

A New Dawn for Religion in China

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A Leap Forward

Everyone who visits China today comes back with a similar impression: big changes are taking place. There has been a great leap forward under the policy of the Four Modernizations. Streets in major cities once occupied only by waves of bicycles, are now being invaded by buses, limousines, and private cars. Commercial advertisements are to be seen at every crossroads, in newspapers, and on television programs. Hundreds of new hotels are being opened, some with foreign capital to accommodate the approximately 10 million annual visitors. Indeed, the number of tourists keeps on increasing at a rate unthinkable elsewhere in the world. About 9 million of them come from Hong Kong and Macao alone. Thousands of temples, churches, mosques, and other places of worship of all religions are now open; many others are in the process of being restored.

Where is China going? This is the question everybody seems to be asking. Will the bamboo curtain close again? While foreign visitors and outsiders raise these questions, the authority of the People's Republic of China keeps on affirming their socialist standpoint, though not without certain criticisms of Marxist orthodoxy. The Institute for the Study of World Religions in Beijing is now revising the opinion that religion is really harmful to society, that it is the opium of the people and that missionaries are all instruments of imperialism.

It was against this backdrop that we, twenty members who had formed ourselves into a delegation of Scholars of World Religions, traveled to China from 10 to 24 September 1985.

The New Era

The Cultural Revolution, led by the Gang of Four from 1966 to 1976, has come to make for most people the dark period of the socialist revolution. No one

wants to live through that nightmare again. The issue of the Cultural Revolution came up every now and then during our meetings, especially on visits to churches, temples, and historical places. The one name still mentioned with full respect was that of Chu-en Lai, apparently the only one who could prevent the Red Guards from destroying many temples and cultural heritages. Although restoration is in progress, damage can still be seen in many places.

The Cultural Revolution was like a boxer struggling desperately to score a knockout before the 15th round. Of course, it failed to achieve its ideal of establishing a classless society within the space of a few short years. Schools, universities, temples, and churches were closed; everyone was obliged to join the proletariat in the fields and in the factories. But instead of rapid progress, the effort only resulted in regression and regret for most Chinese. Then the new leadership emerged and brought China back to reality. The Four Modernizations were underway.

China realized by the end of the Cultural Revolution that even though she possessed enormous natural and human resources and could to some extent become self-reliant, her standard of living and social conditions were not satisfactory. The country needed a real leap forward, which could be provided by modern technology in industry and agriculture. She realized that she was still somehow dependent on the world economic and political systems, where competition for power and the struggle for survival is a fact. Finally, in order to materialize her plan she needed capital, and that in turn required that she modernize her orthodox and rather conservative ideology and mode of production. The bamboo curtain drew open.

Changes are taking place rapidly. In less than ten years of the new era China has already taken on a new look. Businesses and shopping centers are crowded. Clothes are no longer limited to white, blue, and green. Girls can be seen wearing skirts in place of the ubiquitous trousers. New fashions are pouring into the country and seem to be welcome. Fashion shows with expensive new styles from outside are organized in big cities. Big and small electric shops play modern and pop music from Hong Kong and Taiwan to attract their clients.

According to a report in the *China Daily*, prior to September 1985 about 10 million private enterprises had been registered, about 6 million of them shops and restaurants. The number is increasing rapidly. Such families have saved from their income of the past years, but also through assistance from their overseas relatives. Incentives are provided in all sectors. The principle "from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs" has now been changed to "more production, more income." Many farmers work up to 16 hours a day in order to increase their incomes. Families who earn up to 10,000 yuan (about US \$4,000) annually are accorded public recognition. Radios and television sets are becoming part of family life. Although China herself produces these electrical goods, during the first six months of 1985 she imported about 400,000 television sets from Japan alone.

Like a dawn that opens up new horizons, all roads seem to lead to China much as the Silk Road has done over a thousand years ago. As foreign traders from both governmental and private enterprise seek new fortunes, China must try to maintain a suitable balance between progress and her own socialist policy.

