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# The History of the Assemblies of God Theological Education in Myanmar

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# THE HISTORY OF THE ASSEMBLIES OF GOD THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN MYANMAR: DEVELOPMENT OF THE ASSEMBLIES OF GOD BIBLE SCHOOLS

By Saw Tint Sann Oo

Apart from encouraging Pentecostal ministers to depend on the leading and guiding of the Holy Spirit, providing formal theological training for them is crucial for maintaining Pentecostal unity in faith and effectiveness in missions. Moreover, a proper theological training can help them to be watchful of false teachings so that they will be able to nurture Pentecostal believers with sound doctrines. For example, the problem of "Jesus Only" teaching, which the Assemblies of God faced during the period of its inception, was solved by studying the Bible and Church history that resulted in the declaration of the statement of faith.[1] Therefore, theological education at all levels is necessary in the world of Pentecostals. In this paper, I will argue that since the inception of the Assemblies of God mission in 1931 in Myanmar, the leaders themselves have seen the importance of theological education regardless of anti-intellectualism among some of its ministers and believers in Myanmar. This claim will be explained and supported by tracing the development of the Assemblies of God Bible schools in Myanmar. Before proceeding to the history of theological education of Myanmar Assemblies of God, I will discuss a common Pentecostal attitude toward higher education and provide an overview the history of Pentecostal theological education in the context of American Pentecostalism with a special reference to the Assemblies of God.

[1]William W. Menzies, *Anointed to Serve: The Story of the Assemblies of God,* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1971), 114-21.

## Pentecostal Attitudes Toward Higher Education

The majority of Pentecostals have had conflicting views on higher education, "with many regarding it with open suspicion."[2] Several factors lie behind this ambivalence. One of the factors may be the influence of anti-intellectualism, which sprang out of the fear of most Pentecostals that "education would produce carnal pride."[3] There are still a number of Pentecostal ministers in Myanmar who oppose formal theological education claiming that formal education spoils Pentecostal ministers. This anti-intellectualism also used to prevail among some fundamentalists as a by-product of the Fundamentalist-Modernist debate. Although Vinson Synan says, "the Pentecostals emerged without the deep anti-intellectual bias that distinguished much of the conservative Protestantism after 1925,"[4] we should not overlook its influence on the Pentecostals.

Second, many Pentecostals have felt that the Pentecostal experience is more important for ministry and mission than formal education. As a result, although they may not oppose higher education, they consciously or unconsciously refuse to support it.[5]

The third factor that lies behind the ambivalence toward higher education is the misunderstanding of the doctrine of the "imminent return of Christ." This doctrine, for many early Pentecostals, led to the sense of urgency for world evangelism. As a result, it prompted many ministers to leave their educational endeavors and become engaged in proclamation of the Gospel of Christ.[6] Since most of them were not well prepared, they had little success in their fields.

Fourth, some key Pentecostal leaders did not have a formal theological education. For example, a famous Pentecostal evangelist, Smith Wigglesworth of England, who had a great influence on Pentecostalism not only in Great Britain but also in other places like Australia and New Zealand, was semi-literate. He had never read a book other than the Bible. These kinds of persons, for many Pentecostals, became models of anti-intellectualism. Indeed, God can

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[2]*Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, s.v. "Bible Institutes, Colleges, Universities," 57-65 by L. F. Wilson, n.p.

[3]Menzies, *Anointed to Serve*, 141.

[4]Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century,* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 207.

[5]*Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, s.v. "Bible Institutes, Colleges, Universities," by L. F. Wilson.

[6]Ibid.

use anyone whether he is well educated or not. However, it is not to be taken for granted that God will readily use someone without formal theological education.

## Overview of Pentecostal Theological Education

Although the Pentecostals have been ambivalent about higher education, they have felt the need of Bible training for new converts as well as for new leaders. This positive attitude is reflected in the Pentecostals' keen interest and involvement in publication.[7] Printed materials have been the first means used by the Pentecostals in their ministry of theological education.

