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Power, Print, and Martyrdom: C. C. Crisler and the Development of Seventh-Day Adventist Missions in China, 1916–1936

MICHAEL W. CAMPBELL

Abstract

The life of C. C. Crisler showcases the development of Seventh-day Adventist missions in China. As a relative latecomer to the Protestant missionary enterprise in China, the Adventists developed mission strategies during an era of growing professionalization and bureaucratization, most notably through the medium of print. Crisler was the foremost architect of Adventist print in the two decades of his missionary service. It was furthermore print that secured his lasting memory and elevation to the status of martyr. Crisler's heavy emphasis upon missionary success, based upon his interpretation of Ellen G. White's writings, led him to equate such success with baptisms and the expansion of church institutions. After the Chinese Revolution in 1949 a reversal meant that Crisler's memory and martyrdom were later for the most part largely forgotten.

Key words: Clarence C. Crisler, Seventh-day Adventist Missions, Protestant missions, print, martyrdom

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INTRODUCTION

Missionaries played a vital role in the development of a Seventh-day Adventist presence in China.[1] Although Seventh-day Adventists were relative latecomers to the Protestant missionary enterprise, they quickly made up for lost time. Initial contact began with Abram La Rue (1822–1903), who had such a burden for sharing the Adventist message that in 1888 he went as a self-supporting missionary even though church leaders declined his offer due to his old age.[2] La Rue focused his ministry on foreign sailors in and around Hong Kong with occasional forays into other parts of Asia. Although he never learned Chinese, he did ask an acquaintance to translate a tract, *The Judgment*, from which he printed 2,500 copies in 1891. Along with other subsequent tracts, Adventist missionaries followed a missiological pattern by harnessing the power of print to transmit the Adventist message.

Such efforts grew more serious with the establishment of the first "official" denominational missionaries: Jacob Nelson Anderson (1867–1958) and his wife, Emma Thompson (1865–1925), along with Ida Thompson (d. 1939), sister to Emma, who together arrived in Hong Kong on February 2, 1902. They began serious language study and sold literature to English-speaking residents, and Ida Thompson opened up the first English school for Chinese children. In December 1902 Edwin H. and Susan Wilbur went to Guangzhou as the first permanent Seventh-day Adventist missionaries in mainland China. Thanks to itinerant efforts by Eric Pilquist, the first six converts were baptized on February 14, 1903, in Xinyangzhou, and the next day J. N. Anderson organized them into the first Seventh-day Adventist Church in mainland China. Three years later Anderson ordained the first "native" Chinese Seventh-day Adventist minister, N. P. Keh, in Amoy. In 1909 the China Union Mission was organized, and by 1916 there were 25 churches with 679 church members (240 baptized that year). The

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[1] This paper is adapted from a presentation given to the "Adventism in China" project, Hong Kong Adventist College, October 31, 2014.

[2] "Abram La Rue," in *The Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, vol. 10, ed. Leo R. Van Dolson (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1996), 898.

Seventh-day Adventist Church had effectively planted roots in China.[3] By the time of Crisler's death the church had expanded to 49,622 church members.[4] This paper explores the role of Crisler in this rapidly expanding Adventist missionary enterprise and argues that Crisler played a vital role in facilitating this expansion.

MAKING OF A MISSIONARY

One person who knew how to harness the power of print was Clarence Creager Crisler (1877–1936) who worked closely with Ellen G. White (1827–1915) as her personal secretary (1901–1915). Crisler strongly believed in the prophetic gift as manifested through her life and ministry, especially through the estimated 100,000 pages of print. After White's death he assisted in completing her last two books: he prepared the final eighteen chapters of *Life Sketches* (1915) as well as assisted with final preparations for *Prophets and Kings* (1917).[5] White was nothing short of a prolific author. Her extensive literary repertoire necessitated an elaborate literary production staff that enabled her to leave such an extensive print legacy. The fact was that after her death the majority of her staff, including Crisler, were left to find other forms of employment.

It appears that Crisler found his niche possibly at the 1915 Annual Council session where he worked as a stenographer. The rousing mission report about Asia by R. C. Porter and R. F. Cottrell bespoke of "great missionary activities"—specifically in China—as a fulfillment, they believed, of Bible prophecy that mirrored Pentecost.[6] What is

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[3] "People's Republic of China," in *The Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, 10: 333–345.

[4] H. E. Rogers, ed., *Statistical Report of Seventh-day Adventist Conferences, Missions, and Institutions: The Seventy-sixth Annual Report Year Ending December 31, 1938* (Takoma Park, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, [1939]), 2.

[5] Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches of Ellen G. White* (1915; Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1943); White, *Prophets and Kings* (1917; Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1943).

