

The Christian communicator is a prophet to the community and is at the cutting edge of evangelisation and development. In this role we are called to challenge the myths of our communities and cultures with the values of Christ which are uplifting and humanising. It is the difficult task of the Christian communicator to express Christian values in the diversity of cultural traditions

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China - From Isolation to Communication

HOPES FOR THE CHRISTIAN CHURCHES

La Chine est de nouveau présente au monde. Une tache blanche sur l'atlas pendant près de trente ans dévoile son relief d'antan, ses couleurs fascinantes et son visage humain toujours mystérieux. La chrétienté aussi re-découvre ses frères et soeurs, et s'interroge sur son histoire, son avenir. La communication sociale est au centre de ce dialogue naissant entre l'Eglise Catholique de Chine et l'Eglise Universelle. Presque tout reste à faire. Les murs d'isolation et d'aliénation ne sont pas encore tous abattus: partout on le sent, partout on en souffre. Mais la lumière d'une nouvelle ère s'annonce.

The year 1978 marks a decisive turning point in the recent history of the People's Republic of China. After the dark period of the Cultural Revolution which is seen by some scholars as a rebellion of the peasant population against the elitist urban intellectuals, doors and windows were opened to the modern world, and fresh air came in, bringing a spring of optimism and confidence for the future all over the country. Chinese society definitely should dismantle its walls of isolation and strongly foster the modernisation of its four most vital areas: agriculture, science and technologies, industry, and national defence. Hence any Chinese citizen, including the major religious bodies, should contribute to the upbuilding of a united and powerful new nation. This new policy of the Chinese government opened unexpected horizons for the great religions in China: Islam, Buddhism, Taoism, as well as Christianity.

1. THE OPEN-DOOR POLICY

The new attitude of the Chinese government which is still developing and taking shape, affects all aspects of life such as economy, education, as well as religious affairs. There is undoubtedly during the last two years a trend to greater freedom of publishing, of speech and teaching, of religious services and also of travelling - even abroad. All religions profit from this, and according to many sources, this policy will remain. "We see a lot of difficulties ahead. But a return to the path of ten years ago? Impossible!" (Beijing Review, October 1986). This policy has created hopes for an improved way of living for the people in China, even after the student demonstrations end 1986, with a clear trend towards Western economic and spiritual standards. One of the basic principles of the communist party in its policies towards religion, is that no religious affairs may be dominated by a foreign country. The three self principles are the cornerstones for this policy. Christianity is especially affected by this principle, since it is a religion which came from outside. Therefore the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA) was established to safeguard the three self-principles in the Catholic Church and to function as a link between government and the Church. For many Catholics inside and outside China, this organisation was - and very likely still is - rejected for its separatist and independent stand with regard to the universal Church, in particular its communion with Rome. That is most probably the reason why in June 1980 two other Catholic organisations were set up to get the support of the whole Catholic population, namely the Religious Affairs Committee (RAC) and the Catholic Chinese Bishops' Conference, both based in Beijing and headed by the Bishop of Beijing. Both organisations uphold an independent stand and are pastorally oriented. Yet it has given many priests the opportunity of being active in the Church, without being a member of the CCPA. As a result, an evolution took place in the CCPA itself, becoming more and more a semi-political lay association, primarily concerned with the civic loyalty of Catholics.

2. THE CHINESE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN CONTEXT

In 1946, Pope Pius XII established the Chinese hierarchy comprising 20 ecclesiastical provinces with 70 dioceses, and 38 apostolic vicariates. Diplomatic exchanges between the Vatican and China were established through ambassadors.

On 1st October 1949, the People's Republic of China was established under the leadership of the communist party headed by Mao Zedong. Once in power, the Chinese communist government started its attacks against the Christian Churches in the name of the struggle against imperialism. The institutions were nationalised, and all the foreign missionaries expelled. In the Catholic Church many Chinese bishops and priests were arrested and jailed because they applied the Pope's directives of non-cooperation with the communists, or because they refused to join campaigns of denunciation and executions.

At that time there were - according to official figures - in the whole of the Catholic Church in China 146 bishops (60 Chinese), 5,701 priests (2,859 foreigners); 6,927 nuns (2,095 foreigners) and 979 brothers (390 foreigners). The faithful amounted to about three million.

In 1957, the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA) was officially founded in order to implement the three self principles: self government, self financing and self propagation of the Church. Likewise the Catholic Church was brought under the strict control of the State. Gradually the spiritual communion with Rome became difficult, and finally the official unity was broken in 1958, when two candidates approved by the government were proposed to the Holy See but refused, and the consecration of bishops was initiated independently from the Vatican. About 35 bishops were so consecrated before the Cultural Revolution. In the meantime, more and more churches were closed, many of them destroyed or turned into warehouses, factories or theatres. Church leaders and leading lay people were jailed or banned to other regions in China, or even killed. The other religions suffered the same fate. Buddhist and Taoist temples were also closed and the Monks expelled.

led. During the Cultural Revolution which began in 1966 and lasted for more than 10 years, the Churches were systematically persecuted and a veil of darkness fell over the country.