Moreover, Pentecostal ministers and missionaries have conducted formal theological training in their churches or in their mission fields. Generally, in the early years of the Pentecostal revival, there were two types of formal theological education system used by the Pentecostals to equip their new converts. The first type is a short-term Bible school system – normally three months – in which the students study the Word of God and involve themselves in practical church ministry and evangelism. The second type is a two- or three-year Bible institute (or missionary Bible school) system that offers diploma programs.[8] These schools focused their attention more on spiritual, practical, and biblical lessons than on critical analyses or academic excellence. "A greater emphasis was placed on indoctrination than intellectual development, to avoid compromise and to assure the propagation of the full gospel."[9] Moreover, a strong emphasis on mission galvanized the students to leave immediately for the mission fields once they had graduated.[10]

These Bible schools and institutes were generally small. The majority of them received little or no financial support from their denominations. Both the schools and the students alike had to run by faith. As a result, the "graduates were ready to make sacrifices, live modestly, and even work with their hands to support their families and

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[7]Gary B. McGee, "Pentecostals and their Various Strategies for Global Mission: A Historical Assessment," in *Called and Empowered: Global Mission in Pentecostal Perspective,* edited by Murray A. Dempster, Byron D. Klaus, and Douglas Petersen (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 213.

[8]Menzies, *Anointed to Serve*, 136-42; and *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, s.v. "Bible Institutes, Colleges, Universities," by L. F. Wilson, n.p.

[9]Ibid.

[10]Ibid.

build churches."[11] However, some poorly trained ministers did not finish well in their ministries. Moreover, these poorly prepared ministers were not attractive to intellectuals. Consequently, the Pentecostal movement became a middle and a lower class movement.

By World War II, Pentecostal leaders had come to realize the need of providing higher theological education. Prior to that time, there were few Bible colleges run by Pentecostal denominations in the United States of America.[12] By this time, the American Assemblies of God leaders had already seen the need of higher theological education.[13] But it wasn't until 1949, that the first Assemblies of God Bible college level school, Southern California Bible College (now Vanguard University) opened that offered a four-year B.A. in Bible.[14] Now, like other Pentecostal denominations, the Assemblies of God is engaged in providing high-level theological education programs (graduate schools, seminaries, etc.) to equip their leaders with better tools while being sensitive to the leading and the work of the Holy Spirit.[15] One of the examples is the Far East Advanced School of Theology in the Philippines, which was opened in 1964 by the Assemblies of God to offer Bachelor degree programs, with extension programs in some countries in the Far East. In 1978, the school was upgraded to offer masters degree programs. The name of the school was changed to the Asia Pacific Theological Seminary in 1989.[16] These developments also suggest that "the Assemblies of God is concerned not merely with education, but with "educational evangelism" since the two cannot be separated."[17]

To summarize, most Pentecostal Bible colleges and seminaries have their origins as short-term Bible schools. Then they were upgraded to two or three year diploma level Bible institutes, and then to Bible colleges. The common primary purpose of the schools has been to assist the students to heighten their sensitivity to the work of the Holy Spirit through their lives and to increase their knowledge of the

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[11]Ibid.

[12]Menzies, *Anointed to Serve*, 136-40.

[13]M. Paul Brooks, "Bible Colleges and the Expansion of the Pentecostal Movement," *Paraclete* 23, no. 2 (Spring 1989): 13.

[14]Menzies, *Anointed to Serve*, 355.

[15]McGee, "Pentecostals and their Various Strategies for Global Mission," 214.

[16]Asia Pacific Theological Seminary, *Catalog 1999-2002* (Baguio, Philippines: APTS, 1999), 1.

[17]Robert E. Ferguson, "Advanced Theological Training by Extension in the Far East Mission Field of the Assemblies of God" (term paper, Springfield, MO: Central Bible College, 1976), 5-6.

Bible so that they may be effective and successful in their ministries and missions.

## Biblical Foundations

The necessity of theological education for the lay people as well as for the ministers is has a solid biblical foundation. There are many passages in the Bible that give support to theological training. Here, examining two of these passages will suffice.

The majority of the Pentecostal leaders take II Timothy 2:2 – "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others"[18] – as their motto and biblical basis for providing the new leaders with theological education. The passage is didactic, or instructional. This means that it is imperative for ministers in any setting – in churches or in mission fields – to provide their people with sufficient theological training. Moreover, the language of the passage clearly suggests that theological education, in other words, teaching the Word of God with practical application, is an ongoing process. Also, the leaders should not assign the ministerial responsibilities to the new ministers without providing them a proper theological and ministerial training.

The second passage, Acts 18:24-28, talks about the theological training of Apollo. He was an educated Alexandrian Jew who partially had the knowledge of the gospel of Christ. Moreover, he was really enthusiastic and fervent about proclaiming the good news. "He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately . . . (v. 25)." This passage suggests that Apollo had already had a theological training before, and so he was able to teach about Jesus accurately.[19] However, when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they immediately realized that Apollo still lacked some knowledge about Jesus. Thus, they invited him to their home and shared with him more about Jesus so that his knowledge would be complete and adequate for the ministry (v. 28). This implies that even receiving theological training one or two times may not be adequate. The more training one receives, the better he is equipped for a more effective ministry. Therefore, we can conclude that theological training is not optional for a minister, but compulsory.

