

CHINA'S CHRISTIANS: CATALYSTS OF SOCIAL CHANGE

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After a day and a half's reflection on "Spiritual Growth and Social Change in China", the following presentation's focus is the role China's Christians may have in the process of change, which society is undergoing in China today. The presentations, workshops and discussions have dealt extensively with the general theme of the Conference and have shed ample light on the concrete contribution of Christians towards social change in China. There is probably not much exciting news that I can add to the already rich information and insights we have shared in our meetings.

Catalysts of Social Change

"China's Christians: Catalysts of Social Change". The term "catalyst" is borrowed from natural science and means "*1) a substance (as an enzyme) that initiates a chemical reaction and enables it to proceed under different conditions (as at a lower temperature) than otherwise possible; 2) an agent that induces catalysis; broadly, one that provokes significant change, <his book was the catalyst of the peace movement>*"¹ This last part of Webster's definition, applied to China's Christians, would suggest an expectation of a "significant social change" brought about by their action. Considering the almost negligible size of the Christian Community in the vast human ocean of China, the implication could appear as some sort of megalomania calling for a charismatic faith in the power of Christian action in China.

The first part of Webster's definition of a "catalyst" – "*a substance (as an enzyme) that initiates a chemical reaction and enables it to proceed under different conditions than otherwise possible*" -- , applied to China's Christians, is a welcome description of what their role in the process of social change in China should and could be, limiting their action to that of helping and facilitating, without demanding from them any Herculean involvement and achievement. The function of a catalyst presupposes the existence of some matter, of some substances which enter into a process of transformation, aided by the ingredient of the catalyst. The main agents of transformation are the given substances, while the catalyst only initiates and facilitates the process.

The comparison of the function of Christians in the process of social change in China with the function of a catalyst invites us to focus our attention and expectation on the given substance, that is, on China's society, as it has developed through the ages and as it exists concretely today. It needs an honest and sympathetic analysis of the actual situation of China's society, its problems and its innate potentialities for renewal and society building; it needs a discernment of the principles, tendencies and patterns of thought and sentiment, which have been the foundation of the social organization in the past and have guided its functioning in many diverse historical settings. If Christians are catalysts for social change in China, they must believe in China and trust that the genius of China will finally work out such solutions as are needed and are consonant with the national character.

¹ Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary, 1988, p. 214.

Glimpses of Chinese society

I will not attempt to offer a thorough description and analysis of society of China. In a few words I will try to recall what we all know about China today, be it from our own experience as being Chinese or having spent considerable time in China, or be it from the wealth of information at our disposal in current publications and in news reports in journals and the media.

The first thing that impresses you, when you come to China is the multitude of people. On my first day in Beijing, when I passed through Wangfujing, the Ginza of Beijing, and saw the flood of people, I asked the taxi driver: “What are they demonstrating for?” I couldn’t believe it, when he told me, that this was normal and everyday life. Often you are apologetically told “*Zhongguoren tai duo* – There are too many/very many Chinese”. Nobody ever wanted to answer my questions “*Shui tai duo? Shi ni tai duo? Shi wo tai duo?* – Who is too much, you or I?” As in other Asian societies you are confronted with the reality and problem of overpopulation, you physically feel it when you find yourself squashed in the public bus or in the rush-hour metro of Beijing (an ideal setting to meditate on St. John’s *And the Word became flesh!*). You see the younger generation thronging into the many schools of all levels. You hear that everybody nurtures the hope of making it to university, which for most, however, remains an unrealistic dream and source of great frustration. You see crowds of construction workers putting up a new, super-modern capital. You cannot avoid seeing the masses of young people from the countryside who spill out from Beijing’s central railway stations and who come in the hope of finding employment in the Capital. You read about big State enterprises which have folded up, sending wave upon wave of unemployed workers into the streets

Moving around the cities of Beijing or Shanghai you are overwhelmed by the sight of these super-modern megalopolises, their banking palaces, hotels, shopping centers, high rise buildings, avenues. Whatever you want, you find it in the shops, the restaurants, the libraries. The volume of traffic is steadily increasing. Often, especially when you are in hurry, you find yourself stuck in a traffic jam on one of the circular highways. It makes you fear, that soon it will be so dense that no wheel will be able to move anymore. Whereas, in 1985 it was hardly possible after 8 o’clock at night to find something decent to eat, there now seems to be no end of hotels and restaurants which cater to your needs and tastes at any time of the day or night. In its capital and in other cities China demonstrates its newly acquired wealth and a high degree of development on all levels, a development which, with China’s entry into the World Trade Organization and in the run up to the Olympic games to be held in Beijing in the year 2008, is expected to advance with ever greater effectiveness and speed.

