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The North China Mission and The Shantung Revival: 1931-1937

"Revival" Defined

Students of revival have long recognized the awakening movement in the Shantung Province from 1927-1937 as genuine revival. What is often left unsaid is exactly what makes a movement a revival. For some, the term may carry negative connotations, referring to fundamentalist revivalism.[1] Others may only understand the term revival to refer to a set period of time when a church plans to have nightly "gospel meetings" with a visiting evangelist. In regards to the Shantung Revival, both set of assumptions are only partially accurate. Though the Shantung Revival was characterized by a distrust of modernism and a high regard for the authority of the Bible, the revival was more than biblicist hysteria. And whereas the missionaries employed means similar to those of Charles Finney in their revival meetings, the ten year movement was more than the right use of means for creating revival. Therefore, a clarified definition is required. A revival, then, is an awakening of laity and clergy that results in deeper devotion to God that is expressed visibly through increased prayer, repentance, Bible Study and evangelism and that leads to extensive numerical growth in the church over an extended period of time.[2] Even with a general definition of revival, one wonders how the term revival was used by the missionaries in the Shantung province.

In the Annual Reports of the Foreign Mission Board (FMB) to the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) from 1927-1930, missionaries from the North China Mission mention the term revival only four times, mostly in reference to a unique instance of spiritual devotion or to a meeting.[3] The year 1931 would

be a turning point in the use of the term revival in the Annual Reports of the North China Mission to the FMB-it was used thirteen times. Four of these instances referred to meetings held by Marie Monsen,[4] whom will be discussed later in this paper. Nonetheless, even the references to these meetings imply something greater than a meeting or a localized revival. For instance, D. F. Stamps reports that "the revival on the Hwanghsien field began with the special meetings conducted by Miss Marie Monsen."[5] In other words, though protracted meetings may have been planned, the missionaries sensed that something greater than just meetings was happening. This something is what they called "a deep sweeping revival" in Hwanghsien, "a real spirit of revival" in Tsinan, and "the work of the Holy Spirit in a continuous revival" in Tsining.[6]

From 1932-1935,[7] missionaries used the word revival seventy times in their annual reports, with forty-four references in the two years 1932 and 1933 combined.[8] Also in 1933, Mary Crawford's book entitled *The Shantung Revival* was published in China. In the 1935 annual report, the revival is for the first time called the Shantung revival; then in 1937, the annual report speaks of the "Revival," without reference to Shantung. During these six years, Southern Baptist missionaries would witness the climax of the revival. Undoubtedly, the missionaries began using the term revival in a context broader than individuals, protracted meetings, or awakenings in a locale. The missionaries began to see things that they would say, without exaggeration, that they had never seen before. Therefore, it is highly probable that the Shantung Revival was more than Chinese men and women finding escape in western progress and more than the result of missionaries appropriating the right means to see conversion. Neither of these options would fit the way missionaries used the term.

Nonetheless, between 1936 and 1938, the term revival is used only nineteen more times, the last four in 1938 referring only to revival meetings similar to pre-1931 references. With the invasion by the Japanese in 1937, the revival as the missionaries knew it ceased.[9]

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[1]Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 1994), 59-64; Mark A. Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism: Evangelicals, Scholarship, and the Bible in America,* 2d ed. (Vancouver, BC: Regent College, 1991), 152. Noll traces revivalism into the nineteenth century where it became associated with a form of Christianity that began to lose the intellectual side of the faith. Movements that inherited revivalism and American nationalism were anti-modernist and saw new critical methodologies as robbing interpretation from the level of ordinary intelligence. Revivalism, then, was one factor in the split of Evangelical and Mainstream Christianity in the early 20th century. See also Bays, "Revival in China," 167. Bays states that "by the 1920s, for the most part in China, as elsewhere, it was 'fundamentalists' who insisted on the need for 'revivalism,' and 'modernists' who could do without it."

[2]Author's own definition. Cf. Malcom McDow and Alvin L. Reid, *Firefall: How God Has Shaped History Through Revival* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1997; reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2001), 1-11. McDow and Reid have an excellent survey of different definitions of revival and they define six types of revival. The definition in this paper is more specific than that of McDow and Reid-"Revival is God's invasion into the lives of one or more of His people in order to awaken them spiritually for Kingdom ministry." Though their concern for individual personal revival is noteworthy, revival movements such as the Shantung Revival cannot be explained solely by the experience of one individual. Complex relationships exist that might escape the record of the historian and the eye of the careful researcher. For instance, except for small excerpts reported by foreign missionaries, the testimonies of the national Chinese are absent from the record of the Shantung Revival.

[3]In 1927, the term revival is not used once regarding the North China Mission. In 1928, it was reported that "genuine revival" broke out at the Williams Memorial Girls' School in Chefoo. While the missionaries would be in Chefoo in 1929, the Chinese faculty seminary in Hwanghsien held a "protracted meeting" that would result in the salvation of many students. Earlier in Hwanghsien, the revival in the school had an impact upon the church in that city. Finally, in 1930, Paul Rader and Leland Wang held "revival meetings in Tsingtao. See Eighty-Second Annual Report Foreign Mission Board, May 4, 1927, accession no. 2719; Eighty-Third Annual Report Foreign Mission Board, May 16, 1928, accession no. 2712; Eighty-Fourth Annual Report Foreign Mission Board, May 15, 1929, accession no. 2720; Eighty-Fifth Annual Report Foreign Mission Board, May 14, 1930, accession no. 2726. The reports above are each accessible at the online Solomon Database, Archives of the International Mission Board, Southern Baptist Convention, < http://archives.imb.org >. All further references to Annual Reports may be accessed at the same website, unless otherwise noted.

[4]Eighty-Sixth Annual Report Foreign Mission Board, May 13, 1931, accession no. 2728.

[5]Ibid.

[6]Ibid.

[7]See Eighty-Seventh Annual Report Foreign Mission Board, May 13, 1932, accession no. 2729; Eighty-Eighth Annual Report Foreign Mission Board, May 19, 1933, accession no. 2730; Eighty-Ninth Annual Report Foreign Mission Board, May 16, 1934, accession no. 2731; Ninetieth Annual Report Foreign Mission Board, May 15, 1935, accession no. 2727.

[8]Note: From 1932-1938, Marie Monsen was only mentioned twice in 1932 referring to her previous engagements with the North China Mission in 1931. Though she would play a vital role in the beginning of the revival, and though revival followed her wherever she would go, the revival in Shantung was not dependent on her continued presence.

[9]See Ninety-First Annual Report Foreign Mission Board, May 14, 1936, accession no. 2725; Ninety-Second Annual Report Foreign Mission Board, May 13, 1937, accession no. 2724; Ninety-Third Annual Report Foreign Mission Board, May 12, 1938, accession no. 2723.

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  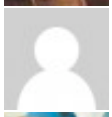
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