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Union Theological Seminary, New York

Missionary Research Library Archives: Section 12

Finding Aid for
Laymen's Foreign Missions Inquiry Records, 1879 – 1940



Albert L. Scott

Credit to Underwood and Underwood, Washington DC

Finding Aid prepared by: Daniel Asen, December 2007, Arunabh Ghosh, April 2009
Review and updated with additions by Brigette C. Kamsler and Kristen Leigh Southworth, 2013
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Summary Information

Creator: Laymen's Foreign Missions Inquiry
Title: Laymen's Foreign Missions Inquiry Records, 1879-1940
Inclusive dates: 1879-1940
Bulk dates: 1930-1932
Abstract: Laymen's Foreign Missions Inquiry (LFMI); Institute of Social and Religious Research; Commission of Appraisal; National Committee for Promotion of LFMI; Modern Missions Movement; Movement for World Christianity; National Committee for Christian Education in China; Commission on Christian Education in Japan; YMCA in China. Topics include church and education, economics, medical work, women, and social, industrial, and religious backgrounds of India, Burma, China, and Japan. Report *Re-Thinking Missions* and its reception. Notes, manuscript reports, printed materials; missionary personnel; returned interview forms; surveys of pastors, missionaries, and medical professionals.
Size: 30 Records Cartons, 3 Manuscript Boxes, 31.25 Linear Feet
Storage: Onsite storage
Repository: The Burke Library
Union Theological Seminary
3041 Broadway
New York, NY 10027
Email: burkearchives@library.columbia.edu

Administrative Information

- Provenance:** Originally donated in 1933 to the independent Missionary Research Library, under the direction of Charles H. Fahs, curator of the Missionary Research Library from its foundation in 1914 until 1948. In 1976 the records were accessioned to the Burke Library archives with the closure of the MRL. A
- Access:** Archival papers are available to registered readers for consultation by appointment only. Please contact archives staff by email to burkearchives@library.columbia.edu, or by postal mail to The Burke Library address on page 1, as far in advance as possible
- Burke Library staff is available for inquiries or to request a consultation on archival or special collections research.
- Access Restrictions:** The collection is open to readers; however materials are in a very fragile condition. Advance notice to use the collection is appreciated to evaluate preservation needs. Especially fragile material is noted on finding aid with **[FRAGILE]**. Two boxes of original documents were moved into separate boxes as part of a Chinese Medical Project in 2011. These are also noted as **[FRAGILE]**
- Preferred Citation:** Item description, MRL 12: Laymen's Foreign Missions Inquiry Records, series #, box #, and folder #, The Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary, Columbia University in the City of New York.

History

In January 1930, a group of Baptist laymen met in New York City at the invitation of philanthropist John D. Rockefeller, Jr. to hear an address by John R. Mott, chairman of the International Missionary Council. Out of this meeting grew a plan to conduct and finance an intensive, objective study of the efficacy and value of foreign missions in Asia. Other denominations were invited to join the study, and ultimately seven chose to participate: Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., Reformed Church in America (Dutch Reformed), United Presbyterian, Methodist Episcopal, Congregational, Protestant Episcopal, and Northern Baptist.

The study that was carried out became known as Laymen's Foreign Missions Inquiry (LFMI). Five representatives from each denomination made up a group of directors who worked under the chairmanship of Albert L. Scott, a prominent New York churchman and President of Riverside Church Board of Trustees. The Inquiry was carried out with the full knowledge and cooperation of the Missionary Boards but independently of any involvement on their part.

The Inquiry consisted of two stages. The first began in late 1930, when twenty-seven "Fact-Finders" were sent to India, China, and Japan by the Institute of Social and Religious Research to collect data on missionary work and local conditions. The Institute was also founded by Rockefeller, based on his belief in the application of scientific methods to the religious field, and it was directed by John R. Mott. Specialized research teams compiled extensive background information on missionary work in each of the countries before sending the Fact-Finders to spend five months in India, six months in Japan, and six and a half months in China.

The second stage began in September 1931 with a "Commission of Appraisal." The Commission of Appraisal consisted of fifteen laymen, laywomen, and ministers. Under the chairmanship of Dr. William Ernest Hocking, an idealist philosopher and Harvard professor, they spent nine months visiting the fields of the Inquiry. The Commission of Appraisal then combined their own observations with the preliminary reports of the Fact-Finders to compile a final *Report of the Laymen's Foreign Missions Inquiry*. This *Report* was formally presented to the Mission Boards of the seven denominations on November 18-19, 1932 in New York City.

