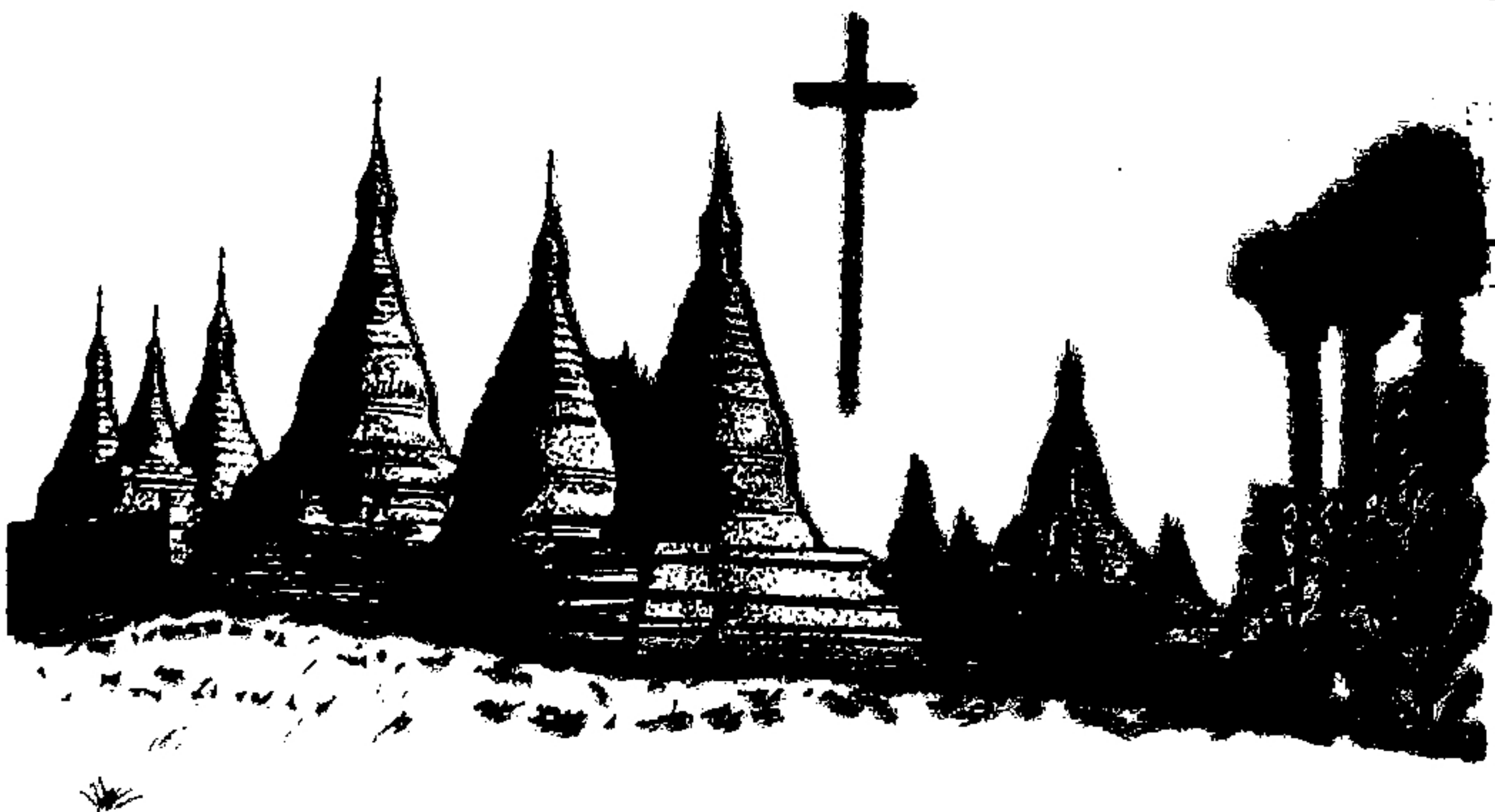


The Cross *Among* *Pagodas:*



A History of the *Assemblies of God in* **Myanmar**

CHIN KHUA KHAI



Baguio City, Philippines

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INTRODUCTION

Christianity in Myanmar has been looked at with suspicion and with pity as a church branch cut off from the rest of the world's Christians. It is also true that many feelings of Christians in Myanmar cannot be shared by people from other parts of the world who have freedom to express their rights. However, it is thrilling to observe and report that churches in Myanmar are well and alive, and are achieving steady growth of about three percent annual increase in membership. I always have had a great desire to explore the groundwork of missionaries and the growth of the church, and to understand the needs which must be addressed for its future growth.

This study is framed by seven chapters, which follow the present introduction. The first chapter describes the setting of the country. The second chapter presents the churches in Myanmar in general while the other chapters explore the mission of the Assemblies of God in particular. There is included a chapter on the roadblocks to evangelism today. Each chapter ends with a short summary. The concluding chapter presents vision for future work.

The nation is composed of many ethnic groups with diverse cultures. There are four major religions: Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, and Animism. Buddhism comprises the vast majority. The country is also

known as a "Land of Pagodas," for pagodas are seen everywhere. It has rich natural resources. Yet, it is one of the poorest countries in the world.

The Catholic mission first came to the land and the Protestant missions followed later. The Myanmar Baptist Convention is the largest Christian church, and Catholics form the second largest body today. The Pentecostal mission arrived in this century but is growing very fast. A completely indigenous leadership took the reins when all missionaries were forced out of the country in 1966. The Assemblies of God came late but is growing that it forms the third-largest church today. The origin of its story is seen among the Lisu people in northern Myanmar. Only a few Assemblies of God missionaries ever came to Myanmar. Their mission work is covered in three chapters—the first chapter is on the pioneering work, the second chapter on the growth, and the third chapter on revival and growth with the indigenous leadership today. The Church has accumulated more than twenty thousand members through a great revival among the Zomi Chin people. It is implementing evangelistic endeavors throughout the land.

There are roadblocks to evangelism. Christians need to acknowledge those barriers and find solutions to cross them. In the concluding chapter, I introduce a method and strategy for evangelism today. This chapter is concerned with reaching the unreached in the country. I hope the church will adapt the strategy and work through it.

This piece of work is incomplete. Much more information in greater detail needs to be collected, analyzed and presented. But the present study is a foundational piece of work. Some readers may see it as more methodological than historical, but it is a history both of mission methods and the mission itself. I hope that someone will be able to construct a more complete story based on this book. God's blessings to those who read it.

I THE LAND AND THE PEOPLE

Myanmar, formerly Burma, is a country in mainland Southeast Asia. Several ethnic groups with their diverse cultures make up the country known as the "Union of Myanmar." The nation has seen political structures of monarchy, colonization, parliament, socialism, and military control. The land has a significant supply of rich natural resources.

I. THE COUNTRY

Myanmar is the largest country on the Southeast Asian mainland with an area of 261,226 square miles. The country lies between latitudes 9° and 29°N, and longitudes 92° and 102°E. It covers over 1,300 miles from north to south, and about 575 miles from east to west at its widest part.¹

1.1 FEATURES

It shares long borders with the world's most populated countries: China on the north and northeast, India on the northwest, and Bangladesh on the west. It also shares borders with Laos on the east and Thailand on the southeast. It has long coastal areas on the Andaman Sea to the south, and the Bay

¹The New Encyclopedia Britannica, 1992:460-2.

of Bengal to the southwest.

The three major geographical features are: the mountains or hill areas, the plateau, and the plains. Mountains rise 12,000 feet and above in the northern part of the country. The Khakaborari peak in the Kachin State, the highest mountain in the country, rises 19,578 feet above sea level. The mountains in the west, going from north to south, range from 8,000 feet to 10,000 feet. These mountains rise to over 6,000 feet in Rakhine (Arakan) State and slope down to the Bengal Sea.

The plateau, with an average elevation of 3,000 feet, covers most of the Shan state in the east. Deep valleys divide the high land in the southeast, mainly in the Tanintharyi (Tenasserim) division. The plains lie between the western mountains and the plateau on the east, and spread to the delta region. The central plain is divided longitudinally by a lower range of hills known as Pegu Yomas. Oral history mentions that central Myanmar became a dry zone when the ancient kings cut down all the trees for building pagodas.

Four great rivers and other smaller ones pass through the land. The great river Ayeyarwady emerges from the northern mountains and runs across the whole plains area. The Chindwin river also emerges from the northern mountains and combines with the Ayeyarwady at the center of the country. The river then forms a great delta region as it enters the Andaman Sea. The long river Salween passes through the Shan plateau and empties into the Anda-

man Sea. The Sittaung River, which runs parallel with the Ayeyarwady, begins in the middle of the country and runs to the Andaman Sea. All the rivers are used for water transportation, fishing, fertilizing farms, and floating teakwood.

1.2 STATES AND DIVISIONS

Administratively, there are seven states and seven divisions. The seven states represent the major tribes, and the seven divisions of the ethnic Bama (Myanmar proper). The states and divisions are subdivided into 314 townships in which a total of 13,754 villages are located.²

According to the 1983 census, the total population of Myanmar was 34,125,000. The rural population was 25,659,000, that is 60 percent of the whole population; and the urban population was 8,466,000, that is 30 percent of the total. There are 16,939,000 males and 17,186,000 females. The estimate for the total population by the year 1995 is 44,744,000, and by 2000 is 49,008,000.³

Yangon, formerly Rangoon, is the capital city of Myanmar. The name itself has a root meaning in history, going back to the seventeenth century. King Alongpaya (1752-1760) subdued all his enemies, the Mons, and named the place Yangon, meaning "no more enemies." It is now a modern city and the center

²Robert H. Taylor, *The State in Burma* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987), 305.

³*Statistical Year Book 1995* (The Government of the Union of Myanmar, Yangon, Myanmar: Sein Tin, 1995), 19-26.

of trade, commerce, communication, education, and administration. Situated twenty-one miles from the bay, it has a very mild climate.

The five major cities and their urban populations are as follows: Yangon (2,500,000), Mandalay (600,000), Moulmein (250,000), Pegu (150,000), and Pathein (150,000).⁴ Table 1 lists the seven states and seven divisions, their population (in thousands), and their capital city.

	States and Division	Population Census Estimate			Cities
		1983	1995	2000	
1.	Shan State	3090	4486	4851	Taungyi
2.	Kayin (Karen) State	633	1349	1489	Phaan
3.	Rakhaing State	2046	2524	2744	Sittwe
4.	Mon State	1680	2233	2502	Mawlamyang
5.	Chin State	369	444	480	Haka
6.	Kachin State	819	1157	1272	Myitkyina
7.	Kayah State	160	234	266	Loikaw
8.	Mandalay Div.	4578	5944	6574	Mandalay
9.	Magway Div.	3243	4145	4548	Magway
10.	Bago (Pegu) Div.	3800	4687	5099	Bago
11.	Yangon Div.	3966	5126	5560	Yangon
12.	Ayeyarwady Div.	4994	6216	6799	Pathein
13.	Tanintharyi Div.	914	1214	1356	Myeik
14.	Sagaing Div.	3825	4985	5488	Sagaing

Table 1: States and divisions, their population (in thousands) and cities

⁴Frank Kaleb Jansen, *Passport to the World: Myanmar* (Pasadena: World Population Student Center, n.d.), 17.

1.3 NATIONALITIES

Linguists broadly classify the people by three major stocks: the Mon-Khmer, the Tibeto-Burman, and the Tai-Chinese. The 1983 census figures give a total of 135 ethnic groups in the country.⁵ Those ethnic groups are composed of the following racial groups: Bama (69%), Shan (8.5%), Kayin (6.2%), Rakhine (4.5%), Mons (2.4%), Chins (2.2%), Kachins (1.4%), Kayah (0.4%), Other indigenous (0.1%), and foreign race (including mixed) (5.3%).⁶ According to *Ethnologue* 1996, prepared by the Summer Institute of Linguistics, Inc., a total of 111 languages are spoken in the country today.⁷

1.4 RESOURCES

The country was once known as a “happy land” because of its rich resources. Agriculture, forestry, mining, and textile productions are the main sources of income for the country. The agricultural resources such as rice, beans, pulse, sugar cane, wheat, corn, maize, oil seeds, sesame, millet, and jute are grown mostly in the plains and in the delta region. Rubber trees are planted in the Tanintharyi (Tenasserim) coastal areas. Apples, tea plants, and

⁵The people groups are likely dialectic ethnic groups. Some of the records overlap. If we dismiss these overlaps, there may be about 120 ethnic groups. Alan Sterling puts 118 people groups.

⁶*Statistical Year Book* 1995, 25.

⁷Barbara Grimes, *Ethnologue*. Asia, Myanmar: Online. WWW@sil.org 1996.

coffee trees are planted in hill areas. Livestock is raised all over the country.

Natural resources such as timber, crude oil, tin, tungsten, iron, copper, lead, zinc, natural gas, marble, gems, and coal productions are spread over the country. Deposits of silver, iron, lead, zinc, and ruby can be found in the northern Shan plateau. The Mawchi mine in Kayah State, the Namtu-Bawdwin mine in Shan State, and the Kalewa Thitchauk coal mine are well known. Jade and other gems are found in the northern mountain areas. Rubies from Mogok are very well known. Tin and tungsten are found in the Thanpyuzayat and Tavoy areas in Tenasserim. Petroleum is produced in the western dry zone, and the Rakhine coast.

The major exports are rice, teakwood, metal, ores, rubber, and oil seeds. The major imports are fuel, transport equipment, spare parts, machinery, and building materials. After operating under the socialist economic system for two and a half decades, the government recently has ventured into the open market and joined projects with foreign companies. The economy today is mixed with 75 percent private activity, mainly in agriculture, light industry, and transport, and about 25 percent state-controlled activity, mainly in energy, heavy industry, and foreign trade.⁸

⁸America Online: Myanmar, May 20, 1997.

1.5 CLIMATE

The country is a tropical land with a monsoon season. It has three seasons: summer, rainy, and winter. Summer begins in March and ends in May; the rainy season is from June to October; and winter is from November to February. The climate is hot and moist in the plain and coastal areas and temperate in the mountain areas. Average temperature ranges from about 90°F in April, to 70°F in December. The annual rainfall varies from 200 inches in coastal areas to 35 inches in dry zones.

2. A BRIEF HISTORY

Some historians trace the origin of Myanmar to Tagaung. Some claim Shwebo is its origin. Others even claim the history of Myanmar begins at Kyaukse. Whatever the assumption, they only trace back to the origin of the ethnic Bama, and do not include all of the present day ethnic linguistic groups of people. The nation as a united country today can only trace back its political origin to the independence from British colonial rule.

2.1 THE EARLIEST HISTORY

The oldest city mentioned in the Myanmar Chronicles is Tagaung, built by the Indian prince Abhi Raja. Raja came from north India with his army to the center of Ayeyarwady and settled there. His reign began around 825 BC. He was said to have

thirty-one descendants. Later they were mingled in the mass of Mongoloid tribes who were known as Kanyan, Pyu, and Thet. The earliest inscriptions are from AD 500-700, written in the local language of Pyu at Pyi (Prome). The Pyu, defeated by Mon and Kayin in the eighth century, fled northward to Shwebo. The Tai, or Shan, first migrated from central Asia toward the south and settled down along the rivers Mekong, Menam, Ayeyarwady and Bamaputra. The Talaing, or Mon, were the remnants of the earliest invasion of Indo-China into the southeast corner of Asia. The Bama migrated down the river valley from the east of Tibet and entered the Ayeyarwady plain after the overthrow of Pyu in AD 835. They settled down at Kyautse among the Mons, and there they began to write using Mon scripts. The Chins (Zomis) and Kachins also moved down from northeast Tibet and occupied the western and northern sides respectively.

2.2 MONARCHY

King Anawratha (AD 1044-1077) united the small kingdoms into one, and founded the first dynasty known as the Pagan kingdom. He conquered the Mons kingdom of Thaton and also subdued the northern Rakhaing (Arakan) kingdom. He introduced Buddhism to the Pagan kingdom and promoted civilization.

Kyanyittha, the successor of Anawratha, maintained the kingdom and made peace with the Mons. He welcomed many monks from India and

Sri Lanka to Pa Gan. King Alongsithu succeeded him and built a large number of pagodas in Pagan city, and various parts of his dominion. Tapinyu pagoda in Pagan is the most splendid and greatest one.

The Tartars, the armies of Kublai Khan, destroyed Pagan city in 1287. The kingdom then was split into small states under Shan princes. From the year 1287 to 1364, the kingdom was shifted to Pinya and then to Sagaing and was known as the Sagaing-Pinya dynasty. Again in 1364, King Thadominbya shifted the capital to Ava. The latter part of Shan dominion was known as the Ava dynasty.

King Tapinswehti (1531-1550) and his successor Bayinnaung (1551-1581) reunited the country for a short period. Bayinnaung also gained victory over King Ayuthia of Thai and the Manipur king in northwest India. During this period, the Portuguese founded their colony at Muhtama, in the southeast coastal area of the country.

King Alongpaya (1752-1760) of Shwebo, the third founder of the country, united the small kingdoms by 1756. This period was known as the Kong-bong-Shwebo dynasty. His successors were Shinbyusin (1760-1781), Bodawpaya (1782-1819), Bagyi-dawpaya (1819-1837), Thayawadi Min (1837-1846), Pagan Min (1846-1853), Mindon (1853-1878) and Tipaw (1878-1885). The country was occupied by the British during Tipaw's reign.

2.3 COLONIALISM VS NATIONALISM

As early as 1612, the British East India Company had trading posts in Tanyan (Syriam), Pyi (Prome) and Ava. But they relinquished their holdings before the close of the century. The first Anglo-Burmese war occurred in 1824 while King Bagyidawpaya was king at Ava. It resulted in the secession of Asam of India, the two long coastal strips of Rakaing (Arakan) and Taninthayi (Tennaserim) which went to the colonists.

The second Anglo-Burmese war was in 1852 while Mindon was king at Ava. This led to the annexation of Yangon, Pegu and Pyi by the British. The third war occurred in 1885 while Tipaw was king at Ava. The British troops captured Mandalay and the rest of upper Myanmar including Shan, Kachin, and Chin. They imprisoned king Tipaw and made Myanmar a province of India under British rule in the following year. Before the coming of the British no Burmese monarchy had managed effectively to subjugate all frontier peoples.⁹

Strong nationalism arose very shortly. Opposition to the British developed in many parts of the country. The university Boycott in 1920 was the first political movement against the colonists. In 1908, the Young Men's Buddhist Association (YMBA) was founded and developed into a political body. Other

⁹American University, *Burma: A Country Study* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office 1982), 2.

political bodies such as the General Council of Buddhist Association led by U Chit Laing, the Moderate People's Party led by U Ba Pe, and the Progressive Party, were formed. Under the leadership of Saya San, the peasants' rebellion broke out in 1930-1933. Saya San was crushed and hung. In 1936, the school boys went on strike against colonial rule, and in March of that year, the university students joined them. Also in 1936, Dr. Ba Maw, who was to become the chief administrator of the Burmese Executive Government under the Japanese during World War II, founded the Poor Men's (*Senyetha*) Party. Two years later, he formed the Myochit (Patriotic) Party. Meanwhile, nationalism and the independent movement were increasing.

In 1937, Myanmar was separated from India and given a large measure of self-government, with a cabinet of ministers responsible to the legislature. In 1941, Japanese forces invaded Myanmar. On March 8, 1942, Yangon fell to Japanese soldiers. But May 3, 1945, Yangon was liberated. On October 16, 1945, the British colonial government resumed its civil administration. On January 24, 1947, an agreement between the British government and the Burmese Executive Council, also known as the Aungsan-Atlee Agreement, was drawn to determine the methods by which the people of Myanmar might achieve their autonomy either within or without the commonwealth as soon as possible. Simultaneously, on February 12, 1947, the national leaders signed the Pinlong Agreement at Pinlong in the southern Shan State. This document agreed to the independence and unity

of Myanmar and the progress and welfare of the whole country. The anniversary of this day is called "Union Day." On June 10, 1947, the Constituent Assembly headed by General Aung San met in Yangon, and drafted a constitution which included the agreement of all the hill people to be approved on September 24, 1947. However, while holding a session on July 19, 1947, General Aung San and six members of the Executive Council were assassinated by a group of political dissidents. On October 17, 1947, a treaty providing for the independence of Myanmar as a country not within the British Commonwealth was signed in London. It was enacted by the British Parliament on December 17, 1947. On January 4, 1948, Myanmar was declared an independent country.

2.4 THE INDEPENDENCE OF MYANMAR

In the same year of Independence, Myanmar became the fifty-eighth state to join the United Nations. Prime Minister U Nu tried to establish a parliamentary-democracy. But since the country had suffered more than any other country in Southeast Asia during the Second World War, such establishment demanded a great commitment. Rebellion and violence arose from its citizens. As a result, the function of tax-collecting, policing, and dispensing justice collapsed. Also, there was strong opposition to U Nu by non-Buddhist religious groups when he tried to make Buddhism a national religion.

In 1962, the Revolutionary Council headed by General Ne Win took over the government to hold the country together when Shan tribesmen threatened to secede from the country unless they were granted a larger independence. The government was much more concerned with improving social conditions than with religious revival. The government began introducing to the nation the doctrine of the "Burmese Way to Socialism." Its policy of "Neutrality" meant doing things in its own way, without help or interference. Banks, businesses, schools, hospitals, institutions, and all private enterprises were nationalized with a view to strengthening the economy while also spreading goods and services more widely among the peasants. In 1966, all foreign missionaries were dismissed and banned from the country, and such remains the situation today. The military rule ended in 1974.

Under the 1974 constitution, Myanmar became a one-party socialist republic with Ne Win as the chairman. The governing body was known as the "Party Central Committee," which was made up of 665 members. The executive committee members were selected out of the 665. The chairman held the highest authority over state affairs. The State Council included thirty members who were selected out of the Party Central Committee members. The Party members established a new policy of state affairs. During this period, freedom of worship was officially granted. The government itself was more secular and afraid of the religious leanings of the people. Free hospital treatment and free school

tuition were also granted to the nation. Human rights and social justice were ensured by the so-called Party policy.

Ne Win stepped down in 1981 but retained his role as chairman of the Burma Socialist Program Party (BSPP). In July 1988, he resigned as chairman of the BSPP. Sein Lwin, a former military officer, became president but resigned two weeks later. Maung Maung became president in August, as the first civilian leader in twenty-six years, but failed to end the street violence. On September 18, General Saw Maung, a close associate of Ne Win, led a coup *d'etat* against the civilian government. Street violence and military actions resulted in the deaths of thousands. On September 10, article 11 of the constitution, on the one party state, was dropped, and on September 26, the name of BSPP was changed to the National Unity Party. In an attempt to quiet protests by ethnic minorities, the country's name and the names of many cities were changed in 1989.

On May 27, 1990, while General Saw Maung was chief, the country celebrated its first free and general election. This pro-democracy movement was also a result of the social-economic unrest of the people throughout those years. The National League for Democracy (NLD) headed by Aung San Suh Kyi,¹⁰ daughter of General Aung San, the architect of independence, and her colleagues won the landslide election.

¹⁰Aung San Suh Kyi is the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize winner.

However, the government did not hand over the authority to Aung San Suh Kyi. Instead, a military coup was instigated and the military took charge over the government. This military governing body is called the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) and is headed by General Than Shwe as chief and Major General Saw Maung as general secretary. Aung San Suh Kyi has been kept under house arrest since that time. The government is slowly introducing a free market system into the economy by allowing foreign investment. It also is building many hotels in many cities and has designated the year 1996 "Tourist Myanmar Year." Road systems and old buildings in major cities were repaired and reallocated. Yet, the educational and health systems are declining, and inflation is rocketing upward. The social-economic and political unrest of the people has not been solved but is greater than ever before.

3. BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

OTHER THAN CHRISTIANITY

Out of a population of 44.74 millions, 89.4 percent are Buddhists who mainly come from ethnic Bama, Shan, Mon and Rakhaing; 3.9 percent are Muslims mainly Bangalese and Rakhaing; 0.5 percent Indian Hindus; 1.9 percent Animists, 0.1 percent

others; and 4.9 percent Christian, mainly from the ethnic tribal groups.¹¹

3.1 BUDDHISM

Theravada Buddhism, or the Way of the Elders, also called Hinayana (or Lesser Vehicles), came to Myanmar with Pali and Sanskrit literature. It came from India through Sri Lanka, first to the Mons of Thaton, and then to the Pagan kingdom. King Anawratha warmly accepted the monk Shin Araham to his palace and helped spread Buddhism throughout his dominion. It was firmly established in the king's dominion by the eleventh century and became the pervasive element in the evolution of Myanmar culture.¹²

The teaching of Buddhism is based on the Hindu premises of *maya* and *karma*, but it emphasizes moral principles of conduct as opening a way of escape from the otherwise endless wheel of rebirth and existence, the *samsara*. The suffering of life can be overcome by following the "Noble Eightfold Path"—right belief, right aspiration, right speech, right action, honest livelihood, sustained mental exertion, alertness, and sincerity. All circumstances are conditioned by *karma*, which means that every action, good or bad, has a result that must be experi-

¹¹Statistical Year Book 1995, 27. There are different statistics from different sources. I am following the statistics prepared by the government which I believe to be accurate.

¹²Donald Eugene Smith, *Religions and Politics in Burma* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 11-8.

enced either in the present existence or some other of the thousands of rebirths on thirty-one different planes of existence. A future existence may be improved if a person performs merits such as building pagodas, almsgiving, acts of kindness, and devotion. The five precepts to be followed by laypersons are the prohibitions against stealing, deceit, murder, adultery, and intoxication. Every kind of life and every creature is considered sacred; and all killing whether of man, animals, fishes or insects must consequently be avoided.¹³

There is no concept of God as creator or savior in Buddhism. Salvation is *nirvana* and is attained by extinction of life and desire, thus release from the wheel of rebirth.¹⁴ *Nirvana*, in Myanmar is *neikban*. It is attained when desires are conquered and the soul substance is merged with absolute essence. Theoretically, all persons can attain *neikban* without meditation or priestly magic or the aid of gods.

Myanmar is known as "Land of Pagodas." The ancient cities such as Pagan, Sagaing, and Mandalay are full of pagodas. Shwezigon pagoda in Pagan contains a duplicate tooth of Buddha Gautama and some relics. Shwedagon pagoda in Yangon is 370 feet high on a high square platform paved with marble and is said to contain eight hairs of Buddha. Shrines in pagodas contain statues of Buddha Gautama and

¹³ For further detail see Melford E. Spiro, *Buddhism and Society* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 44f, 64.

¹⁴ Spiro, *Buddhism*, 56, 63.

sacred relics. There are monasteries attached to pagodas. The monks live, teach, and meditate in their monasteries. An estimated 10,000 monks, excluding novices, were staying in the monasteries in 1970.¹⁵ In rural areas, almost every male has had early life experience as a novice.

The six great Buddhist World Councils were held in Yangon in 1954-1956 under the leadership of U Nu, the premier.¹⁶ A great World Peace Pagoda Cave was built in Yangon. Also, several hundreds of small pagodas were built at the foot of Mandalay hill to commemorate the synod. The scholars carefully examined the texts of the scripts and prepared a new edition of *Tripika*, the Buddhist scripture. This helped bring a revival of Buddhism.

3.2 MYANMAR FOLK RELIGION

Animism is interwoven with the practical religious daily life of the people in Myanmar. Central to this religion, *Nat* are spirit beings as well as the unseen objects of worship for any purpose in socio-economic life. The practice of animism impacts individual religious experience as well as political matters.

¹⁵American University, 132, 135.

¹⁶Smith, 232.

3.2.1 FOLK BUDDHISM

Animism is interwoven with Myanmar Buddhism as well. Hastings states, "It is now a recognized fact that, whatever the profession of faith may be, the practical everyday religion of the whole of Burmese peoples is Animism, called generally in Burmese *Nat-Worship*."¹⁷ *Nat*, the generic term for all supernatural beings,¹⁸ includes ghosts, demons, and witches.

The propitiation of *nat* is a daily concern even among the members of the Buddhist monks and teachers. The monks themselves take part in animistic rites and act as experts in astrology, fortune telling, and exorcism. Spirit-shrines, called *nat-sin*, are built beside the monasteries and pagodas, in the belief that beneficent *nat* protect them.

Every village has a *nat-sin*. In the same way, every fervent Buddhist maintains a *nat-sin* in his or her house and keeps it sacred and holy. Beside the *nat-sin* is placed an image or picture of Buddha. Believing the *nat-sin* is protected by the *nat* (commonly known as the household *nat*), sacrificial offerings are made and put in the *nat-sin* every morning and evening. The household *nat* are trusted to protect the family, bless and make them prosper, and even guide

¹⁷James Hastings, *Encyclopedia of Religions and Ethics*, vol. 3 (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, n.d.), 21.

¹⁸Melford E. Spiro, *Burmese Supernaturalism* (Eaglewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1967), 41.

their lives. The family makes special offerings, sacrifices, and prayer to the household *nat* from time to time, especially on certain days and in certain seasons.¹⁹

Thirty-seven *nat* are identified as the most important supernatural beings. Spiro notes, "These spirits not only occupy the preeminent place in the Myanmar supernatural belief system, but they are the objects of a widespread cultus which, in its complexity and organization, rivals even Buddhism."²⁰ These *nat* are classified according to four groups: *Kosongh nat*, meaning personal spirit or body-keeping *nat*; the guardian *nat* or the household *nat*; the village *nat*; and innumerable *nat* which are not individualized and whose characteristics are not clearly apprehended. Besides these, the *mihkkin-phahkkin nat*, meaning "father-side mother-side *nat*" and "public works *nat*" are in some respects very important. The *mihkkin-phahkkin nat* are prayed to for material blessing. The public works *nat* are also known as guardian *nat* associated with public works, protecting the city and the field, and so on. Village *nat* are propitiated to protect the people from illness, witches, rebels and robbers.