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[18]All Scripture quotations are from the New International Version.

[19]Stanley M. Horton, *The Book of Acts*, The Radiant Commentary on the New Testament (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1981), 218.

## Development of the Assemblies of God Bible Schools in Myanmar

With the Pentecostal history and the theological issues serving as a backdrop, I will now detail the history and development of the Bible Schools in Myanmar.

### The Early Bible Schools

The early part of the Assemblies of God mission to Myanmar can be linked to the ministries of the Assemblies of God missionaries in the Upper Salween River Valley of southwest China. The Assemblies of God mission first came into the northern part of Myanmar (Kachin State[20]) in 1931, when a Chinese preacher, Paul Yong and a Lisu preacher, Timothy, were sent from southwest China by an American Assemblies of God missionary, J. Clifford Morrison, who was working in that area.[21] Prior to that time, a few Assemblies of God missionaries, such as Ada Buchwalter and Leonard Bolton, were able to make a few trips into the northern part of Myanmar by crossing the border to minister to Lisu and other tribal people. However, it is not certain that these trips had a connection with a definite history of Assemblies of God in Myanmar.[22]

Since 1931, the Assemblies of God mission had flourished in northern Myanmar among Lisu, Rawang, and other Kachin tribes. When Morrison paid a first visit to that area in 1941, there were already not less than 500 Pentecostal believers in that region. The ministries among these Lisu people were first carried out by "Lisu Bible students and evangelists who would travel among the newly developing churches and then return to the China side for more training themselves."[23] Meanwhile, because of religious persecution by communist Chinese, the influx of Lisu Assemblies of God Christians emigrated from southwest China to Myanmar. They brought "with them their Scriptures, song books, simple catechisms, and vibrant

[20]The Kachin people group comprises of the Jing Paw, Lisu, Rawang, Maru, Law Waw, La Chaik and other tribes.

[21]Chin Khua Khai, "The Growth of Churches in Myanmar with a Special Reference to the Assemblies of God" (Th.M. thesis, Los Angeles: International Theological Seminary, 1991), 76; and Leonard Bolton, *China Call* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1984), 213.

[22]Glenn D. Stafford, "A Brief History of the Assemblies of God of Burma" (term paper, Springfield, MO: Central Bible College, 1977), 1-2.

[23]Bolton, *China Call*, 214.

testimonies"[24] and so they had sufficient tools for further evangelism and Christian education.

In 1947, Morrison entered Myanmar with his family to begin his permanent mission among Lisu and other tribes in Kachin State.[25] He settled in Maral Dam (Miraldum) village of Khawlungphu Township. As the missionary saw the pressing need of Bible training for new converts and new national leaders, he opened short-term Bible schools in various places.[26] He first opened two Bible schools around 1954, one in Maral Dam and the other in the Hpang Lang Wa (Palawa) with about 200 students in both schools. Geraldine Morrison, his daughter, conducted the Bible school in Maral Dam. Glenn D. Stafford, an American Assemblies of God missionary to Myanmar, who came in 1957, records, "These schools taught 3R's [i.e. basic elementary school subjects] and the Bible. The primary purpose was to prepare workers for the ministry."[27] Some secular courses were also offered to fulfill government requirements (i.e., the integration of the Bible school and the primary school). In fact, most of the students came to receive primary education. The students were self-supporting and they had to bring their own food and other supplies.[28] A third short-term Bible school was opened in Putao after Morrison moved there.[29] Besides the three Bible schools, the Morrisons conducted annual one-month preacher training schools and all ministers were required to attend.[30]

These schools produced many Pentecostal leaders who would later sustain and continue the ministry in Myanmar with only the help of the Holy Spirit when all foreign missionaries were evacuated from the country by the government in March, 1966. At that time, the Myanmar Assemblies of God had 180 churches with 12,000 members. But only one and a half year later, in September 1967, when Maynard L. Ketcham who was then Field Secretary for the Far East of American Assemblies of God from 1955-1970 visited Myanmar again, there were already 300 churches with 25,000 members.[31]

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[24]Ibid., 213.

[25]Ibid., 214.

