

CSCH President's Address 2011

**Faith in Development: Donald K. Faris's Path
to a New Mission in the Postcolonial Era**

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After the Second World War, Western nations, multilateral agencies, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) began providing development assistance to newly emerging nations in Asia and Africa. Their engagement reflected the great need for humanitarian assistance in those nations and the pragmatic stimulus of the Cold War. The pace, at first halting, accelerated dramatically in the 1960s, which the UN proclaimed the United Nations Development Decade.¹ Far from perceiving this trend as a threat to their historic roles and their influence in the non-western world, many mainstream missionaries embraced it, either by serving with secular development agencies or by encouraging the mission organizations of their churches to make multi-faceted assistance to the developing world a priority. In the course of the 1960s, the mission organizations of many mainstream churches did in fact make this transition, in effect becoming faith-based NGOs. For historians of western Christianity as well as for development studies specialists, much can be learned, I believe, by investigating intersections between secular and faith-based approaches to international assistance in the postcolonial era.

For the past several years I have been researching a secular NGO, CUSO, originally called Canadian University Service Overseas. Established in 1961, the same year as the US Peace Corps, CUSO was the first

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distinctively Canadian non-governmental organization to undertake development work from a secular stance and in a postcolonial and decolonizing world. In a paper at the CSCH conference in Vancouver in 2008, I dealt in a preliminary way with some of the links between Canadian mainstream missions and CUSO. A substantially different version of that paper has since been published under the title “When Missions Became Development: Ironies of ‘NGOization’ in Mainstream Canadian Churches in the 1960s.”² In the published article, I focused mainly on the United Church of Canada during the 1960s and in doing so referred briefly to the man whose career I consider here, the Reverend Donald K. Faris (1898-1974).³

Faris began his overseas career as a United Church missionary in China but worked after the Second World War for several different United Nations agencies and thus, in a broad sense, illustrates a secular approach to development. Through his book *To Plow With Hope*, published in 1958, Faris was a significant, albeit indirect, influence on the founding of CUSO. I’ll highlight briefly how that came about near the end of the essay. The main part of the paper outlines the stages in Faris’s career so as to show the unfolding of his own new mission. Faris came to believe strongly that humane, small-scale, locally sensitive technical assistance that enabled the world’s poorest to help themselves could both improve the quality of their lives and contribute to the growth of international friendship and understanding. That aspect of his faith journey began early on in his career as a missionary. I will focus mainly on his postwar years. As well as outlining his UN work, I suggest that his understanding of mission and his youthful Christian faith both informed his approach *and* underwent change as he moved out of the orbit of his church’s mission board and into the not always congenial new world of UN agencies and large-scale secular development. By focusing on a cross-culturally engaged individual like Donald K. Faris who made this kind of transition, one can, I believe, get a richer understanding of how such major international phenomena as decolonization, the Cold War, and secularization were experienced at a personal level as well as a better sense of the missionary legacy in development. Before turning to Donald Faris, however, we need briefly to revisit the early days of Canadian Protestant overseas missions and their evolution through to the Second World War.

The mainline Protestant denominations of Canada, including the three denominations that came together in 1925 to form the United Church of Canada (Congregationalists, Methodists, and most Presbyterians), had

all established overseas missions by the late nineteenth century, missions that were vitally important to their sense of denominational identity and international engagement. Almost from the beginning, like their American counterparts, these denominations established social service and institutional components as adjuncts to their proselytizing, particularly in the form of education and medical work. The home-base committees of these missions were, on the one hand, intensely proud of these elements in their mission outreach and, on the other, anxious to have their missionaries remain mindful that educational and medical work and other forms of non-preaching activity were meant to be merely aids to the evangelization of non-Christians. In general, the missionaries agreed with this emphasis. But not always. In the case of Presbyterians in India around the turn of the century, for instance, specific local circumstances led some prominent missionaries to justify medical work and famine relief even when those activities did not necessarily serve as conduits to conversions.⁴ During the interwar period of the twentieth century, as with mainline mission bodies in the US and Britain, the institutional and social service aspects of Canadian church missions became increasingly important and diverse (agriculture, literacy work, etc.), more ecumenical, and often much more professionalized, despite the fact that in most cases these agencies had not proven to be particularly effective tools for making converts. As for evangelizing, it was increasingly left in the hands of indigenous Christians, although for purposes of fundraising the mainline missions continued to employ a discourse of evangelization, a practice for which, especially in the US, they were sometimes strongly criticized by their more conservative counterparts.⁵

The types of non-proselytizing activity that these mainline missions were practising in the interwar period anticipated much work that would later come under the rubric of development. Nevertheless, from the perspective of missionaries and former missionaries at mid-century who favoured more in the way of service-oriented mission work, or who looked back with regret on the colonialist context of missions and the emphasis on making conversions, the churches still had a long way to go. This kind of perspective became increasingly characteristic of the World Council of Churches (WCC), inaugurated in 1948. In the United Church of Canada, an enthusiastic founding member of the WCC, the new mood appeared strongest among missionaries who had served in China and whose careers there had ended with the triumph of Communism.

