

Theological Institutions and Cultural Diversity in the Republic of China

Chinese Christians are asking themselves again and again the following question: How will Christianity finally enter the life of China? In the history of Christianity in China we observe three missionary attempts and three subsequent drastic stops: the Franciscan mission in the 13th century during the reign of the Mongol dynasty Yuan. It came to a sudden stop with the arrival of the native Chinese Ming dynasty; the second began with the missionaries of the 16th and 17th centuries and it ended with the quarrel of the Chinese rites; the third attempt during the 19th and 20th centuries was mercilessly interrupted by the Communist takeover of mainland China in 1949. Thus Chinese Christians have only Taiwan, Macao, and Hongkong as their free native homes. The Catholic Church in Taiwan, R.O.C., is very young in the canonical sense of established hierarchy; we should not expect too much in such a short time. And yet, as the following analysis tries to show, there are things growing, often quietly without much noise, steadily without unrealistic daydreaming. For the sake of clarity we will follow the three steps as they are

proposed in the questionnaire for authors of working papers and for theological institutions.

I. Current Situation:

1. Principal characteristics of the socio-cultural or political milieu in the Republic of China.

a. The process of modernization:

After the government of the Republic of China resolved the agricultural question in the fifties, it began to promote the industrial modernization of Taiwan. Since the sixties, Taiwan has become the outstanding model of industrialization.

Industrialization brings along increased urbanization. Urbanization creates many positive and negative aspects so peculiar to the "secular city". Masses of workers are crowded around factories. One of the most touchy effects of urbanization is the profound change of family structure. The Population of R.O.C. is shifting from the structure of the clan-family or large family (uniting several generations and lines) to the system of the nuclear family. Due to these changes we observe a new phenomenon in Taiwan: the appearance of the isolated individual. In this highly competitive world and industrial society, people are isolated from the group, and persons are separated and estranged from their fellow-men. This phenomenon exists in the relationships of society and family, among relatives and friends.

b. The intellectual-philosophical milieu:

Seven major trends can be identified today in Taiwan:

- (1) In the atmosphere of Renaissance of Chinese culture the Neoconfucian humanistic School promotes the conviction that the reinterpretation of Confucianism and ancient cultural values are the answer to the world's need for a genuine humanism.
- (2) The political philosophy of the Chinese system of government is based on the teachings of Dr. Sun Yat-sen, the Founding Father, as expressed in the Three Principles of the People (nationalism, democracy and social welfare).

Although a physician and scientist, Dr. Sun was well read in political philosophy and history. He drew on both Chinese and Western thinkers, himself being deeply rooted in Christian faith. Confucius' ideas are found in his system, but so are those of Locke and Jefferson. He was dedicated to the Lincoln thesis that government should be of the people, by the people and for the people.

Presently, this trend does not seem to produce really new insights. An this for two reasons: first, its thinkers are mostly occupied with matters of party and government; secondly, the research is mainly oriented towards practical questions of economics, education, etc.

- (3) Buddhist philosophy shows a movement of renewal and attempts of adaptation to a modernized Chinese way of life.
- (4) Proponents of the New Scientific Humanism School, often trained in the West, refuse to go beyond the data available through empirical inquiry. This school of thought finds a ready fidelity to tradition. Moreover, even if Chinese culture is defended in the educational system, the official training tends to develop a scientific and positivistic mentality.
- (5) Neothomism has a certain influence in faculties of philosophy due to the fact that a good number of professors of philosophy are Catholic laymen or priests, all of them trained in Western scholastic philosophy.
- (6) Existentialism enjoys a certain popularity especially among university students with literary training. They detect in it a philosophical justification for total emancipation from any external pressure.
- (7) Finally, naturalistic liberalism exerts its influence in a different way, through popular books, reviews, and films. Its basic premise is total emancipation on a moral level: satisfy any natural desire as long as you harm no one. While derived from Western influences, this philosophy also has some roots in Taoist naturalism.

c. The political situation:

Without attempting to paint a complete picture of the situation we can nevertheless single out some important factors which deserve our attention:

- (1) The Republic of China is a small political entity between three super-powers; mainland China, Soviet Union and the USA. The government of R.O.C. needs all the possible refined diplomacy to survive between these giants; it needs supporting sympathy in this most crucial phase of its history.
- (2) There can be no doubt that the 16 millions of Chinese people in the R.O.C. have opted for an existence in freedom and human dignity. They are not disposed to surrender to an inhuman system as the one exercised on mainland China.

