature front-page banner slogans quoting from Buddhist scriptures. The Government has published books of Buddhist religious instruction.

The Department for the Perpetuation and Propagation of the Sasana handles the Government's relations with Buddhist monks and Buddhist schools. The Government continues to fund two state Sangha universities in Yangon and Mandalay to train Buddhist monks under the control of the state-sponsored State Monk Coordination Committee ("Sangha Maha Nayaka

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., Annual Report of the United State.

<sup>23</sup> Commission of the Churches on International Affairs, *Human Rights of Stateless People* (Switzerland: World Council of Churches Publication, 2013), 74.

<sup>24</sup> Religious Tolerance key to Myanmar's Democracy, 21, June, 2013.  
<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/news/religion>.

Committee" or SMNC). The state-sponsored International Theravada Buddhist Missionary University (ITBMU) in Yangon, was opened in 1998 to "share the country's knowledge of Buddhism with the people of the world."<sup>25</sup>

They also have a special program at their university which known as mountain mission "Thaung Tan Thar Thanar." That is the government-sponsored Buddhist mission. Before graduation of the monk they need to go remote area for a year for community development and for Buddhist mission.<sup>26</sup> Buddhist doctrine features heavily in the state mandated curriculum for all official elementary schools, where students are required to recite Buddhist prayer daily. Job placement in the public sector and advancement in the military was largely dependent on whether one was a practicing Buddhist or not. Furthermore, one's religious affiliation was a requirement for all identification cards that citizens and permanent residents were required to be in possession of at all times.<sup>27</sup>

### **Burmese Buddhist Women Interfaith Marriage Law**

According to the government, Burma's 1954 marriage law, there is no protection on Burmese Buddhist Women who marry with non-Buddhists. Burmese Buddhist Women are the ones who suffered most and lost all their rights since there is no protection by state. They got neither legal rights, religious rights nor civil rights whatsoever after Burmese Buddhist Women married with non-Buddhist. We believe it could be the driving force behind Burmese Buddhist Monks are proposing to draft Burmese Buddhist Women Marriage Law since according to the existing law of Burma.<sup>28</sup>

At June, Wirathu, an ultra-nationalist Buddhist monk, proposed an inter-religious marriage law which specifies that anyone who marries a Buddhist woman must convert to Buddhism. The proposed law also requires any Buddhist woman seeking to marry a Muslim man to first obtain permission from her parents and local officials. It states that someone who wants to marry a Buddhist woman must be a Buddhist with an official certificate stating he is a Buddhist. "Whoever marries with a Myanmar Buddhist woman against above sections shall be punished with imprisonment of 10 years and all his properties shall be transferred to that Myanmar Buddhist woman," says point no. 6 of the drafted law.<sup>29</sup>

Though the law was just a draft, it indicates the inherent problem between Buddhists and Muslims. Such attitudes are also manifested in the 969 movement, mobilized by ultra-nationalist monks who warn about minority Muslims threatening racial purity and national security. The

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<sup>25</sup> Freedom of Religion in Burma

<sup>26</sup> Samuel Ngun Ling, *Communicating Christ in Myanmar*. (Yangon: Judson Research Center, 2010), 36.

<sup>27</sup> Religious Tolerance Key to Myanmar's Democracy, 21, June, 2013.

<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/news/tolerance>.

<sup>28</sup> Buddhist Women Interfaith Marriage Law is Necessary to Protect the Burmese Buddhist Women's Rights, 24 June, 2013, <http://democracyforburma.wordpress.com/tag/interfaith-marriage>.

<sup>29</sup> Chan Myae Khine. Anti-interfaith Marriage Law would Restrict Women's Rights in Burma. 17, July, 2013. <http://asiancorrespondent.com/author/chan-myaе-khine/>

campaign also encourages Buddhists not to do business with Muslims and only support fellow Buddhist shops.<sup>30</sup>

### **Threat to state religion of Buddhism**

They support whatever it needed. People from other religions think the government does not restrict Buddhism because it's the dominant religion, but this is not true. Sometimes Buddhism faces greater restrictions than others.

