

Little and Late: Cooperation Made Easy

Two Canadian Missions in China

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The Canadian churches were late entries to overseas missions. John Geddie, the first man appointed and supported by a Canadian church left for the South Pacific in 1846. He was followed by missionaries to the West Indies, India, China and Korea. In every case the newcomers deliberately sought the cooperation and guidance of existing missions. In Geddie's case it was the LMS. John Morton, the pioneer in Trinidad presented his certificates to an existing Free Church presbytery in Port of Spain, and remained a member of that Presbytery until his death. George MacKay who went to China in 1872, was shepherded to his field in North Formosa by the English Presbyterians. The field in India, centred on Indore, was chosen after consultation with the American Presbyterians (1876). When Jonathon Goforth arrived in China in 1888, the first thing he did was arrange a meeting with senior missionaries which directed him to North Henan. Until he was finally established in the field he was a kind of guest of the American Presbyterians in Shandong. The American Presbyterians were also crucial in settling the first missionaries to Korea in 1898. Finally, the Canadians opened a second Chinese field in the Pearl River Delta in 1902. After five years of rather complicated negotiations, again with the American Presbyterians, the Canadians finally settled in Kongmoon (Jiamen)

The Methodist experience was different in detail but the same in principle. The Methodists had only two fields, one in Japan and the other in Sechuan, West China.

Virgil Hart, the pioneer of the Sechuan mission started life as a missionary of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States. He first went to China in 1866 and eventually became superintendent of their Central China Mission. In 1887 he went on a tour of Sechuan because the American Methodists were seriously considering opening a mission in that province. Hart was impressed with the place, but malaria sent him home and his missionary career seemed to be over.

Because his wife was Canadian the Harts settled on a fruit farm at Burlington. Just at this point the Canadian Methodist board had on hand three offers for missionary service, two of which expressed a definite interest in China. As it turned out, Hart's minister in Burlington was a member of the Methodist board, and he asked Hart for a field within China. Hart suggested Sechuan, and when the idea was taken up Hart was asked to lead the mission. Hart agreed,

subject to approval by the American Methodists. When the Americans agreed Hart became the leader of a Canadian party to the province he had originally prospected for the Americans.¹

From following the advice of missions already on the field, it was a short step to comity. The Presbyterians in North Henan seem to have worked more or less alone, not by choice but because nobody else was there. The CIM had tried for some ten years to establish a foothold in the area but with very limited success. Hudson Taylor seems to have given the Canadians something of a blessing when he heard of their venture.

We as a mission have sought for ten years to enter the province of Honan from the south and have only just succeeded . . . Brother, if you would enter that Province you must *go forward on your knees*².

With that letter the CIM virtually disappears from the Canadian sources. The Presbyterians seem to have had that part of Henan to themselves³

Similarly, MacKay had a working arrangement with the English Presbyterians, whereby the Canadians were responsible for North Formosa while the English looked after the rest of the island. MacKay's taste for cooperation did not extend to the Catholics. References to competition from priests begin to appear in his journal entries for 1887. On February 3rd, 1888 he identified the priests as Spanish, and then on July 19th he held an event at Oxford College, complete with flags, speeches and fireworks to celebrate the defeat of the Spanish Armada three hundred years earlier.⁴

Relations with the Catholics in South China were somewhat more cordial and cooperative. The Canadians' main inter mission difficulty was with the Americans. The Canadian mission originated from an initiative of Chinese Canadians who had become Christian and wanted the gospel taken to their villages of origin. When W.R.McKay arrived in Macao in 1902 expecting to work in the "Canadian" villages in San Ming district he found them already well served by the American mission. However, the Americans were busy with negotiations which led to the formation of the Union Presbyterian Church of China. McKay joined the conversations and just before the formation of the new church in 1908 he moved to Kong Moon (Jiamen) to take over work in the city and in San Ming.

The Methodists in Szechuan had to work a bit harder. Szechuan is a big place, and in the 1890s there were seven missionary societies at work in the province. In January 1899 a conference was held in Chunking

¹ E.I Hart, *Virgil C. Hart, Missionary Statesman*, Toronto 1917, pages 181-223

² Rosalind Goforth, *Goforth of China*, McLelland and Stewart, Toronto, 1937, page 80

³ At least as far as major Protestant missions were concerned. After 1914 there are scattered references to the Catholics and the Seventh Day Adventists.