The R.O.C. wants to be a sign for the rest of the world that there are Chinese people who are ready to defend human dignity, freedom and right.

- (3) If the countries of the free world don't want to help the R.O.C. then, at least, we expect neutrality from them. But in fact there are even Christian thinkers in the West saying that Taiwan should be taken over by the Communist government of mainland China in order to solve the so-called "China-problem" of today. At the root of such thinking we observe a very questionable non-Christian attitude: to hand 15 million people over to a system of government where people do not in fact enjoy real human dignity, freedom and right. We would like to ask those Western thinkers at least to keep silence. This would prevent them from talking open nonsense.

d. The religious milieu:

Freedom of worship is guaranteed by the Republic of China, and various religions exist side by side. The basic traditional belief centers on "Heaven" (Tien-Kung) as the highest spirit; a special sacrifice to him is common on Chinese New Year. Moreover, ancestor worship, the concrete expression of a belief in the communion of the living and the dead, is still practiced by the

majority of families. Buddhism, the largest specific religion, claims some 5,750,000 devotees, though this number is very questionable. Taoism has an estimated 3,300,000 followers, also this number cannot be substantiated. Although the leadership is distinguished very clearly between Buddhist and Taoist religions, the ordinary faithful freely mix all traditions in a syncretistic popular religion where borderlines cannot be drawn. The main concern of the average believer is beyond doubt the security and prosperity of his own family.

Christianity, still seen as a foreign import even by some of its firm believers because of its incomplete assimilation of Chinese cultural patterns, includes about 300,000 Catholics and 300,000 other Christians. There are some 42,500 Muslims.

The government of the R.O.C. welcomes and encourages centers of popular religions to involve themselves in social activities; but it criticizes strongly the exploitation of simple people's beliefs or the irresponsible solicitation of funds for the construction of luxurious temples and extravagant celebrations.

In contrast, Christianity is often praised for its social involvement and its concern for education; that is, Christianity is considered an agency of modernization. Due to a deep sense of pragmatism inherent in the Chinese mentality, any religion which falls out of touch with human experience will be seen as sterile, fit only for the museum, and irrelevant to the modern world.

2. Challenges and Questions Arising from the Current Situation:

a. Challenges from the process of modernization:

Three challenges can be singled-out as demanding our attention and response:

- (1) There is the challenge to promote an integrated development of the whole nation. As a matter of fact, the process of modernization -as it happens in all other countries too- concentrates its major efforts and energies in the field of material prosperity. In other words, we are facing a one-sided process in which the other dimensions in man, e.g. his aesthetic, intellectual, ethical and religious world, are not equally promoted. Developments on

these levels have not kept pace with the remarkable progress in science and technology leading to an attractive economic and industrial boom. The consequence is a serious imbalance in society. We can foresee that if greater attention is not given to the liberal arts, ethical questions, humanities and religion during the next ten years, the end result could be a serious moral chaos in the Republic of China. The imbalance between lived values and material progress is a serious challenge to us Christian theologians.

- (2) As we have said above: modernization brings industrialization, urbanization, and consequently a profound shift in the Chinese family system. The challenge we face in this area is mainly related to the preservation of positive values of Chinese family life on one hand, and promotion of a new way of life of the nuclear family on the other. Whoever has experienced the intimate atmosphere of a good Chinese family (there are, of course, always human failures) will surely be eager to preserve this atmosphere between parents and children and children among themselves. The deep sense and attitude of filial piety of children towards their parents is an outstanding feature of the Chinese family. It has given to Chinese society a strong inner coherence and stability.

