

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **CHALLENGES IN TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY**

In 1835 British officials in India invited Rev. and Mrs. Brown and Mr. O. T. Cutter, a printer from Moulmain, to begin Baptist missionary work in Assam, in Sadiya under the name “Mission to the Shan.” The mission began in 1836. This is the earliest mission to the Shan people. The first printing in “Shan” was done in Assam on January 1, 1838. There are still Shan-speaking people in Assam who are descendants of the Shan migrants who established Ahom Kingdom in 13<sup>th</sup> century.

On his trip North from Ava in 1837, Kincaid met a party of Shan. He talked to them in Burmese and gave out tracts. Five million Shan are now living in Shan States and other part of Burma. Shan are traditionally Buddhists. Shan have adopted Buddhism since AD 71.

The Baptist mission among the Shan in Burma was started by American Baptist Missionary Union of United States of America in 1861. The first Missionary to the Shan was Rev. & Mrs. Moses Homan Bixby. He started his mission work among Shan refugees in Toungoo. Up until 1986 (124 years) only 0.12% (6,000 out of 5 million Shan in Burma) of total Shan population believes in Jesus Christ and professes as Christians in 26 Shan Churches. The growth rate is 48 believers per year, 4 per month, 0.13 per day among 5 million Shan. American Missionaries had brought the gospel to us. They had planted Churches among us. What do we have to do today? Who are going to tell the Good News to Shan people now? There are many reasons why the Shan Churches should engage in missions and Shan Christians should go out and preach the gospel to their own people. The paramount reason is the “command” of Christ. (Matthew 28:18-20, John 20:20) We engaged in evangelism today not because we want to or because we choose to or because we like to, but because we have been told to.<sup>1</sup>

Shan have their own cultures, which seemed to be mixed up with Buddhist practices for, understandably, the Shan are Buddhists almost two thousand years. They have their own language and literature. Shan are classified as un-reached people group by Joshua AD 2000 project. They live in 10/40 windows.

How many Shan have heard about Jesus?

How many preachers or evangelists or missionaries are working among the Shan today?

Only about 10% of five million people would have heard about Jesus. Most of them are from radio broadcast. There are only a handful of evangelists going out preaching gospel to Buddhist Shan. Most of the Seminary and Bible School graduates are serving in well established Churches, neither as evangelists nor missionaries. Most of the Shan pastors are also confined to Church work in the Church only.

Are the Shan very resistant to gospel? By looking at the early missions among the Shan we have seen the Shan, including SaoPha and monks were tolerant, flexible, helpful, co-operative, interested and neither militant nor aggressive to Christianity. However there are several reasons for not being able to convert many Shan to Christianity like other hill tribes. Their deep-rooted culture and old tradition of Buddhism are some of the main factors influencing the success of missions among the Shan. Shan people use to say, “Shan are Buddhists and Buddhism is Shan’s religion.” If any Shan is not Buddhist he/she is not considered a Shan.

How can we reach the Shan with the gospel of Jesus?

Should we wait for another century to have another 6,000 Shan to the Lord?

How can we make them Shan Christians?

Do they have to abandon their culture so that they can become Christian?

Can Shan become Christians without abandoning their culture?

How can we accept their culture in Christianity?

<sup>1</sup> Christian Missions in Biblical Perspective by J. Herbert Kane, published by Baker Book House, Michigan, 1979, p 43

These questions are very important for people who work among the Shan. Christianity segments among the Shan Christians are; Anglican 5%, Independent 5%, Protestant (Mainly Baptist) 75%, Roman Catholic 15%<sup>2</sup>

Who are responsible to make disciples of Shan?

Matthew 28:18-20 Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Shan are included in a great multitude in heaven

Revelation 7:9 After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.

Who are willing to be sent to Shan people?

Romans 10:13-15 “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they are sent? As it is written, how beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!”

### **Burma Baptist Convention (BBC)**

Formed in 1865

Burma Baptist Convention is a religious organization representing all Baptist Churches in Burma regardless of races and regions. It is recognized by Burma Government as a representative body of all Baptist Churches.

