

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION IN CHINA

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It was a large and responsible task which the interdenominational missionary committees of China, Great Britain, and the United States laid upon the China Educational Commission of 1921-22. The territory to be covered was large, the range of education wide, the societies involved numerous, the problems complex and difficult. The Report of the Commission¹ attempts to deal with all aspects of the subject. If in response to the request of the Editor of the Review the chairman of the Commission undertakes to set forth in a few pages a summary of the situation, almost the only course open to him is one of selection and condensation, the reaffirmation in the same, or other words, of some of the most important statements of the Report.

As finally organized in Peking in September 1921, the Commission, with its two secretaries, included eighteen persons, British, Americans, Chinese. Inevitably each brought to the task his own experience, point of view, and questions. All these were frankly presented again and again and as frankly discussed. The remarkable unanimity of opinion at which the Commission finally arrived was due not to the dominance of any mind or group, but to a persistent sifting of facts and opinions, and an earnest desire to find the best solution of the problem. Before stating any of the conclusions to which the Commission came, it

¹ [The Report of the China Educational Commission will shortly be issued to the public [see Bib. No. 362]. It is now before the mission boards in North America and Europe who are giving careful consideration to its far-reaching proposals for educational reconstruction and advance. The National Christian Conference, meeting in Shanghai in May, had early copies of the Report before it. Professor Burton, the recommendations in the Report being *sub judice*, has confined himself in this article to a survey of the situation which confronted the Commission and a statement of the general conclusions at which it arrived.—ED.]

will be well to set down a few of the facts which the members of the Commission early came to recognize as basal elements of the problem.

The seven thousand educational institutions of various grades which have been established under Christian auspices in China were not founded as parts of a general system of Christian education. The earliest schools were planted as adjuncts of evangelistic work, and with no definite relation to other schools even of the same mission. Later there arose in certain missions or regions, most notably in West China, a more or less definitely organized system of schools, of which new schools when established became organized parts. But this process of organization still falls far short of producing a unified system of Christian education. Neither a co-ordinated system, nor a general policy for Protestant Christian education yet exists.

A second important element of the situation is furnished by the fact that since 1900, and especially since 1905, the Chinese governmental forces have been developing a system of schools patterned after the modern schools of the Occident. Far from adequate to reach China's needs, the schools founded by the government have nevertheless in the short period that they have existed come to have twenty times as many pupils as are to be found in Protestant Christian schools. Moreover in the midst of all the political strife and unrest of the last seventeen years, the schools have been improving in quality of work, until, though many of them are very poor, many are even better than the mission schools.

Account must also be taken of the private schools, some old, some new, some poor, some excellent, which are scattered over the land and together contain five times as many pupils as the Protestant schools, and finally of the Roman Catholic schools. When it is observed that of every twenty-seven pupils in school in China, Protestant schools have one, Roman Catholic schools one, private schools five, and government schools twenty, it becomes

evident that a policy for the Protestant schools can not be framed in isolation, but that the whole body of facts must be taken into account.

Reflection on these facts inevitably raised in the minds of the Commission several fundamental and far-reaching questions. Prominent among them was this :

Is there a permanent place for Christian schools in China, or will the progress of government education make such schools unnecessary, and will the disposition of the government to control the situation sooner or later force the Christian schools to the wall ? Shall they be built in the thought that they will soon pass away, or with an expectation of permanence ?

The problem has two aspects. Does China need, and will it continue to need Christian schools ? Will China permit the continued existence of schools founded by foreigners and supported by private funds ? To the first of these questions the Commission came at length to give a unanimous and confident affirmative answer. Aside from whatever right Christianity may have to press its claims on all peoples, with full concession of the right and responsibility of the Chinese government to lay down regulations respecting the existence and character of schools in China, viewing the question solely from the point of view of China's welfare and the duty of the people of one nation to take a friendly interest in the advancement of another neighbour nation, the Commission became fully convinced that Christian schools, if only they were rightly conducted, could make to China's intellectual, moral, political and spiritual life a contribution of great value and one which would not come from any other source. Of the various reasons that led the Commission to this opinion it must suffice briefly to state two.