After the death of Mao Zedong in September 1976, a new era started with the growing criticism of the "Gang of Four" held responsible for the aberrations of the Cultural Revolution. Friendly exchanges with foreign countries were initiated, and called for a strong support from the whole population in its effort of modernisation. Nineteen representatives of the so-called persecuted religions in China were invited to the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference in February 1978, in preparation of the Chinese People's Congress. Two Catholic bishops attended that meeting. In the course of the following years many priests and sisters were released from jail and labour camps, and on their return found churches completely demolished or ransacked, tombs broken and convents turned into schools; Church property used for all kinds of purposes: workshops, clinics, schools, or assigned to people as living quarters. Now, nine years later, all the religions in China, including the Buddhists, Taoists and Muslims, as well as the Christian Churches, are more openly functioning all over the country, and particularly the traditional religions are enjoying a great revival. Most of the religious leaders have been rehabilitated and gradually Church buildings and properties are being returned, restored, refurnished and reopened for worship.

3. RECENT STATISTICS ON THE CHRISTIAN CHURCHES IN CHINA

Concrete data and figures about the Christian Churches in China are still quite confusing and partly contradictory. The latest official statistics given are:

3.1 The Catholic Church:

There are still 110 dioceses but only 45 Bishops with a total Catholic population of about 3.5 million. Some sources claim that there are additionally at least 3 million so-called "Underground Church" Catholics. Whereas in 1985, 700 churches were reopened, this figure now comes

closer to 1,000. There are about 1,200 priests, whose average age is 75 years. There are seven regional seminaries in China, with more than 600 students, 115 of whom are in the new regional seminary of Sheshan, close to Shanghai. The dioceses which have no bishops are administrated by bishops from neighbouring dioceses.

3.2 The Protestant Churches:

In China, religious sectarianism among the different Christian denominations has been eliminated, and all but the Catholic Church had to join the China Christian Council, representing the unified Protestant Churches. In 1949 there were about 700,000 Protestant Christians, but the official figure today is around 4 million. Unofficial sources pretend that the figure might be around 20 million. Yet over 4,000 church buildings have been returned to the former different Christian denominations. In addition, there are 30,000 registered meeting points in the cities and villages, and about 200,000 or more registered, mainly in the rural areas. Here - and this applies to Catholics as well as to Protestants - many villages are entirely Christian and enjoy far less restriction from the government than groups gathering privately in cities and towns, where the level of education is supposedly higher and consequently also a danger for opposition or reactionary movements.

4. THE DEVELOPMENT OF MASS MEDIA IN CHINA

4.1 The PRESS - one of the oldest means of communications

China has a very old media tradition, its first "newspaper" going back to the 8th century ("Dibao", an official bulletin of the imperial court). In the 17th century it became a printed daily ("Jing Bao"). However the development of a national press was started by missionaries in the beginning of the 19th century and came to a boom after the opium war in 1840. More than 300 newspapers were launched, most of them centered in Shanghai. The space given to religious, Christian news and features was considerable.

It is only after 1873 that newspapers founded by and for the Chinese themselves saw the light, and the period

between 1895 and 1911, in which the press played a decisive role in the struggle for independence, is still seen as the golden era of Chinese journalism. In the following years the press continued to expand, particularly in urban areas, until 1949, when the People's Republic of China was founded and the function of mass media was drastically reconsidered. Their main task from now on would be "re-education" of the people according to the communist party's lines and programmes. During the first six years of the communist ruling, daily newspapers were reduced from 1,400 to 260, but their circulation increased from 4.5 to 8 million daily. Rural press received greater emphasis than ever before.

The great advantages of RADIO in reaching even the most remote areas of this immense country was immediately recognised by the new government, and given absolute priority. It was supported by the installation of a new public address system network all over the country from 1951 onwards, allowing already in 1964 to reach about 95% of the population.

During the Cultural Revolution this address system was further developed whereas many papers and most of the periodicals were suspended.

4.2 The national media landscape today

It is too early to give full statistics about the development of communication structures in China, and figures published in official publications inside and outside China often have no relation to each other. Comparing the official statistics and data with recent publications of scholars at Chinese universities, one is confused. The number of dailies go from the official figure of 188 in (1980) to 380, 661 or even 1,632 in other publications. Very likely the different sources do not use the same categories, and some of them include also enterprise and university news-bulletins; yet the concept "newspaper" should be more specific. The following data seem to be the most approximate:

Television: 54 central and local stations; 50 million receivers (1 per 20 inhabitants); TV audience about 240 million (viewers each day). 1986 there were 35 TV-Uni-

versities with 1.5 million students daily.

