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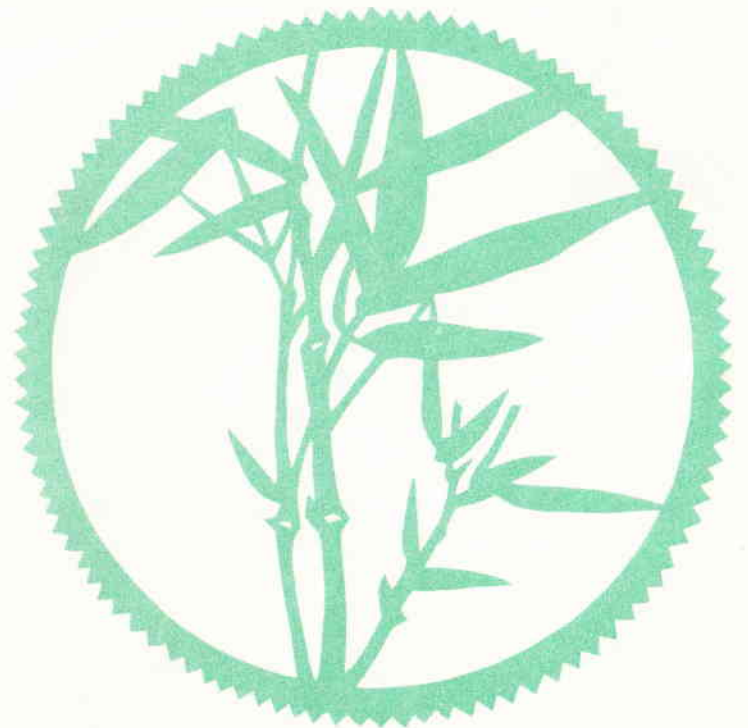
Reporter

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"WHAT ABOUT RELIGION
IN CHINA?"

Some Answers
For
American Christians

by Maud Russell



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An excellent source book on religion in China today is "Religious Policy and Practice in Communist China; Documentary History" by Donald E MacInnis. This book of 117 documents is an invaluable source of government documents, documents by Chinese theoreticians, by organizations and spokesmen of the various religions (Catholic, Protestant, Moslem, Taoist, Buddhist), statements by Chinese and foreign individuals, and comments by Dr MacInnis. (Available from China Books & Periodicals in New York, Chicago and San Francisco. Paper: \$3.95

A continuing source of material on religion in China is CHINA NOTES published quarterly by the East Asia Office of the National Council of Churches USA, 475 Riverside Drive New York NY 10027. (\$2.00 annually)

"WHAT ABOUT RELIGION IN CHINA?" Some Answers For American Christians

by Maud Russell

Background of the Question

The question - "What about religion in China?" represents a widely expressed concern, especially among American church people, over developments in China today.

The century of American Protestant missionary work in China, with the annual "mission study courses" in American churches, the church support for missionaries and their work, the reports of missionaries on furlough to their home boards and to home church congregations, the visits of Chinese Christian leaders and Chinese students to the United States - this century of mission work had its impact on a significant body of American church members. This impact made a sizable part of the American people have some sense of a relationship with China and generated much warm feeling toward the Chinese people.

But beginning with the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 expression of this sense of relationship and this warm feeling were held in check by Washington's anti-China policy and the pressures of the McCarthy period - but released by Mr Nixon's new approach to China in 1972. However, the concentration on religious interest in China served to blot out an appreciation that China's priority was not with religion but with the building of a new kind of society, specifically a people's society, a socialist society.

When questioners about religion in China come to an understanding of the priority concern of China and become aware of the reactions and experiences of the Chinese religious adherents, the question of "religion" will take its proper place and American Christians will not only understand China's approach to the question, but will have sympathy with their Chinese co-religionists experience of "religion in China".

Acceptance That Religions Still Exist in China

The socialist authorities in China have not outlawed religion. The vast population of China does contain religious adherents, religious organizations and religious leaders. "The principal religions of our country (are) Catholicism, Protestantism, Islam, Taoism, and Buddhism. They all command a mass following and exert broad and far-reaching influences on the mass of the people of all nationalities. Almost all the people of the minority nationalities believe in Lamaism (within the dominion of Buddhism) or Islam. These five religions not only have a long history but will exist for quite a long period of time to come after the establishment of a socialist society or even a communist society." *

How People's China Fundamentally Views Religion

The old China in which missionary work was carried on, the semi-feudal, semi-colonial China, is gone. The new China, the people's China, is building an avowedly atheistic society. At best, religion is seen as useless debris from earlier societies - primitive and class (slave, feudal and capitalist). At worst, religion is seen as an instrument used by feudal oppressors, foreign imperialists and counter-revolutionaries to exploit, control and subvert the masses.