[6] For a report, with a note of Crisler's transcriptions, see "Notes from the Field—No. 4: The Spirit of the Council," *Review and Herald* (hereafter *R&H*), December 2, 1915, 1–2. This paper uses largely published accounts from denominational publications in order to reconstruct Crisler's experience. Unfortunately most of the unpublished records were destroyed during the Communist Revolution of 1949.

clear is that within a year A. G. Daniells reported that Crisler had "accepted a call to the Asiatic Division." It was expected that he would help "especially in the preparation of book literature for the Far East."[7] From subsequent reports it appears that this was a last minute decision even though it entailed the expectation of a lifelong commitment. "He and Sister Crisler," Daniells noted, "accepted the call without any hesitation or reservation."[8] Within a few weeks they sailed with Daniells on a "tour" through the Far East. Apparently his "close association" with Sister White was his primary qualification for missionary service. Crisler left aboard the ship *China* with a large group of other missionaries on November 2, 1916.[9] His second wife, Minnie Hawkins Crisler (1874–1963), and daughter, Beatrice, joined him in March.[10]

Though Crisler's initial "call" seemed a bit nebulous, once he arrived he went quickly to work. Part of the reason he traveled with a large group of missionaries and church leaders was that they were headed to attend the Asiatic Division Conference Session—a pivotal meeting that would shape the direction of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Asia from a handful of missions into a well-honed missionary structure replete with unions that would each consist of several missions or conferences. Crisler was elected secretary of the Asiatic Division and appointed chair of the "Literature Bureau" tasked with developing new material in print.[11] He and Minnie likewise assumed an influential role as editors of the *Far Easter Division Outlook* (later renamed the *China Division Reporter*), although it was the title of "Mrs. C. C. Crisler" that actually showed up on the masthead until her departure in 1941 as conflict in the Pacific theater during World War II forced her evacuation. The arrival of the Crislers during World War I coincided with a major missionary initiative on the part of the General

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[7] *R&H*, November 2, 1916, 24.

[8] A. G. Daniells, "In the Far East Again," *R&H*, December 28, 1916, 6.

[9] *R&H*, November 2, 1916, 24. For an extensive description of the departure see R. C. Porter, "Recruits for the Orient: Our Largest Single Offering on the Altar of Missions," *R&H*, February 1, 1917, 8.

[10] See a note in *R&H*, March 22, 1917, 24.

[11] "Asiatic Division Conference: Summary of Proceedings of the First Session, Shanghai, April 5–24, 1917," *R&H*, June 21, 1917, 16–17. See also Crisler's personal reflections: C. C. Crisler, "Asiatic Division Conference Session Notes—No. 2," *R&H*, June 14, 1917, 11–12. Crisler cited as his inspiration for missions references by Ellen G. White about the importance of missions and the example of J. N. Andrews, the first official Seventh-day Adventist missionary. "Uppermost in the minds of those present," he wrote, "seemed to be the realization that God has placed them in these dark lands for the definite purpose of preparing a people for the coming of Jesus."

Conference to develop a significant Seventh-day Adventist presence in China. During the quinquennium between General Conference Sessions of 1914 and 1918 (which corresponded with the beginning and end of World War I) church leaders made it clear that the denomination had to invest more assets in China, especially missionary personnel. According to church leaders, during this period of time, the denomination invested more resources in China than in any other part of the world. Perhaps this may have simply been because the church was quite limited in where it could send missionaries in the midst of such a significant world conflict. Whatever may be the case, the period of time between World War I and World War II was the golden age of Adventist missionary activity in China noted by significant expansion in terms of baptisms, institutions, and most importantly for Crisler, through the translation and publication of a variety of materials in print. It was this power of print that Crisler cultivated, and while other missionaries came and left (most often for health reasons), it was Crisler who remained at the helm as perhaps the most influential Adventist personality in China which continued until his death in 1937.

Such an influential role on the part of Crisler makes him an ideal candidate to study how the medium of print was used to adapt, promote, disseminate, and homogenize Adventism in China. Crisler engaged and energized the Adventist power base in the United States through his regular reports and statistics. His experience furthermore illustrates the lived experience of early Adventist missionaries in China, as well as shows how most Seventh-day Adventists viewed the people and land of China. As a fundraiser Crisler was a seminal catalyst for generating missionary funds to start new institutions. His stories inspired a new generation of missionaries to follow in his footsteps, and finally, his death from overwork elevated his status to that of martyrdom within the pantheon of fallen Adventist missionaries. Clearly Crisler was the primary purveyor of print for Adventism in China.