Radio: 125 broadcasting stations; 260 million receivers; 2,600 wire-broadcasting stations.

Public address system: formerly a very effective radio distribution network through 90-150 million loudspeakers, reaching hundreds of millions of listeners at any time of the day or night. With the expansion of private radio and TV sets, its political impact is steadily decreasing and very likely will only survive temporarily in remote rural areas.

News agencies: two; the governmental Xinhuashe and the para-governmental Zhongxinshe (for outside China), both Beijing.

Newspapers: 1,632 (including enterprise and university papers); over 140 million circulation. One out of three Chinese seems to have a copy of a newspaper.

Magazines: 4,100 titles with a number of 2.1 billion copies per year, i.e. 1 copy per 2 persons. The periodical with the highest circulation is the "Chinese Children's Journal", with a weekly distribution of about 10 million copies per issue.

Book publishing: 6.2 billion books with 40,000 titles per year; 415 publishing houses; 173 (198) printing presses, not including newspaper or specialised print plants. 10,000 public bookstalls.

Nevertheless, the printing and publishing of books is still a serious problem in the whole of China, and infra-structures inappropriate.

4.3 Shanghai and the media

Shanghai was a small town until the arrival of foreign entrepreneurs who succeeded through the opium war in winning trading and residence rights in the 19th century. Today, Shanghai is the largest and most Westernised city of the nation, with a population of more than 12 million. It has the highest population density of any place in China, and is a major cultural and educational centre. Its orchestra, ballet troupe, opera companies and film studios are among China's best. Shanghai's industrial

output is greater than that of any other municipality or province in China, and its steel industry is China's second largest. Shanghai has a long tradition of being one of the major media centres in China, if not in Asia. Some of China's earliest newspapers developed there, as did the country's first radio station in 1923, and the second TV channel in 1958.

5. CHURCHES AND MEDIA SIGNS OF A PRIVILEGED TIME

Along with the other religions, the Christian Churches largely benefit from the "open-door" policy of the government, although it took the Christians obviously more time to realise that a new era had started indeed.

5.1 The Protestant Churches

The Christian Churches united in the Chinese Council of Churches seem to be ahead of the Catholic Church as far as they reacted more rapidly and with greater trust to the pragmatic liberal attitude of the government towards religion. They immediately set some vital priorities for action, especially in the field of communications. The most urgent certainly was the need for religious books, catechisms, bibles, Christian-inspired literature. Most of it was destroyed during the Cultural Revolution.

Actually the Protestant Churches are finalising an ambitious publication and book production programme supported by the establishment of a large printing plant in Nanjing. Since 1981 however, they have already printed more than 2.1 million bibles at local presses, whereas between 1957 and 1980 none were printed in the whole of China. Furthermore, different periodicals were launched: the bi-monthly "Tian Feng" (Heavenly Wind, 32 p. 40,000 copies), the Theological Correspondence Course, a quarterly published by the Theological High School of Nanjing (40,000 copies) as well as a Theological Review, collections of sermons, and other religious books and materials.

5.2 The Catholic Church

Data about the activities of the Catholic Church of China in the field

of communications are still very general and fragmentary. Only those dioceses which maintain more regular contacts with the Universal Church outside China, like Beijing, Shanghai or Canton, are better known, although there seems to be some understandable reluctance to tackle this question openly. In Canton nothing special is undertaken. In Beijing there is the official periodical "The Catholic Church in China", and a modest publications programme. But as in the secular field of communications, Shanghai is playing a prominent role for the Catholic Church in China. Before the Revolution, the diocese ran a large printing press, and most of the religious and educational books and materials were printed there for the Church throughout China. Two years ago a research and information centre, a kind of publishing house was opened, which meanwhile developed an impressive publication programme with 16-20 titles of books ready for printing, with expected circulations of 10-20,000 copies. The centre publishes also two periodicals, the quarterly "Collectanea Catholica" and the bi-monthly "Information about the Church in-and-outside China". To implement this programme a small print unit was installed at the centre, but the establishment of a modern medium-sized printing press in the coming year is under consideration. In addition, a modest but modern equipped AV and video centre with recording studio has been established since some months.

CONCLUSION

The Christian Churches in China seem to be on the threshold of a new historically privileged era, where hopes for the better are stimulated indeed by the pragmatic open-door policy of the present government. There is no doubt that thoughtful and inculturated use of the modern means of social communications represents an extremely delicate but challenging priority so that Christianity may have another opportunity to contribute openly to the building up of the new Chinese society of tomorrow.