Nat pwes, meaning *nat* festivals, are celebrated to appease the *nat*. The local festival is celebrated within the village, and the regional and national festi-

¹⁹Ibid., 92.

²⁰Ibid., 91.

val is celebrated to appease the *nat* whose dominion is greatest. The *Taungpyong* festival is well known in the country. There are two supernatural specialists, the shaman and the exorcist. A shaman is called the *nat kadaw* who performs dance at the festivals and is consulted as a medium. The exorcist is called the *autlan saya*, meaning the lower path master, and is also one who exercises power and achieves his malevolent ends by compelling harmful spirits to execute his intentions. Exorcists are also traditional doctors.

3.2.2 TRIBAL ANIMISM

The tribal folk religionists in Myanmar are known as *nat* worshippers. Shans and Rakhines have a greater number of worshippers than the rest of the tribes. The Karens, who at one time were the most receptive to the Christian faith, still have far more animists than Christians today. The Chins and Kachins are more receptive to the Christian faith but still have a large number of animists. The Mons are Buddhist-animists, while the Kayahs are mostly animists.

Though there are numerous kinds of *nat* according to the various ethnicities, *nat* can be most broadly classified as: those which are naturally harmful to human interest unless appeased, and those which are capable of giving material benefit if placated. *Nat* are believed to be everywhere and constantly affecting human life. They are believed to reside in many natural objects, such as trees, rocks,

caves, mountains, rivers and other outstanding topographic features. They are given names with reference to their habitats and according to their beneficent intent. Some animals, like snakes, are believed to represent the *nat*. The animists show reverence and fear to the *nat* and endeavor to appease them. In a true sense, as Sing Khaw Khai has argued, *dawi* (*nat*) are not worshipped but only propitiated for appeasement by offerings.²¹

The worshippers offer appeasement to village *nat* and the household *nat* for benefits. In the village festivals the people, helped by the village priest, make offerings. The priest prays for the prosperity of their fields and crops and herds, and for protection from destruction, illness, loss, and all kinds of harmful evil spirit beings. Offerings and appeasement, along with requests, are made to the household *nat* at times such as illness, traveling for business, loss and special festivals. Animal blood, meat, food, and other special materials are used for offerings to the *nat*.

The functions and roles of the priests among the tribal animists vary from one place to another. The priest obtains his role by specialized training, by inheritance, or through ordination by clan leaders. In some villages the priest is the leader of the clan, sometimes even the head of the village, the person to whom the villagers inquire concerning their way of life. Most of the priests have orally transmitted

²¹Sing Khaw Khai, *Zo People and Their Culture* (Imphal, India: 1995), 159.

taboos and rules. The way and method of the priest's approach to the *nat* differs according to the kind of *nat*. Some common beliefs and practices among the folk-religionists are as follow.

3.2.3 BELIEFS

3.2.3.1 SOUL

The soul as a Myanmar concept is an independent, immaterial entity bound by special attraction to an individual body, and giving life to it.²² The soul can leave the body and return to it at will. It can be captured and kept away. At death, the soul takes the form of an invisible butterfly which the Myanmar call *leikpya*, and it hovers a while in the neighborhood of the corpse. Sickness is sometimes caused by the wandering *leikpya* being captured by an evil spirit called a *nat-shu* or witch. The wizard, the priest or the specialist in this matter, can call back the soul from its captivity. If the soul fails to return and enter into the body, then the person dies. The wandering soul is said to have appeared in various forms. Sometimes in his own personal image or in the form of an animal, or a disguised figure of another person. The soul that exists for a time after death is called *hta-sii*, meaning ghost. It can frighten living persons.

²²Hastings, 22.

3.2.3.2 *SOONG-KAWAI*

Soong-kawai is a kind of soul possessing demonic power. It wanders in search of edible things, especially at night. It is said that the *soong-kawai* prefers to eat babies. Therefore, babies are often hidden or covered from the presence of *soong-kawai*. On its wanderings the *soong* sometimes takes the form of light, traversing the air, and sometimes it is like a bale of white cotton rolling over the ground. If the original posture of the unconscious person passed by the *soong* is disrupted, the soul is said to be unable to reenter the body and the person eventually dies. A woman descended from the supposed *soong* family is despised as of a low caste and generally not desired as a wife.

3.2.3.3 DREAM

Dreams are defined as spirit communications or as the result of the soul separating from the body during sleep and wandering about to gain information inaccessible while in the body. For the interpretation of a dream, one might consult the professional interpreters, a mantis, or an oracle. Bad dreams are caused by the soul of the departed one, or the *hta sii*, the ghost. Dreams are taken seriously as a revelation of a person's future.

3.2.3.4 LIFE AFTER DEATH

The Buddhists believe that one's soul which exists in a form of life in an endless wheel of life, may be an animal in one stage and a glass in another stage, according to the person's own *karma*. Belief in reincarnation is shared not only in Buddhism but also in Animism. To be reincarnated or re-born as a human being depends on one's *karma*. To many tribal animists, a soul of a person who is killed accidentally can be reincarnated after wandering for a while. The soul can be reincarnated by entering as a child into the womb of a woman. This reincarnated person can recount all the events of his or her former life.

The tribal animists believe in a destiny of life. The next life after death will be like the present human life but in a spiritual form. The person will work, eat, drink, grow and marry. Therefore, life after death is viewed as a continuation of the existence of the soul in another world. In general, whether a person is honest or dishonest is of no consequence in the next world. But some people believe an honest person will enjoy the higher spiritual realm while the soul of a dishonest person will be tormented in a lower spiritual realm.

3.2.3.5 OFFERING AND SACRIFICE

Not only animal sacrifices but gift offerings to gods are common practices among Buddhist folk religionists. Unlike the Buddhists, the animists offer sacrifices of nearly every imaginable material to the

takhu (powers), *nat*, and ancestor. The sacrifice is directed toward appeasement. It sometimes is simply a gift of some sort to the spirit world. Gifts of tools, ornaments, money, incense and so on are left in a sacred place by a person who wishes the favor of the spirits and wants to avoid offending them.

Sacrifices in some places affect the establishment of a communal bond between the *nat*, *takhu*, and humans. The worshippers bring food with meat to the sacred place, burn a portion of it for the spirits, and eat a portion of it, sharing it with the clan. Thus, as the *nat*, *takhu*, and the living share a meal together, their bond is renewed and strengthened.

3.2.3.7 DIVINATION, MAGIC, AND NECROMANCY

The prediction of the future through divination is widely practiced among the folk-religionists. Usually this is the work of the priest or someone who is especially prepared for the task. It is accomplished by various means. The magician is believed to possess some kind of spiritual power that, by performing rituals, can force nature to act as desired; whereas the practitioner of the religion seeks only to implore the gods on his or her behalf.

The objective of necromancy is to acquire influence over the *nat* and make them do their practitioner's bidding.²³ Witches and wizards are supposed

²³Ibid., 29.

to be materialized spirit beings who can project their bodies into space and regulate the movement of the *nat*. Such beings are usually women. Exorcism, witchcraft, and magic are always connected with necromancy.

3.2.3.8 NATURE WORSHIP

The belief that nature is alive with spirits, has feeling and can be communicated with, is common to folk-religionists. These spirits are called *takhu* meaning "power." Death caused by falling from a tree is blamed not on the person falling but the power of the tree. Many animals, stones, rocks, caves, water falls, trees, forests, and mountains are believed to possess *takhu*. Therefore, before cutting a tree in the forest, permission is asked of the spirits of the tree or the forest. Before building a house upon a piece of ground or on a mountain, the spirit of the place is first asked permission, with worship and offering; the spirit is also asked for the material benefits of health and victory. Natural events which happen in an unnatural peculiar manner are regarded as the manifestation of *takhu*. Yet, the animists regard *nat* as more powerful and in many cases as having control over the spirits, or *takhu*, of nature. In some areas, special days and months are observed in reverence of these natural spirits or *takhu*.

3.2.3.9 ANCESTOR WORSHIP

Animists believe that ancestors can bestow blessing upon descendants with whom they are pleased. These spirits are known also as guardian spirits. They can help in preserving, as well as making more fertile, the field and blessing the business. On the other hand the belief that dead people continue to exist in some way, leads to the fear that the dead people may return as living corpses and still interfere in the relationships of the living. Ancestors are believed to be able to communicate with the living from time to time through dreams or other special means. In some places, seeing an ancestor in a dream is taken to be a bad sign. When this happens, sacrifices are offered.

3.3 ISLAM

Islam, represented by 3.6 percent (1.4 million) of the population, ranks as the third largest religious group in the country today. Among Muslims, there are two communities, the Zaidabis (or Pathis) and the Panthyas. The Zaidabis are descendants of Indian Mohammedans who have acquired a Myanma domicile and reared families by local wives. Half of the Rakhines are Zaidabis. The Panthys are the well-known Mohammedan Chinese of Yunan, of mixed alien military and native descent. Some of them are settled on the extreme north eastern borders; and a number wander the country as traders, but they can hardly be said to influence the religion of the people.

Probably, Islam was introduced to Myanmar centuries before the first Anglo-Burmese War (1824-26). Today, fine mosques, and Imams (Islamic teachers) are found in many cities. Most of the Muslims are poorly educated, yet they are accomplished in business.

3.4 HINDUISM AND OTHERS

The Hindus occupy 0.9 percent of the population. Mostly Indians, they are classified as followers of Shiva, but they are nevertheless worshippers of demons. They represent the lowest caste. The Kathes and the Ponas are found in upper Myanmar. The Ponas call themselves Brahmans. The religion of Myanmar in the early period (before AD 1044) was a mix of Animism and Hinduism. Hinduism seems to have remained dimly throughout the ages but was revitalized by the migration of Indians to Burma, beginning in the early nineteenth century. Today there are a few Hindu temples in the major cities. There are a small number of Taoists among the Indians, and Confucianists among Chinese communities. A few expatriates follow Judaism.

4. SOME IMPORTANT SOCIAL FACTORS

Social institutions and customs vary among the multiethnic groups. Musgrave has grouped people according to social custom as (1) the hill people (mainly Chin, Kachin, Naga, and some Kayin), and (2) the plains people (Bama, Shan, Kayin, Rakhaing, and Kayah).²⁴

4.1 KINSHIP AND FAMILY

There is no clan or lineage among the plains people. They give equal weight to the relatives on both sides of father and mother. The nuclear family, especially the mother-daughter relationship, is strong among the plains people.

Unlike the plains people, the hill people trace descent solely from the father's line. They have well defined kinship. The property and office of chief are inherited in the male line, by the oldest or the youngest son. They practice semi-extended family with paterlineal system. The sibs (i.e., all descendants in a male line) are also exogamous.

²⁴John K. Musgrave Jr., "Introduction to the Anthropology of Burma," in *Burma*, edited by Frank N. Trager and Associates (New Haven: Human Relations Area Files, Inc., 1956), 599f.

4.2 MARRIAGE

Marriage in Myanmar, whether in plains or hills, is monogamous, though polygamy is not objectionable. Marriage is a highly desirable state. The choice of spouse is voluntary for both boy and girl; but parents often attempt to influence the choice of a spouse. They sometimes even take the initiative in introducing the future spouses to each other and overtly attempt to persuade them to marry. Approval or disapproval of a marriage depends on the following features. First, it is preferred for both to be of the same religion. Second, the groom should be of the same or superior socio-economic status. Third, the groom should be older than the bride. Among the hill people, the preferred marriage is with the daughter of one's maternal uncle or with some cousin of one's mother's *sib*. The wedding ceremony is a public pronouncement of the couple's intention to live together as husband and wife, and legally constituted marriage is based on this public declaration. The bridegroom's parents pay a dowry to the bride's family.

Divorce is not common. If it happens through mutual consent, the various gifts are returned. Divorced persons remarry at will. Birth control methods are widely known and practiced in the city, at least among the more educated population. Abortion is rarely practiced, not only because it is dangerous but also because it is illegal.

4.3 MALE AND FEMALE STATUS

Among the plains people, the family estate is divided equally between sons and daughters. Girls enter freely into marriage, and wives have the same right as husbands to initiate divorce. Every able-bodied male and female engages in some occupation, if so desired. Women engage in a variety of occupations. Politically, too, women enjoy high status. However, spiritually, the male is superior to the female.²⁵ Only the male can become a monk; only the male is honored in the Buddhist initiation ceremony; only the male can become a saint. Hence, the wife pays homage to her husband in the same manner in which she pays homage to the "Five objects of worship." Women are more attracted to witches, spirits, shamanism, and the like than are men. Moreover, women are socially inferior to men in that women possess no social status in their own right. Their status is dependent upon that of their husband or their father. Men are also believed to be morally superior to women, for women are thought to be more controlled by the baser instincts, especially greed and sex. Women are said to be never satisfied with their gold and silver ornaments.

Virginity is very important in Myanmar society. The prohibition of premarital sex applies primarily to the female. Unless she marries, she is prohibited from having sexual relationship with any-

²⁵ Melford E. Spiro, *Kinship and Marriage in Burma* (Los Angeles: University Press, 1977), 432.

one. For a girl, premarital sex is the worst stigma. The same restrictive norm is also true in the case of a married woman. Even for a wife's hand to be touched is tantamount to adultery. If a girl is found not to be a virgin, the prestige of her parents also suffers a serious blow. In the event of premarital pregnancy, the father of the conception has to marry the pregnant girl soon; if he refuses to do so, he has to pay the girl's parents a heavy fine.

Adultery is a violation of property, for the wife is the property of the husband. If a married woman is known to be practicing adultery, she is divorced. Polygamy is legally permitted but not commonly practiced. A male and female are prohibited from being alone. It is assumed that any two persons of the opposite sex, not excluding father and daughter, will be sexually tempted if they are alone. If a male and female in fact are seen together, especially at night, it is simply assumed that the intent is sexual. Hence, a proper woman often does not allow any man into her house in the absence of her husband, unless another woman is present.

4.4 KOTHOU AND DANA

The doctrine of *karma* (*kan* in Myanmar) serves as a conservative force in Myanmar Buddhist society. It justifies the differential distribution of wealth and prestige. Poverty and riches are determined by one's *karma*. To steal or kill in order to acquire wealth not only leads to *karmic* punishment but also to legal punishment. Wealth is a proof of past merits

(*kothou*). The poor say that the rich have achieved their wealth because they have been openhanded in the past.

Dana, or religious offering, is not only the most important act for acquiring merit, but is equally important for prestige.²⁶ Therefore the people not only feed the monks, but also assist the poor and the unfortunate. They support social services, medical facilities, and religious constructions through *dana*.

4.5 SOCIAL COOPERATION

Religious rituals, festivals, funerals, and social works are performed collectively. Social consequences, which affect the quality of life and standards of living, flow from a rather narrow conception of *dana*. People insist that public work for the common good—for example, the repair of roads—are also *dana* which can confer merit on the volunteer worker.

4.6 DEATH CEREMONIES

Death is not the end of life for any religious person in Myanmar but a transition to a different realm of life. After death, the deceased body is laid in the house for a few days (usually three) before burial or cremation. This custom is observed to permit relatives from distant places to attend the funeral.

²⁶Spiro, *Buddhism*, 108.

Villagers and relatives pay visits to the household from the time of death until the funeral. Religious rituals are performed during the burial days. Among the Buddhists, monks are invited for a feast after burial.

5. SUMMARY

The diverse language and dialect groups with their own unique cultures and customs make Myanmar a composite country. It has rich natural resources, though they are often misused and mismanaged. Interestingly, all religions in Myanmar have been imported rather than being indigenous, and they have also served as transforming factors of culture. Myanmar gained its political freedom from colonial imperialism but still suffers constant pressure from economic poverty and social unrest. The next chapter provides a short history of how Christianity came to Myanmar.

2 CHRISTIAN MISSIONS OTHER THAN THE ASSEMBLIES OF GOD

Christianity is no longer a young religious practice in Myanmar. There has been a Christian presence in the land for more than five centuries. Like other religions in the country, it was imported and introduced to the people of the land by business people, colonial armies, and missionaries.

The contributions of the pioneer missionaries and their methods are very impressive. Different methods are adapted to the culture and to the needs of the people. Today, the church that has been built upon their hard labor is steadily growing in three dimensions: spiritual, numerical, and geographical. There is not sufficient space here to tell the whole story of mission, but the prominent methods will be discussed briefly.

I. ROMAN CATHOLIC MISSION

The first Christians to come to Myanmar were Portuguese soldiers, a few traders, and some adventurers in the sixteenth century. Albuquerque, a Portuguese leader at Mallacca, first investigated the land and the people by sending an agent to Muktama (Martaban) and Bago (Pegu) in 1511. Antonio Correa, a Portuguese trader, signed a trade agreement with the chief of Muktama in 1519. By 1540, about 700

Portuguese mercenaries and soldiers had arrived in Myanmar. Many of them were Catholic Christians.

A French Franciscan priest and two Dominican friars, known to be the earliest missionaries to Myanmar, came to serve those mercenaries and soldiers as chaplains in 1554.¹ But after three years they left, for they were not well accepted by the Portuguese.

With the favor of King Minyazagyi of Bago, Felipe de Brito Necote, an adventurer and captain of many Portuguese, built a fort at Syriam in 1602.² In spite of his growing power, King Annaukpetlun of Ava (1605-28) executed him in 1613 because de Brito destroyed pagodas and forced the Buddhists to accept Christianity. The King took away 400 Portuguese to upper Myanmar, and had them settled in six villages between the Chindwin and Mu rivers. Those people mixed and married Bama and were known as Bayingyi or Feringyi (Franks). The King provided them agricultural lands as well as a Roman Catholic chaplain. Those captives were found there as late as 1785.³

In 1630, Sebastian Manrique, an Augustinian Portuguese monk, came to Mrohang, the capital of

¹*New Catholic Encyclopedia* (1967), 902.

²Donald F. Lach and Edwin Van Kley, *Asia: In the Making of Europe*. Vol. 1 (1993), 11-24.

³In fact, Carson City, Cin Khen Tuang, a Baptist Home missionary to Monywa, recently told the present author that the descendants of those Feringyis are still living in the same areas of Shwebo, Ye O, Monywa and are bearing the same designated name.

Rakhaing (Arakan), and spent five years there. No fruit known from his work. In 1687, two priests from the Society of Foreign Missions in Paris came to Bago (Pegu). But they were arrested and thrown into the river Hlaing in 1693. In 1721 [1722], Innocent XIII, Patriarch of Alexandria, sent Father Sigismond de Calchi and Father Vittoni to Tanyan (Syriam). King Taninganwe of Ava (1714-1783) granted them permission to preach the gospel with full liberty, and to build a chapel at Ava capital.⁴ It is recorded that the king even sent to the Pope, as a gift by the hands of the missionaries, some precious stones. A church was built at Pegu too. As more missionaries came, Pope Benedict XIV appointed Father Gallizia as Bishop at Yangon in 1741.

During the next forty years, Father Angelo and several priests were executed during the Mons' rebellion. Father Paolo Nerini of Syriam fled to India in 1756. However, more priests came to Yangon during the 1760s. A church and a college were built at Monla in 1770, and both institutions were later relocated to Yangon. There were 3,000 Catholics, two parishes, and several schools at Yangon about 1790.⁵

By 1800, there were two Roman Catholic churches and three thousand Christians found in Myanmar. But the two churches were destroyed during the first Anglo-Burmese war in 1824. Only

⁴*The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 3 (1908), 8.

⁵*New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 902.

two priests had survived by 1825; one native and one Portuguese. As a consequence, the Bannabite missionaries surrendered the mission and handed it over to the Pope in 1830. In 1854, the Society de Mission Etrangeres of Paris took over the responsibility. Thirty-seven missionaries were sent to this field between the years 1800-1856. By 1862, there was one college, one bishop, one native priest, and approximately 6,000 members attached to the mission.

By 1892, there were two vicariates apostolic, in upper and lower Myanmar, in Yangon and Mandalay. They were comprised of 60 missionaries, 12 native priests, 64 catechists, 65 sisters, 28 lay workers, and 26,500 members with one bishop by the name of Paul Bigondet. Most of the converts, the catechists, and the native priests were from the Kayin tribe. Also, there was a seminary with a printing press in Mandalay, and forty-eight schools in Yangon.

The early Catholic mission effort was not very fruitful among the Myanma, but prospered among the Europeans and the Anglo-Burmese. But later, as the mission expanded, a slow growth developed among the tribal groups, especially among the Kayins, Kachins, and Chins. There is no complete information available on the latter part of their work. By 1990, the mission was the second largest denomination, having a total membership of over 3,000,000, with 9 bishops and 212 priests serving in nine dioceses.

2. BAPTIST MISSIONS

Protestant Christianity reached Myanmar by the early nineteenth century. The English Baptist Missionaries came first, and the American Baptist Mission followed. Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian and a few others also came and established their missions.

2.1 THE ENGLISH BAPTIST MISSION

In 1807, James Charter and Richard Mardon, who were English Baptists, came to Yangon and established a mission. Mardon soon left for India due to poor health and civil war. Charter remained and built a mission house near Yangon. Felix Carey, the eldest son of William Carey, the prominent missionary to Calcutta, also joined the mission in the same year. During his stay of four years, Charter translated the Gospel of Matthew into Myanma, which Carey revised and published at Serampore, Calcutta.⁶ Unfortunately, Charter relinquished the mission and left for Sri Lanka.

Felix married a Myanma-Portuguese. He soon learned Myanma and also printed a Myanma grammar book. King Bodaw Paya offered him a state service position. However, he was sorely grieved when he lost his wife, his children, and all his

⁶Francis Wayland, *A Memoir of the Life and Labors of the Rev. Adoniram Judson*. Vol. 1 (Boston: Philips, Sampson, and Company, 1853), 158.

servants in a drowning accident in the sea on his move to Ava.⁷ Moreover, he lost his rank, and he left the mission in 1817.⁸ But Adoniram and Ann Judson came from America and continued to work as the American Baptist missionaries.

2.2 THE AMERICAN BAPTIST MISSION

Adoniram Judson⁹ (1788-1850) was an outstanding Protestant missionary to Myanmar.

⁷Wayland, 170.

⁸Ibid., 158.

⁹Adoniram Judson was born on August 9, 1788 in Malden, Massachusetts. His parents were Adoniram Judson and Abigail Brown. Judson made a personal commitment to God on December 2, 1808 while he was studying at Andover Theological Seminary at Plymouth (Edward Judson, *Adoniram Judson* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1883), 13). He was caught up with a vision of foreign mission through the preaching of Claudius Buchanan, a chaplain of the British East India Company, on the subject of "The Star in the East." After meditation and prayer for several months, Judson decided to go for foreign mission work (18). At Andover, he met students from Williamstown--Samuel J. Mills, James Richards, Luther Rice, and Gordon Hall--whose haystack prayer meeting was known as the birthplace of American Foreign Missions (17). At these students' (including Judson's) request, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions was adopted and formed on September 5, 1810. Judson married Ann Haseltine. He came to Myanmar and did the missionary work faithfully till he died on April 12, 1850. Ann died at Amherst (near Mawlamyang) on October 24, 1826 at thirty-seven years of age while Judson was at Ava (290-3), leaving her three children. Maria, his two-year-old daughter, died on April 24, 1827 (298). Judson married Mrs. Sarah H. Boardman on April 10, 1834 (399), the widow of George D. Boardman who died on February 11, 1831 while serving the Lord in Kayin jungles (Maung Shwe Wa, *Burma Baptist Chronicle*, (Yangon, Myanmar: U Maung U, 1963), 73, 87). Sarah died on September 1, 1845, on their voyage to America for health care, leaving five children surviving out of eight (Judson, 451-2). Judson married the third wife, Emily Chubbuck on June 2, 1846 before he came back to Myanmar (Wayland, vol. 2, 249). He died on April 12, 1850, on a voyage and was buried in the sea near the Andaman Islands (Judson, 527; Wa, 131).

Accompanied by his wife Ann, Judson left for India on February 12, 1812. A Congregationalist at first, he became a Baptist on his voyage to India and was baptized in Calcutta on September 6, 1812.¹⁰

Because of the hostile treatment of missionaries other than English by the East India Company, they left Calcutta and went to Mauritius and then to Myanmar, as they looked for an open door for mission. They landed at Yangon on July 13, 1813. They stayed with Mrs. Felix Carey who welcomed them warmly while Carey was in Ava.¹¹ The American Baptist Mission Board was said to be born in response to Judson's letter concerning his mission work in Myanmar.¹²

Within a few days of his arrival, Judson began to study the Myanma language. He was taught by U Aung Min, formerly a priest at the court of the king of Ava. Finding that much of the Buddhist religious thought was recorded in Pali terms, he soon compiled a Pali-Myanma dictionary.¹³ Judson's strategies of presenting the gospel to the Myanma are exemplary.

¹⁰J. Mervin Hull, *Judson the Pioneer* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Pub. Society, 1913), 55. Judson, 41.

¹¹Wa, 4, 6.

¹²Hull, 78.

¹³Wa, 8.

2.2.1 LITERATURE PRODUCTION

The Judsons were engaged in translating scripture, printing and distributing and circulating tracts while preaching the gospel in many areas. By 1817, Judson had published his first three books in Myanma: (1) 1,000 copies of a seven-page view of Christian beliefs; (2) a six-page catechism; and (3) 800 copies of the gospel of Matthew.¹⁴ Many people read those tracts, pamphlets, and booklets, and visited the Judson's rest house to listen to the gospel.

2.2.2 ZAYAT STRATEGY

Judson decided early on that he would preach the gospel rather than promote anti-Buddhism. He observed the Myanma culture of gathering together at a *zayat*, meaning "rest house," for public discussion and sharing their views of thought and beliefs. He soon selected a small roadside *zayat* and spent many hours there, talking with anyone who would stop for a few minutes. He continually preached at the *zayat* for seventeen months.¹⁵

¹⁴ Ibid., 10.

¹⁵ Ibid., 15.

Dialogue

On April 4, 1819, Judson preached in a new *zayat* to a congregation of fifteen people. He talked face to face with each person dialoging informally about individual beliefs.¹⁶ After several hours of discussing about God and His love, Maung Naw became Judson's first convert to confess Christ. Maung Naw was baptized in July 1819 and became a member of the church.¹⁷ Wayland noted Maung Naw's confession as follows:

I [Maung Naw] believe that the divine Son, Jesus Christ, suffered and died, in the place of men, to atone for their sins. Like a heavy-laden man, I feel my sins are very many. The punishment of my sins I deserve to suffer. Since it is so, do you, sirs, consider that I, taking refuge in the merits of the Lord Jesus Christ, and receiving baptism, in order to become his disciple, shall dwell one with yourselves, a band of brothers, in the happiness of heaven, and therefore grant me the ordinance of baptism.... Moreover, it is only since I have met with you, sirs, that I have known about the eternal God, I venture to pray that you will still unfold to me the religion of God, that my old disposition may be destroyed, and my new disposition improved.¹⁸

¹⁶The method of conversation for purpose of evangelism is laid out on pages 187-188 of Wayland.

¹⁷Wa, 17.

¹⁸Wayland, 221-2.

Maung Ing was the second convert. He was a fisherman from Mergui who had the idea of the Eternal God taught to him by his Catholic parents, a Portuguese father and a Myanma mother. He developed a conviction through the reading of a tract of Judson. Ma Min Lay, who stayed with Ann, was the first woman to be converted. The next converts were Maung Tha Hla, Ma Baik (the sister of Maung Tha Hla), Maung Pye, and Maung Shwe Bay. Maung Tha Hla was the first Myanma to have a Christian wedding. Maung Shwe Bay became the first evangelist sent to the Mawlamyang District. Maung Pye was converted through the teaching of Mrs. Judson in the evening literacy class at a *zayat*.¹⁹ All of these converts were able to bring relatives to Christ. Maung Ing became a lay preacher to his own people in the Mergui and Tavoy areas.

U Shwe Gong, a highly influential teacher, was converted to Christ after several discussions. Later he helped Judson in revising the Bible translation. With all the above converts, the young church grew to eighteen members by the end of August 1822.²⁰

2.2.3 EDUCATIONAL WORK

The missionaries also promoted the instruction of native children. Ann Judson, with the help of Ma Min Lay, opened a school where boys and girls of

¹⁹ Wa, 20, 21.

²⁰ Ibid., 30, 32.

villages could be taught to read and write without attending Buddhist monastic schools. Many of the students were converted through the school. And the school became the first of a long line of schools that helped to train the young people during the succeeding 143 years.²¹

2.2.4 SYMBOL AND SIGN MESSAGE

Maung Ing, the first Myanma evangelist in Mergui, printed Christian symbols and messages on a banner and hung it out in front of his house. This attracted visitors seeking more information.²² This method is known to be the pioneer of visual aids in the Myanmar missions.

2.2.5 EVANGELISM IN THE ROYAL PALACE

During his stay in Myanmar, Judson made four trips to Ava as an interpreter for British and Myanma peace talks and later as a prisoner. He made the second trip with Dr. Price, a medical doctor. King Ava invited them to move to Ava, and gave them a place to build a mission house, for he wanted Price to be the physician in the palace. But Judson and Price were jailed during the first Anglo-Burmese war, as they were suspected of being spies.²³

²¹ Ibid., 34.

²² Ibid., 58.

²³ Wayland, Vol. 2, 375.

Ann Judson was kept busy looking after the jailed missionaries, while at the same time her first baby was overdue. Maria Elizabeth Butterworth Judson was born January 26, 1825. Ann was able to make friends with the governor's wife, which eased her struggle a bit. She opened a school at Ava for boys and girls, and Judson was able to share the gospel with the people in the palace. Nineteen people were recorded as having been converted during this imprisonment, which lasted a year and seven months. Later the Judsons moved to Aungpenle, about twelve miles from Ava.