We are aware, of course, that this is not the whole story of China today. Not all citizens are privileged to share equally in the newly acquired wealth (see the statistical figures which have been presented earlier in this Conference). “Socialism with Chinese characteristics” tends to become a ruthless form of capitalism, with the problems of unemployment, poverty, alienation, loss of meaning, and crime. The soaring numbers of unemployed people in the urban industry, the migration of countless young people from the countryside to the cities, the dissatisfaction and anger of peasants and workers with the administration, the incredible corruption, even at highest party and government levels, may turn into dangerous elements of instability and social unrest.

This threatening situation is caused and aggravated by a deplorable loss of values. The development of the centuries had already undermined the traditional value system of China. Confucianism and Neo-Confucian thought, which had been the foundation and rationale of all social institutions, proved inadequate when confronted with the evolution of modern society under the impact of the West's multiple invasion of China. The decline of the Manchu Dynasty and its fall in 1911 ushered in a period of anxious search for national identity and social change. Propagation of the faith in science and concurrent positivistic thinking, connected with the names of such people as Dewey, Russell and Hu Shih, have contributed to the loss of confidence in China's tradition. A great number of young idealists turned to the ideology of Communism for the solution of the nation's burning problems, generously investing their talents and enthusiasm for the realization of the social ideal. We have to give credit to that idealistic and quasi-religious fervor of the early generation of Communists. After the experience of several decades with the reality of Communism [*Realkommunismus*], especially during the years of the so-called Cultural Revolution (1966-76), the idealistic fervor of the early years has vanished and after the destruction of this last ideal, the question of values has acquired a new urgency. Decades of anti-idealistic and atheistic education have obstructed the way to seek and find true values and meaning in life for many. The newly acquired wealth is inducing many to look only for the acquisition of money, material goods, enjoyment, position and power. And this tendency is heavily aided by the practical materialism, hedonism and atheism of our Western world, lived in the market place of the global village, preached on our Web-sites, which are eagerly frequented by more and more technologically minded bright young people in China.

The result of this materialistic orientation is a widespread uneasiness with the state of society, and apprehension in the face of delinquency, drug abuse, the breaking up of marriages and families, abortion, and all the negative phenomena, which have been brought up several times during this Conference. The lack of spiritual leadership and moral example from many in positions of high responsibility leave the younger generation especially like sheep without a shepherd.

The ideal society

This state of today's society is a far cry from the ideal society which the early missionaries of the 16th and 17th centuries thought to have found in China and of which they transmitted glowing descriptions to Europe. They mentioned the great harmony which ideally existed between Heaven and Earth and Man, and which the Emperor, the Son of Heaven, had had the mandate to hold together. The Emperor himself had in the first place the obligation to cultivate in himself the cosmic harmony and the human virtues, which would automatically guarantee the harmony and good functioning of society. Typical of this assumption is the often quoted passage of the Confucian classic called "Great Learning" (*Daxue*), n. 3: "*The ancients who wished to illustrate illustrious virtue throughout the kingdom, first ordered well their own states. Wishing to regulate their states, they first regulated their families. Wishing to regulate their families, they first cultivated their persons. Wishing to cultivate their persons, they first rectified their hearts. Wishing to rectify their hearts, they first sought to be sincere in their thoughts. Wishing to be sincere in their thoughts, they first extended to the utmost their knowledge*"².

² James Legge, *The Four Books*, with English translation and notes.

The Chinese word translated by Legge and others as the "extension of knowledge to the utmost", is *ge wu*. The passage became a fundamental tenet in Neo-Confucian spirituality, cherished by Zhu Xi (1130-1200), the Song time patriarch of this school, which had as its goal the elimination of all traces of Indian Buddhism and the

European scholars who avidly read the reports of the early missionaries, among them the famous German scholar Leibniz, were inclined to believe in this ideal society of harmony and culture, partly also because the spirit of the Age of Enlightenment was pleased at the discovery of an ideal society which, for its harmonious functioning, apparently did not need the existence of a personal God and of a Church.

