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The Gospel in China

Jean Charbonnier

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The Gospel in China*

JEAN CHARBONNIER

A year after the Louvain Congress on Christian Faith and the Chinese Experience (9-14 September, 1974), a new international meeting stirred the attention of the Christian world. The *Love China '75* congress took place near South China, in Manila, capital of the Philippines. It gathered 420 participants from more than 20 countries. The largest group came from Hong Kong, 80 persons, most of them Chinese. The 20 delegates from Taiwan, on the contrary, were mainly Westerners, because Chinese ran into visa problems. The Philippines, the host country, was represented by a good number. Other Asian lands with five or more representatives were Japan, Korea, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, India, and Indonesia. A dozen delegates came from Australia and New Zealand. A strong group of 40 came from distant South Africa where the Chinese minority of about 10,000 persons counts numerous Christians. Latin America and the Catholic countries of Europe were virtually absent. The Europeans came from the Scandinavian lands, England, and Holland; the Americans from the United States and Canada.

The geographical origin of those who attended corresponded to the places where evangelical missions have reached out. These have developed principally in Protestant countries. They are helped by strong financial help from their faithful in America, and their missions flourish in English-language, American-influenced regions. The Manila Congress was convoked jointly by a score of evangelical groups, the more powerful of which deserve special mention here. "Open Doors" is led by an intrepid Hollander, Brother Andrew, the author of two works: *God's Smuggler* and *The Ethics of Smuggling*. For almost 25 years, this organization has made repeated apostolic penetrations into Communist lands. "Underground Evangelism," with headquarters in Los Angeles, likewise has the

*Translated from the French by Charles J. McCarthy.

purpose of supporting Christians of the persecuted churches, and has its voice heard in the magazine *Underground Evangelism*. The Billy Graham Association publishes in Chinese a periodical, *Decision*. The Far East Broadcasting System broadcasts each week 800 hours of Christian radio programs in the different lands of Asia, including not a few directed to China. "Asian Outreach" has a particularly active center in Hong Kong, publishing texts of the Gospel in the present-day language-script of China and sending them into China itself. Other organizations sponsoring the Manila Congress were Bible Societies especially, and religious publication houses, mainly from Hong Kong.

The choice of Manila as the convention site was quite revealing about the intended orientation of the meeting. In June 1975 the Philippines had just established diplomatic relations with Peking. The Marcos government, besides, is not charged with softness toward the Communist ideology. From the Christian point of view, a half-century of American tutelage had given the Protestant societies a foothold in this country, Catholic during three and a half centuries of Spanish colonial rule. Since the end of the 19th century a Chinese minority, amounting today to about 500,000, offered a favorable field for evangelization. Catholic Chinese on their part have grown from 60,000 to 110,000 in the course of the past 25 years. The efforts of Protestant and evangelical groups has been equally vigorous. In the eyes of the Congress organizers Manila offered a three-fold advantage: 1) a Chinese, 2) Christian, 3) anti-Communist city, at least in official position. Hong Kong could have given this meeting the color of a provocation regarding China. Financial factors may also have influenced the choice of Manila. Some of the delegates inquired about the very high cost of this congress. The Philippine Village Hotel near the airport offered favorable conditions for lodging and a quite suitable auditorium. Still, it is among the more costly hotels of the city. How were this comfort and these expenses to be reconciled with the professed solicitude for sharing the hardships and aspirations of the people of China?

Most of the participants, it is true, would not hesitate to make a notable sacrifice in money, considering the spiritual values at stake in the Congress. "The spirit of *Love China '75* is a spirit of passion and commitment. Lord Jesus, through us, let the people sense your love!" This prayer, printed in English and Chinese on

each page of the program was to be the leitmotif of the five days of the meeting. It was spread in large characters on a banner over the speaker's platform above a large picture, the haunting power of which impressed all those at the meeting — a huge throng of Chinese workers coming down the steps of a marble staircase in the Forbidden City, a limitless flow of faces, rough, enigmatic, skeptical, questioning, taken off-guard. The attitude of the assembly was well expressed in these words from the first pages of the program:

We are a gathering of convinced Christians, assembled from the four corners of the world with a single purpose and objective: to study ways of communicating the love of Jesus Christ to the 800,000,000 people of mainland China. We acknowledge our spiritual identity with the Church living in China today. The curtain which fell years ago has been lifted little by little. The closed doors are now less tightly bolted. Slowly this living Church is becoming visible. We are conscious that we ought to be God's instruments in bringing the love of Christ to the people of the Mainland. At this moment we affirm our faith in the Lord and in his authority, and our confidence in the power of the Gospel to transform men and nations.

A "SPIRITUAL" CONVENTION

This congress might be called, in the language of St. Paul, a "manifestation of the Spirit." The speakers spoke with force, clearness, and conviction. The audience responded in prayer and song. There were no indifferent observers; everyone entered into the process.

LIKE THE CHRISTIANS OF PHILIPPI

Each morning Philip Teng, director of the School of Theology of the University of Hong Kong led an hour of prayer on the Epistle to the Philippians. Messengers of Christ to the Chinese, he said, "are called to have the same sentiments as St. Paul towards his beloved Philippians. They should love them tenderly, from deep in the heart. In China there are those who are oppressed by philosophical materialism and suffer bodily pain. Let them hold fast in one same Spirit, meeting the attack in union and with hearts united for the faith of the Gospel, not at all daunted by their

adversaries." There are those who live in the self-styled "free world." These should be on guard against letting themselves be mired in the swamp of a practical materialism.

What the Church of China needs most today is a "sense of mission." It was accustomed to receive, it must learn to give. It must offer itself as "a living sacrifice." Today the mainland Chinese are called to bear this witness. Like St. Paul they invite their brothers in faith to grow in charity: "Even if I am to be poured as a libation upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me" (Phil. 2: 17-18).

It is useless therefore and false for Christians of the "free world" to be pitying the lot of their persecuted brethren. They should, on the contrary, rejoice at their witness of faith and from it draw lessons for their own life in Christ.

