

Reconciliation in the Catholic Church

Reflections on Culture and Spirituality

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Introduction

Since the end of the 1970's, an unfortunate division has arisen within the Catholic Church in China.¹ Authorities in the Chinese church, as well as in its sister churches in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau, have all, to one degree or another, exerted efforts to heal this division and restore unity. Even the Chinese government, through its United Front policy and other administrative measures, (not excluding pressure and coercion), has openly joined the ranks of those promoting the cause of unity.

In the past fifteen years some Catholics have jumped from one side to the other. Some even see this shifting allegiances as evidence of a kind of church unification taking place on the grass roots level. In recent years, many bishops and priests who previously worked underground are now serving in the open church. However, these latter cases are not the general norm, and those who have actually switched loyalties are looked down upon by their former communities. The fact of the matter is that reunification remains a thorny issue for both sides and it admits to no easy solution. In addition, not all approaches to the problem are judged to be helpful. For example, within the church there is concern for retaining "special privilege" status; and from without, many overseas communities are more than willing to offer their support as "bridge churches". In the meantime, the government reacts by increasing regulatory measures in an effort to tighten its control.² Not only do such measures fail to promote church unity, they often add complications to an already complex situation. Some see church unity as Rome's problem, others view it as another painful responsibility for the "bridge" churches to assume, and still others as just a bitter pill for the government to swallow.

Obviously, there is no one set formula for attaining church unity, and it certainly will not be achieved by relying solely on the actions of one or the other elements involved. From the onset many outside observers and

specialists have made a study of how church unity is to be achieved and the ways of fostering fellowship within the whole community.³ In my opinion we must view the problem from another perspective entirely. In this article I shall offer some personal reflections on the question of reunification drawn from a study of Christology. I also hope that my readers will feel free to add their own invaluable insights as we face together the common, if complex, task of rebuilding unity and fellowship within the church in China.

Failing to find a common ground

The division within the Chinese church has also spread to Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau and the overseas Chinese communities.⁴ Visitors from abroad do not shy away from giving reasons for the impasse, offering arguments in support of one side or the other freely and without being asked. All this cannot but have a strong influence on a church that has been weakened by suffering and is still vulnerable to comments from people outside. Moreover, these overseas observers, while engaging in endless debate with each other about the problem, seem to have found no common ground.⁵ But this does not stop them from offering their divergent opinion to like-minded colleagues in the mainland church and show little tolerance for difference, convinced that theirs is the only reasonable point of view. Is it any wonder, then, that achieving unity in the mainland church is no easy task?

Given such circumstances, it is as vitally important for those involved in the "bridge" churches overseas, as well as those responsible for setting church policy in Rome, to strive for the same unity of mind and heart as must animate the church in China itself. The Pope encourages all Christians to become "bridges" for unification.⁶ Therefore, let each individual and group concerned reflect seriously on whether or not they are functioning as true bridges for reconciliation or only creating further disruption.

Part 1: Reconciliation

A divided community's primary need is unity. This is reasonable and obvious. Unity among the brethren is also the most fervent desire and hope of Jesus, as we read in John's account of the Last Supper (Jn 17:11-22).

In many of his more recent addresses, Pope John Paul also made repeated appeals for unity to the Catholics of China. This article will concentrate on reconciliation as the prerequisite for unity. The ideal of unity is rather abstract and illusive for the church in China; whereas reconciliation, in my opinion, is the more concrete and pressing need.

Reconciliation: Basis for Unity

The present division within the Chinese church has its origin not in doctrinal differences but in politics. It arose from an intricate pattern of political and human actions and a volatile mix of political and religious attitudes, all of which were hostile toward Rome. This opinion is common among outside observers and it also resonates with the realities of the Chinese experience. Given this set of circumstances, of the many suggestions about how reunification is to be achieved, one would seem to be to restore normal relations between China and the Vatican. Admittedly, this is indeed a crucial component of any ultimate solution;⁷ nevertheless, we must be careful not to be overly simplistic.

