

The Lord's Mission Miracle in China

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The spread of the Christian faith among the teeming millions of people in China, despite decades of intense persecution to destroy it, becomes increasingly amazing as possibly the greatest missionary miracle of all time. When by 1950 some 2500 foreign Christian missionaries had been driven out, we wondered what would become of the up to a million native Christians left behind. We knew that the Lord had sometimes used intense persecution intended to destroy His gospel testimony, to spread it more widely, as in the story of Acts 11:19-21, but He has not always done so. He had also told His followers, "Whenever they persecute you in this city, flee to the next" (Mt. 10:23). For the next thirty years, we wondered and prayed about them. Then we began to get reports of the amazing increase in believers. Even the hostile government estimated their number as far exceeding 48 million members of the Communist Party, and knowledgeable estimates have raised the number of Christians to nearly 100 million. The few reports that continue to come indicate the growth is accelerating much faster than was expected.

RTF's Strategic Role

As surprising as the growing millions of Chinese Christian converts, mainly in the still illegal "house churches," is the amazingly central and influential role the Lord has been opening among them to the leaders and the literature of the unique agency called Reformation Translation Fellowship. Charles Chao, some readers may recall, was an early native student who became the assistant of missionary professor Rev. J. G. Vos, the Covenantal Presbyterian head of a Bible school in Manchuria, until that project was closed by the Japanese. His Chinese colleague, an enthusiast for the Reformed Faith,

saw the need for and began what became a 45-year career of translating approximately 100 of the best of Biblically Reformed literature from English into Chinese and circulating it among those who spoke the language. Because of the difficulty of turning our 26-letter alphabet into the proper corresponding expressions in 1100 Chinese symbols, comparatively little of such Christian literature (as well as other English literature) is available in Chinese. Now millions of Chinese converts joining the illegal and persecuted "house churches" are eagerly looking for any help they can get to grow in their faith in the Lord. They are finding in the unique collection of RTF publications that the Lord, in His providence, has long been preparing to fill exactly this need. Thus the Chao translations of Louis Berkhof's *History of Christian Doctrine* and of Reformed confessions have become the textbooks providing Biblically Reformed guidance for the systematic intensive training of tens of thousands of young (20-25 years) itinerant evangelists to win and train converts for Christian missionary testimony in every province in mainland China, as well as in the textbooks of other seminaries and Bible institutes all over southeast Asia! Although the number of people involved in Biblically Reformed training of evangelistic leaders may be difficult to estimate, a last year report mentioned that "In one province alone, 1,600 young people are in full-time evangelistic training this summer." A year-end report stated that "the house church group we work with...now has 8,000 full-time evangelists and 15,000 lay leaders." The numbers continue to swell. No one is more astonished than some of the small group who, after years of persistent, patient, and sometimes lonely labor, now find themselves in the middle of such positive developments. Truly, "This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes" (Ps. 118:23).

Widening Appreciation and Support

Organization and support of the RTF project began among and continued over the years with the Reformed Presbyterian (Covenanters), a small denomination totaling about 5,000 members. Its continuing efforts have also been gaining the attention and support of other faithful Reformed churches in Scotland, the Netherlands, and other parts of the world. As a number of our recently organized Reformed churches, breaking away from earlier compromising connections, have become acquainted with it and its strategically important missionary influence, their increasing support has been a great help in expanding the RTF's Biblically Reformed testimony through leaders and literature in the world's greatest mission field.

The RTF Holds God's Word as Standard

From its 1949 beginning, the RTF arose out of Covenanter missionary Samuel E. Boyle's recognition of the urgent need to provide Chinese Christians with Bible-believing literature to help them grow strong in their Faith and testimony in order to overcome forces of unbelief. This remained their vision and aim through the years. In its 1994 annual report, president Dr. Robert Heimburger cited the board decision to keep efforts "entirely reformed." Faced with a temptation to provide additional materials that did not maintain such a strict standard in order to reach a larger readership, the RTF has decided to translate and promote exclusively Reformed material, leaving the circulation of other mixed or partially useful materials to others. In sharp contrast with the increasing confusion and demoralization, even in circles that are traditionally more or less "evangelical," this RTF decision to insist on Biblically Reformed doctrine encourages the confidence and support of our growing family of churches that have had to make the same kind of conscientious decision that it is making.