The Place of Religion in China

The first article regarding religion after the Cultural Revolution appeared in the daily newspaper *Kuang Ming*. It was written by Shi-you, an expert on Buddhism and commemorated the first anniversary of Mao Zedong's death under the title "An Investigation of Religion and the Critique of Theology." The author suggested that in accordance with Mao's request in 1963 research and critical study should be undertaken of all religions, but especially of Christianity, Buddhism, and Islam since they have such an important role to play in the world today. He quoted Mao's own words: "If you know nothing about idealism and metaphysics, if you never have fought against all these things, your materialism and dialectics are not secure." The author's mistrust of religion is nothing new. On the contrary, it is the reaffirmation of the orthodox Marxist idea of religion, which was repeated by Mao: "Religious idealism and the dialectic materialism of our party are contradictory." Shen Shi-you adds the comment: "In the history of our country, especially after the arrival of Buddhism and the establishment of Taoism, religions were manipulated by the feudalists to oppress the people. Christianity was also a cruel instrument of the imperialists' invasion of China"

It is clear from this article, which may be considered an official statement of the Communist Party of China (CPC), that what is being aimed at is not so much a change in *policy* as a change in *strategy*. During the Cultural Revolution the Gang of Four reduced religion to a private affair, prohibiting all communal expressions of religion. In so doing, they only rendered religion more harmful to their cause. The reorganization of religious affairs should be based on a firm strategy. Studies and research are thus required. In fact, the Bureau of Religious Affairs, suppressed during the Cultural Revolution, has now been re-established. The first meeting between party officials and the Bureau of Religious Affairs was held in 1979 and meetings of leaders of the different religions followed.

All parties have had to rethink China's policy towards religion. The results were inscribed in the constitution, "Every citizen is free to believe in religion and is free not to believe in religion and free to propagate atheism." One thinks of actions taken by the CPC in accord with this policy: the Red Army was ordered to respect believers of religions during the Long March (1935-1945), to cooperate with religious groups during the civil war (1945-1949), and finally during the period of the Common Programme (1949-1954) to build up a united front among all parties and people's organizations, including the religious

ones. This should be done as long as religions exist in China Classic statements by Mao Zedong and Chu-en Lai have been taken up in this regard. Mao said in 1927: “The peasants themselves build up their own gods. Time will come when they will chase their gods with their own hands. It is not necessary that someone else should do this for them before that time.” Chu-en Lai made a similar remark to Christians in 1950: “We leave you to teach your religion and convert the people ... We both believe that only truth will prevail. We believe that your faith is untrue and false. Therefore, if our idea is true, the people will reject those faiths; your churches will be deserted. If you are right, the people will accept and believe you. But since we are sure that you are wrong, we are ready to take the risk.”

On 15 March 1979, the Chinese Government issued its official policy on religion in an editorial of the daily *Yen Men Yow Pao*. Siao Zianfa, the director of the Bureau of Religious Affairs, spelled out the consequences for “religious freedom”:

1. Every citizen is free to believe or not to believe in a religion.
2. Every citizen is free to choose any religion to believe in.
3. Every citizen is free to believe today and free to disbelieve tomorrow, or vice-versa
4. All religions, big or small, are equal in China
5. The political status of believers and non-believers is equal.
6. The government needs to monitor the administration of religions.
7. Believers in religions are free to have friendly relationship with believers outside China
8. Every religion may have its own organization such as the Three-Self Movement (Protestant), the Catholic Patriotic Association, the Buddhist Patriotic Association, and the Muslim Patriotic Association.
9. There should be harmonious coexistence between believers and non-believers, because all share the common aims of the revolution and all work for building up a new society.

The March 15th policy was hailed at the time as the official opening of a door that had been closed for a long time. Mao Zedong’s and Chu-en Lai’s policies were revised. Like the artist who darkens the background to highlight certain figures in a painting, the framers of the new policy condemned the Gang of Four for their attempt to build up a new “religion” by “canonizing” themselves as saviors and suppressing all forms of religion. The reestablishment of the five main religions—Buddhism, Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, and Taoism—began from that moment. Perhaps we should rather speak of the start of a second period, since all the patriotic associations created prior to the Cultural Revolution were suppressed during this period.