For socialist China the question of "religion" is not approached in the narrow terms of religious belief and the right to hold such beliefs - a common approach of some who assume that today's China is "attacking religion". China's approach, as she deals with the question of religion, is in terms of relationships in society. "In our country the question of religion involves the relations among the masses, the relations among the different nationalities, the relations among the different classes inside the country, and the relation between China and the other countries. The question is therefore very complicated. From this it follows that in the past, at present and in the future the question of religion has been and will remain an important social question for a relatively long time

* Chang Chih-yi "Correctly Understand & Implements the Party's Policy on Freedom of Religious Belief"

to come. A correct handling of this social question will be of tremendous significance to the strengthening of unity among the people of various nationalities and to the construction of our great socialist society." *

No attacks are being made on specific religions; rather, all religions - their organizations, adherents and leaders - are being subjected to critical discussion on Government, Party and popular levels, and within the religious constituencies themselves. These are not discussions of religious beliefs - "God" or "no-God", "immortality", "revelation", "virgin birth" etc. Rather, there is widespread discussion of new China's basic philosophical approach - which is materialism (dialectical and historical materialism). At the same time there are analyses of the role these religious organizations and adherents played in the domestic and international life of the nation.

The fact that religions still exist in their new society necessitates a thorough educational approach on the part of Government and Party authorities to the question of religion. For everyone there is the primary imperative of involvement in the socialist construction of their society. For religious adherents there is the added imperative; serious study of and facing up to the role their religion has played in the life of China.

China's Religious Policy

Freedom of religion is guaranteed. In the Constitution adopted in 1954 Article 88 stated;

Every citizen of the People's Republic of China shall have freedom of religious belief.

The latest edition of the Constitution, adopted January 17th 1975 by the Fourth National People's Congress stated in Article 28 -

Citizens shall enjoy freedom to believe in religion and freedom not to believe in religion and to propagate atheism.

* Chang Chi-yi Deputy Director, United Front Work Department "Concerning The Problem of Religious Policy (1958)

The Carrying Out of the Religious Policy

While some distinction is made between the adherents of a religion and the leaders of a religion, the general policy toward religion and its believers is as follows:

First, there is the guarantee of religious freedom. "This is the policy of freedom of religion. There must be freedom of belief in religion or non-belief in religion, belief in this religion or that religion, belief in this sect or that sect of the same religion, belief in religion of the past or non-belief now, and non-belief in religion of the past and belief now."*

Second, get out the facts to the followers: that religion was and is being used by interested (exploiting) elements. "Before Liberation Chinese Catholics and Protestants were primarily controlled by imperialism and were tools of imperialism in the aggression against China. Buddhism, Islam and Taoism were primarily controlled by domestic reactionary elements, used as tools for the preservation of their reactionary rule." * "Religions in our country, especially the Lamaist division (of Buddhism) and Islam have been for a long time controlled and utilized by the feudal class. In these religions there were feudal lords and some extremely savage and cruel systems of feudal oppression and exploitation. Temples and monasteries owned large tracts of land, large numbers of live-stock and other means of production. They required the masses to contribute toward their upkeep and to do labor without compensation, and cheated the masses and extorted money from them under various pretexts. They also had their own prisons and courts of justice and meted out punishment to the masses as they pleased - feudal landlords in religious clothing." **

"After Liberation the rule of imperialism, the feudal landlord class and the bureaucratic bourgeoisie had been overthrown...Nevertheless their forces in re-

*Yu Hsiang & Lin Chun-wang "The Correct Handling of The Question of Religion"

** Liu Chun-wang & Yu Hsiang "Religion & Class Struggle in the Transition Period"

ligion have not been completely eliminated and they continue to attempt to fight the people on the religious front. Imperialist elements and other reactionary elements hiding under the cover of religion often collect intelligence for imperialism, fabricate rumors, and even organize insurrections and carry out other counter-revolutionary activities. They spread reactionary views which are hostile to new China, oppose the Communist Party, and slander the socialist system. *

Believers in superstition are learning how their superstitious practices not only had no scientific basis but, in addition, served the interests of exploiting elements. Members of cults are learning how their leaders served and still attempt to serve the interests of domestic and foreign reactionaries.

Third, involve the people in class analysis; this provides an opening to a new relationship within their society - a relationship in terms of class interest, no longer in terms of religious relationships and beliefs, nor in terms of loyalty to religious leaders.