THE CHURCH, COMMUNION OF BELIEVERS

The Church is founded on an act of faith: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." It was in answer to this profession of faith by Peter that Jesus said: "You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church and the powers of hell will not prevail against it" (Matt. 16, 15-18). This phrase was often repeated by the speakers at Manila. The experience of persecution caused whatever was built on sand to crumble. The Chinese are now building on the rock of Jesus Christ and thus are discovering the profound meaning of the Church as the fellowship of believers. At the same time they are conscious of their mission to proclaim the love of God in Jesus Christ. In the jargon of evangelicals, the word *burden* recurs time and again. It expresses a precious charge given by the Lord, that of proclaiming salvation in Jesus Christ to the 800 million people of their race. As Andrew Gih remarked with a smile, "If the Lord made so many Chinese, surely it is because He has special love for them." They are a fourth part of humanity. If God loves mankind, the Chinese enjoy a fourth part of His love. If we line people up one by one, then one out of four is a Chinese! The others, of so many different races, have trouble communicating among themselves. The Chinese could play a favored role in serving cohesion and harmony of the human family.

In the perspective of a Church which is above all a proclamation of the Gospel to the world, missionaries are held in honor. One evening the missionaries who had preached the Gospel in China before the expulsions of the 1950s were brought to the stage. There were thirty of them, mostly Westerners, white of hair, with the kindly air of grandparents honored on a birthday. One of them was a Catholic priest, Fr. Charles McCarthy, S.J., from the Bureau of Asian Affairs in Manila. A souvenir photo was taken. One night, Mrs. Paul Contento, a veteran missionary from the northwest of China, told of her friendship with the peasants and students of Shensi. In 1953, a crowd wanted to accompany her to the Sian railroad station despite the danger of reprisals. They parted from her in tears. The pastor, Andrew Gih, told how his mission had developed with the opening of an orphanage, and today counts 16,000 members. "We are not fooled," he said, "by Communist propaganda. They turn Christian values upside down. They want hatred, we want love. They cut the classes apart, we want unity. They pull down the upper class, we try to raise up the lower."

THE HAND OF GOD IN HISTORY

Andrew Gih shared with other speakers an apocalyptic view of history. The "Deceiver" does his work in today's world. Many let themselves be taken in. Is this not a sign of the last days? The coming of Christ cannot be long delayed. He is the Lord of history. As the sun dispels shadows, so Christ casts the light of truth on earth. An immense act of thanksgiving will rise up to God.

And then even evil will be turned to good, thanks to the power He has to subject all things to Himself. In working to unify China, the Communist Party has been an instrument of the Lord. And likewise the struggle against selfishness and the call to serve the people have prepared the Chinese to welcome the Good News of divine love.

In March 1975, 2000 Chinese churches scattered across the world observed a week of continuous prayer for the people of China. 13,000 churches were involved in this prayer. On Saturday, March 15, an immense prayer rally took place in Manila; telegrams from all over the world were read, and that night the Rev. James Taylor, president of the evangelical seminary of China, addressed the crowd in these terms:

Many of us who live outside of China have simply looked on it as spectators, thinking that all is finished there. For years in Taiwan, the only people who spoke of prayer for China were Western missionaries. But I think that the picture is changing. God had His great plan in everything that happened: the unification of the country and of the language, the elimination of idolatry and the temples. In all this we now see how the hand of God was at work preparing the way for his Church.

DOORS OPENED IN FAITH

The 1954 Chinese constitution included this article: "Citizens shall enjoy freedom of religious belief." It is well known how the churches were first made subject to the political power, and then deprived of all freedom of expression. All the churches were closed during the Cultural Revolution of 1966-69. They were changed into hospitals, centers of ration distributions, warehouses . . . Some official churches were reopened three years ago in Peking and Shanghai, used for foreign visitors. However, a "hidden Church" formed of little unorganized churches, is gradually spreading through the whole country. The fact that Christianity has not died a natural death seems implied in a 1975 amendment to the Constitution: "Citizens shall enjoy freedom to believe in religion and to disbelieve in religion and to propagate atheism." The second part of this article amounts to stating a duty to denounce Christian activities. A new ruling further declares: "No counter-revolutionary or pornographic book, nor any which spreads feudalism, superstition, or Confucian doctrine can be authorized in China."

"GOD'S SMUGGLERS"

These restrictions are probably directed against the work of some evangelical teams which visit China and distribute Bibles and even radio sets there. For a man like the Dutch Brother Andrew, director of the international "Open Doors" movement, the gates of China are not closed, any more than those of Russia, or of the "People's Democracies," or of Cuba. But evangelical penetration of those countries has a 20-year headstart on China.

What strategy is to be employed in China? "We are ignorant," he says. He cited chapter six of the Epistle to the Ephesians: "We are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world-rulers of this present darkness." Communism, he claims, "is a religion without God, a very powerful religion of the world." Determined to crush the Church completely, the Communist finds before it a rosewater Christianity unable to respond to it, Christians who fight among themselves instead of fighting the devil. It is high time that Christians put on the whole armor of God and ready themselves for battle. The truth will triumph.

An American, Joe L. Bass, president of "Underground Evangelism," used almost the same language, and believes it is possible to spread Christian literature throughout China. His experience of Eastern European countries leads him to envisage two phases of penetration: first, spread of a literature composed outside China, and then the preparation of texts within China itself. The introduction of Christian books can perhaps be done more easily by foreign visitors. But it falls to Chinese Christians, on the other hand, to set up the distribution network. They know the worth of these writings. They are ready to face the dangers. The feeling of not being forgotten is an immense comfort to them. This literature should, of course, avoid all aggressiveness against the political system. Christians are friends of China. They seek only the opportunity to profess their faith.