⁴ G.L.MacKay's Journal, photo copy in the Presbyterian Archives, Toronto

The chief work of this conference was the division of the province, leaving each mission in possession of the section it then occupied, and adding other sections so as to include most of the province. This, of course, applied only to the country districts. In the large centres like Chengtu, Kiating and Chung-King, where several societies were working, no change was made.⁵

The Methodists were great cooperators. In 1908, shortly after the abolition of the Confucian examinations, they set about, in cooperation with other missions in Sechuan to build a new, western curriculum

the West China missions have, through their Educational Union have established a de facto Christian educational system for west China, K to university entrance, uniform course outline, similar text books and common examinations. The three high schools in Chengtu (Methodist Episcopal, CMM, and Friends) have combined as a pilot project.⁶

They had already, again in cooperation with three other missions,⁷ begun planning for a post secondary institution which eventually became West China University. In 1909, it existed, in embryo, because it had no students. They began work in 1910, with limited staff and library, especially in medicine. Not all the students were fully qualified when they started, and it took nine years to graduate the first MBs, a degree significantly lower than the MD offered at Beijing. Unique to West China was the existence of a dental faculty. It began, in 1908 as a dental practice, in a leaky, mud floored store room but eventually, with new buildings and better equipment, began to train young men for the profession. The first graduation was in 1922.⁸

In Chengdu the Methodists did nothing by halves . The university campus covered over a hundred acres which housed the university, a Union Bible Training School, a Union Normal School and a Union Missionaries' Training School. In addition to medicine, the university gave courses in arts, science and religion.⁹

The Presbyterians were much less enthusiastic about cooperation, perhaps because there was less pressure. Although Shantung Christian University was founded in 1864 the Henan missionaries paid little attention to it until 1917 when William McLure, one of the first doctors to arrive in Henan, joined the medical faculty. The annual report for 1918 gives two others, J.D. Macrae and Jeanette Ratcliffe on the staff. Presbyterian support of the university expanded over the years. In 1921 they supplied two doctors, William McLure and E.B. Struthers and a nurse,

⁵ E.W. Wallace, *The Heart of Sz-chuan*, The Methodist Young Peoples' Forward Movement for Missions, 2nd Edition, Toronto, 1905, Page 28

⁶ *Report of the Methodist Missionary Society*, 1908-1909, page 33

⁷ American Baptists, Methodist Episcopal, and the English Friends , O.L.Kilborn in *Our West China Mission*, Methodist Missionary Society, Toronto, 1920, p 37

⁸ A.W. Lindsay in *Our West China Mission*, pages 405-411

⁹ O.L. Kilborn, in *Our West China Mission*, page 37.

Jeanette Ratcliffe. J.D. MacRae taught theology and Harold Harkness was in the faculty of Arts and Science. In addition Hugh MacKenzie and Violet Baty were at the Tientsin campus¹⁰

The South China mission followed a similar track, although on a much smaller scale. J.D. McKay, the pioneer spent part of 1913 teaching at the Union Presbyterian College in Canton. The mission staff was keen that the church in Canada support the college by contributing to the cost of the new building and by supplying a permanent member of staff. Since the new member of staff never materialized, the mission sent a man off to Toronto for a programme of arts and theology.¹¹ The most permanent contribution of this mission to cooperative work was Florence Langrill who taught at the Union Normal School from 1920 on. The South China Mission was assigned to the United Church of Canada, but Jessie MacBean, by this time the senior woman doctor, voted against union and went to Hackett Medical Centre in Canton, where she worked as a Presbyterian missionary until her retirement in 1935.

This kind of cooperation, looking for help to find a field, comity agreements where necessary and participation in ecumenical institutions is pretty routine stuff, the natural consequence of being a small mission late in the field. The more interesting cooperative work developed as the result of an initiative of a particular individual or individuals.

One of the earliest was the Methodist press in Sechuan. Virgil Hart, the pioneer had felt the need of a press from the beginning. As he said in Toronto some years later

The Chinese are a literary people, and it seems to me that when they read and gather and love books, that there can be no better way of influencing them than through the medium of the printed page.¹²

Accordingly, during his enforced absence in Canada following the riots of 1895 he collected enough money to buy two small presses and a supply of Chinese type. This precious equipment was lovingly shepherded up the rapids and taken to Hart's station in Kiating, where in a small building erected for the purpose, Hart set up his little press, the first to be used in China west of Hankow.

