CHAPTER TWO

BEGINNING OF CATHOLIC CHURCH IN RELATION TO

BAPTIST CHURCH

Many people in mainland India believe in a lot of misconceptions about North East India like the whole region is Christianized and also infested with insurgency. But the truth is the whole region is not Christianized and the areas that have embraced Christianity are not as much as claimed by them. It needs to be recorded in the annals of the history of the North East the untiring efforts of and contributions made by hundreds of Christian missionaries of various denominations. Insurgency in the region is due to geographical, economic, cultural and political factors. North East is a home to the tribes like the Bodos, Koches, Chutiyas, Kacharis, Ahoms, Jaintias, Khasis, Garos, Nagas, Mizos etc. Much before the influence of Christianity was felt in the region, many parts of Manipur and Assam had already been sanskritized.

Philip (1983) wrote, “the nineteenth century witnessed an amazing growth of Christianity in Asia,…North East India with its diversities, inaccessibility and problems of communication was no exception” (p. 46). The Treaty of Yandabo, concluded between the British East India Company and the Kingdom of Burma on 24 February 1826, was undoubtedly a significant step towards Christianization of the North East India. Downs (1983) wrote, “for the first time in its history the region was now linked politically with a major Indian power and hence brought within the mainstream of Indian history” (p. 1), though there had already been cultural contact with the rest of India. Within a short span of time the entire North East previously fragmented politically was brought under the control of the British. The British presence provided a favourable
climate for the spread of Christianity. The Catholic Church in Nagaland is closely linked with the church in Shillong. In the beginning Catholic Catholic in the North East was under the diocese of Shillong. It was from Shillong, the church reached out to the state of Nagaland, offering her service to the people.

2.1 EARLIEST CHRISTIAN CONTACT WITH NORTH EAST INDIA

In south India the history of the Christian missions has a history of two thousand years while in the North East three centuries. In the North East, Syiemlieh (2004) wrote, “the Catholics were the first of the foreign Christian missions to come to North East India but amongst the last to stay on and grow” (p. 113). Sangma (1987) mentioned that the earliest visit by the Christian missionaries to North East India was in 1626 by two Jesuit missionaries, Frs. Stephen Cacella and John Cabral. Paviotti (1987) wrote on the detailed account of their journey and purpose,

On August 2, (1626) three Jesuits, two Portuguese and one Italian, Fr. Cacella, Fr. Cabral and Fr. Fontemona set out from Hooghly (Bengal) on their way to Tibet. On September 26, only Frs. Cacella and Cabral reached Hajo (near Guwahati), then the seat of the Mughal Governor. At Pandu they met the Raja of Busna. By him they were introduced to the Raja of Cooch Behar at Hajo itself, who advised them to meet his son at Cooch Behar for help in their journey. They reached Cooch Behar on October 21. Then resuming their journey, they made for Rangamati. There Fr. Cabral was taken seriously ill. On his recovery on February 21, 1627, they left for Paro (Bhutan). There they met the Raja who welcomed them. THEY OBTAINED PERMISSION TO BUILD A CHAPEL AND PREACH THE GOSPEL. But as their apostolate bore no fruit, they took to the road again. Eventually they reached Lhasa and returned to Bandel via Kathmandu and Patna (p. 2).
2.2 THE MUGHAL INVASION AND BEGINNING OF CHRISTIANITY

In the second half of the 17th century the Mughal army invaded Assam to overcome the Ahoms. In the army there was a sizeable group of Indo-Portuguese Christians, who lived at Rangamati (Goalpara) for many decades as border guards of the Mughals (Kottupallil, 1991). So here the origin of the Catholic community dates back to the end of the 17th century, and most of the Christians at that time were soldiers. This view is supported by the Chronicle of the Augustinian Friars of Bandel, near Hooghly in Bengal in 1682, which makes reference to a flourishing community of 7,000 Christians at a place called Rangamati in Goalpara district of Lower Assam. Again in 1696 an Augustinian, Frey Sicardo, makes further reference to a Christian community of Rangamati: “n the Camp of Bencomatis on the confines of Assam, in the country subject to the king of the Mughals, there are two Churches, one dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary, the other, to Our Lady of Guadelupe” (Sangma, 1987, p. 15).

A visit by Bishop F. T. Laynez of S. Tome-Mylapore to Rangamati community in January 1715 and spending 25 days was remarkable. Fr. C. A. Barbier who accompanied the Bishop Laynez reported that the latter had confirmed 1,000 persons during his visit (Sangma, 1987). Thus Rangamati, said to have been the first place in the North East India inhabited by the Christian community. Unfortunately the descendants of this community could not be traced back today. In successive years the Augustinian friars made periodic visits to minister to these Catholics who were in the service of Mughal, Cachar and Tripura rulers. Muttumana (1984) mentioned “during the Burmese war in Cachar in 1824, a garrison of Christian soldiers belonging to the former Mughal army had been maintained by the Cachar king against the Burmese” (p. 5). Again after the annexation of Assam by the British in 1838, some of those Christian soldiers and families did not leave Assam. They were occasionally looked after by priests from Calcutta (Muttumana, 1984). The records of Babier who accompanied Bishop Laynez
also mentioned that during the visit of Bishop he visited the community at Ossumpur which had the presence of Catholics and he administered the sacrament of confirmation to them in a church dedicated to St. Nicholas of Tolento (Muttumana, 1984). There was the presence of Christians in Tripura as well. In the words of Syiemlieh (2004), “Tripura which was closer to Bengal had Augustinian and Holy Cross priests visiting Catholics in the village of Mariamnagar just out of Agartala. The earliest visit to the Christians in this native state was that of Fr. Ignatius Gomes in 1683” (p. 114).

Another area that had a significant presence of Christians was Bondashill of Cachar district in Assam. It was situated on the left bank of the Barak River (Barak Valley). About the Christian presence at Bondashill Muttumana (1984) wrote, “throughout the vast Surma valley this was the only settlement of Catholics for decades and formed what we may call an oasis in the midst of a pagan population” (p. 5). However, the origin of this catholic settlement is shrouded in obscurity. According to tradition of the Catholics of Bondashill, their ancestors were Christian soldiers who, around the year 1790, immigrated from Meerut (Uttar Pradesh), under the leadership of a petty prince. Sangma (1987) wrote,

Their number was about 500 and about 600 Muslim soldiers. While the struggles were going on between the Moghuls and the British, these Catholics emigrated into the Surma valley and settled down at Bondashill. The still common family names of Pinero, Fernandez, etc. indicate their Portuguese origin. It may be also that these Catholic soldiers of Bondashill were under the service of the Moghul Emperor and were sent by him from Meerut to Bengal and Sylhet to fight against the British, but when in 1765, Bengal and Sylhet were finally transferred to the British, they found refuge in the kingdom of the Raja of Cachar, who, allotted to them this area which may be the beginning of the
Catholic Christian village of Bondashill. This Catholic community still exists today (p. 16).

There was no mention of the presence of any other Christian denominations in the North East till 1790 other than the Roman Catholics. We can thus conclude that the first contact with the North East India was made by the Catholic missionaries and the first Christian communities in North East India were also the Catholics.

It is a known fact that Christianity spread to the region comfortably when the territories were incorporated under the British Empire after the Anglo-Burmese war. Thereafter, we find a steady progress in missionary activities by different denominations in the region. However, in their enthusiasm to do missionary works, the Jesuits, Augustinians and Holy Cross priests travelling to and through Assam, Cachar and Tripura apparently were not interested in proselytizing; their only focus was China and Tibet (Syiemlieh, 2004). While travelling to these places through Assam they administered sacraments to the scattered Christian communities of the region. In the words of Syiemlieh (2004), “they were more interested in Bengal and North India where they set up missions. Consequently the real beginning of the establishment of the Christian Church in the region has to be attributed to Protestant foreign missions” (p. 2004).

2.3 PROTESTANT MISSIONS IN THE NORTH EAST

The arrival of William Carey, a protestant missionary, at Calcutta, on November 11, 1793 was an important day for the church in this part of the country. Since then this region witnessed a dramatic growth and spread of Christianity through missionary activities. With a view to train the Indians for missionary works he founded the Serampore College in 1818 (Sangma, 1987). This English Baptist mission was a pioneer in the opening of the region to Baptist Christianity.
The passing of the Charter Act of 1813, which permitted the Missionaries to preach the Gospel in India, was a blessing for the Serampore mission which took the opportunity to reach out to the North Eastern region (Sangma, 1987). From 1813 the Serampore mission started taking interest in evangelizing the Khasis at the request of W. N. Garrett, judge at Sylhet. William Carey sent Krishna Chandra Pal, the first Serampore convert who was baptized in 1800 as the first missionary to the Khasi Hills. In the course of time Cherrapunjee was selected as the site for the mission station as local leader/chief (Syiem) was very close to the British. Their next area of interest was Guwahati where they opened the mission centre and a school in 1829 at the request of David Scott, the Commissioner of Assam. James Rae, the first missionary to this mission made some breakthrough. As Kuriakose (2003) mentioned, “Charles Trevelyan, Civil servant and liberal reformer, and Francis Jenkins, the evangelical Governor-General’s Agent and Commissioner in Assam, played an active role in the establishment and, in the latter case, the continuing development of the Baptist mission in Assam” (p. 132). When the Serampore missions were amalgamated with the Baptist Missionary Society, the Serampore Mission station at Guwahati was eventually handed over to the American Baptist Mission in 1838.

From 1836 the American Baptist Mission began their work in Assam. According to Downs (1983), “ironically the first American Baptist Mission stations in North East India were not established for the purpose of evangelizing the peoples of that area but as strategic outposts for reaching the Shan tribes, of northern Burma and southern China” (p. 97). (The Ahoms too are a Shan people who migrated into Upper Assam in the early thirteenth century). With this end in mind for several years after its establishment the mission centered first at Sadiya then at Jaipur was known officially as the Shan Mission (Downs, 1983). The efforts of the American Baptists to enter northern Burma, however, proved futile as the Burmese kings had fortified their territories against intrusion.
Meanwhile the publication of a book titled, “Journal of Two Voyages Along the Coast of China in 1831 and 1832” by Charles Gutzlaff in 1834 aroused curiosity among the Americans to establish mission stations in China. The Chinese authorities on the other hand guarded the eastern Chinese coasts closely and would not allow missionaries to work in China. So the mission authorities in America thought it could be entered from the south, through Thailand. But it was possible neither from the south nor from Burma. So from Sadiya they ventured into Arunachal Pradesh to work among the Adis. Captain Francis Jenkins, the Commissioner of Assam was instrumental in setting up mission centre in Assam particularly among the two tribes of the Shan family - the Khamtis and the Singphos. By 1843 the American Baptist Mission had established mission stations in Upper, Central and Lower Assam, namely Sibsagar, Nowgong and Guwahati. When their attempts to enter Burma and China failed they turned their attention towards the North East. This is how they began to exercise their sway over Arunachal Pradesh, Naga Hills, Manipur Hills, Garo Hills, Mikir Hills and most of Brahmaputra valley.

One of the earliest groups of missionaries to work in the North East was the Welsh Calvinist Methodist Foreign Mission (Welsh Presbyterian) that began working in the Khasi-Jaintia hills in 1841 with the arrival of Thomas Jones. Within a few years they got established well in the whole of the Khasi Hills, the Jaintia Hills, Cachar, and Sylhet in the Barak valley and in Lushai Hills (Mizoram) after its annexation into British India in the early part of 1890. The first Welsh missionary to arrive in Aizawl, the present day capital of Mizoram was D. E. Jones, in September 1879. The mission work in Manipur began in the year 1894 by an Englishman by name William Pettigrew. He took up his residence in Ukhrul and began his work. The American Baptist missionaries in Assam worked out a device to make the church a local church. Kuriakose (2003) wrote, ‘the ‘Guwahati Policy’ (1895 A. D.) as it is known is based on a three-self formula. It aims at
the development of native churches with a view to their ultimate settlement upon a self-supporting, self-governing, self-extending system” (p. 266).