The Yangon church moved to Dahla because of the hostile treatment of the natives during Judson's absence. This hostility was also the result of the response to U Shwe Gong's conversion.

2.2.6 URBAN EVANGELISM

In 1826, Judson, as he was released from jail, with Jonathan Wade who had arrived from Calcutta, opened a new mission work at Mawlamyang.²⁴ With six assistants, they evangelized the town. They went from corner to corner with a handful of tracts, distributing them and preaching the gospel. Ann, with Maung Ing, also opened a school there. They opened a *zayat*, where preaching resulted in the baptism of thirty-one converts within two years. In 1829, another twenty-eight people, including some

²⁴Wa, 58.

British soldiers, were baptized. During the 1830s, the Mawlamyang church added another fifty-four converts.

Three churches founded at Mawlamyang were the Mon-Burmese Church, the 45th Regiment English Church, and the Mawlamyang Indian Church. The Mon-Burmese Church grew rapidly through the *zayat* preaching. Nai Myat Kyaw was the first Mon pastor at Mawlamyang.²⁵

2.2.7 BIBLE TRANSLATION

The Myanma Bible which Judson completed translating January 31, 1834 came off the press in December 1835. He commented on his achievement as follows:

Thanks be to God, I can now say I have attained. I have knelt down before him, with the last leaf in my hand, and imploring his forgiveness for all the sins which have polluted my labors in this department, and his aid in future efforts to remove the errors and imperfections which necessarily cleave to the work, I have commended it to his mercy and grace, I have dedicated it to his glory. May he make his own inspired word, now complete in the Burman tongue, the grand instrument of filling all Burmah with songs of praise to our great God and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.²⁶

²⁵Ibid., 62-3.

²⁶Wayland, 405.

He revised and printed it again in 1840. Also, he completed his work on a Burmese-English dictionary at the end of 1848.

Judson faced many troubles. His co-workers U Shwe Gong and U Naw (Maung Naw) had already passed away when he came back from Aungpenle, Ava. Dr. Price died at Ava after two years of imprisonment. Ann died of malaria at Amherst in November 1826, during Judson's fourth trip to Ava. In spite of such discouragements, Judson continued to work in Myanmar.

The growth among Bama (Myanma proper) in the early period was slow. The Bama came to Christ against the tide of their culture, traditions, and beliefs. There were 207 baptized church members in 1836, and 267 in 1852. This slow growth may have been caused not only by their Buddhist background, opposition and discouragement toward Christianity by the government, but also their lack of zeal in propagating the gospel.

2.3 MISSION TO THE TRIBES AND ETHNIC GROUPS

When Christian mission reached the tribes and ethnic groups of Myanmar: Kayin, Rakhaing, Shan, Kachin, and Chin, the tribal people were more receptive to the gospel than the Bama, for they came to Christ in people movements.

2.3.1 TO THE KAYIN

Jonathan Wade and his wife came to Yangon in December of 1822. He helped Judson's mission work at Mawlamyang. He put the Sagaw Kayin in writing using Myanma script. Also, he was engaged in translations.

George and Dana Broadman joined Judson in 1826.²⁷ They started a mission work at Tavoy, and repaired an old *zayat* for their preaching. Broadman made trips into the jungle many times, evangelizing the Kayin tribal people. The Broadmans were also engaged in translating the Bible into the Sgaw Kayin dialect. On his last trip to the Kayin villages, he baptized thirty-four converts. In addition, he opened a school for the people.

Ko Tha Byu was the first convert among the Kayin who took water baptism on May 16, 1828. He also became the first Kayin pastor. His conversion was a turning point in the people movement occurring among the Kayin.²⁸

In 1843, a complete New Testament, an Epitome of the Old Testament, hymnals and children's books were printed in Sgaw Kayin. The Kayin Theological Seminary was founded in 1845, and the Women's Bible School in 1897.²⁹ During the years

²⁷Wa, 57.

²⁸Ibid., 68

²⁹Ibid., 122-3.

1830-1860, mission stations were opened at Pyi (Prome), Taungoo, Thayet, Henzada, Danuhpyu, Shwekyan and Taungyi. The mission reached the Bama, the Kayin, and the Rakhaing.

The Pwo Kayin church showed slow growth. The people were animistic and gave allegiance to Buddhism. The first convert, Pu Sung Paw, was baptized on January 12, 1987.³⁰ Sra Kon Luht was the first Pwo Kayin to be ordained. Also, he was the first Kayin to visit America, which happened in 1848.

The Pwo Kayin in the Bassein area came to Christ through the ministry of their Sagaw Kayin brothers. Dr. Durlin L. Brayton, the last missionary to this group, translated the whole Bible into Pwo Kayin. By the year 1880, the Pwo Kayin had 26 pastors serving in 27 congregations, with a membership of 1,450. The missionaries were not in a hurry to baptize, but taught and watched the converts for a time. Also, national ministers and pastors were too few to follow up the converts.

The Kayin, unlike the Bama and Mon, were responsive to the gospel. They were animists but believed in the existence of a creator and eternal God whom they really did not know. They had a myth about a lost book, the book of life, which at one time was in their fathers' hands. They believed that a white man would bring back the book to them some

³⁰Ibid., 327.

day. Probably Broadman was considered as the white man with the book of life when he preached about life eternal while holding the Bible in his hand. Given this predominant belief, the Kayins responded to the gospel with a people movement. Thra Myat Kyaw, who was ordained in January of 1843, baptized more than 2,000 converts within the first two years of his ministry. Thra Tway Paw baptized almost the same number. Saw Quala's evangelization resulted in the conversion of hundreds of Kayins within a couple of years.

The educational and medical work, literature, self-support and self-propagation, and the establishment of the Home Mission Society all reinforced the Kayin Baptist movement. By the year 1852, there were 7,750 members in 76 churches, with 12 licensed and 2 ordained ministers. By the time the Kayin celebrated the centennial in 1928, the membership had grown to 70,000.

2.3.2 TO THE MON

Mission to the Mon was begun in the early years by Judson and Wade. Mrs. Judson, the widow of Broadman who married Judson in April of 1834, took care of the work later. With the help of Nai Mem Bok, a Mon convert, she preached and distributed gospel tracts. Later, in 1835, Reverend James Haswell took care of this ministry. The first New Testament in Mon was released in 1847 at the mission press in Mawlamyang. Arthur C. Darrow arrived at Mawlamyang in 1902. He opened a Mon

students' boarding house and a hospital, and also planted a church. The Mon Bible school was opened at Mudon in 1959.

2.3.3 TO THE RAKHAING

The mission work was also extended to the western coastal areas of the country, among the Rakhaing (Arakanese). In 1835, Grover Comstok and his wife came to Kyautpyu. They preached and taught in a school there, and also distributed to the natives some 25,000 copies of gospel tracts. In May 1837, the missionaries, with native workers Maung Kat and Saya Kong Aung, planted the first Baptist church at Kyautpyu.³¹ In 1851, the Kinchaid planted a Myanma speaking church at Thandwe (Sandaway). A short seminar for pastors and evangelists was conducted once in a while at Pathein (Bassein) and Pantanaw.

Several missionaries came and worked among the Rakhaings. However, the heavy rainfall, the cholera and malaria, and the mangrove swamps presented great barriers to the mission. Seventeen missionaries died within a period of twenty years. The work among the Rakhaings, therefore, is noted as a heroic failure.³²

³¹Ibid., 106, 108.

³²Ibid., 110.

2.3.4 TO THE SHAN

Christian work among the Shan tribe met with the same difficulties as that among the Buddhists. The first mission station for the Shans was opened at Taungoo in March, 1861 by Moses Homan Bixy. There, Bixy reached out to the Shan refugees. The first Shan convert was Maung Aung Myat, the son of a *sawbwa* (chief) in 1862.³³ By the end of 1863, there was a Shan-Burmese church with forty-one communicants at Taungoo. It became a center for training Christian workers and preparing Shan literature.³⁴

Josiah Nelson Cushing, a medical doctor, began to work among the Shans at Bhamo, Hsipaw, and Namkahm. The Bhamo station extended the mission work among the Kachins too. More missionaries, most of them medical doctors, joined the work later. But, the Bhamo station was closed when Dr. Robert Harper left for home due to poor health in 1925. The Hsipaw station was closed earlier in 1922 because of the civil war, and the death of missionary Dr. M. B. Kirkpatrick.³⁵

The mission work in Southern Shan state began at Mongnai when Dr. and Mrs. W. C. Griggs and Mrs. Huldah Mix arrived there in 1888 and opened a station in 1892.³⁶ Also, Dr. and Mrs. Albert

³³Ibid., 204.

³⁴Ibid., 205, 353.

³⁵Ibid., 354.

³⁶Ibid., 357.

Haley Henderson arrived at Mongnai, and opened a dispensary. They emphasized evangelistic and educational work and opened a school and an orphanage too. They also started the Shweli Valley Mission to work among the Palaungs, Lisu, and Chinese. This work reached even the Paos, Lahus, Was, Akhas, and Tais. Also, Henderson started another dispensary and school in 1906. The work here attracted a cosmopolitan population. As more missionaries came, churches were planted and schools were opened in other villages. By 1942, there were about five hundred Christians in Shweli valley.³⁷ Work in the Eastern Shan state began with a medical mission as Dr. and Mrs. Howard Clinton Gibbens came to Kengtung in 1903.³⁸

2.3.5 TO THE KACHIN

In 1878, Mr. and Mrs. Lyon came to Bhamo and started a mission work among the Kachins. Three Karen missionaries, Thra Na Hta, Thra Ko Te, and Mrs. Thra Saw Pe, came with them to assist them. But Mr. Lyon became ill and died one month after his arrival.

In 1879, William Henry Roberts came to replace Lyon. With the help of other workers, he founded a school. He engaged in translating scriptures, preparing hymnals, and catechism in Kachin (Jingpaw), and in training Christian workers. He

³⁷Ibid., 355.

³⁸Ibid., 362.

reached out south and north, opening mission stations. In 1882, he with Mr. Cronkhite baptized the first seven Kachin converts. The Gospel of Matthew was completely translated from Myanma into Kachin (Jingpaw) in 1885. Mr. and Mrs. Ola Hanson put the Kachin languages in writing using the Roman alphabet in 1890.³⁹

The mission work among the Kachin encountered the same troubles as in other tribal groups. The first converts suffered great persecution. Nevertheless, conversion spread rapidly by people movement. In 1911, there were nine churches with 517 converts. Within two years, there were 29 churches with 1,231 members. By the year 1926, there were 3,506 members in the church. The school work was also growing fast. The whole New Testament, the book Pilgrim's Progress, and some portions of hymns were translated into Jingphaw Kachin and printed in 1916. The Kachin Baptist Church grew rapidly during the years 1912-1941. The members increased to 11,260 by 1940. A Bible school was opened at Kutkai in 1933. The Christian schools numbered 26 in 1921, and increased to 96 in 1940. Literature work was developed. Women's Societies were organized. The Bible schools were mainly supported by the Women's Societies.

During the Sino-Japanese War the church suffered greatly. Mission buildings and church buildings were damaged. However, Christians remained

³⁹Ibid., 368-71.

more confident than ever. The Home Mission Society was formed in 1934. The Kachin Baptist Convention was formed in 1951.

2.3.6 TO THE CHIN

Mission to the Komee-Chin began with Reverend and Mrs. Burpe Ub in 1845. They baptized five converts as the first fruits of the mission in 1847. There were ten Asho Chin converts at the Prome mission station by 1856. Reverend Arthur E. Carson came to Thayet to begin his mission among the Asho Chins in 1886, and baptized thirteen converts who came from villages before he moved on to Chin Hills. The mission station opened at Thayet and Sandaway (Thantwe) reached many parts of those areas. The New Testament translation in Asho Chin was completed in 1954.⁴⁰

Mission work among the Zomi (Hill) Chin began with the arrival of Arthur Carson. In 1889, Mr. and Mrs. Arthur E. Carson came to Haka. Along with them came a Karen evangelist, Thra San Win. Later, more Karen evangelists and teachers came to assist the mission in various places: Thra Poku in Khuasak, Thra Po Aye in Lumbang, Maung Lun in Zokhua, Maung Kya in Thantlang, and Thra Kyi Ghine in Haka. On their first night in Haka, Mrs. Laura Carson wept with weariness and disappointment, saying tearfully, "How can I possibly stay a

⁴⁰Ibid., 346.

lifetime?" Carson replied, "Don't talk that way. Things will look brighter in the morning. Remember our motto: I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."⁴¹

By the time Carson died in Haka on April 1, 1908, there were one hundred converts, with two churches, a mission station, and one hospital at Haka. The Four Gospels and Acts had been translated by Carson into Haka, and a hymnal was published in 1920.⁴²

In 1902, Dr. Erik Hjamar East arrived at Haka and constructed a twenty-bed hospital there. On May 11, 1905, he baptized Thuam Hang and Pau Suan, along with their wives, at Khuasak village. They were his first converts among the Zomi Chin.⁴³

Herbert J. Cope arrived in Haka soon after Carson's death in 1908, and then came to Tedim and lived about thirty years among the Tedims. He put the Tedim language into writing using the Roman alphabet. He translated and published the New Testament into the Tedim language in 1936. He also wrote more than thirty-five booklets for schools. By the time he died in 1938, baptized members had increased to 4,000.⁴⁴

⁴¹Robert G. Johnson, *History of the American Baptist Chin Mission*. 2 volumes (Valley Forge: Robert G. Johnson, 1988), 384.

⁴²Wa, 386.

⁴³Ibid., 384, 386.

⁴⁴Ibid., 387, 389, 391.

The Chin were animistic at first, and were converted to Christ one by one. The tribal chiefs strongly opposed Christianity, so that some of the first converts were persecuted and excommunicated. But, slowly and steadily, the people came to Christ. In 1915, there were 150 Christians among the Chins. Three years later, the Haka mission field alone had 600 baptized members in 8 congregations. By 1926, there were 1,403 members with 45 churches in the northern Chin Hills. All missionaries left the field during World War II. But the Holy Spirit strengthened the church so that the membership increased to 18,000 in 1949.

Only two missionaries, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Johnson, came to Chin Hills after World War II. The Zomi Theological School was opened at Falam in 1953 to serve the growing Zomi Baptist Convention. By the year 1980, the Zomi Baptist Convention numbered 372,245. There were 16 evangelists working among the Chin people and the Nagas.

2.4 THE MYANMAR BAPTIST CONVENTION

The Myanmar [Burma] Baptist Missionary Convention was formed at Yangon by missionaries and some seventy national church leaders in October 1865. The purpose of this convention was for building unity and cooperation between missionaries and home mission societies. By the year 1900, the mission had 689 congregations, with 39,065 members, 639 native preachers, and 170 missionaries serving in the field. The increasing number of missionaries, native

preachers, and schools accounted for the growth. Also, 206 churches out of 488 were self-supporting, providing another vital factor of growth. The dedication of the Judson Memorial Church in Mandalay on November 2, 1890 was a notable incident that took place during this period. The church is still the largest one among the Protestant churches in Mandalay.

Due to the depression before World War II, the number of missionaries—206 in 1926—dropped to 84 in 1939. The Japanese army occupied institutional buildings, churches, and mission compounds so that these structures became targets for allied air raids. The Christians scattered, yet they continued worship and social services as conditions permitted them. The work was hindered from growth but not destroyed because it was already self-supporting. Another great blow to church growth was dealt in 1949, when the Karens organized an insurrection against the government. This movement affected the church's mission and identification, because three out of four Christians in Myanmar at that time were Karens. The Baptist mission compound in Bassein, Taungoo, and Loikaw, and the seminary in Insein-Yangon were damaged as well.

In 1943, the missionaries decided to transfer church leadership to native leaders. Thus, the national church assumed responsibility for nationwide coordination of the work of the Baptist Church among the different language groups. In 1953, the committees of the Myanmar Baptist Mission were

transferred into the Myanma jurisdiction. In 1960, the supervision of all foreign missionary personnel was given to the Myanmar Baptist Convention. Finally in 1963, all the property of the American Baptist Mission was handed over to the national church.

The Baptists were organized in several conventions, according to linguistic groups rather than on a geographical basis, and the church maintained various theological institutions. By 1963, there were 18 theological schools and seminaries, with a total enrollment of 741 students. The Myanmar Divinity School, later named the Myanmar Institute of Theology, Insein, Yangon is the best known.

The Christian Endeavor Society Union was organized under the Myanmar Baptist Convention. This provided Christian youth a variety of experiences, and helped them grow in the knowledge of Christ. The magazine *High Call*, published by the organization, was known to be one of the best Christian youth magazines in Southeast Asia.

From time to time, the Myanmar Baptist Convention launched evangelistic programs under specific themes: Mission to the Church (1961), Mission to Families (1962), Sesquicentennial--Our Baptist Heritage (1963), Mission to the Youth (1964), and Mission to the Rural and Urban Areas (1965). Two main purposes of the evangelistic programs were: 1) for all Baptist churches in Myanmar to become evangelistic groups; and 2) for all the mem-

bers to become evangelists. However, the impact of the program was small because of the tendency of the church towards uncritical ecumenism, and the loss of church government, which affected the financial support.

Since the 1960s, the Myanmar Baptist Convention, as well as other mainline denominations, has been so influenced by ecumenism and liberalism in theology, that the church has been losing its evangelistic zeal.

The 150th anniversary of the Myanmar Baptist Mission was celebrated at Yangon in December 1963. This event recalled the missionaries' work in the past, and challenged the Christians to reach the unreached millions with the gospel. By that time membership numbered 216,631.

3. THE ANGLICAN MISSION

Just after the second Anglo-Burmese war (1853), the British army chaplains raised a Myanmar mission fund to spread the Christian faith among the Myanma. An educational work was begun at Mawlamyang. The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (S. P. G.) sent Mr. Cockey, a school-master, to work among the Eurasians in Myanmar in 1854. He was ordained five years later. In 1859, the Society sent Reverend A. Shears to

Yangon to oversee the mission work in Myanmar, and sent Mr. Jonathan to Mawlamyang.⁴⁵

McLeish has listed a number of missionaries who worked in Myanmar. Among them were Dr. and Mrs. John. E. Marks who came in 1860 and developed educational work and propagation of the gospel.⁴⁶ Purser recorded that Prince Thoze, son of King Mindon at Mandalay, became interested in Christianity, and invited Dr. Marks to the royal palace. The king granted Dr. Marks permission to build a school. In 1863, the missionary erected a school and a church at Mandalay, the royal city of the king, at the expense of the king of Myanmar, where nine of the king's sons, including Thibaw Mintha, who later became king, studied. The first Myanmar convert, by the name of Maung Shwe Zahn, was baptized in 1863.⁴⁷

Moreover, Marks started a school at Yangon in 1863, now known as St. John's College. Yangon became a mission center with a girls' school and St. John's College. In the 1870s, Mrs. Mark started a mission enterprise to keep the Karen Christians from slipping back into paganism or going over to the Roman Catholics. They extended this mission also to the Asho Chins at Pyi and Thayetmyo, to the Tamils, Chinese, and Eurasians.⁴⁸

⁴⁵William C. Bertrand Purser, *Christian Missions in Burma* (Westminster: Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, 1913), 108-9.

⁴⁶Alexander McLeish, *Christian Progress in Burma* (London: World Dominion Press, 1929), 24.

⁴⁷Purser, 110-8.

⁴⁸McLeish, 27.

As more missionaries came, the mission added more schools and orphanages. Girls' schools at Pyi (Prome), Thayet, and in Payundaung Yangon were run by the Women's Association. The mission founded an English-Myanma school at Taungoo, and St. Michael School at Kyimindine (Kamendine), Yangon. Also, a divinity school was opened at Kyimindine in 1883. By 1881, there were fourteen mission schools. Most of the teachers were missionaries or Anglo-Myanma. William Henry Jackson, who himself was blind from childhood and who had graduated from Oxford University, founded a school for the blind.

The mission started home mission work and self-propagation in the 1870s. The first four Kayin teachers were ordained to serve among their own people in 1878.⁴⁹ A medical mission was opened at Taungoo under the Kayin mission in 1879. The Shwebo mission started with a medical station in 1887. Also, a Tamil clergyman was ordained in 1878 to oversee the Tamil mission. By 1881, the Anglican Mission of Myanmar had about 3,500 native Christians, including 1,400 communicants, 49 village chapels, and three well-built town churches. According to McLeish the work among the country people (the tribals) was more successful than among the townspeople (most of Bama).⁵⁰

⁴⁹Purser, 123.

⁵⁰McLeish, 26.

The mission at Mandalay developed between 1888 and 1900. G. H. Colbeck built a church and a school at Madaza, near Mandalay. His ascetic life greatly impressed the people, and several converts became excellent workers.

The mission work was less indigenous and more successful among the Eurasians and foreigners. However, the church licensed native evangelists and priests, and as they gave the gospel to the native Kayins they won more. One of their strategies was that they did not spend a long time in an effort to win resistant persons but focused on the responsive ones. The educational approach was also very effective.

The Bible Church Men's Missionary Society sent Reverend A. T. Houghton to Mohnyin in the northern part of Myanmar in 1924. He felt the call to evangelize the Jingphaw Kachins while he was in the military. After being ordained by the Church of England, he with his wife and his sister, the latter a trained nurse, settled down at Mohnyin. The whole area was opened up for the gospel through the dispensary. Twelve Kachin converts within a few years seemed to promise a great harvest. The work was carried to the Jingphaws throughout Hukong valley, and also to the Shans.⁵¹ Mission work through the hospital among the Shans won a few Palong Buddhists. A Bible school was opened at Mohnyin in 1931.

⁵¹Ibid., 30-1.

Reverend and Mrs. Hacking extended the mission work to the Paletwas-Chin and won mostly Khumis. The New Testament Translation into Khumi was completed in 1953 by the hard work of missionary E. Francis. The mission had 3,000 members in this area in 1970.

4. THE METHODIST MISSION

The Methodist mission came to Myanmar under two groups: the American Methodist Episcopal and the Wesleyan Methodists. The respective mission fields were known as the Methodist Lower Myanmar and the latter the Methodist Upper Myanmar respectively.

4.1 THE METHODIST LOWER MYANMAR

There were some Indian Methodists in Yangon even before the mission began work in Myanmar. In 1879, a worship service began with those believers when James A. Thoburn, a missionary to Calcutta, visited Robert E. Carter who had just arrived from Ohio, America as a missionary to Myanmar. A church was established with those believers in 1880.⁵²

The Women's Foreign Mission Society sent Ms. Edna Warner to Myanmar in 1881 to start a girl's

⁵²Nolan B. Harmon, *Understanding the United Methodist Church* (Nashville: Abindon Press, 1974), 360.

school. The school was opened at Yangon in 1882. The works were extended to Bago (Pegu), Thanyan (Syriam), Thonwa, Thandaung, Magwe (Mergui), and Twente. Thus, schools became the most instrumental method for the extension of the mission.

Mission work was not as easy as in other parts of Myanmar. McLeish noted H. J. Hawwood's words about the difficulty, saying:

Burma has been one of the most different and unresponsive fields for Christian evangelism, and the walls of spiritual lethargy will not collapse through any human agency. One of the difficulties mentioned was the scarcity of those who offered themselves for Christian service. Too few had been forthcoming to keep the work going forward, much less to supply a growing need.⁵³

By 1920, the Methodist Lower Myanmar had five districts: Pegu, Yangon, Chinese, English, and Indian. Educational work was one of the prime tasks. There were two high schools, five boys' Anglo-Vernacular middle schools, three girls' Anglo-Vernacular middle schools, and thirteen primary schools.⁵⁴ The English Methodist High School in Yangon was well known until the government nationalized the institution. By 1978, there were 13 full-time preachers, including three ordained women ministers. The English Methodist Church at Yangon

⁵³McLeish, 29-30.

⁵⁴Ibid., 30.

has been slowly regaining its evangelistic zeal since 1980. Rev. Zothan Mawia has assumed the pastoral leadership.

4.2 METHODIST UPPER MYANMAR

In 1887, soon after the close of the third Anglo-Burmese war, Rev. J.H. Baitsan from England came to upper Myanmar as an army chaplain. His main activities were through schools. But the work in upper Myanmar was found to be much more difficult than in lower Myanmar, as McLeish has noted: "there still appears no sign of any Christ-ward movement in the near future."⁵⁵

Mr. W. R. Winston came to Myanmar in 1887 and opened an English school at Mandalay.⁵⁶ Seeing many lepers while preaching on the street, he founded the first leprosy home at Mandalay in 1890. It was well equipped, so that many lepers were able to obtain treatment and so be healed. Besides, mission stations were opened at Pakoku, Monywa, Kyautse, Salin, Kalaw, and Mawlaik. The work among Shan tribes met with initially enthusiastic response, but follow-up was not done adequately.

The Mission extended its field from Mandalay to Pakoku, and to the Chin Hills. The early converts were mostly young people won through the mission schools. Furthermore, Bible classes, evange-

⁵⁵ Ibid., 28.

⁵⁶ George Gilanders Findlay, *The History of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society*, vol. 5, (London: The Epworth Press, c. 1921-4).

listic services, and sometimes open-air preaching helped the evangelistic work. Unfortunately, missionaries were few and workers were always needed.

By 1900, the community numbered 780, including 396 communicants, 6 catechists, and 65 school teachers, with 1,351 students. By 1925, the growth suddenly increased by transfer of members. D. E. Jones and Edwin Rowland pioneered the mission among the Lushai (Mizo) immigrants in Kaley Kabaw valley. Those immigrants, who were formerly Baptists and Presbyterians, but had felt the lack of pastoral care, had consequently joined the Methodists. They formed the majority of Methodists in Upper Myanmar.⁵⁷ By 1981, the membership had increased to 35,250.

5. CHURCH OF CHRIST

The origin and growth of the Church of Christ was centered among the Lisu people of Kachin, as was established by the efforts of J. Russell Morse's family. In the 1920s, they started a mission among the Lisu people on the China-Tibet border, beyond the Mekong and Salween rivers of Yunan province. In 1927, political troubles in China forced them to leave the field. Morse encouraged the Lisu Christians to begin missionary efforts among their own people in Myanmar.

⁵⁷Changte Lal Hminga, "The Life and Witness of the Churches in Mizoram," unpublished M.A. Thesis. Fuller Theological Seminary, 1976, 166.

By 1933, there were a few congregations being established at Tiliwago in the Kachin state of Myanmar. The missionaries visited these congregations at various times until 1949 and conducted short-term Bible seminars. The mission was carried also to the Rawangs, and churches were planted among them. The Morse family established a mission center near Putao in 1950. The missionaries opened short-term Bible schools and trained evangelists. Mission schools were opened in many places. 'Bible translation into the native dialect was done. The native preachers brought the gospel to their own tribe, and to the Nagas as well. Beginning in 1968, the mission prepared broadcasts in the Lisu language and these were beamed to northern Myanmar from the Far East Broadcasting Company in Manila.

The church grew steadily. There were 30 churches with 3,500 members in 1941. By the time the Morses left the field in 1964, the community had grown to 19,000 members. By 1981, it had increased to 54,000. This growth took place mainly by a people movement among the Rawangs.

6. SEVENTH DAY ADVENTIST

This mission work started in 1919 with pioneer missionaries such as Mr. R. A. Becker, G. A. Hamilton, D. C. Ludington, Tree B. Hare, Mr. and Mrs. H. A. Skinner, Mr. and Mrs. A. J. Denoyer, and Mr. and Mrs. G. E. Shannor. It was organized in 1919 under the Southern Asia Headquarters in Poona,

India. The first mission headquarters in Myanmar was opened at Yangon, with three mission sections: Yangon-Upper Myanmar, Ayeyarwady Delta, and Tanintharyi (Tennasserim). From the very beginning the Sabbath school department, the Educational department, and the Young People's department were organized. Several native workers assisted the missionaries. Dr. and Mrs. O. Tornblad pioneered the medical mission station.

The Adventist work among the Kachins, Chins, Shans, and Kayahs had more growth than any other group in the country. The Hospital in Yangon had a great impact on the people before it was nationalized. Many people went through the schools, literature, and personal evangelism. The church had 23 congregations, with 1327 members in 1950. It grew to 102 congregations with 8,074 members by 1981. The Adventists are strong in tithing and offerings. Their Sunday school work is a good example for others.

7. SALVATION ARMY

The Salvation Army began a Myanmar mission in 1915 and was directed from India. It became Burma Command in 1928. By 1929, there were eighteen European officers carrying the ministry among young people and prisoners. They opened soldiers'

homes at Maymyo and Mandalay.⁵⁸ Little more is known about the work of the Salvation Army in the latter period.

8. PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

British soldiers and traders first introduced the Presbyterian mission to Myanmar after the third Anglo-Burmese war. But no chaplain or missionary ever came. The first church, St. Andrew in Yangon, was one of the finest before Independence, but church membership decreased when the members left for their native lands.

The church today, established among the Mizo-Chins, is a result of the revival among the Mizos in India, which was passed down to the Mizo ethnic group in Myanmar. When they celebrated their twenty-fifth anniversary in 1981, the membership numbered 21,280. This growth took place mainly among the Mizos and Dai people in southern Chin State.

The Home Mission was organized in 1968 and has sent evangelists and missionaries to the Matu and Mindat areas of southern Chin state. By 1980, there were twenty home missionaries working in those areas. Local churches raised mission funds by methods of *lawmbawm* (thanksgiving box), collections

⁵⁸McLeish, 31.

of “handful of rice” and “firewood,” and with these collections supported the missionaries. These methods have been a great example to other churches. By 1983, the Presbyterian church had grown to 22,000 members.

9. EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH OF MYANMAR

This mission began with an indigenous church leader, Reverend Lalthan Liana, in the 1955. The church has adopted fundamental evangelicalism and is opposed to the ecumenism of the Myanmar Christian Council. Its mission had a great impact among the Mizo, the Tedim, and the Matu people among Chin. By 1980, the community had 17,000 members.

