

RECONCILIATION IN CHINA —

A Holy And Urgent Task

by Elmer P. Wurth

In an era of hot and cold wars, countless refugees fleeing terrorism, violent political offensive and retaliatory killings, marital and family tensions and strife, the only real hope and the first step for improving our world is through reconciliation. Peace, justice and human development at all levels depend upon a healing of tensions, differences, confrontations and open hostility before there can be any hope of their coming to fruition in our world.

For the past three years I have been involved in studying the religious situation in China, especially Christianity within the context of China's cultural, economic and political reality. China has had a long history of internal strife between warlords and then was under the oppression of feudalism and later foreign domination. She is presently attempting to open up to the world and asks for assistance in nation-building, but at the same time striving for a sense of independence. Within all this tension and transition she desperately needs genuine reconciliation.

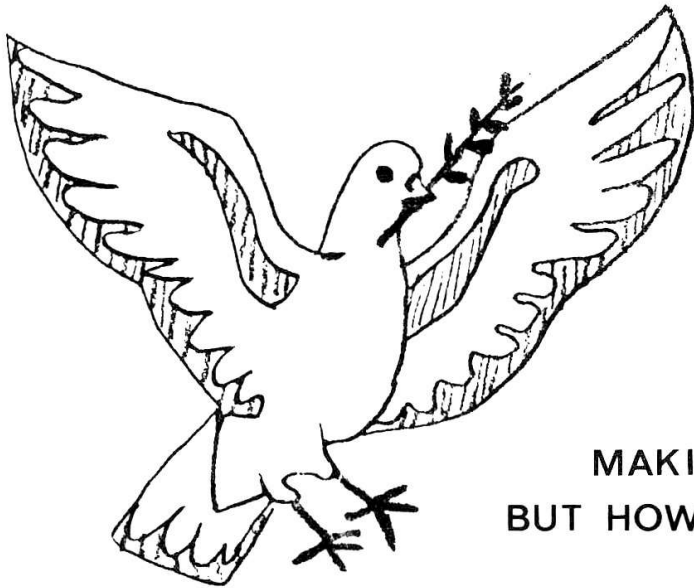
Within this reality of the needs of a whole nation, perhaps it is fortuitous that it is the Christians in China who are presently in need of reconciliation to an even greater degree because they are supposed to know from both the words and example of Christ what reconciliation is. Jesus came to reconcile us to the Father. St. Paul says: "Gentiles and Jews, he has made the two one, and in his own body of flesh and blood has broken down the enmity which stood like a dividing wall between them; for he annulled the law with its rules and regulations, so as to create out of the two a single new humanity to himself, thereby making peace. This was his purpose, to reconcile the two in a single body to God through the cross, on which he killed enmity."(Eph. 2:15) Jesus tells us that reconciliation is essential to and must precede any true worship. "If, when you are bringing your gift to the altar, you suddenly remember that your brother has a grievance against you, leave

your gift where it is before the altar. First go and make your peace with your brother, and only then come back and offer your gift." (Mt. 5:23) In the 'Our Father' he told us that we determine our own forgiveness by the degree to which we are willing to forgive others. "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who have done us wrong." (Mt. 6:12) St. Paul reminds us of our call to facilitate reconciliation in saying: "He has reconciled us men to himself through Christ, and he has enlisted us in this service of reconciliation. What I mean is that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, no longer holding men's misdeeds against them, and that he has entrusted us with the message of reconciliation. We come therefore as Christ's ambassadors. It is as if God were appealing to you through us: in Christ's name, we implore you, be reconciled to God." (2 Cor. 5:18-20) We are all familiar with the mutual joy resulting from reconciliation as is so movingly illustrated in the parable of reconciliation between the prodigal son and his forgiving father. (Lk. 15:12)

So true is the sense of this need for reconciliation among Chinese Christians today that they distance themselves from the 'Theology of Liberation' as espoused by many especially in Latin America. They speak of having been liberated from domination and place their priority rather in developing a 'Theology of Reconciliation'. The greatest need is for understanding and forgiveness among themselves. Besides the tensions and problems of other Chinese, Christians have added difficulties. In trying to survive under the more violent days of the Marxist revolution, and now trying to relate to the present political reality as Christians ruled by an atheistic government, families have been torn asunder by their varying responses to this reality. They have suffered for their convictions, some at the hands of the authorities, nearly all at the hands of each other, as they were forced to take sides in relation to their government and their church leaders vis a vis the government, and for catholics also the pope. Many who spent years in prisons and labor camps have been rehabilitated and often exonerated, but the wounds of anger and the difficulty of forgiving still remain. Family members suffered at the hands of their loved ones who understood the relationship between patriotism and religion in a different way than they did. So deep and festered are the wounds that many feel the present generation is incapable of ever reaching true reconciliation. For them, Christians will again be united only when those who have hurt each other so deeply have passed from the scene. Others, encouraged by Christ's call to be ministers of reconciliation, by the stories He used to illustrate what this entails, and buoyed up by the personal experiences of the joy of making up after misunderstandings and conflicts, search out ways to bring the wounded closer together. These people like to think of themselves as healers or bridge-builders. And because a