THE PEOPLE AND LANDSCAPE OF CHINA

Unfortunately Crisler's diaries have not survived along with many of the early meticulous records that he was known to have kept. Thus any constructions about the people and landscape of China must be taken

from published accounts. Crisler framed his view of China through an eschatological lens focused on the missionary imperative to share the Adventist message in order to prepare a people for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. These were vast "heathen lands" that could only be "evangelized" through "utter dependence on him [God]."[12] Crisler noted how one anonymous "Chinese evangelist" through an interpreter had made an important point that he felt was especially significant: "while Europe is at war, the dark lands of Asia are at peace, and the people in these lands are in a receptive mood."[13] Through Crisler's participation in the formation of the Asiatic Division Conference, April 5–24, 1917, he cast a vision for a broad initiative that encompassed three prongs: publishing, education, and medical. Although he was called to lead out in the publishing work, his leadership as secretary of the division meant that he would play a key role in all three areas.

What is clear from his missionary reports is that he fell in love with China and the Chinese people. "The people of China are among the most lovable of all people on earth; they are precious in Heaven's sight; and there are many among them who are ready to hear and to obey the Master's call," observed Crisler in 1930.[14] Soon after his arrival Crisler went to work purchasing numerous books, maps, and other resources to help him learn about the Chinese culture and language. Perhaps it was this drive to understand the culture and language contrasts as juxtaposed against reports by other missionaries. While numerous other missionaries, for example, titled their reports with the term "heathen," Crisler reserved such a term for only a handful of times in conjunction with the murder of missionaries or destruction of mission property in order to frame their missionary work within cosmic proportions. Crisler presumably harbored his share of racial and cultural prejudices, but at least in print he maintained a respectful and appreciative tone.[15]

If overall Crisler loved the people and culture of China, the area that pained Crisler the most, as a man who loved words, was the recognition that large numbers of the peasant class were illiterate. Adventists

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[12] C. C. Crisler, "Asiatic Division Conference Session Notes—No. 2," June 14, 1917, 11–12.

[13] Ibid.

[14] C. C. Crisler, "Advance Returns from China," *R&H*, October 30, 1930, 12–13.

[15] For example, one missionary described China "as one of the most . . . backward nations." See George J. Appel, "Finding Believer's in China's Capital," *R&H*, November 25, 1926, 15; I. H. Evans, "Our Responsibility to the Heathen," *R&H*, June 30, 1927, 10.

hired and eventually trained their own translators following patterns set by other Protestant missions. Even with this by 1927 Crisler, during a time of armed conflict, knew the task was daunting. Still he clung to the hope that the good news could still travel rapidly across China. He noted how "astonishing" it was to see how quickly news traveled by word of mouth. As a consequence, the task of reaching China's millions through print seemed daunting, yet at the same time, God could finish the work moving beyond the medium of print if necessary. Thus he believed that through divine intervention that "the work will be quickly finished."[16]

While numerous other anecdotes could be given, what is clear is that at least from his published writings Crisler maintained a deep love and profound respect for the people of China. As the denomination's first significant statistician (he produced detailed statistical reports at the 1901 General Conference session where he met Ellen G. White), he continued to keep meticulous records. Some of his statistics reveal missional priorities. For example, one development that he tracked closely was the development of "native" workers, particularly ordained ministers. By 1928 there were 159 ordained ministers of which 76 were "native."[17] He repeatedly urged that the church needed to invest in Chinese workers by giving them training. By 1931 he reported on an ordination service in which six of the eight ordinations were of "Chinese brethren" helping to equalize the ratio of native versus foreign ministers.[18] At the very next ordination service three additional Chinese and two foreign workers were ordained. With this last batch the tipping point was reached where there were now more "native men" as ordained ministers instead of foreign workers. Crisler viewed this as a significant milestone for the development of Adventism in China.[19] He clearly embraced a vision that the Chinese people were the most effective at reaching their own people.

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[16] "Notes from the Field," *R&H*, August 4, 1927, 17.

[17] C. C. Crisler, "The Far East Grows," *R&H*, July 4, 1929, 32.

[18] *R&H*, June 25, 1931, 24.

[19] See report of Crisler published in the report: E. Kotz, "Mission Board Items," *R&H*, July 2, 1931, 24.

THE PROCESS OF PROSELYTIZATION

If C. C. Crisler believed that native workers were the most effective means for publicly facilitating the Adventist message through preaching and selling books, he therefore also believed that the medium of print was the best tool for such workers to reach the vast peoples of China. In this way he mirrored the work of other Protestant missionaries as Shanghai developed into a center for missionary printing.[20] Crisler believed that all church members, especially ministers and colporteurs, must have literature to nurture and enrich the lives of new converts. He saw tracts and books as missionary agents that could go perhaps even where missionaries could not then reach.