[26]Ibid.

[27]Stafford, "A Brief History of the Assemblies of God of Burma," 4.

[28]Foreign Mission Dept., Assemblies of God, *Burma* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1960), 8-9.

[29]Ibid.

[30]Stafford, "A Brief History of the Assemblies of God of Burma," 5.

[31]Maynard L. Ketchem, "Burma Revisited," *The Pentecostal Evangel*, 16 June 1968, 8.

### Evangel Bible Institute in Myitkyina

The Bible school in Putao was upgraded and moved to Myitkyina, the capital city of Kachin State (Northern Myanmar), in September 1965.[32] The school, which offered a three-year diploma program, was opened there as an all-Myanmar Bible school and named "Evangel Bible School." Evangelism, pastoral ministry, and Sunday school teaching were the primary foci of the curriculum.[33] The establishment of the school was coordinated by Ray Trask, another American missionary who came into Myanmar in 1961.[34] Again, the students had to bring their own supply such as rice, chickens, and goats.[35] A minister from Yangon, Walter Myo Aung, who graduated from the Bible Institute of Malaya in Malaysia, was one of the Trask's colleagues and became the principal of the school in 1966 when the Trasks had to leave the country.

Since that time, the School has been under the supervision of the General Council of the Assemblies of God of Myanmar. It was renamed "Evangel Bible Institute" some years later and offered two-year as well as three-year diploma programs. Apart from offering courses recommended by Asia Pacific Education Office, the school has added more courses on ministry and evangelism according to the need. Students are required to take turns preaching in chapel services. In addition, they are required to participate in the ministries of local churches and in various types of evangelism every weekend.[36] The local churches work closely with the school. The students help these local churches by participating in their ministries, some as pastors, some as Sunday school teachers, etc. In fact, most of the churches in Myitkyina were founded with the help of the students of Evangel Bible Institute.[37]

Although the school had been successful and efficient in producing well-trained ministers, the leaders realized that diploma level education

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[32]Janet Walker, "The Message Came 50 Years Ago," *Mountain Movers*, January 1981, 8.

[33]Khai, "The Growth of Churches in Myanmar with a Special Reference to the Assemblies of God," 93.

[34]Stafford, "A Brief History of the Assemblies of God of Burma," 8.

[35]Maynard L. Ketchem, "Spotlight on Burma," *The Pentecostal Evangel*, 23 January 1966, 7.

[36]Teddy Nang Hee, Academic Dean of Myitkyina Evangel Bible Institute, interview by author, 12 August 2000, Manila, Philippines.

[37]Ngwa Ye Yaw, General Secretary of the General Council of the Assemblies of God of Myanmar, interview by author, 2 September 2000, Yangon, Myanmar.

was not adequate for the church in the long run in a fast developing world. In 1993, seeing the need of providing higher theological education to the ministers, the General Council and the school board decided to offer a bachelors degree as an extension program of Evangel Bible College in Yangon (see below).[38] At that time, the principal was L Joseph, one of the Rawang ministers. After offering some of its graduates with supplementary courses for three years (following ICI curriculum and lecture guides), Evangel Bible Institute of Myitkyina and Evangel Bible College were able to confer 36 students with B.A. in Theology degree in 1996 when the General Council annual conference was held on the school compound. The General Superintendent, Myo Chit, together with Ronald Maddux, the Area Director for Peninsular-Asia of American Assemblies of God, was present at the graduation.[39] In the same year, the General Council approved to upgrade the school to a college level and to offer their own B.Th. program,[40] but the school continued to offer the extension program of Evangel Bible College until 1999. In that year, the school was able to graduate twelve students with B.A. in Theology. Now, having a sufficient number of qualified instructors, the school has begun its own B.Th. program. Seventeen students have enrolled in the program in addition to ninety students who have enrolled in the diploma programs.[41] Up to this day, the school has graduated over 998 students with a Diploma in Theology, 124 students with a Certificate of Theology, two students with a Graduate of Theology diploma, and 148 students with B.Th.[42] More than ninety percent of these graduates are currently serving the Lord in Assemblies of God churches all over the country.[43]

## From a Youth Camp to Evangel Bible College

In Yangon, the capital of Myanmar, the first Assemblies of God mission was begun in 1956 by Leonard Bolton and his family. They started two home churches in the city. When they moved to Mogok, Walter Erola, a Finnish American missionary, took care of these home

[38]Minutes of the General Council Executive Presbytery meeting 2/93, 17-22 November 1993, 5.