bridge must join two banks, they strive to maintain contact with the wounded on both sides, encouraging them in dialog, understanding and forgiveness. Of course, in doing this, the would-be reconciler often becomes wounded too as he is accused of taking sides and placing blame. Then he needs healing himself and is challenged to share more deeply in the ministry of which St. Paul speaks, that of Christ the Wounded-Healer.

As I try to arrive at possible ways to foster reconciliation between Christians in China among themselves, with their authorities with whom they have frequently been at odds because belief and atheism are bound to be confronting, and with those outside who they feel have oppressed them in the past and fail to understand their present difficulties in relating to their peers, government authorities and the universal church, I am encouraged by a story told to me by an older priest who was expelled from China and now works in Taiwan. His touching account of how seemingly insurmountable difficulties were overcome has been an inspiration not only in my present work but also for sharing these thoughts with all of you. Prepare for a happy ending to the story! Pray for a happy ending to the work of all reconcilers and bridge-builders for the Chinese!



**MAKING UP – OFTEN DIFFICULT
BUT HOW BEAUTIFUL AND REWARDING !**

When Fr. Albert Fedders, a native of Covington, Kentucky and one of five priests and nuns in the family, was asked in Taiwan what the most difficult doctrine of Christianity for the Chinese to accept was, he told this story.

"I would say that it would be the same as for the people in America. The most difficult of all is to love your enemies. They just can't see that at all. They feel it's nonsense to love someone who has done them harm, who doesn't love them. Why should they try to be kind and compassionate with a person like that? I think this is one of the most difficult doctrines for people all over the world. It is certainly true here in Taiwan. My people think nothing at all of arguing with a person, and of course when they argue with people, it's a very ferocious argument and gets violent and sometimes people get killed. It's almost impossible, unless by a very special grace, to be reconciled once such an argument takes place. Sometimes the people are not enemies, but relatives or even husbands and wives who continue to live together but just quit speaking to each other. You might say 'that's impossible'. I sometimes think divorce is the lesser evil in a situation like that. They never speak to each other, don't eat together, but live right in the same house. Let me give you an example from my mission here in Erh Lin. I have a very wonderful young man on our parish council, a fellow of about thirty-five, very talented. His mother is a catholic, but his father wasn't. They had an argument like I'm talking about. They quit speaking to each other and never ate together. The father got sick and the young man came in to see me. He was crying and said 'Father's sick. Will you come out to the village and baptize him? He says he wants to be a catholic.' I went out first on a friendly visit to talk with the father. He did say that he wanted to be baptized. I said 'I'll have to talk that over with your son.' I told the son 'Look, I can't baptize your father. That's impossible. That would be making a joke of Christianity. The only way I could baptize him is if he would say to your mother that he forgives her for everything that she has done wrong to him and if your mother would forgive your father by going into his sick room and talking with him. That's all they have to do.' The people around here heard about it. The boy himself said 'That's impossible. They'll never do it.' The people said 'You don't know the Chinese. That's just impossible. That could never, never happen that those two would ever talk again. They haven't been talking for twenty years, and they're not going to start now just because you want them to, or because he wants to be baptized.' So I said 'All I can do is pray for him.' The son was very frustrated of course, he was sad about the whole situation. We prayed and prayed for him, and then I went out and prayed over the father, I put my hands on him and prayed. Then I had the son pray over him, and we prayed over the mother too. About a week later the son came in and said 'Father, I have some very good news for you. My mother went in and said to my father that she forgave everything wrong that he had ever done to her, and my father forgave mother everything too.' So I said 'Well, wonderful, wonder-

ful!' Then I went out and baptized the father, and a few days later he died. We had a big, wonderful funeral here, and the people were absolutely astounded. They said 'That's a miracle!'"

Some say a miracle is also necessary in China before reconciliation can come about between Christians, before others could look at them and say "See how these Christians love one another." If a miracle is needed, then that's what we should pray and work for. Fr. Fedders and his Christians in Taiwan believe in them now that they've witnessed true reconciliation happen. May our faith be strengthened by witnessing another reconciliation.



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