Patriotic Associations

Although China declared religious freedom at the time of the founding of the Republic in 1949, the meaning of this freedom must be understood in the Chinese context. China cut itself off from the outside world as it tried to reorganize society. All groups were asked to cooperate in the reconstruction of the country under the banner of a "United front" directed by the China Communist Party. Religions were to keep functioning on condition that they responded to and cooperated with the Party's policy. Patriotic associations of all important religions were set up for this purpose.

With the establishment of the Peoples' Republic in 1949, religious organizations and groups were gradually restricted in their contact with outside connections. In 1951 the Government declared that all religious organizations and their affiliates (such as cultural and charitable organizations) must be registered. The Three Self-Patriotic Movement of the Protestants had already taken shape in the previous years. The Catholic Church in China was criticized and forced to join the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, formally ending its ties to the Vatican. By 1957, however, the Catholics had set up their own Catholic Patriotic Association.

In that same year 1,150 missionaries were deported, 22 bishops were jailed. In the following years the remaining missionaries would leave also. The reaction from the Vatican was expressed in a letter of Pius XII entitled "*Ad Sinarum Gentem*" and dated 7 October 1954. It criticized China's policy and declared the Patriotic Association, as well as the consecration of new bishops in China, illicit.

The Christian Churches in China were split down the middle. On the one hand were those who declared themselves members of the patriotic associations; and on the other, an "underground" church which condemned the patriotic associations as traitors to the Christian faith and disloyal to the universal Church.

A similar situation arose within Buddhism and Islam. Both set up Patriotic Associations and cooperated with the Government. The result was considerable reform for all religions. Religious ceremonies and festivities were reduced to a minimum. The number of religious leaders and believers decreased; many went underground. Numerous temples and churches were closed down, though there were still enough left for believers to worship in. The "Three-Self" spirit began to be practised by all Patriotic Associations: self-support, self-propagation, self-government. They became religions of "the people," not the property of outsiders.

As mentioned before, during the Cultural Revolution, all Patriotic Associations of religions were suppressed. They came back to life again after 1976. The first assembly of religious leaders was held in Shanghai on the 11 January 1979. Eight hundred leaders from different religions came together to

denounce the suppression of religious freedom during the Cultural Revolution, and to issue an appeal for religious freedom and the release of those detained in prisons because of religious beliefs. A month later, another meeting took place in Kunming, the capital of Yunnan. The government expressed its policy clearly and promised its support for the publication of the Muslim *Koran* and pledged freedom for other religious publications and studies.

The Religions in China Today

The following information is based on meetings with leaders and members of the Islam Patriotic Association (Beijing), the Buddhist Patriotic Association (Beijing), the Catholic Patriotic Association (Beijing), and the Three-Self Movement (Shanghai). It also draws on discussions held with monks, bishops, priests, ministers, and leaders of the various religions in Beijing, Sian, Loyang, Nanjing, and Shanghai.

Islam was introduced into China through via the Silk Road during the time of the Tang dynasty in the 8th century. Islam in China is different from other religions in that the Muslims, which consist of 12 tribal groups numbering about 14 million, are scattered throughout the country in minority groups. After the Cultural Revolution, hundreds of mosques were opened. Many of them are being restored, some with contributions from the Chinese government. The Imam at the mosque in Beijing told us that every year there were about six to seven thousand foreign visitors, mostly Muslim, from all over the world visiting their center. Some 2,000 Chinese Muslims go to Mecca every year. Schools for Muslims are also being opened. The Muslims are more interested now in higher education, which is also encouraged by the government. Interestingly, the mosque in Beijing and the famous mosque in Xian were all built in Chinese style, confirming one's sense that Islam has been integrated into Chinese culture more markedly than other religions.