10. EVANGELICAL BAPTIST CONFERENCE

This church was planted at Tedim, Chin state on July 5, 1975. It emerged as a result of a renewal movement. It also split from the Baptist Church, as the “born again believers” were expelled from the church. Renewal swept over many individuals beginning in 1972 in the Tedim Cope Memorial Baptist Church and other denominations. Reverend Go Za Kham, a former president, was one of the leaders of the renewal movement. As the movement strengthened, the anti-renewal movement was also

strong. As a result, the born again Christian group established the Church for evangelistic purposes. It is one of the leading evangelical churches today with its Faith Bible School, evangelism and mission outreach, and church planting.

11. MORE INDIGENOUS CHURCHES TODAY

More indigenous churches have been rising up since the 1970s. Almost all of them are Evangelical and Pentecostal churches. This shift reflects the renewal movements, evangelism, and church planting in urban and rural areas. Some of the products of these movements are the United Pentecostal Church, the Church of Jesus Christ, the Evangelical Church of Christ, the Gospel Baptist Church, the Christian and Missionary Alliance, the Four Square Church, the Fundamental Baptist Church, the Nazarene Church, and the Full Gospel Church. All of them have their own programs and projects in Christian education, evangelism and mission, and church planting.

12. SUMMARY

Churches in Myanmar, though founded by foreign missions, are largely indigenous today and are enjoying steady growth. Christianity is the second largest religious group in the country. The majority of Christians come from major ethnic groups such as the Kayin, Chin, and Kachin. The church has suffered

political, social, and economic turmoil throughout its history, but it is standing firm on a solid foundation. A recent evangelical and Pentecostal renewal movement has greatly stimulated evangelism and mission work.

CHURCHES	YEAR BEGAN	TOTAL CHURCHES	MINISTERS	BIBLE SCHOOLS	MEMBER- SHIP
CATHOLIC MISSION STREAM					
Catholic	1554	-	-	-	400,000
CONCILIAR MISSION STREAM					
Myanmar Baptist Convention	1807	3,510	3,850	32	920,000
Church of Province of Myanmar	1824	110	185	5	48,400
The Methodist Church (Upper Myanmar)	1886	240	80	1	18,750
The Methodist Church (Lower Myanmar)	1879	24	18	-	3,150
The Presbyterian Church of Myanmar	1954	230	110	1	14,600
Self-Support Kayin Baptist Mission Society	1912	65	92	1	7,000
Lutheran Bethlehem Church	1978	5	2	-	1,050
St. Gabriel Church (Congregational)	1925	1	1	-	200
Salvation Army	1915	14	32	1	570
Lisu Christian Church of Myanmar	1878	250	165	4	2,500
Independent Church of Myanmar	1938	55	25	1	5,500
Mara Evangelical Church	1971	70	33	-	14,200
EVANGELICAL-PENTECOSTAL STREAM					
Assemblies of God of Myanmar	1931	675	748	4	67,648
Church of Christ	1933	200	250	5	65,000
Evangelical Free Church of Myanmar	1955	80	64	1	17,000
United Pentecostal Church	1965	160	101	1	14,000
Evangelical Baptist Conference	1975	70	50	4	7,000
Church of Jesus Christ	1975	305	69	1	n.r.

CHURCHES	YEAR BEGAN	TOTAL CHURCHES	MINISTERS	BIBLE SCHOOLS	MEMBER- SHIP
EVANGELICAL-PENTECOSTAL STREAM					
Biblical Baptist Church	1979	15	15	-	3,015
Evangelical Church of Christ	1980	16	15	-	500
Christian & Missionary Alliance	1985	20	7	-	2,404
Gospel Baptist Church	1986	105	66	1	8,000
Nazarene Church	1984	26	10	-	5,000
Foursquare Church of Myanmar	1988	20	17	-	3,000
Church on the Rock	1990	24	18	1	2,500
Christian Brethren (Witnessing)	1884	45	109	1	4,954
Bethany Baptist Evangelical	1985	6	10	-	612
Evangelical Church of God	1985	9	8	1	1,200
Pentecostal Church of God	1979	7	10	-	2,500
Full Gospel Center	1988	1	n.r.	1	600
Evangelical Presbyterian Church	1983	54	60	1	10,000
NON-AFFILIATED CHURCH					
Seventh Day Adventist	1919	115	173	5	18,223
New Apostolic Church	1979	n.r.	n.r.	-	-
Seventh Day Baptist Conference	1965	n.r.	n.r.	-	-
Church of God (Sabbath)	n.r.	n.r.	n.r.	-	-
PARA-CHURCH MOVEMENT					
Campus Crusade for Christ	1972				
Every Home for Christ	n.r.				
Myanmar Church Planting Mission	1994				
Myanmar Young Crusades	1974				

Table 2
Churches and Christian Membership
in Myanmar (1995)

3 THE ASSEMBLIES OF GOD OF MYANMAR

The Assemblies of God is the fastest growing church and the third largest denomination in Myanmar today. The establishment of the mission dates back to the year 1931, and since then the mission has drawn more than sixty thousand followers. It started among the unknown tribes of Lisu and Rawang people at the most northern part of the country and has spread out to several ethnic groups through the country. Major growth has taken place since revival has swept over churches among the Chin people over the last two and a half decades, shifting the majority of born again believers into Pentecostal affiliation and practice.

The whole history can be put into three chapters: the pioneering stage (1920-1966), revival and growth (1967-1980), and the general council and mission strategies (1980-1995). The year 1966 marks the missionaries' return home and indigenous leadership taking full charge of the mission.

I. THE PIONEERING WORK

The earliest Pentecostal witness to Myanmar nationals came to the Lakher who are scattered and live on the borders of three countries: Myanmar, Bangladesh and Assam of India. Around 1905, Mr. Reginald Lorrain, a clerk in a London business house

at Shillong, India, was able to witness to this people. He put their language into writing and translated and published parts of the Bible and hymnbooks in Lakher. He observed, "...there is beginning a great movement towards Christ among the Lakher, and ... the worshiping of demons cannot last many years."¹

The March 20, 1926 issue of *Pentecostal Evangel* weekly magazine published an account of the gospel being preached to the Melee people, in upper Myanmar, that resulted in the turning of the whole tribe to the Lord. The missionaries at work were Hector and Sigrid McLean.² The September 11, 1926 issue of *Pentecostal Evangel* again described a Pentecostal movement among the Loheh tribe at Ming-tz-shan in Myanmar. It reported, "Approximately 60 have received the Baptism of the Spirit according to Acts 2:4 and numbers are at the altar seeking."³ It goes on to mention people confessing their sins for forgiveness and receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Another article mentions an event in 1924, detailing how a Jingpaw man and his wife confessed Christ and took water baptism under the ministry of three white missionaries.⁴ Nothing further is known about the above early Pentecostal mission.

¹*Pentecostal Evangel*, January 3, 1925.

²*Ibid.*, (March 20, 1926):6.

³*Ibid.*, (September 11, 1926):10.

⁴*Ibid.*, (January 26, 1935):3.

1.1 MISSIONARIES

1.1.1 THE LEONARD BOLTON FAMILY

The Pentecostal witnesses came to the Lisu people in Myanmar as a bridging mission with the work in Southwest China. An English missionary, Alfred Lewer, his wife Mary, and his sister Ada Buchwater, came to Southwest China and began their pioneering ministry at Wheisi, on the China-Myanmar-Tibet border, in 1919. Sometime in 1921, Miss Ada Buchwater (later Mrs. Leonard Bolton) made a trip to Pen Kai village, on the Mekong River, where she came into contact and shared the gospel with some Lisu people from Myanmar.⁵

The first Assemblies of God missionaries to set foot in Myanmar, and whose ministries in China had a great impact on the people in Myanmar, were Leonard and Olive Bolton. Responding to God's call to China, they sailed from England in preparation for their northward trip to the Salwin Valley of Southwest China and landed in Yangon (Rangoon) in September, 1924. While staying at the YMCA building in Yangon, they received the bad news about the drowning of Alfred Lewer on his way to meet the new missionaries. The news made Leonard hesitant about their missionary call, and he felt a check about proceeding further. But the Holy Spirit reminded him of the Word of God that says, "No man having

⁵Glen D. Stafford, *A Brief History of the Assemblies of God of Burma*. Springfield: Central Bible College (unpublished) (1977), 2.

put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”⁶

Bolton was further encouraged as he meditated on the Word of God that says, “I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go. I will guide thee with my eye.”⁷ So they went from Yangon to Mandalay by train, and then to Bhamo by boat along the Ayeyarwady (Irrawady) River. Then, they crossed over the Chinese border, using a mule train.

The Alfred Lewer family sent a Lisu preacher by the name of David Ho, and some escorts, to guide the new missionaries from Bhamo to Wheisi, China. Not knowing the language, they communicated only by gestures, signs and smiles. The way to Wheisi was considered hazardous and troublesome, requiring the crossing of high mountains and deep valleys where bandits attacked often. Finally, by God’s help, the Boltons reached Wheisi where they joined their sister, Vicky, and Mary, the widow of Alfred.

Bolton readily learned the new language, adapted to the culture, and started preaching the gospel. Unfortunately, he lost his wife and newborn son within a few months of arrival. In spite of such discouragement, he was able to preach, witness, and bring many Lisus to Christ. He made extensive journeys preaching the gospel to people who were sitting

⁶Leonard Bolton, *China Call* (Springfield: Gospel Pub. House, 1984), 25.

⁷*Ibid.*, 26.

in darkness, baptizing them and teaching them to be Disciples of Christ.

The ministry in Southwest China was always linked with the ministry among the Lisu in Myanmar. Bolton and David Ho often made exploratory trips to the Lisu and Kerning people in Myanmar and ministered to them. Moreover, the Lisu immigrants were effectively instrumental in bringing the gospel to their own people in Myanmar. Many Lisus of the Mekong and Salwin River regions, who came to Christ through the ministry of Bolton, had migrated to Myanmar. They brought with them their Scriptures, hymn books, simple catechisms, and vibrant testimonies and became part of the Myanmar Church. The Rawang (Kanong) people in the same area also received the gospel and shared the Lisu Scriptures, for they did not have their own written script.

Bolton served many years in the China field. He was a refugee in India during the Sino-Japanese War. He told how his life had been saved many times from cruel death. His work had a great impact in Myanmar.

1.1.2 THE CLIFFORD MORRISON FAMILY

The next Assemblies of God missionaries to set foot in Myanmar were G. Clifford and Lavada Morrison. Their pioneer work began at the Salwin River valley in Southwest China, probably sometime in the 1920s. While in the mission field, God gave

them a vision through His words, saying:

Enlarge the place of your tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thy habitations . . . thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited (Isaiah 54:2-4).⁸

1.2 MISSIONARY CHARACTERISTICS

1.2.1 MISSIONARIES' COMMITMENT

They were completely convinced that God would meet the need of the vast territory whose people were still "sitting in darkness" and in the shadow of death. Thus, they wrote their new commitment as follows:

Knowing that we would not be building upon another's foundation but on virgin soil we earnestly sought the Lord to give us wisdom and understanding of what His plans were for establishing a church on a solid foundation. We prayed that by His grace and Holy Ghost power He would enable us to do this as quickly as possible. We needed divine guidance for the great task before us which only God could give.⁹

⁸*The Missionary Challenge* (1947):17.

⁹*Ibid.*, 18.

In the year 1927, when the Communists revolted in China, the Morrison family, with others, escaped to Myanmar. The only exit available to them was the Sila pass, ranging 15,500 feet high. It was a time of struggle against the elements, frustration, and hunger, according to their records. The journey from Shang Pah to Putao (Fort Hertz) in northern Myanmar took seventy-seven days, of which fifty-four were on foot. Mrs. Morrison saw this hazardous trip as the means God would use to bring them to minister among the tribes of Myanmar, saying,

Then one day God spoke to our hearts and revealed His purpose in it all, saying, "where there is no vision, the people perish!" I had to lead you out this way by this route to give you an eye vision of a people sitting in darkness and the shadow of death. A people so isolated from the rest of the world, and so secluded in the depth of these mountains that they are in a particularly unknown region, and none had ever taken to them the gospel light. I have chosen you to be my messenger to this people. Will you obey my call? ¹⁰

The Morrises, with their four children, went back to China and continued their work in the Salwin Valley, in 1929. A dramatic encounter took place which served as the starting point of mission

¹⁰J. Clifford Morrison, *Burma-China Border Mission* (A letter to Maynard Ketcham). Assemblies of God Head Quarters: Springfield, 1965:159.

work in Myanmar in 1931. Stafford described this incident as follows:

Two Rawang tribesmen from Burma traveled over high mountain passes into Salwin Valley carrying packs of Burmese goat wool to trade for Chinese rock salt. They came to Shang Pah, where the Clifford Morrisons were living, and “happened” on a Pentecostal convention. There they heard for the first time of Jesus who could wash away their sins. One of the men, tears streaming down his face, waved his hand toward the west and exclaimed, “My people live beyond those mountains.... They have never heard the story you tell of the one True God, and know not the ‘Way of Life’.... Won’t you send someone to my people to tell them about Jesus?”¹¹

1.2.2 BRIDGING THE MISSION

Like the Macedonian call of Paul, the appeal to “send the light to the other side” touched the hearts of the missionaries. The Morrisons themselves could not go and preach the gospel to the people in Myanmar right away because of the heavy demand of their work. But when spring came and the snow had melted, making travel through the mountains possible, they sent a couple of Chinese Lisu evange-

¹¹Stafford, *A Brief History*, 213; ref. Maynard L. Ketcham, “Rawang Christians Hold Silver Jubilee,” in *Pentecostal Evangel* (April 12, 1966):6.

lists, Paul Young and Nathaniel, with a few others to Myanmar for evangelism. After three months of their hard work, thirty-seven Lisu and Rawang families had come to Christ, put away their spirit-altars of the primal religion, and committed themselves to worship and serve the living God.

Thus, the work of the Assemblies of God which was started in China, began to extend into Myanmar, spreading from village to village, through the jungle and over the mountains. As the Lisu, who were converted on the China side, brought the message to their villages in Myanmar, their converts, in turn, began to witness to the Rawang people, and some years later the Rawang witnessed to the Lhao-vo (Maru). Thus, the seed was sown that would bear fruit in a strong Myanmar work.

1.2.3 EQUIPPING NATIVE WORKERS

More workers were needed however, as small churches were springing up everywhere in the two parts of Lisu land. So, the missionaries opened Bible schools at their mission center to train the native workers and put them into the needy field where people were calling for the gospel, both in China and in Myanmar.

The classes lasted from six weeks to three months at a time. Following the period of study, the students were sent into pioneer fields to preach, tell the gospel, and teach the natives to read, sing, and write. At the end of six months they were recalled

for more teaching, and others were sent out to take their place. In this way zeal increased, and a mix of heathen ideas with Christian faith was prevented by the teaching of the Word of God.

1.2.4 PLANTING CHURCHES

Morrison often traveled on foot over the rough mountains for two and three months, covering hundreds of miles deep in the interior where the gospel had never been preached. As new churches were springing up both in China and Myanmar, the missionaries set them in order, elected deacons and elders, and appointed them over certain districts to take charge of the local services through the week. The lay ministries assumed many—even most—responsibilities.

The newly planted churches were truly indigenous. Buildings were erected by believers' own efforts, using local materials like bamboo. Missionaries taught believers to tithe and develop spiritual and physical responsibilities to be self-reliant.

Many notable events took place through the prayers and simple faith of the deacons and Christians. Often the deacons and Christians would gather in the home of a sick person, pray all night long, and sometimes two and three days at a time, until the sick person was healed. If they still failed to get deliverance for the person who was sick, they would call for the missionaries to come and pray. This method helped to relieve the missionaries, and

at the same time strengthen the local churches in faith and in the things of God.

The missionaries visited the work in Myanmar for the first time in 1940. To their surprise, more than 500 believers gathered at the start. They realized the Holy Spirit had preceded their going to Myanmar. Lavada Morrison wrote about an event of revival, saying,

Words will never be able to express our joy.... During the first or second service in their midst, the Holy Spirit fell over the whole vast assembly, and over half of the congregation was praising God and singing in an unknown tongue while many were dancing in the Spirit.¹²

During these two weeks of meetings, the Morrisons baptized over three hundred new believers. The 1941 census recorded 367 members.¹³ They helped set the churches in order and assigned young prospective workers, for the first time, to the ministry under the supervision of older workers.

The revival continued under the ministry of Lisu Bible students and evangelists. The students and evangelists traveled, like Wesley's circuit riders, to the newly planted churches. They then returned to the China side for more training.

¹²*The Missionary Challenge* (1949):13.

¹³*Pentecostal Evangel*, March 31, 1941.

Besides the Boltons and Morrisons, Pentecostal missionaries from Sweden, Finland, and the "Go Ye Fellowship" came and labored in Myanmar prior to World War II. The "Open Bible Standard Church" started a mission for a short time just before the fall of the country to the Japanese armies. None of these groups however returned to Myanmar after the war, and thus there was no continuing work. Nevertheless, the years following World War II were the great years of advancement for the work of the Assemblies of God in the various areas of Myanmar.¹⁴

1.3 INDIGENOUS LAY PREACHERS

During the 1930s, the Lisu preachers mainly carried the work in Myanmar. The Morrisons sent native evangelists to oversee believers in Myanmar. The evangelists effectively propagated the Christian message among this isolated unknown people. The work of these indigenous pioneers remains evident in the Pentecostal story in Myanmar.

The Chinese Lisu convert, Paul Young, came to Myanmar through Magonjicyit pass in 1931. He was a co-worker of Morrison among the Lisu in China. He began witnessing among the Lisu villages-Khuabude, Zang Yaw, Zimmasuam, Namzar, Nangseng, and Marangdong. About sixty people, adults and youth together, accepted Christ within a few months as the first fruits of his hard labor. The number of

¹⁴Stafford, 3.

believers increased during the following years, and the first Assemblies of God church in Myanmar was erected at Khuabude in 1933.¹⁵

David Ho was 20 years old when he accepted Christ in 1930. He acquired the knowledge of the Word of God at the feet of Morrison. In 1933, he with three of his friends, John, Huchisi, and Meyer, came into Myanmar via the Lakhu Razi pass and started proclaiming the gospel at Labang village, near Khuabude, and villages nearby. Many new converts were added to the church during the three years of their ministry. The evangelists were persecuted severely by Communist soldiers so that the scars remain evident on their bodies to this day.

Timothy was fourteen when he accepted Christ in 1932. Three years later he committed himself to the ministry of the Lord. He also came to Myanmar through the Lakhu Razi pass, and propagated the gospel in the villages of Amatzong, Chang Jong, Langda Jong, Raninthi, and Lawa. He is remembered as a powerful preacher. Believers were added and new churches were planted among Lisu and Rawang in northern Myanmar. Timothy also suffered greatly under the persecution of Chinese authorities.

¹⁵Dakhum David, "The Assemblies of God of Myanmar (in Myanma)." (Unpublished Manuscript. n.d.), 4.

Nathaniel was the first indigenous ordained minister who obtained a minister's license from the British government. He began serving the Lord in 1931. He, along with his co-workers Jacob, Matthew, Barnabas, and Moses, planted a number of churches. Under their efforts, the first combined Christmas service for all the churches was celebrated at Nyiwa village in 1938.

Moses, born at Shinnago village near Khuabude, was the first Myanma national Christian worker. He accepted Christ in 1935. Along with his friends, Naphachi and Thomas, Moses acquired Bible knowledge from Morrison. They were the first national Christian workers to collaborate with the missionaries. Moses was elected as the Lisu district superintendent of the Assemblies of God of Myanmar in 1940.

By the year 1940, there were about 700 converts in this northern region. The church was strengthened by the sacrificial labor of the indigenous workers. God was fulfilling the vision of the Morrisons, to bring the gospel light to this very dark part of the world.

2. CONSOLIDATING THE CHURCH (1940-1956)

World War II devastated Myanmar as Japanese armies entered the country in 1939. Missionaries left the field with uncertainty about returning. The church in this period showed rapid growth in multiple dimensions in spite of the war and the missionaries' absence.

2.1 PEOPLE MOVEMENT

Although there were various ethnic groups in the country, the Assemblies of God mission work in upper Myanmar mainly focused on the Lisu, Rawang (Kanong), and Lhao-vo (Maru). The growth in this whole area came through a people movement. The Lisu had brought the gospel to the Rawang, and the Rawang in turn brought it to the Lhao-vo. The ministry among the Rawang people group began in 1934. They responded to the gospel and turned to Christ in great numbers. In the same way, the Lhao-vo responded to the gospel with a people movement. Entire villages turned to Christ and they dropped their heathen practices. Their social and religious lives in bamboo churches were Christ-centered lives. Herman Tegenfeldt, a Baptist missionary to Kachin land, described the people movement among the Lisus, saying,

A decade later, the Lisus (mostly in China but some in Burma) began to respond when Baptists in Burma and China Inland Mission

in China contacted them. Later, they turned to Christ in large numbers, a movement in which Assemblies of God and Church of Christ missions also participated.¹⁶

2.2 THE CHURCH IN WORLD WAR II

The effect of World War II was severe loss throughout the country. In 1942, the Japanese armies occupied Myanmar and almost all the mission stations, institutions, schools and even churches. They persecuted and even tortured the Christians. Christians died for their faith as they lived for Christ. All the missionaries from different denominations left the field. The Morrisons left their field in China and evacuated to India. For about three months in 1944, Morrison was a civilian refugee worker as a liaison officer, under the U.S. army at Hukong Valley in the Kachin state of Myanmar.

2.2.1 INDIGENOUS PRINCIPLES AT WORK

In spite of war and the absence of the missionaries, the church showed progress under the leadership of indigenous workers. The progress was enabled by the fact that the church had been firmly established to be self-propagating, self-supporting, and self-governing from the very beginning. A report about the indigenous church says this:

¹⁶Herman G. Tegenfeldt, *The Kachin Baptist Church of Burma* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1974), 94.

Suddenly, as they sat on the mountain top looking out at the clouds around, the stillness of the village was broken by the sound of a bell, and they noticed the natives leaving their huts. It was time for evening prayer, and so the British soldiers followed. They found the hut set apart as a church. There were low forms for seating, a black-board on the wall, and pictures from sacred calendars. The women and girls sat on one side, the men and boys on the other. One of the natives was a minister, and led them in singing hymns in the native tongue. Then there was a deep reverence as they prayed. A bamboo wicker bowl was passed around for the offering. The natives put their hard-earned *annas* in... and preached in the native language.¹⁷

The Holy Spirit strengthened these efforts by bringing signs and wonders. Morrison reported how signs and wonders convinced people to turn to Christ:

One of our preachers was telling me how a Baptist family in Burma was led into a deeper experience with the Lord through a case of healing in the family. This man was the headman of the village and his daughter

¹⁷*Pentecostal Evangel* (Feb. 10, 1945):7.

was very sick. They had tried every kind of medicine from the hospital, but to no avail. One of our Lisu workers was present, and under the power of the Spirit he began to sing a hymn in their own tongue, a language he did not know. The people were amazed. The song was so worded that they listened with awe, and so moved that they asked him to pray for the girl. He did, and the girl was instantly healed.¹⁸

2.2.2 THE GROWTH

The number of believers showed growth from 700 before the war to 2,600 just after the war. Of these about 2,000 had been baptized in water, and about the same number had been filled with the Holy Spirit.¹⁹ By the year 1948, there were 26 churches with 12 Christian workers; 4,615 baptized members; and 3,380 affiliated members. The missionaries baptized 90 of the Rawang people some time in the 1950s. By 1955, there were 214 churches in this whole area.

The mission field in the uppermost part of Myanmar consisted of hundreds of villages and thousands of natives to be reached with the gospel message. Many of the mountain passes reached 12,000 to 15,000 feet in altitude. Mrs. Morrison described their trek to the field saying, "The field was twenty

¹⁸*Pentecostal Evangel* (April 3, 1948):7.

¹⁹*Pentecostal Evangel* (1948):84.

days in each direction and this was measured in foot travel as there was no road.”²⁰ The western district, which was a week’s journey from the headquarters, also had more than 1,000 believers. Alomo district, another seven-day journey from the headquarters, had over 1,000 believers. The Palawa district had about 600 believers, wherein more than half had received the baptism in the Holy Spirit. The Potao district, a ten-day journey from the mission center, had about 750 believers. The Konglongphu district, where the central work was located, was mostly settled by the Kanong tribe and had over 1,000 believers.

2.3 ESTABLISHING A MISSION CENTER

After the war in 1947, Morrison came to Myanmar to resume missionary work. His wife Lavada and daughter Geraldine joined him in 1951. He went up to the northern part of the country, to Khawlungphu, and continued their former work among the Lisu. Believers gladly and warmly welcomed him. He found that the Lord had blessed the work and a church had been planted at Putao (Fort Herzt) town, the administrative center in that region.

Perceiving the need to strengthen the growing work, Morrison decided to open a mission center in the northern part of the country. He chose Konglongphu on the eastern edge of Putao, which soon became the only major center when the Communists

²⁰Stafford, *A Brief History*, 4.

took over China from 1945-1950. Moreover, the influx of refugees from China evacuated to Myanmar, mainly the Lisu people, were added to the Myanmar church during this time.

2.4 SELF-SUPPORTING MISSION SCHOOL

Because of the pressing need for Bible training of new believers, the missionaries conducted short-term schools in various villages. There was not yet an established school building so they held classes in houses. The students often came to the missionaries' place, where a temporary shed was erected to hold the crowd. From 50 to 100 students attended each school.

By 1954, there were 150 students in two schools;²¹ one at Konglongphu and the other in Palawa. Students were taught not only the Bible, but also reading, writing, and arithmetic. The primary purpose was to prepare workers for ministry, as the missionaries felt that the only hope of reaching upper Myanmar was through their students.

Morrison wrote about the Palawa school as follows:

There is a nice group of students here, seventy in all. A wonderful spirit of prayer prevails over the student body; they have been praying steadily for two weeks now.

²¹Tegenfeldt, 287.

Many are receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and this wonderful move of God has been brought to the attention of those in the Baptist area. The Lord is moving upon the Christian Church in this part of Burma. If only we had more help! Just two more couples would give this revival a tremendous boost—a boost that the whole Kachin state would feel!²²

In spite of their poverty, the students supported themselves as much as possible. They brought their own rice and wood for cooking, and their own books, pencils and paper. They usually paid for their school supplies with vegetables, grain, and other home products since money was scarce. Local churches also donated food for the students. Morrison, in his letter to Maynard L. Ketcham, the Far East director, mentioned how students were supported:

Food for the school has been the biggest problem, because of the scarcity of it in these mountains. Hitherto, the local church in all parts of the territory have sacrificed greatly to meet this need, giving of their tithes and offering until often their own families have had to go hungry. All of the grain given has to be carried by natives to the school and much a five to ten day journey over the mountains.²³

²²Missionary Challenge, date and page missing.

²³Morrison, 6.

Local churches also helped students in evangelistic works. Whenever they labored in a new field where there were no Christians, their expenses were provided by donations from the local churches and by freewill offerings from believers. Moreover, Christians built new chapels in villages with their own labor and supplies.

2.5 SELF-PROPAGATING CHURCH

Licensed preachers were assigned in different districts to oversee the churches. Their ministry entailed not only preaching, but baptizing new converts, administering the Lord's supper, and performing marriage ceremonies. The young ministers, most of them Bible School graduates, were assigned to assist them.

Timothy and Phung Shar witnessed an important event in their ministries. They preached about the salvation of Christ, holiness, and the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Persecution followed their ministries. They turned themselves to fasting and prayer for many days. One day, while they were preaching, the Holy Spirit fell upon the new Christians in the audience so that they all spoke in tongues. As a result, many people turned to Christ, and ten new chapels were opened very shortly in the Potao area. They soon opened a Bible School.

Because of tension in the border territory with China, the missionaries were encouraged by the government to move over to Potao. Realizing the

shortness of time they might have to labor there, and not knowing when the door might be closed to missionaries, the third school was opened at Potao in 1956. Other primary schools were opened at Phung-jang, Manpung, Tawadam, and Zithung villages.

From this first work among the mountain people in remote sections of northern Myanmar, the missionaries began to feel the burden for the country as a whole. The work of evangelism then proceeded to central, southern and western Myanmar, reaching places such as Mogok, Mandalay, Yangon, and Kale.

3. MISSION TO CENTRAL MYANMAR

Eino Walter Erola from America came to Myanmar and worked under the Finish Salem Mission from 1937-1942. He returned as a liaison officer with the conquering British and American forces during the closing days of the war. Walter Erola with his wife Lucille Kathryn came back to central Myanmar in 1951.

When the Erolas came back, they started the mission work at Mogok town developing a church with outreach in other villages nearby. Here they laid the foundation for the work in central Myanmar. Lucille mentioned the fruit of their prayer ministry, saying, "Tun Gaun and Ma Tin were a Burmese Buddhist couple who turned to Christ by seeing in their dream the cross of Christ higher than pagoda. They

accepted Jesus and were both filled with the Holy Spirit.”²⁴

4. MISSIONARIES TO THE URBAN CITY

The Leonard Boltons arrived in Yangon from Chitagong of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) as missionary transfers in 1956. They found everything had changed, except the spiritual darkness, since they landed there twenty years ago. The city was still full of Buddhist monasteries, temples, and shrines.

“Church planting here meant rock-bottom pioneering,” said Leonard Bolton.²⁵ The missionaries began a meeting at an Indian family’s home, a rented house on Windamere Road, with a few people who were interested in Pentecostal messages. A few months later, they opened a “preaching point” at Kanto on the edge of the city.

The Lord blessed the ministry as they added two co-workers—Evedu, an Anglo-Myanma, and Felix, a Tamil Indian—to the mission work. Within a few months of their hard labor, eighteen members attended the services regularly at Yangon church, and twenty at the Kanto preaching point. Shortly, sixteen new converts took water baptism.

