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## PENTECOSTALISM IN MYANMAR: AN OVERVIEW<sup>1</sup>

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Myanmar, known as Burma before 1989, is a country in mainland Southeast Asia that shares its borders with China on the northeast, Laos on the east, Thailand on the southeast, Bangladesh on the west and India on the northwest. The estimated population by the year 2000 was 51,539,000 comprised of 135 ethnic groups in which 89.8% are Buddhist, 4.9% Christian, 3.9% Islam, 0.5% Hindu and 1.2% primal religions.<sup>2</sup> Catholic Christianity was introduced to the people in Myanmar around 1554, Protestant Christianity in 1807,<sup>3</sup> and Pentecostalism in the 1920s.

### 1. The Contribution of Missionaries

Modern Pentecostalism asserted a rediscovery of the New Testament phenomenon of baptism in the Holy Spirit evidenced with speaking in tongue (*glossolalia*). As in many parts of the world, it is the most dynamic Christian movement in Myanmar today. Three church

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<sup>2</sup> Sein Tin, *Central Statistical Year Book of Myanmar 1995* (Yangon: Central Statistic Organization, 1995), p. 398.

<sup>3</sup> Chin Khua Khai, "Myanmar Mission Board and Agencies," in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, ed. A. Scott Moreau (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), pp. 667-68.

organizations—the Assemblies of God, the United Pentecostal Church<sup>4</sup> (Oneness), the Foursquare Church<sup>5</sup>—and a host of individual charismatic believers<sup>6</sup> scattered in various churches represent this vital Christian movement that encounters nominal Christian practices as well as the non-Christian world. Both missionaries and national leaders and believers share in the great work of spreading Pentecostalism in Myanmar.

### 1.1 Hector and Sigrid McClean

Perhaps Hector and Sigrid McClean were the first resident Pentecostal missionaries to Myanmar beginning their work in the 1920s. They wrote about their work among the Melee people in upper Myanmar which resulted in the whole tribe turning to the Lord from idol worship.<sup>7</sup> Also their work among Loheh tribe at Ming-tz-shan resulted in a revival where approximately 60 received the baptism of the Spirit according to Acts 2:4 and numbers at the altar sought repentance and made confession to Christ.<sup>8</sup> Nothing further is known of their work.

The third largest single denomination in the country, the Assemblies of God of Myanmar is the oldest and largest Pentecostal organization established in 1931. It reported a total membership of 84,158 by the year 2000.<sup>9</sup> The history of the mission began among the Lisu and Rawang people in the northern country where half the members belong today.

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<sup>4</sup> J. Ral Buai organized the United Pentecostal Church in 1973. Their belief of modalism (oneness), speaking in tongue as evidence of salvation, practices such as baptism in the name of Jesus, and dancing and rolling and excessive drum beating during the worship are not accepted in the rest of the Pentecostal groups, however.

<sup>5</sup> Philip Ahone has founded the Full Gospel Foursquare Church in 1989. Formerly he was a minister in the Assemblies of God and a well-known evangelistic preacher in the early renewal movement. With a few daughter churches, he organized the Foursquare Church.

<sup>6</sup> The charismatic movement in Myanmar so far is a practice among individual believers rather than the church as a whole. It is seen among some local churches and para-church movements.

<sup>7</sup> Hector McLean, "A Thousand Families Turn to the Lord," *The Pentecostal Evangel* (March 20, 1926), p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> H. McLean, "Pentecostal Revival in Burma," *The Pentecostal Evangel* (September 11, 1926), pp. 10-11 (11).

<sup>9</sup> Suak Za Go, "Statistics of the Assemblies of God of Myanmar" (A letter to the author, Jan. 25, 2001).

## 1.2 China Missionaries

Initially, the Assemblies of God of Myanmar began through the extension ministry of missionaries in southwest China, in the Salwin and Mekong river valleys. Ada Buchwater was an English missionary who arrived at Wheisi in the Mekong valley in 1919. In 1921, Ada made contact and shared the gospel with some Lisus from Myanmar, which was believed to be the first Pentecostal witness to Myanmar nationals. Leonard and Olive Bolton from England joined the field in 1924. Their work on the China side had great impact upon the people in Myanmar too. Also, G. Clifford and Lavada Morrison from America came to Wheisi for language study in 1926 but fled to Putao, Myanmar when a communist insurrection began in 1927. They came back to Shang Pah, in the Salwin river valley of southwest China and opened mission work in 1931. Lavada described the hazardous trip of their exile as the means God used to bring them to ministry among the tribes in Myanmar.

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?<sup>10</sup>

## 1.3 Clifford Morrison

The actual ministry to the Myanmar interior started in 1931<sup>11</sup> when two Rawang tribesmen from Myanmar asked the Morrisons to visit them. The story goes 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

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<sup>10</sup> Glenn D. Stafford, “A Brief Story of the Assemblies of God of Burma” (A class paper for The Overseas Church and Missions, Central Bible College, Springfield, MO, 1977), p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> This date has been probably taken as the beginning of the Assemblies of God ministry in Myanmar.

