

**Story of a dialogue  
between the *Christian Friends of Myanmar in Germany*  
and *Myanmar Institute of Theology* in Yangon,  
which culminated in a biographical project  
of the *Judson Research Centre***

## 1) The beginning

### 2007

There was an evening in September 2007 at a Hamburg restaurant in the fashionable Eppendorf area. Two retired men in their 60ies were having a bite to eat and discussed their professional life of ecumenical, theological, academic work since the 1960ies. Both of them had lived for some while in South East Asia. And they shared their experience of failure of “development work” of the Westgerman churches.

The most pressing issue was, to their understanding, the ongoing military rule over Myanmar, and the failure of the ruled people to make their voices heard. Travelling was limited. So the two men decided: our role as Europeans is to undermine the European (EU), and Myanmar, policies of isolation - and try to establish forms of dialogue with the people in Myanmar. So far they had only come to know Christian people in Myanmar. So they decided: let us use commercial tourism and visit Myanmar on our own means, and by that occasion meet our professional counterparts, i.e. Christian theologians.

So the two, Peter Tachau (left) and Gerhard Köberlin (right, on the boat to Mandalay),



came to find friends who wanted to join them:

Ulrike Bey, Essen, cultural anthropologist, head of the Burma project of Asia Foundation, Essen;  
 Dr. Kenneth Fleming, theologian of the Episcopal church, Edinburgh;  
 Gertrud Wellmann-Hofmeier, librarian and member of the synod, Protestant Church of North  
 Germany, Hamburg;  
 Kathrin Jaschinsky, artist, Berlin;  
 Sylvia Jaschinsky, teacher, Hamburg;  
 Gerhard Köberlin, theologian, Hamburg;  
 Dr. Peter Tachau, theologian and journalist, Hamburg;  
 Dr. Hans-Bernd Zöllner, theologian and lecturer of South East Asia studies, Hamburg University,  
 Hamburg.



In Yangon, from the left: Kathrin Jaschinsky, Kenneth Fleming, Gerhard Köberlin,  
 Sylvia Jaschinsky, Gertrud Wellmann-Hofmeier, Peter Tachau,  
 missing: Ulrike Bey, Hans-Bernd Zöllner

## 2009

With the excellent help of a former colleague of Gerhard Köberlin, Rev. Smith Ngulh Zgulh Za  
 Thawng, who used to be the General Secretary of the Burma Council of Churches,



the group travelled to Myanmar in January 2009, for a week of dialogue with some 20-30 teachers of the Myanmar Institute of Theology/ MIT at Insein/ Yangon.

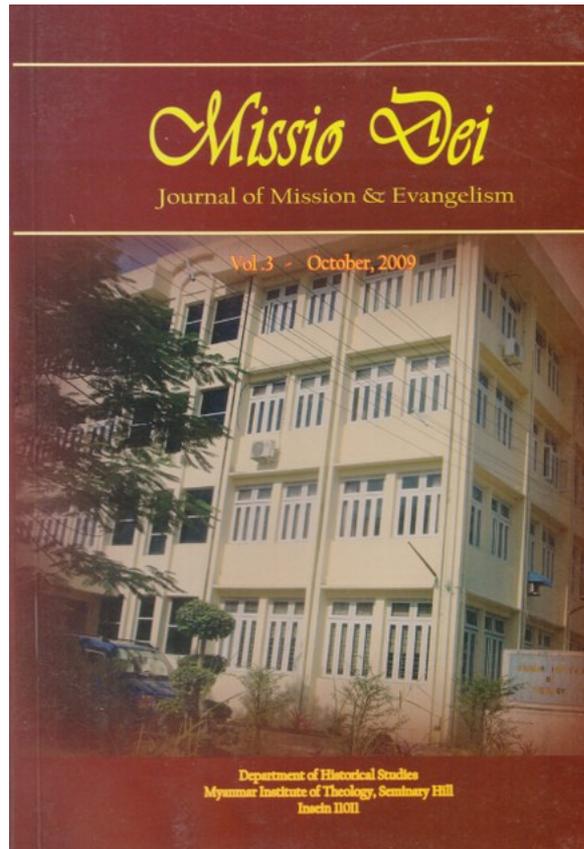


Dialogue meeting in January 2009

This week excited all of us. It was a great joy to meet and find common interests in the discussed issues like Charles Darwin (born 1809!) - evolution and Christianity, the interpretation of the bible, the role of women in the church, Buddhist-Christian dialogue, M.Luther and the reformation, the economic role of the Asia Development Bank, Max Weber and contextualization, ecumenical perspectives in both countries.

Both parties agreed to document this dialogue. A selection of the contributions was made and a joint publication of MIT and the German group was planned. In the end it turned out that the Myanmar Institute of Theology produced the documentation on their behalf. Our thanks go to the editor, Cung Lian Hup.

*Missio Dei*  
*Journal of Mission and Evangelism*  
 Vol. 3 – October, 2009  
 Myanmar Institute of Theology  
 Insein, Yangon 2009, pp.207



After returning to Germany, the group reported to many friends, to the national *Association of Protestant Churches and Missions in Germany/ EMW, Hamburg*, and to *Asia Foundation, Essen (now: Cologne)*, and to the newly formed *Myanmar project* in Berlin with Ursula and Dieter Hecker.

Two results were to be seen immediately:

a) the group decided to stay together, and was named *Christian Friends of Myanmar in Germany/ CFMG*, and

b) EMW Hamburg, the Asia secretary Dr. Anton Knuth, called for a national ecumenical Myanmar meeting to discuss German-Myanmar issues, including the Roman Catholic church. This annual two-day seminar resumed the work of the former Burma panel of EMW of the 1980ies. This German ecumenical Myanmar meeting keeps working until today.

