

SHORT BIOGRAPHY OF DR. FRANK W. PRICE

Frank W. (Francis Wilson) Price, missionary, Sinologue, churchman, author, statesman, and moderator of the Southern Presbyterian Church from 1953-54, was born in Sinchang, Kashing Province, China, on February 25, 1895. His parents, P. Frank (Philip Francis) and Esther Wilson Price served in China as missionaries of the Southern Presbyterian Church for more than 50 years. Taught in the home by both parents, with supplemental study at a Chinese mission school, Frank Price returned to the United States at the age of 15 for one year of high school before entering Davidson College, where he graduated in 1915 as salutatorian, president of the YMCA, and a member of Phi Beta Kappa. He later went on to receive a B.D. from Yale University, an M.A. in Christian education from Columbia Teachers' College, a PhD from Yale, and an honorary DD from his *alma mater*, Davidson College.

From 1915 to 1917 he served first as principal of the Hillcrest Foreign School in Nanking and then as secretary of the Nanking YMCA, before traveling in the fall of 1918 to work for several months with Chinese laborers in post-war France, under auspices of the International YMCA. In 1922 he was ordained to the ministry by Lexington Presbytery and commissioned as a missionary to China with a special relationship to the First Presbyterian Church of Harrisonburg, Virginia. The following summer, he married Essie McClure of Greenville, Virginia, and the young couple set out for the Orient. From 1923 until he and Mrs. Price were forced to leave China in 1952, he served as professor of religious education in Nanking Theological Seminary, as the founder and implementor of a program of rural involvement for nascent Chinese theological students, and later, during the Sino - Japanese War, as director of the seminary's Rural Church Department, relocated to Chengtu in West China.

During his pre-war years in Nanking, Frank Price was heavily involved in the experimental inauguration of multipurpose rural development activities, where theological interns traveling by bicycle or on foot sought rapport with village families and acquired firsthand experience not only in founding churches but also in fostering programs of agricultural improvement, health, education, and community organization. He became widely respected and beloved for his teaching, his efforts in behalf of rural development, his advocacy of China's cause in resisting Japanese military aggression, and his ecumenical leadership among the churches.

With a keen mind and extraordinary linguistic abilities, Dr. Price also continued his scholarly pursuits throughout his life. In 1925 he translated into English the *Three Principles of Dr. Sun Yat-sen*, considered the father of modern Chinese democratic movements. He was the author of a half dozen books and numerous articles about the Chinese Church and its relation to the West. (see below) During his years in West China during the Second World War, he translated most of the war messages of China's president Chiang Kai-Shek.

From the beginning of his missionary service, Frank Price was an enthusiastic supporter of the Interdenominational Christian Church in China, a cooperative venture

of Protestant missionary churches in that country, and later, from 1948 to 1950, he served as missionary co-secretary of that organization. He consistently advocated for the Chinese to assume greater positions of leadership, coupled with diminishing control by overseas missionaries.. In 1938 he served as a delegate from China to a meeting of the International Missionary Council. in Madras, India. "Out of the forty-nine delegates from China only nineteen were non-Chinese; that he was selected is evidence of the trust Chinese churchmen and missionaries had in him." (H. McKennie Goodpasture, article in the *Journal of Presbyterian History*, 1971, p. 257). For years he urged the reunification of the Southern Presbyterian (Presbyterian US) and Northern Presbyterian (Presbyterian USA) Churches. Sadly, he did not live to see the merger in 1983.

During the Second World War, Dr. Price worked closely with the Chinese government, twice sent by air on special missions to the United States. He also helped to set up liaison interpreter schools for Chinese and American troops. From time to time, he served as an interpreter himself for Generalissimo Chiang when visiting American nationals came to Chungking, the seat of the Chinese nationalist government. He also wrote a series of reports, based on extensive travels throughout China, often behind enemy lines, about the dire situation of the rural people of China under Japanese occupation,. According to Goodpasture, Dr. Price at this time "appeared more oriented to China and the Chinese church than to foreign missionary organizations." (p. 359) In 1945 he served as an attache to the Chinese delegation to the United National organizing conference in San Francisco.