²⁴Walter E. Erola, “The Cross Above the Pagoda,” in *Pentecostal Evangel* (Dec. 4, 1955):8-9.

²⁵Bolton, *China Call*, 199.

The Erolas came to Yangon from the Mogok field while the Boltons moved to Mogok in 1957. The Erolas continued the meetings in houses for a year, as they had no permanent worship place. Special services were held in borrowed churches or rented halls when special speakers came from abroad. In 1957, the Glenn Staffords came to Yangon as missionaries to oversee the work in the capital city. The Boltons had to leave the country because they were not permitted to extend their visa.

In August 1961, Ray and Bethany Trask arrived at Yangon and worked in the evangelistic center, while the Staffords took a furlough. Ray Trask, with the help of translator Saw Sein Po Tin, made several gospel tours to nearby villages. A year later, the Trasks moved to Mogok to reside and continued the work there.

5. NATIONAL ORGANIZATION

The church's maturity and stability were as important in this period as its rapid growth. Thus, it is worth commenting here on the Assemblies of God structure. It is organized as a national council, elects its presbyters, and assumes responsibilities. It holds conventions biannually.

5.1 THE THREE DISTRICTS

By the year 1956, churches became more stable, laid as they were on a solid foundation. The growth, therefore, required a well-organized national church. Hence, on October 13, a National Council meeting was held at Mogok. The Council divided the mission field into three districts on the basis of regional contributions as well as linguistic orientations. The three districts were: the Lisu district, the Rawang district, and the Lower Burma district.

5.2 THE PRESBYTERS

In addition, the Council elected the first general presbyters to oversee the mission work as a whole. The elected presbyters were as follows.

General Superintendent.....	J. Clifford Morrison
Assistant Superintendent.....	Moses Fish
Secretary/ Treasurer.....	Walter Erola
Executive Committees.....	James Fish (Lisu) a Phung Shar (Rawang)

The National Organization of the “Assemblies of God of Burma (Myanmar)” was registered with the government the same year.²⁶

Missionary Glenn D. Stafford, who came to the field in 1957, was elected general superintendent

²⁶Stafford, *A Brief History*, 8.

in 1958 and served until 1966, when the entire committee was composed of Myanma nationals for the first time.

5.3 THE CONVENTIONS:

SILVER JUBILEE AND BIENNIALS

The Council held jubilee and biennial conventions for elections. The Silver Jubilee convention was held at Htawadam, Putao, in 1956. The convention was planned by the Lisu Christians as a celebration of their "first seeing the light" twenty-five years before. The host church erected a bamboo tabernacle and motel where the convention was held for two weeks.

The special guests at the convention were Maynard Ketcham, the Far East Director of Foreign Missions, and Morrison, Bolton, and Erola, who were missionaries to the field.

The two-week convention was attended by more than 2,000 believers. For many of those who would attend, the trek took as long as two weeks. They brought their supplies of rice, corn, and other food stuffs in addition to their sleeping mats. The host churches brought chickens, fish, and cows to butcher for food. Meals were served on bamboo leaves on long tables made of split bamboo. Everything was done using indigenous methods.

The convention was wonderfully blessed. The native leaders took turns leading the worship

services. The guests ministered the Word of God. The messages were translated into the different languages. Each meeting ended with an altar call. People repented of their sins and renewed commitments to the Lord. Many believers received the baptism of the Holy Spirit during the time of praise, worship, and prayer.²⁷ By this time, the church numbered 7,000, the majority of whom were from the Lisu tribal people. They had 36 Christian workers serving in the mission field.

The Rawang Silver Jubilee was celebrated in the same location in 1958. A thousand believers, including missionaries and foreign guests, attended the convention.

By the year 1960, there were 89 full-time pastors and lay preachers who ministered in 155 churches, and 81 outstations, with a total of 18,108 Pentecostal believers in the whole country.

A biennial convention was held at Htawadam, near Putao in 1961. Missionaries and delegates from churches in all parts of the country, about 3,000 believers in all, celebrated joyfully. Christine Carminal commented on the eagerness of the people: "They had walked for as many as fifteen days to find; they would not be denied. The national church dedicated itself afresh to the task of evangelizing the tribe of upper Burma."²⁸

²⁷ *Pentecostal Evangel* (July 23, 1961):10-1.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, (July 23, 1961):21.

The language barrier did not prevent the fellowship nor hinder the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Reverend Sturgeon served as the special guest speaker. The convention message was translated into the various dialects of the people.

Each meeting ended with an altar call. The evening service was scheduled to begin at 6:30 p.m. and ended at 11:00 p.m., yet people were praying and worshiping the Lord until midnight. Stafford said of this revival, "These were Pentecostal Christians and we had a 'real' Pentecostal convention."²⁹ He further mentioned how people were restored to God:

God dealt with sin. Some repented and confessed sins of long standing; some were convicted of carrying firewood on Sunday, or maybe it was killing a chicken on the Lord's day. You might smile at this, but to these sincere Christians they had transgressed their standard and wanted to repent. Others were guilty of greater things and we knew God was working.³⁰

The convention report evidenced an increase in the overall work of the Lord in the field. The delegates and ministers re-elected Glenn D. Stafford as the general superintendent, Sara Samuel as the assistant, and Walter Erola as the secretary/treasurer.

²⁹Ibid., (July 23, 1961):11.

³⁰Ibid.

6. URBAN EVANGELISM

In 1957, missionaries Glenn and Kathleen Stafford came to Yangon to take the Erolas' place. As they took over the ministry, they rented a hall at 325 Bar Street, just one-half block from the railway station, on a narrow street filled with rubble and bomb craters from the World War II air raids. The hall was small, holding 113 folding chairs.³¹

Special meetings with visiting evangelists from abroad always attracted crowds, and the spiritual response was gratifying. One of the outstanding preachers during this time (1958) was the evangelist Harvey McAlister. His full gospel message attracted people from all corners of the city. The sick were healed and believers experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

In 1959, the church moved temporarily to 47th Street, and in July 1960, it moved to 471 Pyi (Prome) Road near the Yangon Art and Science University. The latter location became the scene of a remarkable Pentecostal revival that broke out in 1961. Evangelist Mabel Willetts was the guest speaker. Her salvation messages were so powerfully anointed that the people could not help but repent and confess Christ as their personal Savior and Lord. An outpouring of the Holy Spirit fell on a group of people in the

³¹Stafford, *A Brief History*, 6-7.

congregation, which then developed into a veritable deluge.³²

Myo Chit, the current pastor at Yangon Evangel Church, commented on the result of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit: "Soon after the Stafford arrival in Rangoon, they started the Evangel Church. Several of us former anti-Pentecostals received the Holy Spirit as a result of their ministry."³³

Stafford opened a short-term Bible seminary at the church in 1963. It was conducted for thirteen weeks, from June to August. The school remained open for three years to prepare ministers and lay leaders, as well as to train believers in a deeper spiritual life. It was closed when Myitkyina Bible School was opened in September 1965.

In 1964, the church moved and was situated in a permanent place at No. 15, U Ba Wa Street. It was an old Indian Telegu church, purchased by the congregation when thousands of Indian citizens were repatriated back to India, thereby depleting the congregation.

In preparing for the future of the mission, God raised a national leader at Yangon church. Myo Chit had a rich Christian heritage. His great grandfather, U Ing, was one of the six Myanma who had accepted

³²Ibid., 7.

³³*Pentecostal Evangel* (Feb. 10, 1980):18.

Christ under the ministry of the great Protestant missionary Adoniram Judson. Coming from a Plymouth Brethren background, he was strongly anti-Pentecostal, criticizing the Pentecostal mission in Yangon as a "crazy church." Employed by the American embassy in 1957, he prided himself in his earning, thinking that he could do whatever he wanted for the Lord in his spare time.

This pride was broken as God baptized him in the Holy Spirit in 1961. He then became affiliated with the Staffords and the Pentecostal church. In 1965, knowing without doubt that the Staffords' invitation to a full-time ministry was the call of God, he quit his job and assisted the Stafford in the church. In March 1966, he succeeded the missionaries as the pastor of Yangon Evangel Church, when the government sent all the missionaries home.³⁴

7. MISSION TO THE CHIN

It is not clear how Pentecostalism among the Lakher spread into the Myanmar interior. Nevertheless, revival movement in Mizoram, India, was seen also among the same people group at Matu, in Chin state, and Kale Sagaing division in Myanmar. The spontaneous revival among these people started even before the war. These Lushai were organized later into the Independent Church of Burma and became

³⁴Stafford, *A Brief History*, 7.

known as the "drum beating church," because of their using local drums in worship services.

In 1960, there were six Lushai congregations at Kale Kabaw Valley desiring to have fellowship with the Pentecostal mission. At their request, the Staffords and Erola made a special trip to Kale. The trip resulted in short-term Bible training to meet the spiritual needs of the people.

Also, Ray Trask, a new missionary to Myanmar, visited this area at the urgent request of believers and conducted a one month Bible Seminar, sometime in the 1960s. Very soon, a church was erected at Tahan of Kale. Van Kunga was the senior pastor at Tahan as well as the leader of the church in this area.

Unfortunately, churches did not show much growth, for the indigenous work among the Lushai ethnic group had no outreach to other people groups. Also, their worship with dancing did not persuade or impress the local people at all. The whole congregation in the Tahan church was transferred to the Four Square denomination in 1988. However, the church building, which was erected by Ray Trask, still stands as a memorial of the work of the missionaries in this area.

Despite the problems in the Tahan church, many churches were planted throughout the whole Kale-Kabaw valley when a revival broke out at Tedim in the 70s. It has since spread throughout the whole region. Today, there are seven self-supporting churches

in Kale town itself. Maranatha Bible School has been opened there with the support of local believers, the district No. 4, and the General Council.

8. THE EVANGEL BIBLE SCHOOL AT MYITKYINA

The Potao school was moved to Myitkyina in 1964. The school was long needed and planned as a resident Bible School for training preachers and workers. Missionary Ray Trask supervised building the school in 1964. The school was opened by Ray Trask himself in September 1965 and was named Burma Bible School.³⁵

The teachers were Ray Trask the principal, and Mrs. Ray Trask, Geraldine Morrison, and Salai Myo Aung. Salai Myo Aung succeeded as principal when the missionaries left the country. He was a graduate of the Assemblies of God Institute in Malaysia.

The school offered a three-year diploma in Bible and theological studies. The faculty emphasized and had a full curriculum on evangelism, pastoral ministry, and Sunday school teaching. The graduates were sent back to their mother churches or to the mission front lines. The school has aided the growth of the church by training ministers since the very

³⁵Ibid., 8.

beginning of its establishment.

9. MISSIONARIES RETURN

Few Assemblies of God missionaries had been sent to the Myanmar mission field. The missionaries had always struggled for their entrance as well as their resident visa since independence. It became much harder after the military coup in 1962, and since 1964 when Myanmar became a closed country.

The Boltons labored for a short period, but were unable to renew their residence permit. The elder Morrisons returned to the U.S.A. for retirement in 1959. The Walter Erolas left the country for the last time in 1962. Stafford has noted Erola's writing on a wall, "No new visa nor any re-entry visas were issued to missionaries since late 1962."³⁶

In March 1966, the Socialist government declared that all foreign missionaries had to leave the country within a month. Ketchem cited a phrase from the *Guardian* newspaper about the government order, saying, "By April 30th, 1966, all Christian missionaries must leave Burma."³⁷ Therefore, all the missionaries left the country in April. The Staffords were in the process of leaving for furlough, and the expulsion did not effect them. However, Geraldine

³⁶Ibid., 10.

³⁷*Pentecostal Evangel* (July 17, 1966):12.

and the Trasks were part of the general missionary exodus at that time.³⁸

10. SELF-GOVERNMENT BEGINS

All missionaries in Myanmar were asked to leave the country by April 12, 1966. The Assemblies of God missionaries arranged to hand over the leadership offices to the national church leaders. On January 12, Stafford convened a General Council meeting at Potao, at which time the nationals took over all the offices. This council, which was biennially convened, had been postponed for one year due to an insurrection in Kachin state. David recorded the newly elected General Presbyters as follows:³⁹

General Superintendent.....	Samuel Fish
Assistant Superintendent.....	John Adam
Secretary/ Treasurer.....	Khong Dai
Executive Presbyters.....	John Fish, Phung Shar, Jong Tang

The General Council assigned David Dakhum, Jonathan, and Myo Chit to oversee educational work and the literature department.

On March 25, 1966, on behalf of the General Assemblies of God Foreign Mission Department,

³⁸Stafford, *A Brief History*, 10.

³⁹David, 18.

U.S.A., Maynard Ketcham, the field Director of Far East Asia, came to Yangon to wind things up in order to hand over authority and responsibility and transfer all mission property and equipment to the national church leaders. He stated four reasons why the missionaries felt prepared for such an event.

1. Twelve to fifteen thousand solid, holy-living Christians.
2. A carefully devised and smoothly functioning organizational structure, with divisional heads over various tribal groups—Lisu, Rawang, Kanong, Maru, Burmese—and a central committee representing all groups.
3. A unique system of local church government with converts residing in Christian villages. Ethics, morals, education, and spiritual training are administered on theocratic principles by village elders.
4. A well-established Bible school in Myitkyina, supported by the whole field and led by a spiritual and able Burmese young man who was trained abroad.⁴⁰

Ketcham declared that the church government was officially handed over to the nationals. Bolton quoted the words of Ketcham:

It was an emotion-packed hour; it was the end of mission era. I went with a

⁴⁰*Pentecostal Evangel* (July 17, 1966):13.

commemorative plaque in my brief case and a burning message on my lips. Making a manful effort to hold back the tears, I presented my plaque to Rev. John Fish [Samuel Fish] the Lisu general superintendent of the Assemblies of God in Burma, with these words: "Into your hands we give the torch. Hold it high...."⁴¹

The reply from the national leader, as Ketchem presented the plaque, went as follows:

Choked with emotion, brother Fish replied, "Brother Ketcham, we will hold it high. We will show the world how rapidly a national church can grow, depending only on the Spirit of God."⁴²

The era of foreign mission in this land came to an end. This does not mean that missionaries lost their burden for Myanmar. They had even more burden with mixed feelings of doubt and confidence in the survival of the church: fear because of the government policy against religion; confidence because of the firmly established church. With the dawn of the new era, the national leadership had not only to guard but also to expand the mission that was firmly established in the soil.

⁴¹Bolton, *China Call*, 215.

⁴²*Pentecostal Evangel* (July 17, 1966):13.

II. SUMMARY

The pioneering work of Pentecostal mission in this country is impressive. Unlike other mission groups, the Assemblies of God came across the China border and began mission among the Lisu and Rawang ethnic groups where the majority of church members still belong to the Assemblies of God. The mission came late to urban cities. Very few of the early missionaries had ever worked in the field. However, they laid a solid foundation of mission. They were then able to hand the leadership responsibilities over to indigenous leaders as missionaries left the country. The strategies and methods they employed remain exemplary for mission today.

Lisu Tribal Women



Leonard & Olive Bolton & family





Ray & Bethany Trask



*Silver Jubilee 1958; Glenn Stafford, Walter Erola, Cliffords,
Lavada & Geraldine Morresi
(left to right in front row)*



*Clifford & Lavada
Morrison*



*Glenn & Kathleen
Stafford*



Burmese Man



*Golden Jubilee at Putao
(People coming from main auditorium)*

4 REVIVAL BRINGS GROWTH TO THE CHURCH

Maynard Ketcham once stated that the Assemblies of God in Burma is a model church—self-propagating, self-supporting, and self-governing.¹ The church has gained tremendous growth with its “three-self” movement during the last three decades of this century. Revival is the phenomenon of this growth. New believers are added, and new churches are planted all over the country.

I. SURPRISING REPORT OF GROWTH

It was on September 30, 1967, just one and one-half years after the missionaries' departure, when Maynard Ketcham visited Yangon on a twelve-hour visa. The church leaders from up-country came down to Yangon to meet with this guest. A big rally was held at the Evangel Church. Ketcham was surprised to hear of the growth reported. Bolton noted the event as follows:

And there was the Rev. John Fish with his broad grin and twinkling eyes! “How it is, Pastor Ketcham, when your missionaries left we had 180 churches, 12,000 believers, and 25 students in tribal school? Now we have 300 churches in a fellowship of 25,000 believers, and 75 students in the Bible School.

¹Pentecostal Evangel (June 16, 1968):8.

See what the Spirit can do! ”²

The attitude of the government was always uncertain. The expulsion of the missionaries had caused the believers fear and discouragement. Church attendance had in fact dropped for a time everywhere. The Holy Spirit, however, was not subjected to expulsion or evacuation from the field. Rather, He had moved in a mighty way. As they recovered from the painful event, the churches everywhere began to show outstanding growth.

2. REVIVAL AT YANGON EVANGEL CHURCH

Yangon, the capital city today, is a center of commerce and political administration. It is a melting pot of racial and ethnic groups of people. The church in the city is highly challenged and the gospel faces many barriers.

2.1 GOD’S PROVISION

In 1966, Myo Chit was left alone in full charge of Evangel Church in Yangon. An old building was purchased with mission backing, with plans to renovate it. Attendance dropped so that ten to fifteen people in the Sunday worship services were considered to be a large crowd. However, the church soon overcame as God met their needs.

²Bolton, *China Call*, 215.

A woman previously unknown to the pastor, was touched by the message. As she learned the church was in debt, she wrote a check to the pastor that completely canceled the debt. Another family felt led to donate land that was their family inheritance. The site became a center for short-term Bible training of young people from all over Myanmar, which later became Evangel Bible College.

God moved and never left the church alone. Souls were converted and the sick were healed in answer to prayer. Believers were strengthened with the pastor's words of encouragement as he preached that Jesus was in the midst of their gathering. People were filled with the Spirit of God. The church soon became a center for evangelism and outreach.

2.2 EVANGELISTIC CENTER

The 1970s were a prime time of evangelism. Young people in the church were trained to be evangelists and street preachers. They went out on the streets of Yangon to witness. Usually they chose a location, stood together at one place, played guitars and sang. The railway station, the open air market, and the beach were the main target places for street evangelism. When people began to gather around, the young Christians happily told why they were sharing the gospel. As some shared their testimonies, others distributed tracts about salvation.

The church provided a three-month Bible training for young people from all over the country.

They were trained and sent back to their native places for evangelistic work. As they worked hard, churches were either planted where Pentecostal believers already existed, or were started by a trained person. With this method churches pioneered daughter churches at Phawhkan in Insein, Tweenti, Pyi, Mandalay, Kyugone in Insein, and Thingankyun in Yangon.

The church's Sunday school program was one of the most successful works among churches in the city. More than 400 children attended the various sections regularly. At least one-third of those children came from non-Assemblies of God background.

The church is steadily growing to full capacity. Ministries such as home-cell prayer meetings, hospital visitation, and the circulating of Christian literature have helped the growth. Today, the church has a regular attendance of 800 to 1,000 people.

Myo Chit has just built another church at Kyugone, Insein. It is in the same compound where the International Correspondent Courses are conducted and the office of the General Council of the Assemblies of God is located. The church has hundreds of attendants every service. It is also a training center for local evangelism.

3. RENEWAL AMONG THE CHINS (1977-1995)

A revival among the Chin has brought the Assemblies of God of Myanmar tremendous growth since the 1970s. It began with individual renewal among the Baptists, but resulted in numerical growth in the Assemblies of God as believers experienced the power of the Holy Spirit. One-third of the members of the Assemblies of God of Myanmar came through this revival.

3.1 REVIVAL AT TEDIM

I have mentioned that churches among the Lushai people group at Kale valley had not been fruitful due to lack of outreach and their dance style of worship. Nevertheless, a revival that began at Tedim in early 1972 has spread continuously, not only among the Chin, but also to many parts of the country. Fifty percent of people converted during revival meetings attend Assemblies of God churches today. The Assemblies of God has planted churches throughout the whole area, from the Kale Kabaw Valley to the western border of India.

3.1.1 THE SEEKERS' FERVENT PRAYERS

The Chin were predominantly evangelized by the Baptists. Prior to this mission, they practiced their primal religion. They were converted to Christ with a great people movement through the labors of

the American Baptist missionaries, as well as other pioneers. However, second and third-generation Christianity became so nominal that a local church service looked like nothing more than a social gathering. There was no teaching about the salvation of God being given by His grace and received by faith. To make matters worse, liberalism had slowly influenced the teaching in Bible schools in Myanmar so that the ministries of trained pastors had become more like a social gospel rather than an evangelistic one.

About 1970, God raised a messenger who would bring forth His message to the people at this time. In 1971, Hau Lian Kham, a graduate with a Bachelor of Religious Education degree from Myanmar (Burma) Institute of Theology of Insein, became an ordained pastor of the J. H. Cope Baptist Church at Tedim. Assuming his pastoral position, he soon started teaching the word of God systematically, especially the Bible doctrines on salvation, the church, and the second coming of Christ. People in the church had never heard such teachings before, so they were amazed and their interest was engaged. Church attendance grew from 400 to 700 within a few months.

Meanwhile, a great burden for spiritual awakening came upon a group of people in the church. On January 27, 1973, this small group started praying to the Lord to send a revival to the church. They spent hours on their knees, crying to God for days and nights.

God answered their fervent prayers. Hau Lian Kham, with his colleagues, began conducting an open-air crusade for the purpose of heralding the gospel. On the other hand, Satan was actively working against God's will. Opposition and resistance to this activity arose from the inner circle of the church itself. Hau Lian Kham, with full inner strength and confidence, answered boldly those who opposed him, saying, "I don't care whether people are willing to listen to my message or not. I will conduct an open-air crusade and preach the gospel as long as an animal comes and listens to me."³

3.1.2 THE LAUNCH PAD OF REVIVAL

The crusade which started on April 30, 1973, lasted for a week. About 2,000 people listened to the gospel message every night. As conviction for repentance leading to the salvation of God penetrated, people came to Christ in tears, confessing their sins, and accepting God's salvation by faith. In those days it was considered a shameful thing to confess being born again, or to come to the altar for a commitment, because the matter was entirely new to the people. Nevertheless, the convicted sinners could not help but come to Christ for freedom from their bondages. Gang members, thieves, and drunkards were converted, and they gave their testimonies openly. Conversion led to individual commitment. Eventually the crusade was recognized as the launch pad of the revival move-

³Suak Za Go, Letter to the Author, June 15, 1990.

ment among the Chins that would slowly spread all over the country.

As revival began, people everywhere—in offices, in schools, at the market place, on the street—talked and discussed the issue of being born again, which is salvation by faith alone. People were amazed at the new converts who formerly had been gang members, drunkards, thieves, and so on, but who now showed a total turn-around in their lives. Some people admitted it was the work of the Holy Spirit, while others said it was the work of evil spirits.

People started reading the word of God. They pulled their Bibles out of the dusty stacks in the corners of their houses, cleaned them and started reading them in order to find out what the word of God says about salvation and authentic Christian life. Copies of Bibles that had been piled up in the Christian bookstore for years were sold out within a few weeks.

3.1.3 CONTINUOUS REVIVAL

The impact soon spread not only in the local area, but also to the whole western area of the country. Churches like the Evangelical Free Church strongly supported the movement, while many mainline denominations opposed it.

Unfortunately, a great controversy arose within the church from the beginning of the crusade.

Some supported the pastor and the crusaders, holding to the Bible doctrine "salvation through God's grace is received by faith alone." The opposition defended good deeds as merits to salvation. This controversy led to the formation of two factions in the church. On February 10, 1974, Hau Lian Kham was warned by church elders not to preach from the pulpit of Cope Memorial Baptist Church at Tedim.

The revivalists did not stop witnessing and preaching about Christ. The revival fire was burning and spreading throughout the countryside. The evangelists made gospel tours to villages far and near conducting open-air crusades everywhere. It was not an easy task. They packed their supplies, carried them on their backs and shoulders, and traveled many days on foot across the high mountains and the deep valleys. The gospel was preached at night in houses while visitation, discussion, counseling, and teaching were conducted during the day.

A schism followed in the Tedim Baptist Convention as controversies spread and opposition worsened. On March 9, 1975, the revivalists formed a new church called Evangel Baptist Church. The born again believers looked for a fellowship in which they could worship in a corporate body as well as have freedom to preach the gospel without any resistance. They worshiped at a believer's house rent-free. New churches sprang up throughout the region as extensive evangelization was done. The Tedim Evangel Baptist Church soon became a center for gospel propagation as it sent out evangelists from village to

village, and held short-term Bible seminars from time to time.

Well known preachers such as Reverend Myo Chit, Reverend Philip Ahone, and Reverend Pum Za Thang joined the revival crusades. People from the villages traveled two and three days to attend the crusades. The Spirit moved in a mighty way so that hundreds and thousands of people were converted to Christ.

3.2 REVIVAL AT KALE

An Assemblies of God church was opened at Kale in 1973. Philip Ahone, from Yangon Evangel Church, was the pioneering pastor. He is a Chin by birth, and was greatly involved in the revival movement at Yangon while he was in the University. After he came to Kale, he was greatly involved in the revival movement among the Chins.

Kale is a large town in Sagaing division, providing a gateway between the Northern Chin Hills and the mainland. Half of the population in this town is made up of Chins. With an airport and a commercial center, the town has attracted people from all parts of the western region. The greater Kale area includes Tahan, Taungphila, and Singunau; all of them Chin villages. Thus, it is a strategic center for evangelization.

Churches were planted throughout the greater Kale area as revival swept over the area. By

1995, there were four churches in the town of Kale itself, two churches in Tahan, one church in Taungphila, and one in Singunau. District No. 4 offices of the Assemblies of God and the Maranatha Bible School are now located in this town.

3.3 CHARACTERISTICS OF CONVERSION

Three characteristics of conversion were evidenced in the revival. People came to Christ by various means. Conversions were registered daily and churches grew rapidly.

3.3.1 INDIVIDUAL CONVERSION

Evangelism during this period emphasized personal commitment to Christ, rather than group conversion. Altar calls in the crusade always focused on individual repentance of sins and confession of Christ and accepting Christ as one's own personal Savior and Lord. Witnessing to groups of people and also one-on-one evangelism focused on individual conversion, rather than group conversion. The majority of the converts, from the very beginning of the revival until today, came to Christ through this method. This method led people to more serious commitment than any other method of conversion.

3.3.2 PEOPLE MOVEMENT

People also came to Christ through group decisions. For example, the village society among the Chin is largely made up of clans. Therefore, in some

villages, people changed their religion or denomination by clan movement. They made the decision to accept the gospel after teaching to the group. When such a movement happened, follow-up was done seriously in order to make sure that each person really knew Jesus as personal Savior and Lord.

In one situation, when the evangelist, Daniel, conducted a village crusade at Vangteh, a group of so-called believers strongly opposed him. At last, he conducted the meeting at the village priest's house. After three days of serious prayer, the village priest was converted through Daniel's preaching. The result was the whole clan followed the priest and became Christians.

3.3.3 TRANSFER CHRISTIANS

Many nominal Christians received the experience of a new life in Christ and the baptism of the Holy Spirit throughout the revival. In many cases, they could not remain in their nominal churches, but joined the born again churches, especially the Assemblies of God. A Baptist pastor at Kale accused an Assemblies of God minister, saying, "Why did you steal my sheep?" The Assemblies of God minister responded, saying, "I didn't steal your sheep. Your goats were changed to be sheep in my pasture." It has been estimated that ninety percent of the new converts came from nominal Baptist churches.

3.4 AIDED BY LITERATURE

A few evangelistic books and booklets, published in local languages, helped believers gain knowledge about the salvation of God and how to live mature Christian lives. Some of the books were: *Upna Laigil* (the Essence of Faith), written by Hau Lian Kham; *Pasian Hong Gup Khiat Na* (The Salvation of God), translated by Go Za Kham; *Gup Na Ni* (Day of Salvation), written by Pum Za Thang; and *Pasian Tawh Ton Khawm* (Walk with God), translated by Suak Za Go. These were the only available books on evangelical belief in the local language during the early revival period.

Believers were so spiritually hungry that the little literature available to them was like a spring in the desert. They could not stop reading—they read them as they walked, as they sat, and as they stood. Books and magazines in Myanma and English were also available for believers. Believers helped build one another up in their faith as they read and studied and shared together.

3.5 EMBRACING PENTECOSTALISM

The revival fire spread over the whole western region and kept on burning. Growing toward maturity and witnessing for Christ, believers were hungry for the spiritual gifts and fruits mentioned in the book of Acts and in the Epistles. As a result of receiving spiritual gifts, many believers decided to join and

work with the Assemblies of God of Myanmar, which was well established. It was also the most energetic church in evangelistic work at that time.

By 1977, some Assemblies of God pioneering churches were planted in the Tedim township. Believers found the doctrines and practices of the Assemblies of God to be biblical and quite sound as they sought for spiritual gifts, for a broader evangelism scope and for mission assignments. Therefore, some village churches decided to have fellowship with the Assemblies of God of Myanmar. At the same time, Myo Chit, the General Secretary of the Assemblies of God and pastor of Yangon Church, along with some of his deacons, made a gospel tour to Chin State and convinced believers to work with the Assemblies of God of Myanmar. Local churches, such as Lophei, Gam Lai and Tui Langh, were the first to make a decision to join with the Assemblies of God, and then other churches followed one after another.

At Tedim, revivalist Hau Lian Kham made a decision to join the Assemblies of God to acquire a broader vision of evangelization and a deeper spiritual life. Regarding his choice of the Assemblies of God, he once stated, "We must keep a large vision for the evangelization of the whole country, even the choice of the whole world, while starting to work at the local area."⁴ He announced in Evangel Baptist Church his decision to join the Myanmar Assemblies

⁴Chin Khua Khai, A History of the Assemblies of God in Myanmar, Unpublished Thesis, 1978.

of God. Half of the church members decided to follow him, while the other members preferred to stay in Evangel Baptist Church.

