

# A Glimpse Study of Reginald A. Lorrain Theology

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## Introduction

As the Mara Evangelical Church is approaching to celebrate her centenary in the year 2007, the author feels that one of the urgent works for the Maras is to find out what is the theology of Reginald A. Lorrain. Although the missionary to the Maraland was not a theological writer like some other missionaries, however one can easily understand his theology through studying about his life story and work among the Maras. Therefore this article tries to find out a glimpse of the theology of Lorrain by basing his life experience.

## The Meaning of Theology in General

The word theology is a combination of the two Greek words such as theos and logos. The word theos means about God and logos also means the Word. It is the logos of the theos. For this reason, some evangelical theologians easily interpret the word theology as "the study about God," or "the science of God" (Karl Barth). It is a special science, which task is to apprehend, understand, and speak of "God." According to them theology must be started on God alone. Theology must respond to the Word of God. Theology should not interpret the Word of God. But on the other hand, there are some theologians especially from developing countries, who interpret the theology as "making the Bible passages relevant for it receiver's particular context." This kind of theology in a sense is a little bit complex because discerning on the real meaning of the Bible text is somehow complicated.

Theology in a sense is the study of the contents of Christian faith and making these contents of Christian faith relevant in each particular context. According to this understanding theology is not meant only to study about God (theos) but it is also meant finding out the meaning of God (theos) for each particular context and for the people. More broadly speaking, it is not only to understand what heaven is, but it is also trying to find out what does heaven mean for us. Standing on this point of view, it is clear that doing theology is not solely based on a certain theories. Since such theologies are not so much based on the theories and then the definitions for such theologies are also not possible to mention at all. In light of this perspective, one can understand the way how R. A Lorrain did theology in the midst of the people of Mara. This is also one of the reasons why we could not find out the theory of "the Lorrain Theology" in particular.

In order to find out the theology of Lorrain, I do hope that we need to discern how he understood about God, about Church, and about God's mission by studying of his book and his life story.

## Lorrain and Evangelical Theology

Like almost missionaries, in his life time Reginald A. Lorrain was also influenced by evangelical theology. In fact, the source of evangelical theology is God; therefore, the starting point for all theologies must be God. For Karl Barth evangelical theology in a sense is not a mere a confessional or denominational and exclusive, but it is the theology which treats of the God of the Gospel.[1] For him, "evangelical" signifies the "catholic" ecumenical. This theology intends to apprehend, to understand, and to speak of the God of gospel, in the midst of the variety of all other theologies. Therefore, he defines the evangelical theology as the follows: Evangelical theology claims the God of the gospel not claims for itself because it belongs to God.

Evangelical theology must endeavor directed to the God who proclaims himself in the gospel. It is relating God to man, not man to God. For him theology should not reverse this relationship. The object of evangelical theology is God in the history of his deeds. In this history he makes himself known. Evangelical theology responds to the (yes) God's self-proclamation made in his friendliness toward men. In evangelical theology, man is absolutely not, but man is that creature destined by God to be a conqueror.

Needless to say that Lorrain's faith was influenced by this evangelical theology which bases on God's initiative. He said that he was called by God, and felt that God spoke to him. It was God who called him first. He experienced with God and made confrontation with God like Isaiah (Isaiah 6: 8-13), like prophet Jeremiah (1:6-10) and even he might have dreamt like the apostle Paul from Macedonia (Acts 16:9-10). He felt that he was called by God. For this reason, his theology was based on the calling of the Spirit of God to whom he served faithfully. He said,

“Not long after this decision had been reached, on going one day from one room to another, some thing very distinctly seemed to speak to me... I knelt and offered a prayer similar to the following: “Lord God, if that was thy voice speaking to me...and then I will go.”[2]

Here he had a firmly confidence that God really called him. In other words, he believes that God calls human beings to send them to preach his good news to every nation. Of course, this is the foundation of the Bible. He responds the Word of God and relates the God of Abraham and Isaac, to the Mara People. He did not intend that the Mara Evangelical Church must be isolated from other churches. He opens and calls everybody to join in the mission work in Maraland.