The final report of Laymen's Foreign Missions Inquiry was published by Harper and Brothers Publishers in November 1932 under the title *Re-Thinking Missions: A Laymen's Inquiry after One Hundred Years*. A supplementary series of seven volumes was also published by Harper and Brothers Publishers in 1933, with volumes 1-3 consisting of Regional Reports by the Commission of Appraisal, and volumes 4-7 containing reports produced by Fact-Finders of the Institute of Social and Religious Research.

The *Report* was considered to be "the most searching and exhaustive accumulation of missionary data ever undertaken." Its scope included education, economics, medical work, women's conditions and activities, and the social, industrial, and religious backgrounds of India, Burma, China, and Japan. In its final form, the *Report* contained two major sections: the first four chapters dealt primarily with the philosophy and theology of religion, and consequently of foreign missions. The remainder of the book offered an appraisal of current missionary efforts along with specific recommendations for changes in methods, practices, and policies.

The *Report* offered a bold critique of the entire missionary enterprise, highlighting major inadequacies in both the theology and the practices of the Missionary Boards and individual missionaries. Its criticisms of the Boards were particularly scathing, stating that "the trail of self-interest within the organization lies like the trail of a serpent over the mission of Asia," and that the Commission could see "no ground for a renewed appeal for the support, much less for the enlargement, of these missions in their present form and on their present basis."

In addition to their formal presentation of the *Report* to the Missionary Boards, the Inquiry Commission launched an enormous publicity campaign in order to arouse public interest and secure a wide reading of their publication. A series of press releases consisting of some of the more controversial sections of the *Report* were printed by several newspapers in the months leading up to its release. In 1933, a "National Committee for the Presentation of the LFMI" was established to publicize and educate about the findings of the Inquiry, and to promote LFMI as the first stage of the "Modern Missions Movement." In March 1934, the NCPLFMI reconstituted itself as the National Committee of the Modern Missions Movement, and would ultimately become the Movement for World Christianity, in 1936.

Public controversy surrounding the *Report* was considerable, with many repudiating the whole volume as "the worst and most dangerous attack ever made" on foreign missions. Those who were critical of the *Report* argued that the time spent on the field by both the Fact-Finders and the Commission was too brief, that the qualifications and motives of the commissioners themselves were spurious, and that the ability of any outside observer to accurately evaluate something as complex as foreign mission work was altogether questionable. The theology

contained in the first four chapters of the *Report* was roundly rejected by all the Boards, primarily for its failure to adequately affirm the unique supremacy of Jesus Christ as Savior.

However, in spite of the controversy and public outcry, the Inquiry was still considered by many to be the most notable and challenging statement regarding mission work since the Jerusalem Council in 1928. The majority of the Mission Boards welcomed it as a worthwhile endeavor, accepting most of the practical recommendations contained in the *Report*. Copies were sent to most mission stations by their boards, and missionaries were urged to give it their careful consideration. The Methodist boards even commended the Inquiry for being "in full accord with the temper of youth today," which they believed would "give new meaning and effect to the Christian message as it is presented to this disturbed and distracted modern world."

Sources:

From the materials in the collection, and:

- Baker, Archibald G., "Reactions to the 'Laymen's Report'," *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (Oct., 1933): University of Chicago Press, pp. 379-398.
- Hocking, William E. & the Commission of Appraisal, *Re-thinking Missions: A Laymen's Inquiry After One Hundred Years*, New York: Harper & Bros., 1932.
- Laymen's Foreign Missions Inquiry, *Report of the Commission of Appraisal of the Laymen's Foreign Missions Inquiry*, 1932.
- Speer, Robert E., *"Re-Thinking Missions" Examined*, New York: Fleming Revell Co., 1934.

Collection Scope and Content Note

The bulk of the LMFI collection contains the records produced in the research stages of the Fact-Finding Commission. Also contained in this collection are materials from the Appraisal Commission, coverage of the promotion and reception of the *Report*, and papers from the National Committee for Presentation of the LFMI, which became the Modern Missions Movement in 1934, and later the Movement for World Christianity.