In 2008, the SPDC increased its control over Burma's Buddhist population. Even though there are approximately 400,000 monks in Burma, there are only nine state-endorsed monastic orders that are permitted to operate under the SPDC sponsored Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee (SMNC). Furthermore, independent monastic orders are illegal since the establishment of the 1990 Sangha Organisation Law. These laws have since been used to control the Sangha and limit its rights to expression and assembly. For example, abbots are not allowed to deliver instruction on any topics which could be related to politics and monks are restricted from joining together in opposition to the government. Violations of this law, as witnessed during the September 2007 'Saffron Revolution', result in grave consequences. Monks who were accused of participating in the protests were defrocked in jail, where they were not allowed to shave their heads or eat their meals in accordance with the monastic codes. Monks were thus treated as laypersons and common criminals; treatment which comprises one of the gravest offences one can commit within the Buddhist religion."<sup>31</sup>

During the house arrested of Aung San Su Kyi, the Government harassed a group of Buddhist worshippers who visited the Shwedagon Pagoda in Rangoon every Tuesday, the day of the week that Aung San Suu Kyi was born, to pray at the Tuesday pillar for her release and the release of all political prisoners in the country.<sup>32</sup>

U Gambira, leaders of the 2007 Saffron Revolution, claimed, the dictatorship has committed crimes against humanity. There is a great tragedy for our people and for the Buddha dharma in our long history of monastic Buddhism. At present, the Sangha is the enemy of the regime. Our spiritual obligation is to freedom, not silence or submission. So we, the Sangha of Burma, will not stop until the goal is reached.<sup>33</sup> He was resolute in his commitment to change in Burma telling "If one wants to follow the way of Buddha, one must practice Buddhism." He was

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<sup>30</sup> Religious Tolerance Key to Myanmar's Democracy. 21. June, 2013.  
<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/news/religion>.

<sup>31</sup> Annual Report of the United State Commission on International Religious Freedom on Burma. May, 2009. [http://www.uscirf.gov/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=3594](http://www.uscirf.gov/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3594)

<sup>32</sup> Freedom of Religion in Burma

<sup>33</sup> Aung San Su Kyi, *The Voice of Hope: Conversations with Alan Clement* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2008), 224.

sentenced in November 2008 to 68 years in prison and was soon transferred to a remote labor camp in western Burma.<sup>34</sup>

Lat Pa Daung Taung Copper project cause a lot of effect to the Buddhist monks. Monks stands for the human right of native people and participate for non-violence, they share Myitta Thoke but they are eliminated by the military with bomb. Many monks are affected by the bomb and some are seriously affected.<sup>35</sup> The government is correct in targeting those who try to change or add new concepts to Theravada Buddhism. The case has been highlighted by the Asian Human Rights Commission, which believes that U Nyanna has been persecuted for “peaceful practice of his faith”. An online petition on the commission’s website ([www.humanrights.asia/countries/burma](http://www.humanrights.asia/countries/burma)) calls for “revision or revocation of laws in Burma that deny religious freedom”.<sup>36</sup>

People cannot practice Buddhism without compassion (metta) and non-violence (Ahimsa) which are the teaching of Buddhist.<sup>37</sup> Despite the eternal message of metta and ahimsa, they killed political dissidents, social activists, students, ethnic nationalities, ordinary citizens and even Buddhists monks. Buddhists kill Buddhists monks in Buddhists country. Killing life is truly un-Buddhist. The Buddha strictly prohibits destruction of not only human life but also all other lives.

### **Critique on 2008 constitution of religious freedom**

The government used religion as a tool many times for their own plan. The constitution is just only in paper. They oppressed the religion because they fear that religion can point out the truth. They may know that they do not rule the country according to the teaching of religion. This is the main point why the governments do not give the religious freedom in Myanmar. Now, some of the conservative monks and the government plan to add Burmese Women Interfaith Marriage Law. In 1954 constitution, it includes the law for marriage and inheritance of Buddhist woman. That law already protects the right of Buddhist woman. In 1954 Constitution, Action 25 the law express as follow.

If non-Buddhist husband want to divorce his Buddhist wife because of religion or abuse her physically or abuse psychologically violence (a) the husband need to abandon the material which possessed by both of them. Moreover he has to pay fine. (b) Woman has a chance to take care the children. (c) Man need to give financial support for the children.

According to 1954 constitution, the Buddhist women have a chance as parallel wife. She has a chance to get same inheritance as a parallel wife.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Human Rights Watch, *The Resistance of Monks: Buddhism and Activism in Burma* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2009), 67.