[39]Durka Bahadu, Principal of Myitkyina Evangel Bible Institute, interview by author, 18 July 2000, Baguio City, Philippines.

[40]Minute of the General Council Executive Presbytery meeting, 8-10 June 1996, 6.

[41]Durka Bahadu, interview by author, 12 August 2000, Manila, Philippines.

[42]Report of Evangel Bible Institute in Myitkyina to the General Council, 7 August 2000; And Taik Chun Sein, interview by author, 12 January 2014, Yangon, Myanmar.

[43]Durka Bahadu, interview by author, 12 August 2000, Manila, Philippines.

churches. In July 1957, a new missionary, Glenn Stafford, and his family arrived in Yangon to oversee the Yangon mission field and Erola went back to Mogok.[44] The mission in Yangon was gradually growing. In 1965, a national minister, Myo Chit joined the church as an assistant to Stafford. The Staffords opened a thirteen-week short-term Bible school in Yangon during the rainy season in 1963. They conducted this school for three years until Myitkyina Evangel Bible School was opened.[45]

In 1966, all foreign missionaries had to leave the country, and the Yangon church –now Evangel Church– was left in the hands of Myo Chit. For a number of reasons, the attendance dropped to a low of twelve during the time of transition. But the Lord blessed Myo Chit and the church as the attendance began to grow rapidly again. In 1972, he opened the Evangel Bible Training School (also known as "a training camp" or "a youth camp") to provide a short-term Bible training to the new converts and the young people on premises donated by a family for this purpose. Apart from studying the Bible, the trainees went out to conduct street evangelism every Monday. Later, the school offered three-month Bible courses for ministers. Major activities of the school were Bible training, fellowship, and worship.[46] The graduates of this school were "fervent witnesses for the Lord."[47] Many of them went to various regions in Myanmar to start evangelistic outreaches there. As a result, many new Assemblies of God churches were born in these regions.[48]

Great leaders have great visions, and correctly see the needs of the Church. Of the short-term Bible school opened in Yangon, Myo Chit, then General Secretary of the General Council, said, "This short-term Bible school could by no means substitute for specialized and systematic training."[49] He had had a vision to open a college level Pentecostal theological and ministerial training school for Assemblies of God ministers.[50] Until 1979, Evangel Bible Institute in Myitkyina was the only Assemblies of God Bible school available for the

[44]Bolton, *China Call*, 200; and Stafford, "A Brief History of the Assemblies of God of Burma," 6.

[45]Ibid., 8.

[46]Myo Chit, "The Youth Camp That Became a Bible School," *The Pentecostal Evangel*, 29 November 1981, 20.

[47]Ibid.

[48]Ibid., 21.

[49]Ibid.

[50]Myo Chit, General Superintendent of the General Council of the Assemblies of God of Myanmar, interview by author, 8 September 2000, Yangon, Myanmar.

Assemblies of God ministers, which offered a diploma program as the highest theological training for them. Most of the Assemblies of God ministers in Myanmar are the graduates of that school.

The door was opened for the establishment of a college level Bible school when Myo Chit was able to discuss the matter with Wesley Hurst, who succeeded Ketcham as the Field Director for the American Assemblies of God in the Far East in 1970, and George Flattery of the International Correspondent Institute (ICI) in 1976. They agreed to open an Assemblies of God Bible college in Yangon that would offer the ICI college level program.[51] The matter was brought to one of the General Council executive presbytery meetings in that year for further discussion and approval. Hurst, who was present in the meeting, shared his experience as follows:

> When I was in Burma the brethren asked about advanced studies for intellectuals. Our Bible school up in the mountains is a typical diploma or sub-diploma level. But there are many intellectuals, university graduates, some with Masters' degrees, that want to study the Bible. The Executive Committee of the national church asked if we would approve their sending students to the Baptist Seminary, supplementing their studies with Pentecostal subjects taught in the local church by Myo Chit . . . [Hurst asked] 'Is the Baptist Seminary fundamental?' . . . 'Do they believe in the virgin birth, the resurrection, the born again experience, the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures. . . . ?' They dropped their heads.[52]

Finally, the General Council decided to open its own four-year college level Bible school in Yangon with the cooperation of American Assemblies of God as a branch of ICI (Now Global University). The three-month Bible courses were phased out and the college level Bible school was opened with twenty students on August 2, 1979 on the premises of Evangel Bible Training School. The name was changed to "Evangel Bible College." Myo Chit served as Chairman of the school committee and Hau Lian Kham, an Assembly of God pastor in Tedim, Chin State (northwest Myanmar) served as principal. The two leaders also served as the only professors at that time. Then a few years later Mary Hau Lung Cin, wife of Hau Lian Kham, Dora Moses, a graduate

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[51]Ibid.