#### **Original constitution**

The name of the organization shall be the BURMA BAPTIST CONVENTION.

The registered office of the CONVENTION shall be situated at 143 St. John’s Road, Rangoon, Burma.

The Aims and Objects of the Burma Baptist Convention shall be:

1. To promote the Christian religion in Burma and throughout the world, by sending out and supporting missionaries and evangelists, by establishing and maintaining schools and educational institutions by promoting medical and other benevolent institutions and enterprises and by promoting the distribution of Bibles and Christian literatures.
2. To gather annually for the promotion of religious activities, for inspiration, edification and the deepening of the spiritual life and for the engendering and fostering of an ecumenical spirit.
3. To present a united front and to unify and centralize Baptist forces in Burma so that they can speak with one voice whenever and wherever needed and act in harmony in all matters of national scope which affect their religious life.
4. To formulate and state broad policies, which will guide the Board of Management and all Committees of the Convention.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.joshuaproject.net/peopctry.php>, Apr 21, 2006

5. To guard the Baptist inheritance of liberty, independence and autonomy of the local Church, association, or organization, in regard to all ecclesiastical.

### **Cooperating bodies**

The Burma Baptist Churches Union, with 6 Associations.

The Karen Baptist Convention, with 12 Associations.

The Pwo Karen Baptist Conference, with 5 Associations.

The Kachin Baptist Convention, with 4 Associations.

The Zomi Baptist Convention, with 5 Associations.

The Asho Chin Baptist Conference, with 3 Associations.

The Mon Baptist Churches Union, with 1 Association.

The Indian Baptist Convention, with 1 Association.

The Southern Shan State Indigenous Home Mission Society, with 1 Association.

The ShweLi Valley Baptist Mission with racial or regional organizations but contribute financially to the Convention.

The Immanuel Baptist Church, Rangoon.

The Judson Church, Rangoon.

### **Burma Baptist Convention and Shan Churches**

In 2001, according to the national set up of the Burma Baptist Convention, there are 12 Language (racial) and 4 Regional Conventions, and 2 individual Churches under BBC. They are;

Ahka Baptist Convention (3 Associations, 75 Churches, 7,862 members) (Racial)

Lahu Baptist Convention (4 Associations, 273 Churches, 23,496 members) (Racial)

Myanmar Baptist Churches Union. (6 Association, 103 Churches, 16,217 members) (Racial)

Kayin Baptist Convention. (17 Associations, 1,354 Churches, 205,920 members) (Racial)

Po Kayin Baptist Conference. (6 Associations, 203 Churches, 38,803 members) (Racial)

Kachin Baptist Convention. (12 Associations, 261 Churches, 137,150 members) (Racial)

Zomi Baptist Convention. (25 Associations, 761 Churches, 82,378 members) (Racial)

Asho Chin Baptist Conference. (2 Associations, 25 Churches, 4,535 members) (Racial)

Mon Baptist Churches Union. (1 Association, 13 Churches, 2,039 members) (Racial)

Southern Shan State Baptist Home Mission. (2 Associations, 50 Churches, 4,800 members) (Regional)

ShweLi Shan Baptist Mission. (1 Association, 17 Churches, 2,292 members) (Regional)

Eastern Shan State Shan Baptist Convention. (4 Associations, 70 Churches, 8,500 members.) (Regional)

Northern Shan State Baptist Conference. (6 Association, 157 Churches, 15,320 members) (Regional)

Rakhine Baptist Churches Union. (1 Association, 25 Churches, 4,500 members) (Racial)

Lisu Baptist Convention. (4 Associations, 110 Churches, 17,482 members) (Racial)

Naga Baptist Convention (3 Associations, 119 Churches, 46,401 members) (Racial)

Immanuel Baptist Church (0 Association, 1 Church, 2,538 members) (Individual)

Judson Church (0 Association, 1 Church, 278 members) (Individual)

Immanuel Baptist Church and Judson Church have special privilege of becoming voting members of the convention despite a single Church. Burma Baptist Convention now called Myanmar Baptist Convention (MBC) is a member of Myanmar Council of Churches, Asian Baptist Federation, Christian Conference of Asia, American Baptist Churches in USA, World Baptist Alliance, and World Council of Churches. Shan Baptist Churches are members of MBC through regional conventions. There's no Shan Baptist Convention representing all Shan Churches as a member of Baptist Convention.