"In dealing with the problem of religion, the proletarian political party must employ the Marxist-Leninist method of class analysis for a penetrating investigation and research, and handle them correctly in accordance with their different nature." *

In other words, the religious believers must come to see their relationships in the New, the People's China in new philosophical terms, that is, materialism not idealism; they must see themselves in terms of classes, understanding which class it is that they as individuals belong in - know which class serves their interest and which class exploits them.

* Yu Hsiang & Liu Chun-wang "The Correct Recognition and Handling of the Question of Religion"

Fourth, There must be a patriotic united front between the Marxist-Leninist political party and the religious believers.

"The primary task of the Marxist-Leninist political party on the problem of religion is this, to unite with all religious adherents who can be united with (including professional religious practitioners who can be united with) under the revolutionary and construction causes, and carry out a struggle against domestic and foreign reactionary class enemies, eliminating their forces and influences in religion.

"Differences in ideological belief among people do not exclude cooperation on a given political foundation... The world outlook of the Marxist-Leninist political party is basically different from the world outlook of the religious followers among the working people. Nevertheless, the revolution and construction causes led by the Marxist-Leninist party represent the basic interests, politically and economically, of the religious followers among the working people. This point fundamentally decides the fact that religious followers among the working people can join the other working people and be united around the Marxist-Leninist political party." *

There is a distinction made between the religious adherents (the followers) and the religious leaders (the professional religionists) or as they are sometimes called, "the religious circles." Religious leaders (religious professionals, religious circles) are defined as those who principally dependent upon religious occupations - such as Catholic fathers, Protestant pastors, Buddhist monks, Taoist priests - to make a living. For the purposes of the study of the "religious

pastors, Buddhist monks, Taoist priests - to make a living, for the purposes of the study of the "religious problem" they are those who for three full years preceding Liberation (1949) were so employed.

"Religious adherents among the working people constitute the mainstay of the patriotic united front between the Party and the religious adherents, and the foundation of this united front. The alliance with patriotic religious circles is the auxiliary but also important alliance in this united front. Both alliances cannot be neglected as they promote each other. Religious circles exert a definite amount of influence over the religious adherents among the working people. Nevertheless, in the final analysis, only on the foundation of unity with the religious adherents among the working people may we truly achieve unity with the patriotic religious circles under the patriotic united front." *

Fifth: "We must patiently, repeatedly and continually carry out political and ideological education among the religious adherents among the working people,"

"Gradually raise their awakening, mobilize them into participation in the practice of the revolution and construction, making them educate themselves in the midst of such practice, distinguish between the enemy and themselves, gradually rid themselves of the negative influence of the upper strata of religion and even the political influence of domestic and foreign reactionaries, and join the other working people in being firmly rallied around the Party."

* Yu Hsiang and Liu Chun-wang "The Correct Recognition and Handling of the Problem of Religion"

*The Correct Recognition & Handling of the Problem of Religion By Yu Hsiang & Liu Chin-Wang

The reiteration of the phrase "among the working people" stresses the socialist ideology - the dictatorship of the proletariat, a society ruled by the working people. The great bulk of the religious believers in China are in the working class, not in the "upper strata."

"We must see that the religious adherents (are) easily susceptible to the negative political influence exerted by the upper strata of religion, and even the ideological poisons of domestic and foreign reactionaries." *

Sixth: "Practice the principle of both uniting with and struggling against the patriotic religious circles."

"Though the patriotic religious circles can participate in the united front, nevertheless ideologically they have been deeply influenced by imperialism and the domestic reactionary classes.... Some of them cannot demarcate clearly the boundaries between the enemy and ourselves."*

The long relationship with the benefits of being connected with missionary work and their support of Chiang Kai-shek (proud that he was a "Christian") make the changing of their loyalties to the working people of China a hard task. For the first time for many Chinese Christians it means understanding and facing the fact of class struggle.

The Party's task is

"to unite with them and struggle against them, continually pushing them to carry out political and ideological reform."*

This involves struggle - especially with the religious professionals;

*Yu Hsiang & Liu Chun-wang "The Correct Recognition & Handling of the Problem of Religion

"If it is considered that by merely making a certain agreement and without going through a definite struggle, unity with them can be realized - it will be a mistake. They entertain, to varying extents, suspicions, conflicts and disagreements over the Party's line, directives and policies. They vigorously attempt to expand the forces of religion and, through the foundation of religion, deepen their own influence among the religious followers." *

What About Christians in China?

Since this presentation seeks primarily to answer questions asked by American Christians, I go into details only about the reactions and adjustments the Chinese Christians have had to the imperatives of the new China. The adherents of the other religions have reacted and adjusted in corresponding manner; but, since Christianity is the only non-Chinese religion in China and the only religion with foreign missionaries functioning, the Chinese Christians have had an added, a distinct, adjustment to make. Questioners must keep in perspective the conditions in which Chinese Christians have found themselves since 1949.

