

THE INTERNATIONAL REVIEW OF MISSIONS

THE CHINESE CHURCH IN RELATION TO ITS IMMEDIATE TASK

By CH'ENG CHING-YI

THE recent events in China's political sphere have not only caused the astonishment of the outside world, but also of many of her own sons and daughters of the most progressive typé. Who could have thought that within a brief period of merely one hundred and fifty days the "Son of Heaven" was to give way to a President? Who dared to expect, even among the revolutionists, that with so little bloodshed the Imperial Empire of several thousand years' standing was to become the "People's Kingdom"? It seems to be too great a step to move, in such a country as China, from Imperialism to Republicanism. Time alone will make the adjustment between the new form of government and the qualification of the people. The effect of the recent occurrence upon the Church is not less significant. Last year many of the Chinese Church leaders were labouring with all their might in the hope of securing religious liberty from the Government that then existed, but under the new order of things religious liberty is being granted before it was asked for, and to-day there is many a "Nicodemus" in social and political circles coming to Christ in the broad daylight instead of under the shadow of night.

The general impression of the people regarding this great change

When articles are an expression of the policy or views of the Continuation Committee, or of the conclusions reached by any of its Special Committees, this fact will be made clear. In all other instances the writer of the paper is alone responsible for the opinions which appear over his name.

is that Christianity has had a great deal to do with it. There is some truth in that. While Christianity did not interfere with political affairs, it did, and does, fight against evil, corruption, and sin. Many men of action have inhaled the pure atmosphere of Christian truth, and were moved consciously or unconsciously by the Christian ideas of national righteousness, purity, and love, to overcome all manner of evil, and in this sense the religion of Christ did much and helped much indirectly in the recent revolutionary movement in China. As regarding those who work from low motives for purposes of self-glorification, of whom there are not a few, they are unworthy of this great movement.

A new China, however, does not necessarily mean a better China. It depends upon the foundation on which the new Government will be based. The new form of government needs a new type of men—men of life, of principle, of courage, otherwise the nation will still remain in its feeble and weak condition, and here Christianity is called upon for assistance. Upon the new stage of China's reforms the Christian Church has a large and important part to play, and both her opportunities and responsibilities are unutterably great. How she is prepared to face the situation is the problem to-day.

Concerning the Christian Church in China, the most needed, and perhaps most neglected, consideration is the importance of a ground plan, a strategical policy. Many are working on the field with praiseworthy earnestness and remarkable devotion, but, comparatively speaking, there are few who view the Church as a whole and see it in its entirety. Take, for example, the idea of self-support. There is quite a vast difference in the churches in various parts of the country. In one place self-support was taught almost from the beginning of the formation of the church, while in another place it is not regarded as a matter of much importance even to this day. Last year the writer of this paper had the opportunity of visiting many churches in several provinces. In certain districts the churches have been self-supporting for more than fifty years, and these churches were established only some sixty years ago. In other districts the churches have been planted for fifty years, and self-support was not enforced upon the members until the last year or two. It was not surprising therefore to hear one of the oldest deacons of one of the latter churches say, when the idea of self-support was introduced to him: "My brethren! do not let these revolutionary ideas creep into the Church of God. We have already too many revolutionists in the

country ! ” The Church cannot grow from infancy to manhood in a single day. It needs far-seeing vision and sound judgment patiently but firmly to train the children of the Church in the principles of Christianity. They can never be able to walk unless by actual walking.

The Church, as well as the nation, is now passing through a time of transition. The Christian messenger is confronted with difficulties and hopes, encouragements and discouragements. It requires patient and tactful dealing. The time is passed from the period of the China Mission into the period of the China Church, and it will slowly but surely pass from the period of the Church in China to that of the Church of China. During the time of the first period it was of necessity that the work was entirely in the hands of European missionaries. In the second period joint action and the united efforts of men both of the West and East are of absolute necessity. In the third period we may hope for the time when the Chinese Church will undertake her own responsibility, and our missionary friends will be spared to evangelize other unoccupied dark fields. He is a wise man who knows the time in which he works, and who acts in accordance with it.

In the early days, Protestant Christianity in China was under social and government prejudice, and the introduction of the new religion was then almost a total failure. When the apostolic Xavier lay burning with fever on an island off the coast of China in the year 1552 he exclaimed : “ O rock, rock, when wilt thou open ? ” The conservative China was then in such a state of mind that she herself was all in all, and there was nothing worth receiving from the outside world.