### **Shan Churches in Burma (1954) by E.E. Sowards<sup>3</sup>**

Mr. E.E. Sowards reported about the Shan Churches in 1954,

“The Burma Baptist Convention office in Rangoon is a long way, remote from work in the Shan State and it would help the work considerably to have strong local organizations (in Shan States) to assume responsibilities and to plan more wisely the forward steps necessary for the advancement of the work. In Burma Proper the organization has tended to be along racial lines, with the Karen Baptist Convention, the Pwo Karen Baptist Conference, the Burma Baptist Churches Union, the Kachin Baptist Convention and the Zomi (Chin Hills) Baptist Convention as outstanding examples. This kind of organization has probably tended to promote the progress of the evangelization of the different racial groups by their own people but especially since independence it has given rise to the Church that mission work is divisive rather than unified.”

“The Shan State has so many varied racial groups occupying the same territory that it would seem highly inadvisable for the mission to promote the organization of racial conventions. In Northern Shan State the KutKai Kachin Baptist Association is already organized along racial lines but maintains very cordial relations with the Shan and other Christians. The ShweLi Valley Shan Baptist Mission is ministering also to Chinese and Palong and is on very good terms of cooperation with the Kachin Baptists. In the South the Southern Shan State Indigenous Home Mission Society is not organized on racial lines but includes several different racial groups residing in the TaungGyi-LoiLem area. In the Eastern Shan State there seems to be very good cooperation between Shan, Lahu, Wa, Ahka and Chinese Baptists. Therefore, I recommend that we follow the example of the Southern Shan State Association and organize a new convention based not on racial but on geographical principles, with all the Baptists residing in the area of the Shan State as potential members of a new Shan State Baptist Convention. TaungGyi, the administrative and communication center of the Shan State would seem to be theological location for the administrative office of the Convention. The Director of Evangelism for the Shan State, when appointed, can do a great deal toward laying the groundwork for establishing the Shan State Baptist Convention.”

“A complication arises in the fact that a good many of the Baptist Churches in the Shan State are already in a racial Convention. The strongest group is the KutKai Kachin Baptist Association, which is the largest group of the four Kachin Associations making up the Kachin Baptist Convention. The Kachin Bible Training School at KutKai serves the whole Kachin Convention territory. If a Shan State Baptist Convention were formed, I would not recommend that the KutKai Association withdraw from the Kachin Convention but that they maintain all the ties with the Kachin Convention, which they now have. However, I see no reason why the KutKai Kachin Baptist Association could not at the same time maintain close ties of fellowship with the Shan State Baptist Convention, just as many Churches in the United States maintain cordial relations with both the American and Southern Baptist Conventions. Several Churches in the Shan State are members of the Burma Baptist Churches Union, or perhaps some other group such as the Upper Burma Karen Baptist Association. The same principle could apply to these Churches and they should be able to cooperate in many ways with the new Shan State Baptist Convention without weakening their loyalty to the other group of which they are now members. It would seem that a strong Shan State Baptist Convention

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<sup>3</sup> A Study of Baptist Work in the Shan States By E.E. Sowards, 1954, published by Burma Baptist Mission, Rangoon, 1954

should be able to promote the progress of such smaller groups as the Ahka, Palong, Lisu and other groups in which the Christian community is not yet large enough to have strong local organizations.”

Mr. Sowards was advocating in formation of regional conventions in Shan States rather than racial convention. But the racial conventions are already in place and they are not willing to dissolve their racial conventions and form regional conventions. However there are regional conventions formed in Shan States and Shan Churches are put under these conventions.