2.4 BRITISH POLICY AND ANNEXATION OF THE NORTH EAST

The British colonial rule did not favour the Catholic Church in India but the Protestants. Ever since the Reformation movements started in Germany the Catholic faith had suffered a setback in most of the European countries. A staunch supporter of papal causes, Henry VIII (1509-1547), the Tudor King of England, who condemned Martin Luther’s teachings, turned out to be an arch enemy of papacy when Pope Clement VII declined to accept Henry’s request for a dispensation annulling his marriage with Catherine. In this marriage he had no male issue to succeed him. As Bhattacharjee (1993) wrote, “Henry caused the Parliament to pass the Act of Supremacy which declared the king to be the Supreme Head of the Church of England” (p. 96). His successor, Edward VI (1547-1553) through a series of reforms made England a Protestant country. Various attempts made by James II (1685-1688) to restore Catholicism in England finally led to the Glorious Revolution (1688). This also resulted in the expulsion of the king and the accession of Mary and William (Mary- James II’s daughter, but a protestant married to William of Orange) as the joint sovereigns of England. Through the ‘Declaration of Rights’ enacted in 1689, the new government upheld the official status of the Protestant religion in England. Undoubtedly, the British Government helped Christian missions especially the Baptist mission to grow in India. In record there are a number of statements made by highly placed British officials. Downs (1983) wrote,

In 1806, when the East India Company officially opposed missionaries, Lord William Bentinck wrote, ‘Our first wish must be to see the followers of Mahomet and Brahma embrace Christianity’. Ten years later the British representative in Travancore-Cochin, Col. Munro, declared in a
letter to the C.M.S., ‘I regard the diffusion of genuine Christianity in India as a measure equally important to the interests of humanity and to the stability of our power.’ In 1854 Lord Palmerstone, the British Prime Minister, used the following words, ‘It is not only our duty, but it is our interest to promote the diffusion of Christianity as far as possible throughout the length and breadth of India (p. 50).

Various policies of the British like appointment of chaplains in the service of the East India Company, extension of the company’s rule in India, end of Napoleonic war, assignment of school education in India to missionaries in some areas, increased interest of English and American Protestants in mission work, etc favoured the growth of the Protestant churches in India. A common saying ‘Missionary followed the British flag.’ indicates that it was the policy of the British Government to propagate religion, strengthen empire and consolidate trade.

Before the British arrived in North East India in the early nineteenth century, the whole region was in a state of disunity and isolation. In the hill areas the basic unit of administration was the village. Puthenpurakal (1984) observed, “tribal and village feuds, head-hunting and village raids were frequent. In the plains on the other hand, there were several rival kingdoms” (p. 146). Since the region was fragmented on many accounts, both the Burmese and the British wanted to exploit the existing situations. In the course of time the British managed to oust the Burmese from Assam and both sides ended the hostility by the treaty of Yandaboo signed in February 1826. Soon Assam became a part of the British province of Bengal.

In few years time the British managed to bring most part of the North East under their control. For example between 1829-1833 the British extended their political control into the Khasi Hills. By 1858 the British extended their sway over the most valuable revenue producing territories of the North East, including the Brahmaputra and Surma
valleys (Downs, 1983). Cachar was annexed in 1832, after the murder of the raja of Cachar. The rajas of Manipur and Tripura had submitted to the British. The Jaintia Hills and a portion of the Khasi Hills were annexed before 1858. In the Naga Hills, the Angami area was occupied in 1866; the Lotha area in 1875 and the Ao region in 1889. It was during the Kuki rebellion of 1917-19 that the tract between Kohima and Manipur was brought under the British rule (Puthenpurakal, 1984). By 1914 Assam and nearly all of the hill areas of today were brought under administration (Downs, 1983).

An important restricted regulation promulgated by the British Government at that time was called the Inner Line Regulation of 1873. By this regulation entry into the hill areas was restricted. Downs (1983) wrote,

The Government could now prescribe, and from time to time alter by notification,…a line to be called the Inner Line and to prohibit any subject living outside the area from living or moving therein,…beyond this line the tribes are left to manage their own affairs with only such interference on the part of the frontier officers in their political capacity as may be considered advisable with the view to establishing personal influence for good among the chiefs and the tribes (p. 41).

This regulation was extended to many places except Mikir, Khasi, Jaintia and Garo Hills. Downs (1983) again wrote,

It was under these regulations that the entrance of missionaries into the hills areas was controlled. As a general rule the government seems to have adopted a policy of allowing only one mission to work in each hills district. This policy worked in favour of the older Protestant missions, the American Baptist and the Welsh Presbyterian, and against others like the Roman Catholics. Throughout the British period Catholic missionaries
were only permitted to work in the hill areas that now constitute Meghalaya (p. 41).

2.5 CATHOLIC CHURCH IN NORTH EAST INDIA

As a whole the British in India did not extend any tangible support to the Catholic Church, even the English employees of the government were not given leave on Catholic holy days till 1890 (Bhattacharjee, 1993). However, Downs (1983) mentioned, “by far the most important denomination to begin missionary work in the North East during the second half of the nineteenth century was the Roman Catholic Church” (p. 115). Since its establishment in 1834 the entire North East was under the jurisdiction of the Vicar Apostolic of Calcutta. The Vicariate never had sufficient personnel to spare for the pastoral ministry of its small flock scattered in and around Assam. In 1845 Mgr. Patrick Joseph Carew, the Vicar Apostolic of Calcutta (Bengal, 1841-1856) had the Vicariate divided into the Vicariates of West Bengal and East Bengal; and Assam then became part of the East Bengal Vicariate. In 1844 two missionaries, fathers Everista Huc and Joseph Gabet, French Lazarists, passed through Lower Assam on their way to Tibet (Downs, 1983). Meanwhile, the Vicariate of Tibet-Hindustan was divided and Tibet was separated from Agra and made into the Vicariate Apostolic of Lhasa in 1846. It was entrusted to the Missionaries Etrangeres de Paris - the Foreign Missions of Paris (MEP). Paviotti (1987) wrote, “as access to Tibet was not possible through China, which was hostile, the MEP Society asked the Calcutta Vicar Apostolic (Bengal) to transfer Assam to the Lhasa Vicariate as a base for the evangelization of Tibet” (p. 3), and on February 16, 1850, Assam became part of the Lhasa vicariate.

2.5.1 ASSAM AND THE FOREIGN MISSIONARIES

From 1850 to 1854, Assam was the centre of missionary activity for the foreign missionaries of Paris. The MEP, however, tried in vain to enter Tibet as the Chinese
military kept strict vigilance to prevent any foreign influence. On 27 June 1850, Mr. Francis Jenkins, the Commissioner of Assam, welcomed fathers Julien Rabin, Nicholas Michael Krick and Louis-Marie-Noel Bernard, the first three French men, destined for the missions of Tibet (Kottuppallil, 1990). From Guwahati they looked after the spiritual needs of the scattered Catholics of Assam. In 1851 Fr. Krick made his first attempt to enter Tibet, passing through the present Arunachal Pradesh inhabited by Mishmis (Downs, 1983). The Abors or Adis blocked his way while the Mishmis let him through. On January 16, 1852; Fr. Krick entered Walong, the first Tibetan village on the frontiers (Menamparampil, 1981). He, however, could not proceed ahead as he was ordered back by the Tibetan Governor at the border. Again the missionaries’ successive attempts to reach Tibet via Mongoldai, Udalguri and Bhutan also failed. In 1853 when father Rabin had fallen ill and gone back to his place, Father Bourry came to join the mission. In February 1854, another attempt was made by Fathers Krick and Bourry. They were accompanied by two Mishmis, Kroussa and Powasing. Menamparampil (1981) reported, “They reached Somme, a Tibetan village, exactly on July 25 1854, the feast of St. James the Apostle. As it was a Saturday, Fr. Krick dedicated the Mission to Our Lady and wrote to his Superior in Paris about it all” (p. 28). There at Somme they were murdered by a Mishmi chief Kaisha/Kaisa. It was said that the fathers had offended the chief, this was not, apparently, their fault. Becker (1989) wrote,

They had invited Kaisa to take them over the Tho Chu Pass and had promised him money and guns as reward. But another Chief double-crossed Kaisa and got the reward instead, at the same time ensuring that the fathers did not pay the expected friendly visit to Kaisa’s house. The angry Chief followed the fathers into Tibet and killed them as they came up the Tellu path by the mouth of the Tho Chu. He carried off their property and took their Singpho servant as a slave (p. 206).
They were the first two martyrs who shed blood for Christianity in North East India. Of course the British immediately undertook an expedition and captured the chief and put him to death. After the tragic death of the two missionaries, the Paris Mission withdrew from Assam and it was reverted back to the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of Dacca, with the intention of entering Tibet through Darjeeling or Simla. When requested the Holy Cross missionaries of Dacca had neither personnel nor resources to look after the scattered Catholics. Assam was once again placed under the care of the Vicariate of Bengal.

In 1860, however, a Holy Cross missionary Fr. Mercier, CSC from Dacca, visited Catholics at Guwahati and Dibrugarh (Kottuppallil, 1991). Since there was a shortage of personnel, the spiritual care of the people of Assam could not be taken care of until 1870. The Apostolic Visitor to the Bengal missions, Mgr. Charbonneaux, and his assessors, took note of the utter neglect of the Assam mission and recommended to Rome to entrust it to the pastoral care of the Foreign Missionaries of Milan (PIME - Pontificium Institutum pro Missionibus Esteris) (Kottuppallil, 1993). So in 1870 Assam and Bhutan were included within the Prefecture Apostolic of Krishnagar and it was entrusted to the care of the PIME, who were already working in Central Bengal. The Prefect Apostolic, Mgr. Antonio Marietti sent father Jacopo Broy of PIME mission, to pioneer the Assam missions and he reached Guwahati on 20 June, 1872. He was the first resident missionary in this area. He worked for 18 years between 1872 and 1890 (Diocese of Kohima-Imphal, 1973) alone in Assam with no companion priest to work with him. In 1883 he built a Church and dedicated to St. Joseph. Meanwhile in the latter half of the 19th century, migration of coolie workers from Bihar and Madhya Pradesh into the tea gardens of Assam had already started (Kottuppallil, 1988). Before he could anything tangible for them, about 200 of them had left for their native villages in Madhya Pradesh and Bihar. His mission was limited to the care of the catholic families
of the Brahmaputra valley. In 1886 two dioceses of Dacca and Krishnagar were established, which encompassed the whole territory of North East India (Bednarz, 1993).

2.5.2 CREATION OF A NEW PREFECTURE APOSTOLIC OF ASSAM

In the meantime, the success of the American Baptists and the Welsh Presbyterians among the hill peoples of Assam reached the ears of the Roman Catholic Bishops. At the Synod of the Catholic Bishops of North India held in 1887, the PIME congregation expressed their inability to spare either personnel or money for the evangelization of Assam. It was also decided to request Rome to separate Assam mission and create a new Prefecture Apostolic of Assam. Accordingly the Prefecture Apostolic of Assam, Bhutan and Manipur, comprising the Brahmaputra Valley, the Surma Valley (Cachar and Sylhet Districts), and the Hill Districts, with the exception of Mizoram, which still belonged to the Dhaka Vicariate was established on 13 December, 1889 by Leo XIII and handed over to the Society of the Divine Saviour, popularly known as the Salvatorians. Earlier the Society of the Divine Saviour was known as the Catholic Teaching Society. It was founded in Rome by Rev. John Baptist Jordan. In 1904 this name was changed as Society of the Divine Saviour. The new Prefecture Apostolic of Assam was to be carved out of the two dioceses of Dacca and Krishnagar. With the arrival of the Salvatorians and the creation of the Prefecture Apostolic of Assam, Bhutan and Manipur serious Catholic missionary work began (Downs, 1983). The Propaganda Fide had suggested that the centre of the Prefecture Apostolic of Assam thereafter would be in Shillong. It was also felt by the administrator of the diocese of Dacca, as also Bishop Pozzi of Krishnagar, that the hill tribals were ready to accept Christianity than the Assamese (Becker, 1980). Accordingly the centre was shifted to Shillong and the first missionaries moved from Guwahati to Shillong on 27 February, 1890 under the leadership of Fr. Otto Hopfenmueller. In the words of Curran (1993), “the arrival of the
Salvatorian missionaries in March 1890 marked the beginning of the Catholic mission in the whole of the North East India” (p. 345).