In later years, when China willingly or otherwise opened up the country to international intercourse, the gospel of Christ followed the tracks of political and commercial enterprises, and found its way into many a heart, on which the power of the good news has had such a firm grip that many have not been ashamed to own Christ as their Saviour and Redeemer even in the face of death. Churches have been planted in nearly every province, and it is said that there are at present scattered all over the land some 300,000 full members connected with Protestant Churches.

China is now opened up from both the secular and religious standpoints. She is not only having an open door, but also an open heart. The opportunity is greater than ever, but the pressing question which remains with the Church is—How are we going to meet it ?

Before proceeding any further in our consideration, a few points seem to be of importance and should be recognized by the Christian Church if she is to master the situation, and not to fall behind.

1. The evangelization of China depends largely upon the men and women of the soil. The Chinese can understand their fellow-countrymen more thoroughly and more easily than those who are of a foreign nationality ; and only by the using of Chinese workers can we meet the cost incidental to having the work efficiently done.

2. The chief occupation of the missionary in the future is to devote more and more his energy and time to training and educating the Christian youth for the ministry and similar works. We have at present some 15,000 Christian workers, which is quite a large number, but only a small proportion of them have received good training and some even are entirely without systematic education.

3. The Church work as far as possible should be gradually in the hands of Chinese pastors. The task of the missionary is the founding of the Church and not the raising of the structure. In the days of the primitive Church, St. Paul and other apostles planted churches in Galatia, Corinth, and elsewhere, but elders were appointed in every place who undertook to care for and shepherd those churches.

4. The Church of China must be scientifically taught and trained for self-support and self-government. Responsibility and privilege go hand in hand, and cannot be separated. The training is by no means an easy task, especially with those who have been Christians for years, and have not learned the art of working and giving. But whatever pains we take now will be repaid with great profit in the days to come.

5. The Chinese Church should be based upon union. There was, and is, no necessity for introducing Church divisions to the East, and there is every reason to believe the Church would have been better developed if such divisions had been non-existent. The vital oneness of the Church of Christ, which I think is even deeper than unity, should have characterized the Church as one of its special features. For this our Lord and Master several times pleaded with the Father on behalf of His people in His last great prayer recorded in the Gospel of St. John. People think, however, that the Churches in the West under present circumstances have reached the "hardened case" state of affairs, and that such a union can only be looked on as figurative speech or an imaginary vision. Granted that is so. Here in China is the new Church, tender and young. Should we not

turn our eyes from historical or traditional interests, and try to remember the word of Christ in His prayer, and in China, at least, turn over a new leaf ?

6. The Christian Church should also more and more recognize the fact that China, as far as the present is concerned, appreciates more the practical side of Christianity than the philosophical. This is probably because the time has not yet come for the Chinese people to enter into the sphere of theoretical or philosophical lines of thinking. The Church, in order to meet its present need, should in every way manifest this phase of the Christian religion which may be the stepping-stone to things higher and nobler.

7. Christian literature is one other matter of chief importance. For many years the Christian Literature Society for China has done excellent work. It has powerfully helped China in her growth and advancement both directly and indirectly. The emphasis of this branch of Christian activity in the future in China is not so much on the word Literature, but rather the word Christian. Through the helping hand of Christianity, China has been led to value and pursue modern learning, and she is now really in earnest to do her best to educate her people. For our part we are to lead them to something still better, and to give them something more than modern learning—give them a God, a Bible, and an eternal hope.

8. The religious training of boys and girls should occupy a warm corner in the heart of every student of missions. There is in China a growing tendency to undervalue scriptural teaching on the part of the young people in Christian schools, and even among many of the college-trained men there is a vast amount of ignorance of Bible truths. But we all believe that the Christian youth is the hope of the Church. The early religious training of the Scottish people from the time of the Reformation is bearing abundant fruit to-day. It is worthy of the name "The land of scholars and saints." When the Roman and Greek priests in China were asked for an explanation of the careless way in which they swept men and women into their Churches, their answer was very significant. "We do not mind much about these grown-ups," they replied; "what we really count upon is their children, the younger generation." Such a method, be it right or wrong, has distinctly a policy, a far-seeing vision.