## 2) The formation of an idea

Whenever the group met, the basic experience was our ignorance about life in Myanmar, and especially about the Christian contribution to Myanmar. Books did not help because there is no church history of Myanmar, or an introduction into life and work of Christians in Myanmar. We were just educated news paper readers about Myanmar.

## July 2010

So we were very lucky to receive the visit of Prof. Saw Hlaing Bwa in July 2010. We were sitting together around the kitchen table of Dietrich Schilling, a journalist and friend of ours and of Myanmar. Prof. Bwa proved to be a born interpreter of Myanmar for the Germans, because he used to be a doctoral student of Prof. Schwarz at Regensburg University/ South Germany.

We learned from Prof. Bwa

*that the task of Christians in the present situation of Myanmar is to make their voice heard in society, with the controlled constitutional elections coming soon. This would mean to open up towards society, to start communication, engagement, confrontation, in the fields of culture and religions, of politics, raising issues like "state", "democracy", "law", and in the field of economy, in a future Myanmar.*

*However, Christianity in Myanmar would not be in prepared and trained position for that task. That is why any kind of friendship in dialogue would be useful, for example with ecumenical friends in Germany.*

Our group reported from our meetings that we were thinking of a possible focus on the coming three years towards 2013, the 200th anniversary of Judson's arrival in Burma. We had realized however, that we do not know anything about Myanmar church history. So why not supporting theologians in Myanmar to write their own church history, and accompanying that process by communicating with the writers in reading their texts and commenting on them, and by inviting some of them to one or two conferences at the Academy of Mission, Hamburg, in the coming three years.

We learned that there were already some persons working on the history of the church in Myanmar, however mostly under ethnic, not national, perspectives. We understood that in order to overcome this approach of particularity, Christians would rather need to study

- a) their mutual Christian understanding of the history of the Myanmar state, being one context of Church history, and their mutual Christian understanding of being the church in Myanmar, as ecumenicity is the other context of church history; and
- b) to study their mutual Christian understanding of "law", i.e. Christian and Buddhist social ethics as their social context.
- c) We thought that German Christians could share their experience from their own church history.

In conversation with Prof. Bwa around the kitchen table, many more ideas came up. There was one to suggest dialogue on four German theologians like Bonhoeffer, Tillich, Moltmann, Sölle, including suitable biblical texts. We suggested the model of reading texts from those theologians together, by joining courses of Prof. Bwa for a week or two, or by starting with the paper of Prof. Bwa which he had presented to our meeting in 2009, and commenting on it from the German side, especially on his interest in Khin Maung Din. We thought of using the internet for this ecumenical sharing. Another idea was to get Kenneth Fleming and myself involved with sharing our experience as members of the European Network of Buddhist-Christian Studies/ ENBCS.

This exciting result one year after our starting point in 2009, was followed by a visit of Prof. En to Hamburg and Berlin, the retired dean of MIT, in August 2010, when we continued the sharing. And the further follow-up took place when Prof. Bwa was able to visit Germany for a second time in September 2010. Plans for a continuing dialogue began to take shape.



At Hamburg University, 2010:  
Gertrud Wellmann-Hofmeier, Hans-Bernd Zöllner, Prof. Bwa

### 3) The idea

It was the day after the meeting with Prof. Bwa at the kitchen table, when I suggested a project for our group, how to “make the voice of Christians heard” - ahead of the coming all-decisive elections in Myanmar.

a) My first suggestion on 26<sup>th</sup> July, 2010, was:

Could we support the research of some authors of MIT to publish a small series of biographies, portraying some personalities of church history in Myanmar? This could become a “Nagani Project” of Christians: who are the five most important Christian “saints” of Christianity in Myanmar? Who would be regarded an important Christian contribution for future Myanmar? (The literary “Nagani project” had selected the most important 100 texts of world literature for independent Myanmar after the British rule).

These five books should be presented to the ecumenical world by Myanmar. Our group would pledge to take care of the necessary funds for the five authors. For such purpose I would offer the bequest of my late aunt to the CFMG group, who had recently died at the age of 97.

I called this idea

*“the mothers and fathers of Myanmar/ Burmese Christianity, who gave an example by contributing to society, culture, inter-religious dialogue, economy, and politics”.*

The publication of these biographies would introduce the Christian presence in Myanmar to the general public, as a step towards a church history of Myanmar, at the occasion of the jubilee of 2013. The life and work of those mothers and fathers of Myanmar Christianity should present their voices for a “just, participatory, and sustainable society” in their country, using the ecumenical concepts of the “conciliar process” of the 1970ies and 1980ies.

I suggested on the German side, to ask EMW to administer to the project, and on the Myanmar side, to ask MIT/ Judson Research Centre to decide on the realization of the project. Finally I suggested that each publication shall provide a possibility for the German side to add a first

comment on the Burmese text, so to start an exchange on these Christian voices from Myanmar.

b) Three days later

our conversations in the group made the proposal much more practical. Our suggestion of 29<sup>th</sup> July, 2010, reads like this:

*„Suggestion for our German-Myanmar exchange: Idea to write a series of biographies of Christians in Myanmar*

*Such biographies should be brief, and portray individuals in their day-to-day context, so to present the many realities of life in Myanmar.*

*Biographies should be selected from each historical period since Judson's arrival in 1813, until today.*

*They should present many ways of life, not only church work, but rather the human and the social context, family life, professional life, political roles, economic conditions.*

*We would like to read about the lives of*

- women
- pastors, men and women
- children
- mothers (e.g. the mother of Aung San Suu Kyi)
- nurses
- Christian members of the first parliament after independence
- Christian businessmen
- Christians who did reflect their lives next to Buddhists, and those who did not reflect this.
- Theologians, like Khin Maung Din.