### **Formation of Shan Baptist Convention**

Most of the Shan Churches are Baptist. In 1977 all Shan Churches in the Eastern Shan State are members of Eastern Shan State Baptist Convention, all Shan Churches in the Northern Shan State are either members of Northern Shan State Baptist Convention or ShweLi Valley Shan Baptist Mission and all Shan Churches in the Southern Shan State are members of Southern Shan State Home Mission Society, which all are regional conventions with multiracial groups. There is no “Shan Baptist Convention” to represent all Shan Churches in Shan States. When saying Shan Churches, I mean Shan Churches who use Shan language in their worship services. ShweLi Valley Shan Baptist Mission cannot be called Association of Shan Churches because it does not represent all the Shan Churches from all Shan States. More over the members of ShweLi Valley Shan Baptist Mission is comprised of mixed racial groups such as Shan, Palong and Chinese Churches from Northern Shan State. Newly formed Eastern Shan State Shan Baptist Convention in 1997 is also not representing all Shan Churches from Shan States. It only represents some Shan Churches and Wa Churches from Eastern Shan State.

### **Initiation**

The formation of “Shan Churches Association” representing Shan Churches in Shan States is not a new idea. It was in fact tried and done in HsiPaw by American Baptist Missionaries. Shan Churches were first planted in Northern Shan State in 1889, Southern Shan State in 1892 and Eastern Shan State in 1901. In the year 1977 there were about fifty Shan Church scattered all over three Shan States (Northern, Southern, Eastern). They have no formal communication, relationship, cooperation, meeting, talking, discussing and working together. They live hundreds of miles away from one another. They function under regional conventions, which set up their own regional boundaries, rules, regulations and restrictions. Small groups of Shan Churches in the east, south and north are very weak in many aspects. Indeed they need to see one another, know each other, fellowship with one another and work together since unity is strength.

Shan have their own unique culture, language, literature and religious back ground which are completely different from other tribal groups. Other tribal missionaries and evangelists may not be very successful in reaching the Shan with gospel of Jesus because of their different cultural background. The most evangelized tribal groups such as Chin, Kachin, Lisu, Lahu, Wa and Ahka are animist in their backgrounds but Shan are Buddhist almost two thousand years. Buddhist Shan use to say that Christianity is a religion of Kachin or Lahu because most of Kachin and Lahu in Shan States are Christians. What will happen if Shan evangelize the Shan? We need to get all Shan Churches from all over Shan States together and form an organization called “Shan Baptist Convention”, since almost all Shan Churches are Baptist, to work together to reach our own people. Since Shan Baptist Churches are under BBC it requires permission from BBC to form a convention.

Jesus wants us to be united. John 17:11 “I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name--the name you gave me--so that they may be one as we are one.” Paul wants us to be united. 1 Cor 1:10 “I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.”

### Beginning

In the year 1977, Saya Sai Nyunt Tha (General Secretary of ShweLi Valley Shan Baptist Mission), Saya Maung Su (pastor of LaShio Shan Baptist Church) and I met at my home in LaShio and discussed about Shan Churches and mission works among the Shan. We all had the same view and opinion that Shan mission works were not very successful like other racial groups in one hundred years. All the Shan Churches should unite and work together to establish the “Kingdom of God among the Shan.” The first step was to get all Shan Churches from the Eastern, Southern and Northern Shan State together and form “Shan Baptist Convention.” We should have a convention that can represent all Shan Churches in one voice, one mind and one spirit. People groups such as Bamar, Kachin, Karen, Chin, Lahu, Lisu, Naga, Rakine, Mon, Ahka are united and forming their own convention and working among their own people effectively. Most of the members of BBC are racial conventions representing their own races. Shan also need one.