9. Scientific and systematic teaching of the Word of God is another matter which deserves careful consideration. Theological colleges and Bible schools of the highest order will render invaluable

service to the Church of the coming day, for which the Church will always give thanks to the Father on high. If the Christian pastor cannot be a student of all religions, he must, at least, be a student of the Christian religion, of which the Bible is a revelation.

These are some of the things that will consolidate the foundation of the coming Chinese Christian Church. From this we can perceive that the missionary has even greater work to do at present than in the past. The Christians in China are beginning to feel their way to action. The earnestness, the liberality, the spirit, are all beyond praise, but as to their wisdom one hesitates to speak with absolute assurance. They must be men filled with the Spirit of God, backed by sound judgment, and understand thoroughly the position of the Church and the condition of the country. Therefore they must be taught and qualified to shoulder such a great undertaking, and such a teaching largely rests upon the missionary. He must try to help and not to shrink from them, and let them feel they are being encouraged even when they should make mistakes and cause blunders. In the end the Church must become Chinese, so let the missionary do his best to lead them into the right and proper way.

The editor has kindly permitted me to write what is in my own heart and in the hearts of my fellow-Christians in China, and with that liberty I call for the serious attention of the readers to the importance of the Chinese Church question and the way to bring it about. I have dealt with the subject elsewhere, but feel it is high time now that the servants of the Lord should study the situation more closely, and let the matter be settled in practical ways.

To deal with such an important subject two things must be observed and constantly kept within sight. The one is to view it in its entirety, and the other is not to look for mere immediate gains, but rather have enlarged visions that the Church of Christ must grow strong from day to day and year to year.

With the past experience of the existing Churches in the world at large, and with hopes and expectations as to the future in China in particular, the question seems clear as to *how* the Chinese Church should be established. Of course one is not to overlook even for a moment the spiritual side of the question. Christ is the only Head of this divine organization, and what I emphasize here is by no means something new, something apart from the Holy Word, but rather the getting back to our Lord's idea "that they may be one even as we are one."

China affords, from many standpoints, an excellent opportunity for such a union enterprise, union in spirit, in prayer, and in practice. In presenting before the churches, in various places in China, the idea of Church union, the writer of this article received very hearty support and response from his fellow-workers in the same service. There are, I admit, difficulties in the way, as there are in everything of any importance, but they are possible difficulties only, not actual, and even these are, as a whole, foreign, and not Chinese.

We hear with great joy that some time ago there were some forty missionary societies met in England to discuss missionary problems, and that there was a manifest sign of a desire for a better understanding and a closer relationship. We, men of the East, are looking with great expectation to see that in the near future such a movement may be enlarged and spread throughout the whole of the Christian world. As the years roll on the religion of Christ will be more and more manifested before the world's gaze, and our petty differences and divisions will gradually sink into nothingness.

China is the best experimental ground for such a work. The work is really only at its beginning, and the Church is yet teachable. The Oriental Christians are willing and ready for a trial, and many of them, with not the slightest unkind feeling, regret that Church divisions should have landed on China's soil at all. But if the Church allows the time to pass away without some definite plan and action, then the loss will be beyond measure; and it is not too much to say that it will be the men of this generation, not they of the past, who must shoulder the responsibility, and answer for the consequences.

We have, as a matter of fact, already seen a good deal of union work—in educational, medical, and evangelistic efforts—and the results are at once remarkable and encouraging. The saving of time, men, and money is still the secondary gain; the enlargement of the Christian minds, the preparing of the way for further development, are indeed of greater value. The idea "the society" has been widened to the larger outlook of "the religion." But now we come to the centre of all Christian activity—I mean the Church. Should we not do more to unite the Churches from which all good works flow? No "sacrifice" on the part of any missionary society is too great for this grand cause.

The uniting of the Churches of various missions is by no means to undervalue the saints and fathers of the old world who formed the various church organizations. Nor do we think we possess wiser

heads than the ancient worthies. The emperors Yao and Shun of ancient China are still esteemed and loved by the Chinese people even though the country is now under a republican form of government, where emperors and kings have no place at all. We can best admire and love the great men of old by not making them a stumbling-block to the people of the time. The Christian Chinese can understand little, the non-Christian not at all, why the Christian Church should be thus divided and holding each for its own its particular form of worship, government, and belief, while they all profess to be members of an essentially spiritual religion, and not of one of mere outward forms. Let the Christian body as a whole do its uttermost to meet the present needs while the opportunity is still available, as the future Church depends largely upon what is now done. Every step the Churches take at present will not be in vain in the days hereafter. Even if the Church does make divisions in the future it will be the outcome of the consciousness of the Chinese Church, and not something which is foreign to it.