Donald K. Faris was one such missionary. One of four children born

to a farm family near Bradford, Ontario, Faris obtained a degree in Arts and Theology at Queen's University in 1923. As an undergraduate he was in on the early days of the Student Christian Movement and attended a Student Volunteer Movement (SVM) conference in Des Moines, Iowa, in 1919. Designated as a missionary to China in 1925, he first served in a challenging mission field north of Kamloops, British Columbia. It was there that he met Marion Fisher, the minister's daughter and public health nurse whom he married before leaving for China and who, despite frequent periods of ill health, outlived him by twenty years and herself underwent diverse spiritual journeys.⁶

Faris was appointed to the United Church of Canada's North China mission (formerly the North Honan Mission of the Presbyterian Church in Canada). While attending the SVM conference in Des Moines he had become acquainted with a prominent India-based agricultural missionary, Sam Higginbottom. Early on in China, agriculture likewise emerged as a strong interest for Faris notwithstanding his ordained status and his appointment to evangelistic work. Political and social upheaval in interwar China (contending Nationalist and Communist forces, anti-foreign agitation, ongoing banditry, Japanese invasion) exacerbated the routine poverty and malnutrition that marked the lives of the rural masses among whom the North China missionaries worked. Although he was stung when he saw his name included in a printed diatribe against foreigners during his first term, Faris was led to ponder whether it was appropriate to preach God's love and Christian brotherhood to people experiencing starvation. As the son of an innovative farmer, he had seen the difference that careful seed choices and other sound agricultural practices could make in improving crop yields. Thus, in 1931, "as a hobby I started growing a few imported fruit trees in China." Back in North America on furlough in 1932-33, he visited the Dominion Experimental Farm and audited courses at the Ontario Agricultural College. He also attended an agricultural seminar at Cornell, where he met John Reisner, the well-known head of the Agricultural Missions Foundation.⁷

During the furlough, like many other missionaries at this period, Don had a strong religious experience through the Oxford Group movement, though the introspection and elite associations often associated with the movement and deplored by its critics was far from typical of his personality.⁸ Once back in China, agricultural experimentation and work for rural community improvement, broadly conceived, became his priority, notwithstanding the constraints placed on all mission work by the

Depression. In a 1934 letter to J.H. Arnup, Secretary of the Board of Foreign Missions, he reported encouraging early outcomes from initial experiments on two small farms using “already improved seeds” from North America to compare crop outputs with yields from native varieties. He also told of a work-study initiative for eighteen boys (more than fifty had applied) to equip them with training for agricultural extension work in nearby villages. Faris’s detailed account of his work was a prelude to asking Arnup for help in contacting Canadians willing to donate money and equipment. Improved crop yields had the potential to fend off the risk of starvation facing thousands in the area, Faris wrote, but he had exhausted the resources of his personal salary, and in the current state of the mission’s finances “new work just has no look in.”⁹

Two years later in *The New Outlook*, Faris wrote in enthusiastic terms about achievements and future prospects for the mission’s now multi-faceted programme of Rural Reconstruction. Though they had had successes with improved yields on a wide variety of crops, they had decided to focus on fruit production and to that end were beginning a canning and bottling initiative through a farmers’ cooperative. A farm fall fair, the first in Honan, had been visited by some ten thousand people and had received strong official support. The Church of Christ in China, having become aware of the mission’s agricultural initiatives, had asked Faris and his colleagues to research and present a report on measures for rural reconstruction that could extend beyond the region. Especially in view of the “continuous over-emphasis on revival” within the Church, Faris was gratified by this turn of events. “In our programme,” he wrote, “love seeks to face the realities of every-day life and find its fulfilment in practical service in the rural communities.” Although Japanese forces occupied Honan in 1937, the mission’s rural work carried on until the mission was evacuated in 1939. Amidst the chaos, the grafting of some 1500 peach trees onto local stock and their distribution to village cooperatives was perhaps its most enduring physical legacy.¹⁰

Following the evacuation, Faris was invited to be Director of the Rural Institute established earlier as an extension of Cheeloo University in Tsinan. Some programmes at Cheeloo and at other universities initiated by missionaries were relocated to West China (so-called Free China) when Japanese forces took over. But the rural extension programme remained in Japanese-occupied territory, and despite the uncertainty of the political situation Faris became absorbed in his new work and its future possibilities. As had been the case back at the mission, he was deeply interested at

the larger Cheeloo experimental farm in trying out new means for improving the diet of malnourished peasants (here experimenting, for instance, with breeding poultry and hares as cheap sources of protein). He was initially less comfortable with Institute plans for training agricultural workers at three different levels of expertise, including a graduate level. In the past he had favoured “a village-centred” approach to training and for a time was concerned that institutionalizing rural training on a large-scale and over a prolonged period would produce graduates alienated from village life.¹¹ Although Marion and their three sons returned to Canada in March 1941, Faris stayed on and was able to continue working at Cheeloo even after Japan and the Allies were at war and he became a detainee. His return to Canada in June 1942 in an exchange of wartime detainees proved to be the end of his career as a missionary.¹²

Faris spent most of the last two years of the war as an RCAF chaplain in British Columbia, the province that was home to him and his family when they resided in Canada. He had turned to chaplaincy work, since, as explained in the memoir, “ordinary pastoral work didn’t appeal to him after what he had been doing in China.”¹³ A reluctance to take on a pastoral role was to be a recurring theme in his postwar life. Then, even before the war was over, in January 1945, Faris applied for a position with UNRRA, the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration. That fall after briefing at UNRRA headquarters in Washington and a short period of training at the University of Maryland he was on his way back to China to work on a major UNRRA rebuilding project on a portion of the Yellow River in Honan. UNRRA’s historian called it “perhaps the best known among all the specific rehabilitation enterprises sponsored by UNRRA.”¹⁴ The project occupied Faris for the next two years. Like other missionaries who were hired by UNRRA and other similar UN agencies in the immediate postwar years, he was probably hired mainly for his language skills and local cultural expertise. The first part of the project involved rebuilding dikes on a stretch of the Yellow River in order to restore farmland that had been deliberately flooded by Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalist forces as a means of holding back the invading Japanese (a strategy that had killed or displaced millions of Chinese peasants). The original job description called for engineering expertise, but Faris functioned principally as an expeditor of supplies for the thousands of labourers employed on the project and as a liaison between the Nationalist and Communist forces who controlled different parts of the region and who had agreed when the project began to cease fighting in order to allow

the work to proceed. As the months passed and the agreement broke down, Faris frequently found himself caught in crossfire between the rival forces: a Shanghai newspaper called him “the most shot-at man in UNRRA.” His main personal frustrations, however, seem to have arisen from tense relations with his mercurial American supervisor and other uncongenial western co-workers and from his own insecurity about his fitness for some aspects of the UNRRA assignment.¹⁵