*Such publications should be available in Burmese and English. They should not be written for an academic purpose. They should not be big books, but rather handy booklets.*

*Friends in Germany and elsewhere should be asked to read each text, and comment on it. Then these comments should be published with the text, so to enable ecumenical exchange with Myanmar.*

*Financial support:*

*In case MIT would identify persons who have an interest in such case studies on Christianity and society in Myanmar, we could work on presenting this as a project and find financial support for this.“*

#### **4) The masterplan of Judson Research Centre**

The group CFMG is lucky to have Hans-Bernd Zöllner as a regular messenger. He travels to Myanmar ever so often. So he could serve as a bridge between MIT and the German group. We are so grateful for his work.

## 2010

a) This is the suggestion from Germany, which went to Myanmar

Our proposal which he took to Myanmar in December 2010, carried a concrete suggestion: we want to ask for some 50 small three-page mini-biographies. So many students could become involved.

*“Project Mini-Biographies of Burmese Christians, 1813 – 2010*

*The project aims at*

- *providing foreign friends of Burmese Christians to get some basic and vivid insight in the Burmese Christianity both past and present;*
- *help Burmese Christians to reflect on their own history and the many diversities of Christian life in Myanmar that even the Holy Spirit might sometimes find difficult to cope with;*
- *give some younger Myanmar Christians an opportunity to contribute to a better understanding of the situation of their church’s and their country’s situation both inside and outside Myanmar;*
- *throw some light on the interactions between Christians and non-Christians in Burma/Myanmar;*
- *promote dialogue between Christians inside and outside Myanmar by a mutual cooperation in the project.*

*Some technical details:*

- *The mini-biographies should be short (3 pages of English text in average);*
- *about 50 biographies should be published. Some more might be written to allow the editors some choice;*
- *approximately one third of the texts should deal with persons who are dead;*
- *the selection of persons to be written about should reflect the ethnic and denominational diversity of Myanmar Christianity to some extent;*
- *the final publication should be bi-lingual;*
- *the project should be finished in 2013.*

*Responsibilities:*

- *The project is a conceived as a joint venture between the Judson Research Centre (JRC) and the Christian friends of Myanmar in Germany the (CFMG);*
- *the JRC is responsible for the organising the project in Myanmar;*
- *each draft should be sent to the CFMG; it will be sent back in due time with some commentaries and questions;*
- *each contributor whose text has passed the selection process will get a small financial reward of 30 – 50 US \$ provided by the CFMG.*
- *the final decision about the texts to be included in the publication will be jointly done.*

*Guidelines for the writing of the mini-biographies:*

- *Each biography should give a short (maximum: half page) biographical information about the respective person listed in tabular form;*
- *The main body of the biography should provide some information about*

- *the background of the person's Christian life (religion of the parents, conversion or not, change of denomination or not, ethnic family background including spouse, relatives, children; etc.);*
- *special commitments (preaching, teaching, helping etc., with special reference to commitments to society) and particular incidents (in anecdotal form);*
- *relations with, and contributions to, the person's non-Christian environment;*
- *a short personal assessment by the author.*
- *if ever possible: photo of the person.*
- *Not all points must (and cannot because of the limitation of space) be dealt with in extenso."*

## 2011

b) This is the response from Myanmar, which went to Germany:

One month later, in January 2011, we received the response from Judson Research Centre. It reads:

*"Mini-Biographies of Burmese Christians 1813-2010*

*Concept:*

*The Myanmar Baptist Convention is planning to celebrate the bi-centenary of the arrival of the Judson family in 2013, and as a part of this celebration there will be a compilation of the history of the development of the Baptist Churches in Myanmar. On the other side of the coin, the Judson Research Center is concerned rather on the Christian participation in the life of the nation in the process of the national history. The underlying motivation of this concern is that there is a generally accepted attitude among the majority Burmese Buddhist people of Myanmar that Christianity is a Western religion and Christians are almost self-alienated from the life and the historical development of the nation. But there are a lot of unheard voices and actions taken by the anonymous who contributed a lot for the society within the reach of their power. The Judson Research Center is committed to let their efforts heard and in fact to become an encouragement and inspiration for the younger generations and show that Christians with their strong faith commitment are faithful for peace, justice, participatory and sustainability of the nation.*

*Objective:*

*The ultimate aim of this research is to be a part of healing a long affected trauma of hatred, misunderstanding, mistrust among the people and building a bridge of trust for a more peaceful, participatory and sustainable society. Without being talking in the air, the pragmatic aim is to launch a research work in order to rediscover, keep a historical record and make heard the unheard voices and the efforts of Christian participation and contribution in the historical development of the nation.*

*The project aims at*

- *providing foreign friends of Burmese Christians to get some basic and vivid insight in the Burmese Christianity both past and present;*
- *help Burmese Christians to reflect on their own history and the many diversities of Christian life in Myanmar that even the Holy Spirit might sometimes find difficult to cope with;*

- *give some younger Myanmar Christians an opportunity to contribute to a better understanding of the situation of their church's and their country's situation both inside and outside Myanmar;*
- *throw some light on the interactions between Christians and non-Christians in Burma/Myanmar;*
- *promote dialogue between Christians inside and outside Myanmar by a mutual cooperation in the project.*

**Strategy:**

*The "Biographical Research on Christian Contribution in Society" project is designed as a two years project starting from 2011-12 and to be accomplished in 2012-13. And this will be implemented in cooperation with the Christian Friends of Myanmar in Germany. The JRC will be responsible for organizing the project in Myanmar.*

- *The mini-biographies should be short (3 pages of English text in average);*
- *about 50 biographies will be published. Some more might be written to allow the editors some choice;*
- *approximately one third of the texts should deal with persons who are dead;*
- *the selection of persons to be written about should reflect the ethnic and denominational diversity of Myanmar Christianity to some extent;*
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- *The main body of the biography should provide some information about*
  - ❖ *the background of the person's Christian life (religion of the parents, conversion or not, change of denomination or not, ethnic family background including spouse, relatives, children; etc.);*
  - ❖ *special commitments (preaching, teaching, helping, and contribution in the society etc.) and particular incidents (in anecdotal form);*
  - ❖ *relations with the person's non-Christian environment;*
  - ❖ *a short personal assessment by the author.*