This is the most pressing need of the time, but nevertheless it cannot be done in a single day, nor should it. Careful, frank, and open-minded discussion and consideration are necessary. There are questions to be studied such as these: Should the Chinese Church be formed within the existing Churches, and if so, how would it effect the work of union? Should the Chinese Church be started outside the existing Churches, and if so, what would be its relation to them? What should be the ultimate end of the existing Churches in China? How fast and how slowly should the Church move forward toward a larger unity, and by what gradual and progressive methods? What is the best way in which the combined ideas of self-support and union may be worked together in mutual help? These are a few of the great questions that are awaiting an immediate answer.

May I here be allowed to make a bold suggestion? Let all the missionaries consult with each other, with the Chinese Christian leaders, and with the various home boards, as to the advisability and practicability of affording united help to the Chinese Christian Church which, as we have seen, should be from the beginning self-supporting and self-governing. The ways of helping such a Church are more than one.

1. Let the existing missions be more and more active in the matter of educational work, i.e. in turning out well-qualified men and women for the Chinese Church.

2. Let the missionary act in the capacity of adviser in the Chinese Church in things spiritual and material.

3. The China mission field should be geographically divided, and local, district, provincial, and national Church Councils be formed so as to link up the work into one great whole.

4. The name of the Chinese Church should be known throughout the land as "The Chinese Christian Church," and the separate parts distinguished from each other only by the location which the Church occupies, as "The Chinese Christian Church of Peking."

In this way, it seems to me, there is not only the advantage of having the twofold nature of the Chinese Church combined, viz.—self-support and union, but also the linking up of both missionaries and Chinese workers in the service of the Divine Master during what I call the second period of missionary activity in this land of ours. China is the best field for such a development, and now is the best time for action.

Now let us consider some of the natural advantages which are peculiar to China.

1. Language. China, although she has many dialects such as the Canton, the Fukien, the Ningpo, the Shanghai, etc., has but one language. Of late years the almost universal spoken language, the *Kuan Hua*, is becoming the everyday speech throughout the whole country. It is taught in schools, and is used by the more educated people in all the provinces. So in the near future China is most likely to have only one language, both spoken and written. This is an indirect advantage to the cause of Christian union which the country of India, say, cannot furnish.

2. Communication. The existing and prospective railroads and the two great rivers, the Yellow River and the Yangtze, which will certainly be developed more and more in the coming years under the new Government, form another physical advantage contributing indirectly to the cause of Church union such as the great continent of Africa cannot give at the present time.

3. The result of Church divisions as seen in the West affords another incentive to union in China. In the nature of things China is by no means interested in such divisions, and in fact, the very opposite is the general opinion of the Chinese Christians to-day.

Indeed God has placed upon the shoulders of the Chinese Church a great responsibility, the assuming of which will be an example to the whole of the Christian world.

The Christian Review, a monthly magazine published by the Christian Literature Society for China, has done good work for many years. Recently it has been transferred to the Chinese Christians, and is now known under the new name of *The Chinese Christian Review*. In the first issue of the magazine under its new title it declared that in recognition of the growing interest in self-support and Church union it would give to the movement its hearty support and promote it to the utmost. It is both humiliating and dangerous for the Churches in China to be thus divided and dependent. The magazine calls for the co-operation of all Christians, and hopes that through its circulation the whole Christian world may be blessed.

In another Christian periodical an article was written on the Chinese Church problem in the form of a dialogue. As it was Chinese writing to Chinese it may be of some interest if I give an abbreviated translation here. With some introductory remarks the writer started the questions and answers.

“ Q. What is the most pressing need of the Christian missions in China to-day ?

“ A. The need of a Chinese Church.

“ Q. What is the scope of this subject ?

“ A. It affects all the Christians in China.

“ Q. What are the principal requirements ?

“ A. Earnestness and wisdom.

“ Q. How should this work be pursued ?

“ A. In two ways, the internal and the external.

