

# Lloyd Robert Rist

**1885 ~ 1929** A Canadian missionary who served faithfully in Gansu (China) until his death.

Robert Lloyd Rist was born on August 14, 1885, in Ontario, Canada. In 1909 he graduated from Toronto Bible College, whereupon he joined the China Inland Mission (CIM), committed to service in China. He and his wife arrived in China on December 7, 1911, and proceeded first to the CIM language school in Anhui, after which he was assigned to Gansu for missionary work. In the summer of 1912, he and his wife had to travel for 40 days before they finally reached Qinzhou (now Tianshui) and entered into their labors.

Qinzhou was the CIM's first mission station in Gansu, having been opened in 1878. When Rist and his wife arrived, Mr. and Mrs. Douglas A.G. Harding were in charge of the station; other missionaries there were Miss Hilda E. Levermore, Miss A.E. Brett, and Mr. Harold A. Weller.

Rist set off in the spring of 1913 on his first evangelistic trip - a two-week circuit to outlying areas. Heading northward, he stopped first in Qin'an County, after which he visited twenty towns and villages. When he preached, though more than a hundred would gather, most came only to see the "foreigner." Sometimes after he had preached he would be pelted with stones. In 1914, aside from preaching in the streets and in the Gospel hall, he sometimes went to Xihe County, to the south, and to Mapaoquan and other places towards the east. He opened a preaching station at Qin'an County in 1917. There was a young believer there who ran a pharmacy, and was willing to let his premises be used for evangelism, testimonies, and eventually worship on the Lord's Day. A church building was erected in 1919. At that time, there were opium smokers not only among believers, but elders and deacons as well, but Rist did not compromise with such behavior, but rebuked it severely from the pulpit, and strictly enforced church discipline, until the offenders repented and reformed their ways.

In January, 1916, Dr. George E. King came from Borden Memorial Hospital in Lanzhou to Qinzhou for two-weeks of medical evangelism, along with a Chinese physician who, with him, treated more than five hundred patients. Rist joined them in sharing the Gospel with sufferers as they were being medically attended to. In December of the same year, another physician from Borden Memorial Hospital, Dr. R. C. Parry, also came to Qinzhou. Under his kindly attentive medical care and leading, one opium addict not only was healed, but after he had broken the habit in the opium recovery ward at the mission station was completely transformed. He went home and smashed all the family idols. Not only so, but he also opened his own opium refuge, using his own experience as a testimony influenced others to come and break their addiction. As a result, the CIM's mission work not only expanded, but churches were established in Qinzhou and in six or seven villages nearby. Thirty-one people were baptized in 1920, and two new Gospel halls were opened. There were many inquirers, and even more people forsook their idols and turned to the Lord. In December of that year, just as Rist was preparing to return home on furlough, a huge earthquake struck Gansu, toppling many buildings and causing much suffering. Three homes and the church building in the mission station were destroyed. Happily, Rist and his family escaped and none of the missionaries were injured.

The Rists did not return to Vancouver, Canada, until June, 1921. During the period of eighteen months in Canada and the United States, aside from taking time to rest and visit with family, they visited churches to share their testimony. The family of five returned to China in January, 1923. This time, Rist was assigned to a new work in Huixian, south of Qinzhou. It was a place of few people, high mountains, deep valleys, and very difficult travel. Sometimes there was nothing to eat; occasionally he had to sleep in a stable. Nothing daunted, Rist pressed on, going to that region to sow the seed of the Gospel and preaching with great joy:

“Although the surroundings are very inferior, and there are all sorts of difficulties, nevertheless, I really love this work. It is a great honor to preach the Gospel and shepherd the flock of God here!”

For years Rist had wanted to erect a Gospel hall in Qinzhou. When he returned from furlough, he brought a sum of money donated by American Christians, which he used to purchase wood and bricks in preparation for construction. In 1924, under his leadership, and with the participation of all the church members, an octagonal chapel that could see more than 300 people was built---the most distinctive and most beautiful structure in the city. Thereafter hundreds of people came each day to hear the Gospel, with activities each day and on three evenings a week. The believers entered more into the ministry of the church, and the work of the Gospel prospered greatly.

In 1925, when all three of the Rist children had reached school age, in keeping with the policy of CIM at the time, they were supposed to attend the mission school in Chefoo (now Yantai), Shandong Province. Because travel to Shandong was so difficult, and they could see their children only once in three years, the Rists themselves accompanied their children to the school. As soon as they arrived, two of their sons came down with measles, which was raging at the time, so Mrs. Rist had to remain behind to care for the children, and Lloyd Rist assumed the responsibility of going to CIM headquarters in Shanghai to report on the situation in person.

In May of 1926, Lloyd Rist took a group of new missionaries to Gansu to begin their work. Widespread fighting between warlords at the time disrupted both society and communications, and their progress was hindered in Shanxi, Shaanxi, Gansu - everywhere they went. It was not until the middle of June that they reached Longzhou (now Baoji) in Shaanxi, and they did not arrive safely in Qinzhou until July. In 1927, because of fighting between the Nationalists and Communists, the situation became even more chaotic. For the sake of safety, European and American missionary leaders issued an order for all their workers to evacuate, so in the summer of 1927 the Rists went with other missionaries to Chefoo in Shandong. In this way they were able to re-unite with their three children. While they waited for permission to return, they made preparations for future work in Gansu.

When the situation got better, the Rists said farewell to their children in October, 1928 to return to Gansu, traveling through Tianjin, then Beijing, by a simple and crowded train, through Datong in Shanxi, and Baotou, where they changed to a truck for Wuyuan, thence by oxcart through the desolated terrain of the Northwest in the cold winter, bumping along for a full ten days, finally reaching in Yinchuan, Ningxia on December 7th. This time they had been assigned to Zhongwei, between northwestern part of Gansu and the border of Inner Mongolia (now Zhongwei county in Ningxia), to open a new mission station. When they arrived in Zhongwei on January 1st, 1929, they knew absolutely no one, and had no place to stay, so they lodged temporarily in a Muslim inn. Here's how Rist described it: “We arrived in Zhongwei completely alone, with no friends, not help, and no servants. Compared to Qinzhou, it was the difference between heaven and earth! But this place really needs us to be here and open a new work!”

In a completely strange place, totally strange foreigners, preaching a totally strange Gospel, it was truly not easy! After a while there, they rented a house in the center of the city on the main street as a preaching station. Every day they spoke with people, preached the Gospel, and helped the famine victims in countless ways. After a few months, there were already more than 200 believers, and a class with more than 40 catechumens.

Rist did not spare himself as he cared for the refugees, even while he lost no time in his efforts to save souls. But at this time of an epidemic, he contracted a fatal form typhus fever. On June 26, 1929, he felt unwell, but took no rest, insisting upon working until the 28th, when his condition worsened considerably. His wife gave him medicine and nutritious food, but he did not improve. At the time, Zhongwei had no resident physician or the necessary medical equipment, and the closest doctor was eight day's journey away. On July 2nd, his whole

body erupted into a rash, confirming that he indeed had typhus fever. His wife just had to rush to the telegraph station 30 miles away and send messages to Ningxia and Lanzhou for help. The Rev. Ralph C. Scoville and G. Gindlay Andrew hurried from Ningxia and Lanzhou, respectively, and did all they could to save him, but it was all too late. On the morning of July 9th, Lloyd Robert Rist peacefully passed away, leaving Mrs. Rist and three young children behind.

The CIM publication *China's Millions* published a special report in memory of Rist, calling him a “front-line point man”; one who attacked the very den of Satan” and “a hero who destroyed the base of the enemy.”