**2011-12**

*This will be a data collecting phase to find out who, where and how Christians have participated and contributed to the society in their own respective areas... by mobilizing the interested students of MIT to do research works on the individuals for the data collecting process..., including extended travels and interviews, collecting the resource materials and field surveys.*

**2012-13**

*This is the phase in which the research works in phase one will be compiled, scrutinized, and processing the biographies of the selected individuals into a book which will become a historical milestone and a published resource on Christian participation and contribution in society in the life of the nation after independence.*

**Expected Outcome:**

*Since the significance of this research is not to produce Church history, but the history of Christian involvement as being the salt and the light in the history of Myanmar, the expected outcome of this two years research project is to let the unheard voices heard in the society and*

*the world that may create a mutual understanding between those who misunderstand each other, hence promote a healing process in the society.”*

We were very happy to see that our suggestion was received well in Myanmar. We were impressed by this plan of the Centre. They had

- to establish a committee to identify some 50 personalities,
- to find authors to write on them,
- start writing on them,
- by travelling to these persons,
- interviewing them or their descendants,
- and providing photographs of the portrayed.
- The authors had to write up their texts in their own languages
- and then had to get them translated into English, or had delivered English texts from the beginning.

c) On the German side,

the Association of Churches and Missions in Germany/ EMW – Dr. Knuth, Ms. Ennen, Mr. Krieg - had joined this work of Judson Research Centre and helped with providing the project costs. CMFG had pledged to take care of the costs of the authors from the beginning.

## **2012**

d) One year later,

in January 2012, we received an enormous list of personalities. The authors had begun to work on the biographies. What an ambitious plan!

## Mini-Biographical Research - Name List

No	Name	Gender	Age	Race	Church Denomination	Vocation	Area	Significance/ Remark	Researcher
1	Mrs. Ba Maung Chain	F	D	Karen	Baptist		Yangon		Seng Tawng
2	Daw Mya Kyi	F	D	Burma	Methodist		Yangon		
3	Eh May	F	L	Lahu	Baptist		N. Shan		Thu Za Thein
4	Daw Khin Kyi	F	D	Burma			Yangon		Seng Tawng
5	Dr. Daw Sein Shin	F	D	Pwo Karen	Baptist		Kyonypyaw		
6	Dr. Saw Sa	M	D	Karen	Baptist		Yangon		
7	Daw Khin May Sint	F	D	Burma	Anglican		Yangon		
8	Catherin Khin Khin	F	D	Burma	Anglican		Yangon		
9	Melvin E Way	M	L	Karen			Ye Zin		Nathanayla
10	U Khin Maung Din	M	D	Burma	Anglican	Philosopher, Professor	Yangon		
11	Dr. Saw Wah Hlooo	M	L	Karen			Paan	Leprosy Mission	
12	Dr. Hla Bu	M	D	Burma			Yangon		
13	U Saw Mahn Saw Bu	M	D	Karen			Myaungmya		Nathanayla
14	Dr. Sa Bwe Gyun	M	L	Kachin		Politician	Myitkyina		
15	Daw Yaw Nam	F	D	Kachin		Nurse	Myitkyina		
16	Naw Wah	F	L	Karen	Baptist		Kya Inn		Thu Za Thein
17	U Phe Maung Din	M	D	Burma	Anglican	Professor, writer	Yangon		
18	Dr. San Si Po	M	D	Karen			Yangon		
19	Dr. Salai Tun Than	M	L	Chin	Baptist		Yangon		Dr. Zaw Win
20	La Bya	M	D	Kachin			Myitkyina		
21	Archbishop A. Mya Han	M	D	Burma	Anglican		Yangon		Daw KHYi
22	U Thein Lwin	M	L	Burma	Baptist		Yangon	Blind Mission	
23	Dr. U Kyaw Than	M	D	Burma	Baptist	Theologian	Yangon	Theologian	
24	Dr. Jama Din	M	D	Burma		Doctor	Paan	Leprosy Mission	MMNyunt
25	U Khin Thein	M	D	Burma			Paan	Leprosy Mission	MMNyunt
26	Dr. Thang Bil Luai	M	L	Chin	Methodist	Doctor	Tahan	Wesley Hospital	MMNyunt
27	Dr. Ro Uk	M	L	Chin	Baptist	Doctor	Matupi		GVMung
28	Sap Nei Thang	F	L	Chin	Baptist		Yangon	I Love Myanmar	GVMung
29	Vung Nang	M	L	Chin	Baptist		Tidim		GVMung
30	U Hla Tun	M	D	Burma	Anglican		Yangon	Tun Foundation (cancer Hospital)	
31	Dr. Tha Tun Oo	M	D	Burma			Yangon	Today Media	MMNyunt
32	Naw Ruth	F	L	Karen	Baptist	teacher	Kya Inn		TZThein
33	David Yone Moe	M	D	Karen	Evangelical Baptist		Yangon		MMNyunt
34	Rev. Lan Tun	M	D	Chin			Yangon		MMNyunt
35	Ya Tung	M	D	Chin			Yangon		MMNyunt
36	Rev. Zaw Win Aung	M	L	Burma			Monywa		MMNyunt
37	Dr. Hmuh Thang	M	L	Chin	Baptist	Doctor	Chin State	Politician	SNLing
38	Fr. Mang Za Kum	M	L	Chin	Roman Catholic		Yangon		SNLing
39	Cin Za Lian	M	L	Chin			Tidim		GVMung
40	Issac Pau	M	L	Wa			Lashio	Politician	SNLing
41	Van Kung	M	L	Chin	Mara Enangelical Church		Matupi		SNLing
42	U Aung Thein	M	L	Lisu	Baptist		Mokok		
43	U Ma Htu Naw	M	L	Kachin	Baptist		Myitkyina	Politician	
44	Susana Hla Hla Soe	F	L	Karen			Yangon	World Vision	
45	Sayamah Htoi Ba	F	L	Kachin	Baptist		Yangon	Differently Able	Kmai
46	Vum Suan Pau	M	L	Chin	Baptist		Chin State	Enviroment	GVMung
47	Rev. Nan Thu Zar Mon	F	L	Shan	Baptist		Shan State	MBC. V president	
48	Saw Sar Law La	M	L	Karen	Baptist		Yangon		TZThein
49	Manh Win Maung	M	D	Karen			Yangon		
50	General Abel	M	L	Burma	Roman Catholic		YANGON		
51	Dr. Tun Shein	M	L	Burma			YANGON	Judson Church Chair man	
52	Collegen Ne Win	M	D	Burma	Roman Catholic		YANGON	ACTOR	MMNyunt
53	Nweh Nweh Mu	F	D	Burma	Baptist		YANGON	ACTRESS	YKPau
54	Daw Ohn Mar Wai	F	D	Burma	Baptist		YANGON	Ywama Church	
55	U Thla Uk	M	L	Chin	Baptist		YANGON		SNLing
56	Prof. Tun Aung Chain	M	L	Karen	Baptist		YANGON	Historical Researcher	
57	U Pe Twin	M	D	Burma	Baptist				