Early missiology

The missionaries themselves, at least a sizeable group of them, seemed, however, not totally convinced of the perfect state of this society. During the famous Controversy of Rites³ the group around P. Bouvet S.J. and P. Foucquet S.J.⁴, called the “Figurists”, held the opinion that in the grey past the Sages of China had known and passed on to posterity the true principles about Heaven and Earth and Man, and that the society of their times was the incarnation of those principles. Later generations, however, were supposed to have tampered with the wisdom of the Sages, misinterpreting their insights and falsifying their written transmission in the Chinese Classics. Therefore, the “Figurist” missionaries saw therefore their mission as the task of purifying the classics and helping the Chinese to rediscover the original form of their principles. Once the original principles were put back into place, China would automatically recover her knowledge of the True God, find in the Classics all the truth of a supposed “Uroffenbarung” (primeval revelation) and apply the principles to the functioning of a good human society.

In the mind of Figurism, the catalyst function of Christians in China would mainly consist in the endeavor to restore the original Chinese tradition, which then by itself would solve all the problems. The representatives of Figurism were deeply convinced of China and of her original principles. Their legacy to the missionary Church in China has been an attitude of admiration and respect for the Chinese Sages of the past. Although the leading ideas underlying their research had soon been abandoned, these missionaries certainly have to be commended and followed in their attitude of respect for and trust in the Chinese genius.

Some basic principles

Among the principles underlying the traditional Chinese society just a few shall be mentioned *en passant*.

restoration of the original Chinese heritage. Strangely enough, by its ferocious opposition to Buddhism, Neo-Confucianism had to tackle all the metaphysical and psychological positions Buddhism had developed, and became thereby so deeply enmeshed in Buddhist problems, that some one could say, that Neo-Confucianism has done more for the Chinese transformation of Buddhism than the many Buddhist missionaries had done before. The above quoted passage, for example, with its “extension of knowledge to the utmost”, brought into Neo-Confucianism the controversy about the gradual and sudden enlightenment of Zen Buddhism, Zhu Xi being considered more as the exponent of gradual enlightenment and Wang Shouren (Wang Yangming, 1472-1528) the exponent of sudden enlightenment². – In modern times, especially under communist attacks against any form of idealism, Zhu Xi and his followers have been vehemently criticized for their thought which was judged as being out of touch with the reality and the problems of Chinese society.

³ D.E. Mungello, ed., *The Chinese Rites Controversy: Its History and Meaning*, Monumenta Serica Monograph Series XXXIII, Steyler Verlag 1994; Claudia von Collani, *P. Joachim Bouvet S.J.: Sein Leben und sein Werk*, Monumenta Serica Monograph Series XVII, Steyler Verlag 1985, Secondino Gatta, *Il natural lume de Cinesi: Teoria e prassi dell'evangelizzazione nella Breve relatione di Philippe Cpouplet S.J. (1623-1693)*, Monumenta Monograph Series XXXVII, Steyler Verlag 1998.

⁴ W. K. Müller, “Jean François Foucquet’s Reading of the Daode Jing and Other Chinese Classics”, in *Dongxi jiaoliu luntan*, N. 2, Shanghai Wenshu Chubanshe, 2002 (read in Chinese at Hangzhou University, 1998).

Goodness of human nature

Ancient Chinese thought was characterized by a basically optimistic view of human nature, as expressed in the famous axiom *ren xing shan* “man by nature is good”, defended mainly by the philosopher Mengzi (371?-289? B.C.) who “proved” this thesis by the same universal reaction of concern and spontaneous will to save a child in danger of falling into a well and of drowning.

Optimistic faith in the goodness of human nature is a requirement for any selfless engagement in favor of eliminating the evils which beset human society and for contributing to the achievement of a society, which could be classified as ideal. At a time in which we are struggling against terrorism, crime, corruption, perversion, war, discrimination, poverty, and where we see so little progress, one easily could lose hope in the possibility of ever achieving the ideal and easily become sarcastic. Faith in the basic goodness of all human beings and an ear for the perennial yearning of the human heart to see the good realized, make it possible not to abandon the quest, but to go on laboring for the creation of a worthwhile society.