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?"<sup>12</sup>

The Morrisons responded to the call by sending Lisu evangelists. After three months of the evangelists' hard work, thirty-seven Lisu and Rawang families came to Christ. They put away their spirit-altars and committed to serve the living God alone.<sup>13</sup> Also, Bolton sent native preachers to Lisus in Myanmar. Thus the work of the Assemblies of God in Southwest China was extended to Myanmar.

Pentecostal mission became more concrete when believers were gathered into a church and became a worshipping community. The first Assemblies of God churches in Myanmar were planted in the Lisu land of Kachin State in 1933.<sup>14</sup> Morrison visited the churches and helped set them in order by electing deacons to oversee the local services. He taught them to tithe and develop spiritual and physical responsibilities to be self-reliant. The believers erected church buildings by their own efforts, using local materials such as bamboo.

Lay ministries incredibly extended the ministry throughout the pioneering period of the mission. Many notable events took place through the prayers and simple faith of believers. They gathered in the home of a sick person, prayed all night long—sometimes even two and three days—until the sick person was healed. Signs and miracles proved the preaching of gospel and drew people to the Lord. Morrison noted a case of healing saying:

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 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

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<sup>12</sup> Leonard Bolton, *China Call* (Springfield: Gospel Publishing House, 1984), p. 213.

<sup>13</sup> Bolton, *China Call*, pp. 213-14.

<sup>14</sup> David, "The Assemblies of God in Burma" (unpublished manuscript, n.d.), p. 4. The author is known only as David.

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.<sup>15</sup>

The gospel spread fast through people movements. The Lisu brought the gospel to the Rawang, and the Rawang in turn brought to the gospel to the Lhao-vo. Entire villages turned to Christ and dropped their heathen practices. Their social and religious lives in bamboo churches were Christ-centered lives. Herman Tegenfeldt, a Baptist missionary to Kachin land, noted large numbers of people turned to Christ and the participation of the Assemblies of God.<sup>16</sup>

The Morrisons revisited the work in Myanmar in 1940 and convened a two-week revival meeting. They wrote about the revival:

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.<sup>17</sup>

The church kept progressing through the self-propagating, self-supporting and self-governing of indigenous workers. The Japanese war left the people persecuted, tortured and bereft of institutions. In spite of these hardships, the church grew. By the time they convened for a silver Jubilee in 1956, the church numbered 7,000 members.

#### 1.4 Post-war Era

In spite of the developing Pentecostal work in Myanmar, there had not been a permanent resident missionary until the end of World War II. Pentecostal missionaries from Sweden, Finland, the “Go Ye Fellowship,” and the Open Bible Standard Church labored for a short time prior to World War II, but none of these groups returned to Myanmar after the war, and thus there was no continuing work.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Clifford Morrison, “Speaking in Known Tongues,” *The Pentecostal Evangel* (April 3, 1948), p. 7.

<sup>16</sup> Herman Tegenfeldt, *The Kachin Baptist Church of Burma* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1974), p. 94.

<sup>17</sup> Lavada Morrison, “Developing Indigenous Lisu Churches,” *Missionary Challenge* (April, 1949), pp. 12-13 (13).

<sup>18</sup> Stafford, “A Brief History,” p. 3

Nevertheless, the years following World War II witnessed the greatest advancement for the Assemblies of God in various areas of Myanmar as resident missionaries came to work. The Morrisons came to the Lisu land in Myanmar in 1947. They started two schools in 1954 in order to prepare workers. Walter and Lucille Erola from America came in 1951. Walter had worked under the Finish Salem Mission in 1937 but returned as a liaison officer with the conquering British and American forces during the closing days of the war in 1942. He came back with his wife Lucille Kathryn as an Assemblies of God missionary and developed a church at Mogok in central Myanmar with outreach to other villages nearby. Lucille mentioned a result of their labor, 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 pagodas. They accepted Jesus and were both filled with the Holy Spirit.”<sup>19</sup>

The Leonard Bolton came to Yangon, the capital city of Myanmar from Chitagong of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) as missionary transfers in 1956. They noticed that everything had changed since they had landed there thirty years ago except the spiritual darkness. The city was still full of Buddhist monasteries, temples and shrines. They began a meeting at an Indian family’s home, a rented house on Windamere Road, with a few people who were interested in the Pentecostal messages. Bolton noted, “Church planting here meant rock-bottom pioneering.”<sup>20</sup> The Boltons labored for a short period but were unable to renew their residence permit, so they left the country in 1957.