## 5) The exchange begins

A number of activities developed.

a) A first attempt at inviting partners from Myanmar to the German “Kirchentag” (Protestant Convention) in 2010 failed. A programme with Kenneth Fleming of encountering our European spirituality at the Community of Taizé/ France could not be financed, in conjunction with the Kirchentag in Munich.

A later invitation, though, could be realized with Prof. Khin in 2015 for the Stuttgart Kirchentag.

Other visits from Myanmar were possible through Ms. And Mr. Hecker in Berlin.

b) The purchase of theological books for the library of MIT could be funded and transported to Myanmar with the help of Kenneth Fleming, Hans-Bernd Zöllner, Ms. And Mr. Hecker and others.

c) Some questions concerning German theologians like Dietrich Bonhoeffer could be discussed by email.

d) A joint seminar of myself with Prof. Bwa in 2011 failed because of my ill health at that time, but Florian Höhne, assistant lecturer of theology at Bamberg University was prepared to replace me, with the help of the Bavarian Luthern Church. This joint seminar should focus on the message of Prof. Bwa at his visit to our Group in Hamburg in 2010, when he said: The present task of Christianity in Myanmar is to “*make the Christian Voice heard in society*”.

Florian Höhne was able to invite Prof. Andreas Nehring of the theological faculty of Erlangen University to join him for this seminar. They conducted two seminars at the MIT.

Florian Höhne worked on the basics of “social ethics” – how Christians think about their involvement in society theologically, including examples from German theology like Luther, Bonhoeffer, Moltmann.

Andreas Nehring worked on the basics of the “theology of religions in the context of globalization” – how Christians think about their involvement with other religions theologically. He focussed on the perspectives of the study of religion, and of cultural studies, on this issue.

Both were highly grateful to Prof. Bwa for this rare chance, to work with some 20 M.Th.-students and with some of the teaching staff.

Their German report reads like this:

**Professor Dr. Andreas Nehring (Universität Erlangen) und Florian Höhne, theologischer Assistent an der Universität Bamberg,** waren vom 29.10. bis 6.11. 2011 in Yangon, Myanmar, Gäste des Myanmar Institute of Theology (MIT) und haben jeweils ein Blockseminar von 20 Doppelstunden (45 min pro Einheit) für 20 Studierende des Masterstudiengangs „Master of Theology“ gehalten. Unregelmäßig haben auch Dozierende des MIT an den Seminarsitzungen teilgenommen. Beide Seminare fanden in englischer Sprache statt. Die Teilnehmenden beider Seminare waren identisch. Die Studierenden haben sich aus verschiedenen Masterstudiengängen zusammengesetzt (MTh Mission Studies; MTh Feminist Theology; MTh Theology and Science; MTh Interreligious Dialogue)... ..

Titel des Blockseminars von **Florian Höhne** war: „*Making the Christian Voice heard in society*“. Ziel war es, die Teilnehmenden an den fünf Vormittagen mit grundlegenden Denkmustern der Sozialethik bekannt zu machen, die es insbesondere ermöglichen, christliche Orientierung als relevant für eine weitere Gesellschaft zu formulieren. Damit sollten Anregungen für die Entwicklung einer eigenen kontextuellen Öffentlichen Theologie für die Kirchen in Myanmar gegeben werden.

In der Einführungssitzung wurden nach ausführlicher Vorstellungsrunde von Ausschnitten der Bergpredigt ausgehende die Probleme diskutiert, die sich ergeben, wenn Orientierungen aus der christlichen Tradition auf das Zusammenleben von Christen und Nicht-Christen bezogen werden. Die darauffolgenden Sitzungen stellten anhand von grundlegenden Texten die Denkmuster des Naturrechts

und der Zwei-Regimenten-Lehre vor und fragten nach den Beiträgen von Bonhoeffers und Moltmanns Theologie zu der Fragen nach der öffentlichen Relevanz des Christentums.