One of the problems, among many, faced by the missionaries was lack of personnel. The Protestant missions, on the other hand, had enough personnel at their disposal, and so people began to flock to them. By now the Protestant churches were well established in Khasi and Jaintia Hills. They had nearly 800 schools, many hospitals, self-supporting infrastructures with indigenous pastors, leaders and teachers. In comparison to them the Catholic Church was just a beginner there. As a result she had to face the fury of the Protestants who unleashed hate campaigns against her in Shillong. Kottuppallil (1993) wrote, “the government supported the Protestants by forbidding the establishment of Catholic schools in areas where the Protestants objected to them and this often disheartened the Catholic missionary” (p. 45). Becker (1980) quoted the words Fr. Otto Hopfenmueller who wrote on 4 August 1890 about the hate campaigns of the Protestants about the Catholics as, “they attacked the Catholics as usual in their newspaper,…they accuse us of adoring Mary, St. Peter, the saints and of worshipping holy pictures. They deny the perpetual virginity of Mary” (p. 254). Despite many allegations the Catholic Church continued with her good works. As a result of the hard work of the missionaries the first Khasis were received into the Catholic Church on 8 December 1891 in Shillong. On 9 January, 1906, Fr. Christopher Becker from Frankfurt was appointed the first Prefect Apostolic of Assam by Propaganda Fide.

2.5.3 WORLD WAR I AND CATHOLIC MISSIONARIES IN THE NORTH EAST.

The first German Salvatorian missionaries set foot in Assam in February 1890, and their committed service continued for twenty five years till the outbreak of the World War I in 1914. About the war Maliekal (2005) wrote, “towards the beginning of 1914 Europe sunk into a deep crisis,…two thirds of the Catholics of the time were directly involved in the war, 124 million on the side of the Allies and 64 million on the
side of the Central Powers (p. 111). In the beginning of 1914 itself the British Government in India had imposed vigilance and restrictions on German and Austrian citizens in India (Maliekal, 2005), including missionaries both Catholic and Protestant. The missionaries were accused of being the enemies of Britain and spies of Germany. In June 1915 the missionaries were given orders by the British Government to quit India. It was stated that the Catholic priests and ordained Protestant ministers were to be repatriated. This war, therefore, put an end to mission of the Salvatorians as they were Germans. They had to leave for Ahmednagar prison camp and then to Germany. Finally the German and Austrian missionaries both Catholics and Protestants were expatriated on 27 March 1916. The growth of the Roman Catholic Church in North East India, however, is essentially a post-war phenomenon, although Catholic missionaries were familiar with this region ever since 1627

At the departure of the German missionaries the young Catholic Church in the North East was at the point of becoming an orphan. At the request of Becker, Archbishop Meuleman, S. J., of Calcutta sent his own Secretary, Fr. Lefebvre, S. J., on 24 June, 1915, to take charge of the Assam mission. Soon four more Jesuits namely, Frs. A. Boone, J. Vial, N. Krier and A. Grignard joined the caretaker missionary group of Assam. They were a too small group to man such a big mission territory and so they were unable to maintain all mission stations managed by the Salvatorians. Of the nine resident stations managed by the Salvatorians the Jesuits could reside at only four stations. Despite the hard work and self-sacrifice of the experienced Belgian missionaries, particularly their outstanding leader Paul Lefebvre, the Catholic communities of Khasi and Jaintia Hills suffered losses as they could not reach out to many places (Kottupallil, 1991). The Jesuits were not willing to continue after 1921 as they were short of personnel in Calcutta.
The First World War adversely affected the Catholic mission work in the region. The Jesuits’ inability to continue eventually, paved the way for the change of guards to the Salesians of Don Bosco/Societas S. Francisci Salesii (SDB), (Aluckal, 2006). In 1921 after repeated requests by the Propaganda Fide the Salesians of Don Bosco agreed to come to India and take charge of the Assam mission. 11 Salesians including 6 priests and 5 brothers led by Fr. Louis Mathias reached Shillong on 13 January 1922. Fr. Louis Mathias was appointed the new Prefect Apostolic of Assam on 15 December 1922. Bishop Ferrando wrote that the Salesians took charge of the vast region which had little more than 5000 Catholics, and the Christian life at this juncture was at ebb. The disastrous period of the war with its consequent drain on the missionary strength, was the cause of this (Ferrando, 1935, Chronicle).

In 1923 the Salesian Sisters arrived in Guwahati and took over the Guwahati Civil Hospital in 1932. Towards the end of 1926 more missionaries joined the mission. Based on the 10 years’ (1922-1932) report sent to Rome of missionary activities in the Prefecture Apostolic of Assam, Bhutan and Burma, the Holy See decided to make the Prefecture of Assam into a Diocese. On July 9, 1934 Monsignor Louis Mathias was appointed Bishop of Shillong for the whole North Eastern Region (Paviotti, 1987). The Episcopal consecration of Monsignor Mathias along with that of Fr. Stephen Ferrando, the Bishop elect of Krishnagar, took place in Shillong on 10 November, 1934 (Aluckal, 2006). Upon his transfer to Madras, Monsignor Bars was elected Vicar Capitular of the diocese of Shillong on 9 June 1935. In November 1935, Bishop Stephen Ferrando of Krishnagar was transferred and was appointed Bishop of Shillong and he took possession of the diocese on 24 January 1936. With his appointment a new chapter began for the Church in the North East particularly Nagaland.
2.6 BAPTIST CHURCH IN NAGALAND AND EARLY CONTACT WITH THE NAGAS

The study on the Impact of the Catholic Church on Naga Society is done in relation to the beginning of the Baptist church in Nagaland. The arrival of William Carey, a prominent Protestant missionary in 1793 and the founding of the Serampore College in 1818 were the most important steps towards the establishment of the Protestant Mission in the North East. Later on the Treaty of Yandaboo signed in February 1826 after the first Anglo-Burmese war could be considered the gate-way to the introduction of Christianity in the North East. The English then annexed Hills after Hills and added them to their vast empire. Towards the end of the nineteenth century they had almost the entire North Eastern territories under their control. The considerable involvement of British officials in missionary work helped the mission to grow step by step. Some of the British officials had great interest in religion and so they were proponents of protestant religion in the region. One among them was Major Jenkins, Commissioner General of Assam who invited the Baptist missionaries of Bengal to come to the North East. They in turn thought that it was more convenient for the American Baptist missionaries in Burma to go and the latter readily responded to the invitation. The first American Baptist missionaries to enter Assam were Reverend Nathan Brown and his wife and Reverend Oliver T. Cutter and his wife were (Philip, 1983), from Calcutta and reached Sadiya on March 23, 1836. In July 1837 they were joined by Mr. and Mrs. Miles Bronson and Mrs. Jacob Thomas. Due to the hostility of the Kamptis in Sadiya they abandoned it and came to Jaipur on the edge of the Naga Hills to settle down in May 1839. The Baptist mission had a very strong presence in Sibsagar and Nowgong.

Through the policy of annexation, the British formed the Naga Hills District in 1866 and its headquarter was established in Kohima in 1878. In 1890 Mokokchung became the sub-division headquarters of the Naga Hills District. Even much before the
establishment of the Hill District the missionaries came to know about the Nagas of the Hills. The American Baptists stationed at Guwahati since 1836 and in Sibsagar since early 1840’s had contacted the Ao Nagas from 1850. The Nagas used to come down to Sibsagar on market days and out of curiosity they used to visit the mission centre at Sibsagar where the missionaries had a small printing press. So the missionaries kept up the contact with them and as a result the first Naga convert, Hube, a Konyak Naga, was baptized on September 12, 1847. But he died shortly after his baptism on October 10, 1847 (Philip, 1983). The first Ao Naga convert, Longjanglepzük from Merangkong village was baptized on 7 September 1851 at Sibsagar by Rev. S. W. Witting.

2.6.1 BAPTIST MISSION TO THE AO NAGAS

Naga Hills is a land of different tribes who speak innumerable dialects and with different social customs and practices. Many people like Verrier Elwin, a well known writer, had therefore, doubted the success of missionary work in the hills. In support of this view he quotes a remark made by John Butler in 1847 about the “vain endeavour to awake in them (the Nagas) a sense of the saving virtues of Christianity” (Downs, 1983, p. 81). Against all pessimism and speculation the Baptist church in Nagaland began to take roots. The credit for sowing the seeds of Christianity in Nagaland goes to three important missionaries of Sibsagar mission namely, Edward Winter Clark (Dr. Clark), his wife, Mary Mead and Godhula Rufus Brown, an Assamese convert evangelist. Dr. Clark reached Sibsagar on 30 March 1869. He was the missionary in charge of the mission and printing press. It is believed that he abandoned the Assamese mission, in favour of the Nagas of Nagaland due to poor response from the Assamese. It had been noticed that there were just about a hundred converts after thirty seven years of work in Assam. Puthenpurakal (1984) reported Clark’s total disillusionment at the poor response in the mission which he once wrote to the missionary union: “can it be believed, that Paul or other New Testament evangelists would have spent so long a time on such a field
and not tried hard to find a heathen people more favourable to Christianity than the Assamese” (p. 58).

With the objective to begin the mission work among the Nagas, Clark had asked Mr. Godhula, his Assamese assistant, at the beginning of 1871 to try his hand at learning a dialect of the Nagas who used to visit Sibsagar and the mission compound occasionally (Puthenpurakal, 1984). Godhula was an Assamese evangelist and the first to undertake Christian work among the Nagas. On being asked to go to the Ao country, he expressed his willingness. An added reason for Dr. Clark to venture into this strange land was his acquaintance with Subongmeren an Ao, who lived with Godhula for some time. He was baptized after being inspired by the exemplary Christian life of Godhula and his family in early 1871 by Dr. Clark at Sibsagar.

Godhula’s first visit to the village of Deka Haimong (Molungkimong) was in the winter of 1871 with some Ao traders and Subongmeren. On his entry into the Ao area the people took him for a government spy who had come to occupy their land. Meanwhile the people had heard that the British had forcefully occupied Angami, Zeliang, Lotha and Rengma areas of Naga Hills and moving forward to occupy the Ao areas. He, however, won over the people by his pleasing attitude and the broken Ao dialect he had learned earlier. In Clark’s writings Molungkimong is known by its Assamese name ‘Deka Haimong’ or simply, Haimong. In November 1872, Godhula and his wife led a group of Nagas to Sibsagar, of whom nine were baptized on 10 November 1872 by Dr. Clark in the Dikho river.

Despite Government restriction and denial of permission by the Home Mission Board in the United States of America (USA), to visit the Naga Hills, Dr. Clark decided to go ahead at the risk of his life. He was escorted by a group of sixty warriors sent by the Molungkimong village councilors and reached the village on 18 December, 1872. There, to his heart’s contentment he saw the chapel built by the new converts. On 23
December 1872, he baptized fifteen men. In the words of Philip (1983), “this was the first baptismal service ever held in Nagaland” (p. 53). With this a solid foundation of the American Baptist mission work was laid in Nagaland.

From May 1876, Dr. Clark took up his residence in Molungkimong. Meanwhile as the mission work was progressing he decided to move to a new place with his converts to establish a new village solely for them because of pagan opposition. They moved to an uninhabited mountain top, about three miles west of Molungkimong on October 24, 1876. The village was named as Molungyimsen (New Molung). The present Chief Minister of the state Mr. Neiphiu Rio called Molungyimsen as ‘Bethlehem of Nagaland’ and said that it could become a pilgrimage site because of its history (“Molungyimsen, Bethlehem of Nagaland,” 2011, March 20, p. 1). In 1881, Godhula established a church at Merangkong village. In 1894 Clark moved the mission centre to Impur which is presently known as Ao Baptist Arogo Mungdang (“Baptists of Nagaland,” 2008, August 24). It was from here that the Baptist movement spread among the Ao Nagas and neighbouring tribes.

2.6.2 BAPTIST MISSION TO THE ANGAMI NAGAS

After the establishment of the Baptist Church in the Ao area, the next attempt was to implant it in the Angami area. The British Government managed to occupy Kohima, the centre of the Angamis after strong resistance from them. Before and after the occupation of Kohima in 1878 the Angamis had inflicted a number of raids on the British. Dr. Clark himself requested the committee in the USA to send a missionary to the Angami area. Following the request, Mr. Charles DeWitt King (C. D. King) was sent and he and his wife Anna Sweet reached Samaguting, now Chumukedima on June 27, 1879. They established themselves there because the people at Samaguting were the “only Angamis who were then quiet, peaceful, friendly and accessible” (Philip, 1983, p.
Once, he described the Angamis as the “most independent, enterprising, warlike and treacherous of all the numerous hill tribes of southern Assam” (Philip, 1983, p. 79).