[52]Wesley Hurst, "Burma: A Field Report to the School of Missions" (Springfield, MO: Assemblies of God, USA, School of Missions, 1976, photocopied), 2.

of FEAST and Kyi Wynn, a graduate of Myanmar Institute of Theology, joined the faculty.

The primary purpose of the school was "to assist both in the spiritual and intellectual development of young people who recognize God's call in their lives" and the theme of the school was II Timothy 2:2.[53] At first, the whole ICI curriculum and materials were used. Two years later under the supervision of the General Council, the school and ICI agreed to revise the curriculum. According to the agreement the ICI courses would make up seventy-five percent of the whole curriculum, and the remaining twenty-five percent would be courses written and created by the school that were relevant to the Myanmar context. Examinations for ICI courses were sent to the international office for grading and it conferred the degree, B.A. in Bible-Theology. In 1985, Evangel Bible College graduated seventeen students with B.A. in Bible-Theology. George Flattery of ICI was present in that first commencement, and conferred the diplomas on the graduates. About 1990, the school introduced its own B.A. in Bible-Theology program, while it also continued to offer the ICI program.

Dora Moses became acting principal about 1987 when the Khams left for the Philippines to do their graduate studies at FEAST/APTS and the Asia Graduate School of Theology (AGST). In 1994, Hau Lian Kham finished his studies and came back to the country to resume the responsibilities of the principal. In 1996, when Hau Lian Kham was called to be with the Lord, the General Council approved the appointment of his widow, Mary, as acting principal.[54] Now the school has five full-time instructors. The focus of the school curriculum has been on ministry and Pentecostalism. Apart from offering courses recommended by Asia Pacific Theological Association, the school also offers courses relevant to the Myanmar context like Myanmar Church History, Buddhism, Cults and Occults, Signs and Wonders, Spiritual Warfare, Christian Spiritual Formation, etc. The school also encourages the students to participate in local church ministries.[55]

Throughout the history of Evangel Bible College, the majority of faculty members – at least seven of them – have been graduates of APTS. In fact, all who have served as principals are APTS graduates. In 2002, seeing the need of offering graduate programs for local ministers, the General Council invited APTS to start an M.A. Extension

[53]Ibid.; and Myo Chit, "The Youth Camp that became a Bible School," 21.

[54]Minutes of the General Council Executive Presbytery meeting, 8-10 June 1996, 6.

[55]Mary Hau Lun Cing, Acting Principal of Evangel Bible College, interview by author, 6 September 2000, Yangon, Myanmar.

Program in Yangon with Evangel Bible College as host institution. The first cycle of APTS extension program began in 2003 with eleven students at Evangel Bible College and the second cycle in 2007 with twelve students. Altogether, the APTS Extension Program has graduated eight students with M.A. in Ministry so far and two of them have finished their M.Div. on campus in Baguio, Philippines. In this way, the students have been able to enjoy studying under international scholars and receive high quality internationally recognized theological education. These facts suggest that the General Council has worked closely with APTS to fulfill its mission of theological education.

Again, according to the need of offering residence graduate programs to the students in Myanmar, with approval from the General Council and the Board of Directors, Evangel Bible College was able to start the M.A. and M.Div. programs in the 2013-14 school year with thirteen students. The school is currently making an arrangement with APTS to offer joint M.A./M.Div. programs with the aim that the student will receive internationally recognized high quality education.

Up to this day, the school has graduated around 288 students with B.A. in Bible-Theology degree including the 38 students who received their degree from ICI. While, most of the graduates are serving in Assemblies of God churches in various places in the country, some of them have continued their studies abroad. The graduates are serving the Lord not only locally but also inter-denominationally and internationally.

### Bible Schools in the Chin State

Pentecostal revival broke out in Chin State, the northwestern part of Myanmar, in 1970s as a result of the ministry of Hau Lian Kham and the evangelistic crusades conducted in different towns (such as Kalay, Tedim, Falam, Haka, Tamu, and etc.) in that region by Myo Chit and his colleagues. By 1978, twenty-five new Assemblies of God churches were founded there.[56]

[56]Janet Walker, "Pentecost in the Land of Pagodas," *The Pentecostal Evangel*, 12 March 1978, 17; and Khai, "The Growth of Churches in Myanmar with a Special Reference to the Assemblies of God," 99-105.