Together with this fundamental optimism, we find in traditional Chinese thinking a healthy realism, expressed in a slogan which seems to negate the first principle and which says *ren xing e*, “man by nature is evil”. This has as its basis the ever present experience of evil and crime perpetrated by people. The formulation of this realistic axiom is connected with the name of the philosopher Xunzi (probably between 298-238 B.C.)⁵. Whereas the first axiom underlines the possibility of education and of progressive achievement of good, the second one is complementary to the first one and stresses the necessity of education: “*Human nature is evil, and the good which is in him, is the result of his efforts*”⁶.

The Family

The individual, subject of the first two principles, in traditional Chinese thinking, was never seen as isolated by himself, but always as being integrated into the basic social institution, the family. He defined himself always in relationship to the members of his family⁷. This carefully mapped out description of each one’s position in the extended family context, regulated the relationships and the individual’s duties and rights. The family structure provided for the need of the individual, who in turn saw his primary obligation in contributing to the well-being and the orderly functioning of this nucleus of society. Marriage, which affects the extended family community, was not in the first place left to the choice and decision of the two individuals, but was considered a matter to be decided upon by the elders, the natural leaders of the family. Little room was left for personal freedom and the evolvment of individualism, as it had come about in the West. The painful clash of the generations and the struggle of the individual to wrench his personal freedom from the rigid family structure has been the subject of many pieces of modern literature⁸.

⁵ Hermann Köster SVD, *Hsün-tzu* (complete translation), Steyler Verlag, 1967, pp. 301-314

⁶ Köster, p. 301.

⁷ Classical dictionaries of the Chinese language list no less than 120 terms, which define the position of the individual with regard to the members of his family, a remarkable feat of sociological lexicography.

⁸ See, for example, Ba Jin, *The Family*, describing the tragic breaking up of a family under the impact of modern western ideas and individualistic tendencies.

The State and society were conceived on the pattern of the extended family. A reflection of this situation is found in the popular saying *Si hai zhi nei xie xiongdi ye*, “All who live surrounded by the four oceans, are but older and younger brothers”. Knowledge of people beyond the frontier of oceans and mountains still being very dim, the saying concerned only directly the Chinese people and declared all in China to be but one enlarged family of brothers. It is, however, often invoked in view of foreigners and human relationships among Chinese and non-Chinese individuals and peoples. Foreigners, though not honoured with the appellation of *tongbao* “child of the same womb”, find it relatively easy to live with Chinese peoples and to have this specific feeling of being members of the extended Chinese family.

The heritage of Buddhism

Beyond the native principles underlying traditional Chinese society, we have to pay attention also to the ingredient of Buddhism⁹. Although Buddhism came from India and is recalled even today as a foreign religion, come from the West, it has had a deep impact on China, changing many Chinese ways of thinking and acting.

Arriving in China towards the end of the former Han dynasty (206-23 B.C.), it met a situation of painful intellectual and spiritual uneasiness. The Confucian ideology, which in the early stages of the Dynasty, had offered a unified world view and the orthodox guideline for the functioning of government and society, and was defended mainly by Dong Zhongshu (c. 179-c. 104 B.C.), towards the end of this period drew heavy criticism of skeptics and naturalists, which eventually undermined the impressive cosmic and social construction of the Han Dynasty. Wang Chong (A.D. 27-ca. 97) was the main speaker of this group. Causing the eventual ruin of the mighty Han Dynasty, the entrenched old-time aristocrats, the new-rich families, relatives of empresses and imperial eunuchs and their families were promoting their own selfish interests. The peasantry, the vast majority of the population and backbone of the society, sank deeper and deeper into poverty and utter misery. From A.D. 166, following the violent attack of the eunuchs against the intelligentsia, and the tragedy of slander, massacre and assassination, the leading forces of society were heavily weakened. In 184 and in 189, the desperate peasantry rose up in the famous Yellow Turban uprising. For once more, the conflicting parties of the Dynasty united in putting down the rebellion, causing a holocaust of millions of lives and devastating large areas of the country. By 220, the Han Dynasty had exhausted itself, and the country broke apart. For 369 years, the country remained divided into North and South and was governed by a sequence of weak Chinese dynasties in the South and by a number of nomad dynasties in the North. It was only in 589 that the Sui Dynasty succeeded in uniting again the whole nation. In 618, the power was passed on to the Tang Dynasty, which became the starting point of a united China, for most of the time until today.