“ Q. What are they ?

“ A. Promoting unity within the Churches, and securing religious liberty from the Government.

“ Q. What is the idea of union ?

“ A. Union in spirit and in practice.

“ Q. What are the chief advantages ?

“ A. In the saving of time, men, and means ; and in the welfare of the Chinese Church in the days to come.

“ Q. What about the practicability of such a union ?

“ A. There are difficulties, but they are not impossible of solution.

“ Q. What form of government would it adopt ?

“ A. Try to get the best elements of every Church such as would suit Chinese conditions.

“ Q. How would it be named ?

“ A. The Chinese Christian Church.

“ Q. But would not this violate the form of government of the Churches in the West ?

“ A. The aim of the missionary is the kingdom of Christ, and not his particular Church government.

“ Q. Is this urgently needed ?

“ A. Decidedly. The longer one waits, the more difficult it will become.

“ Q. What is the general feeling of missionaries in China ?

“ A. Many are highly in favour of union, and a great deal of union work has been done.

“ Q. What was the mind of the Edinburgh Conference ?

“ A. The Conference only had ten days at its disposal, and it spent one whole day for the discussion of this all-important subject, federation and unity.”

Then the article went on to discuss the necessity and importance of securing religious liberty from the Government. As the situation has since been changed so much, religious liberty is being granted to the people by the republican Government. But this means increased responsibility which the Church of Christ must realize. Without religious liberty the Church was in a very difficult position as far as its relation to the State was concerned. Prior to the revolution last year, many Christian leaders were working hard to secure religious toleration. They were not at all sure that their desires could be realized. They only thought it was their duty and right to ask for it regardless of the consequences. For in those days Chinese Christians in government schools, in official circles, and in the establishing of Chinese churches suffered injustice and ill-treatment. Now things are changed and difficulties removed by the granting of such liberty. Ex-President Sun Yat-sen in Nanking wrote to some of the Chinese pastors stating that religious liberty would be included in the new constitution. So also said President Yuan Shih-kai when receiving a deputation from the Peking pastors, three times mentioning the granting of religious liberty. This gives the Christian Church a fresh opportunity, but the using of it is for the Church to decide.

“ The People’s Kingdom ” is at its new beginning, and the Chinese Church is at its new beginning too. But is the way in which we do our work sufficiently adequate to meet the needs of the twentieth century ? Many of us say that we must try to suit the native conditions, but what are they ? View China from the Chinese

standpoint, for every missionary working in China is labouring for China's good and welfare, and the missionary is China's best friend. We cannot all be leaders, but we can all be friends. The fundamental truths as set forth in the Book must be safeguarded, while historical interests, divisions and parties, forms and rules, can be naturalized to meet China's great needs. East and West should mutually help each other, and with one accord work for the common cause—the kingdom of Christ, and the salvation of men. "Sail your boat," so goes the Chinese proverb, "while the wind is with you." Such endeavours will be richly rewarded, and will cause the repetition of the words of old, "This is the Lord's doing and it is marvellous in our eyes."

There are the active, well-educated young people in China who are holding the reins of political and social affairs. Many of them are returned students. There are the humiliated Manchu nobles, whose pride and haughtiness have been cast down to the dust. There are—by far the greater part of the people—the ignorant, uneducated class of the man in the street. These, one and all, are waiting, unconsciously perhaps, for help from the Christian Church. The people of China view Christianity from a new standpoint and with a new consciousness. What is the Church going to do? is the question upon which depends the future position of the Church in this land of ours. The Church itself, too, is getting more active and is feeling its sense of duty, so what we now really want is a Church policy.

We must not be influenced too much by the passing changes of the day. A time of reaction is likely to follow, and if nothing is done between now and then, we can fairly predict that what will be left to the Church of God will be nothing better than bitter lamentations.

I fear I have made it irksome for my readers not a little by the illiteracy of my style of writing, and by viewing the situation too much through Chinese spectacles. For this I beg your pardon. But on the other hand it is a problem that affects China so intensely and immediately that I feel I must be bold and frank, and try to forget my own shortcomings and inabilities. It is with sincere Christian friendliness I present before you what is to me the most important and most urgent problem, and ask for your patient and open-minded consideration. For this may be the starting-point of the larger union when the Christians of the whole world will be as one flock under one Shepherd, and then "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea."