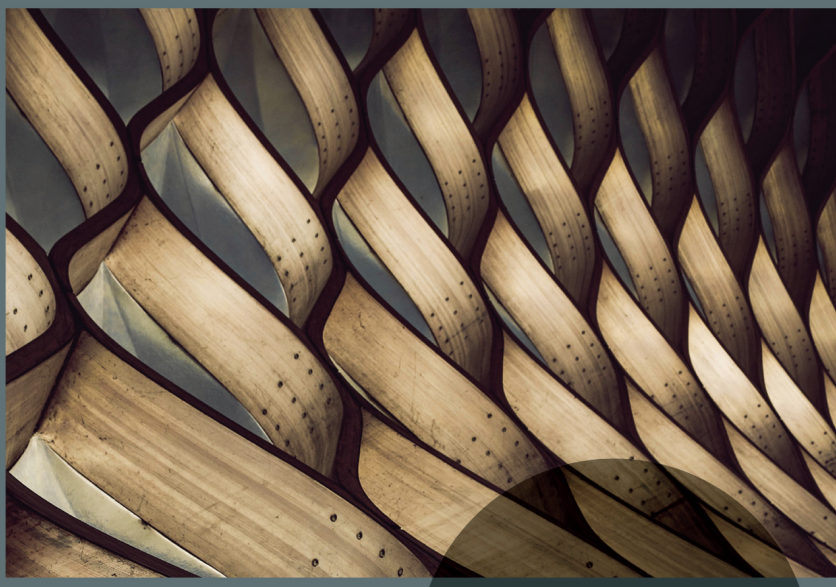
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Evaluating the Past and Looking to the Future



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CHAPTER 1

"How Shall They Hear?": A History of the Use of Romans 10:14 Among Missionaries to China, as Seen in the *Chinese Recorder and Missionary Journal*, 1868 to 1938

MATTHEW STEVEN WINSLOW

In 1877, Rev. Dean Butcher preached a sermon in Shanghai that would later be published in *The Chinese Recorder and Missionary Journal*. In his reflections on Romans 10:14, the preacher echoed the thoughts of the majority of missionaries when he stated that "everywhere and always the plan of God seems to be 'how shall they hear without a preacher,' man shall be taught by man" (Butcher 1878, 295).

Indeed, in the late nineteenth century, missionary men and women who came to China from the West generally did so with the conviction that China needed to hear the gospel clearly preached. Romans 10:14 and the surrounding verses served as an important rallying cry for these missionaries—and for the entire nineteenth-century Protestant missionary movement. So, historian Andrew Walls notes that "the number of nineteenth-century missionary sermons and appeals based on Romans 10:14f. alone is beyond calculation" (Walls 1996, 55). Yet, in the waning years of that century and carrying forward through the dramatic changes of the early twentieth century, a debate began to take shape among missionaries to China regarding the importance of Romans 10 and the necessity of preaching the gospel to the "Chinese heathens."

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Finally, in the late 1920s, when Pearl S. Buck burst onto the literary scene, views on Romans 10 and the necessity of preaching the gospel had considerably changed.[1] In this chapter I will look at these changes through the lens of *The Chinese Recorder and Missionary Journal*. By reading articles and letters to the editor, one sees a missionary community that slowly segregated into two different groups. The resulting modernist/fundamentalist divide was based on a number of issues, but of central importance was the spiritual condition of the Chinese people and the necessity—or futility—of preaching to them.

Within this debate, Romans 10:14 played a central role. In exploring the use of this text within a specific community of missionaries, in this chapter I will argue that the way Romans 10:14 was used, and its importance, shifted as worldviews and models of missions changed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In many ways, this transformation mirrored the shift in the mainline Protestant church in America; yet in China there were some particularities to the debate, and missions texts like Romans 10:14 played a more prominent role in the arguments.

The Chinese Recorder and Missionary Journal

The Chinese Recorder and Missionary Journal was published from 1868 to 1941. During the years that it circulated, the *Recorder* was probably the most widely read journal within the missionary community in China. The journal published feature articles on topics of interest to the missionaries, as well as opinion pieces, letters to the editor, and mundane details, such as which missionaries had arrived and left the country each month, marriages, deaths, and important regional legislation or announcements. At its height, its distribution was only around three thousand copies,[2] but most missionaries in China read the journal. Generally, one missionary in each station would subscribe to it, and the monthly copies would be shared among everyone in a location (Lodwick 1986, vol. 1, xii).