Buddhism might first have been regarded as another branch of native Taoism, due to its emphasis on meditation, breathing techniques and dietary prescriptions. The impression was somehow confirmed by the use of Taoist terminology in the early translation of Buddhist scriptures. The distinctiveness of Buddhism was definitely clarified by the Chinese monk Shi Dao An (312-85), who developed a new buddhist terminology. Generations of Indian and Central-Asian monks as well as Chinese monks translated the immense amount of buddhist

⁹ From the many books and articles, which deal with all aspects of Buddhism in China, and are written in Chinese, Japanese and Western languages, I only mention Kenneth K. S. Chen, Buddhism in China: A Historical Survey, 572 pages, Princeton University Press, 1964; --, The Chinese Transformation of Buddhism, 345 pages, Princeton University Press, 1973; Arthur F. Wright, Buddhism in Chinese History, 144 pages, Stanford University Press, 1959.

sacred scriptures and commentary literature. As time went on, new scriptures and more commentaries were written in China itself. By the time Buddhism arrived in China, it had traversed Central Asia or the South-East Asian countries, and had developed into the typical form of Mahayana Buddhism. The metaphysical speculations, the psychological inquiries into the nature of man, appealed to the intelligentsia. Mahayana devotion and liturgies made a deep impression and found the generous support of the highest strata of society. But mainly the broad illiterate masses were attracted by the figures of the compassionate Buddhas and the all-present and helpful Bodhisattvas, who represented for them a safe haven in the ocean of suffering, which formed much of their lives.

It would lead too far to describe all the contributions which Buddhism has brought to social and cultural life in China. It visibly opened up the horizon of China, not only by introducing a selection of Indian culture to China, but more so by popularizing the careful approach to reality of Madhyamika, the central philosophy of Mahayana Buddhism, which hesitates to make definite statements about reality, emphasizing that reality or truth lies beyond all human conception and possibility of expression¹⁰. Buddhism deepened China's perception of human nature, underscoring its spiritual and otherworldly character. In this way, the present life, family and worldly possessions were given a relative value. The great number of monks and nuns was a visible departure from the traditional place, the family occupied in Chinese thinking¹¹.

The most beneficial influence on Chinese society came from the Buddhist ideal of the Bodhisattva¹². The Bodhisattva, the "Enlightenment Being", having, in the course of innumerable reincarnations, acquired an endless store of spiritual merit, done away with all traces of evil karma, and having attained the highest perfect enlightenment (*anuttara-samyak-sambodhi*), which would entitle him, at any moment, to enter into the final perfect *nirvana*, has made the vow to remain in the world of suffering beings, in order to help them to attain final deliverance and leave the painful circle of reincarnations. Only after all suffering beings have attained the final goal, would he himself claim his rights and enter into *nirvana*. Whereas in the earlier form of Buddhism, Hinayana Buddhism, the ideal was the *Arhat*, the monk who through his own efforts has attained perfect enlightenment and enters into *nirvana*, cutting off all links to the world of suffering, in Mahayana Buddhism, the new ideal was seen in the form of the Bodhisattva. This development presented the followers of Buddhism with an ideal of altruistic love, which hardly could be conceived higher. It inspired the Chinese followers to very concretely turn to their fellow men and to serve them in their needs. Arthur F. Wright points out that "*the growth of Buddhism as a common faith was accompanied by a great increase in charitable works of all kinds. Buddhist monks had been the first to open free dispensaries, and in time of epidemics the clergy ministered to thousands in the stricken areas. They established free hospitals, to which, by T'ang times, the state was contributing support. Buddhist congregations supported the chains of free or low-cost hostels... and, such charitable enterprises as the building of bridges and the planting of shade trees along well-travelled roads*"¹³.

¹⁰ T. R. V. Murti, The Central Philosophy of Buddhism, 372 pages, George Allan and Unwin, 1954; D. T. Suzuki, On Indian Mahayana Buddhism, 284 pages, Harper Torchbooks, 1968; Richard H. Robinson, Early Madhyamika in India and China, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1967; Frederick J. Streng, Emptiness, a Study in Religious Meaning, Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1967

¹¹ *Chu jia de ren*, "one who has left the family", is a speaking designation of monks and nuns.

¹² Har Dayal, The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature, London, 1932.