Fred Magbanua, director of the Far East Broadcasting Corporation of the Philippines, believes in the power of the airwaves to bring the Gospel message to China. According to a March 1973 issue of *The Economist*, at least 114 million families (of 3 persons) in China have a radio set. To listen to broadcasts from overseas is not as taboo as formerly. The government radio has overdone its chanting to the people a repetition of the same slogans. If only to enjoy some change, the dial is turned to pick up foreign stations. Five radio stations transmit a total of 111 hours of religious and secular programs to China, two in Korea, one in San Francisco, two in the Philippines. Sixty percent of the broadcasts are reserved for religious programs: Bible readings, sermons, Christian drama. The secular programs include news of the world, or art and science broadcasts. The "feedback" is thin, but significant. A certain number of refugees reaching

Hong Kong say that they have heard the programs. It is true that these people, coming from nearby Kwangtung province, can pick up even low-powered broadcasts on their receiver. In 1974, 37 letters of appreciation reached the FEBC offices. We note here that Catholic broadcasts by Radio Veritas include programs destined for several Asian lands, but not yet for China.

David Aikman, correspondent of *Time Magazine*, believes in the power of personal testimony. This witness, he says, is always possible when there is prayer. At the time of his first visit to China, he was himself rather an indifferent Christian, and nothing could be done. In China again in 1973 after an inner conversion, and filled this time with a sense of mission, he had occasion to speak of God with certain officials and to offer Bibles to them. According to Aikman, the simple affirmation of God as Spirit of Love does not come to grips with the arguments of materialist criticism. The Marxist critique of religion can operate only in the politico-economic domain. Marx does not try to destroy religion in the name of an ideological atheism. He simply foresees its disappearance as logical when the evolution of economic relations shall have rendered useless the production of the religious illusion. The Chinese policy regarding religion varies with the needs of international strategy. It is possible that China would invite an evangelical leader in the future. It would be to win the support of Christian world-opinion as China faces the threat of Soviet Russian aggression. Still, this evangelist should not come from American conservative circles. Among American evangelicals, indeed, an anti-Communist and pro-Taiwan policy has too often been mixed in with their Christian message.

EVANGELICAL ENCIRCLEMENT AND GATEWAYS TO SERVICE

Support for Christians in China should not, moreover, be considered only under the aspect of a more or less illegal penetration. A certain number of missionaries stressed the need of working to awaken the Christians among the Chinese living in lands near China. One of them recalled the biblical episode of the taking of Jericho.

This biblical parallel should not be pressed too far. The idea of quickening the faith of the overseas Chinese has nothing aggressive in its purpose. It aims at offering China the image of committed Christians, ready to avail themselves, as the occasion offers, of a stay in China to proclaim the Gospel there. Besides, if it is quite difficult to get into China itself, it is rather easy to come into contact with Chinese citizens who leave their country for various reasons: workers sent on aid and development missions to the Third World, entertainers, diplomats, delegates to international bodies. The People's Republic of China aids 14 African countries. In Zambia, 35,000 Chinese workers are building a trans-African railway. They mostly belong to the People's Liberation Army. A Swiss missionary, Rudy Lack, and a young Chinese from Taiwan, Caleb Loo, went among them in 1970. They gave them copies of the Bible at their barracks, at the hospital, and even in the airport toilet at Karachi. But, Lack said, young women had more success in the Chinese work camps. A convincing account was given with refreshing simplicity by Stella Chan, a Chinese girl from Hong Kong:

I have always dreamed of bringing the Gospel to China. It was materially impossible. He told me as He did the apostle Paul: "My grace is sufficient for you." To proclaim the Gospel in China is impossible but in Zambia there are more than 30,000 Chinese building the trans-African railroad. I first set out for Tanzania with a missionary group. From there I got a 3-month visa. I went alone by bus, or hitchhiking. An African family welcomed me in to their home. I consider them as my spiritual parents. I worked as midwife in a hospital and brought many adorable African babies into the world. But how could I approach the Chinese? October 1 was their national liberation holiday. So I went to the embassy. I greeted the receptionist: "Hello, comrade. Are there celebrations for the anniversary today?" She gave me her address and phone number. I could talk two hours with her. The first hour she talked to me of Communism; the second, I spoke to her to the greatness of God.

Later, I was able to make six visits to the work-camps of the Chinese. The guards told me: "You have no right to come here without a permit from the ambassador." I answered them: "I am Chinese, and happy to meet my countrymen . . . I know who sent you: it was Chairman Mao Tse-Tung. For me, I am sent by the Lord, by God who loves you." After a while they sent me off politely, saying: "We are glad you visited us." I told them, "It is not I, it is the Lord." Later on, I was asked to take care of a Chinese worker, sick in the hospital. Each evening I left him to go to the church.

"Do you go to pray?" he asked. "Yes, I'm going to pray for you and for the others." "Do you love China?" he asked. "Yes, very dearly; but first of all I love God."

And Stella concluded with the words: "After this congress, I shall return to Africa. I love the Africans and all the peoples of the world; but I give priority to the Chinese."

In Hong Kong there are a dozen societies animated by the same spirit. Paul Kok, born in Peking, with a group of young folk is committed to bringing the Gospel to Yunnan province. He told the congress:

The gates of China are declared closed; but there is a little service-entrance by which the Good News of Christ can be slipped in. I discovered it thanks to Christians in Bangkok and Chiangmai. The mountain people of Yunnan use the Burma road built in World War II. They go by Burma to trade their products in north Thailand. We have prayer meetings with them and explain the Scriptures to them. Afterwards they return to bring the Gospel into China.

THE TESTIMONY OF CHINA'S CHRISTIANS

A number of attempts to penetrate China could eclipse a quite different aspect of the exchanges with China. Perhaps the most important revelation of the Congress was this: the Christians of China address a message of faith and hope to the Christians of the whole world. It is from them that the most striking Gospel message issues. In March 1975 the "China Bible Fund" published the second edition of a little collection of 20 stories of Chinese life entitled: *God Still Lives in China*. Here is one, offered at random.