Insbesondere in der Diskussion über Texte der Zwei-Regimenten-Lehre wurde der Zusammenhang von dogmatischen Lehraussagen und ethischen Grundorientierungen deutlich, was zugleich zeigte, wie das Nachdenken über Gottes Handeln kaum auf dessen Relevanz für den Raum der Kirche beschränkt bleiben kann. Noch vertieft wurde diese Einsicht in den Zusammenhang von Dogmatik und Sozialethik bzw. öffentlicher Theologie in der Diskussion von Bonhoeffers Aussagen über die Wirklichkeit und Christus in der Mitte. Es sind gerade Leben und Theologie Bonhoeffers, an dem die Studierenden wie Dozierenden ein sehr großes Interesse haben – wohl wegen der Ähnlichkeiten zwischen der Situation Bonhoeffers und der Situation der Christen zur Zeit des Militärdiktatur in Myanmar. Auch das Thema der abschließenden Sitzungen am Freitag – Moltmanns Theologie der Hoffnung – stieß auf großes Interesse. In der Diskussion zeigte sich, wie viele der Studierende für ihren Kontext den Weg als hilfreich empfanden, den Moltmann zwischen den extremen der Hoffnungslosigkeit und der anmaßenden Hoffnung vorschlägt.

Das abschließende Evaluationsgespräch zeigte, dass das Seminar von den Studierenden insgesamt als bereichernd und anregend empfunden wurde. Die Gespräche in den Pausen mit Studierenden boten die Möglichkeit, die Situation der Christen in Myanmar besser kennen zu lernen.

Das Seminar von **Andreas Nehring** mit dem Titel „Theology of Religions in a Global Context“ wurde nachmittags durchgeführt. Die Studierenden hatten zuvor einen Reader bekommen mit einschlägigen Texten, die sie auch gelesen hatten. In einer Mischung von Vorlesungen, Textarbeit und Diskussionen wurden sowohl klassische wie auch neuere Entwürfe aus dem Bereich „Theologie der Religionen“ vorgestellt und diskutiert. Erstaunlich war dabei das breite Vorwissen eines großen Teils der Studierenden, sodass ich die Vorlesungen mehr auf kulturwissenschaftliche und religionswissenschaftliche Fragestellungen verlagert habe, die eine andere Perspektive auf theologische Ansätze einbringen konnten, die die Studierenden als ausgesprochen bereichernd empfunden haben. Es wurde auch der Wunsch geäußert, in einem späteren Seminar dazu noch intensiver zu arbeiten. Beispielsweise hat eine religionswissenschaftliche Klärung des Religionsbegriffes in seiner unterschiedlichen Verwendung, für die Studierenden und auch Dozierenden neue Fragen und Perspektiven aufgezeigt, wie sich Theologie noch sehr viel fundierter in den interreligiösen Dialog einbringen könnte. Auch eine Einheit in der verschiedene Globalisierungstheorien vorgestellt wurden, wurde als Bereicherung des eigenen Theologietreibens gesehen. Der Bitte, grundsätzliches zum Dialog zwischen Buddhisten und Christen zu sagen, bin ich aber nicht nachgekommen, da ich es nicht für angemessen hielt, in einem mehrheitlich buddhistischen Land den Christen hierzu Lektionen zu erteilen. Die Diskussionen zu diesem Thema, zu dem die Studierenden selbst viel beizutragen hatten, waren aber dennoch fruchtbar. Ich habe versucht kulturwissenschaftliche Fragestellungen in die Theologische Diskussion zum Dialog einzubringen, die bislang am MIT noch nicht diskutiert worden waren. Insgesamt war das Seminar so inspirierend, vor allem durch die Offenheit und das Interesse der Studierenden und der Dozierenden, dass ich gern über eine Fortsetzung nachdenken würde.

Prof. Saw Hlaing Bwa ermöglichte neben dem Unterricht Begegnungen mit Vertretern der lutherischen Kirchen in Myanmar sowie einer anglikanischen Gemeinde, dem Myanmar Council of Churches, dem Vertreter des Lutherischen Weltdienstes David Mueller, und dem Executive Secretary von ATEM Dr. Lal Tin Hre...

Wir haben auch die Vertreter der Lutherischen Kirchen eigens aufgesucht. Das erste Gespräch mit dem Präsidenten der Evangelical Lutheran Church in Myanmar (Lutheran Bethlehem Church) machte dann auch gleich die prekäre Situation der Lutheraner in Myanmar deutlich. Es gibt 4 Kirchen, die aber zum Teil nicht miteinander kooperieren wollen. Die Bethlehem Church versteht sich als älteste Kirche im Land und begründet sich auf eine tamilische Tradition aus der Zeit der Leipziger Missionare. Der Präsident Dr. Jenson Andrews sagte, dass es schwierig sei die anderen Lutherischen Kirchen anzuerkennen, da sie ja auch kein Mitglied im MCC seien, bzw. eine von ihnen die Mara Evangelical Church nicht eigentlich lutherisch sei obwohl sie seit 2010 Mitglied im LWB ist...

Bamberg und Erlangen im November 2011, Florian Höhne, Andreas Nehring

## 6) Working on texts

### 2013

#### a) The first batch of 24 biographies

In July 2013 we received the first biographies from Myanmar. We were excited and divided up the texts between the Hamburg members of the group: Sylvia, Gertrud, Gerhard, Hans-Bernd, Peter. We took turns to meet regularly at our homes. We started to select 15 texts which seemed to be most suitable for a first small publication, and started to translate them into German.

Our counterpart on the side of Judson Research Centre was Mr. Nathanayla M.Th. He was the Project Coordinator. He has received countless requests from us, and he was patiently answering them. We thank him very much!



Our first experience was that we missed the Burmese counterparts. It would have been much better to sit down with each author and talk over their biographies. So we had to rely on written exchange by emails. This proved to be unrealistic. We decided to use our own understanding, and wrote down our personal comment on each selected biography, and a short summary. In addition we found some more details about the persons, either from their contributions to the ecumenical movement, or from the internet, or from the great knowledge of Hans-Bernd Zöllner.