The stated aim of the journal was "to appear before the public as the recognized advocate of the Missionary cause." Furthermore, the editors defined their purpose as giving a voice to "every shade of Christian teaching and shewing a readiness to give each side a fair hearing" (Introductory 1874, 2). The articles in the *Recorder* are thus fairly representative of the wide spectrum of views among missionaries across China, and they provide a window into that world. So, in the words of one reader, "I do not agree with a considerable portion of the opinions expressed, nor do I find value in all the ideas proposed. But I do contend that it is the

1 In 1932, Buck famously observed that she was "weary unto death with this incessant preaching" (Buck 1932b, 1437). Her comments, which were hotly debated in China and in much of the Christian world, are discussed below.

2 This is an estimate. No records for the journal exist; they were all destroyed when the Japanese took over in 1941.

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function of the Recorder to keep me acquainted with all these diversified activities and opinions" (Hayes 1932, 316). I am using the diverse views expressed in the *Recorder* to examine how Romans 10:14 was used as a foundational principle of missions within China.

Early Missionary Views of Romans 10:14

In the mid-nineteenth century, in the wake of the Opium Wars, China was forced to open a series of port cities to foreigners. The reach of foreign powers gradually expanded; and as opium traders flooded into the country, so did missionaries. The majority of these missionaries came with the expectation that gospel preaching would play a central role in their activities. In an 1869 article, one observer noted that "it will be agreed, perhaps on all hands, that preaching claims a position of paramount importance" (S. A. 1869, 173). The author further reflected that while schools, hospitals, and other institutions have a place in missions, preaching is of the utmost concern to the missionary and should consume the majority of his time. He thus concluded, "It is not civilization that the Chinese want, not education, but true religion; and 'faith cometh by hearing'" (S. A. 1869, 175).

This appears to be the first allusion to Romans 10:14 in the *Recorder*, and it echoes the way that many others saw the verse. "Faith cometh by hearing" serves as a rallying cry to remind all true believers of the monumental task of preaching the gospel to those who do not believe.[3] This strong emphasis on preaching the gospel also leads to the maxim, "The soul first, then the body" (S. A. 1869, 174).

This idea is further supported by glancing through other articles in the 1869 and 1870 editions of the *Recorder*. The journal, for example, ran a nine-part series of feature articles, with a total of sixty pages, addressing the topic "On the Best Method of Presenting the Gospel." In those articles a missionary to Hong Kong explored several aspects of how the gospel was received and presented in China. Ultimately, he implores other missionaries to continue to think carefully about how to preach the gospel to the Chinese so that they can believe (Turner 1870).

In his 1877 sermon, Dean Butcher took Romans 10:14 as his text and then proceeded to explain how the whole Bible was a record of the missionary endeavor. For him, Romans 10:14 represents the theme of the entire narrative of God: Throughout history, God has been sending men and women to proclaim the gospel in order that all may be saved. Ultimately this continued proclamation

3 One should note that in this context preaching is not merely teaching Scripture; but rather, in the words of one evangelist, it is "The presentation of Christ as He is made known to us in the sacred scripture" (Muirhead 1893, 253.) So, as the rest of Muirhead's article on preaching makes clear, what he and others have in mind when they talk about gospel preaching (especially in the context of Romans 10:14) is a focused explanation of the doctrines of sin, repentance, and forgiveness as they relate to Christ. The expectation and hope of this kind of preaching is that those who hear will convert to Christianity.

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of the gospel in all lands will lead to the triumph of Christ over all. "Therefore, though at times the task be hard and the deferrings of Hope often make the missionary's heart sad, still the ultimate triumph of Christianity is one of the very few things about which there cannot be a shadow of doubt" (Butcher 1878, 298).

