Christianity And Modernization
International Consultation Marks Fresh Start For Academic Dialogue

Chen Zemin, Vice-Principal of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary and Amity Board representative, addresses the consultation.

In the fall of last year, the Amity Foundation embarked on a new avenue in its ten-year-old pursuit of people-to-people contact, international dialogue and social development. From October 10 to 14, 25 scholars from around the world met in Beijing with an equal number of Chinese colleagues for a consultation on "Christianity and Modernization." The event was jointly sponsored by the Amity Foundation and the Institute of World Religions of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

Overseas participants, mostly Christian scholars and ecumenical staff persons, came from ten different countries and regions, primarily in Asia, Western Europe and North America. With the exception of three professors from Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, Chinese participants were academic researchers from social science academies and universities in Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin and Chengdu.

The consultation, which was held in Chinese and English with simultaneous translation, aimed at exploring the relationship of Christianity as a social and cultural phenomenon to modernization. Over 40 papers, presented by representatives of different academic disciplines, dealt with a wide variety of themes and questions, including Christianity in the cultural encounter between East and West, Christianity's contextualization in Asia, Christianity and modern science, Christian ethics and global economic development, and modernization's challenge to Christianity as well as Christianity's challenge to modernization.

Discussions showed that today's Chinese intellectuals generally welcome a model of modernization similar to that which prevails in the "developed" world as a necessary prerequisite for China's much-needed social development and enhancement of human values. Many of them have personally experienced that the ongoing process of economic reform and industrialization is widening the range of individual liberties and thus supporting the growth of academic freedom. Amidst these changes, however, they search for a new spiritual path which can provide human values and a sense of meaning and purpose for individuals as well as the life of the nation. It is widely felt that China's modernization process needs a corresponding transition in the cultural and spiritual sphere and that a transformed material civilization demands new models of human and spiritual understanding.

In this context, many Chinese intellectuals seem to hope for a revival of Confucianist ideas. Just before the Amity consultation, a much larger conference was held in Beijing on Confucianism, which explored many of the same questions, although from a different angle. The Chinese participants in the Amity symposium, on the other hand, represented a considerable intellectual minority which hopes to see China benefit from Christianity's rich heritage of thought and spirituality.

Not all Chinese speakers were as straightforward and unreserved as Yu Ke, a history professor at Nankai University in Tianjin. With great enthusiasm, he recommended Calvinist thought as an excellent spiritual re-
source for China to nurture a sound morality and to cultivate personal attitudes with which the Chinese can live up to the demands and challenges of modernization.

Modernization Challenging Christianity

In more cautious terms and from different perspectives, other speakers from China emphasized the basic ability of Christian religion to reform itself and to adapt to China's contemporary society. Duan Qi, a researcher at the Institute of World Religions, saw Protestant faith in China contextualizing itself by emphasizing its universalistic substance, such as the idea of the "cosmic Christ," of God's universal love and the superiority of grace over sin. Her colleague Zhuo Xinping explored new interpretations of the doctrine of sin to make it easier to understand in the context of Chinese anthropology, while Ren Yanli, another scholar from the institute, interpreted the Second Vatican Council as a turning point in which Roman Catholicism gained new relevance for modern societies.

All Chinese views on religion presented at this meeting were a far cry from the previous official ideology that all religion is the opiate of the masses, as well as from the opinion of old-style administrators who would still like to sweepingly denounce religion as superstition and backwardness. "At a time when the influence of Christianity is in decline in the developed countries of the West, when some Western scholars are looking to Eastern philosophy for a cure for the ills of Western society..., Christianity has now found a new and appreciative audience [among intellectuals] in China, where Christianity was once hated and demonized," observed Li Pingye of the Chinese Association of Religious Studies.

As representatives of the Protestant church in China, Chen Zemin, Xu Rulei and Kan Baoping, all three from Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, attracted the attention of other Chinese participants. The conference was one of the few occasions for an academic dialogue between theologians and intellectuals who sympathize with Christianity to take place inside China in such an official and public way. While public interest was great, however, Chen Zemin was quick to dampen too high expectations about the Chinese church. He spoke of the challenge which modernization poses to a church with a poorly educated laity, an inadequate number of pastors and an underdeveloped theology. According to him, the Protestant church in China needs time for self-development before it can engage itself in an intellectual ministry. This view was supported by Kan Baoping, who expressed his hope that the technologically-driven commercialization of all human life." Seeing an urgent need for "cultural constraints on greed in China," he asked whether there were "alternative ways to achieve modernization without succumbing to bourgeois greed." In his analysis of the shadow side of modern individualism, Martin Conway of Selly Oak Colleges in Great Britain pointed out that "in the face of rampant individualism, Christian faith insists that... issues of the quality of human relationships in society deserve priority over those of the quantity of goods to be consumed and enjoyed by the individual."

One of the panels was exclusively dedicated to questions of economic ethics. Here, World Council of Churches staff member Rob van Driemelen reported how churches worldwide feel increasingly alarmed over the growing gap between the rich and the poor and over the worsening destruction of the environment. His contribution was complemented by Ulrich Duchrow from Germany, who gave an analysis of economic alternatives drawn from the Bible and delivered the most critical conclusions about the totalitarian and life-destroying nature of today's global economic system. Its underlying ideology, he said, betrays itself as idolatry.