Please note that the original Index cards organizing the records have been retained and are so marked within the Contents list to this collection.

The collection is organized in three series:

- **Series 1: Fact-Finding Commission Investigation, 1879-1936 (26 boxes, 24.25 In. ft.)**
This series, which forms the major part of the records, contains materials produced and collected as part of the Fact-Finding phase of LFMI which was directed by investigators of the Institute of Social and Religious Research. Materials in this section can be categorized as follows:
 - a) Development of Fact-Finding investigation methods and drafting of surveys;
 - b) Completed surveys of pastors and missionaries;
 - c) Printed materials collected for analysis;
 - d) Analyses conducted by Fact-Finders;

- e) Drafts of Fact-Finder reports to be included in *Re-Thinking Missions* (1932) and its Supplementary Series (1933).

Pamphlets, notes, maps, newspaper clippings, and other resource materials that the Fact-Finders produced or collected in their investigations are also included.

LFMI Fact-Finders also collected materials produced under the auspices of other contemporary inquiries into missionary and religious education in East Asia, such as the inquiry of the National Committee for Christian Religious Education in China of the National Christian Council of China, which was published in 1931 as *Religious Education in the Chinese Church: the Report of a Deputation*, as well as the Commission on Christian Education in Japan's 1931 study, published by the International Missionary Council in 1932 under the title *Christian Education in Japan*. The series also contains manuscript material on religions in China, produced in collaboration with Earl H. Cressy, including translations of sections on religion from Hangzhou gazetteers (LFMI Series 1B, box 6-7).

The series is further subdivided into four subseries, as described below.

- **Subseries 1A: Methods/Development, 1922-1931 (1 box, 1.00 linear ft.)**
This subseries covers the methods and development of the surveys including a sample black book, correspondence, reports, and other administrative documents.
- **Subseries 1B: China, 1879-1936 (15 boxes, 13.25 linear ft.)**
This subseries contains research materials on China. This subseries contains large quantities of newspaper clippings from the English language China press on diverse topics such as social conditions, philanthropy, family, children, festivals, crime, politics, women, communications, and transportation infrastructure.
- **Subseries 1C: India, 1913-1935 (5 boxes, 5.00 linear ft.)**
This subseries contains research materials on India and Burma.
- **Subseries 1D: Japan, 1929-1931 (5 boxes, 5.00 linear ft.)**
This subseries contains research materials on Japan.
- **Series 2: Commission of Appraisal Report, 1931-1934 (2 boxes, 2.00 lin. ft.)**
In this series are the papers produced by the Commission of Appraisal relating to the writing and publication of the final LFMI report, published as *Re-Thinking Missions* in 1932. The series includes minutes, manuscripts, press releases, and printed commentaries on the report from the press, as well as from the print materials of mission boards. Proceedings from the Meeting of Directors and Sponsors of LFMI and Representatives of Foreign Mission Boards are included in this series. In some folders, LFMI press release materials have been interspersed with contemporary commentary. This arrangement has been preserved.

This series also contains a folder of material (Series 2, Box 2, f 9) from 1934 on the MRL acquisition of LFMI archives.

- **Series 3: National Committee for Presentation of LFMI and Modern Missions Movement, 1932-1940 (5 boxes, 5.00 lin. ft.)**

This series contains materials produced by organizations which were established after the publication of *Re-Thinking Missions* in order to publicize and educate about the findings of LFMI. It contains administrative records of the National Committee for the Promotion of the Laymen's Foreign Missions Inquiry, the National Committee of the Modern Missions Movement and the Movement for World Christianity. It also contains a large group of correspondence from these organizations relating to efforts to promote *Re-Thinking Missions* through visits to U.S. cities and dissemination of publications.

Processing

This collection was processed following the More Product, Less Process method. Limited preservation work and replacement of folders was carried out during the first processing in 2009. Deteriorating folders had been replaced in parts of the collection, but many materials, especially Fact-Finder notes and compilations of newspaper clippings, remained in original folders. In 2013, all deteriorating folders were replaced with legal-size, acid-free archival folders.

Deteriorating metal clips have been removed from a large portion of the Japan pastor and missionary surveys, but remain throughout the rest of the collection. Some papers were flattened and manuscript copies of Fact-Finders' reports were removed from acidic binders. Folders containing acidic newspaper clippings are still in need of preservation work, and have been marked as **FRAGILE** on the Contents list of this Finding Aid. The deterioration of the newspaper clippings is greater than other papers and individual evaluation will be carried out before use.