¹³ Arthur F Wright, Buddhism in Chinese History, p. 75; also Kenneth K. S. Chen, The Chinese Transformation of Buddhism, p. 296 et passim

We find a reflection of the enduring influence of the Bodhisattva ideal in the person of Lei Feng, the idealized communist soldier, surrounded by legendary accounts of his selfless service to the people, dying in an accident while trying to help somebody. Chinese today are well acquainted with this figure whom Mao Tsedong had all young people emulate during the yearly “Learn from Lei Feng campaign”. The Bodhisattva ideal is evoked by Liu Shaoqi, the first President of the Peoples’ Republic of China, who described the ideal communist party member as one “*who grieves before all the rest of the world grieves and is happy only after all the rest of the world is happy*”. Liu Shaoqi applied to the communist cadre, what Fan Zhongyan (989-1052) had attributed to the new ideal of the Confucian scholar: “*One who is first in worrying about the world’s troubles and last in enjoying its pleasures.*” Neo-Confucianism, in its fight against Buddhism, had adopted the Bodhisattva ideal, incorporating it into its own store of moral values. Fan Zhongyan might have referred to the formulation of the ideal, found in Santideva’s *Bodhicaryavatara*: “*May I become an unfailing store for the wretched and the first to supply them with the manifold things of their need. My own self and my pleasures, all my righteousness, past, present and future, I sacrifice without regard, in order to achieve the welfare of all beings*¹⁴.”

Christians and Social Change

“China’s Christians: Catalysts of Social Change”? In their passionate concern for China’s future, young intellectuals have subjected traditional Chinese thought and ideals to a painstaking scrutiny, asking at the same time what positive values Christianity might be able to contribute to the process of social change in China. Among the most representatives of these thinkers we may consider the well known professors Tang Yi, He Guanghu, Yang Huilin, Zhuo Xinping and Liu Xiaofeng¹⁵. Taking up and pursuing their indications, the following can be stated:

1. To empower the traditional principles and ideals of China for the functioning of human society and eventually to effect those changes which might be necessary, there has to be one absolute, ultimate point of reference. Traditional cosmological and social speculations, inspiring as they are, do not have this character of ultimacy. They do not provide an answer to the existential questions of human existence, the existence of the world, of history. As human beings, we want to relate to an Ultimate, which has the character of a person. We want to know, from where we came and why we are as we are. We want to know the meaning. Concepts such as Heaven, the Great Primordial Oneness, Nature do not yield such an answer, and we are left alone in the vast, dark and cold universe.

Christians are catalysts for social change, if they are deep down convinced of and pass on to other people by their lives above all, but also by their word, their faith in God who is that Ultimate, which has revealed itself as a Person, as God, as creator of all that is, calling itself Yahwe, the “I am who am”, the “I am for you”, the “God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob”. He is the God who speaks to his creatures, revealing himself in his historical relationships dealing with his people, giving instructions, demanding obedience and asking account for our personal deeds. The cosmos and man in it, is not the blind outcome of

¹⁴ Quotations from Arthur F. Wright, l.c., pp. 93 and 122.

¹⁵ Arnold Sprenger, SVD, “A New Vision for China. The Case of Liu Xiao Feng”, a paper delivered at the International Symposium on Religious Education and the Development of Chinese Society, Taipei, Dec. 4-6, 1989; A.Sprenger, “Die Intellektuellen und das Christentum in China”, in *Katholische Missionen*, no. 2, (March-April) 1995, pp. 45-50; Leo Leeb, S.V.D., “New Perspectives? Some Observations Concerning Scholars in Mainland China Studying Christianity”, in *Verbum SVD* 431:3 (2000, pp. 435-443

blinkered and unintelligible energies, but is designed, wanted, created by God, who “in the beginning created heaven and earth” by saying “let there be”.

By sharing their faith in God who is the Creator of all things, the ultimate source from where we come, Christians make the greatest contribution to the stability of society. This faith brings light into the origin of all, and invites all to perceive the meaning and purpose of all. As the origin of the world does not lie in a blind accident, and as the world is not the outcome of the accumulation and condensation of karmic events of former universes (as Buddhists declare it to be), but is created by the will of God who is Love and has a heart, in the same way its future is not shrouded in darkness and left to the mercy of blind developments, but lies in the hands of the merciful God. People who have this conviction, are well equipped to stand in this changing world, whose developments have certainly frightening aspects. Christians in China are to be beacons of hope in the darkness which seems to invade our contemporaries.