Glenn and Kathleen Stafford came to Yangon and oversaw the urban mission work in 1957. Their special meetings featuring visiting evangelists from abroad always attracted crowds. An outstanding occasion was the full gospel message of evangelist Harvey McAlister, where the gospel message attracted people from all corners of the city; the sick were healed and believers experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit. A remarkable revival accompanied the ministry of evangelist Mabel Willetts in 1961. Her powerful messages drew people to repentance of sins and confession of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. The Holy Spirit fell on a group of people in the congregation, which then developed into a veritable deluge.<sup>21</sup> This event was a hallmark for the

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<sup>19</sup> Walter Erola, “The Cross above the Pagoda,” *The Pentecostal Evangel* (December 4, 1955), pp. 8-9.

<sup>20</sup> Bolton, *China Call*, p. 199.

<sup>21</sup> Stafford, “A Brief History,” p. 7.

church as a future leader came forth through the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Myo Chit, the present General Superintendent of the AG, commented on the result of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. He said, "Several of us former anti-Pentecostals received the Holy Spirit as a result of their ministry."<sup>22</sup> Coming from a Plymouth Brethren background, he was strongly anti-Pentecostal, criticizing the Pentecostal mission in Yangon as a "crazy church." He also confessed that his pride was broken as God baptized him in the Holy Spirit with an evidence of speaking in tongues (*glossolalia*) 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 Staffords in the church. In March 1966, he succeeded the missionaries as the pastor of Yangon Evangel Church, when the government sent all missionaries home.

Ray and Bethany Trask were the last missionaries to arrive in 1961, continuing the urban ministry at Yangon as the Staffords took a furlough. Ray Trask made several gospel tours, preaching to near by villages and was able to bring some Buddhists and Hindus to Christ. They moved to Mogok until the government forced them to leave the country in 1965.

Stafford reminisced about the revival in a biennial convention celebrated in 1961. More than 3000 national believers from all parts of the country attended the convention. Each meeting ended with an altar call at about 11:00 p.m., yet people were praying and worshipping the Lord until midnight. He said,

These were Pentecostal Christians and we had a "real" Pentecostal convention.... 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.<sup>23</sup>

The missionaries had always struggled for their entrance as well as their resident visas since independence in 1948. The Morrisons returned to the U.S.A. for retirement in 1959. The Walters left the country for the

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<sup>22</sup> Myo Chit, "Even the Buddhist Monks are Listening," *Pentecostal Evangel* (February 10, 1980), pp. 18-19 (18).

<sup>23</sup> Glenn D. Stafford, "Convention Time in Burma," *The Pentecostal Evangel* (July 23, 1961), pp. 10-11 (11).



last time in 1962, not able to obtain a renewed visa. He wrote, "No new visa nor any re-entry visas were issued to missionaries since late 1962."<sup>24</sup>

### 1.5 The Era with No Missionaries (After 1966)

It became much harder to evangelize when the military coup took place in 1962, and especially when Myanmar became a closed country in 1964. In March 1966, the Socialist government declared that all foreign missionaries had to leave the country within a month. Maynard Ketcham cited a phrase from the Guardian, a local newspaper about the government order, saying, "By April 30th, 1966, all Christian missionaries must leave Burma."<sup>25</sup> No missionary has worked in Myanmar since then.

However, God did not leave the country when the missionaries had to leave. By 1970, Pentecostals everywhere in Myanmar grew steadily. In Yangon, the capital city, Myo Chit was left alone in full charge of the Evangel Church since 1966. Attendance dropped so that ten to fifteen people in the Sunday worship services was considered a large crowd. But the church soon overcame as God met their needs. A woman unknown to the pastor before 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 for young people from all over Myanmar, and later became the Evangel Bible College. The Pentecostal message and worship drew more people from all corners of the city and foreign visitors during the 1970s. It had grown to four to five hundred regular attendants by 1980. Healing and miracles often occurred as the pastor put forth his Pentecostal ministry.

## 2. Renewal Movement and Pentecostalism

The Pentecostal movement has become more visible as a great renewal has swept churches among the Chins since 1970s. The renewal started in some local Baptist churches and spread across the country. Many Pentecostal churches have also been planted as a result. The Assemblies of God has added up half of its total membership since the

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<sup>24</sup> Stafford, "A Brief History," p. 10.

<sup>25</sup> Maynard Ketcham, "A New Day Dawns in Missions," *The Pentecostal Evangel* (July 17, 1966), pp. 12-13 (12).

renewal. The United Pentecostal Church and the Four Square Church have also sprung up during this time.

The Chins have been converted to the Christian faith from primal religion with a great people movement since the 1900s. Christianity has helped to bring great transformational change in society and culture. By 1970, many educated Chins held and served in government offices all over the country. Also, many Chin soldiers served in the government army. Unfortunately, the second- and third-generation Christians not only among the Chins but also everywhere in the country were nominal in faith and practice. They had no knowledge about the salvation of God given by His grace and received by faith. To make matters worse, liberalism slowly influenced and eroded the teachings in Bible schools in Myanmar since 1960s.<sup>26</sup> The ministries of trained pastors became have become more liberal concerning the authority of the scripture.

