

Ba Hla Thein (1935–2016)

By Paul Tanbaunaw

Ba Hla Thein was an Adventist administrator and pastor from Myanmar.

Early Life, Education, and Marriage

Ba Hla Thein was born on January 25, 1935, in Zayatsu, a village in Kyung Pyaw Township, Ayeyarwady Region, Myanmar.¹ His parents, Mahn Bo Yin and Ga Thinn Zan, belonged to the animist-practicing Buddhist Pwo Karen tribe. Ba Hla Thein was the youngest of five siblings. His father passed away soon after his birth. When his mother remarried, two more siblings were added to the family. Despite his mother's remarriage, Ba Hla Thein always referred to himself as a widow's son, a status that influenced his work with orphans in his later years.²

Believing that the parent of a monk would have automatic entitlement to Nirvana, Ba Hla Thein's mother cherished the idea of her son becoming a Buddhist monk.³ His maternal grandfather was a witch doctor, and Ba Hla Thein appeared to be destined for the same vocation when he enrolled at a Seventh-day Adventist school in his home village. Here he converted to Christianity and was baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist in July of 1947.⁴ After completing fifth grade at Zayatsu Church School, Ba Hla Thein attended the Myaungmya Seventh-day Adventist Mission High School from 1950-1956,⁵ where he passed the Division High School Examination.⁶ Lacking consent and financial support from home, he worked at the school year-round to pay his tuition and board.⁷

After high school, Ba Hla Thein worked as a clerk in Yangon

Adventist Hospital for one year (1955-1956) before attending Spicer Memorial College in India.⁸ He graduated with a Bachelor of Business Administration degree in 1962.⁹ While a student, on the recommendation of an elder from Myanmar, Ba Hla Thein was given work in the business office of the college—a rare privilege for a freshman. This privilege, however, created jealousy among some of the senior students who worked in the same office. Stressed by harassment from his coworkers and suffering a gastric disorder, Ba Hla Thein became depressed and considered suicide. But he was dissuaded from taking his own life by the belief that it would jeopardize his salvation.¹⁰

As with the attainment of his education, Ba Hla Thein faced financial challenges when he decided to marry Magnolia Thein. After he began working as a colporteur, Ba Hla Thein married Magnolia on October 20, 1964.¹¹ To this union were born three sons and five daughters—Bliss Thein, Susie Thein, Orchid Thein, Elaine Thein, Mackay Thein, Irene Thein, Sharon Thein, and Macket Thein.¹²

Career and Ministry

From 1962 to 1964, Ba Hla Thein was employed as an accountant by the Myanmar Union of Seventh-day Adventists.¹³ He transferred to the Upper Myanmar Mission at Brightlands, Pyin Oo Lwin in 1965 where he served as secretary-treasurer.¹⁴ After serving two three-year terms as secretary-treasurer, Ba Hla Thein was called to the Central Myanmar Mission.¹⁵ In 1973 he returned to the Myanmar Union office where he served as union treasurer for 15 years.¹⁶ Following his ordination in 1977, Ba Hla Thein¹⁷ became the union secretary for three years. He was elected president of Myanmar Union in 1991.¹⁸ Ba Hla Thein also served as business manager at Myanmar Union Adventist Seminary

before his retirement on December 31, 1998.¹⁹

Later life

In retirement, Ba Hla established Love Villa, ICC Myanmar in collaboration with Don and Marilyn Beveridge of Australia and International Child Care (ICC).²⁰ He worked as an ICC supervisor for more than a decade. Working with administrators from Ayeyarwady Adventist Seminary, Ba Hla Thein also established Happy Kids Sponsorship to provide financial assistance for underprivileged students.²¹

After being bedridden for a few months, Ba Hla Thein died on October 20, 2016 at his Myaungmya residence.²²

Notes

1. "Ba Hla Thein," Employee Service Record, Myanmar Union of Seventh-day Adventists.↵
2. Mervin Myat Kyaw, *The Legacy of Eric B. Hare and Tribute to Wonderful Missionaries*, 203-224; McKay Thein, interview by author, Myaungmya, Ayeyarwaddy Region, March 15, 2018.↵
3. Sharon Thein, interview by author, Myaungmya, Ayeyarwaddy Region, March 15, 2018.↵
4. Kyaw, 204.↵
5. Ibid.↵
6. Ibid.↵
7. Ibid., 204, 205.↵
8. Susie Thein, interview by author, Maungmya, Ayeyarwaddy Region, March 19, 2018.↵
9. Kyaw, 205.↵
10. McKay Thein, interview by author, Myaungmya, Ayeyarwaddy Region, March 15, 2018.↵
11. *Burma Union Committee Minutes*, Myanmar Union Mission of Seventh-day Adventists (1964), 64.↵

12. "Ba Hla Thein," Employee Service Record, Myanmar Union of Seventh-day Adventists.↵
13. *Burma Union Committee Minutes*, Myanmar Union Mission of Seventh-day Adventists (1962), 14.↵
14. *Burma Union Committee Minutes*, Myanmar Union Mission of Seventh-day Adventists (1965), 11.↵
15. *Burma Union Committee Minutes*, Myanmar Union Mission of Seventh-day Adventists (1968), 58.↵
16. *Burma Union Committee Minutes*, Myanmar Union Mission of Seventh-day Adventists (1973), 56; Do Hen Pau, interview by author, Myaungmya, Ayeyarwaddy Region, March 17, 2018.↵
17. *Burma Union Committee Minutes*, Myanmar Union Mission of Seventh-day Adventists (1976), 56.↵
18. "Ba Hla Thein," Employee Service Record, Myanmar Union of Seventh-day Adventists.↵
19. *Burma Union Committee Minutes*, Myanmar Union Mission of Seventh-day Adventists (1997), 33.↵
20. David Kyaw, interview by author, Myaungmya, Ayeyarwaddy Region, March 25, 2018.↵
21. Ibid.↵
22. Ibid.

Sources

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Burma Union Committee Minutes. Myanmar Union Mission of Seventh-day Adventists, 1997.

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