A Christian Family Enterprise

The story of the RTF is, to a remarkable extent, the story of a family. "Out of the Tiger's Mouth" is its title as told by father Charles Chao. It tells how the family, eventually of 10 children, were repeatedly delivered first from persecution by the Japanese invaders in Manchuria and then from the Communists in China. We came to know them briefly in 1948 when Pastor Chao and family were part of our CRC mission during the last chaotic months when the Nationalists were losing a million-man battle raging only a hundred miles north of us. That extraordinary family has heartily supported the parents through the years of literary effort. A son, Dr. Harry, has just completed adding an apartment for his parents to his San Dimas home overlooking the Los Angeles basin where he is a medical specialist and can also watch over their health. The still-busy eighty-year-olds are encouraged by nearby children and grandchildren; as an airline employee, one daughter helps arrange their occasional inexpensive travel to the Orient. There, a son, Dr. Jonathan, who headed a Taiwan seminary training native evangelists and is now RTF International Director, has taken over and greatly expanded the Oriental work his father used to do. Through a related agency, China Ministries International (CMI), he works with the training programs using RTF literature to equip evangelists in and outside of the mainland. Copies of the dramatic story "Out of the Tiger's Mouth" are still available on request from the Birmingham office. One is in our church library; other libraries would profit by obtaining a copy.

Shockingly Low Overhead

Both the loyal family support and volunteered labor, and the gifts over the years, much from Covenanter Presbyterian churches, has helped keep down the "overhead costs" of the RTF astonishingly low.

ishingly low. Office activity and space are provided by the Bloomington RP Church, so the '94 annual report revealed that only "approximately 5% of what was contributed went to overhead expenses this past year." In times when all kinds of business, government, and even religious "administrative" costs throughout our society are escalating, isn't it a shock to see in the annual report item of \$25.39 for "office supplies"? The offerings of God's people to this China mission are obviously not being wasted.

Bargain Bibles for China

In a report last fall, I mentioned, in addition to the regular literature activity of the RTF, the projected beginning of a massive effort to place over 100,000 Bibles in the hands of eager converts through the house churches at a phenomenally low costs, although details were not yet available. On January 1, it was announced by CMI that "through an incredible matching agreement, we are able to triple every dollar pledged for Bibles..." and that "this generous matching agreement has come about through a cooperation agreement with seven other ministry organizations" involved in various ways. The RTF's part in this project will be directed only to distributing copies of the standard union translation (not more costly than other issues). One of the very great merits of this standard translation is that it can be read by all Chinese who know the national language, even though they have difficulty understanding one another's speech due to widely divergent dialects. Thus each US dollar contributed through the RTF will place a copy of this standard Bible in the hands of a convert through the house churches! Where else in the world can we circulate God's Word for more faithful and enthusiastic use at such an astonishingly low cost?

What Better Investments?

The Apostle Paul, at the end of his letter to the Philippian church, makes a surprising appeal (Phil. 4:10-20). He recalls how that church, from the beginning of his mission among them, had been the only one that had so heartily and persistently supported him and his further labors in other places. He expresses deepest appreciation for these demonstrations of their continuing love and concern for him. What does he have in mind? Is he only soliciting their further support? Decidedly not! He writes (v. 17) "Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account." He is interested in what is best for them! Commentator Lenski suggests that we look at Luke 19:15ff. and Matt 25:19ff. These references portray the accounting the Lord's servants will give to Him for the use of the capital with which each was entrusted and the rewards the Lord will give to each faithful servant. What more worthwhile investment of their lives and efforts can these Christians make than to share as richly as possible in the great saving work the Lord is doing with His gospel in this world—the only really saving and certain enterprise there is? Paul doesn't want the Philippians to miss the opportunity to share in it. The China story shows that enterprise is still going on—on a bigger scale than ever! Can we afford to miss the opportunity to invest ourselves and our efforts in it?