On the other hand, the traditional Chinese family system has not stressed clearly enough the partnership of love between husband and wife, the independence of the children as human persons with their own free creative responsibility. In consequence up to this moment not a few Chinese young people feel that they exist for the sake of their parents; e.g. they study years and years under toughest conditions in order to enter a top university, since this is considered the highest honour for a Chinese family. In reality, such young people do not live their own life, but are lived by other people, as the whole value-system of the country dictates it. The result is painful: after these young people have reached the demanded goal, they feel empty and face a profound crisis of self-identity and meaning.

The challenge for the Christian theologian consists in showing the mystery of love of children unto their own personality according to their own capacities and interests, in view of the needs of the nation.

- (3) The "rise of the isolated individual" is the third major challenge arising from the process of modernization. Without the protective and formative system of the larger clan-family as background, many people in the R.O.C. are faced with a multiplicity of coexisting value systems and life-styles of the "secular city". Many people are driven into confusion, not knowing anymore what is right and what is wrong; this brings about a kind of deep isolation.

The challenge we face in this area can be formulated as follows:

The Christian theologian is called to show attractively the value and the dignity of the individual human person and to outline the way to human maturity which consists in full responsibility for one's own life as a service for others, grounded in a firm commitment to some transcendent values.

b. Challenge from the intellectual-philosophical milieu:

The challenge can be called a closed humanism. It is praiseworthy to extol human nature and the splendour of its accomplishments. However, to absolutize human nature to the extent of denying the existence of the transcendent mystery and its possibility is an unbalanced, closed and short-sighted view.

The Christian theologian is challenged to present God's revelation in its totality; he has to show that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is intimately connected with the life of Chinese people; it is his task to make people gradually see that the living God of Christian revelation is already at work in the history of Chinese people from its very beginnings. Indeed, many educated Chinese have serious difficulties to accept the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God, i.e., to believe that in Jesus of Nazareth God himself speaks to man. This "concretissimum" of God becomes for many an intellectual scandal and a stumbling block, due to the strong inclination towards the "Universalissimum" of God. There is a historical

reason for this present difficulty, especially among intellectuals of the Confucianist stance: the central point in China's ancient culture was the harmonious and uniform advancement of "Knowledge" of the Laws of Heaven, Earth, and Man. To keep the whole structure in balance, metaphysical thought, physical achievement, and humanist doctrines should have been equally stressed. In reality, Man came to be emphasized over and above Heaven and Earth, at least in the Confucian tradition. Should not the Christian theologian go back to Confucius himself? His teaching is firmly based on the conviction of Heaven as a transcendent and objective reality. It is the ultimately real, although its metaphysical nature is never discussed by Confucius. The other realities of Earth and Man are changing and contingent. Confucius had a sacred sense of the "will of Heaven" inscribed in the very nature of men. This wisdom immanent in nature is 'acted out' in the rites, which are then the visible expression of the hidden reality of the universe: the manifestation of Heaven.

c. Challenges arising from the political situation:

The very delicate and sensitive political situation of the R.O.C. poses the following challenges to the Christian theologian:

- (1) First, to give prophetic support to a government in a highly critical situation. In the OT we see some prophets standing on the side of kings giving them the most profound support by proclaiming the message of Jahweh. The Christian theologian is expected to stand up and give strong support of faith to the government of the R.O.C. which is basically good and based on Christian-like principles. (Human weakness is always granted). In a time when leading intellectuals and businessmen lose courage and begin to drift away to other countries where higher security is guaranteed, in a time when the international world seem to sympathize strongly with mainland China at the cost of breaking off diplomatic relationships with the R.O.C., in a time when the movement for an "independent Taiwan" is enhanced in Western countries by rather questionable elements opposing directly the present government of the R.O.C., in such a time the

Christian theologian should come to the public scene and voice out his support.