The wife of a soldier rejoins her husband: Kiangsu, 1974. To make a 5,000 km. journey across the breadth of China is always a challenge. To leave one's home and all one holds dearest is difficult in itself, not to speak of expenses and the discomforts of travel. Still that is what Kit did, a young woman known for her confession of the Christian faith. She had gotten permission to rejoin her husband in the Northwest. She made the first part of the trip by train, but had to shift for herself when she reached an army bus depot. She had no companions, and simply relied on help from strangers. Exhausted by the strain of the trip she fell seriously ill, but some women treated her very kindly, and the idea of soon being together with her husband quickened her heart with joy.

At the end of each day, Kit read the Bible openly and many who noticed it asked her about her faith in Christ. One soldier observed that a certain military unit was particularly known for its hostility to Christianity. Kit was alarmed upon learning that he spoke precisely about her husband's unit, and prayed fervently to the Lord to give her the possibility of offering some true witness. At last she reached the end of this harrowing journey. What joy she felt to see the barracks of the camp come into view. Her husband awaited her and, with him, the men she had been told were so unfriendly to Christianity. With firm determination and a loud voice she told her husband: "God be praised! Let's thank God for letting me arrive here safe and sound." Everyone knew from that moment, without any doubt, that she was a convinced Christian.

Kit was a great blessing for the community, because she had received training as a midwife. Sometimes people asked her questions about her faith and she had occasion to read parts of the New Testament to them. This Christian couple became the nucleus of a little "house church" in a remote region which had never seen a foreigner, much less a missionary! But, beyond doubt, God is still alive in China.

The style of this account reminds one of the edifying stories from the pen of Communist writers to encourage service of the people. It is close also to the words and deeds of the first believers as they are written down in the Acts of the Apostles. In Manila, some young Chinese were able to give first-hand accounts of their own experience of China. The fervor with which they spoke let me sense the radiation of the faith of Christians in China despite the paucity of information. An American missionary had one day asked James Taylor what "missionary strategy" he envisaged for the day when China would be opened anew to the Gospel. He answered, "Brother, I don't believe it will happen like that. I suppose you and I will need to sit at the feet of the Christian brethren who have suffered through fire and trials, and let ourselves be schooled by them."

THE WEAKNESS OF MAN – THE STRENGTH OF GOD

Spied upon, hunted down, falsely charged, sent to labor camps for thought-reform, the Christians of China often find themselves

in humanly desperate situations; and still there are those who seek to join and support them. Many go to the frontiers, brave the barricades, set out on dead-end roads. Both groups discover the power of prayer in the name of the Lord Jesus.

MY GRACE IS SUFFICIENT FOR YOU

The experience of the apostolate under difficult conditions impels young witnesses like Stella Chan in Zambia to rediscover the words of St. Paul speaking out his anguish to the Lord: "But he said to me, my grace is sufficient for you; for my power is made perfect in weakness. I will all the more gladly boast of my weakness, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weakness, insults, hardships, persecutions and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong." (2 Cor. 11: 8–10).

The work of salvation belongs to God alone. A long Scriptural tradition, ably expressed by the prophet Ezechiel, pictures God as saving His people simply to manifest the glory of His name. They are the servants of God who undergo this experience of their weakness, and of the power of Him who sends them. Their very powerlessness becomes a manifestation of the Spirit. Born of apostolic experience, this dialectic — Power-of-God/weakness-of-man — is applied to the revelation of salvation. It is a manifestation of love which vivifies and pardons. It is at work in the mysterious relationship which unites man to God. Apart from this revealing virtue of a salvation hidden in God, the Power-weakness opposition loses its meaning and yields place to certain mystification about which we should now say a word or two.

THE MAGIC OF THE BOOK

The tendency to put to the service of grace sacramental signs effective *ex opere operato*, in an almost magical way, has been an unfortunate deviation of Catholic theology. The Protestant Reformers rightly criticized this sacramental "thingism." It is true that, originally, the *ex opere operato* doctrine corresponded to a legitimate care for safeguarding the power of the passion of Christ

as the efficient cause of salvation, and for not making it dependent on the worthiness of the minister of the sacrament. Starting from the principle that the grace of salvation is manifest in the very weakness of the servants of God, a transition came gradually to pass to the idea that grace acts automatically "despite" the weakness of the minister of the sacrament. A similar deviation has tended to affect the Evangelical concept of the "Sacred Book." The Bible contains the all-powerful Word of God. Reading of it enables one to re-live the prophetic and apostolic experience of the salvific love of God. But the biblical text can remain a dead, incomprehensible letter if it is not proclaimed and explained by a living witness. According to the story of the Acts of the Apostles, the eunuch of the King of Ethiopia understood nothing of the Scripture until the deacon Philip explained it to him: "The Spirit said to Philip: 'Go up and join this chariot,' Philip ran to it, and he heard the eunuch read from the prophet Isaiah. He asked him, 'Do you understand what you are reading?' 'How can I,' he said, 'unless someone guides Me?' " (Acts 8: 29-31).

The distribution of copies of the Bible has assumed, with evangelicals, the aspect of a sacred duty that has salvific power in itself. They get Bibles into China at great risk, and this no doubt is meritorious. They leave copies on seats in railroad cars, in hotels, even in toilets, hoping that a curious hand will be tempted to pick them up and read them. Surely a great number of these books end up in wastebaskets, far from having the effect counted on. But some reckon the success of evangelization in China by the number of Bibles distributed, just as Catholics have measured the faith of their faithful by the number of confessions and communions.

One information period during the Manila meeting was particularly significant in this regard. Eight people who had recently traveled in China were invited to answer questions about life in China and their apostolic experience there. The great majority of questions dealt with the possibility of distributing Bibles and the effectiveness of radio broadcasts. Almost nothing was said about the life of the Chinese people, their aspirations, their witness to faith.