Because of his close ties to the National government, it is not surprising that when the Communists took over control of China, Frank Price was sentenced by a "people's kangaroo court," condemned to death, and kept under virtual house arrest in Shanghai from 1950 to 1952. During his enforced confinement he translated 23 Chinese hymns and the poems of a traditional Chinese poet into English. After their sudden release, Dr. and Mrs. Price returned to the U.S., where he accepted the position as pastor of New Monmouth Church, just outside of Lexington, Va. This small rural church was seriously split and he sought, successfully, to bring about a new harmony and sense of goodwill to the divided congregation. When asked how it felt to be insulted by disgruntled parishioners, he always replied that one could not be insulted unless he was willing to accept the snub.

He had no sooner been installed as pastor than he was elected moderator of the Southern Presbyterian Church (Presbyterian Church in the U.S.) , serving from the summer of 1952 till May of 1953. (His father, P. Frank Price, had served in that same capacity from 1936-1937.) During this time, Dr. Price traveled widely, going out from Lexington almost every week to far corners of the Southland, coming home on Fridays to prepare his Sunday sermons and engage in pastoral visitation. The 1954 general assembly meeting, coming as it did immediately after the Supreme Court decision concerning desegregation in public schools, was a difficult one, with delegates' feelings running high.

In 1956 Frank Price accepted a position to become head of the Missionary Research Library in New York and professor of missions at Union Theological Seminary. He retired from these positions in 1961, and he and Mrs. Price moved back to Lexington. For the next five years he taught international studies at Mary Baldwin College in Staunton, Virginia.

In 1963-64 he and Mrs. Price embarked on a 14-month trip around the world, to assess Christian church in indigenous countries - India, Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia the Philippines, Hong Kong, Korea, Japan, and Taiwan. The trip was sponsored by Agricultural Missions, Inc., a consortium of theological seminaries concerned about the training of rural ministers in national churches. It was an exhausting trip and when the couple returned to Lexington, Dr. Price's incipient Parkinsonism had noticeably worsened. Sadly, he was unable to complete his report to the sponsoring organizations. He died in Lexington in January of 1974 at the age of 78, survived by his wife, two children, and eight grandchildren.

With a brilliant mind and a gift for languages, Frank Price was a dedicated Christian theologian, a scholar with wide-ranging interests, a man of extraordinary energy and enthusiasm, a warm and caring pastor and friend, a man equally comfortable cheering up a sick parishioner, offering a lonely Chinese student a weekend of Chinese food and conversation, commiserating with a frightened little girl who had lost her pet dog, or congratulating a local farmer for his sheep-shearing prowess. However, given the intensity and variety of his enthusiasms and his high level of activism, it is not surprising that he had his critics.

There were those who felt his theology was not orthodox enough, beginning at the time of his ordination examination before Presbytery. Others were concerned that he was too "ecumenical," diluting his faith by being willing to work with other denominations and even with non-Christians. And still others believed that he spent too much of his energies with social, economic, and political activities and that he seemed sometimes to be more "Chinese than American." Certainly, China was where his heart was and his love of and concern for the Chinese people, their everyday lives as well as their souls, were the focuses of his full energies, all the while surrounded and upheld by the God to whom he felt a close personal attachment and dedication. He stirred up a hornet's nest after his return from house-arrest in Shanghai, by advocating publicly that the United States should "recognize" Communist China and should offer that government a seat at the United Nation.

Some have wondered at the source of his ever-renewing energy. A young college student, spending a week assisting at New Monmouth's daily vacation Bible school, acknowledged to the preacher that he, a rising sophomore, was exhausted at the end of the five-day session. Seeing the minister looking fresh and eager the next morning, the student asked how in the world Dr Price managed to do so much. "He paused for a moment," the student reported, "and then replied, 'They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.' " When asked how he managed to endure the

stultifying inactivity of his long two years of house-arrest, Frank Price always answered with a smile, "Nothing kept me from praying."

Books by Frank W. Price:

Religion and Character in Christian Middle Schools of China (1929)

China Rediscovered Her West, co-editor,(1939)

We Went to West China (1943)

The Rural Church in China, 1938 and 1948

As the Lightning Flashes (Sprunt Lectures) (1948)

China-Twilight or Dawn (1948)

Chinese Christian Hymns - translation (1953)

Marx Meets Christ (Settles Lectures) (1957)

Sources for this article -

Our China Investment, by P. Frank Price, 1927

Who's Who in the South and Southwest

"China in an American: Frank Wilson Price: A Bibliographical Essay," by K. H. McKennie
Goodpasture, in *Journal of Presbyterian History*, 49:4 (Winter, 1971)

Obituary of Frank W. Price, January 10, 1974, written by his brother Philip B. Price

Newspaper Articles

Personal Letters and Recollections