### First Effort

As the first step we organized a meeting on December 23, 1977 in MuSe at Daw Martha’s home and discussed about formation of “Shan Baptist Convention.” The meeting was attended by some Churches’ leaders from the Northern Shan State. All participants agreed to work toward the formation of “Northern Shan State Shan Baptist Convention” as the first step and then would proceed to form Shan Baptist Convention with other Shan Churches from the South and East. The decision made at the meeting was submitted to Extra-ordinary General Meeting of ShweLi Valley Shan Baptist Mission on February 18, 1978. At the meeting it was agreed and decided to form “Shan Baptist Convention” instead of “Northern Shan State Shan Baptist Convention.”



Nyunt Tha, Zau Yaw, Kham Kya, Myint Lay, Stephen  
1979 meeting

In 1978 Sai Nyunt Tha and representatives of Shan Churches in Northern Shan State put forward the request to BBC for granting permission to form “Shan Baptist Convention” (SBC). But it was rejected on the reason that “BBC does not encourage formation of convention based on race.” During the meeting the focus was shifted from formation of SBC to “Celebration of Shan Bible Centenary” which was going to be held in 1985. Instead of giving permission to form SBC, ShweLi Valley Baptist Mission was promised BBC’s support in leadership production, opening new mission field and holding Shan Bible Centenary Celebration.

In 1979 December, Sai Nyunt Tha and four representatives from Shan Churches including Chit Pwai, Yee Poi, San Lwin and Ba Yin met with five representatives from BBC including Zau Yaw, Victor San Lone, Clifford Kyaw Dwe, Chit Tin and Du Lum, in LaShio for further talk about “Formation of Shan Baptist Convention.” Again permission was not given. Instead Shan Churches were given assurance of support to hold Shan Bible Centenary in 1985 and financial support of new Shan mission in MuongMyit with Kyat 5,000 per year. Shan Churches’ leaders were asked to forget about the formation of Shan Baptist Convention. Chit Pwai, Chairman of ShweLi Valley Shan Baptist Mission, asked other members to agree with BBC and accept the offer.<sup>4</sup> Was it an exchange or negotiation or compromise?

<sup>4</sup> As interview with Rev. Sai Nyunt Tha on March 3, 2003. ThaCheLeik

### Second Effort

In 1980, Sai Stephen, leader from Eastern Shan State Shan Churches and Sai Nyunt Tha, leader



**Sai Philip, Sai Stephen, Sai Nyunt Tha  
1981 meeting**

of Northern Shan State Shan Churches, met and talked about SBC formation and both agreed to begin to organize Shan Churches again in the East and the North to be united to form Shan Baptist Convention. In 1981, Sai Stephen and Sai Philip, leaders from Eastern Shan State, went to the North and held a meeting with Sai Nyunt Tha and the leaders of Shan Churches in MuSe. They all agreed to work for formation of Shan Baptist Convention.

In 1983, Sai Stephen came to Hong Kong with a delegation from BBC to attend Baptist World Alliance Convention. He stayed at my home and held discussion with me about Shan missions. Both of us agreed to the following points;

1. Shan Churches should unite and form Shan Baptist Convention for future Shan missions.
2. Getting permission from Burma Baptist Convention is important but not compulsory. We have freedom to form our own convention. It is considered to be a blessing if we can form our convention with BBC's agreement.
3. If BBC persistently refuses to give us permission Shan Churches should go ahead and form Shan Baptist Convention and later apply to be a member of Burma Baptist Convention.
4. If BBC refuses to accept us as their member we can apply to become a member of Burma Council of Churches.
5. Shan Baptist Convention can directly apply to Asia Baptist Alliance for membership and join World Baptist Council.

After Stephen returned to Burma they held a meeting on April 30, 1983 in DaKuan, Eastern Shan State. All Shan Churches' leaders from Eastern Shan State agreed to form Shan Baptist Convention. In February 1984 Sai Myint Lay was sent to Hong Kong by BBC to study on drug addict rehabilitation program. He stayed at my home for a month and held discussion with me. I advised him that it was our opportunity to show our unity, desire and decision to form Shan Baptist Convention at our Shan Bible Centenary Celebration, which was going to be held in December 1985. If BBC again refuses to allow us to form Shan Baptist Convention all Shan Churches should unite and form Shan Baptist Convention and declared it in the Shan Bible Centenary Celebration.