2. Christians in China are catalysts of social change, if they share their faith in man, who has been “created by God in his own image and likeness”. Human dignity and rights are not a concession granted by any human power, but are at the very essence of the individual, due to being created as son and daughter of God and called to share in God’s divine and eternal nature. Respect for the dignity and rights of the human individual is guaranteed by this faith in man’s origin.

Evidently, as our experience shows, the principle of the dignity and rights of the concrete human person too often is also practically overlooked by Christians, who therefore need constantly to be reminded to live up to what they profess in their faith.

3. Christians in China are catalysts of social change, if they face the reality of evil, of sin, of guilt. The traditional Chinese statement *Ren xing shan*, “man in his fundamental nature is good”, needs to be interpreted as “man is basically made to be good”. But it must be supplemented by the acknowledgment of the experience of bad and destructive tendencies in the individual, pointing out that there is also some fundamental flaw in human nature, as it concretely exists. Acknowledgment of some fundamental flaw calls for the attention and correction of a blind optimism in human nature.

It needs no intellectual acrobatics to acknowledge the all-pervading evil of personal sin and guilt, which has a self-destruction tendency and does harm to human society. However, too often we have the experience that people do not shy away from doing evil, from pursuing their own selfish purposes to the harm of other people, if they can do so without being seen and without the danger of being punished. This attitude is all pervading. We simply might recall the scandalous examples of corruption, which are coming to the surface one by one and in many countries, including China. In these cases we are faced by a great danger to human society, all the greater, as these cases involve people in high and influential positions in the world of politics, economy and education. But on a lower and personal level, the tendency not to shy away from evil, if it can be done without loss of face and without being punished, is also to be considered a great danger.

Christianity has often been accused of having infected mankind with a complex of guilt. And in fact, it cannot be denied that exaggerations have caused many neuroses. However, it is equally true, that not wanting to acknowledge personal evil as evil and storing away and trying to forget what objectively has been evil, creates a much greater psychological sickness

in mankind and represents a much greater danger to society than any personal neurosis, leaving it open to ever greater evil and ever more refined ways of hiding it. Acknowledgment of sin, of guilt is something precious, is the possibility of a new beginning. Sincere confrontation of a past guilt through acknowledgment, penance and conversion brings about peace for peoples and for individuals. Ancient Chinese tradition has already spoken about the blessing of conversion after acknowledgment of one's failings, as you find in the famous passage of The Analects of Confucius (xix, 21): *Junzi zhi guo ye, ru ri yue zhi shi yan; guo ye, ren jie jian zhi, geng ye, ren jie yang zhe* -- "The faults of the superior man are like the eclipses of the sun and moon. He has his faults, and all men see them; he changes again, and all men look up to him" [presented as calligraphy by some unknown Chinese to Pope John Paul II during the Holy Year, in reference to the confession of sins committed by the Church during her 2000 years of history].

4. Christians contribute to healing the wounds of society, the sickness of sin and guilt, when they share their faith in God who is Love, and in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, made Man, who has carried the sin of all mankind and has made satisfaction, offering forgiveness to all who believe and want to accept it. We are not left alone with our guilt. We know that in spite of our best intentions, we are inclined to evil and that the "just man sins seven times a day". Or as St. Paul says, "Though I wish to do what is right, the evil within me asserts itself first" (Rom 7.21). "Alas, for me! Who will free me from this being which is only death? Let us give thanks to God through Jesus Christ, our Lord!"

5. It goes without saying, that it would not be enough for Christians only to know and to profess these basic truths of their faith. It is for them a matter of interiorizing what they profess and applying it to their actions. Their generous involvement in development projects of human society, their efforts of making love of God and their neighbor the leading principle of their relationship with everybody are the convincing proof of the truth they want to communicate to others.

6. Much is being expected from China's Christians! Will they be able to live up to such expectations, in a better and more convincing way than we have done? In justice we have to declare, that China's Christians alone cannot be made responsible for fulfilling the function of "catalysts for social change". In the globalization of our present day world, this responsibility lies as much with China's Christians, as it lies with America's Christians and the Christians of the whole world. The efforts of China's Christians definitely need the cooperation of Christians the world over. China has opened up to the world, and the Christian world lies as an open book before the eyes of China, and everybody can read it. And so finally, let me reformulate my topic and say "**Christians of the whole world: – catalysts for social change in China.**"