Faris would serve on three more UN projects, all of them involving varying degrees of challenge and frustration before working in India on his final and most satisfying UN assignment. Shortly after his UNRRA job ended there was a UNICEF refugee-feeding project in Hankow, China, closed down just ahead of a Communist takeover of the region; some two years of work in Korea with the United Nations Korean Reconstruction Agency (UNKRA); and almost four years in Thailand, 1955-1959, on the staff of the Thailand-UNESCO Fundamental Education Centre training workers for community development leadership in rural areas, an assignment similar in some ways to one part of his wartime work at Cheeloo.

Meanwhile, however, in 1949-50 Faris sought to return to China under the Overseas Mission Board (OMB) of the United Church. This period is worth considering in some detail, since it shows how the immediate Cold War context and Faris’s views about the need for a wholly new approach to missions in the postwar world strained his relationship with the OMB. Faris hoped that in spite of the Communist triumph in China, he would be able to go back to agricultural extension work at Cheeloo University and to that end sought authorization from the mission board to return.¹⁶ His expectation was not as naive as it may seem in retrospect, for as Jessie Lutz, the US historian of China’s Christian colleges, explains, the period 1948-1951 was “a transitional era” in which it still seemed possible that the Communist Party might permit some of the colleges’ previous roles to continue.¹⁷ Still, there were several things working against Faris’s plan. Mission Board secretary Jesse Arnup and Faris had had tense relations in 1948 when Faris, then recently back from his UNRRA work and giving addresses to various non-church groups, had seemed to Arnup and some other concerned observers to be unduly critical of Chiang Kai-shek, and vulnerable to charges of being soft on Communism like fellow China missionary Jim Endicott. One man had accused Faris of being “a Communist masquerading in a UNRRA uniform.” For a brief period, suspicions about his political leanings would even result in

his being refused entry to the US.¹⁸ As for Arnup's recently retired predecessor at the OMB, A.E. Armstrong, he had written to Faris in January 1948 from Toronto, saying "I do plead with you to refrain from any further speeches of a political nature . . . I hope that you will talk about the church in China." Armstrong confessed that he was concerned about "the effect [of political discussions] on the missionary spirit, and practical expression of it in support of the work." For his part, Faris believed that he was being censored by Armstrong's letter and by the OMB, which, in contrast to secular organizations, had provided him with few speaking opportunities following his return to Canada from his UNRRA assignment.¹⁹

In 1949, having returned from his UNICEF relief work in Hankow, where he had seen much that was troublesome about the ruthlessness of the Communists' tactics as they extended their control, Faris was more conciliatory in writing to Arnup than he had been earlier and anxious for OMB sponsorship to return to Cheeloo. There was temporary work for him at the United Church's new lay training centre at Naramata, he explained, but he was mindful of his and his family's uncertain future. His preference, he now declared, had always been to work in China under church auspices, and he had taken the position with UNRRA only to have employment. Still, he was concerned that the church's mission policy was not in keeping with new world conditions and that the approach to overseas work that he favoured would put him out of step with the home church. "These are days of great and drastic changes in the world and there must be matching changes in mission policy and concept of mission work," he wrote. Several months later, again writing to Arnup, he declared, "leadership in World Brotherhood has passed, in large measure, out of the hands of the Church. Almost everywhere in our communities we find that the majority of the active key persons with this vision are not in the Church."²⁰

Faris *did* get to China at the end of 1950. Along with OMB sponsorship, he had support from Vancouver-area ministers and their congregations in obtaining audio-visual equipment and other supplies for his work, and he had obtained numerous fruit trees from the Dominion Experimental Farm in British Columbia as well as assistance in preparing these and other plant materials for shipment. But any hope that the door to mainland China would reopen was dashed when China entered the Korean War. Faris seems not to have got beyond Hong Kong.²¹ With no possibility of getting back to Cheeloo, he sailed to India at his own expense, arranging to leave his cherished fruit trees at the Allahabad Agricultural

Institute. This highly regarded ecumenical institution, founded by Sam Higginbottom, was evidently the place where Faris most wanted to find employment, but he also travelled elsewhere in India and Ceylon vainly seeking an agricultural assignment, whether under mission, UN, or Colombo Plan auspices.²²

This Hong Kong-India period (early 1951) was a low point in Faris's career and effectively the end of his working relationship with the OMB. The United Church's mission in India, described by Arnup as probably the most conservative of all the church's missions, would probably not have been a congenial work site, but Faris evidently believed that the OMB could and should have done more to find or create a mission niche in line with his vision. In a letter to his son Ken early in 1951, he wrote that there seemed to be no place in the church for that vision. The kind of work that he had the experience and desire to do was, he said, "something that the church has no machinery or thinking prepared to use. It forces me to a conclusion that is none too happy a one[,] that my best contribution to the world now, perhaps is outside the church organization . . . This exodus from China and growing sentiment in all countries of the world has in it factors that make the older concept of missions a complete impossibility." Declaring that he had "no beef against the church," he went on to express the hope that as younger men with new ideas and ideals got into service, the church would face its mission with "new vision and courage . . . As the church makes such adjustments so will the church be powerful and living." The task of aiding the world's poor was far too vast for the church alone, he wrote, but "[i]t must always be in the forefront in the inspiration of such programs."²³