Still, it was asked whether or not the text of the Bible was accessible to the youth of China. One Chinese had good sense enough to reply, with all sincerity, in the negative. Even the latest translations are still in a language very difficult for people to under-

stand, for whom the notion of the existence of God is a novelty. This is why these "God's smugglers" have often preferred to distribute a little "pre-evangelistic" booklet entitled *My Beautiful China*.

"MASSA DAMNATA" AND SALVATION OF THE MASSES

Among the evangelicals, the urgency of proclaiming salvation rests on an historical sense that God's Judgment is quite near. Only the triumphant coming of Christ will save men from the great, imminent catastrophe. As in the early days of the Church, this apocalyptic vision is born from persecution, false charges, the ruinous activity of false prophets, and from rampant injustice. The eschatological force of the Christian message is anchored in the apostolic tradition. Courage to bear witness in danger arises from confidence in Jesus Christ, supreme Judge, to whom all power has been given!

St. Paul himself develops this missionary sense of the urgency of salvation in his theology of the universality of sin. According to the Epistle to the Romans, all, Jews and Romans, have been plunged into sin. And it was when evil reached its peak that the gift of salvation shone forth in Christ. And so all can be saved by an act of faith in Jesus as Savior. The mere observance of the Law among the Jews or submission to the directives of right reason among the pagans have proven themselves inefficacious. But there where sin abounded, grace has superabounded.

In the mind of St. Paul, the revelation of God's love in Jesus Christ is primary. He himself was flooded with the light of Christ on the road to Damascus, while he reckoned himself righteous and even as one of the best of the Pharisees. Formed in the Jewish tradition, he lived profoundly a relationship to God in the prayer of the Covenant. His personal encounter with Christ, dead and risen again, was to renew his concept of the Covenant: vivifying love is given in faith, and not in sterile observance of the Law.

On the first day of the Manila Congress, a pastor of the Baptist church in Hong Kong, Princeton Hsu, raised some questions as to why the penetration of the Christian message into China had been so difficult. Confucianism, he said, easily imbues the whole of Chinese life and thinking. It has no need of being spread. It

says that the human heart is radically good (*jen shin ben shan*). Christianity, on the contrary, tells the people of China: "You are all sinners; you are going to hell! Only Jesus can save you. Believe in Him!"

The ordinary approach of the evangelicals seems in fact to be to convince men of their sinfulness and to call them to a profound repentance in prayer and tears. Confessing Jesus as their Savior, then they are saved. In Manila the preaching of an old American pastor left no doubt as to these deep-rooted orientations: "Millions of these souls," he shouted, "are on the road to hell. At night I cannot sleep when I think of them. Do we know how to pray, to implore God to spare His people?"

In the Catholic Church, some missions preached by religious also aimed at provoking a moment of conversion and a renewal of Christian life by raising up the threat of hell and driving the crowds to the confessional.

It should be noted that this type of preaching was developed for the use of a Christian people, to reproach them for their infidelity and bring them back to God. Pastor William Willis, on his part, referred to the great revival movement he had known in Wales when he was a young man. "There was a great movement to repentance then," he said, "the cafes were emptied and the houses of pleasure shut down." Filled with the Bible, men preaching a return to God took up again the prophetic expressions and their message appealed from the first to the people of God.

Is it legitimate to transpose this prophetic experience to the very different context of a people for whom God Himself is a foreign concept? Why convict of sin men who have never had the idea of disobedience to a personal God? The word used to translate sin is itself defamatory: *zui* is for them a crime that deserves at least a prison term. To tell the Chinese of their sin then, is to make oneself guilty of a calumnious conduct, the more outrageous because it comes from a foreigner. This is certainly not to proclaim the Good News. The true liberating message is that God loves them. Beyond doubt the Chinese are looking for their own "justice" in their exercise of virtue, their effort to be a model people, their cultural self-sufficiency. But like St. Paul himself they can arrive at the knowledge of Jesus Christ only by a revelation of the love of God. Fr. Matteo Ricci won the hearts of thousands of Chinese thanks to his *Treatise on Friendship*. A false concept of the grace

of God has driven a number of missionaries to "humble" the Chinese to bring them to give up their cultural pride and acknowledge themselves sinners before God. This was to forget that they themselves were often puffed up with national pride and a sense of superiority about Western civilization. Now the recognition of weakness as revealing the power of God is an experience which the servant of the Gospel, above all, should undergo himself. It is not up to him to exact it from those to whom he preaches.

THE WORD OF GOD IN HUMAN LANGUAGE

If the work of the evangelicals is burdened by certain theological misunderstandings, it does have the merit of being a permanent encounter, in the field, with people molded by a long history and by particular ideals and cultural patterns. To be understood, apostles have to speak the language of those who hear them. To convince them, they have to use arguments which have weight in the minds of their audience. As in the early days of the Church, in the context of Greco-Latin culture, the apologists and catechists of today are striving to initiate themselves into the new culture of the Chinese people. In this they benefit from initiatives their predecessors took, well before the Communist regime came to power.

INDIGENIZATION

One of the reasons why Buddhism could spread throughout China was the ease with which it could be cast into the traditional Chinese religious molds. Thus, Buddhist meditation, preparing for inner illumination by becoming conscious of the universal suffering, could easily be grafted on the Taoist meditations intended for reform of life.

Christianity, on the contrary, is not Sinicized. In Shanghai during the 30s, Easter was called the foreign "Ching Ming," or feast of the dead. Christmas was the "winter festival of the foreigners." And still, the Chinese Church gradually won its autonomy. Speaking only of Protestant history, the Rev. Princeton Hsu noted in Manila the major dates of this emancipation. In 1903 the Hing

Wah Independent Baptist Church was organized in Canton. The "three-self movement" — self-rule, self-support, self-staffing — slowly took its rise from 1924. In 1926 many mission bodies transferred their properties to the independent Chinese Churches. But it was in 1929 finally, that the idea of "indigenization" properly speaking, the adaptation of Christianity to the Chinese cultural context, took hold. Some people at the time thought that the churches should take on the shape of Buddhist temples, and the faithful should use Chinese musical instruments and melodies. Those were details. More attention was due to the development of Chinese theology. The latest step to indigenization has fortunately been more ideological than formal.