- (2) Further, he is challenged to constructively involve himself in urgent matters of the actual situation of the country. As a Christian he should show convincingly that love and service for others is the most important motivation of educating the youth; this is contrary to a certain tendency of using hatred in order to build up a strong anti-communist stand. In fact, students who go abroad not rarely turn in sympathy to Communism in reaction to the education received at home.
- (3) In a time when the R.O.C. has to find its course between the three giants (Mainland China, USA and Soviet Union) should not the Christian theologian be a constructive element of discernment of essential issues in order to help the government to reach really wise and prudent decisions? Why do we Christians leave those important decisions completely to the people in government offices? Do they not need our support of Christian-divine wisdom? Such an assistance might take on the form of necessary criticism, given in critical courage, when obvious deviations can be discerned.

d. Challenges from the religious milieu:

The challenges take on the form of questions.

- (1) Nobody doubts that Chinese religiosity is very different from that of India or the West. The question, then, is what is precisely the very core of Chinese religiosity? What "makes it tick"? Where is its source of energy? Where are the similarities to Christianity and where does it differ?
- (2) The colourful renewal of popular religion in Taiwan raises some questions like: What makes this kind of religion so "popular"? Where is its central force? How does it respond to the needs of the common folk in Taiwan? What can we learn from it? Where does it need purification and sublimation in the revelation of Christ?

- (3) In the search for a genuinely Christian-Chinese spirituality we try to discern those elements in the history of religion in China which appear as possible carriers of a Christian experience of the living God. So we ask: What are the main features of a Chinese Christian spirituality? How is the aspect of "passivity" combined with the aspect of "activity"? What are the foundational categories of such an inculturated spirituality?

There are many more questions to be asked. But those we have asked ourselves are more than enough. What interests us now more are the responses given presently to these challenges and questions.

II. Present Responses:

1. Response to the process of modernization and its challenges.

In general it can be said that theological institutions (e.g. Catechetical Institutes, Pastoral Centers, Seminaries) do respond to the process of modernization more on a practical than on a theoretical-theological level. And they do this by educating integrated human Christian personalities; they do less to meet these challenges and questions on a theological — theoretical level. This is due to the lack of a sufficient number of well trained theologians, especially natives. Theological reflection on these questions is just beginning; it takes time and many experiences in order to find the necessary inspiration for a broader vision.

No doubt, the pastoral formation of future priests and sisters and lay persons is marked by a vivid consciousness of the urgency of assistance for the Chinese family and the "isolated individual". These efforts, in turn, require a theological foundation which has yet to be worked out in the context of the R.O.C.

2. Response to the intellectual-philosophical milieu and its challenges.

In spite of the pluralism of Chinese thought and schools of learning there is an underlying common vision which can be described as "the unity of Heaven, Earth and Man"; or shorter, the "Heaven-Man" unity. Thome H. Fang, the celebrated Chinese philosopher who died in the summer of 1977, elaborated the Chinese way of life under the key-motif of "comprehensive har-

mony". Some other Chinese thinkers consider "life" as the key-concept of Chinese thought. As it can be seen, these expressions do convey one basic conviction; there is a kind of "continuum" between all reality, shaping all real beings into one integrated whole. As Chinese we profoundly feel that the "category of unity" is of essential importance to the Chinese vision of reality. Thus we understand what Bishop Paul Ch'eng Shih-Kuang wrote in his excellent book "Heaven-Man-continuum", (1974). We hope this book could be translated into English. Bishop Ch'eng shows in an attractive and typically Chinese way how the Christian way of life contains the best of Chinese humanism, but elevates, purifies and completes it. In the summer of 1977 I wrote an article with the title: "A complementary category to the category of the person. A basic reflection about a Chinese Theology". (*Collectanea Theologica Universitatis Fujen*, 32 (Summer 1977), pp. 313-331; a German translation of it has been published in the "Orientierung", March 1978, in two subsequent numbers). In the article I try to show that the Chinese category of "unity" of Heaven-Earth-Man (i.e. the profound experience of a certain continuum of all real things, the mystery of God included) can validly be considered as a complementary category to the category of the person, elaborated by Western Christian thinking. It is not a question of either/or, but rather of both/and. There are aspects in our Christian existence, e.g. the sacramental life of the Church, where the category of unity throws new light unto the Christian mystery. We are still in the initial stage of a more genuinely Chinese theology, but we hope that such attempts can make Chinese people feel more at home in the Christian world.