In order to facilitate this goal it appears that Crisler developed new tracts and books in what they termed "Wenli" as well as in Mandarin.[21] Yet in order to accomplish this and stretch missionary funds from abroad, he needed to create new ways to raise funds. The earliest evidence I have found in which he tried to accomplish both of these goals was the development of a special "Harvest Ingathering" number of the Chinese *Signs of the Times*. A Mandarin edition of 20,000 was printed that quadrupled their investment. A Wenli edition was also produced for the South China Union.[22] Together these put the fledgling publishing house on a firmer financial basis. Within a short time the publishing house found it necessary to move the bookbinders into the chapel in order to accommodate all of the additional work. He continued his fundraising efforts by sending regular reports to the *Review and Herald* in which he thanked church members in North America for their sacrificial offerings that made missionary expansion possible.[23]

As the Adventist publishing house expanded Crisler carried on a full array of publications. As the leader of the "Literature Bureau" he arranged the translation of a new health book, the translation of A. G. Daniell's tract on *The World War*, and a translation of James Edson

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[20] Christopher A. Reed, *Gutenberg in Shanghai: Chinese Print Capitalism, 1876–1937* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2004), 27.

[21] The term "Wenli" was a missionary term used to refer to written classical Chinese as opposed to colloquial usage. It was a term not used outside of missionary circles.

[22] "A New Thing in China," *R&H*, January 3, 1918, 17.

[23] Cf. C. C. Crisler, "The Budgets for 1918," *R&H*, February 21, 1918, 13.

White's book on the gospel story intended for African Americans in the American South, *The Coming King*. These were prioritized for translation into Mandarin, Wenli, Taglog, and Japanese.[24]

During the 1920s Crisler focused more of his attention on training colporteurs. Much of his energy was spent traveling to remote regions across Asia, especially northwestern China, to encourage colporteurs. At one such meeting the workers reported that as a result of his encouragement that "a new spirit was revived in the colporteur work, and many entered the work as evangelist colporteurs."[25] While it is not entirely clear exactly what made his work so encouraging, there are at least a few hints that indicate some culturally innovative strategies. For example, he learned that an effective colporteur strategy was to obtain the endorsement of local government officials, which was one of the most effective means in selling books.[26]

Another creative means of outreach, despite significant setbacks due to conflict during the late 1920s, was repurposing missionaries who were on emergency leave to Shanghai. He noted the interest of locals to learn the English language along with an influx of missionaries from other unstable regions of China. With these excess missionaries he developed one of the earliest English language schools specifically designed with an evangelistic purpose.[27]

Even as the Adventist work struggled at times, Crisler viewed the establishment of new institutions, the organization of new missions and conferences, and the increase in the number of baptisms as evidence of the "steady advance" of Adventism in China.[28] Crisler envisioned an Adventist missionary base that ultimately would be self-sustaining and would in turn train and send out other missionaries to more remote regions. In 1929, for example, he rejoiced that three new provinces of China had been entered.[29] "Our publishing work, while not fully self-sustaining," he noted in 1933, "is steadily gathering strength. Our sales are on the increase; for this miracle we are grateful to our heavenly

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[24] C. C. Crisler, "Literature Bureau," *R&H*, April 18, 1918, 18.

[25] John Oss, "Literature Work in China during 1929," *R&H*, December 11, 1930, 26–27. If sales are any indication, the article notes that during 1929 there was $192,338.17 of colporteur sales, a gain of $21,724.30 over 1928.

[26] J. J. Strahle, "The Work in Western China," *R&H*, January 30, 1930, 32.

[27] C. C. Crisler, "Bringing a Language School to Our Doors," *R&H,* June 30, 1927, 10–11.

[28] Cf. untitled note found in *R&H*, June 20, 1918, 24.

[29] Cecil K. Meyers, "The Gospel Commission in Practice," *R&H*, November 7, 1929, 12.

Father and to our bookmen."[30] The 1930s were particularly challenging with increased warfare (an "orgy of destruction") and two catastrophic floods. The advance of Christianity in China, Crisler repeatedly reminded his readers, was dependent on faith.[31] Despite numerous setbacks he continued to observe net membership increases, even if they were not as large as in previous years. By 1930 he noted there were 80,000 subscribers to their monthly missionary magazine and other promising signs such as new church buildings. Due to the Civil War transportation and communications became very difficult. The "Chinese magazine" in "not a few cities" was being censored or confiscated. Opposition to Christianity was severe. Based upon his reports it is clear that the statistics that mattered most to Crisler was the increase in baptisms.[32] Almost every single published report from the time he was in China makes some reference to baptismal statistics. It should be noted that Crisler was also concerned with training these new converts. The solution, he believed, was to have new converts sign up for the full lineup of Adventist publications in the Chinese language.[33]

MOTIVATIONS OF MISSIONARY LIFE

Crisler viewed print not only as an effective tool for conversion, but also a powerful means to motivate others to become Seventh-day Adventist missionaries. In doing so he reveals some of his own missionary motivations, which may have in turn helped to reaffirm the faith he had in his own calling. His reports give insight as to what Adventist missionary life was like during this golden age of Adventist missions in China. He observed:

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[30] *R&H*, July 6, 1933, 24.