Buddhism was introduced into China in the first century and spread during the Eastern Han Dynasty and in the period of the Three Kingdoms. Loyang is said to have been the center of Buddhism since the Buddhist scriptures were brought first to this city and the first Buddhist monastery was erected there. It is recorded that in the sixth century, there were 1,367 monasteries in Loyang, and about 30,000 temples and monasteries, as well as more than 2 million monks in the whole of the north. Caves with sculptured Buddhas still remain to be seen in many cities. One of the most famous sites is in Lungmen in the vicinity of Loyang itself. Sadly most of the statuary had been damaged during wars and conflicts throughout history, especially in this century. What time and the weather have wrought is minimal compared to the damage done by thieves and vandals.

Buddhism has clearly contributed a great deal to Chinese culture. The arts

of sculpture and painting associated with Buddhism remain unequalled even today. The Thousand-Buddha grottoes at Dunhang, the stone caves at Bingling Temple, the Grottoes at Maijishan, the stone grottoes at Yunhang and Lungmen, all date back to the first centuries and are now part of China's great historical treasures. The introduction of Buddhism also brought with it new types of music, dance, musical instruments, and architecture.

It is hard to reckon the actual number of the Buddhists in China today, while statistics for Muslims and Christians are much easier to come by. Although broken up into numerous "sects" and schools, Chinese Buddhism belongs to the Mahayana tradition as distinct from Theravada Buddhism in Sri Lanka, Burma, and Thailand. In most of the temples we visited in the major cities there were schools for novices and monks, as for instance the national school in the monastery where the Buddhist Association is situated in Beijing, the Lama Temple in Beijing, temples in Loyang, Nanjing, Shanghai, and Han-Chou. The famous Sao Lin Temple, situated about 70 kilometers from Loyang, is still in operation, continuing its famous tradition of Chinese martial arts and training its novices both in the practice of the Dhamma and the martial arts. The monks in one monastery near Nanjing told us that they also had some monks from Sao Lin coming for weekly instructions in the martial arts.

Some of the many temples damaged during the Cultural Revolution, such as the famous Lama Temple and monastery in Beijing and the famous Lingyin Temple of Han-Chou built in the 4th century were rescued by the intervention of Chu-en Lai. Besides these two, which our delegation had an opportunity to visit, there must be many others that he saved in the same period. Currently monasteries and temples are being restored on a large scale. New monks are being ordained and schools for novices are being assisted financially by the government. The maintenance of these sacred buildings is helped by contributions from visitors and tourists, who pay an entrance fee and give alms, in addition to which the government pays the rent for monasteries and temples not yet returned to the community.

Today the leaders of the Buddhist Association have an important role in the Chinese People's Political Consultative Councils (CPPCC) both at national and regional levels. Moreover, the secretary general, Mr. Zhao Puzu, is well known internationally for his active participation and contribution to the World Conference for Religion and Peace. Earlier this year he was awarded the Peace Prize of the Niwano Foundation (affiliated with the Rissho Koseikai, a new Buddhist sect in Japan.)

According to the secretary general, Buddhism seems to be the religion that stands closest to the people. Its scholars are never far away from the real life of the people. At the same time, Buddhism in China is not closed in on itself. He noted that there are now four Chinese Buddhist scholars studying and working in Japan as part of an exchange program. Chinese Buddhists often take part in symposia around the world. After the Cultural Revolution, many schools were opened for the study of Buddhism. Research centers engaging in

research in the cultural heritage of China were established. A board of Buddhist research has also been founded. Centers for the study of Buddhist tradition—from the elementary to the highest levels—have been set up in various provinces. The Association contributes directly to the *Chinese Encyclopedia* on matters concerning Buddhism. There are also various publications that contribute to spreading a deeper understanding of Buddhism. The secretary general himself writes articles and books in a popular vein to make Buddhism more accessible to ordinary people.

At the end of our meeting, the leaders of the Buddhist Association repeated that it was the time of restoration and that much still remains to be done. Buddhism needs to adapt itself to changing society. More and more parents are sending their sons to become monks. More and more people are interested in Buddhism. Buddhism cooperates with the government to rebuild a new society in China. The Vice-Chairman of the Buddhist Association noted in conclusion that, as long as the CPC is interested in the welfare of the people, there should be no conflict between the government and Buddhism.

