

A CHURCH POLICY FOR NORTH CHINA¹

I

AT THIS moment the Anglican Church is proposing to enlarge her action in China by the foundation of a new bishopric in Shantung. It seems, therefore, a fit opportunity to review the situation and to attempt to define what should be the policy of the Church in that country. It is unnecessary here to discuss whether the Church has any right to send missionaries to China at all. That question was decided by the authorities of the Church when they first consecrated bishops for the Christians in those parts, and that decision has now been reaffirmed by the determination to hold to this course and to consecrate yet other bishops as opportunity occurs. On religious grounds, in obedience to the command of the Divine Head of the Church; on moral grounds, in recognition of a duty to a people whose ancient faiths are being undermined by the inrush of new Western learning; on philanthropic grounds, in the desire to ameliorate the sufferings and to raise the social condition of the ignorant; on social grounds, in the conviction that the spread of Christianity tends to the progress of the whole race, no Christian will find any difficulty in justifying the action of the Anglican Church. But, in view of the widespread activity of the Roman Catholics and Nonconformist bodies, in view of the peculiar conditions of time and place in that part of the world, it may well be asked what policy the Anglican Church intends to pursue, what success is likely to attend her action; and I propose in this paper briefly to make a few suggestions which may help to determine what that policy might be.

It must be remembered, then, first, that the Anglican Mission in North China has hitherto been, and will probably long continue to be, a very small one numerically, compared with the Roman Catholic and some of the Protestant Nonconformist

¹ [This article appeared in a Church of England weekly, the *Guardian*, in two issues in the summer of 1902.]

Missions. It is obvious that it cannot compete with them: it cannot in a moment procure the supplies of men and money which have enabled them to make a notable mark in this work of evangelizing North China. There is not the smallest reason to suppose that the Church of England either can or will find such supplies of men or of money. The Anglican Church will found no great hospitals, no great universities, no great Brotherhoods in North China for many years to come.

Secondly, the special circumstances of time and place are worthy of note. It is impossible to set forth at large the particular details; but three things must be abundantly clear to anyone who has carefully followed late events¹ in China. (1) That the reform edicts issued by the Court have been sufficiently numerous and emphatic to impress a large part of the population with the idea that it is politic, if not necessary, to seek for a knowledge of Western affairs. (2) That this widespread thirst for Western knowledge, when once created, will not be easily or lightly quenched, even if the Court should presently withdraw the reform edicts and revert to its old conservative custom of obstruction. (3) That the local magistrates in seeking for teachers in the newly opened schools have invariably turned to the Protestant missionaries, rather than to the more highly organized and more powerful Roman Catholic Church. There is thus open to missionaries of experience, unburdened by the political entanglements and the unfortunate reputation for interference which attaches to the Roman Catholics, a singular opportunity for leading and instructing a people who, whilst anxious for disinterested advice, are naturally jealous and suspicious of political intrigues or of any sort of interference with their local government. If once missionaries succeed in persuading the Chinese of their honest goodwill and readiness to give disinterested advice, they are welcomed not only by the common people who desire to get some idea of Western matters, but by the mandarins who naturally turn to them when face to face with a new set of conditions to which they are complete strangers.

¹ [The reference is to the 'Hundred Days' of reforming edicts from the Emperor Kuang Hsu in 1895; to the conservative reactions against them led by the Dowager Empress and the Boxer Rebellion; and to the belated reforms actually begun in the years after 1900.]

In view of these two considerations the Church of England would surely be well advised if she were to aim, not at collecting casual parties of missionaries, but rather at sending to each of the provinces a bishop and two, or perhaps three, priests of ability who might make it their task to study the complex questions which now beset the Chinese people, and attempt to win the goodwill of the chief men of the province by really disinterested labour on behalf of the general weal. In this way they might, in a few years, win a position of influence, especially with the rising generation of young officials, which would be of greater value to the Church than the local efforts of a great number of preachers of smaller culture and ability. It is as a step towards this ideal that I value the foundation of the Shantung bishopric.