But, Princeton Hsu went on, we still have a long way to go. The building up of the local church must adhere faithfully to three principles:

1. It should be faithful to the New Testament;
2. It should be an affair of salvation, and not simply a cultural system;
3. It should aim at building in China and in the Chinese communities a new culture which China needs, a culture which of its nature is profoundly Christian.

Unlike what happened to Buddhism, it is not so much a matter of "Sinicizing Christianity" as of "Christianizing China." We should preserve Christianity in all its purity. These latter remarks might call for a long development and for a re-evaluation of the history of the mission. Princeton Hsu is content to suggest concretely how we can better find certain harmonies between biblical teachings and the long Chinese cultural tradition: filial piety, family solidarity, respect for "heaven," love of peace, esteem for the sages, the ethics of social relations, education of conscience, etc. These values are stones on which a local Chinese church can eventually be built.

It is evident that these values belong to the ancient culture of the Chinese people. The way in which they have been modified by 25 years of Marxist education should be taken into consideration also.

CONTEXTUALIZATION

The idea of indigenization as Princeton Hsu set it forth was

largely surpassed by other speakers at the Manila congress. Referring to the Communist ideal of the "new man" and of concern for mankind, Philip Teng demanded that Christians exert efforts for "contextualization." They should show how the Cross of Christ saves mankind and is the focal point of reconciliation.

Leslie Lyall, the author of a book on the Church in China, left his haven in a small English village just to speak at the Manila meeting. He too urged a presentation of the Christian message which takes into account the social transformations achieved in People's China. The new social structures, he says, are accepted now and have largely succeeded. Any future progress will have to be set within their context. The Communists have undertaken to produce a new man, unselfish, devoted to serving the people. This is a preparation for the Gospel.

David Adeney, director of the "Discipleship Training Center" in Singapore, could speak from experience. He recalled with relish how his October 1934 arrival in China with a group of young "China Inland Mission" workers, coincided with the start of Mao-Tse-Tung's long march on the 16th of that month. Installed in a small Honan town and sharing the people's troubles, he could closely follow the sweep of the historic events which marked the political awakening of the Chinese people, and as well the positions taken by Chinese Christians. Outside China during World War II, he returned in January 1946 to take part in a new evangelical movement, the "China Inter-Varsity-Fellowship," which originated in the universities of Chungking. From there on he was closely associated with the lot of Chinese Christian students confronting Communism. Adeney sums up his experience and points out the necessary basics for the formation of apostolic workers in a Communist context in a small book of remarkably rich content entitled: *China: Christian Students Face the Revolution*. His position is firm. On the one hand, no Christian can live in China without sharing the pride of his countrymen at having gained independence and at the extent of their social and economic achievements. On the other hand, a Christian cannot commit himself to a human system (capitalist or Communist) which rejects God. So he has to be ready to suffer for his faith. To hatred for religion, a Christian must answer with love.

The disciple of Christ must first of all approach in all humility those who have been deceived by the prophets of materialism. They are men and

women for whom Christ died, and the barriers of prejudice can only be brought down by love. They must be respected as human brothers deeply sincere in their effort to find a solution to the problem of offering a reasonable level of living to the 800 million who lie under the threat of famine, flood, and war. The Christian apostle living in a Buddhist or Muslim society should never begin by attacking the religion of those to whom he is sent. He should proclaim faithfully, without compromise, the overall design of God. In the same way, the servants of Christ in China should courageously reveal Christ to their Communist friends, without denouncing their tenets, but by showing positively that Christ alone can answer the needs of the whole man (p. 82).

The positive approach to the Chinese Communists supposes a thorough grasp of their ways of thinking. First, of their pragmatism: any teaching that does not serve the masses is useless. How does one judge a young revolutionary according to Mao? There is only one norm: Does he agree to involve himself in the vast mass of workers, and to do it in practice?

A Christian message which emphasizes individual salvation alone, and shows little interest in the needs of the masses will hardly attract young Communists. The witness of Christ should be actively engaged in service of the needs of the society in which he lives. Many Communists have a hard time understanding the apparent selfishness of Christians. What would they think of the pack of Christian doctors who crowd into rich residential suburbs and neglect the rural or workers' neighborhoods? Or of Christian teachers who do not want to teach in out-of-the-way corners or in the slums of cities? Shall we give grounds for the shameful charge that Christianity is very good, but it will not work in Asia because it is not sacrificial enough? (p. 86).

Chinese Communism is also marked by its loyalty to the great leaders of the country. Faith in the success of the Communist movement is crystallized in the person of Chairman Mao. A Christian whose attitude towards Christ is tepid would have no message to convey to the Communists:

Only disciples of Christ totally devoted to their Master, sharing the inner experience of His real presence and confident in His victory, can speak to the disciples of Mao, whether they be in China or in any other land.

Finally, Chinese Communism is characterized by its view of the world. Young Communists think in terms of historic development. They look for a transformation of history through the revolutionary process. Their life takes on meaning insofar as it is a contribution to history. The life of a Christian, too, assumes individual and

collective sense in the light of God's design in history:

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God (Rom. 8: 20-21).

David Adeney, moved by his desire for an effective presentation of the Christian message, is thus brought to an analysis of certain problems with ideological implications. Through them he comes into touch with the theological analyses taken up in the ecumenical meetings at Bastad and Louvain in 1974. But he was one of the rare speakers who contended with the whole importance of the politico-ideological context of the problem.

POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF A LETTER OF LOVE

The evangelicals gathered in Manila agreed to emphasize the "spiritual" character of their message. At the end of their debates, they wanted to proclaim the love of God for China. Taking note of the many suggestions submitted in writing to the steering committee, David Aikman proposed to the assembly that it adopt as an official declaration of the Congress the following text:

We, Chinese and other Christians, who have participated in "Love China '75" in Manila, Philippines, September 7-11, 1975, convey loving greetings in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to our brothers and sisters who worship the Lord in China, and to all the Chinese people.