*Maranatha Bible College*

The growing number of churches in the Chin State caused the church leaders in that region to consider how they could provide the new ministers and lay people with theological training. Most of the new ministers were not able to afford to travel and study in Myitkyina or in Yangon. Moreover, many of them were not qualified to study at Evangel Bible College in Yangon.[57] The leaders also had a vision to train evangelists who would go and plant new churches in various places throughout the country.[58]

Thus, in 1987, the Assemblies of God of Kalay Section, conducted Maranatha Seminar for three months with sixty students in Kalay and presented a certificate to the participants. Then the faculty proposed the section to open a permanent school to offer diploma level training. Due to the growing needs, the section approved the proposal and opened Maranatha Bible School, which would offer a three-year Graduate of Theology (G.Th.) program. Tun Go Lian was appointed as principal. The primary purpose of the school was to provide an adequate theological education to those who have committed themselves to the work of God. [59] However, the school first offered three-month short-term Bible courses. Then the curriculum was gradually upgraded to three-year diploma (G.Th.) program. During the school breaks, the students were required to participate in practical outreach ministries in various places where there were no Assemblies of God Churches. They were sent in groups to these places to preach the gospel to the people there. If churches were established, the section would appoint the students, who would be able to serve full-time in these churches, as pastors. [60]

In 1990, the school graduated about fifty students with G.Th., the same year Hla Myint was appointed as the new principal and the school received the recognition and provision from the General Council. Then in 1994, the school was upgraded again to offer a four-year B.Th. program and fifteen students enrolled in the program that year. The name of the school was changed to Maranatha Bible College. In the same year, upon the completion of their supplementary courses, ten

[57]Ibid., 124.

[58]Khup Lian Pau, Former Superintendent of Kalay Section, interview by author, 7 September 2000, Yangon, Myanmar.

[59]Hla Myint, Principal of Maranatha Bible College, interview by author, 20 July 2000, Baguio City, Philippines.

[60]Khup Lian Pau, interview by author, 7 September 2000, Yangon, Myanmar.

students graduated with their B.Th. degrees. To this day, the college has graduated over 100 G.Th. students and 500 B.Th. students.[61]

*Bethel Bible College*

The Assemblies of God leaders in Tedim Section also saw the need of providing Pentecostal theological training for newly emerged leaders of the revival. By 1990, there were already about seventy Assemblies of God churches in Tedim Township and Ton Zang Township, but there were only two ministers who had formal theological training. The new ministers were also faced with the need of correcting the false teachings and practices in local churches. Therefore, in that year, the Tedim Section decided to open a Pentecostal Bible School on the premises of Bethel Assembly of God with Suak Za Go as its founding principal. The school first planned to offer a three-month course once a year, and to present G.Th. to the students, who have completed four years (four three-month courses). Upon the request of the students, the school was opened the whole year and the students were able to complete G.Th. in a short period of time. In 1992, the school was able to graduate seventeen students with G.Th. The purpose of the school was to provide the ministers with Pentecostal theological training. The focus was on Pentecostal distinctives. In order to provide the students with practical training, the school assigned the students to various ministries of local Assemblies of God churches in Tedim Township every weekend. Mission trips were also planned during school vacations.

In 1994, according to the need, the Tedim Section decided to upgrade the school to college level and to change the name of the school to Bethel Bible College. To this day, the school has graduated about 100 students with G.Th. or B.Th. In 1999, the school was recognized by the General Council. Now Bethel Bible College is under the supervision and responsibility of number 7 District Council and the local churches in the district support the school financially. Thuam Khan Thang, a D.Min. graduate from Oral Robert University, is serving as principal of the school.[62]

[61]Ibid.; and Hla Myint, interview by author, 14 January 2014, Yangon, Myanmar.

[62]Suak Za Go, General Treasurer of the General Council of the Assemblies of God of Myanmar, interview by author, 6 September 2000, Yangon, Myanmar.

## Other Bible Schools

Myo Chit, the former General Superintendent, also has conducted the School of Evangelism at his church, Evangel Church, in Yangon since 1989. The school offers three- to six-month long Bible and practical Evangelism courses. Students sent from various district councils as well as other new ministers are trained in this school. Students are required not only to study in the classroom but also to go out and practically be involved in various forms of evangelism and ministry.