But they would not, therefore, abandon the proper work of the missionary—the direct propagation of the Gospel. In this they would wisely cling to that middle position which seems to me to be the key to the real purpose of the existence of the Anglican Church in the world. They should neither throw themselves into the arms of the Protestant Nonconformists so as to obscure the force of their witness to historical Christianity, nor, by imitating Roman Catholic methods, allow themselves to be confused with that despotic and intriguing body. Rather, in contradistinction to both these, they should endeavour to present Christianity to the people, not as a system peculiarly Western, but rather as a moral power, capable of vivifying and renewing every race, and leading each to that complete development which is natural and peculiar to itself. It is in doing this that they will win that confidence and secure that influence which I have above pointed out to be so desirable.

But in order to do this, they must keep clearly in view two great principles: (1) that Western institutions cannot be wisely forced, in their entire and peculiarly Western form, upon Eastern peoples; (2) that healthy growth depends upon the free exercise of functions in the earliest stages.

The first of these principles involves the advisability of removing many of the external characteristics of Western Church systems as unsuited for Chinese Churches, either wholly at any stage of their growth, or for the present in the early stages of

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their growth. It is well known now that the Chinese view foreign institutions with peculiar dread, and that their native conservatism has been in many points strengthened rather than weakened by their intercourse with foreign nations. Everything, therefore, which is not of the essence of the faith, especially external forms which catch the eye and impress the mere passer-by with the idea that Christianity is essentially a Western and foreign institution, may well be abandoned as tending to hinder rather than encourage the natives to accept its doctrines. We should, as far as possible, avoid the erection of foreign buildings, whether churches, or schools, or houses, in the interior; and we should not insist upon peculiarly foreign forms of worship, either in dress or ritual. This implies a certain 'economy'. Many things are seemly and useful in a fully organized and long-established Church which are not convenient in a new-born community of Eastern Christians, and it is not convenient to give the impression that every Chinese who takes part in Christian worship is necessarily a man of Western education, and a follower of Western fashions.

Similarly we should endeavour to minimize the impression that the missionary is a ruler set over the converts by a foreign Power, who exercises an arbitrary sway or administers a code of foreign laws as though the Chinese on entering their Church abandoned their independence, escaped the obligation of their ancestors' moral codes or transferred their allegiance from native to foreign rulers. The position which the parish priest in England holds over a flock of educated Churchmen, when exaggerated, as it is bound to be in cases where he is in charge of men of different race and thought, is a source of real danger to the Chinese Church. That the priest in charge of a district should perform all his functions according to a code of rules, of which not one, or at the most very few, of his people understand anything whatsoever, is liable to great misconstruction, and opens the door to the oft-repeated and inevitable complaint that the foreign priest comes to China to occupy the position of a mandarin.

It would be better that the foreign priest should be to the Chinese Christians a guide and friend whose word is not law but advice. If a code must be drawn up we should do well to observe carefully the rule laid down by our greatest colonial

governors that the new code should embody as much as possible of the ancient customary law. This would give an air of familiarity to the new code. Codes are apt to emphasize most of the things that are new rather than the things which are familiar and ancient. But it is the familiar which attracts.

II

The second principle which I laid down last week as necessary to the success of Church work in North China was that healthy growth depends upon the exercise of the functions. By this I mean that missionaries should from the very first refuse to do for their converts anything that they may legitimately do for themselves. It seems that the native Church, even in its earliest infancy, can exercise many powers which at present are too often concentrated in the hands of the foreign priest—e.g. I think that each little community of Christians may wisely decide for itself who is to be admitted to its fellowship, and how long a probation each inquirer should undergo before admission. I think that if it has native officers, it may elect its own and present them to the bishop, that it may raise its own funds for the support of most of its officers and administer them, that it may found and direct its own schools and find its own teachers, that it may in great measure order its own services, that it may decide many minor questions of local custom. And all this *from the very beginning*.