All of the Word of God for All of Life

From its modest beginnings, the RTF literary and educational missionary effort suddenly finds itself overwhelmed by its place in the strategic center of possibly the greatest Christian missionary development of all time. It attempts to equip believers to bring God's good news to the countless millions in China who have never heard it.

The message which they, like we, must bring is God's revelation that all of us were created by God, "in His image," to know, love, and serve Him. All of our human miseries and troubles, frustrations, sufferings, and death really result from the common revolt against God. God's good news is what He has promised and done through giving His Son, Jesus Christ, to save us from that revolt—"sin" and all of its consequences—by giving Himself to die and arise again for us and bring us back to God, and so to life that is real and eternal, through believing in Him (John 3:16).

As millions of Chinese are being brought to know Christ, these eager and enthusiastic, many young, converts are now asking questions about how the Lord wants them to serve Him in their families, communities, occupations, businesses, and all of the surrounding chaotic society. They face the missionaries with questions that must be answered. And the Word of God answers them. Paul wrote, "The Holy Scriptures...are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." They begin, but do not stop with that. "Given by inspiration of God," they also teach, correct, and instruct in right living, that these people of God "may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:15-17). Peter wrote the same thing. The "knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord" includes and gives to us "all things that pertain to life and godliness." Nothing necessary is missing! It is the glory of the Biblically Reformed Faith that it has tried to stress, as many Christians have not or have forgotten the unimaginably vast extent of God's gospel vision for us. Faithfully trying to serve that cause often carries God's people far beyond anything they themselves would have dreamed. Over a century ago, Abraham Kuyper was converted from a liberal unbeliever into a preacher of the Lord's gospel. Faithfully preaching the

gospel, with its "world and life" view, turned him also into a journalist, educator, professor, and political leader, eventually propelling him even into becoming the prime minister of the Netherlands. Missionary professor-writer J. G. Vos, whose mission to China continued and spread to the career of his student and colleague Charles Chao in the RTF, shared deeply the wide appreciation of the gospel to every area of life exemplified by Kuyper. Now the RTF, with its literary and educational outreach, has the thrilling opportunity to bring to millions of Chinese who have suffered much from the false and hopeless vision of a godless Communism, the unchanging good news of the grace and power of Christ. They, and we as well, all have to face and seize the opportunities to bring to an increasingly godless society and world suffering ever-increasing troubles because of still fighting against God, the message of Christ the only Savior whose saving word and work are so large that they save all of the lives of those who believe in Him. That message does not change, because God who gave it does not change. Yet in reaching out to all nations, we must reach out to them in their own language and culture, like Paul speaking as a Jew to Jews, or as a Greek to Greeks, becoming "all things to all men that I may by all means save some" (1 Cor. 9:20-22). That is the way Christ's followers will grow to become "the great multitude which no one could count, from every nation" (Rev. 7:9), as they are growing in China today.

The Miracle is the Lord's

Our Lord taught us in John 15:4ff., "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me... he who abides in Me... bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing." "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you

wish, and it shall be done for you. By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples”(vv. 7, 8). “You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask of the Father in my name, He may give to you” (v. 16). Relate this to 14:12, ff., “Truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go to the Father. And whatever you ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.” In what way were the Lord’s followers going to do greater work than He did? Consider how the Lord’s own direct teaching in the world was limited to tiny Palestine. Now that teaching through His followers, despite intense opposition, is reaching and gaining converts in every province of the most populous country in the world! What can explain this current greatest missionary miracle? It is exactly what the Lord predicted it would be: His own work. To him, “nothing is impossible” (Matt. 19:26 Lk. 1:37). Characteristic of the reports we have been seeing regarding these events in China is the fact that reporters have all been most impressed by the way these thousands of young, enthusiastic evangelists, in the face of extreme opposition and hardships, have been sustained, preserved, and enabled to face and overcome the obstacles, especially by their earnest and constant prayers to the Lord for the grace that He has promised. The explanation of this missionary miracle is that it is not theirs, but the Lord’s. Not they, but He is in charge and still leading His people on “from victory unto victory.” Paul wrote in 2 Cor. 2:14, “Thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place.” Let us learn and pray to share as deeply and widely as possible in the same miracle of God’s amazing grace.

To receive more information about the RTF,
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