However, C. D. King and his wife had to flee to Sibsagar in November when the Angami uprising at Kohima started in the middle of October 1879, “to extirpate every European and every trace of European supremacy in the Angami Hill” (Puthenpurakal, 1984, p. 94). His next attempt to work among the Lothas in Wokha at the advice of Dr. Clark was objected to by Major Michell, the then political Officer of the Naga Hills District at Kohima who said that former would be the only white person among the Angamis. Major Michell, then advised him to take up his residence in Kohima when things got well. Back in Kohima in April 1880 he found hard to learn the Angami dialect. He, however, understood the importance of schools in relation to preaching. He had written even before he reached Kohima: “something must be done for the Nagas, and I suspect it will cost money and that educational work will constitute an important branch of the work of the missionary who tries to save souls among them” (Puthenpurakal, 1984, p. 96). With the assurance of all possible help from the government and the Inspector of Schools, he started a school with eleven Naga boys and two Assamese Christians namely Henry Goldsmith and Sarbey from Nowgong church to teach. The work was carried on with much success till 1886, when the number gradually declined. One of the reasons for the decline of students could be, there were no books in the Naga language and so the work was done in Assamese (Sangma, 1992). In the meantime he had organized a church at Kohima on 29 March 1883. This first church among the Angamis had Mr. and Mrs. King, Mr. and Mrs. Henry Goldsmith, Messers Sarbey and Robi as members and not a Naga as member. King’s labour however, bore fruit when S. Sieliezhu of Kohima, the first Angami was baptized in 1885. Dr. Rivenburg, King’s successor, continued the mission after latter’s departure. It had been observed that the growth among the Angamis was at a low pace compared to the Aos and later on among
other tribes. Even after forty years of work there were only two Angami churches one at Kohima and the other at Nerhema. The reason for this could be that the Angamis were more of independent and individualistic in character (Philip, 1983), also they were more resistant to change.

2.6.3 BAPTIST MISSION TO THE LOTHA NAGAS

The initiative to open a mission centre at Wokha came from Clark himself because in 1876 he had written that he had a plan to go and settle at Wokha (among the Lotha Nagas) (Puthenpurakal, 1984). In 1885 C. D. King had also expressed his desire to work there. Perhaps the missionaries found Wokha as a prospective place for evangelization. Finally Mr. and Mrs. W. E. Witter from Sibsagar were transferred to Wokha and they reached the place on 9 April, 1885. At Wokha they began the literary works and opened a school on 25 August 1886 with three Naga boys. Due to ill health the Witters had to leave Wokha for America in March 1888. So Wokha did not have regular missionaries till 1947, and the missionaries from Impur and Kohima attended to the needs of the Lotha church. According to some reports, though doubtful, the first baptized person was Mmohomo in 1891.

2.6.4 BAPTIST MISSION TO THE SEMA NAGAS

Christianity among the Semas was a mass movement and it is amazing to note how the Semas became Christians. Philip (1983) observed that “without the work of a missionary or the preaching of a native evangelist, people became Christians and organized themselves into churches” (p. 102). The first contacts with the Semas were through Sema boys who frequented the Impur mission school started by Perrine, and the Kohima mission school continued by Rivenburg (Puthenpurakal, 1984). It was the Dicksons, who were appointed in Kohima in the place of the Rivenburgs took interest to convert the Semas with the help of one Avilhu Sema and one Lucitzu Angami who used
to visit the Sema villages. Dickson kept up the contact with different villages. From the visits of Dickson from 1907 he came to realize that many villages were ready to accept Christianity. A positive change was noticed among the Semas that the non-Christians had stopped persecuting the Christians because “the crops of the Christians were the best” (Puthenpurakal, 1984, p. 103). Ivilho of the Ghokimi village was the first Sema convert around 1906.

Among other tribes only the Chakhesangs had an earlier contact with Christianity in the beginning of the twentieth century and the rest much later. It is believed that Mr. Sieliezhu, the first Angami convert, preached Christianity among them from 1893 to 1894. Through his efforts a church was founded at Chazouba village, with three members (Philip, 1983). One of the smallest tribes in Nagaland is the Kukis. On the 50th anniversary of the Kuki Baptist Association of Nagaland and Mikir Hills it was stated that the first Kuki conversion to Christianity took place in 1897 and the first Kuki Church was established at Sirhima on February 7, 1912. The beginning of Christianity among the Rengmas began in 1918 with the conversion of Lokin of Tseminyu. Among the Zeliangrongs the missionary work was slow as there was the influence of Rani Gaidinlu who opposed conversion. It is said that she was worshipped as a goddess for her extraordinary powers and her stiff opposition to the British occupation. Despite her opposition the first conversion to Christianity took place on December 31, 1905, when three students who were studying at the Kohima Mission Training School were baptized.

In the unadministered district of Tuensang, the British administration had prohibited all kinds of missionary activities. Even though Britain claimed sovereignty over the area, it had left the administration with the people. This was done to avoid any kind of disturbance that might lead them to annex and administer the area. Even in the 1940s the Government of Assam denied permission to the Ao Baptist Association to undertake any missionary activities in the Sangtam area. Contact with the Konyak Nagas
started in the 1840s. Hubi, the first Naga convert in 1847, may have belonged to the Konyak tribe, the largest of the tribe in Nagaland. The murder of Longjanglepzuk, the first Ao Christian probably from Merangkong village, at the hands of the Konyak warriors of Tamlu village speaks about the early contact the missionaries had with this tribe. According to Syiemlieh (1990), “Christianity came only late to the Sangtams, Konyaks, Changs, Phoms, Yimchungers and Kheamungans. These tribes got their Bible only after independence” (p. 34).

Today majority of the Naga people in the state are Christians except a few who still follow their traditional religion. The Aos were the first to embrace Christianity and by the beginning of the twentieth century a good number of them became Christians. Downs (1983) wrote, “the second largest ‘Christian’ tribe, the Semas, began to become Christian in significant numbers in the late 1920s and were followed by the Lothas in the 1930s. These three tribes represent the main concentration of Christians” (p. 133). In the early part of 1950’s when the Baptist missionaries had to leave the Naga Hills, the leadership of Baptist church passed into local hands (Puthenpurakal, 1993). As a result the churches grew in large numbers and work was extended to nearby tribes as well. So after this there was a steady progress in the conversion of people to Christianity.

2.7 CATHOLIC CHURCH IN NAGALAND

It was only after the Independence of India the Catholic Church could make her entry into Nagaland. The first Nagas embraced Christianity were Baptists due to the policy of the British not to allow other Christian sects into Nagaland. Syiemlieh (1990) wrote,

The different Christian missions had almost distinctly marked out areas of their operation. The Baptists were in Upper Assam, the Naga Hills and the Garo Hills. The Presbyterians were in the North Lushai Hills, the Khasi
and Jaintia Hills and had some activity in Cachar. The Lutherans and the Anglicans worked among the plains people in Assam, particularly the tea garden labourers. These missions had generally agreed not to encroach upon each other’s fields (p. 35).

One reason for assigning one area to a particular denomination believed to have been to avoid rivalries. In Nagaland the Government had insisted on even the Baptist missionaries to seek their permission before exploring new areas because of the hostile nature of the Nagas especially towards foreigners. For example they had warned the missionaries not to venture into the unadministered areas where people themselves had the say in administration and not the government. The Baptists were not at all pleased to have the Catholic missionaries in Nagaland. It is evident from the remarks made by Clark in 1873 when he compared the non-responsive Assamese Hindus to the “stiff, bigoted Roman Catholics of America” (Puthenpurakal, 1984, p. 88). He also did not want any part of Assam or of the Naga Hills being occupied by other Christian denominations (Puthenpurakal, 1984). He was shocked to hear the plan of Major Michell to ask the Bishop of Calcutta to “send one or two missionaries to open a school in Kohima” (Puthenpurakal, 1984, p. 89). Clark and other missionaries also decided to prevent the Church of Scotland from opening a mission station among the Lotha Nagas. That may be the reason why he was too haste to send W. E. Witter and family to Wokha to establish a mission there. Meanwhile the Catholic Church in Assam and Meghalaya had been deeply rooted along with the Baptist and the Presbyterian churches. It was through the Diocese of Shillong (now Archdiocese), the mother diocese of the North Eastern dioceses, that the Catholic Church in Nagaland made the first contact. The Church made her first contact with the Angami tribe and then the Lotha tribe. About the freedom to move into the hills, Puthenpurakal (2000) wrote,
It is true that the so-called Chin Hills Regulations was abolished in 1946, thus removing from the police sweeping powers to expel from the North East anyone they thought harmful and who was not a native of the place. Thus the law that kept the Church out of the region was finally abolished. So with the dawn of independence the Church was free in principle to enter anywhere in the North East to preach the Good News (p. 281).

2.7.1 MEANING OF THE TERMS ‘CATHOLIC’ AND ‘THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH’

Common but strange and derogatory remarks commented against the Catholics like ‘Catholics are not Christians’, or ‘they are worshippers of Mary’, or ‘Satan worshippers’ or ‘idol worshippers’ etc, by some section of the people of other denominations to confuse ordinary people are actually a blot on the very nature and spirit of Christianity. The meaning of the word ‘Catholic’ will perhaps clear some of the doubts people have of the Catholic Church. Jesus did not give any name to his followers or the church but they evolved in history. Just as the name ‘Christian’ originated in Antioch, so also the name ‘Catholic’ was used for the first time by St. Ignatius of Antioch, in 109 A. D. In his letter to the Smyrmians, he said, “Where Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church” (“Searching for the truth”, 1985, p. 5). St. Cyril of Jerusalem (315-386 A. D) said, “If you are sojourning in cities, enquire not,…merely where the Church is, but where is the Catholic Church. For this is the particular name of the Holy Church, the Mother of us all” (“Searching for the truth”, 1985, p. 5). St. Augustine (354-430 A. D) one of the great defenders of the early Church also used the term ‘Catholic Church.’ The Encyclopaedia Britannica says the term ‘Catholic’ was used since the 2nd century to distinguish the Christian Church at large from local communities or from heretical and schismatic sects. The gradual use of the word ‘Catholic’ was due to
the negative attitude of the Jewish Christians towards the non-Jewish Christians who were considered as inferior. Some of the early Jewish Christians insisted that non-Jewish Christians should follow the rules, traditions and customs of the Jews. To counteract these unhealthy feelings, the early Fathers of the Church, especially Bishop Ignatius of Antioch, stressed the universal aspect of Christ’s church and called the Church Catholic (i.e. universal or equally meant for all peoples) (Chacko, 1990). Another explanation for this is that Jesus Christ established a church of which he made Peter head (Mt. 16: 13-19) and which he intended to last for all time (Mt. 28: 20), thus presupposing successors to Peter. This apostolic Church became known as the Catholic (universal) Church (Sheedy, 1978).