Protestantism is particularly interesting to observe in China today. The Three-Self Movement (to which the designation “Patriotic” was added after the 1949 liberation) has its roots earlier in Chinese Protestant history. This made it easier for its leadership to be integrated into the new system and to cooperate in the reconstruction of the country. Amazingly, the number of Protestants of various denominations has multiplied during the last thirty years from 700,000 to about 3 million, the major increase apparently coming after the end of the Cultural Revolution. Protestant places of worship and meeting are typically in the homes of believers rather than in churches. This, as well as the important role played by lay leadership, contributed to the fact that its Christian witness was able to remain alive during otherwise difficult periods for religion. Even today when the churches are open, family gatherings still continue, and ministers and religious leaders consider their visits to the family gatherings as important as the community gatherings in the churches.

The center of Protestantism in China is Nanjing. The national seminary, which has over 200 students and a highly qualified staff, is now open for operation. Under the leadership of Dr. K. H. Ting, who heads the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, different denominations have now been able to achieve a considerable degree of unity. This phenomenon could be observed even in small communities. All the people we met talked about the overcoming of “denominationalism” and the fact that the Protestant Church in China never before could claim to feel as “Chinese” as it does today. “The same baptism and the same faith” is the basis of this unity. The reconstruction of the Church in China today is focusing on the recruitment of members into the service of the Church to replace the ageing leadership. The process of revitalization is also being aided by the publication and distribution of 1.5 million Bibles. A monthly magazine is being issued by the Christian Council of China in Shang-

hai. The development of a theology relevant to Chinese society is also envisaged. Contact is being made with the current theological thought in the outside world. Thousands of modern theological books can be seen lining the shelves of the impressive library of the seminary in Nanjing. In the past years, many distinguished theologians from the West have been invited for conferences and exchange. A group of American missionaries was admitted into China this year. Even though they are not allowed to begin their own universities, they have established good relations with local churches.

More and more churches are now being opened all over the country. There are presently three churches in Beijing with about 1,200 Christians attending Sunday services. There are about 4,000 Protestants in Beijing, the rest of whom apparently continue to meet in private homes as before. Pastors often preside at services and officiate at the sacraments in these familiar settings. Study of the Bible takes place both in churches and in the families. One Church we visited in Beijing was opened on Easter Sunday of 1979, symbolic of the theme of "Resurrection" which predominates in the Church in China today. Indeed, everywhere we went, this theme was in evidence.

Many difficulties remain for the resurrection of full Church life in China after the Cultural Revolution. The recruitment of personnel is progressing slowly, not so much for lack of young candidates, who apply in great numbers, as for a lack of organization and materials. The seminary in Beijing now has 17 candidates, 3 of whom have been sent to further their studies in the Nanjing Seminary.

As for the practice of "ecumenism" in the parishes, the church in Beijing holds a common service once a month for all denominations, and every week one particular denomination will organize its own service.

The churches maintain themselves with offerings from their members and from the rent they earn from the government for the use of church lands and buildings. The ministers and personnel of the churches live a life as simple as the ordinary people and feel themselves more a part of the people than ever before. It is a poor church with great simplicity in its style of life. Even so the ministers in Beijing church still thought they were in a slightly better position than ordinary workers.

Statistically, the Protestant Church in China numbers about 3,600 churches opened since 1979, with more slated to be opened in the future. In addition, there are about 10,000 gathering places in families. There are 9 seminaries, and 3 more in planning. Five YMCA hostels are in operation, with more being planned. Protestant representatives take part actively at all levels, even in the provinces, at weekly interreligious meetings where leaders and representatives of the various religions gather to exchange experiences and search for ways of cooperate more closely. The increase of the number of Christians is a tribute to the long years of personal witness given by the Christians themselves. The newly "converted" are relatives and friends of the older Christians. Most of the people we met repeated the fact that the Chinese Church is no longer a

“Western” Church, foreign to the society but has integrated the Three-Self principle. External aid is welcome, but only provided there are no conditions attached and no external interference.