The first has to do with the political situation. As the combined result of the corrupt and corrupting method of government maintained by the Manchus for over two hundred years and the fact that during the same period

education was sought mainly as a preparation for office holding, among the educated and office-holding classes in China self-interest had largely displaced disinterested patriotism. Broad-horized public spirit is rare enough in any land, but as the result of the causes named above, under the Manchu government it had become almost extinct. Unfortunately the substitution of a republican form of government for the imperial has made little or no change for the better in this respect. There are those who believe that there has been a change for the worse. High-minded men there are in office and out of office. But there is still a sad dearth of intelligent and able patriots, and the whole country suffers seriously for lack of good government. Despite all the excellence of its teachings, Confucianism did not remedy this situation under the Manchus and is not remedying it under the Republic. Education under Christian influence, producing men who combine ability, intelligence, breadth of vision and unselfishness, is the only remedy for this evil, which is preventing, and until it is corrected must continue to prevent, the development of a healthy national life in China; and a part of this education at least must be given in distinctly Christian schools.

But obviously there are deeper things in China's life than politics. For her highest moral and spiritual welfare China needs within herself a Christian community which shall embody, illustrate and promulgate the Christian ideals of personal, social and industrial life; and for the production of such a community Christian education is an indispensable instrumentality. It is indeed not too much to say that without the powerful influence of Christian education there is no prospect that China will either develop a healthy life within the nation, assume the place among the nations which her magnitude, native ability and resources call for, nor escape being a serious menace to the world at large. It is not Christians only who observing China's recent history have said, 'Christianity alone can save these people.'

But if China needs the Christian schools, will China permit their development? Our Commission is convinced that it will, if only those who control their policy frame that policy wisely. The Chinese people are natural pragmatists; they want what works. Even the Japanese, whose whole history and genius dispose them to concentrate all power in the hands of an imperial government and to insist on conformity to government standards, are much more disposed than they were a few years ago to permit and even to encourage the maintenance of schools independently supported and directed. But the Chinese are by tradition and disposition far more democratic and tolerant than the Japanese. Education has for centuries been a matter of private enterprise with the Chinese, and, though they have now awakened to the fact that the nation as a whole must take the responsibility for the support and direction of education, it is unlikely that they will so far react from their traditional policy as to forbid private initiative in education, if that initiative is wisely and helpfully used.

The new national spirit is indeed suspicious of things foreign and of all influences and alliances that tend to denationalize. We cannot blame them for this. Christian schools must become more thoroughly Chinese, less exotic than they have been. Government regulations must be strictly and cheerfully conformed to. The prosperity of government schools must be welcomed and in any possible way promoted. But if these things are done, as they ought in any case to be done, if the Christian schools cultivate love of country as well as personal uprightness and religion, if they are planned with distinct reference to their ultimate control and management by the Chinese Christians, there is, the Commission believes, no reason to look for a time when Christian schools will be refused permission to make their contribution to China's welfare. If we but build wisely on the foundation of past achievements, we shall be building for the indefinite future, and making permanent

contribution to the creation of a Christian civilization in China.

It is with this expectation of permanence that all our work should be done. It should encourage us, but it should also admonish us that we build solidly, even though slowly, that we avoid false and temporary emphasis and the assumption that the foreign is good and the Chinese of necessity inferior. It should help us to keep in mind that the schools which we as foreigners are founding we are eventually, and perhaps at no distant day, to turn over to the Chinese to support and control. It may be chiefly missionary education to-day, but it will some day be the enterprise of the Chinese Christian Church, and the more we can do to hasten that day the greater will be our success. The missionary educator succeeds when he has made himself unnecessary. If we forget these things, if as foreigners we seek too long to hold things in our own hands, if we are foolishly jealous of the growth of government schools, if we insist on division of our work on national or denominational lines, then we may awake some day to discover that all our zeal will not redeem us from our folly, that Christian education has lost its opportunity and Christianity sinned away its day of grace.

A second question which seemed to us of very great importance pertained to the specific and immediate objective of Christian education. We approached it with no ready-made answer. We found few missionary educators who had an answer ready for us. We recognized that the answer must be based on conditions existing in China, because it must depend in no small measure on the state of development which the Christian enterprise has reached in that country. We saw different aspects of the matter, and long discussed the question before we came to an agreement. But we came at length without dissent to hold that the chief immediate objective of Christian education in China must be the development of a strong, effective Christian community. No country can ever be