In 1984, in order to initiate the formation of Shan Baptist Convention, Shan Churches' leaders were encouraged to meet and discuss about it again. I offered 7,000 Kyat to cover their expenses for travel and meetings to be held in TaungGyi, Southern Shan State and second meeting in LaShio, Northern Shan State.



**Sai Stephen and Sai Htwe Maung meeting in  
Hong Kong in 1983**

From May 7 to 11, 1984, the leaders and the representatives of Shan Churches from three Shan States met in TaungGyi, Southern Shan State, at Htun Myain's home.

In attendances were;

1. Rev. Sai Shwe Htun, NamKham, N.S.S.,
2. Rev. Sai Nyunt Tha, NamKham, N.S.S.,
3. Saya Sai Thein Aung Kham, NamKham, N.S.S.,
4. Saya Sai Po Maung, NamKham, N.S.S.,
5. Kyaw Win, LaShio, N.S.S.,
6. Kyaw Hla, LaShio, N.S.S.,
7. Pa Ping, TaungGyi, S.S.S.,
8. Nang Hsaw, TaungGyi, S.S.S.,
9. Htun Myint, TaungGyi, S.S.S.,
10. Rev. Kyaw Myint, TaungGyi, S.S.S.,
11. Daw Khin Lay, TaungGyi, S.S.S.,
12. Daw Mary Kyan, TaungGyi, S.S.S.,
13. Sai Ba Maung, TaungGyi, S.S.S.,
14. Nang Hnoom Hsam, KengTung, E.S.S.,
15. Nang Daw Kar, KengTung, E.S.S.,
16. Daw Nang Hnoi, KengTung, E.S.S.,
17. Nang Zaun, KengTung, E.S.S.,
18. Nang Nar Mee, KengTung, E.S.S.,
19. Saya Sai Myint Lay, KengTung, E.S.S.,
20. Sayama Nang Hsaw, KengTung, E.S.S.,

Regretfully, from that meeting, no decision was made but the “working committee for the formation of the Shan Baptist Convention” was formed.

The members of the working committee were;

Chairman; Kyaw Hla,  
 Vice-Chairman; Rev. Sai Tip,  
 Secretary; Sai Myint Lay,  
 Vice-Secretary; Sai Thein Aung Kham,  
 Treasurer; Kyaw Win,  
 Auditors; Sai Philip, Sai Po Maung,

Committee Members; Rev. Sai Nyunt Tha, Rev. Sai Shwe Htun, Sai Ba Yin, Sai Saw Than, Ba Lwin, Daw Martha, Rev. Kyaw Myint, Rev. Sai Stephen, Sai Hsai.



Committee meeting at U Kyaw Hla's home, LaShio in 1984

Second meeting was held in LaShio, Northern Shan State, from September 6 to 8, 1984 at U Kyaw Hla's home.

In attendances were;

1. Kyaw Hla, 2. Rev. Ya Kuk, 3. Rev. Nyunt Tha, 4. Po Maung, 5. Kyaw Win, 6. Thein Aung Kham, 7. Ba Yin, 8. Myint Lay.

They all agreed to put forward the request with a draft constitution to BBC at 111<sup>th</sup> BBC Annual General Meeting, which would be held in NamKham in December 1985.

On December 26, 1985 another meeting was held in NamKham.