3.6 CHURCH PLANTING

On April 30, 1977, the first fellowship of the Assemblies of God churches in this region was held at Tedim. The fellowship then was named "The Tedim Section of District No. 3 of the Assemblies of God of Myanmar." At this time, 15 churches registered as members of the new section. Churches decided to support the section mission outreach with ten percent of their monthly income.

Revival led the born again people to start church planting in rural villages and towns. Hau Lian Kham, pastor and evangelist, traveled extensively to rural villages preaching the gospel. Other pastor-evangelists, such as Khai Khan Suan and Philip Ahone, were known for their evangelistic preaching across the countryside. Also, lay people and students were heavily involved in the spread of revival. Anywhere the revival swept, a church sooner or later sprang up.

By 1980, there were churches planted in towns such as Tonzang, Falam, Haka the capital, and Thantlang—the strategic centers in northern Chin State. Also, new churches sprang up in villages throughout Kale Kabaw valley of Sagaing division, where many Chin had settled. Churches in the towns gathered members from various backgrounds—the

poor, the rich, the educated, civil workers, and students. The churches, became centers for spreading the gospel to their own respective rural villages.

The Assemblies of God church at the capital, Haka, was planted in early 1979. There were some Pentecostal believers there who were civil officers and workers, but they worshiped in a Fundamental church, called Hrinthal, or in the Baptist church, because there was no existing Pentecostal church. When Hau Lian Kham and his gospel team conducted a crusade in January 1979, the Pentecostal believers gathered themselves together and opened an Assemblies of God church which began with lay leadership.

By 1989, there were three sections in the western region: Kale section, Tedim section and Haka section. There were more than 160 churches, in which over 20,000 believers worshiped every Sunday. A Bible school, Maranatha Bible College, was opened at Kale in 1988. By 1990, the District No. 4 of the Assemblies of God of Myanmar was formed with these three sections—Tedim, Haka, and Kale. Section 4, the Tahan section was added recently. Church planting was a continuous project along with evangelization.

3.7 HOLINESS AND SPIRITUAL GIFTS BRING GROWTH

Individuals committing themselves to a holy Christian life influenced the growth of the church spiritually as well as numerically. From the very beginning of the revival, Christians were instructed to live a holy life by avoiding immorality and unscriptural practices. The Assemblies of God further taught and encouraged the believers to keep the body a holy temple. Drinking alcohol, smoking, chewing tobacco or betel nut, reading novels instead of the word of God, and spending time at movies were activities to be avoided. For, it was taught, all these things never build up, but rather spoiled the body, which is the temple of the Holy Spirit. This holy living attracted unbelievers and caused them to pay more attention to the gospel.

The Assemblies of God accepts speaking in unknown tongues as the initial physical evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, as mentioned in Acts 2:4. Accordingly, believers were encouraged to seek and experience this phenomenal outpouring of the Holy Spirit. As they were baptized with the Holy Spirit, joy and boldness filled their lives. As a result, they shared the gospel with increasing effectiveness. Other gifts such as healing, miracles, and true prophecy also built up the church. Many non-Pentecostals were added to the church as they too received the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

3.8 DOCTRINAL PURITY AIDS GROWTH

Doctrinal purity has aided the growth of the church. A cult that appeared along with the revival was examined thoroughly and refuted according to the teaching of the word of God. Early in 1977, a man named Zam Seia from Manipur of India, entered Tamu. He traveled and preached throughout the villages. As a result, believers danced, cried, and rolled on the floor. They carried tables and chairs and ran around the church as a mode of repentance. They put on sackcloth, stood in the middle of the village and called for repentance. Furthermore, they claimed to have received prophecies, saying the Holy Spirit spoke to them audibly. They waited for the rapture. A man tried to kill his pregnant wife, saying that the baby in her womb was from Satan. Later, they even said the Bible was insufficient, and that prophecies today were far more important.⁵

The cult spread very quickly to the hill areas. A group of believers at Phaiza village tried to raise a dead person, claiming that God told them to do so. The body, however, was not raised. They went around Tedim town believing that God would give them all the people in the town. A group among the cult prepared a piece of ground three foot square for the landing of a spiritual plane that would rapture them. These people considered themselves holier than other people, for they prayed and committed

⁵Khup Lian Pau, Letter to the Author, June, 1990.

themselves seriously. Later, they even denied the name "Jesus," claiming it to be that of an ancient Greek god. Instead, they claimed that *Yashua* was the true name and water baptism in the name of *Yashua* alone gives salvation. They declared themselves descendants of the Israelites. Therefore, they kept circumcision and the Sabbath. Later, the group split into smaller groups: *Khami Pawl* (Spiritual group), *Nazareth Khuami Yashua Pawl* (Church of *Yashua* of Nazareth), and others joined the United Pentecostal Church (UPC).

Moreover, the church here was facing problems with theological issues such as Unitarianism, salvation by water baptism, and speaking in tongues as evidence of salvation. Members of the United Pentecostal Church (UPC) and cultists mainly fueled the issues. They believed that Jesus alone is in the Godhead where He appeared to be the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They denied the distinctive characteristics of each member in the Godhead. They went on to say salvation comes only by water baptism in the name of Jesus, and that speaking in tongues was the evidence of salvation. The Assemblies of God denied those beliefs and explained what the Bible says about the Godhead (the Trinity), the meaning of baptism in Jesus' name and the role of speaking in tongues as a manifestation of spiritual gifting.

The Assemblies of God, by the grace of God, achieved victory over struggles with false doctrines and temptations. Today, the Assemblies of God is

fruitfully growing in this area as it has become rooted in the teaching of the Word of God.

3.9 EVANGELIZATION IN THE 1980's

Evangelization during the 1980's was carried forth by ministers, lay workers, individual believers, and local churches. Church planting, mobilization, and promotion were carried on by each respective district and section council. Evangelism was done by several methods.

3.9.1 CRUSADE EVANGELISM

The Assemblies of God has promoted crusade evangelism as a two-pronged tool: to saturate the whole area with the gospel message of Christ, and to gather new believers into a community of praise and worship to the Lord. With this dual purpose, district crusades, section crusades, and local church crusades are held every year.

Khai Khan Suan, pastor-evangelist at Tedim Bethel Assembly, is a very noteworthy preacher. He was assistant to Hau Lian Kham from the very beginning of the church. He took the responsibility of senior pastor when Hau Lian Kham moved to Yangon as the principal of Evangel Bible College in 1979. In spite of physical weakness, he traveled widely across the region, sometimes by horse and other times on foot, evangelizing the people. People acknowledged him as a preacher who was as powerful as Hau Lian Kham. As he traveled to rural villages, his father

always followed and helped him. He himself credited his success to the prayers of his mother who was committed to pray for her son's service to God. He attributed his mother's prayers as *Kanu hong sunsiah tun*, meaning "a lunch pack my mother prepares for me." Strange things often happened in his ministry. One incident was as follows. One night, while preaching at a village crusade near Kale, some men from the village tried to kill him. However, they could not, for they saw an angel hovering over and protecting Khai Khan Suan and the crusade. They were terrified to do any harm and accepted Christ instead.

Crusades have also often been group-oriented. In 1985, just after being appointed as a Tedim section evangelist, I was entrusted to hold a crusade at Mual Beem village, where about 2,000 people live. Immediately, I formed a temporary sodality mission structure. I organized an intercessory prayer group, Bible instructors, counselors, a music group, and fund raisers.

When the time was ripe the whole group came together with a real commitment to winning the whole village. With Bible instruction at noon, gospel preaching at night, and heralding the gospel through door-to-door visitation the rest of the time, we did not miss a single villager. The result of this one-week crusade was that many were converted to Christ. Follow-up was done and soon a church was planted.

The tribal people have always been receptive to the gospel. It is as if a crusade can be launched anytime, anywhere. A noteworthy incident took place at Tedim in 1988. Pastor Kam Hau organized and launched a crusade at the Town Hall. It was an extremely critical time, as the whole country was about to go on a strike for political freedom. The power of the Holy Spirit fell mightily upon the crusade, so that nobody in the town joined the strike, but instead became involved in the crusade. The hall was full the whole week. Sinners were converted, believers were baptized in the Holy Spirit, and many people committed themselves to witness for Christ.

Such a crusade was rarely organized and held among the Buddhists, especially in cities. Furthermore, political unrest in the country has always been a barrier to religious freedom. In 1981, a Christmas Eve crusade sponsored by a group of believers was launched at Yankin, Yangon. The message was contextualized in a Buddhist manner of thinking with interaction and questions and answers between two well-known Myanmar preachers. The program was organized with the permission of local authorities. The communication seemed good. Unfortunately, the crusade resulted in little impact, with no converts at all. Believers found that other appropriate techniques must be found to reach these unreceptive people.

3.9.2 PERSONAL EVANGELISM

Almost all of the Assemblies of God pastors were known for their giftedness in evangelistic work. They not only ministered in the local church, but also traveled around spreading the gospel far and wide. They were pastor-evangelists who had cultivated and harvested.

The itinerant evangelists carried out two major ministries: pioneering the field with the gospel message, and visiting churches to minister to them. Since many newly-planted churches did not have their own pastors, the evangelists were entrusted to take special care of them.

God gave the church many lay evangelists. They never received any pay but simply exercised their gift of the Holy Spirit. They carried the gospel to neighboring people and villages, with the great burden of winning them to Christ. They often traveled far distances with their own supplies for the gospel's sake.

Individual believers were committed to winning souls to Christ. They were motivated to love the lost, and were convinced that winning a soul was far more precious than gaining the world. With this conviction, believers brought their unsaved family members, relatives, and neighbors to Christ. They shared the gospel with friends in offices, schools, market places, and anywhere they had opportunity.

3.9.3 HOME-CELL EVANGELISM

Home-cell group prayer meetings were another effective means for evangelism. Especially in urban areas, the cell meetings became the best available means for winning souls to Christ. Unserved friends and neighbors were invited to the cell, and were drawn into the fold.

At cell meetings believers enjoyed intimate fellowship. A meeting would include a time for follow-up ministry, sharing personal testimonies and needs for prayer, a time for worship and praise, and a time for Bible teaching. The more systematically the cell-groups were conducted, the more rapidly the urban churches grew.

3.9.4 POWER EVANGELISM

Dominated mainly by animism and Buddhism, the people here have been most attracted by supernatural manifestations. Thus, power encounters have often led people to Christ in people movements. Stories of power encounter are as follows.

Pastor Tam Ki was a converted animist from the Mindat area. He often challenged the animists with the message that God is alive and more powerful than the local gods. One day, as he preached the gospel to the villagers, a group of people plotted to shoot and kill him. The bullet, however, did not leave the barrel of their weapon. The animistic villagers were so surprised that they all submitted to the

preacher and his message.

On another occasion, a dead man was brought back to life. All the villagers turned to Christ.

3.10 MOBILIZATION

Sectional and district councils sponsored Bible seminars to mobilize churches to carry out the mission. Through mobilization, ministers were strengthened and equipped with new vision and goals, and lay workers were trained and equipped to do the ministry. Also, new converts were disciplined and believers were built up in the knowledge of the Word of God. An instance can be drawn from my own experiences in the following paragraph.

The Zozang Bible Seminar in March of 1986, sponsored by the Tedim section, combined a Bible seminar and crusade. It was planned a year in advance with continuous intercessory prayers. More than 1,000 believers, lay workers, and ministers from all parts of the western area gathered together for a one-week seminar at Zozang village, about fifty miles from Tedim. Some people even traveled three to four days to reach the place. They carried their food and supplies on their shoulders. The host church, Zozang Assembly of God, provided and served all of the meals during the whole week. Everything was done according to local and native custom.

It was a time of joyfulness, too, especially for the ministers. They met together once a year for a

seminar, shared with each other, prayed and rejoiced together in one spirit.

Classes began the next day. The three subjects—full salvation, evangelism and church planting, and the Holy Spirit—were taught in an intensive schedule. The morning session was a time of prayer and worship, with messages of encouragement concerning planning and goal setting.

The teachings were inspired and anointed. I taught on the topic of full salvation that includes topics such as the fall of humankind, redemption, sanctification, and glorification. I addressed the special anointing of the Holy Spirit in the last class. As I stressed the believers' "crucified and resurrected life in Christ," the participants could not keep quiet, but all came to the altar with tears filling their eyes. As Paul said, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me . . . I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20; NIV). Lifting up their hands, they all rededicated themselves with the conviction of Christ as the Master and Lord over every area of their lives. Many were saved during the nightly open-air crusade. Many were baptized with the Holy Spirit. The crusade messages were systematically arranged: the fall of human beings, the redemption of God, sanctification and the second coming of Christ, the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and evangelism. In each service, gospel singers, with their gifted voices, sang beautiful and moving solos, duets, trios, and group songs.

Ministers and workers made home visitations every day after the classes, winning some families to Christ. They prayed for the sick, encouraged backsliders, and disciplined new converts.

Sunday was the most thrilling day. Water baptism and communion services were administered. Believers from other denominations also joined the services joyfully. At the closing of the evening service, believers shouted and cried with a loud and triumphant voice of determination to win the nation to Christ. The night passed quickly and soon everybody was ready for departure. Tears fell as they shook hands, but their hearts were filled with a sense of victory in Christ. After greeting friends, I hurried to leave for the Kale section Bible seminar at Taungphila.

4. SUMMARY

Revival has led to the tremendous growth of the Assemblies of God in Myanmar. Churches among the Lisu, Rawang, and Lhao-vo people have seen revival of their own. Evangel Church in Yangon has always been on fire. The revival movement started among the Chins in the 1970s and has spread across the country, resulting in church planting, both in rural and urban areas, and is still burning. Over all, the Pentecostal revival in the country reflects the historic impulse of the vital Church in Myanmar of the late twentieth century.

5 THE GENERAL COUNCIL AND MISSION STRATEGIES

The Assemblies of God has been committed to carrying out a three-fold mission: (1) to be an agency of God for evangelizing the world (Acts 1:8; Matt. 28:19-20), (2) to be a corporate body in which believers may worship God (I Cor. 12:13), and (3) to be an instrument God can use to build a body of believers maturing in the likeness of Jesus (Eph. 4:11-16; 1 Cor. 12:28). To fulfill this commitment, the AOG of Myanmar has carried their mission through the General Council, District Councils, and Sectional Councils, and has supervised and mobilized the local churches to do the job. Today, the Assemblies of God of Myanmar is the fastest growing church in the country with a total membership of 67,648 worshipping in a total number of 612 churches.

I. THE GENERAL COUNCIL

The General Council office was located at Putao, until it was moved to Myitkyina in 1970. Then in 1980, it was moved down to Yangon, the capital city, for the purpose of better and easier communication at home and abroad, as well as to be centrally and strategically positioned. Josiah Hpala Min was elected General Superintendent (1980-1990) until Myo Chit took over this position in 1990.

Growth in the 1980s took place with Hpala Min's forward-looking and mission-minded admini-

stration. He exercised a strong Pentecostal faith and mission zeal in the expansion of the Kingdom. A glimpse of his life story reflects his commitment to the Lord's work. Born of animistic parents in a Kachin village sometime in 1935, he came to know the Lord at the age of twelve, in 1947. Being crippled at the age of ten, he gave up on his life, with no hope, and no salvation from the spirits his family worshipped. The love of God gave him hope when an evangelist came to the village and preached from John 3:16. After he was converted, he testified from door to door and village to village about Christ the Savior. He saw miracles of healing throughout his ministry.

In 1952, missionary J. C. Morrison invited and helped him to study primary classes at a mission school. He was ordained in 1957. Since then, he has worked as evangelist, section superintendent, district superintendent, and mission school chairperson. In 1965, Ray Trask invited him to work at the Bible school in Myitkyina. There he received a work study grant and earned a diploma. He kept soul winning as the highest priority of God's call throughout his ministry.¹

The General Council supervised missions through the district councils, and the district councils supervised their missions through sectional councils. Ministerial ordination was approved, controlled, and guarded by the respective councils. A

¹Josiah Hpala Min, "Biography of the Reverend Josiah Hpala Min." (In Myanma). Unpublished Manuscript (Yangon, Myanmar, 1995), 1-8.

newly proposed minister, whether pastor, evangelist, or teacher, had to be approved first by the sectional council, then licensed by the district council, and finally ordained by the General Council. This slow process seemed to be a barrier to growth while the mission was lacking Christian workers, yet, it has also helped to keep the ministers humble and faithful.

2. BIBLES IN LOCAL VERNACULAR

Bibles have always been the pressing need of believers in Myanmar. Believers are always hungry for the Word of God, as it is light to their lives, food to their souls, and guidance to their Christian journey. It has never been printed in sufficient quantities, either for the local languages, or the major language of the country, Myanma.

Fortunately, the Assemblies of God Foreign Missions Department in the USA was able to ship \$50,000 worth of Bibles in the Myanma language through the American Bible Society in 1969. "It was a miraculous event," said Philip Hogan, the executive director of the Foreign Missions Department, "that the American Bible Society received a license to import \$50,000 worth of Bibles into Burma, printed not only in Burmese, but in the other major tribal tongues."² The Assemblies of God accepted the challenge to meet the financial need. The "Bibles for

²Philip J. Hogan, "Bibles for Burma," in *Pentecostal Evangel* (November 19, 1969):23.

Myanmar" project was launched by the Executive Presbytery, and October 26, 1966 was observed as Universal Bible Sunday. All the donations received were sent to the Foreign Missions Department, designated "Bibles for Burma." The day the Burmese believers received the Bibles was a most joyous one.

3. MEDIA MINISTRIES

Since the 1970s, the gospel in Myanmar has been beamed by the Far East Broadcasting Company (FEBC), and Southeast Asia Radio Voice (SEARV) in Manila, Philippines, and received by short-wave radio. Messages prepared and recorded on tape by Rev. Myo Chit in his own studio, and also by other preachers in different languages, were sent to the broadcasting companies. Myo Chit commented on the program, saying,

Another outreach is through radio. We are able to air a program over the Far East Broadcasting Company in Manila, Philippines. This reaches almost all of Burma and broadens our efforts to proclaim the wonderful salvation of our Lord Jesus Christ.³

The messages have reached even the Buddhist monks. We were informed that eleven monks

³*Pentecostal Evangel* (April 27, 1975):17.

received water baptism in 1988, after they had been listening to the messages for a long time and had inquired further about various issues. Follow-up ministries were sent to them in the form of Christian literature and personal letters of encouragement and Bible teaching.

4. THE GOLDEN JUBILEE

The Assemblies of God of Myanmar commemorated its fiftieth anniversary in a weeklong celebration at Potao from January 29 to February 6, 1981. Over 40,000 people, representing various tribes of Myanmar, attended the convention that was held in Jubilee Village, which was especially built for the occasion. The site was one square mile of land that was allotted to the church by officials of the Myanmar government.⁴

The celebration opened with a mile-long procession of various tribal groups marching arrayed in their distinctive colorful regalia. A ribbon-cutting ceremony followed. Festivities during the week included special music and several speakers as well as a taped message from the executive director of the Division of Foreign Missions of the Assemblies of God in the USA, J. Philip Hogan. Twenty pastors were ordained at this time and throngs of people added to the excitement. Inspired by the presence of

⁴Ibid., May 7, 1981.

the Holy Spirit, God's people celebrated by rejoicing and praising the Lord Jesus.⁵

A vital feature of the Golden Jubilee was the prayer garden called Gethsemane. Here people fasted and prayed around the clock. A plaque of appreciation was presented to the government officials, recognizing the permanent gift of 150 acres, the original square mile allotted to the church. This site has now developed into a settlement. Following the convention, 500 families settled there permanently, cultivating rice and planting orange and grapefruit orchards as their source of income.

The country around Jubilee Village near Potao and going eastward to China's border was totally Christianized. The majority of the tribes—Lisu, Rawang, Maru, and Kanong are spirit-filled believers. Mynard Ketcham, as cited by Bolton, says about the people there:

They reside in a completely Christian village where the sign of the cross is the 'open sesame' of the social register. Willful sinners are banished—house and belongings—to the neighboring jungle until they repent, confess, and make restoration. Such living is in contrast with secular society elsewhere.⁶

⁵Bolton, *China Call*, 218.

⁶*Ibid.*, 219.

5. HOME MISSIONARIES

Home missionaries have been sent to unreached areas, especially among the Buddhists and animists. The home missionaries have pioneered the fields with their hard labor and strong commitment to preach the gospel.

By 1990, the Tedim section alone had sent a total of seven home missionaries to Monywa in central Myanmar, where people were staunch Buddhists; Paletwa in southern Chin land; Nongcho in Shan state; May Myo in central Myanmar; Pa An in Karen state, and other places. The Kale section had sent three missionaries to Kanthee in Naga Hills, Mintut in southern Chin land, and Lashio in Shan state. The Yangon section had sent some missionaries to different areas. The Rawang district and the Lisu district were sending missionaries also to their local areas and to Naga hills.

Home missionaries had trials and hardships, but not like the first missionaries did. They always struggled for their family's livelihood, as they did not receive enough pay to meet their needs. They also struggled with the ability to approach people from various cultures and with different customs. Yet God never left them alone.

6. FINANCING THE MISSIONS

From the very beginning, the Assemblies of God mission has been carried out through a self-supporting program. Most of the help that has been received as "foreign aid" has been used in the construction and maintenance of Bible schools.

The local churches support the mission organization—by section, district, and General Council—with 20 % of tithes and offerings given according to the constitution and bylaws of the General Council. Ten percent of this offering remains in the respective section councils, 7 % goes to the district council, and 3 % to the General Council. Local churches adopt their own style of fund-raising in addition to tithes and offerings.

All ministers send 10% of their salary as their tithe to the designated Councils. The ordained ministers send it to the General Council, the licensed ministers to the District, and the exhorters to their respective Section.

Besides the tithes and offerings, the Assemblies of God has developed other means to support their home missionaries. *Kyiyudaw Shubu (Lawm Bawm)*, "thank offering box," is a box in which believers put coins in thanksgiving to the Lord, in addition to their tithes and offerings on Sundays. The believers put coins in the box with praise to God for the blessings they have received, and then bring it to church on a

fixed date to support the mission work.

Let tashoh sa (khut pham) is a handful of rice which the mother of the household keeps aside whenever she prepares a meal. In the same way, a girl keeps aside a stick of firewood out of that which she collects in the forest. After a time, they gather all the things they have put aside, sell them, and then hand over the money to the missions department. With these methods the Women's Mission group provides support for missionaries.

7. PLANTING CHURCHES

The Assemblies of God believes in church planting as a strategy for growth. Converts must be gathered into a worshiping community and the church must become a viable force.

7.1 PREACHING POINTS

A preaching point was a pioneering field in a receptive area. Evangelists and lay preachers cultivated the area and sowed the gospel seed for a period of time. Hard work, burden for souls, patience, cultural adaptation, and contextualization were called for in shouldering this ministry. The Assemblies of God targeted neighboring villages as preaching points.

7.2 RURAL CHURCH PLANTING

When a preaching point was ready to become a church, the mission council, whether from a section or a district, recognized it as an established church. Usually, a church was recognized when a group of believers existed who were able to carry on the ministry. A church always started small but with a great vision of winning the whole village or town. Also, the mission council approved and started a church where a group of Pentecostal believers existed and requested a church for themselves.

7.3 SUPPORTING NEW CHURCHES

Many newly planted churches supported themselves from the very beginning, as they were encouraged to do. Yet some churches, if they requested it, were supported by other churches or the mission organization until they were able to stand on their own feet.

With this simple method, during the time I served as the superintendent of District No. 3 we established 40 churches via sectional mission works within two years (1987-1989). Many of them were planted in rural areas and some in urban areas. They all started with a small number of believers, but are growing rapidly today.

7.4 URBAN CHURCH PLANTING

Urban areas are economic, socio-political, and educational centers. People with a variety of customs and cultures move to the urban areas for jobs, education, economics, careers, health care, and material comfort. Therefore, in Myanmar population grows in urban areas every year.

To reach these diverse people with the gospel, urban church planting has been emphasized and promoted by the Assemblies of God since the 1980s. The newly planted urban churches are more or less related to the revival movement among the Chin. Today, those young churches are continuing the ministry successfully, growing faster than the mainline churches, which remain stagnant.

7.4.1 GRACE ASSEMBLY OF GOD, YANGON

This church was planted in 1984. Hau Lian Kham, the principal of Evangel College, had a vision of reaching the whole nation through its young people. With great conviction he prayed to the Lord for a mission church. As a result, the General Council approved his request, and he established a church on the college campus. In 1987, the church moved to a downtown rented hall on 45th Street. Miss Dora Moses took care of the church when Hau Lian Kham went abroad for further studies.

Home cells, youth ministry, and Bible seminars boosted the growth of the church. The congreg-

gation has 200 to 300 attendants every service. Also, the church has pioneered and supported new churches in other cities.

7.4.2 FULL GOSPEL ASSEMBLY CHURCH, YANGON

This church was planted at Kanbeh, Yangon in 1987. Reverend Dam Suan Mung, one of the General Presbyters, pioneered the church. After graduating from Southern Asia Bible College, Bangalore, India, he assisted Hau Lian Kham at Grace Assembly of God and then, with a vision of reaching the urban people with the full gospel message, he started a church in a small room in South Ohkala in Yangon. The church was moved downtown in 1988. It has grown from 20 members with two ministers to 530 members. It is the fastest growing church today.

7.4.3 ZION ASSEMBLY OF GOD, YANGON

This church, planted by Reverend Lian Khan Kap in 1992, had a total membership of 130 in 1996. One third of the members come from ethnic people other than Chin. The pastor was a graduate of Evangel Bible College, Yangon, and also a faculty member at the same school. He went to Singapore for further studies and received his Master of Divinity degree. Returning from Singapore, he started the church with a burden for reaching the urban people as well as doing mission outreaches to the unreached people in Myanmar.

Other newly planted churches, such as the Church of the Living Water, the Thingankyun Evangel Church, the Phawhkan Evangel Church, and Harvester Christian Church minister to their respective neighborhoods.

7.4.4 EVANGEL CHURCH, MANDALAY

This church was planted in 1967. David Dakhum looked after the church from 1967-1973, after which Saw Junior became the pastor. Then Philip Ahone replaced Saw Junior in 1976. Today, Charie Thein oversees the church with the support of Yangon Evangel Church.

The church here has faced the most resistant people in the country. As an ancient city, Mandalay is full of Buddhist monasteries and pagodas. Buddhist festivals and ceremonies are more common in this city than anywhere else. Therefore, the church has shown slow growth.

7.4.5 TRINITY ASSEMBLY OF GOD, MANDALAY

This church was planted in 1987. Christians in Nandwin (King's Palace) Military Base, known as the Nandwin Christian Fellowship, guided by Major Kam Khan Thawng and his colleagues, adopted Pentecostal beliefs and practices and founded the church downtown close to the palace. Neng Khan Suan oversees the church today.

The church has shown progress from the beginning. Mandalay, as a commercial center and the second largest city in the country, has visitors from all parts of the country. Therefore, the church has more visitors than members in every worship service.

7.4.6 EVANGEL CHURCH, MONYWA

This church was planted in 1983. As a missionary of Bethel Assembly Church in Tedim, Zaw Lin pioneered the church with a few believers. The pastor himself was a Buddhist-monk convert. Monywa is another staunch Buddhist city as well as a commercial city in central Myanmar. The church is reaching the Buddhists with the gospel.

7.4.7 CHURCHES IN LASHIO AND TAUNGYI, SHAN STATE

The church in Taungyi was established through the endeavor of lay believers and the support of Mogok Assemblies of God church in 1984. Churches in Lashio were planted in 1987. A home missionary from the Kale section pioneered the work at Lashio. The churches here have shown steady growth. With a vision of reaching the Shan ethnic people, the churches have occasionally conducted seminars and have trained local young people.

New churches have been planted in other cities such as Taungoo, Pyi (Prome), Chauk, Mawlamyang (Moulmein), and Phaang. These churches came into existence through the labor of lay belie-

vers, especially military personnel. They all have been planted in the midst of people from various religions, so that they themselves served as mission centers for the surrounding areas. As they work hard they grow steadily.

8. BIBLE SCHOOLS

Numerical and geographical growth must be founded and nurtured in the Word of God. To enhance spiritual growth, teaching the Word of God is of paramount importance.

Short-term Bible seminars were designed for meeting the urgent need to cope with numerical growth in various areas. Yet, they never have explained the whole picture of growth. Well-planned, systematic studies had to be introduced to keep the church growing on a firm biblical foundation. In addition to the Evangel Bible School at Myitkyina, three other Bible schools were established—one in Yangon, the other two in Kale, Sagaing Division and Tedim, Chin State. The schools have supported church growth with their systematic studies in Bible knowledge.

Students have been engaged in outreach ministry, as well as assisting local churches while enrolled in Bible school. Upon graduation, they serve as better skilled leaders in churches and in pioneer fields. They have been effective in carrying out the ministry.

8.1 EVANGEL BIBLE COLLEGE

On August 2, 1979, the Evangel Bible College was opened in Yangon with a resident teacher and 20 students. The college followed the curriculum and materials prepared by the International Correspondence Institute (ICI) of Brussels, Belgium. Myo Chit was the director, and Hau Lian Kham, the principal. Later, Miss Dora Moses and Kyi Wynn joined the faculty.

The school was in a planning stage for many years. In 1972, with the support of his church and with funds donated for this purpose by a family in Yangon, Myo Chit opened a short-term Bible training center for young people and new converts. The camp was so blessed by the Lord that a three-month Bible course was offered the following year.

As a replacement for this short-term training, the General Council decided to introduce a 4-year Bible course leading to a degree. The school was conceived when the General Council presbyters and pastors voiced their concern to Wesley Hurst, the USA Far East Asia mission director, expressing the desperate need to offer higher training for young men and women.

The purpose of the college is summed up in 2 Tim. 2:2: "And the thing you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others." (NIV). The college exists to assist in the spiritual and

intellectual development of young people who recognize God's call on their lives. It helps them prepare for Christian service—as pastors, evangelists, teachers, administrators, and workers in churches.⁷

On October 6, 1985, the first graduation commencement officiated by Wesley Hurst, and Dr. George Flattery, the founder of International Correspondent Institute, was held at Evangel Church, Yangon. About 1,000 believers gathered for the occasion. Those graduates now serve in various parts of the country.

8.2 MARANATHA BIBLE COLLEGE

This school was opened at Kale in the northwestern area of the country in 1988, with Tun Go Lian serving as the principal, Thang Hum as a full-time faculty member, and other part-time teachers carrying out the ministry under the supervision and sponsorship of the District Council No. 3. Thirty students enrolled the first year.

The school was opened for the purpose of training and producing Christian workers, with a minimal cost of study. As churches were planted everywhere many young Christians committed themselves to serve the Lord rather than the world. They needed to be trained, yet finances were always a big problem for students. Studying costs rose higher

⁷Pentecostal Evangel (July 26, 1987):21.

every year. For instance, the travel fare to Myitkyina Evangel Bible School or Yangon Evangel Bible College alone would adequately support a student for the whole year at a local school. At the same time most of the students did not qualify for the Evangel Bible College in Yangon. Also, lay leaders needed to be trained systematically.

With all these burdens, the District Council No. 3, where I was the District Superintendent, and Khup Lian Pau (Kale Section Superintendent) and Suak Za Go (Tedim Section Superintendent) planned ahead to establish the Bible school. In 1987, the Kale Section opened a short-term seminar in the Maranatha building as a pioneering school. With the support of local churches, the school began the following year in a rented building with a few facilities.

The school offers a three-year diploma course, as adopted by the General Council Convention at Kale in 1990. Today the school has 57 students enrolled with five full-time and part-time teachers.

8.3 BETHEL BIBLE COLLEGE

The Tedim Section of the Assemblies of God in Chin State holds a one-week Bible seminar every year not only for evangelists, pastors and lay leaders, but also for all believers. Evangelists and preachers give Bible instruction as they travel to villages for gospel preaching. This helps believers' spiritual maturity by supplying Biblical knowledge.

However, as membership quickly grew and church planting spread, the demand for trained pastors and workers increased. As the challenge was great, the Sectional Council decided to conduct a Bible school every year, beginning in 1990. The Pentecostal Bible School was opened with 21 students, mainly pastors, with Suak Za Go, the Section Superintendent, as the founding principal.

Because of the urgent and great need for theologically trained ministers, the board of the school took further steps to open a Bible college. The three-month Bible seminar was transformed into a college in 1991, and is now called Bethel Bible College. It is also called "Decade of Harvest Center." The first twenty-one graduates (class of 1995) are serving in the field today.

9. A NEW CONSTITUTION AND BYLAWS

A well prepared Constitution and Bylaws for the General Council was written and adopted at the 1990 General Council Convention at Kale. The church did not have such a statement for the previous fifty years. Believers followed decisions made by their respective councils at any convention, but this system could not cope for very long with the rapid rate of growth.

The General Convention was celebrated at Potao in 1988. The General Council decided to prepare and write a new Constitution and Bylaws. The

General Presbyters entrusted me (Chinn Khua Khai) to be the chair and Hau Lian Kham, Lyn Sein Lian and the Presbyters of District No. 3 to write the Constitution and Bylaws. By referring to, adapting, and quoting many sources, we rewrote it within a Burmese context, approved it, and finally submitted it to the General Council at Kale in 1990. It contains the doctrinal statement of the Assemblies of God of Myanmar; the rules and regulations for meetings; orders, rules and regulations of ministerial practice, and faith; and practices for mission." Without question, the convention accepted, approved, and chose to function in the context of this document.

10. THE TRIENNIAL CONVENTION AT KALE

In February 1990, the General Council convened its triennial general election at Kale. It was the first time this event was held among the Chins. 10,000 believers, including delegates from all parts of the country, came and celebrated it joyfully. An open-air crusade and Bible seminars were conducted during the convention.

The General Council prepared and launched the "Decade of Harvest" as promoted by the Assemblies of God World Mission Center of Springfield, Missouri. Gospel tracts were prepared for evangelism, mission funds were raised, and churches and believers engaged in this great harvest project.

II. DEDICATING A NEW GENERAL COUNCIL OFFICE

The General Council celebrated the dedication of a new office on November 30, 1997. The office is a small room in the new building of the School of Evangelism, founded by Myo Chit, then located at Kyugone, Insein-Yangon Road. The General Council allocated five million kyats to Evangel Church in order to open the office. For many years Myo Chit had the vision of building this school. He then became the General Superintendent of the Assemblies of God of Myanmar.

The dedication ceremony was combined with a one-week minister-training program. Ministers from the four districts came to Yangon to attend the training. Foreign guests also came and ministered to the attendants with the Word of God. Thomas E. Trask, the United States General Superintendent of the Assemblies of God gave the dedication speech. Other special guests attending the occasion were Ray Trask, a former missionary to Myanmar and his wife Marjorie; the special guests included Bob Houlihan, the American Assemblies of God Field Director for the Asia Pacific Region from the Division of Foreign Missions, Springfield, Missouri; and American missionaries Randy Hurst, Ron Maddox, and Bob Stefan. The occasion will be remembered as a historical event of the Assemblies of God of Myanmar.

12. THE STATISTICS

Tables 3, 4 and 5 show the statistical growth of the Church up to 1995. Unfortunately, the General Council of the Assemblies of God does not have accurate records of statistical growth. Therefore, I have collected information from four sources: Division of Foreign Missions (DFM), Springfield, Missouri; the General Council of Assemblies of God of Myanmar; the records of Stafford, a former missionary to Myanmar; and the Myanmar Council of Churches.

Stafford's data table depicts a rapid period of growth and then a drop within a very short period. The years between 1953 and 1955 showed a great surge of growth and then a noticeable drop within one year. Again, from 1956 to 1960 shows a doubling of growth. The same trend is seen between the years 1963 and 1970.

Stafford commented on the up and down trends reflected in the data. He proposed that the changes of officers, the different missionaries involved, and the war conditions in some areas hindered statistical accuracy, besides other possible reasons that could account for the variations. Evidently, the 1967 figures were copied from 1966, as they are identical, and then a significant jump is shown. Being a rounded figure, it is apparently an estimate. Stafford mentioned these figures saying,

It is not easy to believe the membership varied that much and if a line was drawn from 1947 membership of 2,600 to 1977 membership of 26,950 the line would most likely give a better rate of growth than the ups and downs. Most likely it was caused by the different individuals compiling the statistics.⁸

As Stafford says, the membership figures seem to have leveled off at a healthy rate of growth if we look at a decadal growth rate. In the graph of decadal growth the membership growth rates double every decade except the decade of the 1960s. If we look at a percentage of growth, the first pioneering years show the greatest growth, and the second decadal period follows. The 1960s showed a low rate of growth which might have been caused by the return of the missionaries to their home countries, the change of officers, and lack of strong zeal for evangelism.

According to statistics received from the three respective District Superintendents, the membership of believers reached 32,000 in 1982. This number is lower than figures from other sources. The Division of Foreign Missions in Springfield, Missouri (Table 3) lists 40,000 active members and 9590 affiliated members, yielding 49,590 members in 1980. Herman Tegenfeldt, a Baptist missionary to Kachin state, estimated the community to number about

⁸Stafford, *A Brief History*, 10.

40,000 by the early 1970s. The Burma Church Council's report in 1982 figured the Assemblies of God community as 51,302 members in total. Other sources suggested a total of 50,000.

The church has doubled during the last two decades. This multiplication is the result of revival among the Chins that began in the 1970s. The revival movement brought individual conversions, transfer Christians, and mass conversions. The majority of converts joined the Assemblies of God. This movement is evidently reflected in the jump in growth during 1975-1980. The membership growth rate shows a bit of slowing down after 1980. This change could reflect the effect of the changing emphases from soul winning evangelism to theological education and church planting.

Table 4 shows that the number of churches in 1970 tripled by 1995. The majority of those new churches were planted among the Chin believers and in urban areas, as a result of revival.

	DC ¹	DC2	DC3	DC4	TOTAL
	1 Lisu	Rawang	Yangon	Chin	
SECTION	9	9	1	6	25
CHURCH	182	173	34	223	612
CHURCH BUILDING	155	139	2	156	471
TOTAL FAMILIES	36,800	2,487	1,000	4,533	11,700
MINISTERS HOUSING	136	151	10	22	319
TOTAL MEMBERS	24,067	15,241	3,500	24,840	67,648
WATER BAPTISM	8,050	7,774	3,600	10,720	30,144
HOLY SPIRIT BAPTISM	1,630	1,542	2,500	5,163	10,835
ORDAINED MINISTERS	55	53	21	24	153
LICESNSED MINISTERS	87	55	13	107	262
EXHORTERS	92	64	44	123	323
DEACONS	243	251	258	1,178	1,930
CHRIST AMBASSADORS	2,250	2,385	1,650	3,921	10,206
YOUTH MINISTERS	241	238	230	25	734
WOMEN MISSION	4,958	5,566	580	3,882	15,356
MEN MISSION	1,584	1,678	75	2,193	5,530
CHILDREN SUNDAY SCHOOL	4,020	4,400	1,530	7,996	17,946
SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHERS	290	315	85	354	1,044

*DC: District Council

Table 3: Statistics of Assemblies of God of Myanmar (1995)

YEAR	MEMBERSHIP (Active + Affiliated)	Church (Organized + Preaching point)	Workers (Ordained + Licensed + Exhorters)
1931	-	-	-
1940	700	-	-
1945	2,600	-	-
1950	7,995	26	12
1955	8,000	-	-
1960	18,108	236	89
1965	13,000	-	-
1970	21,739	225	199
1975	26,000	-	-
1980	49,590	310	241
1985 ('83)	51,305	-	-
1990	62,060	600	504
1995	67,684	612	738

Table 4: Statistics of Growth

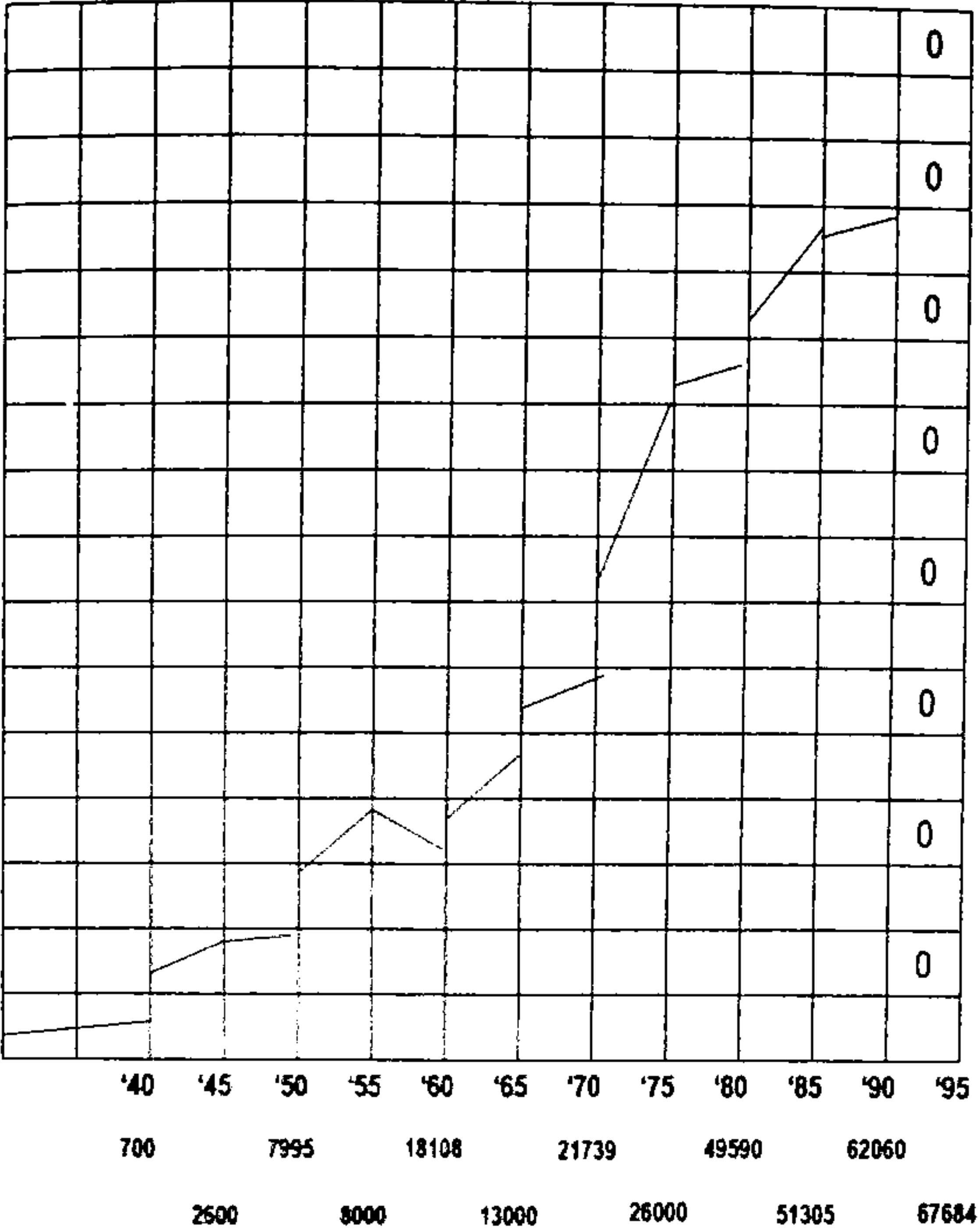


Table 5: A History of Total Membership (Graph)
(Membership in thousand)

BIBLE SCHOOL	STUDENT ENROLLMENT				NUMBER OF TEACHER	TOTAL GRADUATES
	YEAR OPEN	1970	1980	1990		
EVANGEL BIBLE SCHOOL MYITKYINA	1965	78	117	127	6	127
EVANGEL BIBLE COLLEGE YANGON	1979		20	38	5	17
MARANATHA BIBLE COLLEGE KALE	1988			57	5	19
BETHEL BIBLE COLLEGE TEDIM	1991					

Table 6: Bible Schools and Student Enrollment

13. SUMMARY

Revival, evangelism, and church planting all account for the enormous growth of the AOG of Myanmar during the last two-decades (1975-1995). Mission strategies and methods have all helped to carry out the mission mandate. The timely Bible seminars conducted by the respective councils have enhanced believers' biblical knowledge and accordingly have strengthened the church.

With the growing need to train workers, the Assemblies of God added three more Bible schools during this period (1980-1995). Graduates of the various Bible schools are serving in the fields of Myanmar. The schools constantly need promotion, integration, and revitalization.

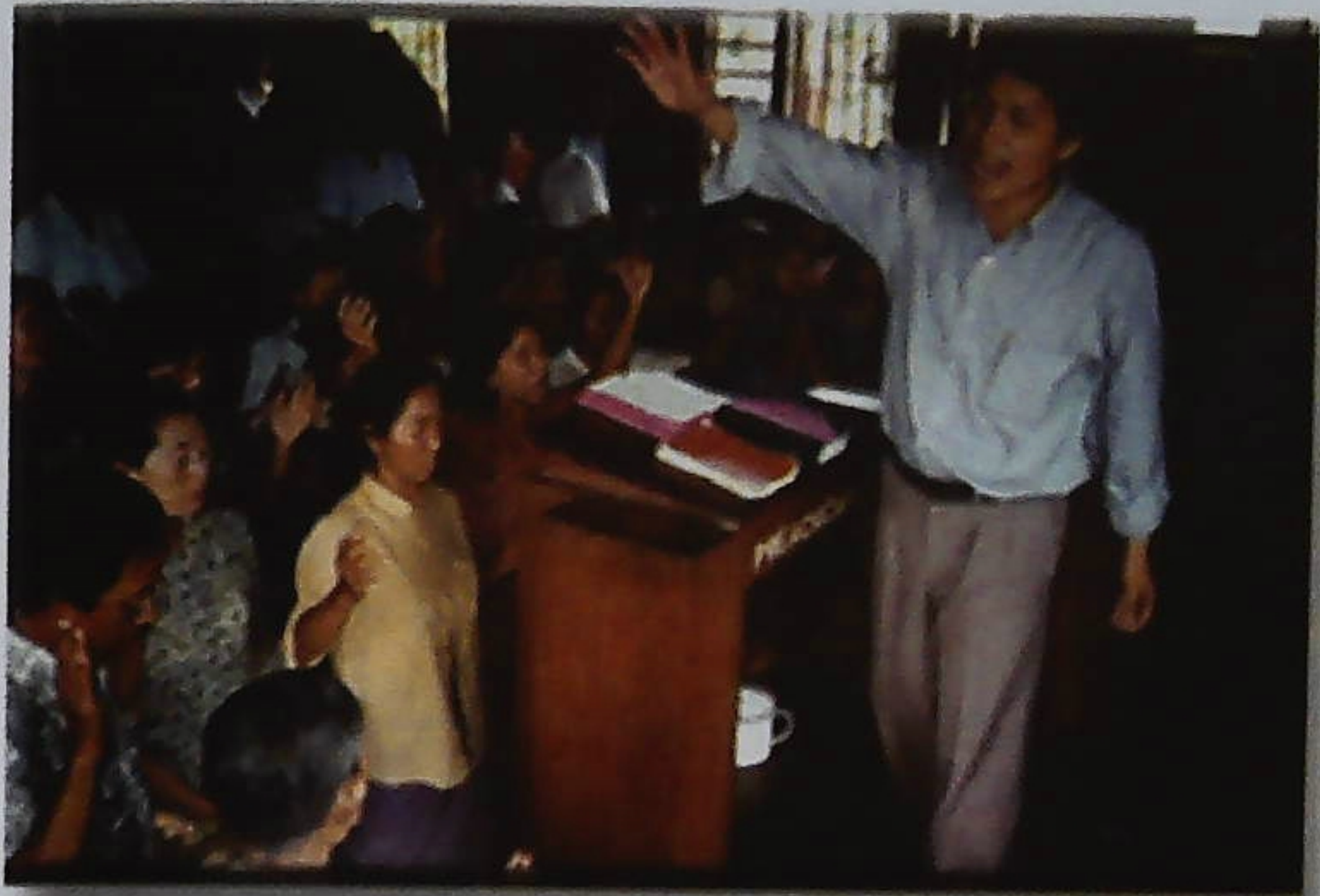
The AOG of Myanmar is still small in number, though it is the fastest growing and third largest church in the country. The graph (Table 5) shows the highest growth took place in the years between 1975-1980. This was a time in which soul-winning evangelism was the priority mission of the church. This reminds us that the church must not lose the priority of its evangelistic mandate.



*Preaching cross-culturally at a
Convention, Kale, Myanmar*



*An opening
ceremony of
a Church
building
Chin State,
Myanmar*



Altar commitment after preaching



Bethel AG Church Tedim, Chin State



Church planting at Frontier Mission-Mon Mission Field



The first graduates of Evangel Bible College, Yangon



*Delegates from District No. 3 (Burma District)
at Putao, Kachin State*



*Rev. T. E. Trask, Rev. R. Houlihan, Rev. R. Maddux at the
Opening Ceremony of General Council Office, Yangon.*



*Baptism
Frontier mission at Chindwin Valley*

6 ROADBLOCKS TO EVANGELISM AND MISSIONS

Church growth involves spiritual, numerical, and geographical dimensions of expansion. Church Growth experts refer to such a growth as internal expansion, extension, and bridging growth.¹ This chapter identifies roadblocks to such growth in order to suggest means for surmounting them.

I. EXTERNAL ROADBLOCKS

The external roadblocks to the growth of the church are mainly cultural issues. Contextualization is a means to overcoming these obstacles. The power and wisdom of the Spirit of God are much needed as the church works through these issues.

1.1 NATIONALISM

During the time of British rule, the Christian movement was often mistakenly identified with foreign domination. Even after independence, Christians were often misunderstood and accused of loving their country less, though they were patriotically serving the country, and interested in building the nation. The U Nu regime supported Buddhism as a process of Myanmar modernization. In 1961, Buddhism was declared the state religion, while rights of minority

¹Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 72.

religions were also granted.²

In contrast, the military regime showed reluctance to involve the government in religious affairs. Constructing the "Burmese Way to Socialism," the regime, in 1962, withdrew the recognition of Buddhism as the state religion and decreed that all religions would be equally respected. The establishment of the one party system in 1964 obligated all groups, including religious and non-religious organizations, to register with the authorities. Christian schools, hospitals, and institutions were nationalized in 1965-66.

In 1962, the government refused to renew the residence permits of all foreign missionaries, a measure which resulted in the expulsion of all 375 missionaries in 1966.³ The edict is still in effect today. Even though visitors and tourists are issued visas, their residency and travel are strictly limited.

Christian publications are sometimes allowed by permission of the authorities after being censored, and the quantity is often limited. In fact, the president once agreed to authorize the government printing press to provide paper and print 10,000 copies of the Bible in Myanmar. Yet, many religious practitioners are doubtful that religious freedom is obtainable. A protest was organized in 1988 to demonstrate the people's desire to end one party rule

²David B. Barrett, ed. *World Christian Encyclopedia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 203.

³*Ibid.*

in favor of a democratic system which would have led to a multi-party election in 1990. Nevertheless, the military junta did not hand over the power to the civilians, but rather imposed martial law, arrested the opposition leaders, and announced a take-over of power in September 1990.⁴ In the midst of political struggles during these times, Christians in Myanmar continue to live as good citizens and pledge full allegiance, loyalty, and hearty service to their country.

1.2 ECONOMIC SHORTAGE

Economic shortages in the country form one of the major barriers to the growth of the church. Since the 1960s, the country has suffered from deprivation which affects the social life as well as the religious life of the people. *Encyclopedia Britannica* reports the situation of the country's economy as follows:

The Burmese political and economic situation reached a new low in 1987, just four decades after independence. Twenty-five years of the Burmese Road to Socialism . . . brought the country—once the richest in Southeast Asia—to an unprecedented level of poverty and isolation from the outside world.⁵

⁴Time, June 11, 1990.

⁵Encyclopedia Britannica: Book of the year 1988, 437.

Rice has always been the major product of the country, the typical food for the people, and the main export. During the 1960s, the country ceased being one of the world's major rice exporting nations, and even faced rice shortages in urban and rural areas, failing to provide sufficiently for the people's subsistence. The nationalization of land, and internal and external trade in rice and other major products, the cultivators' obligation to the purchase and delivery system, the cooperative movement of rice production—none of these systems worked out in the way the government expected. Farmers, unable to survive on the low government prices paid for rice, have left the land. The peasants suffered severely from the rocketing market prices, especially in the hill areas where rice is not the major product of cultivation.

The government attempted to cure the economic shortage from time to time. But no significant changes have solved either its economic or political situation. Corruption in society persists, the inflation rate is higher year after year, and deterioration in political, economic, and social life is unimaginable. *Encyclopedia Britannica* says: "The political turmoil had crippled an economy already on a rapid downward trend. Factories halted production, transport was paralyzed, and foreign currency reserves were virtually nil, . . ."⁷

⁶Taylor, 250, 349.

⁷*Encyclopedia Britannica: Book of the year 1989*, 437.

The church has always struggled in this context to be self-supporting. Christian ministers never receive adequate material support, because churches are so economically poor that all their families struggle for day to day living. Churches cannot utilize modern facilities for rapid growth. The newly established churches, especially in urban areas, do not have property for buildings so they conduct worship services in rented houses. Christian workers do not have proper training, as they have not been able to afford the cost of education. Educated people have no desire to be full-time Christian ministers, since they receive better pay in other services. In the midst of such turmoil the church struggles not only for growth, but for mere survival.

1.3 SOCIAL STRUCTURE

The country is composed of many ethnic national groups. According to the 1983 census, there were 135 people groups, which probably refers to dialect groups. The ethnic Bama occupy almost all the plain areas. The seven major tribes in seven states consist of many people groups with a variety of social structures, roles, laws, taboos, beliefs and rituals, and dialects.

During the socialist regime, the government attempted to organize the classes and the masses into two categories of the same class, the *Lotha Pyitu*

Assiayone (Workers and Peasants Organization).⁸ However, the social structure still falls under two prominent strata: “the dominant group” and “the under dominant group.” The dominant group represents the “haves”—the rich and the royal officers. The under dominant group represents the poor—the ordinary workers and the common people. The two strata, whether it is acknowledged or not, replace the colonial system of social structure—the upper class, the middle class, and the lower class. Usually, the dominant group of people do not allow the common people to get involved in their social community. Christian converts in Myanmar mainly come from the “under dominant group.” It is very difficult to reach people in the upper dominant group with the gospel of Christ.

It is sad to say, but Christianity in Myanmar has often been considered a result of western colonization and a western-cultural form of worship. This has been the greatest single obstacle to its acceptance in the country. A friend once whispered to me that he would turn to Christ if he could worship God in his own cultural way. This statement should remind us of the need to present the gospel in a contextual form.

⁸Taylor, 124-6, 315.

1.4 LINGUISTIC BARRIER

Linguistic barriers are very prevalent in cross cultural mission and evangelism. Since there are many languages and dialects spoken in the country, especially among the tribal areas, gospel communicators always face this problem in their evangelistic work. Furthermore, cross-cultural gospel communication demands interpretation.

The advantage of a trade language must be acknowledged here, for, it helps to carry the gospel all over the country. Myanma is the common language known by all the modern people, and is the trade language throughout Myanmar, like the *koine*-Greek that served throughout the Mediterranean world in the first century. The gospel preached in a trade language has often been translated into various native dialects. Though listening to a message in one's own language is more impressive than hearing it in any other language, the trade language has to be used in communicating to the audience when a language barrier occurs.

1.5 PARALYZED TRANSPORTATION

Due to economic shortages, the transportation system in Myanmar is almost paralyzed, and this in turn slows growth in all areas of the country's life. Traveling by either road or waterway, during the rainy season, is difficult and dangerous. Trains are always crowded and air tickets are not obtained easily. The scarcity of oil, gas, and spare parts, and

the growing number of travelers increases the cost of traveling. Oxcarts are common in the rural-plains and foot travel is mostly used in hill areas. Many rural areas are isolated because of lack of transportation and communication.

The opportunity to expand the Kingdom of God depends on the availability of transportation. When transportation is paralyzed, the work is hampered. Once, I was told that a church leader from Potao in northern Myanmar waited three months for an air ticket for a meeting at Myitkyina, because there is no foot route between the two towns during the rainy season. Thank God for the evangelists and preachers who carry their own supplies and travel up and down hills to spread the gospel.

1.6 INSURGENCY

The continuing revolt against the government by insurgents is a great threat to both the security and development of the state. The government's defense service has been fighting with the insurgents since 1949, the year following independence of the country. The Burma Communist Party and the ethnic insurgents, such as the Kayin National Union, the Kachin Independent Army, the Shan, Lahus, and Kayah (Karenni), resist the government and claim their own autonomy.⁹ There is no peaceful living where such insurgency exists.

⁹*Encyclopedia Britannica: Book of the year 1990*, 456.

Insurgency is troublesome not only to the government, but also to the public. In September 1982, a group of insurgents unsuccessfully attempted to take over the Myanmar Radio and Television Headquarters in Yangon. On July 24, 1985, when a passenger train between Yangon and Mandalay was blown up by a powerful land mine, 67 people were killed and at least 100 others were injured. In a similar incident, a troop train was blown up near port Moulmein in May.¹⁰

It is always dangerous to enter areas where the insurgents are in control. I was not allowed to have an evangelistic night rally when I visited churches in Myitkyina in 1987, because the whole city was under curfew order. A missionary to Loikaw of Kayah state hurried back home when bombs exploded several times in the town. People need peaceful living. Christians in Myanmar need to work hand in hand with the government in building up the country as St. Paul encourages us to do in Romans 13. May the Christians pray to God for peacefulness in the country, for unity, and for progress.

1.7 RELIGIONS

Myanmar is a religious country. Buddhism is the single most dominant religion. Animistic practices are also part of all religions throughout the country. The number of Buddhists and their influence is so

¹⁰ *Encyclopedia Britannica: Book of the year 1986*, 509.

strong that both religious festivals and social affairs are always connected with religious observance. For a time nationalism and Buddhism were bracketed together, with the saying, "A good Myanma is a good Buddhist." This attitude rendered many loyal Christian officers more or less inactive in their Christian faith and practice.

The country itself is known to be the land of pagodas. In the lowlands, pagodas are seen in all directions—north, south, east, and west. Buddhist monasteries have a recognized place in any Myanma village. A church building is scarcely seen in rural areas. Few people in those rural areas have ever heard the gospel, or even the word "Christian."

As a result of a Buddhist revival in 1949, the sixth great Buddhist World Council was held at Yangon in 1954-56. This event resulted in the sending of Buddhist missionaries to other parts of the country, such as Chin state, Naga Hills, and Kachin Hills. Even after half a century of secularization in Myanma society, the Buddhist monastic community remains the most important single feature of the life of Myanma.¹¹ Nevertheless, the church has seen that they are winnable to the salvation of Christ.

¹¹*Encyclopedia Americana*, vol. 5 (1988), 5.

2. INTERNAL ROADBLOCKS

Nominality and theological liberalism have also hindered the growth of churches. Nominality is a widespread symptom that keeps the church inactive, while theological liberalism holds ministers back from zeal in evangelism. Lack of biblical knowledge and scarcity of Bibles in the vernacular also retard growth.