made thoroughly Christian by a foreign force. It is only as Christianity becomes Chinese, and is embodied and expressed in Chinese Christians that it will so enter into the blood of the Chinese as to begin to transform the nation. But not even isolated Chinese Christians can do this work effectively. Christianity is a social religion. It is never adequately expressed except in a community. There may be a state of affairs, a stage of missionary work, when the only thing a school can do is to permeate a non-Christian community with Christian ideas. There may come a time when it can win a few individuals but cannot yet create a community. Neither of these stages any longer exists in China. There is a work of permeation to be done. There are individuals to be won. But the time has come when individuals can be, have been, and are being won in such numbers and from such classes of the community that a strong Chinese Christian community is a possibility of the not distant future. Only through such a community can the task of interpreting Christianity to the Chinese, and on the basis of such interpretation, making China a Christian nation, be accomplished. To the development of such a community the Christian forces ought now definitely to set themselves. It is true that the whole of the Protestant community in China, including church members and adherents, is only about one four-hundredth of the whole population. But its influence on the life of China is out of all proportion to its numbers, as even the opposition to it testifies. It takes but a moderate faith and power of vision to forecast the time when with increase in numbers, but especially in intelligence, spiritual power and sense of community fellowship, it shall become a far greater force than it is to-day.

A word of warning must indeed be added. The Christian community must not become self-centred. In so far as it does, it becomes un-Christian. The Christian school, like the whole Christian enterprise, must continue sensitive to human need. It must not so centre its thought on its

own development as to forget its mission to the outside world. It is dangerous for a Christian school to shut its doors to the non-Christian or to concentrate its strength wholly on efforts that promise to contribute directly to the building up of the Church. The illiterate and the ignorant have a claim on the Christian because of the suffering that ignorance entails.

Yet it remains true that, for the accomplishment of its own highest service to China and the world, Christian education in China must aim chiefly at the creation of a strong and effective Christian community, which shall eventually assume the support and direction of the whole Christian movement.

These two judgments of the Commission are far-reaching in their relation to the whole problem of Christian education in China. From them follows the answer to a third question, viz.: What should be the scope and range of Christian education? Clearly it must include all those types and grades of education that are necessary to the building up of a Christian community except such as are adequately provided by other agencies. A study of the situation, moreover, makes it clear that at present at least there are no other agencies that can be depended on to give the education that is essential to make a strong Christian community, and that hence Christian schools must be provided from kindergarten to college and theological school.

These judgments lead also inevitably to the conclusion that the task of Christian education must be viewed in its unity and not as *dissecta membra*. It is no small undertaking, out of a community of 375,000 Protestant church members, a total Christian community of possibly a million, to weld the army of occupation which, working within the midst of China, will eventually win it to allegiance to Jesus Christ, make it a Christian nation. To achieve it calls for the utmost possible harmony of planning and operation. Duplication, competition, maladjustment, all

hinder the process. Isolation, individualism, sectarianism were once necessities of the situation. They are to-day as unsuitable as they once were inevitable. The hour has come for the unification of the task of Christian education in China ; for the subordination of all denominational and institutional ambitions to the supreme opportunity and the achievement of the great task. For years the individual missionary has been ready to lay down his life for the Gospel's sake. The time has come when we must apply to our enterprise, into which we have put our lives, the same principle we have long applied to the lives that we put into them.

It is the definite conviction of the Commission that the time has fully come when all Protestant Christian schools should be co-ordinated into one great system of Christian education. We are not advocating a common treasury, or the abolition of existing denominations, or of denominational boards and societies. We have not discussed the question of interchange of members, or the creation of a single Chinese Church. We leave all these things to the future and the Chinese. But we are of the opinion that all existing boards and other bodies, foreign and Chinese, that are engaged in educational work under Christian auspices should enter into co-operative relations such as will ensure that what each can best do it shall do in the most effective way possible, and avoid all duplication and waste of effort.

Finally from the nature, importance, scope and difficulty of the task it follows that emphasis in Christian education must hereafter be placed on quality, not on extent or numbers. The race for numbers is already lost by the Christian schools and won by those of the government. The Christian schools can maintain their place, do their work, only by the maintenance of high standards. A poor school, being better than none, may once have been an asset. Henceforth it is a liability.

The Commission is under no delusion as to the magni-

tude and difficulty of the tasks which are here briefly stated, but which in the actual following out are inevitably complex and difficult. Nor is it under any impression that its report outlines a complete programme of procedure for the Christian schools. Certain milestones it has ventured to set up, but the roadway between these is in many cases barely suggested. So much is the Commission impressed with the necessity of further thorough study of some of these problems that it is recommending, and laying great stress on its recommendation, that there be established an Institute of Educational Research. Such an institute would not be primarily a school for the instruction of students, but as its name implies, an institute or bureau of research. It would call to its service experts in the field of education, and analyzing the situation, take up and investigate one problem after another, placing its results at the service of all the Christian schools and all the boards engaged in educational work.