An early restoration of Sino-Vatican ties would certainly give the church in China immediate political recognition and a broader base for its social activities. It would also free Chinese Catholics from the state of anxiety brought about by the constant clashes of Church and State. However, normalization of relations will take much time and effort. But when normalization finally is achieved, and open hostility between Church-State ceases, it will take an even longer time to heal the deep wounds present in the hearts and minds of the people. After decades of rancour, there is no quick and easy way to restore harmony and rebuild friendly relationships. Certainly it is outside the power of any legal system to cure such afflictions of the soul. Meanwhile, continuing to reach out to create new ties of friendship as we give ourselves wholeheartedly to the reconciliation process seems to be our most practical most immediate task. Fostering such relationships should not be limited to the underground and open churches alone, but must include relationships between Church and State, among individual Catholics, and even reach out to include members of "bridge" churches. Such efforts will not only lay a solid foundation for full reunification, which will indeed come at some date in the future, but they will also go a long way in helping to promote the normalization of Sino-Vatican political ties in the present.

Reconciliation: Christ's Command

In proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom of God, Jesus became in word and deed the divine instrument of reconciliation. And this is what he taught his disciples.

If you bring your gift to the altar and there recall that someone has anything against you, leave your gift at the altar, go first to be reconciled with your brother/sister and then come and offer your gift (Mt. 5:23-24).

In his preaching, on many different occasions he elaborated the steps whereby reconciliation was to be achieved: do not judge (Mt. 7:1-5); love your enemies (Lk. 6:27-36); forgive others with gladness (Mt. 18:21-35; mercy is greater than sacrifice (Mt. 9:13) love is greater than the law (Lk. 6:9-10). To reflect conscientiously and often on the good news of the Kingdom and how to put it into practise is to nurture and promote reconciliation in our own lives.

Reconciliation: Mission of the Church

The Church itself, though holy, is also human. And, if the truth be told, it is we, its members, who are the chief cause of the obstacles that plague our efforts to reestablish unity. We find this tendency to break up into hostile factions within the community present even in apostolic times. They are vividly recorded in the Acts of the Apostles and in the Epistles of St. Paul. History also bears witness to the many heresies that tore at the structure of church unity in those first centuries of its existence. (One of these more notable heretical groups, the Nestorians, happened also to be the very first Christians to come to China, arriving during the Tang Dynasty.) The first of the two most serious divisions in church history took place during the 11th century when the great body of Eastern Orthodox churches went into schism over the issue of Papal authority. The second and more painful split, of course, came with the Protestant Reformation in Europe during the early 16th century, which gave rise to an ever increasing number of Christian sects as we know them today.

According to Church teaching, the Eastern schismatics and the Western Protestants, while having separated themselves from the authority of the Catholic Church, are still considered as members by virtue of our

common baptism. In the words of St. Augustine: "All the baptized form one body with Christ and are to be considered as our brothers and sisters in the Lord."⁸

Vatican II's position on how to effect a reconciliation among Christians as found in its *Decree on Ecumenism* might be summarized as follows: (1) resist all forms of judging others and avoid all words and actions that might cause new or perpetuate old divisions; (2) promote authentic dialogue characterized by mutual openness, trust and understanding; (3) widen the areas of social cooperation for the common good; (4) encourage self-examination, reflection and personal spiritual renewal; (5) nourish a just and sincere fraternal love; (6) foster genuine bonds of friendship with others; (7) and above all, pray with sincerity for one another.⁹

Paragraph five of the *Decree* calls for the promotion of church unity: "Everyone should strive with all their strength to manifest the oneness of Christ in their daily lives."¹⁰ And paragraph seven underlines the value of interior conversion:

For it is from new attitudes of mind, from self-denial and unstinted love, that desires for unity rise and develop in a mature way. We should therefore pray to the Holy Spirit for the grace of genuine self-denial, humility, gentleness in the service of others, and having an attitude of brotherly generosity towards others...Thus in humble prayer we beg pardon of God and our separated brethren, just as we forgive all those who offend us.

The *Decree* makes evident the direction our lives should take, which is to strive with all our energies to achieve an authentic reconciliation. This is the chief mission and responsibility of the church, to be reflected in its every attitude and expressed in its every form of service to others.

The church is interested in one thing only--to carry on the work of Christ under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, for He came into the world to bear witness to the truth, to save and not to judge, to serve and not to be served. (Cf. Mt. 20:28)¹¹

St. Paul urged his own Christians to adopt of this very same attitude as a means of counteracting the nefarious divisions that constantly threatened the unity of their communities.