The press turned out to be a godsend. From such small beginnings in 1897 the press grew, if not prodigiously, at least in a very impressive fashion. James Endicott joined Hart in Kiating early on, and began helping out with the press. In 1905 after Hart had retired to Canada, Endicott and the press moved to much larger quarters in Chengtu, where he was soon joined by James Neave, who was a printer by trade. Endicott turned his considerable talents to other things

¹⁰ *Acts and Proceedings of the General Assembly* (subsequently A&P) 1922, page 155.

¹¹ A&P 1923, pp 133-134. His return, if it happened, falls beyond the scope of this study.

¹² E.I. Hart, *Virgil C. Hart, Missionary Statesman*, , page 312

I am still by request of the West China Tract Society, editor of the Sunday School lesson quarterlies published by that society and used by all the Protestant missions in the three western provinces.”¹³

The press continued to prosper. In 1914 it printed 34,470,200 pages in Chinese, Tibetan and Miao, a minority language. It served customers all over West China, including among its principal buyers the American Bible Society and the West China Tract Society. Business fell off during the war, but was back again by 1920. In that year they printed 36,652,276 pages in Chinese alone.¹⁴ By this time they had a contract with the Educational Union, an inter mission agency, to print their text books and syllabi, and were working on a similar agreement with the university¹⁵

By this time the press was housed in an enormous building and employed nearly 100 people. Hart’s initiative, followed up by James Endicott turned into one of the most significant contributions the Canadian Methodists made to the church in China

The West China press paralleled to some extent another Canadian venture in cooperation, Donald MacGillivray’s long tenure at the Christian Literature Society in Shanghai.

MacGillivray was a country boy from south western Ontario with an unusual gift for languages. He graduated from the University of Toronto, with a gold medal, and went off to Brantford where he taught classics long enough to pay off his debts. In 1885 he returned to Toronto to enroll in Knox College, where he became a close friend of Jonathon Goforth. Partly through a visit by Hunter Corbett, the distinguished American Presbyterian in Shandong, the two young men became interested in being missionaries in China, specifically North Henan, which Corbett recommended as a more or less vacant area just west of the American Presbyterians in Shandong . Goforth went off to China in January 1888, but MacGillivray stayed behind until he finished his BD, arriving in China at the end of the year, December 1888.

Henan was a tough nut. The missionaries did not secure a place to live in the province until 1891, and even then they had to be content with small towns like Chu Wang and Hsin Chen. Chu Wang was MacGillivray’s home throughout his first term. It was a busy term, full of the usual hassles of pioneer missionaries, not the least of which was negotiating a property just outside the wall of Changte, (now Anyang) But MacGillivray was an indefatigable worker. In

¹³ James Endicott, *Report of the Methodist Missionary Society, 1904-1905* page xiv. This tantalizing reference is the only one in the easily available sources. Endicott left China in 1910 and went on to a very distinguished career first in the Methodist and then the United Church of Canada. His obituaries are much more interested in his Canadian than his Chinese work. Whether Endicott ever paralleled, even on a smaller scale what MacGillivray was doing in Shanghai at the same time is a question worth pursuing.

¹⁴ *Report of Work, 1920*, page 48. The text also mentions 25,600 gospels for the Bible Society, but it is unclear whether that work is part of the 36,000,000 or not

¹⁵ *Report of Work, 1919*, page 41. The press had already done some work for the university. This appears to be a move to put things on a more permanent basis.

the midst of all his other responsibilities he found time to publish, in 1898, the first edition of his *Mandarin Romanized Dictionary of Chinese*.¹⁶ The book caught Timothy Richard's eye.

Richard was a Welsh Baptist who had come to China in 1870 with the BMS. A turning point in his career came with the famines of the late seventies, which convinced him that western scientific expertise could avoid future such disasters, and that the appropriate missionary strategy was to deal first with the intelligentsia, the scholar gentry and the leaders of reforming religious sects. This position seems to have put him at odds with the BMS and he worked for a while as a free lance missionary, at one point closely associated with the reformers around Kang Yu Wei. In 1891 the Baptists seconded him to the Society for the Diffusion of Christian and General Knowledge among the Chinese, later the Christian Literature Society. Richard was the Secretary of the Society and soon cast covetous eyes on the talented Canadian. MacGillivray was keen, but the Presbytery had to be persuaded to part with him. It couldn't decide, and left the matter to the FMC. Perhaps swayed by a stirring appeal from Richard, FMC approved the transfer and MacGillivray set off for what was to be his life's work.