Representing many different countries, denominations, and cultural backgrounds, we are united in re-affirming our conviction that though the needs of the body may be answered by human endeavor, the needs of the inner man are to be satisfied only by acceptance of salvation through Jesus Christ and his Lordship, whether in China or in any other country.

We dedicate ourselves to strengthen the Body of Christ in China with our prayers and our love. We dedicate ourselves to help the Chinese Church to live and serve the Gospel to the Chinese people, and to keep the spiritual needs of China ever before the eyes of God's people in the world.

This "Letter to the Church of China" was to be the palpable fruit of the five days' meeting. Still its opportuneness was at once called into question by Chinese participants. In case the letter should be officially accepted, some proposed that the word *China* in its title be replaced by *Chinese*. The Chinese Christians scattered over the world are all concerned with this, and not only those in

People's China. As the assembly was hesitant, Peter Lin of Taiwan spoke more explicitly: A letter addressed to the Church in China could be interpreted as an indirect approval of the Communist regime. Moreover, it would seem to ignore the reality of Taiwan's Christianity. Finally, a Chinese of Hong Kong called attention to the provocative tone of the phrase, "We dedicate ourselves to help the Chinese Church live the Gospel." Would not the Chinese government consider these decisions as a foreign intrusion into China's affairs? The control of Christian activities inside of China could in consequence be tightened, and the Christians could suffer more than before.

In short, the declaration of the Manila Congress could be used in a twofold way to the detriment of the Christians. On the one hand, in its first paragraph at least, it could be considered as an approval of China's religious policy. It would thus wrongly recognize a religious freedom which does not exist. On the other hand, in its last paragraph, it could be denounced as a new imperialist aggression trying to penetrate China by illegal means.

While it claimed to take its stand on a purely spiritual or neutral plane, the Manila congress was thus forced to wake up to its political impact. Two speakers had also let certain strategic notions enter into discussion. David Aikman himself, while stressing the need to stay on the spiritual plane, had raised the possibility of some evangelical leader being invited by the Chinese government. Joe L. Bass, an American, spelled out motives for this possible invitation: the sole factor leading to a change in the Chinese attitude is the permanent reality of conflict between China and the Soviet Union. The navy of the Russian tsars had refueled in the Vietnamese base at Cam Ranh during the war against Japan. Today Soviet Russia aspires to use this same base again. The needs of peace have constrained China to a change of strategy, opening up to the world. Would China go further and pay the price of tolerance for religion so as to be better recognized and supported by the free world? God would thus be utilizing the conflict between the two atheist powers to fulfill His promises. Joe L. Bass did not seem to ask himself about the price which Christianity itself would have to pay in looking for the "umbrella" of the capitalist powers!

HUMAN ERRORS – THE WAYS OF GOD?

This view of things rests on a biblical concept of the sovereignty of God, the Lord of history, using even the mistakes of men to manifest His glory.

Retracing the history of China's missions, Arnold Lea, son and grandson of missionaries, and himself 45 years in China, was not afraid to suggest the providential aspect even of the disgraceful Opium War which let the first evangelicals come into China after long exclusion. "The injustice of man," he said, "opened doors for the planting of the Church in China." A more complete view of history should have made him add that this very injustice of foreign encroachment associated with the spread of Christianity would lead later on to the Church's expulsion and a new closing of the doors. It is true that to the extent that Christianity had not fully identified itself with the foreign powers protecting it, it could survive in an independent China. Being persecuted and no longer protected, Christianity could show its true nature, purified of the political and cultural compromises which disfigured it. In the 1950s the Christian Churches incurred a new danger, that of coming into league with the Communist power. The new compromises largely collapsed precisely because of the intolerance built into the Marxist ideological monopoly.

POLITICAL INDEPENDENCE AND IDEOLOGICAL AFFILIATION

China gained its political and economic independence in espousing a philosophy of history which represents much more than a simple instrument for scientific analysis of socioeconomic relations. The evangelical speakers did not fail to remark how the Maoist Marxist ideology had assumed the aspect of a religion. David Aikman brought out certain features of the thinking of Mao, "that spiritual atomic bomb of unbounded force": "have faith in the People, faith in the Party; not to have the correct political line is like not having a soul."

According to Chinese traditional ethics, human nature is indefinitely perfectible. Mao wants a strong China and he wants to save man. Individual salvation can only be obtained within the Party; counter-revolutionaries have committed sins against the

people; they are called to repentance and conversion; they should write out their confessions and do penance by labor and a rationing of food. While claiming to be materialist, Chinese Marxism calls at the same time upon spiritual values.

David Adeney showed how the counterparts of all the essential points of Christian doctrine can be found in Communism:

God is not love, He is not personal, He does not exist. There is only an historic Necessity, which redeems man from slavery, hunger, and injustice.

The *Messiah* is the human Mao-Stalin-Marx-Lenin composite, revealer of the way and the truth of history, which alone has the words of economic life. Christian students kept silent when they were supposed to sing in honor of Mao, "Our everlasting liberator, we want no other savior."

Man creates the world by his labor, following the evolutionary theory of development of society. The Communists seek to establish the "Kingdom of Man."

Salvation is to become a "new man," to pass from the darkness of superstition to the light of Chairman Mao. In a classless society, evil will have disappeared because sin results from the economic alienation of man.

Despite the striking character of these contrasts, speakers like David Aikman or Andrew Gih were perhaps wrong in reading them as a diabolic perversion of Christianity: Christians would be enjoying the "fruits of the Spirit": love, joy, peace, patience, forgiveness . . . while the Communists would be producing the fruits of the devil: class hatred, anger, war, impatience, revenge. . . Without going back to the wars of religion, a simple reminder about the Irish conflict is enough to let us see that hatred can exist among Christians. On the contrary, love can also exist among Communists who know how to serve the people, even to the point of sacrifice of their own life.