Part II: Reflections on Culture and Spirituality

Reflection on culture

China has one of the world's oldest and most revered cultures. It is also one of the world's largest countries, comprising an area of 9.6 million square kilometres. Within its boundaries live 1.2 billion people representing 56 different ethnic cultures, among whom are the Han, Manchu, Miao, Hui, Tibetans, and Mongolian peoples. China puts great weight on family harmony, village solidarity and national unity. It is accepting of differences and has integrated its many ethnic minorities into a shared history and heritage. At the centre of this culture, and considered by the Chinese themselves to be its very foundation, is the family. The Chinese also take great pride in their longstanding unity as a nation and consider peace and prosperity as special blessings from heaven.

Conflicts, differing in size, nature and degree of intensity, have always been part and parcel of China's government and family institutions. We might ask, then, how has it been possible for it to maintain an ongoing unified culture and tradition for over 2,000 years, a unity that has its origins in its first emperor, Qin Shihuang, dating as far back as 206 B.C.E.? Even today, wherever they may find themselves in the world, the majority of Chinese retain a strong sense of cultural identity and unity. Where did this come from? For 5,000 years our society has emphasized as a paramount value the importance of the family. Despite the many internal quarrels and contentions, family harmony was maintained largely because of the rich cultural tradition that saw the cultivation of strong familial ties as the highest virtue to be achieved among family members. This attitude certainly played a major role in maintaining not only family well-being but also national unity.

Confucianists consider *ren* ("compassionate benevolence") as the essential quality of a human being, and define it primarily in terms of clan loyalty, where it becomes the foundation for the filial piety owed to parents and ancestors. *Ren* then extends itself outside the clan where it becomes

the basis for an attitude of deferential respect for others. *Ren*, thus understood, is what makes harmonious relationships with nature, family and others outside the clan possible. People who accept this principal and nourish it in their daily lives learn to cultivate intimate and loving relationships not only within the family unit but also in society at large. The extended family was the basic formative element in all of this, and from the family unit these relationships would flow out to the whole world... "From the near to the distant, from the intimate to the remote," as is written in the *Analects*.

From *ren* emerges the five fundamental relationships that govern Confucian society: ruler and minister, father and son, older and younger brother, husband and wife, and friend with friend. The *Analects* go further in defining those special qualities peculiar to each relationship: "intimacy between parent and child; righteousness between ruler and minister; between husband and wife, acceptance of difference; good order between older and younger siblings; and trust among friends."¹² Cultivating loving relationships will enable one "not to do to others what one would not want done to oneself."¹³ Also they will help others "to become what they aspire to become, and obtain what they need to obtain."¹⁴ From these two principles there will emerge, according to Confucianism, an ideal world commonwealth.¹⁵

Reflections on differences in Sino-Western cultural patterns

The present divisions within the Chinese church have long been a subject of inquiry by both Chinese and non-Chinese scholars. This is altogether understandable since the Chinese church is itself a product of cross-cultural confluence and conflict. It is, then, appropriate for us to compare the two cultures, and in so doing to see if from such a comparison we might be able to find a way out of the present impasse¹⁶ that has resulted from these divisions.

In general, culture is directly related to the geographical environment which has given it life. Chinese culture was born and nourished on a continent most conducive to farming. From these small farming communities there evolved an agricultural society in which clan and family relationships took precedence. It was a familial society "not given to acrimonious disputes, but rather more tolerant and willing to make concessions within the family circle. Harmonious relationships among family members was its highest value. Unity was achieved through the

natural ties of intimacy and not through any benefits that might accrue through patent calculation."¹⁷

Western culture, in contrast, originated on the Greek peninsula in a Mediterranean environment that was more conducive to commerce than farming. In place of the farming village of the East, it developed the city-state, as idealized by the Greek philosopher Plato. In this urbanized environment, groups were formed out of mutual interest, and the resulting relationships were more objective and less intimate. The urban complex was influenced by commercial contracts and its citizenry tended to be more calculating in their social dealings as well. With the result that "each does his best to acquire what eventually will be owned by himself". This, of course, gives rise to a heightened sense of distributive justice which becomes the cornerstone of the organized state.¹⁸

While the Catholic Church has its origins in the Near East, it arrived in China via Europe, where it had already undergone its own process of westernization. The noted theologian Song Xuansheng has suggested that it might not be a bad thing to reintroduce Christianity into China but this time through direct contact with its roots and original spirit, i.e. the Holy Land.¹⁹

The present impasse facing the Catholic Church in China includes both structural and legal problems, and arise from cultural differences. The Western concept of justice, the separation of church and state, democratic, social and legal structures are new and unfamiliar elements for Chinese Catholics who live in an entirely different cultural and legal framework. A Church with an emphasis on adherence to principles, law and personal responsibility and oriented to the production of concrete results tends to create confusion and hardship for the Chinese church and for its members who must live under quite a different set of circumstances, and who are accustomed to take as their criteria for action self-restraint and natural morality.