Many articles have been published by various authors in which Christian ideas, values and experiences are compared with Chinese ideas, values and experiences. One comparison always makes the Chinese heart beat faster: the comparison between Confucius and the prophets of the Old Testament. Once we understand the genius of Confucius and see his immense influence on the Chinese nation throughout nearly 2,500 years, we cannot but ask: Is he not like a prophet of the living God, sent to the Chinese people to prepare the way for the light of Christ? Since we do believe in the universal character of salvation in Christ, we know Confucius under the powerful influence of the Spirit of the Father and the

Son. If this is true, how should we Christians then express our gratitude and respect for him? Is it wrong to give him respect similar to the one Judeo-Christians show to Moses?

From January 23 till 28, 1978, the Theological Faculty of Fujen Catholic University organized its annual theological workshop. The topic of this year was: Jesus Christ. We tried to show an integrated vision of the mystery of Jesus Christ, balancing out carefully the two tendencies of Christology "from below" and "from above". In the concluding conference, "The Chinese Church and Christology," I ventured into no-man's land by saying that the messianism of Chinese culture (to explain it here would carry us too far) finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ who — as the God/man — reveals the *Deus absconditus* in an eschatological way (cf. Hebr. 1, 1-2). Such a definitive revelation can only happen once. Thus it is for all cultures, it is something new and transcendent, and it can be achieved only by God Himself. Again, this theological vision of Christ is based on the category of unity which uses the key-concept "life". If we read John 1, 1-14 substituting "life" for "word" (logos) then it makes the Chinese Christian soul ring with joy. We feel that Christ has come home to us in China.

3. Response to the political situation and its challenges.

Here we surely have to beat our breasts and confess that Catholic Theological Institutions do not respond very assuredly to these challenges. We are doing better on the practical level of full loyalty to the government, but we do not do so well when constructive involvement and critical courage is concerned. Here Protestant Theological Institutions have done much more.

4. Response to the religious milieu and its questions:

Catholic Theological Institutions are responding in a twofold way: First, some articles, dealing with the so-called "Christian Zen", try to point out one common conviction among Chinese Christians: that there is the possibility of non-dialogical, a non-personalistic experience of God in Jesus Christ, an experience where the presence of the living God in the Spirit is thematically coming to the foreground; in this presence the absolute mystery of the God of Christian revelation is experienced as already present within one-self, so that there is no need anymore to place HIM

outside oneself — so to say — in the form of an object or a partner of personal dialogue. In other words, not all Christian meditation and contemplation has to be an “object-meditation”. Secondly, most recently a research-team for the study of Taiwanese popular beliefs has been formed. The initiative started with the ATSSEA (Association of Theological Schools of South East Asia). The research-team includes Protestant and Catholic scholars, theologians, sociologists, exegetes and specialists in matters of religions in Taiwan.

Obviously, our responses leave much to be desired for future efforts.