Faris's belief that the Christian church could be in the forefront in international aid work by providing inspiration and support for new kinds of secular aid programmes and non-traditional missions would be expressed again in the mid- and late-1950s in proposals that he put to the United Church constituency outside the framework of the mission board and for which he found some support, particularly among lay and clerical members of the United Church in British Columbia. What Faris and this group had in mind was something similar to the Unitarian Service Committee or the Friends Service Committee, that is, an aid programme that had church support but that was not "church centric" and not under the umbrella of the OMB. Such a programme, he told *Observer* readers, would help people "right at the level where they are" with simple needs: "food, shelter, health, education, community activity, planned families."²⁴

At the same time, in the early 1950s Faris was also urging the Canadian government to support such multilateral agencies as those of the UN, the Colombo Plan, and the International Labour Organization and making the argument that it was only by making “radical changes of policy” that the west could head off Communism in other parts of Asia now that China had fallen. Faris’s emphasis on the Communist threat at this time was probably partly a pragmatic strategy for encouraging support for international technical assistance in the underdeveloped world, but it also seems to have reflected the chastening experience of having been targeted as a Communist sympathizer in the late 1940s. Correspondence with his son Ken warning him about the risks of being inadvertently drawn into Communist-linked organizations makes this concern clear.²⁵

Meanwhile, following his disappointments in China and India in 1950-51, Faris was not long without work. En route home from India he had called on officials in UN agencies in Rome and Paris and then, back in Ottawa, on Lester Pearson, Canada’s Minister of External Affairs. The result was offers of several positions in UN agencies, including the one he took with UNKRA, arranged through Chester Ronning, a former China missionary like Faris and now with the Department of External Affairs. The Korea assignment began on an optimistic note but ended unhappily in the fall of 1953, when, like a number of other senior staff in the agency, Faris suddenly found his position terminated. As Susan Armstrong-Reid and David Murray observe in their recent history of Canadians’ involvement in UNRRA, the pioneering nature of these postwar aid and reconstruction agencies and the conditions of upheaval and uncertainty in which they functioned made them sources of intense frustration as well as exhilaration for staff.²⁶ In the case of UNKRA, partisan politics in the US and in Syngman Rhee’s Korea, the dominant role of military decision-makers, and concerns about Communist infiltration all contributed to frequent and unexpected changes in broad programming plans as well as in staff. There were three major reorganizations in just over a year.²⁷

For Faris, there were additional complications related to his own professional and personal background. Professionally, Faris’s strong interest and inclination, based on his years as a missionary in China, was, as shown, hands-on, grass-roots outreach to peasant communities to assist in improving their agricultural productivity through relatively simple, locally feasible techniques, arrived at by trial and error. In UNKRA he found himself in a series of senior administrative positions, beginning with the title Director of Technical Assistance Development, and while this was

initially flattering, he worried early on, as he had done in the UNRRA position in China, that he might be beyond his depth.²⁸ He also found that support for a multi-faceted programme of rural and community development work within the Bureau of Rural Services, of which he was made Director and about which he was briefly hopeful, effectively ended after a new UNKRA administrator took over, a military man who favoured a top-down industrial model for rebuilding Korea. At a personal level, there was the discomfort of a cultural milieu very different from that of the close and homogeneous mission community that had formed Faris's interwar world. As in the UNRRA assignment, he was not at ease with the heavy drinking and other aspects of socializing that took place, nor with many of the westerners with whom he was associated, who seemed to him to lack sympathy with and a desire to understand local cultural values.²⁹

Faris's dilemma was somewhat like that of Homer Atkins, one of the unglamorous small heroes in the 1958 bestseller *The Ugly American*. In that book, set in the fictional Southeast Asian country of Sarkan, aid workers like Homer Atkins do hands-on work with villagers to develop low-tech solutions to their immediate problems and thereby win their friendship. But Atkins and his ilk are derided rather than valued by senior aid officials and diplomatic staff, who instead favour showy aid projects and urban settings and by their insensitivity to "the natives" inadvertently abet the cause of Communism.³⁰ December 1953 found Don Faris once again seeking employment with a UN agency or through the Colombo Plan.³¹

Nevertheless, the unhappy end to his Korea assignment proved to be the opening of a door to Faris's most productive venture: the research that resulted in *To Plow With Hope*. Faris did not set out with a book in mind; he simply wanted to improve his own knowledge and understanding of possibilities for technical assistance in the developing world. He was particularly interested in learning more about community development, since that was the approach to technical assistance for which he had had high aspirations in Korea. Living first in Vancouver and using the resources of the university library and then moving back to Naramata, he threw himself and drew his family into this research. It was still ongoing when he took up his UNESCO assignment in Thailand in 1955. He obtained a contract with Harper and Brothers, the New York firm that, over the years, had published many works on missions, but the editors wanted extensive cuts and revisions to the manuscript. Marion Faris made a return trip to North America to update the research, while Ken, who had