Early in the 1970s, a burden for renewal fell on a small group in the Tedim Baptist Church. On January 27, 1973, the pastor Hau Lian Kham<sup>27</sup> with a small group started praying to the Lord for a renewal in the church. After much intense prayer, they conducted an open-air crusade starting on April 30, 1973 that lasted for a week. Such an evangelistic open-air crusade was never conducted before in this region. The gospel message presented the love and grace of God and his forgiveness to repentant sinners, and redemption from condemnation to eternal salvation. The work of the Holy Spirit was so strong that many people responded to the call to commitment with repentance and confessing Christ.

Eventually, the crusade became a launch pad for the renewal movement. Renewal and conversion spread every day through the witness of born again believers. Being born again was an issue of discussion in offices, schools, market places and on the streets. Thirst for the study of the word of God, a burden for prayer, zeal for witnessing and love and burden for lost souls increased in born again believers.

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<sup>26</sup> Myanmar Institute of Theology (formerly known as Burma Institute of Theology), Insein, Yangon is the largest theological school in Myanmar. It has been largely influenced by the teachings of theological liberalism since the 1960s. See "The Church in Myanmar," in *Church in Asia Today: Challenges and Opportunities Today*, ed. Saphir Arthyal (Singapore: Asia Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 1996), pp. 349-60.

<sup>27</sup> For a more detailed treatment, see my article "Legacy of Hau Lian Kham (1944-1995)," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 4:1 (January 2001), pp. 99-107.

The renewal movement brought nominal Christians and non-Christians to conversion. Throughout the years, the renewal continued to spread to many Chin individuals on the periphery of the ecclesiastical structure. The lay believers, emphatically who worked in the government services, provided essential service in spreading the renewal throughout the country. They penetrated society with the gospel and carried out priestly ministry as they offered praise to God, prayed and interceded, preached and taught the Word of God as McGavran has stated:

Revival implants Christ's Spirit in believers and forthwith they, like their master, make bringing salvation to the world a chief purpose of their lives. A holy anxiety that their neighbors and loved ones share the redeeming power of the gospel seizes the revived. Like those in-dwelt at Pentecost, they go everywhere preaching the word. They seek to win men and women to Christ. The good life they now enjoy they ardently wish others to experience.<sup>28</sup>

Since the renewal, the Assemblies of God has become the third largest denomination in the country.<sup>29</sup> Experiencing the special empowerment of the Holy Spirit and looking for a broader mission perspective, Hau Lian Kham, a key leader of the renewal movement, gradually shifted his belief and practice from fundamental-evangelicalism to Pentecostalism. In 1977, he became a member of the Assemblies of God of Myanmar and influenced many believers and local churches to turn to the Pentecostal fervor that has added great growth to the Assemblies of God.

Miracles often follow Pentecostal witness. Many people testified of healing from cancer, high blood pressure, tonsillitis, skin disease and other maladies. Vision and hearing were restored. Deliverance from the bondage of evil spirits occurred from time to time. I select and describe a few miraculous events that would help better understand the phenomena.<sup>30</sup>

As the answer to believers' intense prayer, a water-spring broke out in the middle of Tungzang village in 1980. The Tedim AG section

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<sup>28</sup> Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), p. 138.

<sup>29</sup> Khai, "Myanmar Mission Board and Agencies," in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, pp. 667-68.

<sup>30</sup> Chin K. Khai, "Dynamics of Renewal: A Historical Movement Among the Zomi (Chin) in Myanmar" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1999), pp. 269-75.

celebrated an annual convention at Tungzang. Situated on a mountain, the villagers always have problems not having enough water. Not knowing what to do for a great occasion where 3000 people would gather, believers prayed for rain and water supply. Miraculously, a water spring broke out in the middle of the village on the day the convention began that supplied enough water. The spring still exists today.

Miracles often followed the ministry of evangelist Tamki. He was an animist convert from Mindat in southern Chin State in Myanmar. Dominated mainly by animism and Buddhism, the people there are greatly attracted by supernatural manifestations. Power encounters thus have often led people to Christ in people movements. He often challenged his own people with the name of Jesus. One day, a group of people plotted to shoot and kill him while he was witnessing. To their astonishment, the guns would not fire the bullets. Because of this miracle and God's powerful protection, many came to believe his witness and sought to receive Christian faith. He testified to many more miracles in his ministry.

An angel protected evangelist Khai Khan Suan from being killed. One night, while preaching at a village crusade near Kale, some men from the village tried to kill him. But they could not, for they saw an angel hovering over and protecting the preacher and the crusade. They were afraid to do any harm to the preacher. Finally, they all turned to Christ.

The ministry of evangelist Kam Cin Hau demonstrated many miraculous events. He started the "Back to the Bible" ministry in 1987 as a response to his experience of ecstasy, a vision in which he was taken to the heavenly abode of Christ and his angels. He reported on some of his noteworthy crusades.