All Chinese are living in a changing society. The new China's major priority is getting rid of the old society and the building of a new society. The new society is radically different from the old. In the first place, it is a people's society in which every individual is helped to be both a participating and a responsible citizen. In the second place, it is an atheistic society - by definition, anti-religious.

*Yu Hsiang & Liu Chun-wang "The Correct Recognition & Handling of the Problem of Religion"

Everyone in China must be involved in socialist construction and socialist political and ideological education. All have a responsibility for getting rid of the old and for building the new. Everyone is undergoing socialist education - education which is clarifying and challenging all old ideas, old loyalties, old ways of doing things.

No individual can come through twenty five years of a new social, political and ideological process and remain what he or she was in the old China. Whether or not he or she has become "the new man", the thinking and living of every individual has changed. No one has been outside the conditioning experiences of the changing society.

Chinese Christians today are not what they were in missionary days. In the first place, there are fewer Christians; "rice Christians - religious opportunists who joined for economic or political benefit - have disassociated themselves, no longer needing educational, medical or job privileges from church membership. In the second place, those who have stayed by their faith, though they sincerely believe that as Christians they have a significant contribution to make to their country, today place their first loyalty to their socialist society.

Almost every individual in China has religious or superstitious hangovers - as well as social, psychological, political, economic, cultural hangovers - which must be overcome if he or she is to fit into the new society. This is not an easy process for anyone. The religious policy of the new China has sought to make this overcoming an understandable and reasonable process; understandable on the part of the religious believers and reasonable on the part of the authorities. An atheistic society of course expects the withering away of the ideology of religion. But the process, removing by degrees the roots of religious ideology, respects the current believers' intelligence and capacity to think and change.

"In advocating freedom with leadership and democracy under centralized guidance, we

in no way mean that coercive measures should be taken to settle ideological questions...all attempts to use administrative orders or coercive measures are not only ineffective but harmful. We cannot abolish religion by administrative decrees or force people not to believe in it....The only method is by the democratic method of discussion, of criticism, of persuasion and education..."*

Of course, the overcoming of the old was in many respects a rough road for Christians. For one thing, their long association with and warm feelings toward the United States were early shocked. To see missionary personnel steadily all leave China was a wrench at many cherished friendships. Then Washington's policy of "freezing assets" suddenly cut off financial help that Chinese churches had been used to receiving. The "Resist America - Support Korea" movement forced Chinese Christians to at least openly take sides against what they had long felt was a friendly country.

Learning about and facing the facts about the relationship between imperialism and the missionary movement became an increasingly disturbing experience, especially as this relationship was undeniably evidenced in historical documents and records with which the general public was now becoming familiar.

The Hundred Flowers period("Let a hundred flowers bloom, let a hundred schools contend") in 1957 led many leaders, religious and others, to speak out, some to protest against what they considered mistreatment and injustices, some to openly oppose the new regime itself. This open, critical and hostile taking advantage of the "blooming and contending" was followed by increased emphasis on socialist political education as the authorities recognized that full political solidarity had not yet been achieved. So there was increased pressure on the public to think in terms of class - class differences and class struggle. This forced Christian thinking into new, strange and difficult intellectual paths.

*On The Correct Handling of Contradictions" (Mao 1957)

During the Cultural Revolution of 1966-1969 the "freedom of religion" policy suffered a set-back. Red Guards were militant in their opposition to religion. They put up posters accusing believers of deceiving the people, sheltering spies, opposing Chairman Mao's Thoughts. They had exhibitions showing missionaries as hypocrites; their activities closed down all public religious activity in 1966. As Donald MacInnis wrote in 1972: "The Red Guard action against religion in 1966 appeared to be a part of a broad, emotionally charged response to the Chinese Communist Party's communique summoning 'revolutionary young people' to lead the Cultural Revolution against revisionist bureaucrats, bourgeois reactionaries and 'all parts of the superstructure that do not correspond to the socialist economic base.' Religion for a generation of politicised youth with no personal religious experience, seemed superfluous and irrelevant, a hiding place for slackers and reactionaries. The Cultural Revolution has now moved on beyond the initial phase of militancy and the Red Guards themselves are seldom mentioned in the Chinese press."*

So, for Chinese Christians the readjustment of feelings and thinking and the set-back to "freedom of religion" tolerance has been a rough experience. It must be seen as a part of the process of socialist education which everyone in China is going through.

Socialist Education: What Have Chinese Christians Learned About the Missionary Movement?