[31] "No one can foretell the future, even the immediate future, here in China," observed Crisler. See C. C. Crisler, "Advancing Faith in China," *R&H*, September 25, 1930, 23–25.

[32] See note from Frederick Griggs, at the time acting vice-president of the Far Eastern Division, who notes statistics from "Brother" Crisler that in China they had the largest increase of church membership for the first three months of the year that they have ever had. See "Our Work in China," *R&H*, September 6, 1928, 24.

[33] C. C. Crisler, "In Eastern Szechwan," *R&H*, March 13, 1930, 15.

> If you were here, you would find Pastor J. P. Anderson sitting at a table, with his lantern as a light; I am not far away, sitting on my steel cot bed, made [as much] light as possible for itinerating; and I have three candles burning to make the room cheery. It was our plan to visit all the Hakka churches during the twelve weeks at our disposal, but our plan is failing, because we are hung here at this place on account of the activities of robbers, who hold all roads for several hundreds of li [road] north. It is a strange situation. They hold the roads south also, so we cannot move in any direction. We have been bottled up for ten days. We hope to get safe-conduct from the robber chiefs, and thus get out.[34]

What is clear is that these images of eminent danger fortified their awareness of a sense of sacrifice and commitment. The time they spent delayed was harnessed to learn the customs and language, and of course, to distribute literature.[35] At the same time, Crisler frequently observed how many native workers faced similar perils. Such reports often included detailed accounts of what he believed were God's providential intervention. Of course Crisler was careful to qualify such stories with the caveat that Adventist missionaries did not take unnecessary risks. The very nature of their work included an inherent sense of danger. Yet Adventist parents in America could at least take some comfort as their children read mission reports about China in the *Youth's Instructor* that their work was a sacred one as he sought to inspire and recruit a new generation for mission service. Obituaries published in the *Review and Herald* were grim reminders of such danger.

Beyond such romantic notions was a sense of a clarion call as to why such danger was worth such a risk. Crisler believed that the Adventist message was about hastening the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. The evangelism of the world must take place before this event could occur. Of special significance was Crisler's admiration for the prophetic writings of Ellen G. White. His earlier work with her must have had a profound impact upon his life as a missionary; at least he continued to reference his time spent working with her along with her counsels. Some of this influence can be seen during a visit by then General Conference president W. A. Spicer, whose own daughter was then serving as a fellow missionary alongside Crisler. Spicer reported

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[34] Bernhard Petersen, "Praying for the Missionaries," *R&H*, February 23, 1928, 12.

[35] C. C. Crisler, "En Route to Tatsienlu: Difficulties of Travel," *R&H*, July 12, 1928, 24.

on an influential talk that Crisler gave to the missionaries in which he reflected upon some of his personal interactions with the "Spirit of Prophecy"—the prophetic gift as he witnessed it.[36] The pivotal quote for Crisler by Ellen G. White about the importance of Adventist missions was her 1892 prediction:

> The same work must be accomplished in Australia, New Zealand, in Africa, India, China, and the islands of the sea, as has been accomplished in the home field. Under an appropriate symbol of an angel flying through the midst of heaven is represented the work of the people of God.[37]

What Crisler (and Spicer) took this to mean is that Adventist institutions, especially health clinics and publishing houses, should be replicated around the world, especially in China. Such a view was nuanced by the fact that Crisler believed that such a work could never be finished through material resources alone. Only God could accomplish this great work.[38] The "task is large" but not too great unless "finished by heavenly agencies."[39] What this meant, though, was that Crisler viewed print as the primary vehicle for carrying out this prophetic prediction. Such a divine mandate meant that he along with other missionaries were in fact fulfilling prophecy.

Another significant intersection between Crisler's work with Ellen G. White and his missionary work in China was how he viewed the development of Adventist missions. Although Ellen G. White challenged the church, particularly in her 1892 counsel, to have a worldwide presence, at the same time she cautioned against premature expansion. Thus "strong home bases" must be developed with "strategic bases abroad." As financial resources fell into place then less desirable areas could then in turn be reached. He reflected on a number of occasions that at the time as a young man he did not fully understand her counsel. "She kept urging the importance of raising up large churches in the cities of the more favored lands," especially in places that are "thoroughfares of travel" where "people of means" tend to congregate.

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[36] W. A. Spicer, "How an 1892 Declaration of the Spirit of Prophecy is Fulfilling," *R&H*, July 5, 1928, 10.

[37] White, *Life Sketches*, 338; White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1923), 208.

[38] See note on *R&H*, May 22, 1930, 32.

[39] C. C. Crisler, "Evangelism in East China," *R&H*, August 27, 1931, 13.