Butcher concludes his sermon by reminding his hearers that the map of China is big and that each one is called to do what he can in his own station to proclaim the gospel, in spite of all hindrances, so that light will overcome darkness. For him, Romans 10:14 is foundational to any method of missions to China. This seems to be the general tenor of the early editions of the *Recorder* and presumably the China missionary community. As one reader of the *Recorder* put it, Romans 10:13–15 is Paul's missionary creed and should be the creed of every missionary following him (Editorial 1893, 92).

Debates around the State of the Heathen

By the late 1880s, however, certain questions, which would affect the direction of gospel preaching in China, were beginning to bubble to the surface. As early as 1882, an anonymous article acknowledged that passages such as Acts 10:35 and even Romans 10:12 were being quoted to imply that those who worship the gods of their respective countries would be saved in light of their sincerity. The author firmly declares that "these passages, taken according to their connection and the scope of their meaning, afford no support to any such opinion" (A Student 1882, 391).

Not everyone agreed with this, though. Influenced by modernist Bible interpreters in Europe, some among the missionary community began to wonder if the Chinese really needed to hear the gospel or if they were already seeking God in their own manner. In other words, was it not enough that they were seeking the truth through Confucianism or Buddhism?

In 1883, Rev. D. Z. Sheffield wrote an article seeking to address these growing concerns. In his argument, he acknowledged that other systems of religion do contain some elements of truth and are useful in certain ways to restrain evil and promote good deeds. Sheffield, however, made it clear that from a biblical worldview one must acknowledge that Christ is supreme and that apart from him no one can be saved (Sheffield 1883). In a similar vein, an anonymous article that same year declared that the way to transform China was not to find good teaching in Confucianism or any other system but rather "by returning to the Apostles [i.e., Apostles'] method 'by preaching Christ and him crucified'" (An Evangelist 1883, 280). Both authors viewed preaching the gospel as central to any model of missions.

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Later, in 1887, the *Recorder* published a four-part, forty-four-page series in which Sheffield again tackled the issue of preaching the gospel to the Chinese. In the first article of the series, he outlined his firm belief that apart from the gospel, all people are separated from the one true God and are without hope in the world. Sheffield then quoted Romans 10:14, noting that "such teachings need no commentary to explain their meaning, and any man who propounds the doctrine that there are true worshippers of God in the heathen world, walking in the dim light of nature, is building up a theology upon his own speculations as to the moral government of God, and not upon the teachings of the great apostle to the Gentiles" (Sheffield 1887a, 96).

For Sheffield, Romans 10:14 and the surrounding context presented a clear message that applied directly to the needs of those in China: Apart from the true preaching of the gospel, the Chinese cannot hear, and apart from hearing they cannot believe. In the article, Sheffield proceeded to point out that some theologians, contrary to his views, were proposing a future "acceptation" or probation for the heathen.[4] He said that this view has no real scriptural support, but rather represents only the vague hopes of some younger thinkers. He went on to assert that this theology offers hope and relief to those Christians who don't want to go to foreign lands to preach to "the heathen." However, as he wryly observed, these hopes are false hopes (Sheffield 1887a, 98).

Sheffield concluded his series by imploring his readers to follow the plain direction of Scripture and faithfully proclaim the gospel to those who have not heard.

> There is a long, low wail of hopeless misery that is sounding forth from heathen lands, that breaks like the moaning ocean surge upon the shores of Christendom. Christianity is God's lifeboat which was prepared to save these perishing, immortal souls. Christian sailors, make haste to man the lifeboat. (Sheffield 1887b, 237)

For Sheffield, the misery of the unevangelized is remedied by the preaching of the gospel—the lifeboat of Christianity.

Responses to Sheffield's series were varied. The *Recorder* published several replies; and from what appears in the journal, it seems that many missionaries agreed with Sheffield's assertions and were still firmly committed to the ministry of preaching the gospel as the primary means to help the Chinese. Not everyone was so sanguine, though. A thirteen-page article from an anonymous German missionary argued passionately for "the doctrine of a future acceptance of the

4 The idea of the future probation of the heathen arose in the mid-nineteenth century and seems in many ways to be a mild form of universalism. Sheffield mentions Canon Farrar in his article, and probably had Farrar's two books on the topic (1879, 1881) in mind when he referred to this idea.

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