Chinese people in general have long been aware of foreign intrusion in China. They have seen foreign gunboats on inland rivers; they have seen foreign troops stationed in Chinese cities; they have known that foreigners, including missionaries, under the extraterritorial clauses in the treaties with foreign nations, had juridical and economic privileges that conflicted with Chinese interests. "Down with the unequal treaties" and "Oppose the running dogs of imperialism" were common slogans for decades, in mass

* Religious Policy and Practice in Communist China" Donald E MacInnis (1972)

patriotic demonstrations and movements. But since 1949 the socialist education movement has promoted extensive examination, study and discussion of imperialism and its impact on various aspects of Chinese life. Criticism of imperialism ceased being restricted to leftist analysts and sloganeering patriotic activists; it became a topic of general knowledge, study, and discussion.

For Christians this examination and study of imperialism brought the answer to the questions: Was it true, as the Communists had always insisted, that "The missionary movement served as an arm of imperialism"? Was it true that "Imperialism sent their preachers to China by means of big guns"? * So, an intense ferreting out of facts, much discussion, and much soul-searching has been going on in Christian circles. What are the Christians learning?

Christians have been studying the various treaties that opened up China to foreign penetration; they have learned how these treaties provided for the spread and protection of missionary work, of the advantage the missionaries took to go beyond the provisions of the treaties, of the role missionaries played in the making of treaties, and how certain well-known missionaries served imperialist interests in China.

"In 1840 when China was defeated in the Opium War, she was forced into signing the Nanking Treaty at the point of imperialist bayonets..... This treaty marks the beginning of imperialism and the intensive activities of foreign preachers in China." *

The Chinese Christians discovered that "Rev Morrison, the first Christian pilgrim to China, was the man who drew up the draft of the Nanking Treaty,"*

* Hsieh Hsing-yao "How Did Imperialism Use Religion For Aggression On China? A Historical Survey of Missionary Work in China"

and another missionary, "Dr Gutzlaff, acted as a go-between for the British opium firm of Jardine's and received a subsidy for his religious magazine as a reward...and served as interpreter in the negotiations for the Nanking Treaty."

"In 1844 America forced the Manchu regime to sign the Wan Hsia Treaty in which the right of Americans to establish hospitals and churches in the Chinese ports was first stipulated." **

"In the American Treaty of Wan Hsia it was the American missionaries William Bridgman and Parker (later American minister to China) who advised the American diplomat, Cushing, to take the stand that China must 'bend or break' and conveyed menaces, in Chinese to the officials with whom they dealt." *

The principle of "the most favored nation" treatment which was contained in the Treaty of Nanking meant that all subsequent concessions, in any treaties, would be automatically enjoyed by all. Missionaries and mission work, as well as foreign business interests took advantage of this.

"Following the example set by the Americans, France came to ask the Manchu regime to give protection to French churches in China, in the Whangpao Treaty."**

"In 1858 China suffered defeat at the hands of the Anglo-French Joint Forces and the Sino-French Tientsin Treaty was concluded in which it was stipulated that 'all law-abiding Chinese willing to enter the Catholic Church should undergo no restrictions whatsoever and all decrees to prohibit Catholic Church activities were rendered null and void'." **

* Israel Epstein "From Opium War To Liberation"
2nd edition 1964

** Hsieh Hsing-yao (above)

"The principal American policy" (in the treaty period of the 1940s-1960s..)"was that of the most favored nation, to get whatever privileges others got. This was a me-too policy which indicated that we were participating in the British informal empire in the China seas. Our policy was based on the assumption that the British navy would continue to maintain the unequal treaty system." *

"Although the Nanking Treaty and the Sino-American Wan Hsia Treaty stipulated that foreigners were permitted to domicile in commercial ports only and not permitted to enter the interior for religious purposes, the imperialists willfully violated the stipulation and sneaked into the interior. No fewer than 35 cases happened between 1846 and 1850."**

It has been embarrassing political education for Chinese Christians to realize how missionaries (some of them in positions of leadership) could serve the interests of imperialism. Peter Parker, the first American Minister to China, was an ex-missionary.

But living Chinese Christians do not need to delve into history for their education about the imperialist role of prominent missionary personnel. Dr J Leighton Stuart was President of the prestigious Yen-ching University; he became the last United States Ambassador to the Kuomintang Government in Nanking.

