

2006-2007 Activities

Program- I

Program: BONHOEFFER CENTENARY SYMPOSIUM.

Venue and Date: Thra Mooler Hall, Diamond Jubilee Building, MIT, Yangon on February 4, 2006 (Saturday) Bonhoeffer's Birthday.

Concept of the Symposium

The year 2006 will mark the centenary birth day of Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906- 1945) whose immense contribution to theological field will be perpetual. Bonhoeffer hailed from Germany and had experienced the worst turbulent history of Germany which shook the world so tremendously with the holocaust during the Nazi regime. The churches in Germany were split in two groups, those who supported Hitler as Reich Church (German Church) and others who opposed Hitler with his tyrant and killing policy as Confessing Church. Bonhoeffer had tried his level best go stop and eradicate Nazism and established an underground Seminary to train leaders to encounter this bloody situation. He did not just profess theology but he lived and practiced what he professed even until it cost his life. He was lastly assassinated by the SS at Flossenburg in Bavaria on 9 April 1945. Amidst his unrest and frightening situation Bonhoeffer has authored so many books which are constantly relevant and thought provoking. His writings are still regarded as theological references and many academia are doing research on his theology for their doctoral study. Time has now gone hundred years but his thoughts and theologies are still living and vehemently speaking to the churches in their socio-political turmoils. At the centenary of Bonhoeffer, it will be worthwhile to have a symposium in Myanmar with the following schemes.

Aims and Purpose

1. To study the thoughts and theology of Bonhoeffer so that his theologies and spirit will be revived in the budding theologians of Myanmar.
2. To learn Bonhoeffer's theology of Church- State Relationship and make a necessary adjustment for the particular situation of Myanmar. To pursue the relevance of Bonhoeffer for the Christians in Myanmar today.
3. To exhibit Bonhoeffer's Work (books) as many as available.
4. To challenge the students of theology with Bonhoeffer's theological concerns: Christology, Church and State, The Church for the World, Ethics, Salvation — not Cheap Grace, Discipleship, Church and Society and Brief biography of Bonhoeffer

Resource Persons

Opening & Keynote Address: "Let Bonhoeffer Speak to our Time and Situation"

Dr. Samuel Ngun Ling

Commemoration of the Holocaust

Ms. Ruth Schatz

The Relation Between Church & State: 20th Century Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Dr. Hlaing Bwa

The Significance of Bonhoeffer' in Doing Theology:

Dr.Simon Pau Khan En

The Challenge of the Cross:

Rev. Edmund Za Bik

Documentary Exhibition on Bonhoeffer: Dr. Maung Maung Yin
Closing Worship Dr. Mary Dun, Prof. Edmund Za Bik

Participants

More than 150 participants including students and faculty members from Seminaries, churches, organizations, and some publishing media in Yangon attended.

Program – II

Program: A Joint-Consultation of the Mekong Mission Forum of the Lutheran Theological Seminary, Hong Kong and the Judson Research Center of the Myanmar Institute of Theology on “Mission and Interfaith Dialogue in Mekong Regions”

Venue and Date: Yuzana Hotel, Yangon, Myanmar on June 8-10, 2006.

Theme: Mission and Dialogue Encountering 21st century Asia in Mekong Regions: Problems, Methods and Perspectives

Concept of the Consultation

Since missionaries’ period, the Christian mission in Myanmar has been suspect as a tool of the Christian western colonialists and also as the modern channel of the big nations’ political and cultural dominance into the country. This suspicion continues to exist until today in the minds of Myanmar religious and political leaders under current military regime. Christian mission is therefore never understood by majority Burmans as God’s mission of pure love, peace and justice. It is still unthinkable for majority Burmese people to see the Christian mission and Christianity as driving and transforming forces of civil society. Hence, the works of Christian mission among majority Buddhists have always encountered with aggressive reactions first of all from the Buddhist monks, and secondly from local authorities, the majority of whom are Buddhist. These reactions often resulted in imposition of religious restrictions over the activities, programs and physical plants of the Christian churches, leaving behind some churches in urban areas without buildings and proper gathering places for worship. Local Christian missionaries have also often confronted with religious restrictions, tortures, and various kinds of exploitations. In this context, it is important for Christians to re-evaluate what has been and is wrong with Christian mission. This mission conference will discuss the problems, methods and paradigms of the Christian mission as a whole that have been used for more than a century and suggest new perspectives for future mission in 21st century Myanmar. In a pluralistic, multi-faith context, mission needs to be understood as dialogue and mutual acceptance as well. Doing mission therefore needs to be reevaluated and restructured according to these paradigms. The outcome of this conference, conference papers, comments, discussions, and declarations will be published and be used as educational resources for studies of the Christian mission, missiology, mission history, gospel and culture, and ecumenism in the Bible schools and seminaries in 21st century Myanmar.

Resource Persons:

Bible Study: *Dialogue in Biblical Context* - Rev. James Ngun Hleia
Keynote Address: *‘Mission and Dialogue’* - Dr. Hlaing Bwa (MIT, Myanmar)
Input – I: *Dialogue as a Style of Living: Lessons from the Life of Adoniram Judson* - Dr. Cung Lian Hup (MIT, Myanmar)
Input-II: *Dialogue as Mission: A Responsible Pluralistic Theology* – Dr. Yuen, Wai Mann (LTS, Hong Kong)

Input-III: *A New Perspective on Interreligious Dialogue* – Dr. Kin Ming Au
(LTS, Hong Kong)

Participants: 33 participants attended the seminar. Out of these, 20 from ATEM member schools, 4 from Organizations such as MBC and MCC, 3 from Cambodia and Laos, 3 from Hong Kong and staff of JRC and Mekong Mission Forum.