<sup>35</sup> Weekly Eleven Newspaper. 21 November, 2013.

<sup>36</sup> Cheery Thein. Freeing Religion from Oppression, 9 December, 2013.

<http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/lifestyle/what.s.on.htm/>

<sup>37</sup> U Thila Sara, monks of the Payagyi Monastery, interview by author, Mandalay, 26 December 2013.

<sup>38</sup> Mg Myat Htin, *Medetation (Sin Chin Kyin Myar)*. (Mon Ywe Press : Yangon, 2003), 26- 27.

Many Buddhist educated are not agree with that law. In the book of “*Sin Chin Kyin Myar*” which written by Mg Myat Htin, some of the women organization of colorful girls, Karen Women Development Organization, Jain Paw Women organization, University students Organization, Pan Me Ein, Tri Girl Wu Min post group, 88 student organization, Daw Shwe Zee Kwart are not recognized with that law.<sup>39</sup>

A lack of religious freedom creates socio-economic discrimination. It reduced citizens ability to come together are become agents for peaceful change. This can fuel inter-communal tensions and conflicts which can also lead to the growth of religious extremism. Where the right to religious freedom is denied, human development is also impaired.

## **Theological Reflection**

### (a) Review the traditional belief of Christianity in Myanmar

While the citizens are faced with these problems including the violation of religious freedom, the church in Myanmar keep silence. At present situation the church do not response anything while they face with religious violation. When the churches are push to close, the pastor tries as much as he can. But I never heard Myanmar Baptist Convention or Myanmar Council of Churches take any responsibility. They keep silence because of two basic theological grounds, namely, the principle of separation between church and state and the subjugation of church to the political authority.<sup>40</sup>

**The Separation of Church and State:** Since missionary came to Myanmar, the idea of the separation of church and state is already included. Additionally, the separation of Christian and non-Christian also included. They lead the worship service and liturgy. They do not interest the economic problem and financial problem of their church members. They neglected the political issue which is directly affected us. Asian theology is a living theology. M M Thomas said: Asian theology is “a response to the challenge to make faith relevant to life in the midst of the Asian social revolution”. Therefore the agenda of God’s mission should not only base on worship and rituals but it should promote the right of human being and freedom of religion. M. M. Thomas again presents that the integration of the church’s presentation of Christ with the struggles of the people for their selfhood and dignity. Burma theology should be dialectic between academic and involvement, between commitment to Christ and solidarity with the victims of injustice and suffering, between ritual celebration of the cross and the struggle for human wholeness, freedom and dignity.<sup>41</sup> Nowadays Christianity must open their eyes widely to promote the role of community development.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>40</sup> Pum Za Mang, “Separation of Church and State: A Case Study of Myanmar” in *Asian Journal of Theology* ed. Wati Longcher (volume 25), ( Published by American Theological Library Association: Chicago, 2011 ) 42

<sup>41</sup> Edmud Zabik, “Liberation Now” in *RAYS MIT Journal of Doing Theology*, (Vol. 2), ed. Samuel Ngun Ling (Yangon: MIT, 2001), 1.

**The subjugation of church to the political authority:** The root idea of “king” in the Aramaic is “melekh”, and Assyrian "counsel," and in the Syrian "to consult"; compare Latin, “consul”. If, so "king" is "counselor" and not "ruler."<sup>42</sup> Buddhism does have a set of guidelines for kings, which in the modern context includes prime ministers and presidents. They are called the ten duties of a king, or *dasavidha-rajadhamma* in Pali (or rajadhamma for short). They are: Dana (charity), Sila (morality), Pariccaga (altruism), Ajjava (honesty), Maddava (gentleness), Tapa (self control), Akkhoda (non-anger), Avihimsa (non-violence), Khanti (forbearance), Avirodhana (uprightness).<sup>43</sup> While there was political unrest, Christian leaders used bible in order to obey the government. Concerning with Rom 13:1-3, the greatest mistake is that we neglect the original meaning of Greek so that, misinterpretation came out from there. We interpret the meaning of “king” as ordinary that we occur in our society.

