



THE RELIGIOUS LIFE OF CATHOLICS IN CHINA TO-DAY

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I am neither an expert in China problems nor have I ever tried to be one.

I am only a Christian who loves China and a Chinese who loves Christ.

Embracing this identity to-day I am sharing some feelings on my home-going trip to China.

Rev. Peter Lee and Mr. John England asked me to give some comments on the contributions and view points of the Chinese Catholic laity towards the Four Modernizations. I think I will disappoint them, because the Catholics I contacted during my previous visits to China were clergy only. This does not mean that I did not want to contact the laity but the chance was not available. I wish to discuss with you this topic, and at the same time I also want to raise my personal view point for your comments and criticism. Whether it is appropriate to do so, I leave open to your guidance and advice.

If you do not mind, I venture to categorize the Catholics in China into three groups.

- 1) First Group - those publicly pronounce that they are patriotic and willingly cooperate with the Government to re-construct China. They

advocate that loving the Church and loving the state are never contradictory to each other. The Church should be self-propagating, self-supporting and self-governing. They even cast their doubt on the leadership and magistratum of the Vatican.

2) Second Group - those who never explicitly show their agreement or disapproval of the policies of the Government. They are doubtful about the current relaxed policies on religion, and consequently they are very cautious about them. At the same time they uphold the Holy See in Rome as the supreme head of all Catholics in the world.

3) Third Group - those who treasure very much their religious faith and try their best within their limited capacity to put this faith into practice. Among these there are intellectuals as well as illiterate country folks. No matter under what circumstances, they are faithful and docile to God. But they do not regard as very important to discuss

the question to whom the Church belongs, to Paul or Apollo so they never feel the dilemma whether they belong to Rome or to the state.

The first group are the clergy and laity whom I met each time I visited Beijing and Inner Mongolia.

The second group I came to know indirectly from contacts with some anti-communist clergy and laity, who from their correspondence with their Catholic relatives in China strengthen their antagonism.

I tangibly feel the presence of the third group of people, especially when I participate in the Liturgy in China and when I converse with those who are very familiar with the situation in China as Sr. Teresa Chu.

I think that it is premature to pass a final judgement on what they have done and to what degree they have participated in the re-construction programme of the Four Modernizations. The Catholics in China, like the mass of Chinese people, after the great devastation caused by the Cultural Revolution still do not have strong faith in the Government. In working for the Four Modernizations, it is very definite that they are holding to an attitude which is quite different from that which they had during the early years of liberation. The senior citizens even can compare the difficult days after the Japanese War with the present situation and reluctantly say 'Well, it is O K!' But those under the age of thirty have nothing to compare with the present. Also there were those

endless political movements and struggles from 1957 on during which time they were growing up. It is no wonder that until now they can not find a real meaning to life. (Pan Xiao's letter and responses.) Therefore it is quite difficult for them to plunge themselves into the re-construction. Of course those patriotic Catholics could have worked more actively and positively, but they could only pay lip service and give verbal support to ideology and policies. It does not mean that they do not want to support the re-construction programme by their own action, but temporarily they are very much tied down by their own limitations. (At least my impression is like that).

From this, I am led to raise some serious question:-

1. The good tidings of the Gospel has been brought to China for more than three hundred years, but Catholics in the calamity of the Cultural Revolution like many unbelievers, just sank and disappeared in this black current. When the Nazi regime was in its heyday in Germany there appeared a Bonhoffer, but in the ten years of persecution during the Cultural Revolution not even the slightest voice of a prophet was heard! Here my comparison does not mean that I am playing down our Catholics in China. I am only asking whether our doctrine and our previous religious formation can only form a group of faithful who are able to endure humiliation in order to carry out an important mission, holding the attitude that whenever they are persecuted by this city they will move to another? They lack the courage to stand up and raise

their heads before the judge, not necessarily for the sake of religion but to fight for the people, to refute evil elements. Were the claws of the gang of Four really so formidable, or was there something wrong with the spirit of Christ's soldiers?

2. To-day there are still some thorny questions existing in the Catholic Church. They are - the absolute loyalty to the Holy Father. The absolute docility to the Holy See in its teaching on the China problem in the past and present. Finally the contradictions raised up by the local Church being self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating. These are very serious problems. As far as these thorny questions are concerned, we are led to ask whether we could have further investigation into our doctrine or our commentary on the gospel message which splits us into Patriotic and Holy See groups? Whether absolute loyalty to the Holy See and the establishment of a national Church are the basic core of our Christian faith?
3. There are two periods of vacuum in the history of contemporary thought in China. The first one appeared in the May Fourth movement and the second one after the Cultural Revolution. In the first vacuous period, the Catholic Church failed to make an appropriate response, and also failed to provide an outlet for the confused Chinese intellectuals. Then with the coming of the second vacuous period, what had we done for the people?

What are we doing and what shall we do in future? These are very uncomfortable questions, but they are unavoidable ones.

4. Generally speaking, the faith embraced by the ordinary laity is simple and straight forward. They rely on God wholeheartedly and also trust the Church. Who are the ones who contribute to this phenomenon of split? I am afraid they are not the common people (although we often say people are the masters of revolution) but the intellectuals who are used to exercising their brain. It is the same group of intellectuals that contributed much to separation in human history. Maybe it is good for the clergy to try to have self criticism before they try to criticize and classify who is loyal and who is betraying, who is good and who is bad, and try to think carefully who has brought about this catastrophe in the Chinese Church?

Finally before I end this very shallow way of sharing my trip to China, let me make a suggestion on the possibility of unity among Catholics in China.

In the present situation is not allowed or it is not necessary to argue overmuch the points on orthodoxy and heresy. The feelings of those who experienced sufferings cannot be ignored. But if we only emphasize the sufferings of some laity on certain points and neglect other parts of the laity who had different kinds of sufferings, then it is very easy to create hatred between them. It is true that basically for the past thirty years the Chinese Catholic did not

have good days. Either because they were faithful to the Roman Catholic Church and were labelled running dogs of imperialism, the common enemy of people, or because they were willing to cooperate with the government in the re-construction of the nation, they were denounced as the disciples of Satan. I really hope the blood of these innocent faithful could make the mother earth of China give birth to a new generation of children of God, who have no prejudice and no exclusion, but faithfully live their lives for their fellow countrymen and for Almighty God.

A government cannot be a good government unless its existence is for the good of the people. The same for the Church, if it is not for the service of people it is not the Church of Christ. Let us focus on the real needs of the people and see what can the Chinese Church do for them? Also find out what can the universal Church and Chinese Church offer to the Chinese Government and the Chinese people? The need of the people is the point of departure for our dialogue and co-operation. I do think that it is the right path, because Christ Himself also took this path. 'For our sake and for our salvation He came down from Heaven and became one of us.'

When we honestly search for the real need of the Chinese people, and when we humbly offer ourselves for the service of the people, automatically we can put aside all the disputes of power, grudges both on the personal and communal level, and one-sided commentary on the gospel message, and melt them into the pot of selfless service. I am longing that this day will come soon.

Manaratha, come O Christ!