That is why we asked him to write a history of the land and the church in Myanmar, as it relates to the biographies. This helped us a great lot. I made a glossary of words unfamiliar for a German reader, and to put down the historical data into a time line. Then we produced an introduction into the whole project, and these first 15 biographies, also informing about our experience with translating and understanding the texts.

Every single word of our publication was the result of many joint discussions. Did we understand what we had received from the Centre? Can we adjust texts, or do we stick to the originals? After some while we decided to adjust something and report about it in the introduction and in each comment. We also included questions to the texts. Some details were given to Hans-Bernd Zöllner for his travels. He was able to visit Prof. Bwa and Mr. Nathanayla and bring back some help for our work.

## 2014

### b) Photographs

In our discussion it became quite clear that we must do everything to help the German reader to see photographs of the portrayed persons. It is so important to look into the face of persons unknown – and so far away. We are so very grateful to Mr. Nathanayla. He was able to provide many photographs, historic and actual. Some were copies carried by our “messenger”, some were sent by email. And then I could find the detailed help form Mr. Nathanayla about the who is who. We selected the most suitable ones, and I processed them for the publisher. Thanks to each helper in Myanmar! Without photographs there would not be a publication.

### c) The second batch of 12 biographies

In August 2014 we received the second and last batch of texts from Mr. Nathanayla. We were very happy. What a treasure of 36 biographies had been accomplished! We followed the same procedure: We distributed the texts among each of us, selected some for publication, and started to translate them. Again our group had lots of discussions. The new texts represented among others, the mother of Aung San Suu Kyi, and some new contexts of ethnic minorities like Kachin and Akha. We were again excited. Our main work at that time, however, was finishing the publication of the first batch.

## 7) First German version published

## 2015

### a) Publication

As soon as we finished all discussions on the first batch we presented the result to the Publication Office of EMW Hamburg, being the other German partner of the project. Mr Martin Keiper was most willing to take care of the whole process towards the final book. He also

contributed all the geographical maps. We had decided that not only photographs, but also maps are necessary to help the German reader to bridge the big distance between our two worlds. We found the following headline for the book of 126 pages:



*“This is our Land. Being Christian in Myanmar. Fifteen portraits”*

*(Dies ist unser Land. Christ sein in Myanmar: Fünfzehn Porträts)*

*published by EMW Hamburg, May 2015, volume 79 of Weltmission Heute. ISSN 1430-6530*

It contains all the supplementary material which we had prepared in the meantime (introduction, history, explaining Myanmar personal names, glossary, time line, short biographies of the Myanmar authors and of the German editors.)

It reached the public at the national “Kirchentag”, and was widely distributed. It received warm comments, both locally and academically. It was said that this book represents a very first genuine voice from Christians in Myanmar, not otherwise available in Germany, and opens a wide historical view of Myanmar Christianity, across the ethnic and denominational fields.



The group celebrates the first volume at Peter Tachau's: From left Peter Tachau, Gertrud Wellmann-Hofmeier, Sylvia Jaschinsky, Gerhard Köberlin, Hans-Bernd Zöllner, Kathrin Jaschinsky and her son Elio

#### b) Personal meeting with a Committee member

Our group was very happy to receive the visit of a member of the Centre's Project Committee, who was one of the authors as well: Prof. Anne Khin Htwe Yi, sister of the Anglican Bishop Andrew Mya Han. She had contributed the biography of her brother to the project. She came to Hamburg in 2015, upon our invitation to the *German National Convention of Protestant Christians (Kirchentag)* in Stuttgart. Hans-Bernd Zöllner and Ms. and Mr. Hecker from the Berlin Myanmar Project took care of her in Stuttgart.

The great opportunity of this visit was her presentation of our first German publication of the biographies to the German public, being one of the authors. We were very lucky to have the publication made just in time for the Convention! She was the first Burmese to have it on hand.



Hamburg, 2015: From the left: Sylvia Jaschinsky, Ms. and Mr. Rev. Khai (Academy of Mission, Hamburg), Ms. Cindy (relative of Prof. Khin), Prof. Khin, Hans-Bernd Zöllner

## 8) Publication of the English version

### 2016

In communication with the Myanmar side we realized that the 36 biographies were not yet available in Myanmar, neither in Burmese nor in English. But having received that treasure of literature from the Myanmar side, we thought it necessary to make this treasure available to the public. We decided on an online-publication, as the easiest way to make it accessible inside and outside Myanmar, also for the world wide ecumenical and academic public.

First we wanted to make an edited version of the English language original texts. With the help of our Scottish member Kenneth Fleming, we then decided to leave the texts untouched.

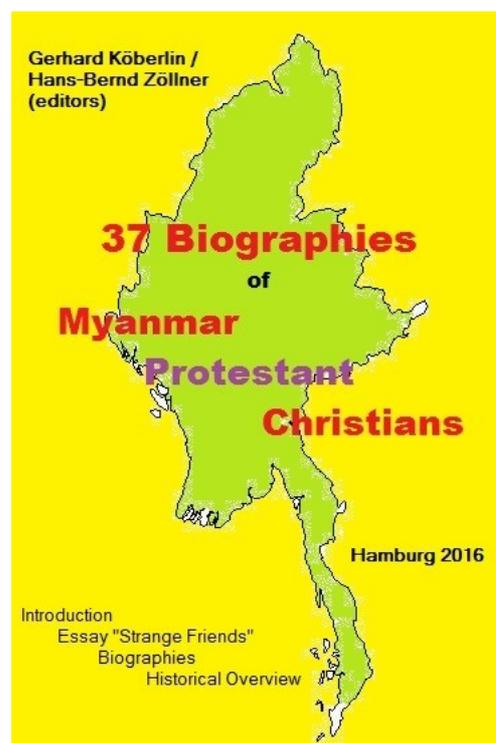
We put them in chronological order and added those supplements, which we had prepared for the first German publication, among others. Our German contributions were translated by Ms Beverly Olson-Dopffel of Heidelberg University into English. She enjoyed doing this and liked the project. The photographs of the German publication and the additional photographs from Mr. Nathanayla were added.