As the headquarters of the Church from St. Peter onwards was in Rome, the Church started to be called later as Roman Catholic especially by others (Chacko, 1990). The word Catholic is derived from the Greek adjective, katholikos, meaning “universal” and from the adverbial phrase, kath’ holou, meaning “on the whole” (McBrien, 1994, p. 3). Hence, it means “according to or in relationship to the fullness of (means)” which Jesus gave to the Church he founded. Plathottam (2001) wrote,

We may also add that the word “Catholic” does not have anything to do really with geography or statistics. The first group of Christians about whom we read in the Acts of the Apostles (1: 14-15) too were “Catholic”, because they possessed as in a seed the fullness of the means given by Jesus to His Church. It is because of this fullness of means that the Church is “universal”, and not necessarily because it is “all over the world”! It becomes present all over the world, because it is “universal” (uni-versare = moving to the same goal marked out by Jesus) (p. 33).
2.7.2 FIRST CONTACT

The first contact the Nagas of Nagaland had with the Catholic missionaries was in the middle of nineteenth century and then later after a gap of fifty years. On September 4, 1847, Fr. Freycenon of Dhaka paid a visit to the foot of the Naga Hills after paying visit to the Christians of Bondashill. He had reported that he found Naga tribes (Zeliangrongs?), well disposed to Catholic religion (Menamparampil, 2006). The first Catholic missionary to enter Nagaland was Fr. Marcellinus Molz, a German Salvatorian from Bondashil (present Bangladesh) (Puthenpurakal, 1993), who reached Tamlu in the Phom Naga area under Longleng District in 1908. He stayed with the Aos for some time to get acquainted with this tribe and to explore the possibility of introducing Catholic mission work among them. In the words of Syiemlieh (1990), “he was the guest of the British officer of Mokokchung and was at Tamlu, a military outpost, twenty-five miles from Nazira” (p. 38). Becker (1980) quotes the words of Molz which he wrote to the Prefect Apostolic of Assam regarding the possibility of evangelization among these tribals from Tamlu on 15 May 1908,

It was very tiring to travel in these areas up and down hills and valleys. Tamlu is military outpost, twenty five miles from Nazira. Around the fort there is a Naga village with about 1000 inhabitants. I am completely fascinated by these Nagas. Not far from here there is an area still independent of the British where all the people go about almost naked. They wear a small leather apron in front about the waist. For the rest they have no clothing at all. I could write many pages about the great hopes and possibilities of evangelization among the Nagas, but what is the use? You know better than I do how things stand and what can we achieve without adequate means! The American Baptists are making great progress in their missionary work here. I think the Naga Hills are sparsely
populated. Yet there are villages ten to fifteen miles distant from each other and each one has at least 500 inhabitants! (p. 132).

Another Catholic missionary to visit the Naga Hills was also a Salvatorian, Fr. Ansgar Koenigsbauer in 1912 (Puthenpurakal, 1993), on his way to Manipur via Dimapur. It has also been reported that a fourth missionary to have had contact with Naga Hills was Leo Piasezcki in 1920 who made a number of visits to Manipur (George, 1990). Bishop Ferrando opined that the Manipur Hills, the Garo Hills and the Naga Hills would probably be the most fruitful fields in India for the growth of Christianity. He (1949) wrote,

These words are true after ten years, but we could not yet start our work in the Manipur and Naga Hills. How great is our responsibility before God. These tribes are ready for the good seed,...in spite of many difficulties the prospects of our entering in the Naga Hills are much brighter than two years ago. From many villages we receive invitation. These messages say: ‘We like the Catholic Fathers because they love the children, enter our houses, stay with us and do not destroy our tribal life.’ We are in touch with the highest authorities and we hope that this day will come soon, as it came for another Hill-Tribe, the Lushai, where after long years of expectation a beautiful spring has begun,...A good friend of ours who by order of the Central Government is always travelling amongst the hill-tribes of Assam to study their conditions told me: ‘Monsignor! Now or it will be too late.’ Dear Benefactor, help us to open the Naga Mission, to win to Our Lord one of the most picturesque primitive Tribes of the earth (p. 2).
2.7.3 WORLD WAR II AND THE CIVIL HOSPITAL

The World War II had been the turning point for the Nagas in general and the Catholic Church in particular. After the Indian independence in 1947, Naga territory remained a part of Assam and so the Nagas renewed their demand for a sovereign state, independent of India. And the voice of this demand echoed by different factions since many decades did not die down but is heard louder and louder today. On the other hand efforts were made and renewed for an amicable solution. During the War the British could count on the trust of the Nagas to fight the enemy in April 1944. They cooperated efficiently and loyally with the British and American forces to repulse the enemy who had to retreat (Ferrando, 2003), forever from this land after the 64 days of battle. The War Cemetery at Kohima is a memorial of this war where hundreds of American, British, Indian and Japanese soldiers died in that battle lay interred there. The dead included Reverend Callahan, an Irish Catholic and Chaplain of the forces. A thought provoking caption in the cemetery is read as, ‘When you go home tell them of us and say for your tomorrow we gave our today.’

Actually the Civil Hospital at Kohima was a gift from the British for the Nagas of the state for their loyalty and dedication during the War. The people helped the British as porters, guides, interpreters, spies etc, while some joined them fighting the enemy (Suosahie, 1994). A hospital was a much needed requirement for this hill state. The need for the staff in the hospital is described by Syiemlieh (1990), “the British soon left the hills without filling in the requirement and the district administration of the Naga Hills had then to look for suitable staff” (p. 41). The noble service rendered by two trained Salesian Sisters at Guwahati hospital was appreciated by the Government. At the time Akbar Hydari was the Governor of Assam and the two Princely states of Manipur and Tripura (George, 2007). Hoping the Church might respond positively to the request, Hydari appealed to Bishop Stephen Ferrando of Shillong for help. The diocese of
Shillong then comprised a very vast territory which included the whole of the North East (Puthenpurakal & Mampra, 2006). Never to miss the opportunity which was the gateway for the Church in the future Bishop agreed to the request. Upon his request the congregation of the Sisters of Christ Jesus from Spain came forward to help. Given below is the letter written by N. K. Rustomji, Advisor to the Governor of Assam, on 14 July 1948 requesting the Bishop of Shillong to depute a sister to the civil hospital at Kohima.

Letter 2.1
Letter to the Secretary to the Bishop

Upon receiving the letter Bishop through his secretary Fr. M. Bianchi wrote on 17 July 1948 assuring him of the medical service of two sisters at civil hospital (Appendix, Letter B 1).
2.7.4 ARRIVAL OF CATHOLIC MISSIONARIES AND THEIR WORKS

The Congregation of the Sisters of Christ Jesus obliged to the request of the Bishop and on 31 December 1948 Sisters Margarita Cifre and Guadalupe reached Kohima along with their chaplain Mgr. Emmanuel Bars (Mgr. Bars). The sisters expressed the need of having a chaplain for their spiritual care. Mgr. Bars was the first resident Catholic priest in Nagaland. They were accompanied by one John, a Naga boy who had studied in Shillong and who would be helping them and studying in Kohima (“Kohima-Nagaland”, 1984). This boy was S. John Longyao who worked with Fr. Marocchino and Fr. Mgr. Bars for a short time in Kohima. The Government had signed a six year contract with the Church. The sisters and their chaplain were forbidden from exercising any pastoral ministry other than medical care (Kottuppallil, 1990). Since their arrival, the Naga Hill was open to the Catholic Church. Sr. Margarita Cifre (1949, January 2) in her diary wrote about her work in the hospital in the following words,

2nd January was the first day of our work in the hospital. The first thing we did was to prepare the beds of the patients,...we gave good baths to some of the patients,...tended to the wounds,...5th January we changed our residence to the hospital campus,...Mons. Bars encouraged us and told us not to worry, that even if we do not know the language to preach to the Nagas, it is enough for them to see us and know that we are their sisters who work in the hospital,...we were just happy and gave thanks to God for bringing us to this mission.

Later Ferrando (1951) wrote about the hospital and the service of the sisters,

During the last war the Japs opened a new road through the jungle carrying their cannon and ammunition on elephants. After fierce battles the Japs were stopped at Kohima. Masters in jungle warfare, the Nagas
made no small contribution toward the victory. As a reward for their (Nagas’) services, the government gave them the most up-to-date hospital in Assam. I am happy to tell you that this hospital is run by a new order of Spanish nuns. Right Reverend Monsignor Bars is their chaplain and our pioneer missionary among the Nagas (p. 6).

After the entry of the Catholic Church into the Naga Hills Ferrando (1951) wrote in the chronicle of the diocese about the possibility of evangelization there in these words,

The American Baptists have worked here among the Nagas for 100 years. It has always been closed territory to Catholics. However, now we have Catholic nuns running the hospital at Kohima, and Msgr. E. Bars, the resident Chaplain, is making many useful contacts. As yet Catholic Missionaries cannot preach in the Naga Hills. But the Nagas themselves repeatedly petition the Government to allow us to open schools and churches.

Sr. Guadalupe, said that since there was a contract signed between the Government and the Bishop, they could not openly propagate catholic faith as it would lead to violation of the agreement. Under this circumstance she felt that doing good to someone was equal to preaching the good news. She said, “Mgr. Bars used to tell us, let us go to the town and Kohima village to preach in silence” (personal communication, December 2, 2008). Mass was celebrated in a small chapel in the hospital. At times Mgr. Bars used to celebrate it in the open-air in which people of the village used to attend out of curiosity to know what it was all about. By seeing their life and work people started enquiring about Catholic faith from them. Sr. Guadalupe also said that a few people who came into contact with Mgr. Bars expressed their desire to become Catholics. According to her they were loved by all patients in the hospital even though the only language they knew then was the language of service and love. One day Mgr. Bars took the photo of
him, John and two sisters and said jokingly, “This is the first Catholic Church in Naga Hills” (Personal communication, December 2, 2008). While being in the hospital for some time, Mgr. Bars came to know some local people who invited him often to their homes. He would distribute books on catholic religion; and many came to like the religion (Suosahie, 1994).

The sisters’ service in the hospital was also a healing remedy to break some of the barriers of hatred and prejudice the Baptists had of the Catholic Church for years. Within two to three years time the suspicious nature of the people had been narrowed down, curiosity about the Church had been aroused and a bridge of friendship had been built. Quoting the words of Thepfünilhu, Vattoth (2010) wrote, “they really changed the attitude of the Baptists, though they did not go about preaching. They took good care of the patients,…changed the attitude about the Catholics” (p. 52). A few young people like, Suosahie Philip, Sasielie Belho, Khriesalie Antony etc used to visit him in the hospital, and their interaction with him made them come closer to the church and later on Fr. Marocchino baptized them. On her second coming to Nagaland, on 9 August 2004, after 54 years, Sr. Guadalupe once again recalled her experiences in Nagaland and shared how the Church took roots in the village. “We were strictly forbidden by the authority and other Christian denominations of the area to teach the Bible or about the Catholic Church, yet by and by they found us Christians with a difference worth following,… and the seed of Catholic faith was sown” (Vattoth, 2010, p. 55). Mgr. Bars and sisters thus sowed the seeds of the catholic faith in Kohima.

Mgr. Bars and sisters strictly adhered to the orders of the administration from involving in religious affairs of the people of the state. It is evident from the chronicle of Catholic Mission Golaghat which states that they used to attend Christmas and Easter services at Golaghat Church in 1950 and 1951. Besides that in the chronicle of Catholic Mission, Golaghat (1941-1958) on 10 March 1949 Neyens wrote, “it is a pity that no
direct work can be done for the conversion of the Nagas, at present, but we hope the
difficulties will disappear and so we shall have a good field wherein there is much hope.”

2.7.5 ARRIVAL OF FR. MAROCCHINO

In 1952 Mgr. E. Bars, was succeeded by Fr. Hubert Marocchino as the chaplain of
the Sisters (Kerketta, 1998). Vattoth (2010) described Marocchino as “one person who is
responsible for the beginning of the Catholic Church in Kohima, Nagaland, is none other
than Fr. Umberto (Albert) Marocchino, (1909-1991) who alone as a one man force
struggled to get a foothold in the American Baptist Mission stronghold” (p. 38).
According to the chronicle of Catholic Mission, Golaghat (1941-1958) dated February 4,
1952 he took charge of the new assignment in January 1952. He was destined to make
history as far as the Catholic Church in Nagaland is concerned.

Fr. Marocchino too had been given strict orders by the then Deputy
Commissioner, Mr. Pawsey, not to go out to do any mission work outside the hospital or
in the villages. As he landed in a new land with totally a different type of people his
consolation was his meeting with a few friends of Mgr. Bars. It was from his residence in
the hospital he started distributing literature on ‘Catholicism’ to his new friends and
asked them to translate into Angami dialect. Slowly a small group was formed. They
participated in Sunday services in the hospital chapel (“Christ King Parish, Kohima”,
1999). Thus as a missionary to the Angamis, he began his ‘silent’ mission work.

Bishop Ferrando was optimistic about the opening of the Naga Hills to the
Catholic Mission. He wrote in the chronicle of the diocese (1951-53), “Nagas seeing the
self-sacrificing and humanitarian work of the sisters and the Salesian father began to take
interest in Catholic religion and are attracted to embrace the Catholic faith. Many Nagas
came to me asking about the true religion,…and wanted us to enter the Naga Hills.” It
had been confirmed by the Bishop that for two years the Naga people had been sending
letters to the governor to allow the Catholic missionaries to enter Nagaland and work. But the Governor said that the permission to work in the Naga Hills would not be granted. What saddened the Bishop was that the Catholic religion is known only through the false teachings of the American Baptists who are in the Naga Hills. He mentions also in the same chronicle, “many Naga students studying at Shillong are preparing themselves to become missionaries to their own villages. They are translating the catechism and small prayer books.”