A crusade in Khuasak during April 20-24, 1988 resulted conversions. People were filled with the Holy Spirit evidenced by speaking in tongues. Others were slain in the Spirit, and some received healing from sicknesses. Some of them cried and laughed as they were empowered by the Spirit.

At the crusade in Suangzang during May 4-11, 1988 many in the audience were slain in the Spirit, confessed their sins and accepted Christ as Savior and Lord. A six-year old boy cried aloud while slain, saying that he had a vision of his parents in hell asking for water. The village primal religious priest was sick to the point of death, but he was healed and converted through prayer during the crusade.

At the crusade in Heilei during May 12-18, 1988, people fell slain before the Lord, crying and laughing, being filled with Holy Spirit. They

put away their smoking tobacco, *tuibuk* drug and drinking *zu* (beer). The crusaders broke 200 beer pots in one day. Five to seven thousand attended every meeting at the crusade in Tedim town during July 29-August 7, 1988. The work of the Holy Spirit was so powerful that many people repented and accepted Christ as Savior and Lord, received healing through being slain in the Spirit, and were speaking in tongues. The crusade was celebrated with singing and dancing in the Spirit. Many pre-adolescents were renewed during the crusade and more than thirty of them went out for evangelism to nearby villages.

The work of the Holy Spirit has not been restricted to traditional Pentecostal denominations, however. The ministry of Lang Do Khup is a charismatic movement in the Baptist church. He had a great turning point in his ministry towards the charismatic fervor. One day, a village priest told him how in the primal religion healing the sick comes by worshipping *dawis* (evil spirits), while Christians are powerless to bring such healing. This challenge compelled Khup to pray to God for the power of healing. One day, with some believers, he prayed for a lame girl. Nothing happened, so they returned home. But the Holy Spirit spoke to him to go back and pray for the girl. As he turned back and prayed, the girl stood up and walked with no help. On another occasion, God spoke to him to raise the dead man. He persisted with God. He said that doubts and fear came as he prayed. But the Holy Spirit encouraged him to persist in prayer. Finally, the dead man came alive. During the youth crusade at Suangpi village, a woman by the name Khup Dim who had been paralyzed for twenty years was instantly healed and was jumping and praising the Lord with a great joy. Many received the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the manifestation of speaking in tongues.

Another example is of Lian Za Dal, who testified to his ministry among the Buddhists at Yangon. He was a former pastor of the Siyin Baptist church but started a new church to evangelize the neighboring Buddhists in 1991. To his great surprise, Pentecostal power fell on the church during the worship time on the day of Pentecost in 1996. The members started speaking in tongues, prophesying and seeing visions they know nothing of before. The Spirit equipped the members with spiritual gifts. Some of the boys and girls, around ten years old, could see visions of what happened in the spiritual realm. Dal himself was given the authority to heal and to command angels in the name of Jesus. They were equipped with spiritual strength for warfare. Being an educated man and trained in the Baptist Theological Seminary, Dal had a hard time accepting all these phenomena. But by searching for the will of God and

examining everything through the word of God, he became a charismatic preacher in a local Baptist church.

### 3. Beliefs and Practices

The emphasis on speaking in tongues (*glossolalia*) as a sign of the baptism of the Holy Spirit was a dynamic factor of the Pentecostal renewal. As Pentecostalism developed into a movement in the late 1970s, believers were urged to seek the baptism of the Holy Spirit, also known as being filled with the Holy Spirit, as subsequent to the born-again experience. As Robert P. Menzies articulated, the baptism was taught as subsequent to regeneration and the gateway to receive other spiritual gifts.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, members hungrily sought for the special gift. As they received it, they were renewed with joy, increased desire for the Lord and boldness for witnessing.

The Pentecostals were evangelical in their basic tenant of faith and practice. They strictly emphasized the authority of Scripture, salvation of Christ by faith through grace, the urgency of Christ's coming, and the need for immediate response to the invitation for salvation. Doctrinally, they were distinct from the mainline evangelical bodies only in terms of their emphasis on the charismatic gifts and functions. Gordon D. Fee has observed the following regarding Pentecostals in general which also applies to the Chins:

Traditionally, they have put their overall theological emphasis precisely where other evangelicals do on the person and work of Christ. Nonetheless, the public expression of tongues, which has so often characterized Pentecostal worship, has also served as much as anything else to distinguish Pentecostals, and very often therefore to separate them, from their other brothers and sisters in Christ.<sup>32</sup>

Moreover, Pentecostals preach and teach subjects on the full gospel message, living a holy life and the imminent return of Christ--messages that have helped many to deeper commitment. Their message of

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<sup>31</sup> Robert P. Menzies, "Spirit-Baptism and Spiritual Gifts," in *Pentecostalism in Context: Essay in Honor of William W. Menzies*, eds. Wonsuk Ma and Robert P. Menzies (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press Ltd., 1997), pp. 48-59.