In attendant were;

1. Kyaw Hla, 2. Rev. Sai Tip, 3. Myint Lay, 4.



Thein Aung Kham, 5. Kyaw Win, 6. Po Maung, 7. Rev. Shwe Maung, 8. Rev. Stephen, 9. Rev. Nyunt Tha, 10. Daw Martha, 11. Ba Lwin,

Formation of Shan Baptist Convention was not successful as it had been planned because BBC again refused to give permission. Shan Churches' leaders dare not to form convention without BBC permission. They continued to form "SBC working committee for 1986-1988"

The members of the working committee were;

Chairman;	Rev. Sai Tip,
Vice-Chairman;	Kyaw Hla,
2nd Vice-Chairman;	Willy,
General Secretary;	Myint Lay,
Associate Secretary;	Rev. Nyunt Tha,
Vice-Secretary;	Saya Hsai,
Treasurer;	Dr. Myo Min, & Kyaw Win,
Auditor;	Thein Aung Kham & Philip,
Exec. members;	Rev. Shwe Htun, Rev. Khin Maung, Rev. Stephen, Rev. Aung Htun Shwe, David Hsam.

### **New Direction or diversion**

In 1987, secretary of SBC Working Committee, Sai Myint Lay had accepted the post of full-time "General Secretary of Eastern Shan State Baptist Convention" (ESSBC), which was a multiracial-regional convention in Eastern Shan State. It had a big conflict of interest with the formation of "Shan Baptist Convention" because ESSBC might lose its memberships from Shan Churches if they join SBC when it's formed. He was in fact holding two full-time secretary posts, which had conflict of interest. How could he fight for the formation of "Shan Baptist Convention" as a secretary of Eastern Shan State Baptist Convention? He then changed the name from "Working Committee for the Formation of Shan Baptist Convention" to "Burma Shan Baptist Mission." The effort of forming Shan Baptist Convention had disappeared. Many Shan Churches' leaders expressed surprise, disagreement and disappointment for changing the name and objective. The idea of forming "Burma Shan Baptist Mission" was, as explained by Sai Myint Lay, that since SBC could not be formed because of BBC's refusal, the Shan Churches could work together under the name of "Burma Shan Baptist Mission" instead of "Shan Baptist Convention."

In 1988 the meeting between Shan Churches' leaders held at Methodist Church in Rangoon during the All Burma Pastoral Conference, all Shan Churches' leaders agreed to try again to form SBC. But when Rev. Shwe Htun, General Secretary of ShweLi Valley Shan Baptist Mission, returned to ShweLi, he wrote a letter to Sai Myint Lay, circulating to BBC and all Baptist Conventions in Burma. The original letter (translated from Burmese)

To.

Saya Sai Myint Lay  
 General Secretary, Burma Shan Baptist Mission, NaungPha, KengTung.  
 Dated 1988 May 10.  
 Subject: Decision made by ShweLi Shan Baptist Mission  
 Letter # 29/Ahpaka/5-Naka/88

Co-workers,

Concerning the above matter, ShweLi Shan Baptist Mission Executive Committee met on April 23, 1988 and made the following decision.

"Burma Shan Baptist Mission" has been formed for years but nothing has been achieved. There will be only a waste of time and money if BSBM continue the work.

ShweLi Valley Shan Baptist Mission has been contacting directly with Myanmar Baptist Convention as a representative of all Shan Baptist Churches.<sup>5</sup> Therefore if you want to do Shan Baptist Mission Work you must do it as ShweLi Shan Baptist Mission's work under ShweLi so that it can be legal.

Therefore if you want to do the work as ShweLi Valley Shan Baptist's works or 21<sup>st</sup> Century Shan Mission's work, they must come under the name of ShweLi Shan Baptist Mission. Otherwise Myanmar Baptist Convention and other Racial and Regional Conventions will not recognize it and will not help and the work will not be successful. Starting from April 23, 1988, ShweLi Valley Shan Baptist Mission withdraws from membership of Burma Shan Baptist Mission and stop contributing financially.

In His Service,

Signed/ Rev. Shwe Htun,

General Secretary, ShweLi Shan Baptist Mission

C.c. to General Secretary, Myanmar Baptist Convention, Rangoon.

General Secretary, All Racial and Regional Conventions, Burma.

All members of SBM.