By 1930 Crisler believed that China had become in itself such a missionary base with new efforts to reach the remote provinces.[40] As a result, from 1933 onward, he focused much of his efforts into expanding the Adventist message into Tibet and Mongolia.[41]

As time went on, Crisler made increasingly more direct and specific appeals for Adventist missionaries.[42] Missionaries were needed to serve in increasingly remote areas. In the process many perished. He affirmed their heroic sacrifice, often with pictures of their family and descriptions of the specific challenges that they faced.[43] In doing so he described each sacrifice in heroic terms. Both foreign missionaries and native workers alike were martyrs whose blood was not spilled in vain.

PERSECUTION AND MARTYRDOM

The reports of Crisler are replete with many accounts of persecution and even martyrdom. Such accounts were at times published simply as an obituary, or, in other instances, formed the background for larger mission narratives. Among the most tragic were stories of the young children of missionaries who were most susceptible to disease.[44] In another instance two female missionaries were murdered in their beds on a mission compound.[45] Crisler thus became the premier chronicler of Adventist persecution and martyrdom.

One of the most dramatic stories, in my opinion, occurred in 1927 during a period of "severe persecution" in Hunan, China. As warlords from the north battled against communist factions and government

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[40] C. C. Crisler, "The China Division Quadrennial Council," *R&H*, April 14, 1932, 20–22.

[41] M. E. Kern, "Into the Forbidden Land of Tibet," *R&H,* November 9, 1933, 6.

[42] "Mission Board Items," *R&H*, February 23, 1928, 24.

[43] Cf. the example of G. S. Luther and his family (complete with family picture with their young child): C. C. Crisler, "Providential Openings in China and the Far East," *R&H*, June 30, 1927, 10–11. The published report included a note that a request had been made to the Foreign Mission Board for three additional families.

[44] Cf. the obituary for Deane Alden Philipps, only child of Elder and Mrs. J. Phillips who died at just a little over one-year old. Obit. *R&H*, November 17, 1927, 22. See also the passing of Dorothy Marie Lee (age 12) who died from Scarlet Fever, Obit. *R&H*, April 21, 1932, 22.

[45] "Our Fallen Coworkers," *R&H*, June 11, 1931, 21.

armies he noted that this was indeed a "time of stress" but he was thankful to find workers loyal "to the fundamentals of our faith." After several years church leaders were unable to reach workers in Hunan, but an opportunity opened up from February 17 to 22, 1927. The day before the meeting was supposed to begin some of those "formerly with us" trapped believers in the church. They escaped one-by-one by crawling along the rooftop. Although the mission compound was closed by provincial officials, a storm prevented their enemies from disrupting them. They met in a dirt floor shack. According to Crisler they held one of the "best meetings they ever had," which included celebrating the Lord's Supper. They then held a meeting of the mission board. Since the foreign workers were unable to work, Wang Deh Dji was appointed to supervise the work. Crisler noted that the anti-Christian communists were strong in this region. Many church members were in hiding, and some had even died. It was one of the "most severe persecutions" faced by the denomination up to that point.[46] As evidenced by this report the late 1920s and early 1930s witnessed the intensification of conflict.

Other accounts from the late 1920s and early 1930s indicate that many other church members from other provinces were similarly "driven from their homes." One of the unique aspects is that these persecutions created opportunities for local leaders to rise to church leadership positions. By 1930 Crisler observed that six of the ten union superintendents were absent from their field due to war.[47] Much of this conflict revolved around regions dominated by the rising Communists. A year later Crisler observed that of the three remaining *hsiens* unreached in China, all were occupied by Communists.[48]

Persecution extended from beyond merely eviction from homes to actual martyrdom. "Many have been persecuted and imprisoned," he wrote, "and not a few have been condemned to death."[49] In a report he noted that thirteen church members were executed for their faith.[50] Unfortunately very few details about such sacrifices are extant beyond their brief mention by Crisler. One of the more detailed examples reports on a female Bible worker who died from a severe beating at a

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[46] This account is based upon C. C. Crisler, "Our Faithful Chinese Workers in Hunan," *R&H*, May 12, 1927, 9–10.

[47] "Mission Board Items," *R&H*, April 9, 1931, 32.

[48] C. C. Crisler, "Evangelism in East China," *R&H*, August 27, 1931, 13.

[49] C. C. Crisler, "'The Seed of the Church' in China," *R&H*, May 3, 1928, 13.

[50] Ibid.

remote Adventist chapel. Another woman, a "mother and Bible worker," gave up her life, according to Crisler, because he was busy tending to another Chinese minister in prison.[51] If such specific references are any indication, it at least suggests that women made up a significant core group of Adventist workers who gave up their lives sharing the Adventist message.