<sup>32</sup> Gordon D. Fee, "Toward a Pauline Theology of Glossolalia," in *Pentecostalism in Context: Essay in Honor of William W. Menzies*, eds. Wonsuk Ma and Robert P. Menzies (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press Ltd., 1997), pp. 24-37.

liberation from poverty and self-lowliness, and toward positive attitude have helped people to improve their low self-images. The subject of holy living emphasizes that believers are the temples of the Holy Spirit, urging them to keep themselves holy, and to be separated from worldly manners. As a result, believers abstained from their old habits of drinking, smoking, singing secular songs, reading novels, watching movies and anything that would affect their spiritual growth.<sup>33</sup> Also believers always look forward to the rapture of the church in their lifetimes.

Pentecostal worship is a great pattern for transformation. Worship is an essential part of being Christians, and corporate worship is a compelling need among believers. Pentecostal worship services are very different from those of the traditional style of worship. The enthusiasm of modern praise and worship choruses and musical instruments in addition to corporate prayer makes worship services exciting and joyful. Praise and worship with choruses and a few hymns, led with musical accompaniment, and clapping hands are seen in most born-again churches. Solos, duets, trios, group singers and action singers attractively and persuasively support the worship. Choruses composed within their own contexts that convey deep relationship with the Lord, developing theological insight that has helped people focus on deeper worship and praise.

The Pentecostals do not despise study and knowledge but emphasize the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The *Khanlawhna Hun* (The Revival Hours) is a newsletter that alludes to a scriptural theme taken from Zechariah 4:6, “Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord Almighty” (NIV). For they acknowledge the Holy Spirit as the only power source, helper and teacher of the things of God. Consequently, the glory of God shown in miracles has always been witnessed and reported.

#### 4. Pentecostalism vs. Excesses and Heresies

In spite of the above phenomena that helped build the body, Pentecostals in Myanmar do face excesses and heresies as well. There have often been prophecies that led believers into falsehood. The prophecies were called *thusuak* or *sawlna*—that is forth-telling, demanding someone to do something. It began with certain people who

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<sup>33</sup> Chin K. Khai, *The Cross Amid Pagodas* (Baguio, Philippines: APTS Press, forthcoming).

claimed to receive the audible voice of God that demanded certain things to accomplish. If people would fail to do these things, then calamity would follow. This time, which I call the “prophetic movement,”<sup>34</sup> can be divided into two periods: the early prophetic movement (1977-1980s) and the latter prophetic movement (1990s).

The movement which appeared in 1977 had the phenomena of dancing, crying, rolling on the floor, carrying tables and chairs, and running around the church as a mode of repentance. The followers put on sackcloth, stood in the middle of the village and called for repentance. Furthermore, they claimed to have received prophecies, saying that the Holy Spirit spoke to them audibly. They said the Bible was insufficient, and prophecies today were far more important.

As the heresies spread, a group of them tried to raise a dead body at Phaiza village, claiming that God told them to do so. But the body was not raised. They went around the Tedim town believing that God would give them all the people in the town. Their meetings commonly used excessive drum beating, dancing and repeating one song more than ten times. They planted crosses at open-ground, waited for rapture and abstained from certain food and meats. Miracles sometimes followed as participants acted on prophecies. A group of them prepared a three-foot square piece of ground for the landing of a plane, which was reinterpreted as a spiritual plane that would rapture them. Any prophecy that did not come true was reinterpreted as testing of faith.

The group considered themselves holier than any believer for they prayed and committed themselves seriously. They asserted the name “Jesus” was that of an ancient Greek god, and stressed *Yashua* as the true name. Therefore, water baptism in the name of *Yashua* alone gives salvation. They even declared themselves descendants of the Israelites. They kept the Sabbath and observed rites of circumcision. Finally, the group split into smaller sects, *Khami Pawl* (Spiritual Group), *Nazareth Khuami Yashua Pawl* (Church of Yashua of Nazareth) and those who joined with the United Pentecostal Church (UPC).

John Thang Hum, a pastor at Kalemmyo, reported a particular event. A prophetess came to Tahan AG church and prophesied in a prayer of healing for a sick person in the church. The pastor, Lian Zam, with two of his deacons followed the prophetess with no hesitation. They prayed for the sick but nothing happened. The prophetess then suggested the need to kill a chicken and apply the blood to the body of the sick person. The pastor instantly objected the prophecy as false, telling that the death

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<sup>34</sup> Khai, “Dynamics of Renewal,” pp. 280-88; 350-53.



of Jesus was sufficient for cleansing our sins and healing our sickness. Such prophecies were similarly denied as false elsewhere in the movement.

Another kind of prophetic movement is called the “cleansing movement”<sup>35</sup> that came through prophecy appeared by mid 1990s. Although some think the movement is heresy, only excesses and misuse of the movement constitute heresy. Generally, it has been a positive force in the church. One of the cleansing movements was called “cleansing village.” It was done mainly as an expression of unity among the villagers-churches, with youth and adults together. The evil spirits were chased and cast out of the village, spiritually unclean things were destroyed or burned down, and united worship was celebrated. It has similarity to the *Khuado* feast,<sup>36</sup> a time when villagers chase spirits out of the village.