In the end Hans-Bernd Zöllner picked up the whole task to produce the publication of the English version of the 37 biographies. He was able to present a first printed copy to the Centre at his visit to Myanmar in January 2016.

Its 167 pages went online under the header:

[www.emw-d.de/ Menu Downloads/ Dokumentationen](http://www.emw-d.de/Menu/Downloads/Dokumentationen)

[https://www.emw-d.de/\\_SIWmNsKV3AIT55bUMH/doku.downloads/doku.39/index.html](https://www.emw-d.de/_SIWmNsKV3AIT55bUMH/doku.downloads/doku.39/index.html)



A first success story of this publication was a letter from a Canadian reader in the internet. He was very interested in this collection of biographies and found even something from his own family. His contribution was included into the second German publication.

## 9) Second German version published

**2018**

### a) The discussion of the Hamburg group

resulted in the selection of another six biographies for a German publication. A seventh biography on the Lutheran Rev. Andrews was contributed by Hans-Bernd Zöllner, as the Lutheran Church of Myanmar, with its roots in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was not represented in the 36 texts. Our discussions focussed on the experience with working on those stories. We were fascinated, and at the same time estranged by the way how life and work of those personalities portrayed their Christian thinking in Myanmar. We felt close and distanced at the same time. This also reflected the fact that we could not have so much personal encounter with authors, or portrayed persons, in Myanmar, unlike the frequent traveller Hans-Bernd!

So we decided to add four comments to the seven biographies:

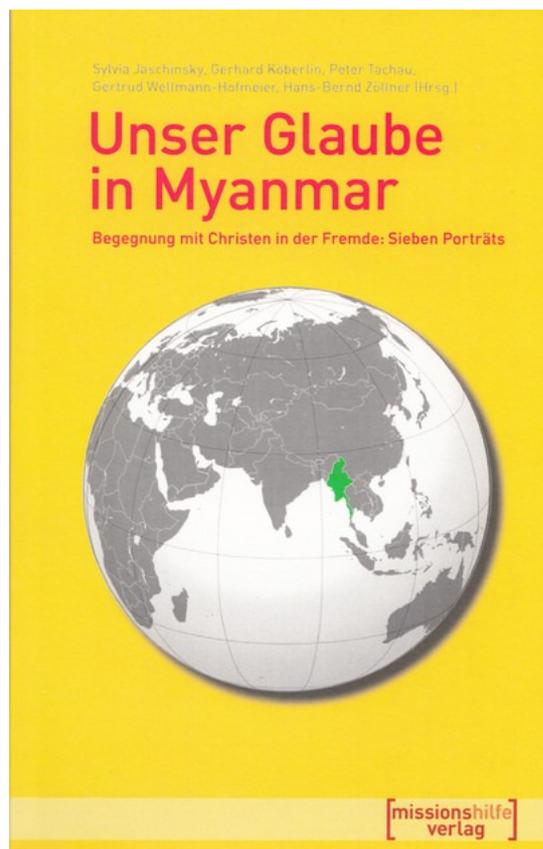
- the personal story of our work on those texts (by the group),
- an introduction into literature from South East Asia as the context of this literature from Myanmar (myself),
- a comment on Christian attitudes to violence, war and peace making with reference to the Kachin situation (myself),
- and a reflection on our closeness and distance to the Christian way of life in Myanmar (Peter Tachau).

Few photographs were available, and maps were added. The publisher of EMW Hamburg was prepared to pick up the publication, being the other German partner of the Judson Research Centre. Peter Tachau took care of the final editing.

On January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2018, the second German volume was presented by the group.  
 At my place, from the left: Peter Tachau, Sylvia Jaschinsky,  
 Gerhard Köberlin. Hans-Bernd Zöllner (the photographer is Gertrud W.-H.)



*Unser Glaube in Myanmar. Begegnung mit Christen in der Fremde: Sieben Porträts,*  
 ed. Sylvia Jaschinsky, Gerhard Köberlin, Peter Tachau,  
 Gertrud Wellmann-Hofmeier, Hans-Bernd Zöllner,  
 Hamburg: Missionshilfe Verlag 2017, ISBN 978-3-946426-07-3, pp. 79.  
 (Our Faith in Myanmar. Encounter with Christians in a Foreign Land: Seven Portraits)



## b) Conclusion

We enjoyed to work together on texts from Myanmar. This kept us going for 11 years. How wonderful!

A number of developments will remain in our hearts in Germany:

- Our report of the first dialogue 2009 established the yearly national Myanmar seminar of EWM, which brings together the Protestant, Roman-Catholic, and other partners of Myanmar in Germany.
- Two German and one English publication are now on hand, internationally accessible.
- Students and pastors from Bavaria were able to visit the MIT, and
- besides the regular speaker Hans-Bernd Zöllner, and Ms. And Mr. Hecker from the Berlin project group,
- another two academic teachers from Germany (F. Höhne, A. Nehring) were able to teach at the MIT in 2011.
- The participation at the “Kirchentag” (Protestant convention) in München had failed, but was successful in Stuttgart.

When going back to the first suggestion for this dialogue with MIT, we realize that the response and the subsequent manifold exchanges helped us to understand: we had raised **our questions** to our Myanmar partners, and we have received answers to **our questions**.

These questions remained our questions. But at present we do not have the chance to know much about the questions which our partners in Myanmar would raise themselves – for themselves, and towards us in Germany. Our two worlds remain two worlds. So there is a long way ahead of us!

This is the story of the project as told by Gerhard Köberlin at the presentation of the final German volume of Myanmar biographies in Hamburg on 10<sup>th</sup> January 2018.