2.7.6 NEW DISTRICT COMMISSIONER

The new District Commissioner/Deputy Commissioner (DC) to the Naga Hills, Mr. S. J. D. Carvalho was a devout Catholic whose presence in Kohima was indeed a solace to Fr. Marocchino and his close associates who were intending to become Catholics. He served as DC from 1953-1957. He was a Goan Catholic, helped Marocchino to stay on in Kohima, even when the sisters left at the expiry of their contract in 1955 (Kottuppallil, 1990). Suosahie (2002) has this to say, “on Sundays he used to come for mass which was celebrated outside Father’s residence, and impressed many by kneeling on the bare ground with his well pressed suit. It was an inspiration for many and perhaps for the first time people had come to know that even Catholics have such respectable officer” (p. 1). Fr. Marocchino and Sisters breathed a sigh of relief when the new DC allowed them to visit Kohima village. They started visiting Kohima village on Sundays and during free time. Meeting and interacting with the people brought them closer and gradually people began to shed their feelings of antagonism and prejudice against the Catholics.

2.7.7 FIRST BAPTISM

“14th December 1952 remains a red letter day in the history of Catholic Church in Nagaland” (“Christ King Parish, Kohima”, 1999, p. 15). On that day, the son of Mr.
Kevipralie Paulus was baptized as Kevipele John Bosco in the sisters’ chapel in Naga hospital. Even though the parents had not been Christians at the time of the baptism of their child, what prompted them is not known until today. Unlike other years there was a change in the venue of the Christmas and Easter celebration of 1953. In 1953, the solemn Christian festivals like Easter and Christmas were celebrated in Kohima village for the first time. The presence of large number of people at these two gatherings was quite encouraging. Dr. Das, the Naga Civil Hospital surgeon who was a Bengalee had all praise and appreciation for the Sisters who worked there. He got permission from the police to let Sr. Annie and Sr. Pilar distribute clothes to the poor children in Kohima village and to visit and care for the pregnant women.

2.7.8 REQUESTS BY PAST STUDENTS

Many Naga students from Nagaland and Manipur had been pursuing their higher studies at St. Anthony’s college and St. Edmund’s College, Shillong, since their establishment. By 1953 many Naga students returned from Shillong after their studies. About the conviction of those students Syiemlieh (1990) wrote, “they did much to dispel the illusions of what the Catholic Church stood for and were convinced that the Roman Catholics, as they were called till recently, were not as bad as what the people were made to believe” (p. 44). Fr. Marocchino was quite optimistic as to the result of their activity among the Nagas. He looked forward with hope to the abrogation of the law which forbids Catholic propaganda among the Naga tribes. Ferrando (1953) quotes the words of Fr. Marocchino,

Since the past 6 years there is a real movement towards the Catholic faith going on in the Naga tribes and the Tangkuls of Manipur. We might say that the movement was “self started”, that is we almost did not mean it. It was due to some few Naga students who chanced to be reading at the Shillong Catholic schools and there discovered the ‘Romans’ and of
course they found out by first hand experience that they were not those that crucified Our Lord!...The factor that we have such Catholic Schools at Shillong where Non-Christians and Non-Catholic students are attracted must therefore be given its due credit (p. 2).

2.7.9 SISTERS’ DEPARTURE

On January 22, 1955 Sisters left the Naga Hospital on the expiry of six years contract (Puthenpurakal, 2000); however, the military authorities were interested that the sisters continue. But it was the time of political turmoil in Nagaland and the Central Government was apprehensive and suspicious of the Christian missionaries as they believed the force behind the political upheaval. The fledgling Catholic Church was caught in between. And the then Bishop of Assam felt he could not take responsibility for the foreign sisters (“Kohima-Nagaland”, 1984). On the other hand it had been mentioned in the institute’s biography that the Government asked them to leave on completion of their six years contract with the hospital. When it was time to renew the Government did not want to renew it again and the sisters had to leave. The sisters were actually a leaven in the dough. During the meetings of the heads of the Hill Districts of Manipur and Nagaland, of the diocese of Dibrugarh from 17 to 18 February 1965, Fr. Bernick said that the Sisters were told by the Union Government of India that their services were not required any more (Rosario, 1965) as a result they had to leave the place. He also mentioned that after the 1956 attack, Fr. Marocchino went out of favour with the underground.

2.7.10 CONTINUATION OF THE WORKS

By the time the Sisters had left the hospital there were already a number of Catholics who came from different parts of India and were serving in the army and administration. A few of them used to attend services whenever it was celebrated either
in the hospital chapel or in Kohima village. It was very essential, therefore, to have a priest to take care of the pastoral needs of these people. It is believed that Fr. Marocchino was granted permission by the DC to stay on at his request or at DC’s own discretion after the Sisters had left the hospital. The DC helped the Church in many ways, and impressed many people who earlier did not like the new religion (Suosahie, 1994).

Thereupon Fr. Marocchino was also granted permission by the DC for free movement and this permit helped him to reach out to many adjacent Angami villages. After the Sisters’ departure, he moved into a small shed in the war cemetery, close to Mr. Samuel Mezhur’s quarters. Vattoth (2010) wrote, “on some Sundays the service was shifted from the hospital to the War Cemetery, where there is an altar, which could be very conveniently used and the custodian of the War Cemetery, Mr. Samuel Mezhur, had no objection to Fr. Marocchino conducting his service there” (p. 69). Seeing the need for a school in Kohima both started the ‘Kohima English School’, presently known as Mezhur Higher Secondary School. One day the Superintendent of Police invited Fr. Marocchino to his office and asked many questions and sought much information about the Catholic Church. One of the questions he asked was, “tell us if you feel safe for your life here in Kohima or if you encounter any sort of opposition from the Naga Hostiles.” To which he replied, “the only opposition I meet is the Baptist warriors” (“Civil hospital Kohima II”, 1950, p. 1). The police officer was pleased with his answer.

It was during the midnight of 24 December 1954 nine young people led by Mr. Kevipralie Belho, who were very closely associated with Fr. Marocchino from the beginning of his stay and often received instruction about Catholic faith from him received baptism. So officially the Catholic Church came into being in the Angami area on that day. These nine prior to their baptism had obtained permission from their parents to become Catholics despite the latter expressing their fear that they were following a wrong religion. Those who received baptism on that day were, 1. Kevipralie Paulus, 2.
Neizo Louis, 3. Deinuo Diana (Kevipralie’s wife), 4. Sasilie Samuel, 5. Kezesuohie Sylvester, 6. Vayolie Valentine, 7. Suosahie Philip, 8. Miapho Marcus, and 9. Neipieü Noemi (Vattoth, 2010). Father did not administer baptism to few boys even though they too had received instruction, as they were too young. Ferrando (1955) quoting the words of Fr. Marocchino, described the unforgetful Christmas celebration of 1954,

Also this year we had the grace and happiness of celebrating Christmas up at the Naga village of Kohima: in the heart of the Angami Tribe. As the school building was at our disposal the Sisters could transform it into a well decorated chapel. The projector show attracted quite a large crowd and so we had the best of opportunities towards the presentation of Catholic faith. At midnight mass most of the people remained in the church and mingled with our Catholics and catechumens. They (people-both Christians and non-Christians) were following all the proceedings with interest and respect. We know that they are greatly attracted by the vestments, ornaments and ceremonies used in the Catholic worship…. for us the best aspect of this ‘Naga Christmas’ was the baptisms of adults and children: the real first-fruits of this lead Tribe among the Nagas (p. 5).

On being asked the reasons for his conversion to Catholicism, P. Suosahie, said that late Kevipralie Paulus’ brother Samuel Belho who was his classmate used to attend Holy Mass at hospital regularly and he invited him also to join him. This participation gradually led him to the Catholic Church (Persoanal communication, June 14, 2011). He also said that people who became Catholics were mostly from the non-Christian religion and very few from Baptists.

In the year 1954 Fr. Marocchino had taken a few Angami Nagas to Shillong so as to have first hand information about Catholic practices and to get acquainted with the Catholics of Shillong. It was indeed an eye-opener for them and the feedback he received
from them was beyond his imagination. He also wanted to inculcate various catholic practices of piety in the new converts and so, he took the first group of Nagas to attend the Corpus Christi procession in Shillong in November 1955 (Vattoth, 2010). This annual pilgrimage to Shillong continued for some more years as it helped to instill deeper faith in the people.

Before he moved out of Nagaland he had stayed at six different places - hospital, War Cemetery, a house below Baptist Mission compound, Levi’s house in D’ Block, Neizo Louis’ house at the Veterinary hospital and Kohima Village. Since it was inconvenient for people of Kohima village to go to War Cemetery for service he conducted them from Neizo Louis’s house in T. Khel. When the number increased with the baptism of 51 people in 1955 he had to look for a suitable place to gather them for worship. Finally the T. Khel elders allowed them the ground floor of the Lower Primary (L. P) School to be used for this purpose. So he looked for a place to stay nearby and he got a house below the Baptist Mission Compound, in Kitsubozou. Meanwhile the search for a leader for full time work began. Although Mr. Kevipralie Paulus and Mr. Neizo Louis were the first and second choices to lead the community, they could not as the former was an Agricultural Inspector and the latter a businessman. Finally the lot fell on Mr. Suosahie Philip, who while working in the Government High School as a lower division clerk, was free from 2 O’ clock onwards, (Vattoth, 2010), to help Fr. Marocchino. And he continues his service to the Church to this very day.

During the course of their work the sacramental and non-sacramental rites and services of the Catholic Church attracted both Baptists and non-Christians of Kohima. The funeral rites of the Catholics accompanied by the holy mass, use of candles, flowers, incense and prayers always won the appreciation and admiration as they felt that their dead have been duly paid the honour and respect for the next life. In the year 1958 two important people of Kohima village asked for baptism at the point of their death and they
were baptized. In the funeral service some of the pagan rites were also added to. This gesture increased the appreciation of the non-Christians for the Catholic Church (“Civil hospital Kohima II”, 1950, p. 1).

2.7.11 ATTACK OF 1956

The 1950s and 1960s were considered the most miserable time for the Nagas. Imchen (2008) described the then situation as, “these decades saw the emergence of the Naga freedom fighters against the defiance of the inalienable rights of the Nagas to sovereignty. The consequence was the deployment of the Indian armed forces in the Hills, and hostilities between the Nagas and the Indian army” (p. 164). Meanwhile Fr. Marocchino decided to stay in the village. Before he moved into the rented house of Mrs. Vilanuo he shifted most of his belongings to Mr. Philip Suosahie’s house. On 8 June 1956, he had gone to Imphal to get some hosts and wine by bus escorted by a convoy. He reached his destination safe and sound but the next day; however, the very bus was attacked by the militants. Back home on Monday the 11 June, the Naga Home Guards attacked the Indian Army stationed in Kohima village. As a consequence, those who supported the Naga cause left for the jungles while others took refuge in the town and sought help from the Indian army (Suosahie, 2002). In the course of fighting the houses of those who joined the underground army and also others were looted and burned down. In this arson father’s belongings kept in Mr. Suosahie Philip’s house were also looted and burnt (“Kohima”, 1957). After fleeing from the village to the nearby forest, it is said that the Catholics were the first ones to return to the village. Fr. Marocchino eagerly waited for the situation to cool down and after few months took a flight to Guwahati and reached Golaghat. He joined a convoy that was coming toward Kohima and when he reached he was shocked to see the vast devastation of the village. As he had no place to stay Mr. Carvalho, the DC accommodated him happily as his guest in his bungalow for
few days before he moved to the house of Mr. Levi Zeliang who was a head assistant in DC’s office, in D’Block, where he stayed for four years till 1960.