One would think, from his long association with Richard, that MacGillivray should be counted among the liberal China missionaries, especially when the fundamentalist, modernist debate got under way. Such however, was not the case. In the initial division of labour between himself and Richard, MacGillivray was responsible for religious books, while Timothy looked after "general" publications. The arrangement worked without a hitch until 1910.

Richard had always been interested in Chinese Buddhism, the Mahayana variety, but it was not until 1884, when he was in Nanjing on other business that he came upon what he considered to be the basic texts for the school, "The Awakening of Faith" and the "Lotus Scripture". He was so taken by the "Awakening of Faith" that he called it a Christian book. Ten years later he completed a translation of the two texts but didn't get around to publishing them until 1910, when they appeared as "The New Testament of Higher Buddhism"¹⁷ The book was published over Richard's name, at his expense, and with no reference to the CLS. Such translations were not unusual, they had been going on since the days of James Legge, a half century earlier. What was unusual was Richard's introduction, in which he speculated that given the parallels between Christianity and Pure Land Buddhism, they probably arose from a common, ultimately Babylonian, source. Further

The religion of the future will satisfy all nations and all races and will not be born of any party cry, but will be born from the habit of looking at the highest and permanent

¹⁶ This is the title of the third edition, 1911. In all he published seven editions, the last one appearing in 1925. He was working on another version when he left China in 1930. See Margaret H. Brown, *MacGillivray of China*, Toronto 1968, pages 210-212.

¹⁷ Timothy Richard, *The New Testament of Higher Buddhism*, Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 1910.

elements in all religions and gladly recognizing all that helps to save man, body soul and spirit, individually or collectively, as Divine¹⁸.

This was not a path MacGillivray was prepared to tread, and for some time he seriously considered leaving the Society if Richard continued as Secretary. Richard was conciliatory, and R.P. MacKay, Secretary of the Canadian FMC thought MacGillivray's departure would be a disaster. Richard was due to retire, but he didn't and by March 1913 MacGillivray was ready to leave at the end of the year if Richard didn't. A few months later he changed his mind. He had taken on too many commitments to leave the Society at that point.¹⁹

One of his commitments was a translation of Hasting's Dictionary of the Bible, for which he had undertaken to do the New Testament. They did not propose to translate Hastings "holus bolus" but to provide the Chinese leadership with a book that was conservative, but "up to date" In other words he did not want to duck the questions which biblical criticism was raising, but to provide traditional answers. In the same way, when the Bible Union was formed in 1921, he refused to join, despite considerable pressure.²⁰

Meanwhile he had become Secretary of the CLS, and one of his first duties was writing the 1919 report in which he poured forth "the finest of eulogies" of Richards²¹

MacGillivray is best described as an open conservative and therefore could manage to straddle the division between the fundamentalists and the modernists. As the dispute with Richard shows straddling the divide was not always easy. The incident suggests the limits on cooperation with modernists, even though the line was very fuzzy. MacGillivray's old friend Jonathon Goforth was much less tolerant of fuzzy distinctions. Goforth's major contribution to the church in China was as a revivalist.

It came about through what his wife and biographer called a "jumble" in the Presbytery of Honan. Because of the jumble Goforth was assigned to accompany R.P.MacKay, the Secretary of the Foreign Missions Committee on a visit to Korea in 1907, the year of the Korean revival. Goforth was impressed with what he saw and on his return began to try his hand at revival preaching. As it turned out, he was very good at it.

¹⁸ Ibid, page 35

¹⁹ MacGillivray to R.P.MacKay, March 7th and May 20th, 1913. I have not seen anything in which MacGillivray says specifically what he found objectionable in Richard's book. However, in February 1921 he wrote to R.P.Mackay saying that he did not think there was a single missionary in China who did not preach Christ as the only name by which men could be saved. Richard's suggestion that Christianity and Pure Land Buddhism were cut from the same cloth is incompatible with Christ as the only saviour. The correspondence cited here can be found in the United Church Archives, Toronto.

²⁰ MacGillivray to R.P.MacKay, February 21st, 1921, United Church Archives

²¹ Margaret Brown, *MacGillivray of Shanghai*, page 136

The Korean visit came at an opportune time. After the excitement of starting the Honan mission and the drama of the Boxer affair life in Changte had settled down to the routine of a moderately prosperous mission. I have a hunch that Goforth was getting bored, and even before the Korean visit his mind had begun to turn to the question of revival.²² From his first visit to Manchuria in 1908 until he returned there in 1926 to start a new mission, Goforth was heavily involved in revival preaching. After his break with the Honan mission in 1917, he did nothing else.