### Meeting with Khazohpa,[3] the Mara God

Lorrain believed that the God who called him in England was the same God with the God Khazohpa in Mara community whom was believed to be the creator of universal[4] by the Maras before they came to know about Christian God. He believed that this (Khazohpa) must be the God Yahweh who caught Abraham and Moses in the Old Testament. He mentioned how the Maras belief in God (Khazohpa) and said in this way:

In the first place there is a most emphatic belief in God, the Giver and Preserver of life, who is known to them (the Maras) as “Khazohpa” but they do not know God as the Only True God.[5]

Here Lorrain did not doubt the Khazohpa, God for the Mara and the God of Abraham and Isaac and the God to whom he prayed for are the same God. Therefore he directly used the name of God (Khazohpa) in the Mara term. The author believes that the word Khazohpa might have descended from the “Lai”[6] original name of God (Khuazing). But among Lai people especially where the Baptist mission was done, the original name of God is not so much heard except from Rev. Van Hre (late) of the Zion Baptist Church in Hakha city.

For this reason, the author thinks that it might be right the word of David Lai Sum who says, “The name of God (Pathian) is probably borrowed from the Lushais” from India who are akin to the Lais in Chin state, in Myanmar. However, his suggestion is denied by some Myanmar theologians because those theologians argued that the name of God (Pathian) had been originated in Lai society before the coming of Christianity into the Lai people. However, the author argues that if Pathian is really the original name for the Lai people, why the Maras, a branch of Lai tribe, became Christians under different missionaries, did not use the name of God as (Pathian) like their mother tribe, the Lais? Here, the Mara people, under different missionaries, did not use the name of God as Pathian in their Bible or in their prayer. Instead they used the word Khazohpa which is derived from the Lai word (Khuazing).

By the time Lorrain came into the Maraland, the Maras believed that there were so many gods which abode in each plain and mountain. However, Lorrain avoided using the name of the god of Pathei Mountain, the god of Kahri Mountain and the god of Sawhmo Mountain. This is because Lorrain knew that these gods are space-bound gods, but contrast to this, he did not hesitate to call the God (Yahweh) as Khazohpa in the Mara term. This means he might have understood the God (Khazohpa) who was not a time-bound God, and was not only presence in the Mara community but who also had caught him before he came into the Maraland to whom he prayed for.

Abraham might have believed that the God (Yahweh) is living in the mountain. Therefore, he sacrificed to him at the mountain. However this God, Yahweh was not only presence with Abraham but he also appeared before Moses at Mt. Horeb which is called the mountain of God, and continually appeared to others and made them know that he was the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Ex. 3:1-6). Lorrain identified with the God (Yahweh) who appeared through Abraham to Moses and even to him was Khazohpa in the Mara people. Here, the author believes that instead of using the gender term for God, Lorrain might have a wish to use the Trinitarian understanding of God. Therefore, he mostly used the name of God (God properly or the Spirit of God) in his book. It was hardly to find the term for God as the Father in his original book (5 Years in the Unknown Jungles).

This means that his understanding about God is a Trinitarian God therefore, it is more suitable to call God as Khazohpa in the Mara term. In fact, for the Maras, Khazohpa was not understood as the one who is having like a human body but more than human body who can abode anywhere and wherever he pleases. The Maras believed that He is the Spirit God and the giver of life and who loves human beings and cares for them.

Therefore, Lorrain directly contextualized the original name of God (Khazohpa), the God of the Maras as to be the Yahweh who appeared to Moses and to him before he came into the Maraland in 1905.

## The Basic Foundations of Lorrain Theology

Honestly speaking, searching for the main theology of Reginald A Lorrain is so much difficult work for the people of today. Because he did not leave any theological books written by him, as he was not a trained theological student before he came into the unknown land, the land of the Maras. Even though he had no a theological book, one cannot say he was not a theologian.