recently done graduate work in the School of International Studies at Johns Hopkins University, largely wrote the chapter on Soviet aid programmes.³² Published in 1958,³³ *To Plow With Hope* illustrated the extent to which Faris's interest in development both reflected and superseded his Christian and mission background. The first part of the book employed a literary device familiar to anyone acquainted with didactic mission literature: the use of an individual character to personify a "before" and "after" experience of change among impoverished non-western peoples. But whereas in the traditional mission genre the redemptive agent for transformation was conversion to Christianity, to which dramatic physical and cultural improvements were ascribed, in Faris's book the character "Old Man Peasant" and his family suffer from poverty, sickness, illiteracy, and other problems, none of them attributed to a particular faith identity. In the Epilogue, "Old Man Peasant" is shown to have made modest improvements in his family's well-being with the assistance provided by two friendly development workers who come to his village and help him to acquire functional literacy. He can now read simple but helpful manuals, and he can check the records of the money-lender. He is also hopeful that he can spare his one surviving son to attend school rather than work full time on the land. In introducing the designation Old Man Peasant in the Preface of his book Faris is careful to explain that "Old" is used as "a term of respect," chosen deliberately "to represent that group whose life expectancy in many instances does not exceed thirty years or at most forty." Part II of the book provided factual information about the range of national, multilateral, and voluntary agencies engaged in what Faris called "the whole international technical assistance movement." As in the section on Old Man Peasant, population control received significant attention.³⁴

The final and most personal part of the book, written with the Cold War context in mind, urged the value of assistance to underdeveloped countries as a better investment than armaments and as a compelling obligation for "the 800 million people who call themselves Christian." If even a tenth of them meant it when they talked about Christian love, why, he asked, had they so far proven so impotent in the face of such obvious need. Jesus's parables "spoke of the fruits of a man's living as the one way of judging whether his life was good [and] . . . as the ultimate criterion for entering the Kingdom. Only thus does our religion come alive – not in words but in deeds." While this part of Faris's message was addressed to a Christian readership, he made it clear that what he called "the forces of regeneration" in Asia and Africa were not exclusively Christian forces;

they also included Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, and others working alongside Christians, “all in their own way obeying the imperative of love. In this brotherhood of man all barriers are down; no lines are drawn.” Thus expressed, “our own religious insight becomes adult.”³⁵

By the standards of much subsequent writing on development, *To Plow With Hope* was unsophisticated and unspecialized; Faris called it “a kind of primer.” Yet with its straightforward mix of empathy, practical information, and idealism, it appeared at the right moment. The book struck a chord among many people for whom practical idealism rather than either religious duty or calculating Cold War pragmatism was the chief motivation for assisting the decolonizing world. Faris was pleased that Sir Julian Huxley, the first Director-General of UNESCO, agreed to provide a blurb for the British edition of the book, pleased, too, that it was put on a list of five or six essential readings in UNESCO’s publication about its Freedom from Hunger Campaign, and that it was well and widely reviewed.³⁶

Even more gratifying in terms of the book’s impact within Canada and on Faris’s personal life was the role that it played in inspiring the students who became the first wave of CUSO volunteers. In the final pages of *To Plow With Hope*, Faris had issued a special call to young adults: “Our youth possess a tremendous potential of energy, idealism and enthusiasm just waiting to be tapped. The one reagent needed is the challenge that life’s fullest expression is found in serving others.” The young aid workers he had in mind would not replace but rather “supplement the older and more seasoned men and women” and “after an intensive period of orientation . . . go into any country where they were invited . . . to work with indigenous leaders in the world’s needy villages.” After drawing a parallel with the youth whose idealism had led them to serve in the recent world war, Faris added, “If, in addition to technical skills, these junior experts were equipped with humility and courage, with sincerity and wisdom, they would be able to transmit not only physical satisfactions to the needy but also lasting values such as friendship, goodwill and understanding.”³⁷

Faris was still living in Thailand when *To Plow With Hope* came out. Back in Canada one of the book’s most ardent admirers was Keith Spicer, a young political science graduate student at the University of Toronto. It was Spicer who organized the pioneer group of volunteers who came to be considered the first CUSO cohort. In his 2004 memoir, Spicer recalled that the call to youth in Faris’s book “seized me and wouldn’t let

me go.”³⁸ Writing to Faris in India in 1960 with a view to obtaining his help in placing volunteers there, Spicer had told him, “[y]ou may be sure that you now have several hundred fervent disciples throughout Canadian universities.” He had recommended the book to the federal government “for distribution to every outgoing technical expert,” he told Faris, and it would certainly be used in orientation with all of the student volunteers. Fred Stinson, the Toronto MP who was Spicer’s most indefatigable ally in seeking to stimulate interest in and raise funds for the sending of volunteers, bought 150 copies of *To Plow with Hope* for distribution.³⁹

Not only did Faris get to know that his book had been a source of inspiration to Spicer and other young Canadians – and this before the founding of the US Peace Corps; he also got to see the volunteers in action. In India for his UNICEF assignment from 1960 to 1966 he and Marion played host, sometimes for weeks at a time, to dozens of CUSO volunteers who came to their New Delhi home to recuperate from illnesses, during holiday time, and on many other occasions.⁴⁰ This richly rewarding experience of engaging with the CUSO volunteers came as a bonus on top of the fact that, in his India assignment with UNICEF, Don Faris was finally able to do over a sustained period the kind of work that reflected his decades-long interest in assisting rural people. After a brief initial period of feeling insecure – his recurring difficulty as a non-specialist in development work – he came to realize that he had the confidence of western and Indian superiors and colleagues.⁴¹ The Applied Nutrition Programme (ANP), as the project was called, proved to be the most satisfying of all Faris’s overseas assignments. Sponsored by UNICEF but conducted in conjunction with India’s Planning Commission, the ANP aimed to improve the diet of villagers by increasing the growth and availability of suitable crops, especially with a view to improving maternal and infant health. To that end Faris travelled to hundreds of villages to win local support and determine the kinds of supplies that would be most useful in a given region. By the time the Farises sent out their Christmas newsletter for 1963, the ANP was operating in ten of India’s fifteen states. And in Orissa, where it had started, it was said to have strong support from women’s committees in several villages.⁴² Immensely challenging physically as well deeply satisfying, the assignment probably worsened the health problems that should logically have prevented Faris from undertaking this final overseas assignment.