As part of Crisler's philosophy, based upon his understanding of Ellen G. White about developing missionary bases, by 1932 Crisler fulfilled his lifelong dream of expanding the Adventist message into Tibet and Mongolia. Crisler discovered a Mongolian-German grammar, which he viewed as the entering wedge to train workers.[52] Crisler and Harold Shultz connected with a Tibetan abbot, a leader of lamas [*sic*], who as a person of influence appeared to be opening doors. He increasingly travelled into northwestern China over the next few years.[53] In 1935 he was chased by bandits who fired guns upon their mule train.[54] With such frequent reports of danger the news that C. C. Crisler actually died came as somewhat of a shock to Adventist workers in China as well as around the world. In fact, he died from pneumonia while on a remote trip to visit the Tibetan mission.[55] M. E. Kern broke the news of his death in the *Review and Herald*. He wrote that "it would almost seem that Brother Crisler had a premonition that this might be his last trip, though evidently he was not thinking of the possibility of disease."[56] This story would be repeated by others. The fact was, in another report, that he had tried to squeeze in another trip although he was not feeling fully recovered from his last trip with plans to leave upon his return to go on yet another trip to the United States for General Conference session. Overworked, with presumably a weakened immune system, he was advised by those closest to him to rest instead. This proclivity to overwork proved to be his fatal flaw. Attempts to secure an airplane from General Chang were made by Harry Miller, but who unfortunately used the airplane, after permission was

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[51] C. C. Crisler, "A Memorable Meeting in West China," *R&H*, January 23, 1930, 20–21.

[52] W. A. S[picer], "'Forward Into Battle' in North China," *R&H*, September 8, 1932, 10–11.

[53] M. E. Kern, "Into the Regions Beyond," *R&H*, November 9, 1933, 6.

[54] Note of letter by C. C. Crisler quoted by H. W. Miller, M.D., "Delivered from Bandits," *R&H*, January 31, 1935, 24.

[55] Frederick Lee, "A Challenge to the Remnant Church," *R&H*, April 23, 1936, 1.

[56] M. E. Kern, "Death of C. C. Crisler," *R&H*, April 9, 1936, 24.

granted, instead to bring out those closest to him to northwestern China for the funeral.[57]

Despite these facts, the myth and legend surrounding his death grew larger than life. Reports praised him as an "indefatigable worker" and as a "noble man of God."[58] His official obituary noted that he "contributed much to the wealth of our literature here in China." In conclusion: "Truly a saint in Israel has fallen whose life perhaps more than ever will vividly continue in the memory of the workers of the China Division and of our church at large."[59] *The China Division Outlook* devoted an entire issue to his memory, complete with a picture of him as embarked on his final journey on the front cover. Further details emerged about his final trip how he was stuck down in a small rural town. Church leaders tried to evacuate him by airplane only to end up using the plane to fly a small group of leaders to conduct his funeral service.[60]

Crisler's death achieved the status of martyrdom later that same year at the 1936 General Conference session, a meeting he had intended to attend. General Conference president W. A. Spicer in his presidential address described C. C. Crisler's special burden for entering new fields in northwestern China, especially Tibet and Mongolia. Crisler "laid down his life, worn with the burdens of the task, weary with days and days of travel, a sacrifice to the call of those neglected fields."[61] The reports of his death had a positive impact to inspire young people to serve and sacrifice their lives, too. At the China Training Institute, where students knew Crisler personally, a special meeting was held in which the news of his death was shared with the student body. At that meeting seventeen students responded to an appeal to follow in his footsteps and become evangelists.[62]

The following year the China Division in their resolutions noted once again that Crisler "laid down his life" and expressed sympathy to his family.[63] After his death his family was left to pick up the pieces.

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[57] A note on a photograph from the Ellen G. White Estate from the funeral observes that the airplane used was from General Chang. Published reports in the *R&H* discretely refer to Miller securing a plane from "a friend."

[58] Kern, "Death of C. C. Crisler," 24.

[59] Obituary, *R&H*, May 21, 1936, 19–20.

[60] *R&H*, May 14, 1936, 24.

[61] *R&H*, June 11, 1936, 254.

[62] John Oss, "Consecration Service at the China Training Institute, April 1, 1936," *The China Division Reporter* (hereafter *CDR*), May 1936, 7.

[63] "Spring Council Resolutions," *CDR*, September 1937, 2.