Nothing of the Church was left in the war. At this time the number of Catholics and the catechumens began to increase and this period could be considered a period of conversion. The first people to become Catholics were from the T. Khel Kohima and the plan to build the Church was also in T. Khel. So father decided to build a Church for the community. It was Mr. Keviselie Sekhose, then a non-Christian, who offered a plot of land in Sozieba, the second highest viewpoint in Kohima village, when everyone else turned down father’s request. Through the collective efforts of the Catholics and with help from one Major D’Souza and one Colonel Adam the Church building was constructed and it was blessed on 20 April 1957 by Bishop Marengo. It was especially for the blessing of this first Catholic Church in the Naga Hills that the Bishop was allowed to visit Kohima again after two years. To his great surprise and joy he found that the number of neophytes had increased fourfold (“Kohima”, 1957). On the façade he had written ‘One Lord, One Faith and One Baptism’ (“Fr. Marocchino Visists Kohima again”, 1984, p. 3). Thus with the blessing of this Church the Catholic Church made her visible presence for the first time in Nagaland.

2.7.12 BOSCO PRIMARY SCHOOL

While staying at Levi’s house in D’Block, Fr. Marocchino established Don Bosco Elementary School in 1959. This move was welcomed by the Baptists as well. This school imparted basic education to about 60 students. One of the teachers Ms. Dierheninuo Helena who taught there for two years from 1959-1960 said that Fr. Marocchino himself was one of the teachers. Among the many other teachers, Ms. Lhouze-ü Lucy and Ms. Sabina Belho were sent to Montessori, at Calcutta for training (“Civil hospital Kohima II”, 1950, p. 1). The school was later shifted to the present Veterinary compound at Pezielietsie. All the teachers of this school were good
missionaries for the church as they used to tour villages with Fr. Marocchino for evangelization works.

There were also many young Catholic boys and girls in Kohima who collaborated with father closely in teaching catechism and doing other missionary works. While he was at Levi’s house many boys from Kohima and Khonoma, stayed with him to help him as well to pursue their high school studies. Among them Mr. James Vilasalie, Dr. Thepfünilhu Francis Kuotsu and Dr. Rüünguto Augustine are to name a few. Mr. James Vilasalie who stayed with him for 3 years was also a touring companion of Fr. Marocchino (Personal communication, April 24, 2012). These boys after being with him for some time received baptism.

Marocchino had sent some young Naga boys to study in Assam. They studied Assamese fluently and this ability of the students was appreciated by the authorities in Nagaland. They observed that language could bridge the people of Nagaland and Assam and could live peacefully with each other. Once the District Commissioner during one of his meetings with his subjects said, “the only person who can change the Nagas is the Catholic Priest” (“Civil hospital Kohima II”, 1950, p. 1). The Catholic community now spread over to a number of villages in and around Kohima received a big morale boost with the baptism of Jasokie, popularly known as J. B. Jasokie. On 20 September 1963, Jasokie John Bosco Zinyü, who eventually became the Chief Minister of Nagaland, joined the church together with his wife and three children (Vattoth, 2010). In 1963 the Government of India declared this area as sensitive and exclusive zone due to warfare and as a result being a foreigner Fr. Marocchino had to leave the place. In his place Fr. Felix and Fr. Bernick who were Indian citizens came in to continue the mission. So after 12 years of hard work Fr. Marocchino left this land on 3 October 1963 to Golaghat. While he was in Damra, Assam the Indian Government decided to expel foreign
missionaries from Assam and he had to leave Assam in 1969 and after a year of rest in Italy he landed in Philippines for the missions.

2.8 CATHOLIC CHURCH IN LOTHA AREA

After years of wait gradually tribal areas particularly Nagaland and Manipur began to open up to Catholic missionaries. An added advantage was the creation of a separate diocese of Dibrugarh which comprised of the entire Nagaland and Manipur and part of Assam. On 12 July 1951 the Diocese of Dibrugarh was formed by a special decree of Pope Pius XII and Fr. Marengo was elected as the first Bishop. But his installation as Bishop took place only in May 1952. On the day of his installation there were two Naga delegations to meet him. One composed of Lotha Nagas from Lakhuti the other of Tangkhul Nagas from Hundung. Nagaland and Manipur were at last opening to the Catholic Church (Marengo, 1976). The plains of Assam provided the basis of the Hill evangelization. In the words of Marengo (1976), “the vast diocese of Dibrugarh has today been trimmed down to its Adivasi flock. But our plain Christians must be happy to have served as spring board for our venture among the hill-tribes of Nagaland and Manipur” (p. 38). He poured out his heart for the hill people when he (1976) wrote,

I have said, as in truth bound, that as Bishop of Dibrugarh my great concern were the hill tribes of Nagaland and Manipur who were beckoning to us for the first time, and for lack of personnel I had to assume direct care of our Lotha neophytes until God sent His man and their man in the person of Fr. Larrea whom they called ‘our Lotha Father’ (p. 37).

When the Church began to establish contact with the Angami tribe, the Lotha tribe on the other side invited the Fathers to enter their area. The Lothas used to come down to Furfating and Golaghat to sell their produce of fruits, vegetables and
manufactured goods. The first known contacts of the fathers at Golaghat with the Lothas go back to 1946, when Fr. Nyans, the then father in charge of the mission engaged a large number of them to clear jungle in the mission compound (Pallikunnel, n.d). About the mission to the Lothas Larrea (1960) wrote,

In the course of a conversation, Fr. Nyans, told them: ‘one day your children will come to study here.’ Prophecy or not, these words were narrated to Fr. J. Larrea in 1963 by one of the workers, a Baptist who came to Golaghat with some Catholic friends, when he saw the Lotha boys happily playing after class. ‘I am really surprised’, he said, ‘to see how the words Fr. Nyans pronounced 17 years ago have become true’ (p. 2).

2.8.1 GOLAGHAT MISSION, THE GATEWAY

Golaghat Mission, the gateway to the Lotha mission, was inaugurated and blessed on the 24 of August 1941 by Bishop Stephen Ferrando of Shillong. Recalling to his mind the beginning of the Lotha mission from Golaghat, Fr. Felix Bollini (1991) who spent 23 years in Golaghat mission wrote thus: “on December 28, 1950 I had a surprise visit by 5 Lotha Nagas. They invited me to go to Lakhuti” (p. 7). The names of the five are Shanpano Humtsoe, Yantsao Lucas Yanthan, Yanpansao Humtsoe, Niemsao Humtsoe and Renzamo Humtsoe. Among them three had been expelled from the Baptist church. Kottupallil (1990) wrote, after two days of lengthy discussions, they left Golaghat with rosaries, medals and crucifixes and holy water, for their village of Lakhuti where the Baptists had expelled them from their church a year earlier.

2.8.2 BACKGROUND OF THE EXPULSION

Lakhuti is a village situated about 45 kilometers away from Wokha district head quarter. The American Baptist missionaries came into contact with this village in the
year 1920. At that time the people were non-Christians (pagans). Prior to the arrival of the Catholics there were many rumours spread against them. Mr. Marcus, said that the Baptists had spread the news “the Roman Catholics are the ones who crucified Christ. So they are not Christians” (personal communication, January 10, 2007). By the time the Catholic Church came to establish many people in the village had already become Christians. Nkomo mentions in his letter entitled ‘Establishment of catholic church in Nagaland’ that in 1949 the Lotha Baptist Church Council passed an order to the Lakhuti Baptist church that its pastor Tsumongo Yanthan’s salary should be increased by Rs. 2.50/ per month. It is said that this order was made known to other Lotha Baptist churches throughout the Lotha region. Following the order, the Lakhuti Lotha Baptist Church discussed the matter two to three times. In all the meetings they could not come to a consensus as some were in favour while others against. The reason for opposing the increment is known only to them even now (Y. Daniel, personal communication, May 1, 2012). There had been some confusion and misunderstanding cropped up into the functioning of the church before and after Christmas 1949 and as a result some deacons had resigned and there was a time the church functioned without a pastor anddeacons for six months. According to Ntheo Louis during that time he took over the overall responsibility of the church and he presided over funeral and marriage ceremonies. On 19 march 1950 Ntheo was appointed pastor of Lakhuti by Rev. Ahamo (N. Louis, personal communication, January 10, 2007). On 29 August 1950 another meeting of the Lakhuti Baptist Church Council was called to discuss the matter again in which Chenisao Humtsoe-deacon, Shanpano Humtsoe-treasurer and Yantsao Yanthan-chowkidar suggested to have the salary of the pastor increased as other churches had already increased and besides their pastor was doing well in his duty. At this deacon Nyansao, the key holder, angrily threw away the key of the church at the door of the church and walked away (N. Louis, personal communication, January 10, 2007). At this Shampano the church treasurer expressed his displeasure over the incident and said that such people
should be corrected then and there and should not behave in this manner. He then expressed his inability to continue as treasurer of the church and asked the council to take away the chest from his house and he waited for two to three weeks. The group that was against the increment meanwhile selected Nyansao as the treasurer of the church. When Shanpano came to know Nyasao had been selected he took the chest from his house and kept it at the house of the latter (H. Marcus, 1976). When this petty quarrel reached a volatile situation the church requested the Lotha Baptist Church Council to settle it amicably. Yantsao and Shanpano reported to the council the fact of the trouble in Lakhuti and warned them if they sided with the other group they would fight to the end. But the council without studying the pros and cons of the situation favoured the opposition and accused the three as culprits who betrayed the faithful in the name of the church. They were also branded as anti-church members and excommunicated them from the church. The Council published the excommunication of these three people in the Lotha news in October 1950 and circulated it all over the Naga Hills for others to know (Humstoe, 1976). Discouraged and unhappy with the unpleasant situation the three excommunicated members requested the Council and community not to do so and not to strike off their names from the church. But the Council did not listen to them.

Disheartened by the state of affairs they again went to the church to ask pardon and to attend service but told to go away as they were no more members of the church. The Gaonbooras said, ‘go to the pagan priests as you have been handed over to them. Pay your tithes to them and they will solve your problems. Either you follow any religion or you serve under the pagan priests. Even during jubilee time you will be excluded” (N. Louis & H. Marcus, personal communication, January 10, 2007). They repeatedly told them that they were Christians and didn’t like to ‘go back.’
2.8.3 CONTACT WITH THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE RESOLUTIONS

Despite the setback, the three took a firm resolution not to go back to their ancient religion. Until then no Lotha in Lakhuti had heard of the Catholic Church. But these three remembered at this juncture having heard of another ‘Christian church’ at Golaghat from a friend Rhansümo Humtsoe. He had told them he had heard of a church called ‘Catholic’ in Dibrugarh when he had worked first as a servant with an Anglican Bishop and then as a servant of Fr. L. Piasecki, a Catholic missionary from Poland, when the latter was building a new church there, which is now called the Catholic Cathedral of Dibrugarh. He also told them this Catholic Church had a mission centre at Golaghat (Larrea, 1988). Soon there began a new turn of events in the life of these three expelled members. A great desire to know of this new Christian religion began to take roots in them. With a firm determination, they discussed and resolved on 2 April 1951 that they would ‘not to go back’. In a resolution written by them they said that they had already requested the church to take them back, but they did not listen to them. It is, therefore, decided that they would bring another denomination (Appendix, Document B 1).

On 4 April 1951 the three- Yantsao, Shanpano and Chenisao signed with thumb impression, their decision to join the Catholic Church. They said that it was in deep sorrow they had to take a firm decision to join another church which no Naga has accepted so far that is the Catholic religion. They also resolved to practise whatever might happen to them (Appendix, Document B 2).

Since they were law abiding citizens they decided to inform the Lotha Baptist Church Head quarter of their firm decision to embrace new faith and to enquire if anything was wrong if they did so. On 7 April Yantsao and Shanpano left for Vankosung Mission which is the mission centre of the Lotha Baptist Church Association, (near Wokha) and asked Rev. Houston, Lotha Baptist missionary if they would be committing
a sin by joining the Catholic Church. Rev. Houston told them, “this is something you must decide on yourselves; I will tell you nothing. I cannot forbid you to join the Catholic Church, since this is the original church” (Larrea, 1988, p. 3). Then they approached Nchemo. Kinghen, Lotha Bench Court Chairman and sought his opinion about their intention to become Catholics and he said, “according to the Indian constitution one is free to practise his or her religion” (Y. Daniel & N. Louis, personal communication, May 1, 2012). The third person they approached was M. Mhondamo Kithan, Lotha Tribal President who also gave the same reply as that of Nchemo kinghen.