In fact, it almost hadn’t happened. Following his return from Thailand in 1959 and worried that there would be no further opportunities

to work overseas, Faris, by then in his early sixties, had applied for and was about to accept a church placement in Vancouver. He had put his name forward to a Settlement Committee with reluctance, since, in the words of the memoir, “my faith had been slipping, although I found that hard to admit even to myself.” Clearly, the idealistic Faris was acting pragmatically with a view to the need to prepare for retirement. But then had come more overseas offers, including the offer of the UNICEF position in India through Newton Bowles, a fellow Canadian, the son of China missionaries and for many years the programme manager for UNICEF International. Despite medical problems so serious that they delayed his departure from New York – the UN medical clinic had recommended against his appointment – Faris had been determined to take the assignment, correctly anticipating that it would be “a real climax to my overseas career.”⁴³

Conclusion

Don Faris arguably remained a missionary at heart, not in the sense of a desire to proselytize for his own Christian faith but rather in his zeal to contribute to humanitarian work in the developing world. I suspect that it would have made little difference to Faris whether his years of service in Asia had been undertaken under mission or secular auspices so long as he had been granted the freedom to do the kind of village-focused work that he saw as of most direct and immediate value to the poor. While he certainly became critical of what he regarded as the outdated perspectives of his church’s mission board, he was equally uneasy with the kinds of large-scale, top-down approaches to development favoured by many senior western aid officials and leaders of indigenous governments. Newton Bowles, writing to Marion Faris following Don’s death and recalling a friendship that went back to the days of the Yellow River project, remarked that through his work in India on the ANP Don had been able “to steer that programme into more emphasis on what was within the reach of the villagers . . . it is a tribute to him and his insight that, at last, within the past year or so, the policies which he advocated so many years ago have been adopted as the official guiding principles for this programme.”⁴⁴

It is noteworthy that, within Canada, Faris’s ideas about development had a more direct influence on CUSO, a secular NGO, than on the mission programme of his own church. His alma mater, Queen’s University, awarded him an honorary doctorate of divinity degree for his overseas

work in 1955. And in 1958 an official with the church's Board of Information and Stewardship, writing to acknowledge a copy of *To Plow With Hope*, warmly endorsed the book's message and assured him that it was being heard: "We need so much to supplement the rather restricted character of our overseas undertakings with the kind of programme to which you are presently giving leadership. Many more people in the Church than you think are cheering because of what you have contributed."⁴⁵ Yet I have failed to find evidence that either Faris or his book had any direct influence on the deliberations of the lay and clerical officials who orchestrated the major changes to the church's approach to mission that came about in the 1960s. The comprehensive *Report of the Commission on World Mission*, published in 1966, made no reference to *To Plow With Hope* even in the extensive bibliography.⁴⁶ When Faris died of Parkinson's Disease in 1974, the church *did* provide a warm acknowledgement of his career, describing him as a "[p]ioneer in the field of Technical Assistance" and a "forerunner of the new practical missionary."⁴⁷ By then, of course, the church had come to share his faith in development and was demonstrating its enlarged understanding of mission by engaging in diverse forms of human rights activity with international and ecumenical partners. The last decades of Don Faris's life had been marked by distance from the denomination and then increasing enfeeblement. But to the extent that he was aware of the broadened global concerns of what the United Church now called the Division of World Outreach he could feel gratified.

Endnotes

1. Gilbert Rist, *The History of Development: From Western Origins to Global Faith*, 3rd ed. (London: Zed Books, 2008), 90. The literature on development is vast, much of it focussing, as Rist does, on faulty premises and tragic missteps.
2. *Canadian Historical Review* 91, no. 4 (December 2010): 661-693.
3. My research on Donald K. Faris draws mainly on a collection of papers held by his family. The papers include originals or copies of official and personal correspondence and various documents related to his mission, UN, and CUSO involvement. The papers also include an unpublished memoir, "A Man Before His Time," begun by Faris in retirement but completed following his death by his wife, Marion, on the basis of Don's records and her own. I am most grateful to the Faris family for sharing the papers and for alerting me to the fact that occasionally wording in the memoir presented as Don's voice in fact

reflects Marion's editing. Materials cited hereafter from the Faris Family Collection begin with a reference to the specific document, followed, where necessary, by Faris Collection.