Number 1 District Council also opened its own short-term Bible school in Myitkyina, called Living Water Bible School, in 1981 through the leadership of Ngwa Ye Yaw, then the Secretary of the School Board of Evangel Bible Institute in Myitkyina. The school is intended

for those who are not qualified to attend Evangel Bible Institute, or who are not able to spend a long period of time to study. Also, there were those who urgently needed a short training for the work among Chinese Lisu people. The school is conducted in Lisu as well as in Myanmar. The program of the school was first designed in such a way that the students were required to take a three-month Bible course in every year for three years. Later, the school changed the program to the one-year Certificate of Theology (C.Th.) program. In 1995, the school became an extension program of Evangel Bible Institute in Myitkyina.[63]

Also, Number 2 District Council and Number 5 District Council have their own short-term Bible schools in Putao. These schools are intended for the ministers from remote and mountainous areas who are not able to study in Myitkyina. Accordingly, these schools are conducted in Rawang and Lisu respectively, and the students need to take a three-month Bible training course every year for three years.[64]

There are many other short-term Bible schools in various places such as Mindat, Haka, Tamu, etc. in Chin State as well as in other parts of the country. These Bible schools are conducted by local churches or by sections. Today there are numerous Assemblies of God Bible schools run by individual churches and ministers as well as by the General Council, district councils, or sectional councils all over the country that offer short-term Bible training, diploma programs, undergraduate and graduate degree programs.

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[63]Ngwa Ye Yaw, interview by author, 2 September 2000, Yangon, Myanmar.
[64]Ibid.

Now the Assemblies of God of Myanmar has grown to about 1200 congregations with more than 150,000 members. This growth highlights the important role that the Bible schools have played throughout the years in church planting.

**Common Characteristics of these Assemblies of God Bible Schools**

As we have seen, the Assemblies of God Bible schools in Myanmar came into being out of the pressing need of the church to provide God's people with the necessary theological and ministerial training so that they may be successful in their ministries and missions. Therefore, these Bible schools were not intended for academic excellence. Most of them were first opened as short-term Bible schools. In my opinion, another common characteristic of these schools is that their focus is implicitly or explicitly on Pentecostal indoctrination and missiological and ministerial training. Moreover, these schools have had a strong supportive relationship with local churches. The activities of the schools and the ministries of their graduates have a great impact on the growth and the ministries of the local churches. Now there are more Bible Schools operated by Assemblies of God churches springing up in the whole country. The General Council schools and these new schools are now aiming at offering a high quality higher theological education to the men and women of God chosen for His ministries.

**Conclusion**

The Assemblies of God leaders in Myanmar, national leaders and missionaries alike, have seen the importance and the need of providing theological education to new converts as well as to new ministers. The experience of the Assemblies of God churches in Myanmar has proved that apart from the empowering and the leading of the Holy Spirit, providing theological education to the ministers is important for the survival and growth of the church.

The Assemblies of God in Myanmar has actively been involved in theological education for ministers since its inception. However, for some reasons, advanced theological schools like Bible colleges were not established immediately in the beginning of the mission. In Myanmar, like in the West, the Pentecostal theological education system has evolved gradually from short-term Bible schools to advanced theological schools as time has passed. This pattern may be due to the fact that, as Menzies suggests, while the Pentecostals see the

need and the importance of theological education at all levels, they also have fear of the intellectualism, which had led the classical churches into spiritual darkness.[65] There are still a number of Assemblies of God ministers in Myanmar who are against higher theological education. However, they are only a few. Therefore, anti-intellectualism is no longer considered a problem in the Myanmar Assemblies of God.

Another reason, I suggest, is the lack of opportunities and resources. The Church in Myanmar has few theological books systematically and academically written in the native language(s). Theological books published in English outside the country are too expensive for Myanmar people. Moreover, Myanmar students are limited in the use of English. That is why many churches and denominations are reluctant to open high-level theological schools in Myanmar. Therefore, Myanmar ministers, who have received higher theological education must take responsibility to solve this problem. They need to write and publish theological books – at least translated works – so that the ministers of the Assemblies of God in Myanmar will be well equipped for their future ministries.

Nevertheless, the history of the development of the Assemblies of God Bible schools in Myanmar suggests that the leaders are aware that theological education is crucial for the survival and growth of the church and that one-time theological training may not be adequate for a minister. Therefore, it is the will of God that Pentecostals are to depend not only on their Pentecostal experience but also on formal theological training.

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[65]Menzies, Anointed to Serve, 141.

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