The reason for the present division into an underground and an open church has its origins in the church-state conflicts of the fifties and sixties and the East-West cultural clashes that also broke out at that time. The divisions that became more obvious in the past 15 years were, then, unavoidable, rooted as they were in the more distant past. And the principles of ecclesial legalism continue to be invoked in today's atmosphere of disharmony and conflict just as they were in the past. (It might be added, with the same negative results.) They are used as the

criteria for judging loyalty among Catholics, the quality and worth of Chinese bishops, and as a cruel and callous norm in the hands of ordinary people, both inside and outside of China, to decide whom to support and whom to attack. In the recent past, during the dictatorship of Mao Zedong when his personality cult was in full bloom, the ordinary citizen was left no room to worship at any other shrine but Mao's. Then came the liberal reforms and people began to enjoy the political and religious freedoms reminiscent of the early days of Chinese socialism. China opened its doors, and the West, along with other nations of the world, were given limited access. Among the new visitors from the West were foreign Catholics. They brought with them a kind of Roman legalism, the tenets of which began to spread among the Chinese Catholics and often took on more importance in their eyes than the original dogmas of faith. The most important reason for obeying a bishop now was not because of his teaching but whether or not he was legitimate in the eyes of canon law.

I do not think we should fault Chinese Catholics alone for this exaggerated concern for matters of loyal obedience and strict observance of the law. While today this attitude might seem to the foreign observer to be somewhat dated, overdone and a hindrance to spiritual growth and development, was it not they themselves who originally placed such emphasis on loyalty to canon law and obedience to the hierarchy which has led us to the present impasse? Also, in Chinese society itself there is at the present time a rising clamour for more respect for the law and a demand for new legislation to supplement the old as China's economy continues to spiral upwards and social order begins to break down. Catholics living in such an atmosphere cannot help but be affected by this new emphasis on legalism.

The political impasse brought about a separation of Chinese Catholics from the universal Church that was almost complete. Not only were they unaware of the existence of Vatican II, but even today most have no notion of the new directions the universal Church has taken. The legal impasse was, in retrospect, unavoidable. Many Catholics had as their only guideline the traditional teaching of the church, which demanded uncompromising loyalty and total obedience to legitimate authority as a basic principle of faith. For them the question was not whether a bishop belonged to the underground or the open church, but whether he had legitimacy within church law. They still hold to this position today. Others who relied on the bonds of relationship, the relationship of warmth and

trust they had formed with their bishops over the years saw these bonds strengthened further by a mutual and shared suffering during the frightful excesses of the Cultural Revolution. In these cases where they knew their bishop to be illegitimate, not recognized by Rome, nonetheless, they supported him out of love and loyalty and continue to do so today. Some even volunteer their services to help him in his work in the chancellery or joined the Patriotic Association, giving visible witness to their ongoing faith and trust in him. And, of course, there are other bishops, who, although they joined the Patriotic Association, and were originally ordained without papal permission have over the years been quietly legitimized by Rome.

Canon Law itself has added to the division within the Chinese church by allowing for episcopal ordinations to take place secretly and under extraordinary circumstances, and also for condoning the secret ordination of priests by such bishops as well. These so called "special privileges", although considered to be temporary accommodations only, have been abused by some to justify compromises with regard to principles. This has contributed to further divisions among church members. One shocking example of this has been the consecration of a number of incompetent clerics to the office of bishop, on the grounds that "a persecuted church must multiply its authority figures."

When looking at the legal aspects of the present impasse, I do not mean to deny or minimize the importance of the law itself. On the contrary, China is presently engaged in legal reforms that seek to objectify and stabilize the rule of law and is devoting much effort to eradicating former tendencies to create new statutes out of the personal whim or fancy of the person in power. Obviously, the church in China, as elsewhere in the world, must respect and obey canon law as well as civil law. My purpose here has been merely to study the present impasse from a legal standpoint with the hope of finding a way towards reconciliation. It also must be remembered in this context that no Pope has ever branded the church in China as schismatic,²⁰ nor has any pope ever declared one side to be in the right and the other in the wrong. There can be no doubt that the pope and other church leaders have given much careful reflection to the present situation in China and the reasons for the impasse. This in itself opens up a wider area for possible solutions that could, eventually, lead to reconciliation itself.