It remains, then, to be explained how this striking religious counter-image of Chinese Marxism could arise. A deeper philosophical inquiry might permit us to see that the "perversion" is only apparent. For the believer, God is not an absolute object, knowledge of which is imposed with the necessity of a scientific proof. The mistake of "theism" has been its wanting to demonstrate the existence of this God as that of a Supreme Architect guaranteeing universal order. Modern atheism could easily reverse this absolute of God into an absolute of man, or nature, or history. For the believer, God remains the Wholly Other with whom he comes into

relation in prayer and invocation. Man finds his own fullness only in relation to this other. Elimination of this transcendental relationship is self-worship, a closing in on self, and death. Salvation, on the contrary, is a welcome acceptance of a gift of love. To the extent that the testimony of the life of Christians is not a revelation of this mystery of love, their affirmation of the truth of God becomes hypocrisy. It can actually be a disguised affirmation of human absolutes, — of financial or national interests, for instance.

The Communists have overthrown the capitalist god and the imperialist god. But have they, in raising up to absolute importance the interests of the masses, created a new idol? The advent of a classless society, it is true, is for the future, and has a utopian value. But the "mass line" is no less a present reality, objectively determined by analysis of the socioeconomic situation, and put into operation by the political power.

The ideology of historical Necessity is identified with the dictatorship of the proletariat. The Chinese political power is then, in the last resort, the absolute before which every individual must bow down. Salvation lies in total conformity to the "mass line." To serve the people means, first, to give oneself body and soul to the great All of the Masses, the development of which is historically determined. In the perspective of Chinese tradition, the will of the Masses has replaced the "Mandate of Heaven" (*t'ien ming*). It represents a "fate" every bit as necessary, to which the individual must submit.

And yet traditional Chinese fatalism did not effect this overthrow without absorbing new elements which threaten its future survival. To conform oneself to the cosmic order could only be the ideal of an individual wisdom producing an inner peace that is somewhat narcissist. On the contrary, to serve the people demands the exercise of a continual relationship with others and a struggle against selfishness. Besides, the "mass line" is not an absolute of the same standing as the order of the universe. It is determined by political leaders whose power struggles are enough to show its limitations. This historical experience invites one to correct the deficiencies of an absolutism of the masses. The price exacted by this absolutism is a crushing political bureaucracy and a return to old cultural habits: the quest for social status, defense of family interests, etc.

The witness of Christian love can, in these conditions, open out

new horizons in this Communist society. Still it would be an illusion, purely and simply to substitute "the Christian ideology" for the Communist philosophy, as some evangelicals seem to think can be done. Any identification of Christianity with the political power holds an inherent danger of absolutism and fanaticism. Christianity would automatically lose therein its true power, which comes to it from a *mysterious* relationship to the transcendent God. The trap of evangelical messianism is to precipitate the coming of the Kingdom of God into human history.

PERSPECTIVES

Although the theological implications of the positions they took were hardly made explicit, the evangelical Christians in Manila rendered a great service to the universal Church. We should recognize in them brethren believing deeply, who know how to place themselves in an attitude listening to the Spirit through intense prayer. Bearing in their hearts the aspirations of the immense population of China, they feel that they are in close solidarity with the faithful who testify to their faith in China itself. They refuse to accept the pessimistic and false argument that all is over and done with Christianity in China. They likewise refuse to identify the Chinese revolution with the history of Christian salvation. This is why they deny the assertion of Joseph Needham "that China is the only Christian country today." "That is to confuse," they rightfully say, "Christianity with the application of a Christian ethic, it is to deny salvation in Jesus Christ."

A year earlier, the Louvain Congress on "Christian Faith and the Chinese Experience" lacked, perhaps, the evangelical thrust, although the liturgy over which Cardinal Suenens presided was also an earnest prayer to the Holy Spirit. The prophetic voices which made themselves heard there, like that of the Anglican Canon Paton, rather challenged the Church itself, bidding it to enter upon self-criticism and to check on the extent of its compromises with the world of the rich and the exploiters. There were lessons to be learned from the Chinese experience: a people of the poor, working out its independence and dignity, but continuing to eliminate the Christians. Why?

At Manila, the recalling of lessons from the Chinese experience

was not omitted, but attention was rather focused on the Church in China. It was compared to the early Christian communities persecuted in the Roman empire. The fervor of faith among a minority of loyal citizens within the People's Republic of China appeared as a lesson for the Christians of the whole world. They testify to the love of Christ in conditions most difficult, and bear promise of renewal for the Church universal. Philip Teng pointed out some hopeful signs: their union with the passion of Christ, their fraternal love liberated from past sectarianism, the freshness of their faith, not tied to institutions over-anxious about worldly success.

The spiritual perspicacity of the Chinese evangelical Christians opens out vast perspectives. Next year (1976) at Hong Kong a decisive hour for the Chinese Church in the whole world will strike. A "Chinese Congress on the Evangelization of the World" will gather 1500 delegates from 23 countries, from August 18 to 25 in the Baptist Center buildings of Kowloon.

The Reverend Thomas Wong of the U.S.A. announces the meeting in these terms: "Throughout the history of the Chinese church, there was a strongly entrenched attitude of individualism, sectarianism, and bigotry. But, praised be the Lord, during the last two or three decades, a desire for unity and mutual comprehension is emerging among the leaders of the Chinese church. Can we take hold of the grace of this precious change, and promote a deeper, wider effort in the ministry of the Gospel by breaking down barriers and fostering inter-church cooperation?"

Why should this appeal be ignored by Chinese Catholics, among whom certain charismatic groups have been surfacing, in Taiwan for example? Let us hope that at Hong Kong in 1976, a substantial number of Chinese priests, Sisters, and lay Catholics will spontaneously offer their participation and their support.