It is vain to bring up little communities as infants for whom *everything* is done and then to expect them to develop powers of organization and initiative; they must first be exercised in small matters, be free to make mistakes in small matters, and so learn by failure. The smallest Church should be forced to feel that its members must act for themselves as a body in things that pertain to the body, and as parts of a larger whole in consultation with other small communities in things that pertain to the whole. The danger of mistakes, of financial quarrels, of little schisms, is not so serious as the danger of keeping the Church in swaddling bands.

In practice I suppose that the system would work somewhat thus: So soon as a few Chinese in any place were baptized, the

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foreigner would ask himself, 'What can these people do for themselves?' and the answer would be, 'Everything except the exercise of priestly functions.' They can meet for prayer, they can procure a teacher for their children if they wish so to do (with a little pecuniary help, perhaps); they can invite others to join them on the basis upon which they were admitted to the Church (Creeds, Sacraments, Orders); they can meet to discuss any little question of local custom, and decide what they ought to do in the light of their conscience and the Bible; they can propagate the faith, they can, so soon as they wish, set apart a place for worship, or build one. All that they need is teaching and the administration of the Holy Sacraments. Therefore the missionary will teach, administer, and advise. For the rest they must do what they can. The foreigner will perhaps help them, but he will not do it for them.

As they grow in numbers and experience they will want more; they will present a man for ordination, they will begin to enlarge and improve upon their earlier efforts at the formation of a Prayer-book, they will compare their own with the translations of the Western and Eastern books, they will perhaps print a book after it has received the approval of the bishop. When there are two or three such communities they will not act separately, but will be able to meet together either as a whole or by delegates, and can then decide common matters in common council; local matters they would decide as of old in their local council. When they reached a stage at which they could offer a suitable man to the bishop for ordination to the priesthood, they would be locally complete and the foreigner would then retire to another field, only returning to visit the station as frequently as possible.

It is obvious that in carrying out this mission the main work of the foreign priest would be that for which he was best fitted, the administration of the sacraments and the training of the better educated of his converts for the work of teaching others. On the thoroughness and skill with which he did this the success of his work would mainly depend.

The adoption of some such policy as that which I have attempted to describe would, I believe, minimize many of the great difficulties with which Church work in China is now beset:

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1. *The political difficulty.* At present the Chinese commonly look upon the missionary as a political agent, sent out to buy the hearts of the people, and so to prepare the way for a foreign dominion, and this suspicion has been greatly strengthened by the fact that Western nations have, as in the case of Kiaochou,¹ used outrages upon missionaries as a pretext for territorial aggression. This difficulty could not be wholly removed, but it would I believe, be minimized by demonstrating that the missionaries of the Anglican Church were not seeking to attract men to a Western institution ruled by foreigners. The Church would be openly and undeniably Chinese. Whatever cause for suspicion might be found in the new doctrine, it would at least be clear that Chinese who accepted it remained free and independent.

2. *The sectarian difficulty.* At present the Chinese recognizes that the Church is a foreign institution, and that there are many such institutions more or less alike, or more or less opposed. They speak habitually of joining 'your Church'. I believe that if we could teach the Chinese to realize that the Church was not 'our Church' merely but 'their Church', if the people once grasped this idea, so far from tending to exaggerate the present unhappy sectarian difficulties, it would rather tend to draw into one the various sects of Chinese Christians, and would be a real step towards unity on a reasonable Catholic basis. I believe that many Chinese Christians would feel strongly attracted to a body in which there were order, system and sound sacramental teaching who would never be ready to renounce Methodism or Presbyterianism in order to accept an equally complete and formal Anglicanism. I believe that a Church which, whilst Catholic in principle, was yet obviously Chinese for the Chinese, would hold the real hope of future Church unity in China.

3. *The evangelistic difficulty.* I see in some such policy as that which I have attempted to describe the great hope for the solid growth of the Church in China. Every one is now agreed that if China is to be evangelized it must be done by the Chinese; and if it is to be done by the Chinese they must be taught to do it.

¹ [The murder of two German Roman Catholic missionaries in November 1897, was used by the German Government to secure in 1898 a ninety-nine year lease of Kiaochow Bay, and other rights in Shantung.]