His first revival tour was in Manchuria during 1908, working with Scottish and Ulster missions. In September and October 1908 he was in Shansi, with the CIM. In 1910, after a furlough he was in Shandong, with Hunter Corbett, who had been so helpful when the Goforths first arrived in China. In the same year he did a series of meetings with the English Baptists, also in Shandong. 1912 and 1913 seem to have been spent conducting revival meetings in north Henan, among his old colleagues. In early 1914 he was back in Shandong and in 1916, extended his activities across the Yellow River to Henan proper. He then went home for a combination of furlough and sick leave, returning to China in the fall of 1917.

At this point he finally parted company with his colleagues in Henan Presbytery. The issue was not his revival preaching, for as we have seen he did a fair amount of revival work within the Canadian mission. The issue was biblical interpretation, the hall mark of the fundamentalists in their controversy with the “modernists”. Goforth would have neither truck nor trade with “higher criticism” and when his colleagues would back down either, he felt he had no choice but to leave the mission. FMC wouldn’t go that far. It insisted he remain with the mission, but without responsibilities in north Henan. They kept him on salary but he had to find his housing and travel expenses himself. The Goforths moved to central China, to a place called Kikungshan.

He never abandoned North Henan. He was back again at the end of 1921 with his usual revival meetings. But the new residence meant that he could expand his work into South China. In November 1919 he conducted a mission for the CMS in Guilin, Guanxi Province. In 1923 he took part in a series of conferences in Fujien and Jiansu provinces, winding up with a meeting of students in Nanjing.²³

In 1924 he was back in Canada on a deputation tour of the Maritime Provinces. The time of decision had arrived; every congregation and every minister in the Presbyterian Church had to decide whether or not to enter the United Church of Canada. Given Goforth’s long history of cooperation with other churches he seems to have assumed that he would vote for the United Church. But his time in the Maritimes gave him reason to doubt, and when he finally had to cast

²² Rosalind Goforth, *Goforth of China*, pages 177-183

²³ See *The Presbyterian Record* for September 1920 and October 1923

his vote, he voted for the Presbyterians. His old mission, in Henan was assigned to the United Church, and Goforth was asked by the Presbyterians to start a new China mission.

By this time he was sixty seven, but like the fire horse in the story he could not resist. After a number of false starts he finally answered an invitation from James McCammon, an Irish Presbyterian in Newchang, Manchuria, one of the scenes of Goforth's early revivals, to start a new mission in the empty spaces of north east China. The mission party arrived in early 1927. As he had begun, so Goforth ended his career, at the suggestion of an established mission. However there were limits to cooperation in Manchuria.

The Canadians occupied a vacant place, a part of Manchuria the other Presbyterians had been unable to handle. Ten years later, in 1937, it was time to organize a Presbytery. By this time Goforth had retired, but the field was effectively led by two of his tradition, Allan Reoch, a Canadian on his first job and William Davis, a veteran American who had been in a way hand picked by Goforth. The Presbytery these men organized was free standing, with only limited and informal cooperation with the other Presbyterian churches in the province. E.H. Johnson, who had replaced Goforth in 1935, believed that the problem was theological

The Reochs and Davises tend to carry on the aggressively fundamentalist atmosphere that Dr Goforth started and look with suspicion on the faith of most of the Manchurian missionaries and the integrity of the Manchurian Presbyterian Church which embraces the large majority of the Manchurian Christians. As a result they don't want our Chinese church to be part of this large church. . . .²⁴

The Goforth tradition set the limits to cooperation somewhat more sharply than did MacGillivray.

As might be expected of small missions coming late into the field the Canadians did the normal things. They sought the advice of established missions before choosing a field, they entered into comity agreements where necessary, and they participated in joint institutional ventures, especially in higher learning. All this is routine. The more interesting examples of cooperation are those in which men of particular talents, Goforth as a revivalist and MacGillivray and Endicott as editors were set free from specifically denominational work to serve the church as a whole. But even here, especially with the Presbyterians, there were limits.

²⁴ E.H. Johnson to his father, Nov 14th, 1937, in the Presbyterian Archives. Johnson was no liberal, but he was more representative of the main stream of Canadian Presbyterianism than Goforth. He subsequently went on to a distinguished career with the Canadian Presbyterians, especially as Overseas Secretary from 1954-1972.