They returned back to Lakhuti on the next day having obtained ‘No objection Certificate’ from the Baptist Church authority. There they signed another document based on the consent of the Baptist Church authority to have another faith in the village. They reported the matter to the Lotha Bench Court, President of the Lotha Tribal President and the missionary of the Baptist Church about the acceptance of the Catholic faith and their reply was to follow their own conscience and none of them told them not to do so. Having obtained the permission of the Baptist authorities they decided to meet the priests at Golaghat.

2.8.4 MEETING WITH CATHOLIC MISSION GOLAGHAT

Yantsao, Shanpano and Chenisao left on 10 April for Golaghat on foot and reached Kurajan (Gorajan - on the border between Nagaland and Assam) where they met with the Catholics of the place. This place is near Champang where there was a considerable number of Adivasi Catholic population who were looked after by the priests from Golaghat. There they must have shared their experiences to get moral and spiritual support from them so as to embrace the new faith. On 11 April they visited Fr. Bollini in Golaghat and narrated all their experiences and hardships during past few months and latter received them kindly. They stayed there for two days - April 12 and 13 and most probably they got instructed in Catholic faith and received baptism. Father prayed over
them and presented them with holy water and crucifix. Thus officially, Chenisao Humtsoe, Yantsao Yanthan and Shanpano Humtsoe were Nagaland’s first Catholics. Fr. Marengo who had gone to Golaghat to preach a retreat to the nuns was present at baptism (Syiemlieh, 1990). After their return from Golaghat on 14 April as Catholics their main concern was to find a place to put up a church for them and their families. They were prepared to accept mounting opposition from their own people for bringing in a new faith. It is said that the people of Humtsoe Khel opposed them tooth and nail from the inception. Any way in the midst of all these expected troubles they selected a place for the construction of a church and blessed the site with holy water on 15 April and started collecting materials and on 1 May they held their first religious service there (Larrea, 1988). After the erection of the ‘house of God’ the news spread all over the Lotha area that ‘Lakhuti village has brought the Roman Catholic Church.’

After a while there was an epidemic in the village and it mainly affected the catholic families. A rumour began doing the round in the village that since they brought the catholic faith God punished them. Soon they were excluded from going to the field for jhum cultivation together. The Baptists refused to attend the funeral service of the Catholics and even unwilling to visit the sick. They were deprived of Government grant and in the school the students were told not to become Catholics lest they lose Government jobs (H. Joseph, personal communication, May 5, 2012).

2.8.5 GENERAL MEETING

The new faith was definitely a subject of concern, discussion and deliberations for various organizations including the Baptist Church. Perhaps when the three people expressed their intention to become Catholics nobody might have thought of its serious consequences for the future. And a lot of groundwork might have been done before a letter was drafted by K. Yanthan (Khodao Yanthan) to Fr. Bollini in Golaghat asking him to wait to venture into Lotha mission as it is a concern for the Baptists and Naga
administration in general. The Baptist church was eager to have the expelled members back to their fold and so they were in earnest pursuance to rectify the error to prevent more members leaving to their fold. To remedy the situation and concerned over the new Church, the Lotha Baptist Church Council, called a general meeting consisted of Wokha public and students at Wokha Church, on 16 May 1951 in which 36 delegates from 15 villages took part. The subject matter of the meeting was ‘Remedy for the Roman Catholic Members of Lakhuti Village.’ It was presided over by Rev. Ahamo, chairman and Mr. Khodao Yanthan, secretary. The following resolutions were passed in the said meeting: (i) to send a selected body with a letter to Lakhuti on behalf of this General Meeting (ii) the selected body would be consisted of two members from each of the villages present; including the members of the Church Council, Rev. Houston, Rev. Ahamo and some other older members from the churches and (iii) the selected body was authorized to settle the matter (Larrea, 1960). It was also agreed that the selected body would meet on the 26 May 1951 at Lakhuti. In the said meeting the catholic members stood firm as not to go back to the Baptist fold again. They told them that despite repeated requests and apology from their side to take them back, the latter refused. Even if they cut their heads off, they won’t go back. They were also promised various positions in the church. As they were not yielding to the pressure, the last word was said by Mr. Khodao, who said, ‘Catholic church will never die away’ (N. Louis, personal communication, January 10, 2007). Syiemlieh (1990) wrote, “nothing came of the delegation that went to Lakhuti on 26 May to try to convince the ‘dissidents’ not to become Catholics” (Syimlieh, 1990, p. 51).

2.8.6 INFORMATION TO THE PUBLIC

Meanwhile the Lotha Baptist Church published the happenings at Lakhuti Baptist Church in the October 1950 edition of the publication from Vankosung, Lotha Baptist head quarter. It was written that is in view of the misunderstanding arose in the Baptist
Church at Lakhuti, the Baptist Church Council from Vankosung had gone to Lakhuti on 29 August and stayed there till 31 August with a view to settle the matter amicably. In the name of the church, if any person wrote against the Church and spread it without the permission of it shall be excluded from the church’s membership. Accordingly three members were found guilty who went against the resolution. So the Church council resolved that henceforth if anybody was doing against the church without the consent of the pastors, council, church, would be excommunicated from the church. ‘Dear brethren, we regret the loss of the members. Some people made mistakes yet they point fingers at others. Those persons who commit mistakes and not admitting are Christians in the flesh and not in the spirit. Good Christians don’t do that (2 Cor. 10: 4)’ (Appendix, Document B 3)

2.8.7 NEW DIOCESE

The Catholic Diocese of Shilling was comprised of the entire North East India till 1951. With the ever increasing number of Catholics in the region it was found extremely difficult to administer. So the need for a division and creation of a new diocese became imperative to care for the spiritual and material welfare of the members. On 23 July 1951, the Vatican accepted Bishop Ferrando of Shillong’s suggestion to divide the diocese. “A new diocese was erected, with its headquarters at Dibrugarh and comprised the Dibrugarh and Sibsagar districts of Assam, the Lohit and Tirap districts of the then NEFA., Naga Hills and Manipur” (Syielieh, 1990, p. 52). Fr. Orestes Marengo, was appointed the first Bishop of the new diocese. In the course of his shepherding he learnt the Lotha dialect, translated the prayers into their dialect, took special care of the catechists and appointed a full time priest exclusively for them, in the person of Fr. Larrea. With his appointment as new Bishop the Catholic Church in the Lotha area entered into a new era of mission work.
2.8.8 BEGINNING OF THE MISSION

Even in the absence of a resident priest and trained catechists the church began to grow in number and vitality owing to the guidance of the pioneers and constant encouragement they received from priests whenever they visited them at Golaghat. For example, the first group of catholic families was six but 24 pagan families extended their help in the construction of the church (Larrea, 1988). Fr. Bollini of Golaghat, the first Catholic priest to visit Lakhuti, whose care the new promising community of Lakhuti came under could visit Lakhuti only after two years from March 16-19, 1953. The elders of Lakhuti said that during two days of Fr. Bollini’s stay at Lakhuti he instructed the new community in faith and visited a few pagan families in preparation for the first visit of the new Bishop of Dibrugarh. Meanwhile the new Bishop had started preparation for the upcoming visit to Lakhuti by learning the Lotha dialect. Some young men were given training at Dibrugarh during the year, and a prayer book was printed in the same year prepared by Bishop Marengo with the help of Peter Yanthan (Pallikunnel, n.d). One of the great missionaries of the region particularly of Manipur Hills was Fr. Ravalico whose great desire to visit the Lotha area, was met with success when he visited Lakhuti on 24 November 1953, which was coincided with the first visit of the Bishop. He instructed people in faith and prepared them to receive their Bishop. Marengo (1989) wrote on his visit,

I visited Kohima the first time when Mr. Carvalho, the then D. C. having granted me permit to visit the Catholic community of Lakhuti. He wanted me to meet him in Wokha where he happened to be visiting with the Kohima S. P. My plan was to leave for Wokha after one night in Kohima where I offered mass for the sisters, then nursing in the Military Hospital; but the truck on which Fr. Marocchino had booked a seat for me would not start unless I was prepared to help the owner to get two new tyres. After
hours of waiting an old Khasi friend from Malki, Shillong, who was a mechanic in one of the military posts, got me a seat in a military truck that took to the Sema area, to Pokoboto, where I had to spend the night. Next morning I said Holy Mass for a motley congregation of Catholics, Baptists and Pagan soldiers before proceeding to Wokha where I had to spend one more night before starting my long strenuous trek to Lakhuti (p. 34).

On 28 November 1953, Bishop and Fr. Ravalico baptized 240 men, women and children of Lakhuti including those came from Sunglup, and Akuk. The following day, 29 November, they administered Holy Communion and Confirmation to the newly baptized Christians. During his stay and during ceremonies no objection was raised from any quarter. It was reported that even the pagan priests were happy and they even praised Catholic Christianity and in the years to come many did become Catholics. In the words of one of the pagan priests, “sir, I am happy that you have come to Lakhuti,...I respect Christianity and am glad that my people follow you. I am the priest of all this area. I only offer sacrifices to the God of Heaven as you do” (Puthenpurakal, 2000, p. 275). Three years later he became a Catholic.

It was indeed difficult for priests from Golaghat to come and lead the community often as they were foreign nationals and many restrictions were placed on them by the Government. Even though Fr. Ravalico had Indian citizenship, he was already assigned to the Manipur Hills. So the need for the service of a catechist was felt and Mr. Nkomo Humtsoe was made the first catechist of the new community. He was somewhat a learned person and knew Assamese well (Marcus, personal communication, May 2, 2012). For two years Bishop personally looked after the Lotha mission. Being a promising area the need for a full time priest was felt. Bishop Marengo, therefore, proposed to Fr. J. Larrea who at that time was in Salesian College, Sonada (near Darjeeling) to cater to the needs of the growing Lotha community. Fr. Larrea generously
volunteered to come and help Bishop Marengo (Puthenpurakal, 2000), and joined the
diocese of Dibrugarh and moved to Golaghat, the base of Lotha mission, in September
1955. Fr. J. Larrea paid his first visit to Lotha area, together with Bishop Marengo, from
March 26 to April 2, 1954, visiting lakhuti, Sunglup, Yimpang and Longayim (Larrea,
1988).

2.9 CHURCH IN DIMAPUR

Much before the Church officially came into being among the two major tribes of
Nagaland namely, Angami and Lotha, in the early part of 1950 the Church made her
presence already at Dimapur (earlier known as Manipur Road) in three smaller
communities of Advasi, Garo and Rongmei. Priests from Golaghat and later on from
Kohima used to visit these communities and looked after their spiritual needs.

Before the first baptism had taken place in Lakhuti and Kohima, some people at
Burma camp had already been baptized by priests from Golaghat. On 31 October, 1950
Fr. Bollini celebrated the Holy Mass and baptized the first four Nagas: one Angami boy
of 16 years old, three Kabuis (Rongmeis) - a boy of 12 years, a girl of 6 years and
another girl of 2 years (Neyens, 1949, chronicle). Burma Camp is the Bethlehem of
present day Holy Cross parish. Mr. Lawrence Gudinho, a devout Catholic from Burma
who was an English teacher in Dimapur led two communities of Burma Camp and
Samaguri to the Catholic faith. Being a learned person and staying at Burma Camp he
instructed some boys in Catholic faith and two of them, namely, Lawrence Rongmei and
Paulus Rongmei were baptized in Golaghat in 1953 (Mandal, 1993).

Singrijan Community is an old Catholic community of Nagaland. A few Adivasis,
originally from Jharkhand, but settled down under Golaghat district and Upper Assam as
tea garden labourers, came to the present place under the leadership of the first catechist
Mr. Joseph Chelekchela in 1948. Another earlier Catholic community of Nagaland is the
community at Samaguri. They belong to the ‘Garo’ scheduled tribe. Majority of the Garos are inhabitants of the state of Meghalaya. But, a good number of them are also settled in the state of Assam. The chronicle of the Catholic Mission at Golaghat shows that there were Garos already in Dimapur area as early as 1946-47, who wished to become Catholics and priests used to cater to their spiritual need by visiting them often and evangelizing them. Six Garo families with some 20 members settled down in Erali Bill in 1949 (Mandal, 1993), under the leadership of Racansing Sangma received baptism.

Thus the Catholic Church in Nagaland took birth despite opposition from the Baptists and non-Christians, and lack of support from administration. It is from this small beginning among the Angamis and the Lothas that the church could reach out to other tribes of Nagaland and to different villages.