So much then for the answer to the questions which presented themselves to the minds of the Commission early in their study. It remains to speak of one or two important matters which came in a measure as a surprise to the Commission, emerging rather late in their studies.

The first of these pertains to the industrial situation. British and American merchants, and to a less extent those of other nationalities, have been in China for many years. Of late there has been a rather rapid spread of industrialism organized on the pattern of the West, but unfortunately on the pattern of the unreformed industrialism of half a century ago. Great cotton factories and silk mills covering acres of ground are springing up in Shanghai, and displacing the old system of household or small shop-weaving. These mills are run twenty-four hours a day, for the most part on twelve-hour shifts, and employ men, women, and children. Children of seven or eight years old work on twelve and even thirteen hour shifts, and mothers who cannot leave their babes at home bring them and lay them

on the floor in the hot, lint-charged air of the factory. Wages are pitifully small, and profits criminally large. There are no effective laws, and there is little effective public opinion, to control the situation. Nor can it be controlled simply by agitation. China is in the first stages of a great industrial transformation. Industry must be profitable or it will cease. It must be humane or it will be a curse to China—a curse coming from western Christian lands. Only a combination of expert knowledge and Christian principles can find a solution of the problem which will prevent this new development bringing great damage to a nation which ought eventually to be one of the great bearers and exemplars of Christian civilization and the Christian religion. The problem is one of education, but of education based on research, itself illumined by the Christian sense of human values. The Commission believes that the Christian forces of China must at once give attention to this matter, and is recommending the establishment, as early as possible, of an Institute of Social and Economic Research, which shall endeavour to discover how business may be conducted in China, on the one hand profitably, and on the other on Christian principles. This is clearly a task for the Christian forces to undertake. The results when reached should find expression not only in books and pamphlets and public lectures, but in the curriculum of our Christian schools.

The Commission was also much impressed with the need of positive and definite measures for the conservation to the Christian movement of the products of Christian education. The Christian Church was originally recruited mainly from the lower classes, and the ministry was very imperfectly educated. Moreover the policy of self-support was in many missions pushed to such an extreme that the churches which were developed were poor in every way—small and unattractive buildings, poorly educated pastors, unattractive service. Of late years on the other hand the Young Men's and Young Women's Christian Associations

have been appealing to the educated classes, and the Christian schools have been drawing students from the better non-Christian families, but in large numbers sending these students out as Christians. It is not uncommon for a Christian school to receive three-fourths of its students from non-Christian homes, yet to send out classes ninety per cent of whom are Christians. Many of these students also go abroad for further study. The result is that we now have large numbers of intelligent, educated young men and women from the better class of Chinese families, and all too few churches in which they can be at home, and all too few pastors who can claim or hold their attention. On the other hand, the return of educated non-Christian young men and women from America and Europe is bringing into China a ferment of thought and discussion which is permeating all the educated thinking classes. In the language of an intelligent observer, written since the Commission left China :

Books, newspapers and magazines all over the country are full of the writings of the leaders of the movement. Its trend is radical—it holds nothing sacred. The literature, customs and traditions of China and all other countries are thrown into the scrap heap with the expectation that the good may be salvaged. On the whole its leaders are fired with patriotism, are altruistic in sentiment, and are haters of tyranny and exploitation. It is full of both hope and peril. Its tide cannot be stemmed. It must be directed.

This whole situation constitutes a great danger to the Church, and a great challenge. The discontinuance of education would indeed solve the problem, but solve it by the failure of the whole Christian enterprise in China. Recent events have shown that in the stream of young life coming back from foreign countries there is a strong anti-Christian element. The extent of the influence which it will exert is not yet determined. But it will not be checked nor its representatives won by any obscurantist measures or any movement that is not in sympathy with China's legitimate aspirations. We of the western world must completely divest ourselves of all remnants of the feeling

that in China we are dealing with a race inferior to our own, and recognize that in China, as surely as in the West, the educated classes will eventually determine the development of national life. China cannot be won to Christianity by an ignorant or a divided Church. A Church must be created that can receive and use the Christian educated product of the Christian school, and deal ably and fairly with the questions and criticisms of the young educated Chinese. When this is done the Christian movement will receive a tremendous accession of strength. There is no time to be lost in these matters. The problem demands immediate and earnest attention.

The future of Christianity in China is not yet assured. By faith we may foresee its ultimate triumph. But its immediate future and its early triumph are very largely dependent on the one hand, on the development of a strong *system* of Christian education, well organized and sustained by all the Christian forces working in harmony, and on the other hand upon the development of a Christian Church which can receive and use the products of the Christian school.

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