Catholicism has a long history in China. The famous stele in the museum of Xian goes back to the 6th century, when the Nestorians came to China for the first time. The second penetration into China was made in the 13th century by Giovanni di Montecorvino. Real mission activity, however, began only in the sixteenth century and is associated above all with the name of Matteo Ricci. Efforts to integrate the Christian faith into Chinese culture—or what we call today the process of inculturation—were made already at that time, as testified by the famous “rites controversy.” By and large, however, the Catholic Church in China remained “westernized” in form and content down through the centuries and closely associated with the colonial powers in the minds of the Chinese themselves.

In the 1950s all foreign Catholic missionaries were expelled from China when the “patriotic” association was being formed, at first in association with the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestants and then later as an independent entity. Bishops, priests, and lay Christians who did not join the new organization were persecuted. In 1957, eleven Catholic bishops and about 70 priests gathered in Beijing and agreed to the foundation of the Patriotic Association in accord with the Three-Self principle. This was followed by an announcement by Pope Pius XII on the 29 June 1958 prohibiting bishops, priests, and Christians believers from joining the new Church organizations. The Vatican did not recognize the two new bishops consecrated in that period. 43 other prelates were consecrated between 1958 and 1980. In January of 1985 the last bishop was consecrated in Shanghai, Msgr. Jin Luxian. Even though he is not a member of the Catholic Patriotic Association, he was consecrated by a bishop of the Association. In the Beijing Catholic Seminary, the headquarters of the CPA, we met with the Chairman of the Association who also serves as the Vice-president of the Bishops Conference of China (There are 48 bishops, who meet once a year.) He told us that the Catholic Church in China is being accepted more and more and recognized for its participation in the reconstruction of the country. There are today about 3 million Catholics spread all over the country. Thousands of churches have been opened, although there is a lack of priests and religious leaders to direct and minister to the communities. Major seminaries now reckon a combined enrolment of about 700 seminarians. The national seminar in Beijing (located on the grounds of what was formerly the Catholic Peking University) has 70 candidates preparing for the priesthood, screened from some 300 applicants. There are also 3 minor seminaries in the province. Permission from the government is not required for ordinations.

In Shanghai, our visit to Zigawe, the “unofficial” center of the Catholic Church in China, provided additional insight. (Zigawe was the name of the first Chinese Jesuit, a former high-ranking official of the royal court in the 17th.

century.) There we saw the cathedral, the Bishop's residence, the seminary, a monastery, a convent, a school, and a hospital—all belonging to what was a vital center for numerous other Catholic activities as well. The cathedral is a Western-style edifice put up in 1906. It was heavily damaged by the Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution, but is now virtually restored to its former state. There we had a long and cordial visit with Bishop Jin Luxian, a man whom many point to as the "rising star" of the Catholic Church in China. The 69 year old bishop, a Jesuit, had done his studies in Rome, Paris, and finally Innsbruck where he struck up a close friendship with Karl Rahner. He speaks Italian, French, German, and English. Following his release from jail after 13 years of imprisonment, he was consecrated Auxiliary Bishop of Shanghai. It is he above all who is directing the reconstruction of the Church, not only in Shanghai, but in China as a whole. Unofficially recognized by all parties concerned as the key figure in reconciling the Catholic Church in China with the outside world, Bishop Jin is the first member of the Catholic hierarchy to travel abroad. He went to the Philippines and Hongkong last June and July. More trips to Asian and European countries are foreseen in the coming years.

The complex at Zigawe is busy at work with its own reconstruction. The cathedral has three masses daily and five masses on Sunday. About 2,000 Catholics attend Sunday mass, while others come on weekdays, a situation brought about by the fact that many workers are rostered to work on Sunday and given a holiday during the week instead. The convent has 80 sisters, whose average age is 73; the average age of the priests is 76. There is a seminary for the 16 dioceses of Eastern China with 98 seminarians, aged 18 to 60. Many seminarians are now continuing their study after the interruption of the Cultural Revolution. Bishop Jin is constructing a new seminary, which will accommodate about 200 students. The 2 million yuan he needs has been secured through a bank loan, but he is confident that Providence will provide for the means to finance the venture, since it is so important for the work of the Church.

