



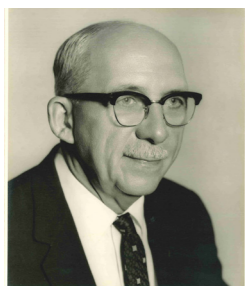
Salted With Fire

By Rev Dr Chiang Ming Shun

In one of his more curious sayings, Jesus tells us in Mark 9:49 that, "...everyone will be salted with fire." Weston Fields, citing Bratcher and Nida decades ago, wrote that there are at least 15 different explanations of the verse. The general view is that salt and fire have something to do with purification and even suffering - the pain of suffering will purify and cleanse.

This phrase comes to mind when I think of two of the earliest principals of Trinity Theological College. Hobart Baumann Amstutz and Hubert Lafayette Sone were men of God who suffered through the horrors of war to be used by God to do great work.

Hobart Amstutz (1896-1980) went through two wars. He was drafted into the Army when the United States entered World War 1. After the war, Amstutz earned degrees at Northwestern University, including a Bachelor of Divinity in 1923. Amstutz came to Southeast Asia and Singapore in 1926. He was appointed associate pastor at Wesley Methodist Church. In 1928, Amstutz was made principal of the Jean Hamilton Theological School, a Methodist institution that trained local students to be preachers in vernacular languages. That same year, he was also made Dean of the Pastors' Institute, which conducted



continuing education for pastors, missionaries and teachers.

When the Jane Hamilton Theological School merged with the Eveland Seminary in May 1940 to form the Malaya Methodist Theological College at 7 Mount Sophia, Amstutz remained as one of the two principals. Amstutz was deeply involved in training people of all ages for ministry.

All this training ground to a halt when the Japanese invaded Singapore. Amstutz was imprisoned with other pastors at the Sime Road Camp. There is a photograph of an emaciated Amstutz and his Wesley Methodist Church colleague, Rev Tyler Thomson in the Camp.

It was during this internment that Amstutz began discussions with the Presbyterian Rev T. Campbell Gibson and the Anglican Canon Sorby Adams about forming a union theological institution after the war.

After the war, unlike other European missionaries who returned home to recuperate, Amstutz remained in Singapore. He retrieved and reinstalled whatever furniture remained for Wesley Methodist Church, including the Hammond organ and stained-glass windows. He restored the damaged Wesley Methodist Church. And he renewed discussions on an interdenominational theological college. The new college opened in October 1948, at the

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site of the Malaya Methodist Theological College, which was absorbed into the new college. Amstutz suggested that the college be called Trinity College and he became its first Principal and Chairman of the Board of Governors.

Even as Principal, Amstutz was involved in missions work in other countries. In 1950, Amstutz wrote about a hair-raising experience in a longboat shooting the rapids of a mad, rushing river after visiting the Methodist Iban School in Kapit, Borneo. Amstutz was to become Methodist Bishop from 1956 to 1964.



While Amstutz was Bishop, the Principal of TTC from 1956 to 1961 was Hubert Sone (1892-1970), another Methodist pastor who had to live through war in Asia. Sone had gone to China as a missionary in 1920, building a mission station in Huzhou before being appointed to the faculty of Nanking Theological Seminary (today the Nanjing Union Theological Seminary) as Professor of Old Testament in 1933. Sone was there in 1937 when the Japanese army entered the city in December. Warned to leave the city by the presiding bishop of his Methodist Conference, Sone had sent his wife and children away to Mount Mogan in Zhejiang. But Sone stayed and so witnessed the "Rape of Nanjing."

For months, Sone wrote letters to colleagues, including the Senior Minister of Highland Park Methodist Church (today Highland Park United Methodist Church, the church that was supporting Sone), detailing the atrocities he witnessed. The Church published these letters in its bulletins and newsletters. Sone also wrote protest letters to the United States Embassy and to the Japanese Embassy in Nanjing. But beyond writing letters as a witness, Sone rescued victims.

The European foreigners left behind in Nanjing had formed an International Committee and created a Nanjing Safety Zone as a haven to protect civilians. Sone was initially the Associate Food Commissioner, responsible for buying and distributing rice to the refugees. He had to ride in the rice truck every day to prevent Japanese soldiers from stealing the truck and taking the Chinese driver and workmen away.

From February 1938, Sone was the Administrative Director of the International Committee.

Besides feeding and housing tens of thousands of refugees, the foreigners also had some restraining influence on the violent excesses of the Japanese. Sone wrote that the Committee spent "a good portion of their time running from one place to another to prevent the soldiers from raping the women or robbing the people." The Committee, including Sone, also documented the atrocities.

In 1941, Sone was finally furloughed out of China and he went to the University of Chicago Divinity School to work on his PhD. The United States' subsequent entry into World War 2 after Pearl Harbour prevented Sone from returning to Nanjing Theological Seminary until after the war. When he did return, it was only for a few years during and after the Civil War between the Kuomintang and the Communists. When the Communists emerged victorious, they expelled all foreign missionaries from China, and the Sones relocated to Singapore and TTC in 1951, among the last Americans to leave Nanjing.

At TTC, Sone taught the Old Testament in both English and Chinese. He was Dean of the College before serving as Principal. He retired in 1961 to his native Texas.

Both Amstutz and Sone had harrowing war-time experiences. But these did not dampen their enthusiasm or shake their faith. They remained unbowed in the midst of immense suffering. Unspeakable evil only plunged them deeper into the work of God. The privations of life in war led them not to focus on themselves but to think about others. Amstutz and Sone considered how they could train others in ministry and how they could save others from evil. Because of people like them salted with fire, we have a TTC today.

In this time of pandemic, the examples of Amstutz and Sone should encourage us not to be despondent, but to draw strength from God so that we may be a light to the world. ❖



Rev Dr Chiang Ming Shun

Associate Dean | Acting Registrar
Lecturer in Church History