4. Ruth Compton Brouwer, *New Women for God: Canadian Presbyterian Women and India Missionaries, 1876-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 118-23.
5. On the "rethinking missions" process in the US and Britain in this period see William R. Hutchison, *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), especially Chaps. 5 and 6, and Jeffrey Cox, *The British Missionary Enterprise since 1700* (New York: Routledge, 2008), esp. chapters 10 and 11.
6. Unless shown otherwise, biographical information on Faris and the overview of his mission years in China draws on information from his family and from chapters 3-10 of "A Man Before His Time."
7. Faris, "The Honan Mission Rural Programme," *United Church Observer*, July 15, 1939, 7, 28 (includes quotation); and "Man Before His Time," chapter 5.
8. "Man Before His Time, 26. On concerns about the Oxford Group movement in Canada at this period see David Marshall, *Secularizing the Faith: Canadian Protestant Clergy and the Crisis of Belief, 1850-1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), chapter 8.
9. Faris to Arnup, 4 November, 1934, Faris Collection.
10. Faris, "The Year in Honan/An Agricultural Triumph," *New Outlook*, 30 December 1936, 1216. For further details about the rural work of the mission in this period, see Faris, "Honan Carries on Rural Programme," *United Church Observer*, 15 May 1939, 6, 29, and "The Honan Mission Rural Programme," and Margaret Brown's unpublished manuscript, "History of the Honan (North China) Mission of the United Church of Canada, Originally a Mission of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1887-1951," especially chapters LXXXV, LXXVII, XCIV, XCVIII, available on microfilm, United Church of Canada Archives (UCCA), Toronto.
11. Brown, "History," chapters XCIX and CII, regarding Cheeloo; and "Man Before His Time," chapters 9, 10, for details of Faris's work.
12. "Man Before His Time," chapter 10.
13. "Man Before His Time," 81.

14. Copy of Faris's application for employment with UNRRA, 8 January 1945, with employer comments, obtained by Ken Faris, October 1985, Faris Collection; George Woodbridge, *UNRRA: The History of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration*, Vol. II, 430-37, "The Yellow River."
15. "Man Before His Time," chapters 12-14; blue binder containing letters from Don Faris, 1945-47, some of them originals, others rewritten and perhaps edited by Marion; "UNRRA Completes Huge Relief Campaign in Honan," *The China Press*, Shanghai, 16 December 1947, 5, 12 (contains "shot-at" quotation), all in Faris Collection. See also Editor, "D.K. Faris Flies from China to Canada on Leave," *United Church Observer*, 15 December 1946, 7, 40. Many other Canadians who served with UNRRA also found their work "both rewarding and exasperating" and perhaps for some of the same reasons as Faris; see Susan Armstrong-Reid and David Murray, *Armies of Peace: Canada and the UNRRA Years* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 10.
16. Faris had several invitations and encouragements to return to Cheeloo; "A Man Before His Time," 158, 162.
17. Jessie Gregory Lutz, *China and the Christian Colleges, 1850-1950* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971), chapter XII. Some missionaries *did* remain for several years after Mao established the People's Republic of China in October 1949, hoping to be allowed to continue doing humanitarian work; Sonya Grypma, *Healing Henan: Canadian Nurses and the North China Mission, 1888-1947* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008), 214-15, also Alwyn J. Austin, *Saving China: Canadian Missionaries in the Middle Kingdom, 1888-1959* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), chapter 14.
18. Handwritten notes of draft letter to Arnup, seemingly in response to Arnup's letter of August 16, in file labelled Arnup, Jesse H., Faris Collection; also "Man Before His Time," chapters 15 (40, for "masquerading"), and 18 (for US border problem). On the church's concerns over Endicott see Austin, *Saving China*, chapter 14.
19. Faris to Arnup, 17 June 1948, citing passages from Armstrong's letter of 30 January 1948, Faris Collection; also "Man Before His Time," chapters 15, 17. The nature and timing of these tensions was bizarrely at odds with a 1948 article in the *United Church Observer* reporting that Faris had been personally decorated by Chiang Kai-shek for his UNRRA work restoring dykes on the Yellow River; "A Brilliant Star Out of China: Rev. Don Faris Receives Highest Civilian Award," 15 March 1948, 9. Remarkably, this unsigned article claimed that the Japanese, not Chiang, had been responsible for destroying the dykes.

20. Faris to Arnup, 5 August 1949, 16 August 1949 (first quotation), 12 February 1950 (second quotation), Faris Collection. For his part, Arnup was evidently feeling pressured from both right and left in the church in terms of what the OMB's policy towards Communist China should be. In early 1950 he met with External Affairs officials to try to encourage the Canadian government to recognize the new government in China and to work towards a revocation of "the edict that now prevents the entrance of missionaries"; Arnup to Faris, 26 January 1950, and 10 March 1950, Faris Collection.
21. "Man Before His Time," chapter 18.
22. "Man Before His Time," chapter 19; copies of Faris to Arnup, 30 December 1950, Arnup to Faris, 8 and 27 January 1951, Faris to son Ken, 9 April 1951 (for Allahabad preference), and portion of unsigned letter from Marion Faris to Arnup, 9 January 1951, all in Faris Collection.
23. Arnup to Faris, 8 January 1951 (for conservative India mission), and Faris to son Ken, 5 February 1951, from Hong Kong, in Faris Collection. See also Faris to Ken from Allahabad, 9 April 1951: "I still feel that there may be a place for me in the service of Asia where I can use English mainly. But that is not in the church." And whatever the work, "I will still be serving under the motive power of God as my father and my fellowmen as brothers to live with and serve."
24. Faris, "The Great World Need: What Are We Doing About It?" *Observer*, 15 September, 1954, 5. 28, for his suggested approach and information that the BC Conference had memorialized General Council to establish a United Church Service Committee. Faris believed that his missionary colleague Norman MacKenzie would be a suitable leader for this kind of initiative, but he doubted whether the OMB would release him for such work, since "the OMB is committed to a church centric programme whereas some of us feel we can avoid misunderstandings and exert broader influence, with less danger of suspicion by being in the government operated programmes"; Faris to Bob McMaster, 30 November 1954 replying to McMaster's letter of 8 November asking him to head up a pilot project. See also Faris to Rev. Elliott Birdsall, 16 September 1954, and Birdsall to Faris, 25 September 1954; undated note from "Phyllis" regarding the BC Conference memorial. For a related but separate initiative by Faris at the end of the decade see his Memorandum to Dr. E.E. Long, General Secretary, 6 November 1959, on "Church Laymen in Canadian Aid Programs." The church should encourage and help prepare strong Christians to go into aid work, he wrote, since, in his experience, those aid workers who had a religious commitment were most sensitive to the values and feelings of those being assisted (all correspondence in Faris Collection).