Similar to this movement is “cleansing houses.” According to the prophecy, certain houses would need to be cleansed for good health, prosperity and the success of the household members. The prophets in visions saw the unclean things in the house--things that were dedicated to evil spirits, material used for worshipping spirits and things in which spirits dwelt. Those things hindered the household from prosperity and health, and even caused sickness and loss among the family members. The prophet and believers would take and throw them away, or burn them in a fire. After that, they would rededicate the house to God with prayer.

Tual Khaw Mang, a retired civil officer, testified to the cleansing of his house at Saizang in 1995. His parents and grandparents were chiefs of the Saizang village and were primal worshipers until they wholly turned to Christ in 1995. They celebrated the ceremony of dedication and house cleansing, as they received Christ and committed themselves to follow him. To their surprise, dilemmas and sickness came on the family members the following days. A prophecy with a vision was pronounced as they prayed. The prophet saw in the vision that there were unclean things left in the house, things that were used for demonic worship, which thus needed to be destroyed immediately. Accordingly, they found

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<sup>35</sup> Cleansing here means an act of spiritual deliverance.

<sup>36</sup> *Khuado* feast is a harvest (New Year) festival. It is similar to the water (New Year) festival of ethnic Bama. The Chins celebrate it every year after the harvest. The traditional concept of *Khuado* is fighting against evil spirits and chasing them out of the village, as well as cleansing the village in order to welcome the new year after harvest. For detail, see Khai, “Dynamics of Renewal,” p. 75.

a sword, a javelin, pots and things dedicated to their household spirits they had not even used for years. As they burned them their problems were resolved and sicknesses were healed.

The prophetic movement gave the church a bad name among the Chin society. Two main reasons underlie this bad name: First, prophecy was misused for personal gain; and second, the prophecy did not come true. Also, the gifts were not practiced with consistent discipline. Much of the unfounded prophecy was not delivered in the church but outside the church where the prophet or prophetess functioned independently. Such a person did not allow himself or herself to be disciplined biblically.

The church, particularly the Assemblies of God, denied the false teachings and practices. In 1978, Hau Lian Kham, Myo Chit, Dam Suan Mung, Suak Za Go and other leaders taught biblical criteria by which true prophets and prophecies could be distinguished from the false. First, a true prophecy must be in accord with, not contradicting, the teachings of Scripture. Second, it must edify believers. Third, it must be fulfilled. Fourth, it must glorify the name of Christ. Again in 1997, churches at Kale organized a prophetic conference in 1997 in order to put the prophetic movement in accord with Biblical teachings. Dam S. Mung, pastor of the Full Gospel Church at Yangon, taught about the nature and characteristic of prophecy in the Bible and how to handle a prophetic movement. It was reported to be very helpful for local churches.

## 5. Pentecostal Education

In Myanmar, critics often speak of Pentecostals as emotionalists who are not oriented toward intellectual matters. In reality, however, Pentecostals have emphasized Christian education from the very beginning and have educated many workers for the service of the Kingdom. All local churches encourage not only children but also adults to attend their Sunday schools.

As early as the mission began, the missionaries conducted short-term schools in various villages that educated the natives. In 1954, there were two schools<sup>37</sup> among the Lisus and Rawangs. Bible lessons were taught as well as reading, writing and arithmetic. The school at Putao was moved to Myitkyina in 1964 and was named Burma Bible School.<sup>38</sup> The

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<sup>37</sup> Tegenfeldt, *The Kachin Baptist Church of Burma*, p. 287.

<sup>38</sup> Stafford, "A Brief History," p. 8.

school offered a three-year diploma course in Bible and theological studies.

Evangel Bible College was opened in Yangon on August 2, 1979 with a resident teacher and 20 students. The college followed the curriculum and materials prepared by the International Correspondence Institute (ICI) of Brussels, Belgium.<sup>39</sup> Maranatha Bible College opened at Kale in the northwestern area of the country in 1988 under the supervision and sponsorship of the District Council No. 3. Bethel Bible College opened at Tedim in 1991. It is also known as the “Decade of Harvest Center.” The Apostolic Christian Bible College at Yangon was opened in 1986 and offers a bachelor degree with the UPC doctrine and curriculum. The Full Gospel Bible Training Center at Yangon opened in 1995 and offers a diploma course. School of Gospel Ministry at Yangon also offers a diploma course. Beside these, there are short-term Bible training schools in different towns and cities. Also, the respective districts and general councils conduct conventions and Bible seminars to mobilize and equip their people for service. With all of this training, the Pentecostals are well equipped for the service of the Kingdom.