The diocese of Shanghai has about 100,000 Catholics, but only 45 priests. In the city of Shanghai itself, there are about 40,000 Catholics with 6 churches already open. Another 20 are now open in the diocese. More and more Catholics are beginning to attend church and more and more parents send their sons to the seminary.

Besides the construction of the new seminary the bishop intends to build a health center as well, which a group of retired doctors, former students of his Jesuit colleges, have volunteered to staff as a service to the Church and the people. Religious publications are also being promoted. The bishop himself has translated the Vatican H documents and co-ordinated the translation of the Jerusalem Bible. 300,000 copies of the New Testament, already translated into Chinese, are now in the printing house.

There is still a great deal to be done; many of the projects will require time. The introduction of the Chinese language into the liturgy is being undertaken gradually. The Church has been cut off from the outside world for so

long, he explained, that it is not easy to adjust itself and keep up with the pace of *aggiornamento* in outside churches. Agreeing with the principle of inculturation and the need to de-westernize the Church, the bishop remarked that “the Church has to change in order to remain the same...”

The question of the Catholic Patriotic Association was not mentioned in our dialogue. He did note, however that the construction of the new seminary was made possible through the assistance of the CPA itself and that he participates in the Bishops Conference. Asked whether there are internal conflicts, he replied, “Not yet.”

Bishop Jin is a unique personality. Our discussion with him was spontaneous, warm, and frank. He follows the progress of the Church around the world and supports the churches in Latin America, the Philippines, and other countries in their expression of solidarity with the poor majority. If invited, he said he would be ready to join the conferences of the Federation of the Asian Bishops' Conference (FABC).

The Catholic Church in China seems to be open to the outside world. Bishop Jin told of his relationship with churches in other parts of the world. He reiterated the principle we had heard expressed elsewhere: external aid and assistance are welcome, but without conditions, so that the Church in China can maintain its independence and its priority of identification with the Chinese people. Too many questions are raised by outsiders who do not give enough consideration to the Chinese situation. As the Chairman of the CPA told us, what the Church in China expects from other churches is first, prayers; second, friendship and a willingness to understand their situation; and third, non-interference.

Conclusion

Religion in China today may be said to find itself in a very important period, not only in the matter of the reconstruction of religious organizations, but also in the challenge posed by the new policy itself. The review of orthodox Marxism must include new questions concerning religion. One of the leaders of the Institute for the Study of World Religions in Beijing told us that students were now raising questions such as these: is religion the opium of the people? have missionaries been only instruments of imperialism? was Confucianism also a religion? The interest in the study of religions is reflected also in the numbers of students being sent to study abroad by the Institute itself. One is doing a doctoral course in Christianity in Munich, another doing doctoral work in religious studies in Toronto. Others are to follow in their footsteps and departments of religious studies are being planned for Chinese universities.

The role of religious groups in China is recognized and the contribution they are making to the new society is on the increase. Representatives of religions have even succeeded in having the constitution amended. Most orthodox

Marxists take a dim view of these developments. For them it is like a Third Opium War, following the first in 1840 and the second during the Cultural Revolution. For them, the advances being made by religion are detrimental. Religions in China today are not only in urgent need of material assistance, but of understanding. The sufferings and struggles of the past decades have put them in a unique situation. It is all too easy to raise an accusing finger when one stands in another context. They live in a unity and solidarity whose form may differ from the expectations of the outside world. The “patriotism” that they feel towards their own country and its people does not mean that they wish to cut themselves off from the rest of the world. As Christians, their unity remains committed to the scriptural ideal of “one Lord, one faith, one Baptism.”

Religions in China have kept silent for a long time. Now they are speaking. It is our turn to keep silent and listen to what they have to say.