When it comes to conflicts and disputes, Westerners are quick to make recourse to the law courts to decide each case. This is not the Chinese way. Chinese people are reluctant to go to court. They see it as a loss of face and a disgrace for the family. An appeal to the courts is used when everything else has failed and only as a last resort.²¹ This attitude towards the judicial system makes quite clear that Chinese people prefer to deal with disputes privately rather than in public.

These days it would not be reasonable to make a judgment based solely on legal grounds in support of or in rejection of either the underground or open church. What is called for today is compassion and ren, the Chinese ideal of an attitude of benevolence, that will move us to establish the kind of close personal relationships that will lead inevitably to a genuine reconciliation. The law must never be our sole consideration. Relationships that are close, personal and founded in Christian faith are by their very nature self-sacrificing and healing.

Although Christian culture has absorbed Western culture's ideal of justice for everyone before the law, it has added to it its own basic component of sacrificing oneself for the good of others. This, however, does not conflict with Confucian moral principles governing human relations which teach us "not to put self before the good of others". Jesus was not a legalist. On the contrary, he offered himself in a sacrifice of unconditional love for the good of all, and he admonished his disciples to follow his example. Ultimately, reconciliation will be achieved when we can animate Chinese culture with the spirit of Christ in an unbreakable bond of unity.

Reflections on spirituality: What have we lost?

When I look back on my childhood during the 1970's, I see how my parents and other Catholics in our village lived simple and frugal lives. They were poor but shared what little food and money they had with Catholics more needy than themselves, to help tide them over in difficult times. Watching them share with the needy what was necessary for their own survival, touched me deeply. It taught me as a youth to see all Catholics as members of one family. Thus were the seeds of faith planted firmly in my soul at an early age. I remember, too, how the villagers would go to those places where Mass was being celebrated, and after Mass invite all those who had come from the outlying areas to their homes. It did not matter that these were strangers, they were welcomed

like long lost relatives who had finally returned home after many years away.

Catholics in China number less than 1% of the total population. Comprising such a small minority and having endured together a long trial of suffering in order to survive, Chinese Catholics have, naturally enough, formed very close ties, and they have demonstrated an amazing ability to stick together, especially in the face of adversity. They have a strong sense of their Catholic identity, and hold their religion in high esteem. In the past, they were renowned for their mutual trust. Their care and concern for each other was proverbial. But since the divisions set in more than a decade ago, a marked change has taken place in the relationships of many. Suspicion has replaced trust and enmity affection. In place of mutual concern, many now are at loggerheads, attacking and criticising each other. When they meet now, instead of inquiring about each other's health, they ask if he or she is a member of the Patriotic Association, or whether their loyalties are with the underground or open church. There is no problem should you meet someone from your own faction, although a certain circumspection might be called for, but the best treatment that a person from the other camp might hope for is the cold disdain reserved only for strangers. Worse still are the shouting matches and vicious public arguments that result from the rancour and mutual disdain. Catholic families from the same village and town, who had been close friends for generations, suddenly turn on each other and become enemies. In the urban area, even among intellectuals who should know better, former friends are now ignored or treated as outcasts.

What have we lost with these divisions? The mutual affection of a shared identity as Christians. And without this, how can we hope to forgive and love as the Lord commands? This affection was sealed by his blood and saw us through so many difficult times and was our constant source of strength in overcoming so many trials. Now in the face of daily occurrences, we forget what this affection has meant to us in the past. Our duty now is to regain what we have lost. We must re-discover the need to love each other as Christ has commanded us, to obey his will and yet, at the same time, to know in our hearts that only through his grace can this be accomplished.

Part III: Our Response to the Lord

Jesus, Mediator between God and Man

Jesus's work of reconciliation can be seen from the perspective of God as creator or from that of the man/woman created. The three elements in the reconciliation process are: 1) love as the unifying force; 2) concern for the needs of the one created and 3) self-sacrifice.

Love as a unifying force

The Trinity is a unity of love. From the love of Father and Son comes the Holy Spirit. In this, their love finds perfect fulfillment. God in creating man and woman allows them to share in this love. In doing this, God manifests his love for them.²² Life and love are God's gifts to them, and they are given without limit in the person of Jesus Christ. The Father loves the Son and the Son the Father. Because the Son loves the Father, he also loves human beings.²³ His love is not only directed towards his Father, but to all of humanity. He considers men and women to be his brothers and sisters (John 15:15). In him they have become sons and daughters of the Father. This sole mediator between God and humanity becomes in reality the bridge that joins the life and love of the Father to his very own children. We do well to reflect on the love of Christ. While we speak of our love and our desire to maintain faith, professing our loyalty to him, do we indeed love our Father, brothers and sisters as he does? And has he not said to us plainly: "You are my friends if you keep my commandment."

Concern for the needs of the one created

Jesus brings the gift of salvation to all humankind. If God has bestowed upon us life and love, Jesus has shown us the full meaning of these gifts in his concern for the needs of all people.

Jesus reconciled us with God through his spirit of loving compassion. He came to serve us, to forgive us, to lift us up after we had fallen. He freed the oppressed in spirit, released from captivity all who had fallen under the dominion of the devil. He healed the brokenhearted and brought back those to God who had wandered away or had been trapped in the evil of social structures, reconciling them to the Father and restoring their lost

dignity as the sons and daughters of God. Jesus brought new life to the sad and new hope to the depressed. He loved to be with children, to serve his own disciples and to enter the lives of the people of his time, sharing their laughter and their tears.

Not only did Jesus reconcile men and women with God, he admonished us to be reconciled with each other. He made it the one condition for receiving God's gift of reconciliation, telling us that we must first be reconciled with each other before offering our gifts to our Father in heaven. And in his healing ministry, he cured the crippled, the blind, the lame, the leper and those possessed that they might once again be restored whole and entire to society. It was to reconcile them to the community that he worked his miracles, enjoining this same curing and reconciling ministry upon his church.

Jesus set about answering the needs of human beings. His proclamation of the Good News demonstrated his concern for them. He gave short shrift to any form of legalism, and went beyond the limits of the law to meet their needs. He fed the hungry, cured those crippled from birth, and raised the dead. In his depiction of the Last Judgment, Matthew leaves us a vivid example of the centrality of service in the ministry of Jesus. We are to imitate his concern for the poor, the weak, the vulnerable, the needy. This is our path, the path of goodness that we must take in order to restore the broken divisions within our communities.

When we reflect on the divisions among us, do we not see too great an emphasis being placed on the legal aspects of the problem, not only by church officials but also in the attitude of the "bridge" churches as well?

Self sacrifice

After a life-long ministry of reconciliation, Jesus brought his life to a climatic conclusion, by offering his life as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. He used his own death as a means of restoring the broken relationship between God and man. He sealed this new covenant of reconciliation with his own blood.

It is not uncommon for people to offer their material possessions, even their lives in sacrifice to the Lord, but are we willing or courageous enough to offer in sacrifice our personal advantage, our opinions, reputations, social status and positions of power to bring about unity and reconciliation? If we had the courage of our Christian convictions to truly sacrifice ourselves on behalf of the church, what a great change would

take place! Our efforts would go a long way towards resolving our present divisions.

Prayer to Jesus our reconciler

Jesus reconciles through his unconditional love. He excludes no one. He acts to relieve suffering. He comes to us as one who serves. This calls for reflection but even more for action. Both the open and the underground church now claim to support the pope. Is it not time for us to open ourselves to accept each other?

We must not look down upon priests whose training we deem insufficient; we must not envy those who have met the pope and who have more extensive contact with the outside churches than we have; and not hold grudges against those who have made mistakes or walked down crooked paths. In fact, we would do well to put an end to all discussions about the rights and wrongs of the past and focus on the needs and possibilities of the present. Let us respond to Jesus' invitation to come together again as a united and loving community.

In these days when the nation's economy is making dramatic progress, our opportunities for serving others and bearing witness to the presence of the Lord in our midst multiply. We must first of all work to help lessen the ever widening gap between the rich and the poor. Secondly, in light of the declining influence of Maoist thought, it is time to find new ideals, to seek out new ways of fusing the world of the past with that of the present. The worship of money and the spirit of hedonism are creating a whole series of new moral problems for society that must be addressed and resolved. Thirdly, we must face the fact that China is a developing country and is still very poor. Under such circumstances, both the open and underground churches must support each other and unite in their common concern to serve society. While grateful for the help given us by our friends overseas, the local church must not become overly dependent on overseas resources and capital. We must become self-reliant, and cultivate this principle as the basis for our social activity.

In our efforts to develop our social services, we must avoid the trap of seeing everything from a materialistic point of view. If we as church follow in the footsteps of Jesus, bringing his spirit and teaching to a materialistic society, we can help transform that society and bring a newer and higher meaning and purpose to its ongoing pursuit of material, spiritual and social well-being. I believe our government will support us in

this because it falls within the realm of its own advocacy for founding a new material and spiritual civilization to serve the good of all its citizens.

Conclusion

Reconciliation consists of a love expressing itself in concrete deeds. Living out this truth in practise remains our primary focus for study and action. We will find ourselves, as we address this task, drawing closer and closer to the kind of unity we all hope to achieve. For the present, we must put a end to our wrangling over who is right and who is wrong, and turn, instead, to concentrate our efforts on works of charity. Recall the admonitions of the Lord Himself who taught in word and deed that love is greater than sacrifice and stronger than the law itself. The bond of charity that unites Christians as a community is far more precious and stronger than the power of any legal contentions that would seek to separate and divide us.

Endnotes

¹ The divisions in the Church in China are different from divisions that occurred in the Eastern Orthodox Church and from the religious revolution that Martin Luther started. In China divisions arise from differences of opinion. The reasons behind them flow from a disharmony between political, human and cultural matters. cf. *God Loves China*, Hong Kong, Sept. 8, 1994, in the fourth edition of *Unity within the Catholic Church*.

² cf., Liu Peng, *Characteristics and Trends in Church and State Relations in China*, *Tripod*, No. 88.

³ cf, *Tripod*, No. 69, Robert Schreiter, *Reconciliation and the Church in China*; Geoffrey King, *The Catholic Church in China: A Canonical Evaluation*. Fr. Stephen Li Binsheng,, *A Reflection on Geoffrey King's Article*, cf. Also *Tripod* nos. 75 and 77, articles by Robert Schreiter, Joseph Zen and Aloysius Berchmans Chang.

⁴ cf. Jiang Jianqiu, *How the Church in China Can Unite*, Duo Sheng, July 1995, No. 348, p. 38.

⁵ cf. My article *We Must Understand: On Reading 'Can the Official Church in Mainland China Still Be Called Catholic?'* *Tripod*, No. 89.

⁶ In 1984, Pope John Paul II addressed the bishops, priests and laity of Taiwan, and also appealed to all overseas Chinese communities to become bridge churches, cf. Luo Yu, *Wu Ying 1945-1986 Record of Forty Years of the Church in China*, Taiwan, Fu Jen University Press, pp. 256-262.

⁷ cf. Note 5.

⁸ Second Vatican Council, Decree on Ecumenism, No. 3.

⁹ Ibid., No. 4.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ The Second Vatican Council, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, No. 3.

¹² Mencius *Teng Wen Gong* quoted in the works of Wu Kunru, *Elements in Chinese Humanistic Culture*, cf., "The Philosophy and Culture Monthly Jan. 1993, No. 224, pp. 19-20.

¹³ Confucius *Lun Yu*, "Yan Yuan, Wei Ling Gong".

¹⁴ ibid., Yong Ye.

¹⁵ *Tripod* No. 69, Aloysius B. Chang, *The Church in China: Ecclesiastical Impasse?*

¹⁶ *Philosophy and Culture Monthly*, March 1989, No. 178, pp. 199-201, Zheng Zhengbo, *Designing Two Cultures*.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Song Quansheng, *The Compassionate God: An Exercise in the Theology of Transposition*, London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1982, pp. 5-7.

¹⁹ Geoffrey King, op. cit., *Tripod*, No. 69.

²⁰ Ye Shulin ed., *Answers to 100 Questions from Foreign Friends*, Taiwan Learning Press, 1988, p. 56.

²¹ John Fuellenback, *The Kingdom of God*, India: Saipakashan, 1944, pp. 278-281.

²² Jose de Messa: *Revelation: God's Offer of Life and Love*, Hong Kong: Theology Annual, 1991-92, No. 134, pp. 189-196.

²³ *Yi*, Hong Kong, May 1995, No. 154.