#### 6. Pentecostal Mission<sup>40</sup>

Pentecostals in Myanmar are committed to evangelism and mission work. Churches send home missionaries both to completely unreached people groups and to where Pentecostal ministry has not yet been started. They believe in church planting as a strategy for growth by gathering converts into worshipping communities and then building viable churches.

Missions have been carried out through self-supporting programs. All Pentecostal churches have developed means to support their home missionaries. *Kiyudaw Shubu (Lawm Bawm)*, meaning “thanks offering box,” is whether believers put coins in thanksgiving to the Lord in addition to their tithes and offerings on Sundays. The believers put coins in the box at home with praise to God for the blessings they have received, and then they 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 (*an sing*) out of that

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<sup>39</sup> Khai, *The Cross amid Pagodas*.

<sup>40</sup> Khai, “Dynamics of Renewal,” pp. 310-12, 340-42.

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 mission department. The Women's Mission provides support for missionaries in this way.

## 7. Conclusion with Comments

Pentecostals in Myanmar are growing fast compared to all other denominations. Many nominal Christians and non-believers have been brought into right relationship with Christ and are also included. They celebrate worship joyfully. Maynard Ketcham, former field director of Far East Asia for the US Assemblies of God recommended that the Assemblies of God in Myanmar be viewed as a model church with its self-propagating, self-supporting and self-governing methods.<sup>41</sup> I would like to comment on few theological and mission issues.

Preaching on salvation should reemphasize a collective approach to the salvation of God. Renewal preachers often have addressed individual sin, individual repentance and individual salvation—a pattern copied from western individualism. This has provided less impact in Myanmar society because social sin has not been addressed, people with a group identity have not been acknowledged, and social change has been less concentrated. The image of “group above self” slowly disappears as the individual movement takes over the people movement. Perhaps many would-be converts were denied acceptance in the church as a result of their inability to restructure their socially determined selves.

Although encounter with spirits and power was not a new phenomenon among the Pentecostals, the “cleansing-prophetic movement” was a breakthrough theoretically as well as practically in the life of the churches. The main distinction from other spiritual warfare was that it operated through prophecy. It had to do with the culture in which primal religion was practiced before. The prophet or prophetess could see in a vision the spirits and their abiding place in the house, the village, or even in the person and animal. Those spirits brought calamities to the people. The prophet or prophetess together with the followers chased (cast) those spirits out in the name of Jesus. The “cleansing prophetic movement” is a deliverance ministry performed in a collective way.

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<sup>41</sup> Maynard L. Ketcham, “Burma Revisited,” *The Pentecostal Evangel* (June 16, 1968), p. 8.

Many believers, even within the Pentecostals, regard prophetic ministry as having no grounds for corroboration or validity and is not scriptural. It is the position of this paper that the participants were not telling lies, but rather were recounting real experiences. The prophetic ministry is an act of encountering unseen spirits and supernatural powers which Paul Hiebert terms the “excluded middle.”<sup>42</sup> Such events were rampant among people of folk religions, not only in Myanmar but also throughout the whole world. These are realities which science does not explain, but which merit spiritual recognition, observation, discernment and intervention. To the people in Myanmar, the existence of spirit beings, demons and souls is not just a myth but a life encounter. Thus, the prophetic movement has offered a necessary and powerful spiritual dimension. Nevertheless, it calls for credibility and reliability-testing in terms of Scriptural as well as empirical interpretation.

Beside the theological issues, the Church in Myanmar always struggles to overcome some mission roadblocks. The Buddhist world still remains unshaken with the witness of the gospel of Christ and is a major challenge to the Christians in Myanmar. Christians feel uneasy when nationalism and Buddhism are coined together, “A good Bama (Burmese) is a good Buddhist.” Consequently, restriction and discrimination from the government follow many Christian activities. Worship in house churches has been prohibited. Crosses on the top of mountains and churches were pulled down and burned. Christian publication and distribution are restricted. Even promotion to higher position both in civil and military offices has been stopped for Christians. Christians as a minority group have no voice in this social landscape.

Poverty is another roadblock to growth. The country economy has fallen to rock bottom, a shortage of major products has occurred for years, and inflation has rocketed higher every day. Many small churches cannot promote activities due to a lack of resources. New churches cannot raise their own buildings. Ministers do not get enough support, so they struggle for survival. They need both spiritual and moral support.

In spite of the roadblocks, Pentecostal witness always will have a major prospect of success in the Kingdom mission. Serving with the power of the Holy Spirit followed by miracles, healing, signs and wonders is a great challenge to the Buddhist and Animistic practices. Also, lay believers have been effectively instrumental in spreading the gospel since the beginning of the mission. Therefore, mobilizing and

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<sup>42</sup> Paul G. Hiebert, “The Flaw of the Excluded Middle,” *Missiology: An International Review* 10:1 (January 1982), pp. 35-47.

equipping them with deeper theological knowledge and then commissioning them to carry forth the task will bring great advancement for the mission of the kingdom of God in Myanmar.

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