2.1 SPIRITUAL NOMINALITY

After a few generations, Christians in Myanmar fell into nominality. Many churches today are nominal, and discipleship commitment is mild, so that Christianity can be more like a religion than an intimate relationship with Christ. Many churches are more like a place of social gathering than a place of worshiping the almighty God.

A few characteristics seen in nominal churches can be identified as follows. Fear and reverence of God decline in the lives of believers. Love declines and selfish ambitions increase. Gossiping, cheating, mocking, bribery, and fighting occur even among the so-called believers. Financial bargains are common in Christian conventions. A leadership position in a church is gained through playing politics. The word of God is quoted for condemnation rather than uplifting the people. There is no burden for soul winning, but rather a social gospel is taught.

With these characteristics, the church has little power to overcome the world, but readily compromises with worldliness.

2.2 THEOLOGICAL LIBERALISM

The influence of liberalism over the mainline churches has hindered disciple making. By the 1960s, mainline churches were more inclined to theological liberalism than toward evangelistic priorities. Tegenfeldt has noted that the Burma Baptist Convention and other mainline denominations were so influenced by liberalism and ecumenism, that the church has lost evangelistic fervor, especially since the 1960s.¹² Unfortunately, Burma Institute of Theology in Insein, one of the most academically respected theological schools, and more than twenty Bible schools of different denominations have been influenced by liberalism and modernism, with concern for the social gospel. Hence, the cultural mandate has taken priority over the evangelistic mandate of winning souls to Christ.

The Myanmar Council of Churches (MCC) is the largest organization representing mainline denominations. The Council theme launched in 1955 says, "Ye are my witnesses." Despite this theme, the council has shifted more toward the cultural mandate.¹³ Their work reports show success in relief

¹²Tegenfeldt, 226-30.

¹³Kawlthang Vuta, "A Brief History of Church Planting and Growth of the Church in Burma." Pasadena: Fuller Theological Seminary, Unpublished Dissertation (1985), 264.

work, yet no effect in soul winning. The council provides for great potential for disciple making, even in its ecumenical movement, were it to give the evangelistic mandate at least equal priority.

2.3 LACK OF KNOWLEDGE ABOUT MISSIONS

The churches' lack of knowledge about missions is another internal roadblock to the work of missions. Churches do not know what missionary work is all about, much less how to pursue it. Mission strategies still seem strange to workers in the field. Many Christian ministers, especially in the rural areas, never receive proper training in Bible schools. Even when trained, the Bible schools and theological schools do not have mission oriented curricula. Inland mission work would be more successful if this great and urgent need were met.

2.4 THE NEED FOR BIBLE TRANSLATION

Since the time of Adoniram Judson, the whole Bible has been translated into ten languages in Myanmar, the New Testament in six more, and select portions into twelve. However, the vast majority of people groups do not have the Bible in their own language. There are 118 people groups in Myanmar with 111 dialects and languages, but only 24 people groups have the Bible or portions of it in their language. In fact, translation work is a difficult task in Myanmar because of the lack of scholars, consultants, and trained national translators. Moreover,

constant changes in culture demand that terms and words used in the early days need to be revised and updated from time to time. Translation requires a natural equivalent of the message of the Bible in the original language. Again, publication is another problem. The following chart shows the existence of Bible translations in the various languages.

LANGUAGE	BIBLE	TRANSLATOR	DATE PRINTED
MYANMAR	Matthew New Testament Whole Bible	Felix Carey Adoniram Judson Adoniram Judson	1811, 1817 1823, 1832 1935
KAYIN, SAGAW KAYIN, PWO	New Testament Whole Bible New Testament Whole Bible	Francis Mason Francis Mason D.L. Brayton, F. Mason A. Taylor & Others	1843 1853 1859 1876, 1885
MON	New Testament Whole Bible	Ms. Geroge Boardman Continued by Haswell	1847 1925
SHAN SHAN-LAHU SHAN-AKHA SHAN-PA'O SHAN-WA	New Testament Whole Bible New Testament New Testament Old Testament New Testament New Testament	Josiah N. Cushing Josiah N. Cushing Paul & Elaine Lewis Noel Kya Heh Mrs. W. Harkett, Maung Maung Marcus V. Young	1882 1892 1962 1965 1994 1980s 1938
KACHIN JINGHPAW KACHIN-LISU KACHIN-RAWANG	New Testament Old Testament Whole Bible Luke & John	Ola Hanson Ola Hanson Robert H. Morse	1911 1926 1968 1931, 1963

LANGUAGE	BIBLE	TRANSLATOR	DATE PRINTED
CHIN-HAKA	Gospels	Carson	1920
	New Testament	Chester U. Straits	1940
	Old Testament	R. Johnson, David Vanbik	1978
CHIN-TEDIM	New Testament	Herbert Cope	1936
CHIN-FALAM	Whole Bible	Kam Khaw Thang	1980s
	New Testament	Jyunbil	1979
CHIN-KHUMI CHIN-ASHO	Whole Bible	Hre Kio	1991
	New Testament	Eamest Francis	1965
ISLANDERS- NICOLARESE ISLANDERS- SALUNG	New Testament	E. Carroll & co-workers	1954
	Gospel & Acts	G. Whitehead	1926
	Mark	G. Whitehead	1913

Table 7: Bible in Languages

2.5 THE NEED FOR ACCESS TO MASS MEDIA

The government controls media, such as daily newspapers and all radio and television programs, and Christians are not allowed to make religious broadcasts within the country. A recording studio in Mandalay, operated by the American Baptist Mission, at one stage prepared programs for the Burma Broadcasting Service and British Broadcasting Corporation. The program was for fifteen minutes every Sunday, and for thirty minutes daily, over the Far East Broadcasting Corporation (FEBC). Later, they prepared programs for release over South East Asia Radio Voice (SEARV) and FEBC (both in

Manila).¹⁴ Today, gospel messages prepared by some church leaders in Myanmar are beamed and received through short-wave radio every morning. It is encouraging to know that many people in Myanmar listen to the program. But this is not enough and the church needs equal rights and privileges in obtaining access to mass media for the proclamation of the good news of Christ.

3. EVANGELISM AND MISSION OPPORTUNITY TODAY

In spite of many roadblocks, evangelism and mission work are more extensive in the country today than they have been at any other time in the past. Pentecostals, evangelicals, and some para-church movements are shouldering the task enthusiastically. Also, some mainline churches have launched mission programs, in spite of the strong influence of liberalism and ecumenism.

The Assemblies of God is known for its evangelistic crusades and mission work. Home missionaries are sent to the unreached people among the Shan, Kachin, Karen, Mon, Kayah, Chin, and to the Naga Hills, and the Buddhists in the mainland. A recent interview with a friend informed me that para-church movements do send missionaries to Naga Hills, the China border, and among the Buddhists in

¹⁴Barrett, 203.

the mainland. They have had good results. The Baptist mission work of Chin for Christ in One Century, the Kachin 3/300 Gideon Band and, the Chindwin Mission all reported success. These reports suggest that the door is opened for the task of evangelism and mission work. If churches take the mission task enthusiastically, they can reach the unreached within a decade.

4. SUMMARY

This chapter has noted some roadblocks to the growth of the church in Myanmar. Some are internal, the others external. There may be other roadblocks which need to be identified. In order to grow, every denomination and local church needs to cross such obstacles by renewing their spiritual life, rewriting their philosophy of church mission, and adjusting to given social institutions. Churches, furthermore, may need to extend efforts in a cooperative manner.

7 CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTED STRATEGY FOR MISSIONS

The Assemblies of God of Myanmar has always been known for its evangelism, zealous and powerful mission, and church planting. Yet, leaders and churches need to know more about the mission of the church and to develop sound methodological and systematic ways of understanding and executing mission, in order to carry out the task with more success. In this concluding chapter, I suggest some basic considerations for such development in the church's mission to Myanmar.

***I.* REACHING THE UNREACHED**

World evangelization is moving toward reaching the unreached groups of people throughout the world with the gospel of Christ. This might be the greatest enterprise in the history of the Christian movement, for the attempt is not only to disciple all nations (*panta ta ethne*) in obedience to the Great Commission (Matt. 26:16), but also to accomplish the task in the church age. Since we are aware that the coming of the Lord is drawing very near and the accomplishment of the commission is urgent, the local church must assume responsibility for this enormous task which the Lord has entrusted to it. The ultimate issue is whether we are faithful to the Lord. Church leaders are in a vital position to mobi-

lize the local churches for this task of mission.

1.1 DISCOVERING THE UNREACHED

The very first step to take in reaching the unreached people in Myanmar with the gospel of Christ is to discover who, where, and what the unreached are. According to Ralph D. Winter, the founder of the American Center for World Missions, the “Unreached People” is a people group within which there is no indigenous community of believing Christians able to evangelize this people group without outside (cross-cultural) assistance.¹

According to “Peoplesfile Index” prepared by the Global Mapping Project, the whole Bible, or at least a portion of it, is available in only 24 language and dialect groups in Myanmar, and 42 people groups have no translations or recordings at all.² It can be assumed that those who have whole Bibles and Bible portions are being evangelized, and 42 people groups remain to be evangelized.

In addition, there are people groups being separated from the common society but living in their

¹Ralph D. Winter, “Unreached Peoples: What are They and Where are They?” in *Reaching the Unreached*, edited by Harvie Conn. (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1984), 44.

²Alan Starling, ed. *Peoplesfile Index* (Pasadena: Global Mapping Project, Inc., 1986), 4-19. The record needs to be updated. Some reached people are counted as unreached. For instance, Haka, Falam, Tedim people of the Northern Chin have some of the largest percentages of Christians in the land. The same applies to the Karen and Kachin though they each have small dialect groups needing to be reached.

own societies. These include beggars on the street, monks in the monasteries, and the blind in the blind shrines. They all need to hear the gospel message of the salvation of Christ.

1.2 MOBILIZING LOCAL CHURCHES FOR MISSION

Emil Brunner, as Kane has quoted, once asserted, “The Church exists by mission as fire exists by burning.”³ The church is God’s missionary to the world, and the people are God’s missionary people. John Bright has set forth a compelling argument about the church’s self understanding:

The Church, therefore, is not mistaken when she understands that her task is missionary. Indeed, her only mistake is that she has not understood it strongly enough. She is not to conduct mission as one of her many activities; she has in all her activities a mission, she is a missionary people—if she is not that, she is not the church.⁴

The call of the local church to mission is both corporate and individual. The roles of pastor(s) and laity are equally important. It is important for them to discover their spiritual gifts, be assertive in their roles, and implement the church’s mission.

³J. Herbert Kane, *A Concise History of Christian World Missions* (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1982), 46.

⁴John Bright quoted in *Proclaim Christ Until He Comes: Lausanne II*, J. D. Douglas, ed. (Minneapolis: Worldwide, 1989), 257.

1.2.1 PASTOR'S ROLE

As a gift of God to the church (Eph. 4:11,12), a pastor is a shepherd, leader of the community, teacher and preacher of the Word of God, counselor, and organizer. One of his or her great responsibilities is to train the people to work. D. L. Moody once said, "Good leaders will put ten men to work rather than do the work of ten men."⁵ Thus, the pastor must teach, train, equip, and send missionaries.

1.2.2 MOBILIZING THE LAITY

As important as the pastor's role is in the church's mission, so is the role of the laity. C. Peter Wagner says, "If the first vital sign of a growing church is a pastor who is using God's given gifts to lead the church into growth, the second is a well-mobilized laity."⁶ Lay people in the church have spiritual gifts which should be used in carrying out the mission. This gifting is clearly seen in the revival among the Chin, where the people preach, teach, plant churches cross culturally, and carry out pastoral work.

The church must enable its entire membership to discover and deploy their gifts for ministry. Lay people in the church are not only to support and pray for the mission, but they themselves have to go across cultures to witness and preach the gospel,

⁵Church Growth International (June 1984).23.

⁶Ibid., 77.

persuade and bring people into the Kingdom of God. An important aspect in a pastor's mobilizing the laity is to help them discover their gifts and let them serve according to their giftedness.

1.3 CHURCH GROWTH SEMINARS

Conducting church growth seminars is of prime importance to share the vision and to mobilize the people. Each respective district and the national organization of the Assemblies of God of Myanmar need to convene church growth seminars once a year. Pastors, evangelists, missionaries, Christian workers, and lay leaders must attend the seminars in order to be revitalized and mobilized for missions and ministry. They will be inspired with vision, goals, and bold plans. They will be trained with strategies of church growth.

It is important to keep records of church growth. Historical records preserve accurate information about our activities. Used with the appropriate tools of analysis and interpretation, they can often point us to where we need to go onward, based on where we have been. One of the weaknesses of the Assemblies of God of Myanmar is its lack of mission history and reliable statistics. Most of the information I have received came from the records of missionaries, and very little from personal conversation with national leaders.

1.4 EVANGELIZE THE UNREACHED PEOPLE

“How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent. As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring Good News!’” (Rom. 10:14-15 NIV).

The Lausanne Covenant of World Evangelization, Article 4, affirms evangelism as nothing other than to preach the gospel of Christ, and to persuade men and women to become disciples of Christ.

To evangelize is to spread the Good News that Jesus Christ died for our sins and was raised from the dead according to the Scriptures, and that as the reigning Lord he now offers the forgiveness of sins and the liberating gift of the Spirit to all who repent and believe. Our Christian presence in the world is indispensable to evangelism.... But evangelism itself is the proclamation of the historical, biblical Christ as Savior and Lord, with a view to persuading people to come to him personally and so be reconciled to God...⁷

⁷Douglas, 20.

Article 6 goes on to affirm evangelism as the mission of the church.

Christ sends his redeemed people into the world as the Father sent him, and for this calls for a similar deep and costly penetration of the world . . . In the church's mission of sacrificial service, evangelism is primary. World evangelization requires the whole church to take the whole gospel to the whole world. The church is at the very center of God's cosmic purpose and is his appointed means of spreading the gospel. But a church which preaches the cross must itself be marked by the cross...⁸

Being committed to obedience to the biblical mandate of evangelism, and participating in world evangelization, churches in Myanmar have great responsibility of reaching the unreached people in the country with the gospel of Christ. To accomplish authentic mission, the church must acknowledge the human responsibilities mentioned in the mandate as well as in the covenants, including: preaching Good News, the Christians' presence in the world as cross bearers, and persuading and discipling lost souls. Our part is to be faithful to God in what He has entrusted to us; the results are in the hands of God.

⁸Ibid., 21.

1.5 SENDING MISSIONARIES TO THE UNREACHED

In order to reach the unreached, the church must send long term and short term missionaries to the unreached people groups. Missionaries must be trained and equipped to work cross-culturally.

1.5.1 LONG-TERM MISSIONARIES

If we are really going to reach the unreached ethnic groups, missionaries must be trained in cross-cultural missions. The missionary must live among the people and accommodate him/her self to the culture and customs of the people. He/she must evangelize the people, disciple them and plant a viable indigenous mission-church. Missionaries have to present not only the gospel, but also a social ministry, so that the gospel is presented in word and deed. Our mission must help the whole development of the people.

A missionary's stay in the field might depend on the time needed for a church to grow to maturity. Until and unless the church becomes a self-supporting, mission-oriented church, the missionary should not leave the field. When the church is mature, the missionary should leave and go to another field.

1.5.2 SHORT -TERM MISSIONARIES

One popular mission method today is that of short-term missions. It is highly recommended because students, teachers, and office workers can participate. Their mission term may be a period of two or three months or more. At the end of their term, they return and report on their mission. Sponsorship and support for short-term missionaries must be raised within the existing churches.

1.5.3 TENT-MAKERS

Another well-known mission method, expected to be the wave of the future, is tent-making. Tent makers are missionaries in name and in terms of commitment, but are fully self-supporting. The method itself is not a new one, for it is known as Paul's method. William Carey is well known for his tent-making mission work at Calcutta, and is known as the Father of Modern Missions.

In Myanmar, there are Christian teachers, nurses, officers and other staff workers who work all over the country. They can be called and trained and sent back as tent-makers where they work. Evidence shows that evangelism and church planting across cultures have been carried out by lay believers. I strongly believe that the success of mission in the future depends on such people.

2. REDEMPTION AND LIFT

Evangelism and social ministry are distinct from one another, yet integrally related in our proclamation of and obedience to the gospel. Jesus once taught his disciples to seek the kingdom first, and their necessities would then be added to them. At another time, he preached to thousands of people and also satisfied their physical hunger by feeding them. He delivered the adulteress from her oppressors and then said to sin no more. Jesus liberated the people from spiritual oppression as well as meeting their physical needs.

After several consultations, the theological work group of the Lausanne Committee at Grand Rapids, in 1982, reflected on Christian social responsibilities and stated:

We affirm that God is both the Creator and the Judge of all men. We therefore should share his concern for justice and reconciliation throughout human society and for the liberation of men from every kind of oppression...⁹

They also established the following three points of relationship between evangelism and social responsibility:

⁹Lausanne Occasional Papers No. 21. "Evangelism and Social Responsibility" (Wheaton: Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 1982), 17.

1. Social responsibility is a consequence of evangelism.
2. Social responsibility is a bridge to evangelism, and
3. Social responsibility is a partner to evangelism.¹⁰

In Myanmar, there are beggars on the streets asking for ten *pyas* (the amount of 10 cents) for a cup of coffee to fill an empty stomach. There are the poor in slum areas with no shelters. People in rural areas need health care, education, clothing, electricity and so on. They all need some one who cares for their needs. They are longing for love. The Lausanne Committee stated, "If evangelism and social responsibilities are twins, their mother is love. For evangelism means "words of love and social service/action means deeds of love."¹¹

3. THE URGENT CALL FOR URBAN EVANGELISM

David Claerbaut has stated, "Cities determine the destination of the nations."¹² Demographics show that world population is concentrated in urban regions today. Cities are centers for commerce, industry, education, politics, and health. People from rural areas move to urban regions to seek a better life. Therefore cities become larger and more complex.

¹⁰Ibid., 21-3.

¹¹Ibid., 49.

¹²David Claerbout, *Urban Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 15.

Myanmar is not an exception. The urban population is growing rapidly with multi-racial, and multi-faith communities. There is no single, well-defined social order. A city is a melting pot containing more than one set of values, more than one culture; it is the place where values and cultures merge. There are classes and masses--groups of wealthy, educated, authoritative, separated and protected people, people with poverty, social problems, all kinds of corruption, and religious, racial, and ethnic division. Moody once said, "If we reach the cities, we reach the nation. But if we fail in cities, they will become a cesspool that will infect that entire country."¹³ Therefore, urban evangelism is not only important, but also urgent.

God loves the urban people as He loves the world. Ministries in the Old Testament period are mainly urban centered. Priests, judges, and kings are urban dwellers. The New Testament commission started with Jerusalem, a city. Generally, Paul's mission was urban centered. Christians need to see how God sees the urban people.

The Assemblies of God of Myanmar has planted a number of churches in urban areas. Those churches have reached out to people surrounding them with the gospel. Yet, little urban church planting has been done compared to the need for urban evangelism. Urban churches need vision, burden,

¹³ Douglas, 59.

zeal, and strategy for evangelism, just as they require cross-cultural missions.

4. THE GREAT NEED FOR RURAL EVANGELISM

Studies about rural church missions today seem to be more neglected than urban ministry. Theologians and authors have sought to analyze urban growth in its many dimensions: population growth, social and cultural diversity, and urgent needs of urban evangelization. Rural evangelism, in fact, is as important as urban evangelism.

Today, 76 percent of the population of Myanmar are rural dwellers. These rural dwellers are a tightly-knit homogenous people group, as defined by McGavran: "A homogenous unit is simply a section of society in which all the members have some characteristics in common."¹⁴ They look for simplicity, unity, and commonness. They like to be part of a people movement, rather than acting individually. They are more social and religious than urban dwellers.

The evidence shows that the majority of Christians in Myanmar belong to rural areas, particularly among the tribal people. They are more receptive to the gospel. When they turn to Christ, they do it in a people movement. However, people in the

¹⁴McGavran, *Understanding*, 69.

plains are still unreceptive. So the call to take the gospel to them is urgent.

5. EVANGELISM TO THE RECEPTIVE PEOPLE

It has always been recommended to go first to the receptive people. We cannot reach everybody within a given time. Therefore, it is better to give priority to the receptive people, whether groups or persons.

McGavran has brought out the fact that there is a time of harvest, when people are receptive to the gospel. People respond to the gospel when it is presented in a right way. Usually, the receptive are the poor, oppressed, sick, disabled, immigrants, new settlers, prisoners, and returning travelers. Christian workers should not miss this potential harvest of a great turning to God. Therefore, our eyes must be opened to discover people who are receptive and ready to respond to the gospel. Workers must put forth effort to win them to Christ while they are winnable.¹⁵

¹⁵Ibid., 192-206.

6. KINSHIP EVANGELISM

The normal pattern of evangelism in the early church was *oikos* evangelism. *Oikos* means an inhabited house, a household, a social system composed of those related to each other through common ties and tasks. It includes a family nucleus, extended to dependents, slaves, and employees.

Oikos constitutes the basic unit by which the early church grew and spread the Good News. For example, Andrew was instrumental in bringing his brother Simon to Christ (Jn. 1:40). Cornelius prepared his household for receiving the message (Acts 10). The Philippian jailer was assured he and his *oikos* would be saved by believing in Jesus (Acts 16:31).

The early revival movement among the Chins was characterized by *oikos* evangelism. The born again believers had burdens primarily for their own families and relatives. Many have turned to Christ in an *oikos* movement. It remains very important today for the church to train and mobilize all believers to win their own kinsfolk and bring them to church.

7. FRIENDSHIP EVANGELISM

Friendship and neighborhood evangelism is another dynamic means to personal evangelism. "Every Christian is not an evangelist, but every Chris-

tian certainly has the role of a witness."¹⁶ Students reach their fellow students with the gospel, office personnel their fellow staffers, and business people their fellow business contacts. This pattern is characteristic of revival among Chins.

Friends are more open to one another, they trust each other, love and care for one another, and have burdens for one another. The success of evangelism begins at the level of personal loving and caring, and this is something that every believer can do. When one shows a genuine concern for, and a sacrificial commitment to the needs of a friend, it often opens the heart so that the seed of the gospel will find good ground and then bring forth a harvest.¹⁷

Ron Rand has listed seven helpful guidelines for witnessing to a friend. They are: (1) find common ground with your friend (1 Cor. 9:19-23); (2) reveal your faith to your friend; (3) witness through your life style (James 2:14-17); (4) intercede for your friend (Col. 1:19); (5) express your faith to your friend (Rom. 10:17); (6) nurture your friend through teaching, fellowship and prayer (Acts 2:24); (7) disciple your friend to be a follower of Jesus Christ (Matt. 28:19-20), and (8) set your friend on a friend's course with his friends (Mark 1:17).¹⁸

¹⁶C. Peter Wagner, *Your Church Can Grow* (Ventura: Regal Books, 1976), 84-5.

¹⁷Sterling W. Houston, *Crusade Evangelism and the Local Church* (Minneapolis: Worldwide, 1984), 54-6.

¹⁸Ron Rand, *Won by One* (Ventura: Regal Books, 1976), 15-6.

8. MASS EVANGELISM

A popular method of reaching the masses is through crusade evangelism. This method has been the most dynamic throughout the revival movement among the Chins. Generally speaking, an evangelist conducts the services, and gospel singers and counselors all work together during the crusade. The focus of this method is to saturate an area with the gospel, to bear witness for the sake of unbelievers at these services, and to refer new Christians to a local church where they can receive follow-up and become mature Christians.

In Myanmar rural areas, crusades in towns are very dynamic. As the center for administration, economics, education, communication, and social pattern, a town has great influence over surrounding rural villages. Whatever happens in a town soon spreads to surrounding villages. However, crusade evangelism rarely happens in urban areas. Due to security concerns, it is only seldom permitted and then only within the church's compound. Thus, urban churches need to apply other methods of reaching the masses with the gospel.

9. CELL-GROUP EVANGELISM

A home-cell meeting, like the house-church of the first century A.D., is not only a place of prayer, sharing, studying the Word of God, and having fellowship, but also a center of evangelism. Many people, including myself, can trace their conversion story back to a home cell meeting. It is the small group meeting where new friends are invited, welcomed, and given counsel at appropriate times. At the largest single church in the world today, Yoido Full Gospel Church, Korea, the pastoral staff attributes church growth to the cell group movement.

If our churches are really to grow, then home-cell meetings in which lay leaders are carrying the ministry must be promoted and multiplied. The cell-group fellowship must be an evangelistic fellowship. The pastor must train lay leaders for cell group leadership. It is a good practice to have the same lessons and same principles across many cell groups in order to foster harmonious growth.

Multiplying cell group meetings not only helps the church to grow, but also solves the problem of facilities and accommodations. Frank R. Tillapaugh comments that the only way a church in small facilities can grow is to multiply its groups.¹⁹ Such a process is most needed in urban churches today.

¹⁹Tillapaugh, 95.

***10.* LITERATURE EVANGELISM AND CASSETTE MINISTRY**

Literature evangelism would be strongly recommended if churches were able to afford the rocketing market prices. This evangelism in the past resulted in a great impact among literate people. Since 75 percent of today's Myanmar population is supposed to be literate, we should continue such effort by all means. Newly circulated newsletters should be evangelism oriented. Other evangelism methods, such as street evangelism and door to door visitation are also suggested and strongly recommended to be carried out by every believer.

Cassette ministry is strongly recommended because it can reach every home with few barriers. Evangelists may not be received into a house, but a well-prepared gospel message with nice music taped on cassette can reach across cultural barriers. In the past few years, gospel music tapes have become the best selling products in the Christian market. Though the cost of recording is high and the ministry demands a professional job, churches should take the risk to support a ministry that can have such an impact on so many people.

II. PLANT CHURCHES ACROSS CULTURES

Church growth professor C. Peter Wagner has said, "Church planting is the best strategy of church growth." Without a church there is no evangelism; without evangelism there is no church. A church is the result of evangelism, and at the same time it is called to evangelize the world.

Carl E. Bratten said, "Because church and missions belong together from the beginning, a church without missions or missions without the church are both contradictory."²⁰ We cannot accomplish world evangelization without planting churches cross-culturally.

Ralph D. Winter stated, "People are unreached when there is no indigenous community of believing Christians able to evangelize them."²¹ The church must be a viable indigenous church if the people group are to be deemed "reached."

Win Arn and Elmer Town said, "To reach lost people in every culture of the world, a church must be established in every culture to communicate the gospel and nurture those who are saved."²²

²⁰Carl E. Bratten, *The Flaming Center* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 55.

²¹Harvie M. Conn, ed. *Reaching the Unreached* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian & Reformed Pub. Company, 1984), 44.

²²Win Arn, & Elmer Town, *Church Growth* (Wheaton: Tyndale Pub. House, 1986), 143.

McGavran, often called the “father of church growth,” comments on church planting as follows:

Only churches that exist can be perfected. Only babies who have been born can be educated. Only where practicing Christians form a sizable minority of their societies can they expect their presence seriously to influence the social, economic and political structures. The church must, indeed, teach them all things, but first she must have at least some Christians and a congregation.²³

An important factor in planting churches is that church planters must work along with the cross-cultural society. The people in Myanmar are proud of their culture and customs. One who keeps the culture is considered a good Myanma. Therefore, without breaking any of their cultural rules or customs, the gospel must be presented in a way the people can understand and accept.

All in all, by trusting the Holy Spirit, the unreached must be reached with the gospel of Christ, and churches must be planted among them. Believers must be nurtured and trained to evangelize those who are unbelievers. Let us accomplish the task before He comes.

²³McGavran, *Understanding*, 286.

12. CONCLUSION

Evidently, the Assemblies of God in Myanmar is growing qualitatively, and quantitatively as a group of self-governing, self-propagating, and self-supporting churches today. This steady growth is building upon the foundation that was laid by missionaries and pioneer lay workers. Words cannot adequately convey the respect and appreciation due those missionaries and workers. They left their comfortable homes, possessions, and loved ones and came to a people unknown to them, and identified themselves with the people so that they might bring the gospel light and win them to Christ.

The Assemblies of God has always been energetic in winning souls to Christ. They often attribute their love of souls and evangelistic zeal to the power which comes through the baptism of the Holy Spirit. They know and practice church planting as the most effective strategy of church growth. Also, they send home missionaries to reach the unreached. With Pentecostal faith and movement, the church always carries the evangelical mandate.

However, the church also has weaknesses. Besides evangelism and mission work, Christian education needs to be seriously carried out in the local churches. In the past, Bible lessons have not been taken seriously except in a few urban churches. This deficit is perpetuated by the fact that teaching materials are not available. Also, the churches lack

qualified teachers, often having none at all. Since spiritual nominality is caused primarily by lack of biblical knowledge, churches need to take their Sunday school lessons seriously.

Theological education needs to be standardized. Up to this day, Bible schools have held a minimal place in the mission of the church. School curricula and courses need to be updated in order to reflect the present theological and practical orientations and standards. Prospective teachers should be sent overseas for higher education in order to equip schools with qualified faculties. It is sad to note that the Evangel Bible College at Yangon, which offers the highest degree program, still has no proper building, library, classrooms, nor qualified teaching staff, after nearly twenty years of existence. In this matter of building up, in fact, the church needs help from outside the country. Additionally, institutions, like Asia Pacific Theological Seminary, in the Philippines can help to train students with less cost involved.

The need for contextual mission is also a pressing one. Acknowledging facts about the road-blocks, the church needs methods of gospel presentation. Contextualization here does not mean to compromise the gospel message, for the truth and the power and the person of the message never changes. However, the method of presentation has to be in the form which suits the local context.

Finally, leadership patterns in the church need to be transformed. The church will accomplish

far more as lay leadership is promoted, servant leadership is emphasized, and theological education for leaders is taken seriously. In the past, leadership often has been authoritarian, centrifugal and position oriented. For mature and balanced growth, the church needs to reconsider the above suggestions.

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