A Chinese Medical Project was undertaken in 2011 and as part of that project a number of records were removed and placed in separate boxes. These are noted as **FRAGILE** and are in Series 1B, Boxes 14-15. The originals were photocopied in their entirety; those photocopies were placed in the original location.

Older MRL notation for folders where it was discernable has been retained in the contents list within brackets, e.g. [II 4-a].

Some material in this collection was clearly removed from other MRL archival or book collections for use during the work of the Laymen's Foreign Missions Inquiry. These are:

- Former NCCC National Committee for Christian Education can be found in LFMI Series 1B box 11.
- Former Commission on Christian Education in Japan can be found in LFMI Series 1D, Box 2-3.
- Former Papers from the Earl H. Cressy collection are to be seen in LFMI Series 1B, box 6-7.

As they have formed part of the LFMI collection since 1930 and acted as a central source for the Inquiry, these items have been retained with the Inquiry working documents.

Further Sources

The Burke Library offers many other collections that relate to the topics and organizations included in LFMI records. The Missionary Research Library, also founded by John Mott, covers the same geographic area as LFMI.

A further archival collection has for some decades formed part of the Japanese group of collections in the Missionary Research Library Archives section 7: Christianity in Japan, 1927 - 1931. This contains more material produced for the LFMI on Japan, including related material on religious education, rural work, and Christian education. The Christianity in Japan collection contains the papers of McGruder Ellis Sadler, Fred Roy Yoder, Margaret Elizabeth Forsyth, Thoburn Taylor Brumbaugh, Harvey Hugo Guy, George L. Maxwell, Nunokawa Magoichi 布川孫市, Charles Hatch Sears and others. Further information on this collection can be found in the finding aid:

http://library.columbia.edu/content/dam/libraryweb/locations/burke/fa/mrl/ldpd_8634529.pdf.

The International Missionary Council, Earl H. Cressy Papers, and the John Raleigh Mott Papers offer a sampling of the related collections. More information can be discovered on the website at: <http://library.columbia.edu/indiv/burke/archives/mrl.html>.

Brown University Archives houses the Clarence A. Barbour Papers which documents the Barbours' travels. Clarence and Florence Newell Barbour traveled in India, China, Hong Kong, Burma, and Japan with the Appraisal Commission of the Laymen's Foreign Missions Inquiry from Sept. 1931 to May 1932. Clarence Barbour was a Commissioner. More information can be found online at: <http://library.brown.edu/collections/archives/>.

The Rockefeller Archive Center (RAC) offers, in the Religious Interests series of the Rockefeller Family Papers, extensive information on the planning stages of the Inquiry. It also has correspondence from members of the Commission who were in China, Japan and India. More information can be found on the RAC online catalog: <http://dimes.rockarch.org/xtf/search>.

The Divinity School at Yale University has a small collection of LFMI records. It can be found online at: <http://hdl.handle.net/10079/bibid/4135891>.

Contents List

Series 1: Fact-Finding Commission Investigation, 1879-1936

Subseries 1A: Methods/Development, 1922-1931

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1A	1	3-5	Methodology of Fact-Finders: Sample Black Book, 1930
1A	1	6-8	Administrative Correspondence, Notes, and Reports, 1930-1931
1A	1	9-12	Preparations for Fact-Finding Commission, 1930
1A	1	13	Continental Missions Book, no. 3, 1922-1925
1A	1	14	Index: Volume VI of Report of Fact-Finding Commission, [193?]

Subseries 1B: China, 1879-1936

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1B	1	5	Middle Schools, 1929
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1B	1	7	Secondary School Schedules, 1928-1930
1B	1	8	Schools, [193?]
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1B	1	54	Central China [華中大學] College, Wuchang, Hebei: Knight, 1931
1B	1	55	Lutheran Theological Seminary: Knight, 1931
1B	1	56	Report on Boone School, Wuchan, Hubei: Knight, 1930

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Series 1: Fact-Finding Commission Investigation (Cont'd)**Subseries 1B: China (Cont'd)**

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Series 1: Fact-Finding Commission Investigation (Cont'd)**Subseries 1B: China (Cont'd)**

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