"J Leighton Stuart, former President of Yen-ching University, has posed as a religionist and educator for many years. Outwardly he acted as though he really sympathized with the Chinese...Unveiling himself, he became the American Ambassador to China in order to carry out America's aggressionist policy toward China." **

* John K Fairbanks in "China Notes" Autumn 1973
** H Hsing-yao (above)

"The missionary (J Leighton) Stuart, a well-known 'China expert' had signed a list of unequal treaties with China during the three years he was Ambassador to China, especially the Sino-American Commercial Treaty, which stipulated that the United States enjoyed various special privileges in China."*

"In 1948 India, Britain and the United States admitted an openly separatist 'Tibetan Trade Delegation' which was given American visas by the U S Ambassador in China, Leighton Stuart, despite its lack of Chinese passports. This was too much for even the moribund Chiang Kai-shek Government which made a series of protests." **

Another well-known American missionary was Frank Price, who translated Sun Yat-sen's 'Three Principles of the People'. Mr Price was criticised at a Christian accusation meeting as a person who

"took the name of missionary to carry on special agent activities." ***

Some individuals who were in the Chungking area during the Japanese War can recall the weekly afternoon teas to which Frank Price invited individuals who were in local touch with Chinese people and work - teas at which brains were "picked" for bits of information about what was happening and being said locally - intelligence gathering for Chiang Kai-shek and the American officials in Chungking.

Walter Judd, a well-known American medical missionary who left his medical profession for politics (as

* In A Statement by 5 Chinese Church Leaders May '50

** Israel Epstein "From Opium War To Liberation

*** Liu Liang-mo "How To Hold A Successful Accusation Meeting" (1951)

a US Congressman) became one of the most vociferous activists in the American China Lobby, supporting Washington's policy against the new China and promoting the interests of the Chiang Kai-shek regime on Taiwan.

By no means were the bulk of the missionaries in China aware of the role they or their missionary movement had in furthering imperialist interests. But their work in the interior gave an excuse for foreign gunboats, on the pretext of "protecting" missionaries, to penetrate hundreds of miles "up river" to inland ports; and at the same time providing protection for foreign economic activities and interests in the interior. In addition, the presence of missionaries gave the imperialists a continuing intelligence service. Missionaries, unwittingly, became sources of information about what was going on in the interior. Gun-boat personnel in inland ports easily made friends with missionaries - for "a touch of home", visiting or coming in to tea or to dinners. Their "big ears" were attuned to tea-talk or dinner-talk of local missionaries who had contact with local conditions and officials, attuned to the local evangelists as they talked about what they had seen or heard of group or guerrilla activity in places away from the ports.

After the establishment of the People's Republic of China, Chinese Christians learned explicitly how the American Government regarded missionary education work in China. Warren Austin, US Ambassador at the United Nations, during the debate on the Korean War in 1950 responded to China's representative, Wu Hsiu-chuan: Mr Wu had gone into detail accusing the United States of a policy of enmity toward China. Mr Austin insisted that the policy was not inimical to China and pointed to all the help the US had given China in times of famine, how Chinese students had come to study in the United States, and "Look at the dozen American missionary universities in China - these are the implements of our policy."! What an eye-opener that statement was for Chinese - especially Chinese faculty of these universities!

The Christian church in China has shed all aspects of control from the outside; the changing society has served as a catalyst to make final what decades of effort, previous to 1949, had slowly been achieving; independence, the becoming of an indigenous institution. The purging of the opportunist church members - self-purging for the most part - reduced the numbers of church members; but there remained a body of believers, convinced, as they told me in 1959, that "as Christians we feel we have a contribution to make to our country." And they were not anti-Communist; rather, in 1959, Christians said to me, "Under Communism we can be real Christians - we have always wanted a brotherhood society, a cooperative society; now we have it."

"Freedom of religion" has meant the freedom to believe or the freedom not to believe. It has never meant freedom of Christians, or of anybody else, to refuse participation in the general mass movements, such as The Great Leap Forward, "Oppose America - Support Korea," The Socialist Education Movement, The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution - movements which have influenced and changed the thinking and relationships of individuals. Christians have not escaped the politicization these movements have generated.

If, during the twenty six years since the founding of the People's Republic of China, Christianity in China has come to occupy a changing, a more restricted role it is because of at least two reasons. One is because of the completely new social, political, economic and ideological situation in which believers (along with everybody else in China) find themselves. The second is because of actions the Christians themselves have taken.

Actions By Christians

Very early after the establishment of the new China in October 1949 Chinese Christian leaders felt the necessity of letting their co-religionists abroad know how they felt about the changing situation in China and its relation to Christianity. In December 1949 an informal group of Protestant leaders sent A Message To Mission Boards Abroad.

