



WHAT IS THIS GENERATION SEARCHING FOR?

by *BEATRICE LEUNG*

Six months ago, the Chinese youth with great enthusiasm, were circulating among themselves an open letter of Miss Pan Xiao, a young worker of Beijing. After reading the article, they earnestly discussed among themselves questions concerning the meaning of life, how to look at life, and why was I born in this world, etc. The official Chinese magazine "The Chinese Youth" published Pan Xiao's letter, in which with a sad tone, she poured out her grievances and revealed her broken heart. She said "I am now twenty three years old. It should be said that I have begun to experience life. Yet, now all the profound mysteries and fascinations that are associated with life do not appeal to me. It seems I am at the dead end of my life..... The path which I am trodding leads from crimson to pale, from hope to despair...."

At an early age, she embraced with lofty aspirations her life attitude, that "one should live for the betterment of other people. One should be noble-minded and be ready to give up all one has for a worthy cause". She continued, "I was intoxicated with my passion for self-sacrifice for the Party and for the state." When the seedling of idealism of the social revolution nourished in her generous bosom by the warm blood of patriotism once came in touch with crude reality, not only was the seedling suffocated, but also it turned out to be a sharp contradiction. What she had experienced and witnessed in life were extremely contrary to what she learned from books and was taught by teachers. She experienced the unspeakable pain of having the family torn apart by the ransacking of their home during the Cultural Revolution. The family members became cold and indifferent. On top of this, she was betrayed by her bosom friend, and she was abandoned by her fiance after the latter was rehabilitated after the downfall of the Gang of Four. Choked with grief, indignation and frustration, she was led to search for the meaning of life from every possible angle. Coming to the breaking point of her emotion, she inevitably cried out, "Human life, now you really show your ugly and horrifying nature. Is the mystery you try to reveal like this?! She tried to read books and seek advice from experienced scholars and sages, yet what she got was the same old cliches of the idealism of the revolution. To go to the Catholic church secretly to attend Mass, and to intend to shave her head and become a Buddhist nun all could neither lessen her internal conflict, nor tranquilise her agony. She did not want to drift along purposelessly in life. She received little satisfaction from her high ideals and experienced a lack of appreciation by others.

She also did not understand why after merry-making man passed away and left behind a dead body. Was that the real meaning of life?

This series of questions by Pan Xiao struck the hearts of youth in other parts of China as well. Many young people felt that after more than ten years this was the first time the opportunity was given to discuss some problems which had for a long time accumulated within their hearts. No wonder that the pouring out of Pan Xiao is more than the forming of ripples on a peaceful lake but turned into foaming waves with formidable force hitting the shore of the hearts of six hundred thirty million Chinese youth. Consequently it aroused an immense echo, and it stirred up their interest to discuss among themselves the meaning of life from every practical aspect of daily living. Within three months' time, the editorial office received more than forty thousand responding letters from the readers. Therefore the office had to enlarge the coverage of the magazine in consecutive issues, in order to publish letters from readers which bore different opinions, and to enable the young readers to survey the problems of life from different aspects. The People's Daily and other local official publications also enthusiastically joined the current of discussion. Hu Qiaomu, the deputy secretary general of Central Political Bureau of CCP, and director of Chinese Social Science Academy also paid great attention to this discussion. Showing concern, he himself went to the editorial office of "Chinese Youth" magazine to listen to the staff and to enquire about the process of the discussion.

After reading all the published letters, one easily discovers that many authors also shared their tragic experiences in life. One young person wrote "Since my life has been full of calamities and mishaps, I was hurled down, broke my skull and became bleeding. For a long time my heart has been paralysed and senseless..... This heart which has already lost the brightness of simplicity, could not respond to the extolling of youth. Only your letter strikes the chords of my heart and makes it regain its vitality. It could not keep silent any longer." Compared with the sufferings of Pan Xiao, experiences described in readers' letters were more or less on the same level. The differences only pertain to work units, educational standards and family backgrounds. All of them were trodding the same "Way of the Cross" and receiving the same "Baptism of Suffering." When they were young they enjoyed their life in an Eden-like paradise. When the youth grew older, they all went through the tremendous sufferings caused by the Cultural Revolution which was more sharp and painful than death. When the Cultural Revolution was over, they all resumed their normal life pattern, and yet they were dissatisfied with the crude reality. Burning with great anxiety, they inevitably asked "If there is no promising future like a resurrection what shall become of us?" We can apply the description of the suffering Christ prophesied by Isaiah (Isa. 53, 2-4) to this generation: "The roots in parched ground; he had no beauty, no majesty to draw our eyes, no grace to make us delight in him, his form disfigured, lost all the likeness of a man, his beauty changed beyond human semblance. He was despised, he shrank from the sight of men tormented and humbled by suffering, we despised him, we held him of no account, a thing from which men turn away their eyes." When their path of life changed from wide to

narrow, the youth began to ask what will be there at the end of the narrow road? If sweetness comes after bitterness, if the gloomy grave is the herald of a glorious resurrection, and if the narrow path is the beginning of the broad high way and the creation of a new heaven and new earth, then when will this longed for new heaven and new earth be realized? This is the question that concerns them most. In the second open letter of Pan Xiao, she thanked hundreds and thousands of compatriots of the same generation for their concern and love. At the same time she frankly admitted, "I shall not be satisfied merely to be Pan Xiao. I have tasted the bitter chalice of the 'past', and I am listening to the call of 'future'. Pan Xiao will open wide her eyes and profoundly search for a new to-morrow..... Although Pan Xiao is much strengthened now by the encouragement of people around, yet she is not satisfied with the present situation."

Discussion on this topic will come to an end some day, but the quest of a strong soul will never stop. The intrepid Chinese youth led by Pan Xiao are determined to continue on the path of inquiry. How can we guide and counsel them, and lead them to realise thoroughly the truth of Death and Resurrection which has already taken shape in their hearts? From the viewpoint of Christian belief, only if we die through and with Christ, can we rise in Him. These young people who grew up in a socialist system and in an atmosphere of atheism, like Christians, also look for resurrection and the coming of a new heaven and new earth. Is such a thing possible? Can they feel the presence of Christ? Have we tried our best to make Christ known to them? Or have we caused them to be closed up and even reject the calling of the hidden Christ?

Hu Qiaomu, the deputy secretary general of CCP, showing his concern at the office of "Chinese Youth" magazine, explained his method for handling the problems of youth. He said "If people dwell in a gloomy situation, generally we should not insist that they sing a joyous melody. When they sigh or erroneously complain, we should understand clearly the reason for their reactions and conscientiously assist them to realise their hopes". His statement carries a lot of weight. It reminds us to patiently listen to youth. However, he has not pointed out the path which they should follow nor introduced concrete methods for finding satisfactory solutions to the problems of life. In contemporary China, a "crisis of faith" or "crisis of trust" exists. This indicates that the young generation has no confidence in the existing systems and the promised future to be realized by the Four Modernizations. This explains why they repeatedly raised the question of the meaning of life. Their longing and searching make us believe that the good tidings of Christ's death and resurrection will dawn in their hearts. Through which channel will the good tidings be transmitted and fully realized in this group of people who are in a parched land longing for rain? These are the questions which draw our attention and are worthwhile researching. The publication of "DING" has as its purpose to draw the attention of the clergy and laity of the Hong Kong diocese to the problems of Christianity and contemporary China.

In this issue we purposely selected this much debated question among the Chinese youth - the meaning of life. We hope this article will serve as a trial ballon, to draw criticism and suggestions, simultaneously acting as a meeting point for the transmission of God's message to arouse the current of attention and action flowing towards the sacred soil of our motherland.