Minnie Crisler was granted a furlough to Australia, but returned at an unspecified time later and remained until hostilities in 1941 forced her evacuation.[64] Crisler's daughter, who taught music for one year at Far Eastern Academy, returned to the United States. While the details are unclear, it appears that she left the Seventh-day Adventist Church.[65] The medium of print, which Crisler cultivated so much, continued to cultivate the memory of his sacrifice. Five years later his death was commemorated by the workers in China. John Oss observed that the "tragic death" of "our beloved Elder C. C. Crisler" would move workers to "greater devotion" and sacrifice for the work that he started.[66] Later missionaries visited his grave in Lanchow. They left resolved to "dedicate [their] lives anew to the task for which he laid down his life in this field."[67] It seems that the only thing that dampened his memory was the China Revolution. During the 1950s and 1960s as the Seventh-day Adventist church organization disintegrated across China and went underground, it seems that Crisler's view of an advancing work through visible institutions had disappeared. Although Crisler was no longer alive, the fact that he measured progress by baptisms and institutions, meant an obvious reversal of what he spent his life laboring for: a vibrant Adventist presence across all of China that was a harbinger of the Second Coming. Thus came to an end calls and appeals to remember the sacrifice of Crisler.

CONCLUSIONS

Crisler was the chief purveyor of Adventist print in Asia, and especially in China, from 1916 until his death in 1936. In this way he mirrored the work of other Christian missionaries, especially in his promulgation of print. During the two decades in China, cushioned between the two

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[64] See note in *CDR*, September 1937, 11.

[65] See note under "Recent Sailings," in *CDR*, June-July, 1937, 24. A search on Ancestry.com and the Internet indicates what I believe is a positive identification, but I am still working to make contact with relatives to try to obtain definite confirmation. What details I have been able to find appear to indicate that she became bitter toward the church after her father's death, but the details are unclear.

[66] John Oss, "Next Year," *CDR*, December 1, 1940, 2.

[67] Bessie Mount, "With Our Workers in Lanchow," *CDR*, December 1947, 6.

World Wars of the twentieth-century, his life is a helpful example in ascertaining the calling, motivations, and methods of a Seventh-day Adventist missionary in China. The life of Crisler is particularly important because he represents a new class of professional missionaries who turned a disparate group of missions into a well-honed missionary enterprise. Thus the growth of the Adventist denomination during this period in many ways corresponds to the growing professionalism and bureaucratization typical of this era.[68]

The Seventh-day Adventist Church heavily invested in China by allocating funds and personnel during and soon after World War I. This investment paid rich dividends as Adventists had to make up for lost time in comparison to the many other Protestant missions in China. Shanghai was a center for the printing trade. As for Adventists, Crisler was the chief facilitator who shaped the message and mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in China. He conveyed a sense of missionary awareness through a wide variety of print publications ranging from those made available in China to reports published in denominational serials back in North America, most notably the *Review and Herald* and *The Youth's Instructor*. He took for granted the fact, he believed, that the most effective means of evangelizing the vast peoples of China was through print. Crisler exerted this power in creative ways in terms of both recruiting new personnel and obtaining additional funds to expand the publishing house and promulgate new publications. Thus Crisler represents a new class of Adventist missionaries to China who built on the initial work done by Abram La Rue, J. N. Anderson, and others so that he would pave the way for other missionaries such as Harry Miller who eventually joined him. Crisler should be recognized as the leading and most powerful figure within the Seventh-day Adventist Church who facilitated this tremendous growth, mostly through the medium of print.

One of the challenges is how to assess the life of such a complex personality such as C. C. Crisler using primarily published sources.[69] It seems clear that he held a deep admiration for the people and land of China, even if traces of cultural misunderstandings occasionally appear. He firmly believed that Adventist missions must be rooted in a love for the people, and that he, along with fellow missionaries, were

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[68] Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877–1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1966).

[69] Unfortunately the unpublished papers of Crisler were later destroyed leaving a challenge to reconstruct his life almost solely from published sources.

called to sacrifice in order to make this happen. He led by example, and both foreign as well as native missionaries unanimously gave from their meager salaries to provide additional funds to expand an Adventist missionary presence in un-entered regions. Crisler believed that their work had cosmic ramifications: in order for Jesus Christ to come again the Adventist message must be preached across China. In order to facilitate that goal he studied the language, customs, and culture, and encouraged other missionaries to do the same. Yet, in the end, it was a fundamental conviction like many other Protestant missionaries that print was the best medium to share the Adventist message that characterized his missionary legacy. At the same time, it was his focus, perhaps obsession, with statistics that also generated another problematic aspect of his legacy within Adventism: the idea that the successful outcome of the Adventist message was closely tied with numerical growth through baptisms, the number of church subscriptions, and the growth of institutions. Any nurturing could be similarly left to print publications. This continues to be a troubling aspect of Adventist missions up to the present. While Crisler is not solely responsible for this conundrum, he certainly contributed to it in a significant way through the medium of print. Finally, it was once again through print that Crisler described both persecution and the lives of those who gave the ultimate sacrifice through their lives. Even in his own life the story of his death inspired yet future sacrifices by others. It was through print that his status as the preeminent Adventist martyr in China was recognized up until the China Revolution of 1949 when the memory of this earlier time period, which was so painful in the face of heavy institutional, membership, and personnel losses, ultimately meant a reversal of his life work.