Program – IV

Program: Multi-dialogue on “Spirit Beliefs in World Religions.”

Venue and Date: Thra Mooler Conference Hall, Diamond Jubilee Building, Myanmar Institute of Theology, Seminary Hill, Insein. August 25-26, 2006.

Concept of the Seminar:

To the surprises of some research scholars who studied Burmese religions, the primal religious element, Nat (spirit) Worship is so deeply rooted in the minds and lives both of the ethnic Christians and of the Burman Buddhists. As Christianity of the minority ethnic Christians in Myanmar is thinly veneered on Nat (spirit) belief so is Buddhism deeply veneered on the Nat (spirit) beliefs of the ethnically Burman Buddhists. There are numerous Nat shrines built inside golden Shwedagon pagoda in Yangon, the largest Buddhist pagoda in the world, and much more Nat shrines in many other Buddhist pagodas in Myanmar. In a typical Burman Buddhist house, there is a Nat shrine side by side with the Buddha’s shrine. Worship of the household Nat called *Eindwin Nat*, by hanging in a corner of the house a coconut fruit tied with a red ribbon, was and still is very common practice among the typical Burman Buddhist families. Many Buddhist drivers stopped their vehicles at the foot of some Trees enshrined to local Nats to adore or appease the Nats for safety in their journey. These are only a few to mention. The potential existence of such numerous Nat shrines and practices of Nat worship in Myanmar therefore calls for rethinking of the whole pattern of Christian theology in a new way, and at the same time, challenges the Christians to address various doctrinal and socio-cultural issues that arose out of their encounters with this belief. This seminar is therefore aimed at to promote theological explorations in the studies of the problems and issues of primal religious beliefs particularly Nat Worship in Burmese Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Judaism and Animism. The seminar will focus mainly on interactions of the major religions’ beliefs and primal religious beliefs (Nat Worship) in transforming and building a better interfaith communities in Myanmar.

Resource Persons:

- Input - I : *Spirit Beliefs in Biblical World* – Sara M. La Rip
- Input - II: *Spirit Belief in Buddhism* – U Maung Maung Aye
- Input – III: *Theological Reflection on Spirit Belief* – Dr. Simon Pau Khan En
- Input - IV: *Spirit Beliefs in Islam* - Alhaj U Aye Lwin from Islam
- Input - V: *Spirit Belief in Hinduism* – Dr. Hla Tun from Hinduism

Participants

37 participants attended the seminar. 5 representatives from each religious group, 5 theology faculties from ATEM member schools, 1 from Alin Ein Media, and other interested individuals and church leaders from local churches.

Program – V

Program: *A Special Lecture on Buddhism*

Venue and Duration: Thra Mooler Conference Hall, Diamond Jubilee Building, Myanmar Institute of Theology, Seminary Hill, Insein on **November 4, 2006** (Saturday).

Lecture theme: The Buddhist Concept of *Anatta*

Concept of the Lecture:

The primary aim of this lecture is to give theological students a general knowledge about essential themes of Theravada Buddhist belief and to enable them to make a critical theological reflection on Buddhist teachings in relevance to their Christian faith and practice.

Methodology: A special Buddhist scholar will be invited to give the lecture. Discussions, reflections, and cross-questions will be an essential part of the lecture.

Resource Person:

Lecturer: Prof. Sao Tun Hmat Win:

Theme: *The Buddhist Concept of Anatta*

Program Facilitator: U Aung Khin

Participants: Between 50 and 60 students from MIT and other theological schools based in Yangon are expected to attend the lecture.

Estimated Budget:

Program - VI

Program: RESEARCH SCHOLAR PROGRAM (RSP)

Call for

The Judson Research Center of the Myanmar Institute of Theology calls for applications from all the MIT Alumni/nae for a one year research scholar program in MIT with effect from 2005-2006 academic year on the following terms and conditions.

Focus of the Research

Scholars who plan to apply for this scholarship program must focus their research and writings in the following areas and fields of academic interest: (i) Contextual Theologies; (ii) Cultures and Religions; (iii) Theology and Current Issues (Poverty, Child Abuse, Human Trafficking, Human Rights, etc); (iv) Church and Society; (v) Interfaith Dialogue; (vi) Feminist Theology/Gender Issues/Liberation Theology; (vii) Environmental/Ecological Issues; (viii) Violence and Peace; (ix) Myanmar Church History; (x) Pastoral theology/Counseling.

Duration

Period of research works (reading and collecting) will take about six months after which the scholar will need to start writing his or her proposed book project for the remaining four months. The research scholar will be fully in compliance with MIT's school calendar and rules/regulations for the proceedings of his or her research works.

Scholarship and Mentors

Free room and board will be provided on MIT campus by the Judson Research Center to each selected scholar during their research period. No scholar is allowed to bring their family. Each scholar will be assigned a mentor and scholars needing advice and help may consult their mentor after fixing an appointment. Mentors are not tutors, they will be available only for consultation and advice, but not to oversee the work of the scholars. If special help is needed including English/Burmese language problems, the mentors will arrange for available resource. The staff of the Judson Research Center will also coordinate in assisting them in their need of library resources.

How to apply

Scholars of MIT alumni/nae who expect to avail themselves of this opportunity should submit by the end of March, 2006 their research proposals, curriculum vitae, a recommendation from their church pastor or institutional head to:

Dr. Samuel Ngun Ling
Director, Judson Research Center
Myanmar Institute of Theology
Seminary Hill, Insein 11011
Yangon, Myanmar.

Research proposals should show clearly how your fields of study relate to the focus and academic interests of this research scholarship program. The administrative committee of the Judson Research Center will make the final selection of the applicants and selected scholars will be noticed.