III. Further Developments:

1. New Theological and pastoral problems and questions:

a. Since the Opium War (beginning in 1838) China has entered a huge process of modernization. What we are witnessing in the R.O.C. today is only part of that radical change within China. China has always believed to be the center of the world and to have a culture 4-5 thousands years old. This gives to the nation a deep sense of identity and belonging, a feeling of national pride and assuredness. All this has been challenged since the moment of intensified contacts with the West. China is learning gradually two things: that there are other cultures on equal footing with its own, and that there is the dimension of the future, as a kind of anti-pole to the past. In this process of cultural re-construction, facing the whole world in openness and accepting the dimension of the future with willingness for change, China needs a force of balance between the past, present and future. There are many Chinese today who want to get rid of the past and look only to the future (is this not the main tendency of Communist China?), but there are also those who want to keep the *status quo* of Chinese culture overlooking the new challenges from the rest of the world. Finally, there are also those who are satisfied with the present and don't care enough neither for the past nor for the future.

The Christian Theological Institutions should develop a great vision of national identity of China today, integrating the past with the present in view of the future.

Based on such a vision, it is the task of Catholic Theological Institutions to educate young Catholics who actualize in their own lives such a balanced "new existence", thus contributing effectively to the growth of a new "national identity" of Chinese people.

b. The integrated development of the nation requires as its basis a solid and correct system of values. A correct system of values, in turn, is based on an integrated vision of MAN. It is the task of the theologian to offer such a global vision, made possible through the revelation in Jesus Christ.

Such a global vision will have two major effects, so much desired in the R.O.C.: First, it will promote a balanced growth of all the important dimensions of man (material, biological, intellectual, aesthetic, ethical, religious); secondly, it will correct the onesidedness of the present value-system which stresses too much the status of the scholar to the detriment of a healthy educational system which develops each student's specific skills and capacities. The present educational system of the R.O.C. is predominantly a means to pass the entrance examination to the university.

c. On one hand Theological Institutions should promote the unity among all Chinese people in the R.O.C. On the other they should also support the dignity and value of each sub-culture. It is a matter of refined discernment of cultures and different values, a discernment which needs profound theological insights. Theological Institutions both on the more theoretical and more practical levels are called to contribute to this urgent discernment.

d. The world of the "worker" puts many questions to the Christian theologian. He is expected to do especially two things: First, he should concienticize the local Christian Churches about the urgency of the "worker's world". It seems that the local churches do not yet realize the importance of the issue, as it happened also in the churches of Europe in the late 19th century. Secondly, he will work out a theological understanding of the world, giving meaning and value to the life of the "working man". It is a question that "they may have life, and have it more abundantly" (John 10,10).

2. Some priorities in order to meet this new problems:

a. The first requirement seems to be a genuine exposure to the living God as He works in the R.O.C. here and now. Such

an exposure has a twofold aspect: first, it is an exposure to the living God in meditation and contemplation. As Chinese Christians we are profoundly convinced that this exposure cannot be substituted by any other form of activity; it is basic because we experience ourselves as the ones who constantly receive everything from the living God. Such exposure in contemplation will sharpen the sense of discernment so much needed in various aspects, as explained above. Secondly, it is an exposure to the living God in the current situation of the R.O.C.; it means active involvement in the life-struggle of Chinese people; it demands an "existence for others" in response to the urgent needs of Chinese people today.

b. The second requirement is teamwork; such teamwork includes theologians, philosophers and other scientists, together with men of praxis. Since the issues of modern life are becoming so highly differentiated and delicate they demand a higher degree of reflection and analysis. Such an analysis seems to transcend the ordinary capacity of an individual scholar. In the past we have not learned to work in teams; we have to get accustomed to it and — sometimes painfully — learn it. No doubt, the results will prove the efforts worthwhile.

c. In order to meet the challenges of the present situation there is finally an urgent need of ongoing translation work. Chinese society at large and the Christian communities in particular have to be constantly confronted with current theological reflection around the globe. Thus inbreeding and seclusion is prevented from the beginning.

Looking back once more to the current situation of the R.O.C. and the challenges it offers to the Theological Institutions, reflecting again on the responses presently given to them, and finally meditating on the further developments we cannot but feel both small in front of so many problems to be faced and joyful witnessing the dawn of more genuinely Chinese Christianity.

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