"A new chapter in the history of China has begun, a new era has dawned. A new People's Government has been born under the leadership of the Communist Party, with the cooperation of all the revolutionary elements in the country and with the avowed common purpose of putting into execution the political, social and economic principles of the New Democracy...From now on a new political concept, a new philosophy, a new creed and a new mode of living will be installed into the masses of the people...China's traditional heritage will be rigorously scrutinized, and if need be, discarded....Likewise, much of the Western culture that has been introduced in recent years will be reexamined and shorn of its undesirable elements. We Christians in China feel an urgent necessity to re-examine our work, and our relationship with the older churches abroad in the light of this historical change in China....We need not re-examine our faith, for our fundamental faith in Christ is not to be shaken.... We feel the necessity of inviting your serious attention to what is happening now to our Christian work and challenge that is upon us..." *

This did not represent a sudden awareness on the part of these Christian leaders; there had been, for years, much soul-searching in Christian circles about their loyalties as Chinese nationals and about their relation to mission boards. The time had come to formalize their conclusions.

However, Chinese Christians still had some more very serious "reexamination" to do. In the "Message" of December 1949 they had stated;

* "Message From Chinese Christians to Mission Boards Abroad" (1949)

"There does exist some deep-rooted feeling on the part of the Communists that the Chinese church has been intimately related to imperialism and capitalism...We wish to assert that missionary work in China never had any direct relationship with governmental politics; missionaries have been sent here with no other purpose than to preach the Christian gospel of love and to serve the needs of the Chinese people..."

But by May 1950 Christian leaders began to openly revise their previous assumption about the relationship between imperialism and the missionary endeavor. They issued A Christian Manifesto; this was worked out by leaders (who later became the founding group of the Three-Selfs Movement) and was eventually signed by at least 400,000 Protestant Christians - about half of all the Protestants in China.

"Protestant Christianity was introduced into China more than 150 years ago.It was most unfortunate that not long after Christianity's coming to China, imperialism started its activities here; and since the principal group of missionaries who brought Christianity to China came themselves from these imperialistic countries, Christianity, consciously or unconsciously, directly or indirectly, became related to imperialism...Now that the Chinese revolution has achieved victory, these imperialistic countries will not rest passively in the face of the unprecedented historical fact in China. They will certainly seek to contrive by every means the destruction of what has already been achieved; and they will also make use of Christianity

* The Christian Manifesto; Direction of Endeavor For Chinese Christianity in the Construction of New China (May '50)

to forward their plot of stirring up internal dissention and creating reactionary forces in this country." *

The Manifesto then went on to proclaim that Christian churches and organizations supported the Common Program (1949 predecessor to the Constitution which was adopted in 1954); and stressed that "Christian churches and organizations in China should exert their utmost efforts and employ effective methods to make people in the churches everywhere recognize clearly the evils that have been wrought in China by imperialism recognizing that in fact in the past imperialism has made use of Christianity, must purge imperialist influences from within Christianity itself and be vigilant against imperialism... especially American imperialism..."

In the spring of 1951 The Three-Selfs Movement brought all Protestant churches together under the administrative umbrella of the Religious Affairs Bureau of the Central Government. The three autonomies are self-support, self-government and self-propagation. In 1957 The National Catholic Patriotic Association was constituted.

"The patriotic movement of the Chinese Catholics and the self-administration patriotic movement of the Protestants represent the conscious patriotic movement of the believers aiming at converting Catholicism and Protestantism in China into self-administered religious undertakings so that they will no longer become tools of imperialistic aggression against China." **

* The Christian Manifesto; Direction of Endeavor For Chinese Christianity in the Construction of the New China (May 1950)

** "Atheists and Theists Can Cooperate Politically And Travel The Road of Socialism" Chang Chih-yi (1958)

In April 1951 Chou En-lai convened a conference of representatives of Protestant Christian organizations which were still receiving American financial aid. One hundred and fifty one Protestant church leaders attended; they represented all Protestant churches and organizations in China. They issued a Declaration to fellow Christians in China and in the whole world. The five days of discussion with Premier Chou further deepened their awareness of imperialism's role in religious work:

"Most Christians in the world are good. It's the wicked imperialists who use the church as their tool of aggression. In July 1950 the Executive Committee of the World Council of Churches met in Toronto, Canada, and passed a resolution concerning the war in Korea.. appealing to the United Nations to take part in police action in Korea and opposing the signed appeal of 500 million people (the Stockholm Peace Appeal) against the use of atomic weapons.....The resolution echoes the voice of the United States Congress. If one examines the truth-distorting resolution of the World Council, one can see that the World Council is the tool of Wall Street, and of that instigator of the Korean War, Dulles."*

In 1954 Y T Wu, Chairman of the Three Selves Movement reported: "The principal achievement of the China Three Selves Reform Movement during the past four years has been the freeing of the personnel, management and finances of the church from imperialistic control, the cutting off of imperialist relations, the beginning of the wiping out of imperialist influence, and the first steps in self-government, self-support, and self-propagation."