Today Christian need to know their rights and need to learn the social, political, economic situation in our country and we need to participate for peace and justice in our community and our country. It is not the time to keep silence and subjection under the unjust political leader. “To prophetically challenge unjust structures and policies is part of our religious vocation.”<sup>44</sup>

### **(b) Reflection on Advanced Buddhist monk**

According to Buddha teaching, the king needs to rule the country with ten duties of a king. Since the time of Myanmar king there was “min saya” which means the teacher of king. Min Saya has a right to teach the king to rule the country with peace and justice. Nowadays, there is “Thangha Naryaka” in our country, who has to counsel the government. But “Thangha Naryaka” is under the control of government.<sup>45</sup>

It is clear that there are two kind of Buddhist in Myanmar; one is who live according to the order of the government and on the other hands who identify themselves with the oppressed people. But now under the new government, the situation is a little change. The monks also get the new insight so that we can see many Buddhist Monastery Education in our country. Paung Taw Oo, Thida Gu, Asia Alin, Wai Lu Won are very famous school and many others Buddhist Monastery Education can be seen in many villages. They work for peace engagement, educational engagement, health engagement, political engagement. Although the government do not recognized them, their program are going very well.

### **(c) Dialogue**

Now is the time to start interreligious program among us. Some of the advance Buddhist monk already started dialogue program in their monastery. I really appreciated Asia Light Sayadaw, Badanta Seintita, who is working for inter-religious program in his monastery. In his

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<sup>42</sup> KING; Kingdom, The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia Online. [www.internationalstandardbible.com/K/King-kingdom.html](http://www.internationalstandardbible.com/K/King-kingdom.html).

<sup>43</sup> Buddhism by Numbers: 10 Duties of a King [buddhaspace.blogspot.com/2012/07/Buddhism-by-numbers-10-duties-of-king.html](http://buddhaspace.blogspot.com/2012/07/Buddhism-by-numbers-10-duties-of-king.html).

<sup>44</sup> Jim Walls, *Faith Works: Lessons from the Life of an Activist Preacher* (New York: Random House, 2000), 177.

<sup>45</sup> U Tayla Dipati, monk of Shwe Chin Thit Pa Ya Gyi, interview by author. Shwe Bo. 28 December, 2013.

educational engagement, he invite young Muslim trainer to teach computer at there. He always encourages them to pray to their God without absent.<sup>46</sup>

Our target is toward religious freedom which can perform peace and justice in Myanmar. So, all religious communities in Myanmar should be corporate and develop the idea of a dialogical dialogue to promote harmony and peace between religions. We need to promote mutual learning, sharing so that each religious tradition may develop a culture of religious cooperation and peace. We need to build mutual trust, mutual recognition and mutual respect among adherents of religions. We also need to develop a working relationship that can promote both “intra” and “inter” religious cooperation and thereby find a better common living across those religious traditions.<sup>47</sup>

## Conclusion

Promoting and protecting religious freedom is not a matter of self-interest. Promoting religious freedom is an important part of its values and ethos of upholding human dignity and the human rights of very individual. When the people lose freedom of religion, which strengthens their spirits and souls, the development of their country is disturbed. A scenario of hatred or pessimism against diversity will end in destruction. People in our country need to be made aware of this point.

In Myanmar religious oppression is not only target to other religious but as already mention above monks and Buddhists also persecuted for religious freedom. Therefore it should be unity among each religion. There is no world peace without peace among religions, and no peace among religions without dialogue between religions. “If there is lack of harmony between religions, it will benefit the dictators. While people are fighting over power, it ensures a doomed future for the country.

Religion can promote peace and justice, at the same time religious can disturb peace and justice. Every religions show the truth but interpretation is really important. Nowadays we need to re-read our Bible, Pitaka, and Quaram with new eyes. We must not use the religious teaching as a tool to oppress others. The true hermeneutical reading without bias is really needed. We must practice the true teaching of our own religion, so that we must be filled with spirituality in our life. If each and every one of us filled with spirituality, when we are mature in spirituality we can understand each other and we can work out together for peace and justice in our country.

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<sup>46</sup> Badanta Seintita, monk of Asia Light, interview by author. Pyin Oo Lwin. 26 December, 2013.

<sup>47</sup> Samuel Ngu Lin, *Communicating Christ in Myanmar*, (Published by Judson Research Center: MIT, 2010),

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