25. "West Urged to Move Fast to Forestall Reds in India," unidentified newspaper clipping, 10 July 1951, reporting on the views of Faris as recently expressed in Vancouver (including quotation). For the letters to his son see Don Faris to Ken, 9 and 10 April 1951, from Allahabad, India. Communism had done much good, he told Ken, but its ruthlessness in suppressing dissent was evident in every country where it operated. Meanwhile, he himself was grateful that he had resisted associations in Canada in 1948 that would have given him "the chance to speak to certain audiences on China but . . . would have allied me with a group that would have placed me where Jim Endicott is today"; quotation in 10 April letter. Clipping and letters in Faris Collection.
26. Armstrong-Reid and Murray, *Armies of Peace*, 10.
27. "Man Before His Time," chapter 20.
28. "Man Before His Time," chapter 20. Although Faris had a strong interest in agricultural assistance and had greatly improved his knowledge and skills by auditing courses, etc., he was conscious that he lacked specialized training in any form of technical assistance and, he confided to Ken, suffered from an inferiority complex that went back to his youth; Faris to Ken, from Ottawa, 13 October 1960, Faris Collection.
29. "Man Before His Time," chapter 20, and extensive file of correspondence, 31 August 1951, to 15 September 1953, mainly from Don Faris to Marion, in green binder, Faris Collection.
30. William J. Lederer and Eugene Burdick, *The Ugly American* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1958). Although it was a work of fiction, *The Ugly American* was based on the authors' knowledge of real-life US diplomatic and aid staff in Asia and very much reflected their concern that the war on Communism could be lost by US insensitivity and ignorance in diplomacy and aid practices. The phrase "ugly American" passed into usage as a byword for that kind of insensitive official, even though in the book it is Atkins with his grease-stained hands and unprepossessing appearance who is the physically ugly American.
31. Letters to Faris from H.L. Keenleyside, Director-General/UN Technical Assistance Administration, 7 December 1953, and from Escott Reid, Canadian High Commission, India, 11 December 1953, in Faris Collection.
32. "Man Before His Time," chapters 20 and 21, and conversations with Ken Faris and other family members.
33. The title drew on a quotation from a Third-World writer reproduced opposite the book's title page: "Nor will peace come to the earth until mass poverty is lifted and the millions who scratch the soil for a precarious living can look up

and plow in hope.”

34. *To Plow With Hope*, 11, 12, for quotations.
35. *To Plow With Hope*, 201, 203, for quotations.
36. “A Man Before His Time,” 217, for Huxley’s statement. The Faris Collection contains an extensive file of correspondence related to the book as well as copies and lists of reviews. The reference to the book’s inclusion on a UNESCO essential readings list is in Mother to Ken and Lois, 13 November 1962. In her review of *To Plow with Hope* in *The Missionary Monthly*, November 1958, Don’s friend and fellow China missionary Margaret Brown expressed some disappointment that Don had not been more explicit about the pioneering development work done by missionaries, including himself. Yet Faris clearly recognized that such an emphasis would undercut the book’s acceptability to a larger audience, one different from that traditionally reached by mission-centred accounts.
37. *To Plow With Hope*, 202-03.
38. Keith Spicer, *Life Sentences: Memoirs of an Incurable Canadian* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2004), 49.
39. Keith Spicer to Dear Mr. Faris, 26 November 1960, and Stinson to Faris [February 1962], Faris Collection. Faris later learned that his book was even being used in the preparation of Dutch student volunteers. The influence of *To Plow With Hope* on Spicer and on the founding of CUSO is discussed in Bill McWhinney’s Introduction to *Man Deserves Man: CUSO in Developing Countries* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1968); and in Ian Smillie’s *The Land of Lost Content: A History of CUSO* (Toronto: Deneau, 1985), 9-10.
40. As well as Marion’s accounts of these visits, the Faris Collection contains moving letters and cards of appreciation from the India volunteers, some of whom remained in touch decades later.
41. See, for instance, Mother to Ken, 6 January 1961, Don to Ken, 8 January and 5 March 1961, Faris Collection.
42. Don to Ken, 8 January 1961; form letter, Christmas 1963, from New Delhi, Faris Collection.
43. “Man Before His Time,” chapter 22 (page 70 for slipping faith); Faris to Ken, 19 February, 26 May, 1 July, and 13 October, 1960 (latter contains “climax” quotation); Newton Bowles to Dear Marion, 30 December 1974 (Don’s health problems); all in Faris Collection.
44. Bowles to Dear Marion, 4-5.

45. Regarding the honorary degree see “Donald Kay Faris,” Faris biographical file, UCCA. The letter from the Rev. C. M. Stewart to Faris, 24 July 1958, is in Faris Collection.
46. I discuss the *Report* and the 1960s changes in “When Missions Became Development.” Faris’s ideas about development would have been well known, if uncongenial, to the Commission’s conservative chairman, the Honourable Donald M. Fleming: in 1959 when Fleming was Minister of Finance in John Diefenbaker’s government, Faris had sent him a thirteen-page memo on the subject; “Memorandum . . . A Look at Foreign Aid,” 6 November 1959, Faris Collection.
47. “Donald Kay Faris.”