Rev. Sai Nyunt Tha lamented, "This letter has betrayed us. It is very shameful. ShweLi is not representing all Shan Churches. How can all Shan mission works come under ShweLi? Why do they want to be the boss of all? Why are they so selfish? Why did they send this letter to BBC and all conventions in the whole country? What is the motive?"<sup>6</sup>

### Third Effort

Many Shan Churches' leaders from all Shan States were gathering in MuSe Shan Baptist Church during the "ShweLi Valley Shan Baptist Mission Centenary Celebration" in the evening of December 24, 1993. Church leaders from ShweLi Valley Shan Baptist Mission, Eastern Shan State Baptist Convention, Southern Shan State Home Mission Association, Shan Churches from Northern Shan State and other Shan Churches' leaders attended the meeting. In the meeting Rev. Sai Nyunt Tha and I gave detailed history of the beginning of our vision and our effort in forming Shan Baptist Convention since 1978.



Meeting at MuSe Shan Baptist Church on December 24, 1993

Two important decisions were made unanimously at the meeting.

1. All agreed to revitalize our vision of forming SBC. All agreed to form "Preparatory Working Committee" for the formation of Shan Baptist Convention. The members of the working committee

<sup>5</sup> ShweLi Shan Baptist Mission is representing only a few Shan Churches from the North, Palong and Chinese Churches.

<sup>6</sup> As interviewed with Rev. Sai Nyunt Tha on March 13, 2003, ThaCheLeik.

were Dr. Sai Htwe Maung, Rev. Sai Nyunt Tha, Saya Sai Myint Lay, Rev. Sai Philip, Rev. Sai Htun Kyaw, Rev. Sai Maung Kaing and Saya Sai Htun Myat. Saya Sai Htun Myat was appointed convener for the future meeting.

2. General Secretary of Southern Shan State Home Mission Society clarified that the land in TaungGyi, which was given to Shan Mission by Southern Shan State Home Mission when they shared the land to various ethnic groups, was not given to ShweLi Valley Shan Baptist Mission. It was given to all Shan Churches. But at the time of receiving the land there was no Shan Mission Organization representing all Shan Churches to receive the land officially and legally. On behalf of all Shan Churches ShweLi Valley Shan Baptist Mission was asked to receive the land. ShweLi Valley Shan Baptist Mission had paid Kyat 50,000 to Southern Shan Home Mission for receiving the land. It was agreed that ShweLi Valley Shan Baptist Mission would give the land back to Shan Mission if Shan Mission gives Kyat 50,000 back to ShweLi Valley Shan Baptist Mission. A Christian brother from Thailand agreed to pay the money back to ShweLi on behalf of Shan Mission so that the land would belong to all the Shan Churches and will be used in building TaungGyi Shan Baptist Church.

In 1994, Sai Htun Myat, convener of the meeting, called for the meeting of the working committee. But ShweLi Valley Shan Baptist Mission withdrew from participating. They did not allow any one from ShweLi to attend the meeting. Rev. Sai Maung Kaing, a member of the committee, was told that if he went to the meeting he would be taken disciplinary action and would be dismissed from ShweLi Valley Shan Baptist Mission. Sai Maung Kaing came to the meeting just to inform the committee that ShweLi had withdrawn from participation in formation of Shan Baptist Mission. Because of withdrawal of ShweLi it was meaningless to form Shan Baptist Convention. The working committee was then dissolved. When a Christian brother from Thailand tried to send money to ShweLi for the transfer of land to Shan Churches, ShweLi Valley Shan Baptist Mission refused to accept the money and refused to give the land back to Shan Churches. However in the year 1996 TaungGyi Shan Baptist Church had negotiated with ShweLi and paid them large amount of money and took possessing of the land. Until today “Shan Baptist Convention” is still up in the air.

If it is God’s will, who can stop us?

I believe that one day, we will see Shan Churches come together in unity to build the Kingdom of God among our Shan people in our Shanland, one day.

1 Sam 14:6-7 “Perhaps the Lord will act in our behalf. Nothing can hinder the Lord from saving, whether by many or by few. Do all that you have in mind”