As a matter of fact, he was a great practical theologian but not a writer of the theory of theology. For instance, we read about the great philosopher Socrates. He did not write a philosophical book. But it was through his pupil Plato people come to know that Socrates was a great philosopher. Likewise, our Lord Jesus never wrote a book. However, he was a great practical theologian for the people of his earthly life. In the same manner, Reginald A. Lorrain was a great practical theologian. Such people might be called as practical theologians.

Even though he was influenced by the evangelical theology but he went beyond the evangelical theology. He was rather a great contextual theologian for the Maras. His works among the Maras talk about his theology. In other words, his works for the Maras is the actualization of his theology (that is his understanding about God, about Church, and Mission, etc). Here our question is, "What theology made him to sacrifice his life for the Maras?" By reading his book *Five Years in the Unknown Jungles* we can trace out his theology from pages, 109, 127, and 264. From these pages, one can say that Lorrain's theology is "Consecration Theology." In order to have a more observation on his theology, I compare the above sentences as the following ways:

In page 109 he says, "Consecrate your money, your time and your talents, your all, that one stream of light may pierce that terrible darkness, the true light of the Son of God." In page 127 he says again, "Consecrated lives, consecrated intellect, consecrated wealth" are the instruments through the gift of those who have never missed what they have given, but through a life so consecrated that all that they have...And again in page 264, he also says, "Consecrated lives, consecrated prayers, consecrated purses (wealth) are what are needed, and if we have this, Lakher heathenism will in a few years be a thing of the past..."

By looking at these sentences, one can know that Lorrain based his theology of mission on a consecrated life. In other words, his theology is a consecration theology. However his consecration theology in a sense is three fold-theologies: consecrated life, consecrated intellect, and consecrated wealth. In fact, consecration theology is not a new theology. It is an old fashion of theology but it is a life-oriented theology for all Christians. Although this theology is not so much known in the Protestant circles, Roman Catholic Church emphasizes more on this, especially by the persons who dedicated their life for God.

In the language of the Church, consecration theology is talking about the consecrated life. A consecrated person is the one who a) professes the evangelical counsels b) follows Christ more closely under the action of the Holy Spirit and c) dedicates his or her totally life to God whom he or she loves most of all. Here, the evangelical counsels are the characteristic features of Jesus - the chaste, poor and obedient one. It is attending the school of Jesus Christ daily, to learn from him to have a heart that is meek and humble, courageous, and passionate. It also means allowing oneself to be educated by Christ, for following his footsteps as a living memorial of Jesus' way of living. In other words, consecration theology is not only trying to submit the commands of Jesus Christ, but it is also trying to go beyond submission to what must be done by every Christian.

## Conclusion

Although Lorrain was still young when he received the call of Khazohpa, but he decided to give his life for "God and His Kingdom" by basing the three-fold theology: consecrated life, consecrated intellectual and consecrated wisdom. Lorrain with a clear vision for the Maras asked the questions, "What about the future of these Lakher (Maras) tribes, what are the needs and what are our plans?" His vision is to work for God and to extend the kingdom of His Son, and to grow the seeds of Peace so that the Maraland may stand as an ensign to the Maras for liberty, justice and peace. As a consecrated life is living memorial of Jesus' way of living, Lorrain fulfills the mandate he received from God and he sacrificed his life for the mission of God in the Maraland. Now, It is our task to re-read our missionaries' theology and crawl with God the hill of our long journey mountain until we reach the top where liberty, justice and peace are actualized as our missionaries had dreamt for the Maras for many years ago.

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[1] Karl Barth, *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids Michigan: William B. Eedmans Publishing Company, 1963), pp. 5-7.[2] R. A. Lorrain, *Five Years in Unknown Jungles* (London: Lakher Pioneer Mission, 1912), p. 2.[3]

Khazohpa is the God of Maras to whom the Maras worshiped before the Christianity came into the Maraland. [4] N. E

Parry, *The Lakhers* (London: 1932).[5] Reginald A. Lorrain, p. 91.[6] Lai is one tribe in Chin State, Myanmar.[7]

&ldquo;For God and His Kingdom&rdquo; is his motto while he was working in the Maraland as a Missionary of God.[8]

Lorrain, *Five Years in Unknown Jungle*, p. 258.Related Totpics:

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