* United Declaration of the Delegates of Chinese Christian Churches, Issued at a Conference of 151 Church Leaders, Convened by Chou En-lai in Peking April 16-21 1951

It may have needed the pressures and victory of the revolutionary forces in China to jar Christians (and other religionists) into facing and analyzing historic facts; but their own study and soul-searching has been an equally major factor in the socialist education of Christians.

Conclusion

Christians and Christianity in China must be judged from what Chinese Christians are saying and doing - not from what certain Christians with an entirely different background and society would like to see. The most Christian thing fellow-Christians in other lands can do is to listen to their Chinese fellow-believers, try to appreciate what they are experiencing and rejoice that Chinese Christians are a part of the great forward movement that is building a people's society in China.

ADDENDA OBSERVATIONS OF FOREIGNERS VISITING CHINA

In 1959 when I visited China I attended services in both Protestant and Catholic churches. The YWCA with which I had worked (1917-1943) had extended its work (though no longer with any foreign staff) and I had many interesting hours visiting local YWCA's and delightful hours with former colleagues. When I was in China in 1972 I visited no YWCAs nor attended any church services, though again I had the joy of seeing former colleagues. Bishop Ting at the Nanking Union Theological Seminary said some churches had opened but I gathered mostly worshipped in home gatherings.

Since Mr Nixon's visit in 1972 many more foreigners have been going to China; some are meeting and talking with Christians and reporting on "religion in China" as they see it.

Dr Joseph Needham of Cambridge University made one of his frequent trips to China in 1972. When!

asked about the situation in Christian churches he he responded; "This is exceedingly weak. I suppose I don't have to say that after all those centuries ever since the Nestorians got to China in the seventh century A D - all those centuries past, out of 800,000,000 people not more than 3,000,000 could be counted as Christians in the present century...May I say that I never felt so forcefully the strength of the Marxist case against organized religion....On the one hand I might paradoxically say that I think China is the only truly Christian country in the world at the present day, in spite of the absolute rejection of all religion. But on the other hand there may also be a case made out for the view that the Chinese have never been really fundamentally gifted in the sphere of religion, as I think the Indians have been." *

In August 1973 Kentaro Shiozuki visited China as a member of a delegation representing thirteen Japanese youth organizations. "Even though the church has lost some of its 'missionary zeal' it has gained understanding and a new opening to the community....Because the church is still being transformed by the revolution it is not yet sure what to say to society. They suggest that Christians over-seas get beyond concern over the number of Christians, the kind of church services, and the level of religious freedom in China, and patiently concern themselves with understanding the whole context of the transformed society in which the church functions." **

Donald MacInnis, a former missionary in China, now Director of the China Program of the National Council of Churches USA, and Editor of "China Notes", visited China in the fall of 1974. "Traveling in China, one is overwhelmed by the total secularization of a society that once was permeated with religious signs and symbols. During our visit to five cities we saw no evidence of a surviving religious practice. Among the three major religious groups of pre-Liberation China the public practice of worship has dwindled, it seemed to us, to little more than token observances. We saw

* China Notes (Spring 1974)

** China Notes (Winter 1974)

no functioning Buddhist temples....We attended one Christian service in Peking, the only Protestant service seen by visitors in China since 1966. Sixteen persons were present, most of them members of the foreign diplomatic community. In a talk with the two Chinese pastors after the service I was told that weekly services were resumed on Easter 1972 after a 5½ years lapse. They are not in contact with the Roman* Catholics in Peking, who also hold a weekly service. One of the pastors is on duty each day of the week to meet with Christians who may be working on Sundays - or for other persons who cannot come to the Sunday service. I was told that few youth come to the services - 'They are too busy on Sunday to come and have other interests now.' There are about 500 Protestant in Peking, they said. In Nanking we spent an evening with Bishop Ting who is President of the Nanking Union Theological College and is also a Deputy to the National People's Congress. Bishop Ting confirmed that none of the thirty eight church buildings in Nanking formerly used by Protestant congregations are now used for religious services. The Christians now prefer to meet in their homes or in school rooms to avoid the stigma of Western-style churches built during the period of mission expansion in China and linked to the period of foreign imperialist penetration and protected by unequal treaties." *

Bishop Ting told Donald MacInnis that "We are now witnessing the withering away of organized religion."

Mr MacInnis goes on: "Religion defined in conventional terms as an institution with a priesthood, a clergy, a doctrinal creed, a liturgy, a theology and a theistic belief with spiritual dimensions transcending this world, finds itself with no parallel in the experiences of China's youth today. But the fruits of religion - particularly with concern for one's neighbor and the whole society, are in many ways more evident in China than in the West."*

* China Notes (Fall 1974)

*The Catholic Church in China no longer has "Roman" in its name. (...ed)