Significantly, this panel was composed of Western speakers only and was met with reservation by participants from China. For various reasons, many Chinese intellectuals tend to shield their fields of work from current political and social issues and keep a clear-cut separation between "material" and "cultural" or "spiritual" matters. In the process of the discussion which followed the panel, it was, however, widely acknowledged that human culture and people's ways of production and distribution are closely interconnected, just as the spiritual and the material are inseparably linked in
Cultural Bridge Builders

Chinese theologians from outside the People's Republic were able to build bridges of understanding between the differing cultural perspectives. Lo Ping-Cheung of Hong Kong Baptist College suggested that the adaptability of Christianity over the centuries serve as a case study and model for China's modernization. Giving an overview of ethical challenges and Christian responses in modern societies, he emphasized that "Chinese culture can learn from Christian culture the ways in which tradition is fused with modernity."

A less formal but equally universalistic line was taken by Choong Chee-Pang, professor at Trinity Theological College in Singapore. In the biblical tradition he identified four basic principles as a minimal guide for Christians engulfed in social change. These were, first, an understanding of the world as creation and a basic ecological concern; second, a Biblical anthropology focusing on human dignity and freedom, which in their particular combination contradict both Western individualism and Asian development dictatorships; third, societal ethics and a political perspective rooted in the concept of God's covenant with his people; and, finally, a Christian eschatology as a constant reminder of the transient and penultimate nature of human life at any given time.

A short article cannot do justice to the diversity of papers and the richness of discussion. Participants learnt about Christianity's modernizing role in medieval Europe and in 20th-century Korea, about the oppressive effect of the church on women in the Philippines, as well as its empowering function in Brazil.

This consultation was not meant to produce a statement or consensus on the issues involved, but rather as an occasion for the exchange of ideas and scholarly views. It was a ground-breaking event, since the People's Republic had never before seen an academic symposium exclusively focusing on Christianity. The conference atmosphere was one of openness, freedom of thought and lack of fear. According to many observers, such a conference would have been impossible three to five years ago. The very fact that it was held illustrates the changes China's process of "opening and reform" has brought to the academic study of religion in China. A number of people commented that because this consultation has been held, it will be much easier in the future to organize similar international consultations in China. And the excellent cooperation between Amity and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences has certainly paved the way for more contact in the future.

Gotthard Oblau

The Amity Foundation was founded in April 1985. It is surprising to realize that we have already had a history of ten years!

As we look back, we cannot but realize that there has been a timeliness in Amity's birth and continuing growth. Chinese Christians in larger and larger numbers feel a need to go beyond the walls of their churches and to express our faith and witness through social involvement. Christianity has an appeal to those with idealism who consider a cause such as Amity's worth identifying with. Christians abroad are looking for channels for ecumenical sharing with the church and the people in China. The Chinese government has adopted liberal policies of religious freedom and encourages people's initiatives in nation building.

There is no ground to suppose that these conditions will not continue in the next decade. We are determined to proceed with our work and to unite with friends on all sides in order to further the cause of LOVE and AMITY in China and beyond.

Bishop K.H. Ting, President of the Amity Foundation
In Search Of Universal Love
Chinese Scholar Discusses The Value Of Christianity For China's Society

At the age of 40, Prof. Zhuo Xiping is quite an accomplished scholar. In 1988, he returned to China from a five-year study program in Germany, where he became well versed in Western philosophy as well as Catholic and Protestant theology. His research earned him a doctor's degree from Munich University. Fluent in English and German, he has made the study of Christianity in both its Western and Chinese manifestations the focal point of his profession. Employed by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing, he heads the Christianity Division in the Academy's Institute of World Religions. In this capacity, Zhuo was a key partner in the cooperative process of planning and organizing the International Consultation on Christianity and Modernization.

"This is the first time that our institute has been involved in a conference focusing exclusively on Christianity," he commented at the end of the meeting, visibly pleased with its outcome. "We have already been successful, insofar as we have managed to bring together scholars from diverse cultural backgrounds, religious traditions and social systems. People got to know each other and learn about the different areas of research they are involved in. Of course, differences of views and opinions became obvious, too, but the meeting provided an opportunity to discuss questions more deeply and enhanced mutual understanding."

For Zhuo, one of the most important issues discussed at the consultation was the question of how Christianity can renew itself in the process of modernization and social transformation and thereby regain its public relevance. This is connected with the widely acknowledged concern for Christianity's inculturation and contextualization.

Though Zhuo is well experienced in the East-West encounter of religious studies, he said that he himself benefited from the conference, coming across questions he had not particularly reflected on before. How, for instance, can one define the relationship between the universal meaning of Christian religion and the particularity in which it embodies itself at different stages of history and in different human cultures? Where, in the course of contextualization, does the unchanging, universal identity of Christianity lie? "So far," Zhuo explained, "we Chinese scholars have generally perceived Christianity as a rather uniform, consistent system of teaching. This has to do with the fact that when we dealt with Christianity in the past, we mainly focused on China's mission history. But the expression of Christianity prevalent at that time should be viewed as relative, just one of the many different forms it adopted over the centuries.

Asked why he, although not a Christian himself, would welcome the idea of Christianity gaining greater social influence in China, Zhuo listed a number of reasons. In the modern world in which people are less bound by communal group identities, such as clans, classes, or ethnic groups, but rather encounter each other as individuals from a diversity of backgrounds, Zhuo sees the concept of universal love as a perfect base for a humane spirit. Christianity's spirit of self-sacrifice, its ideal of serving others, its concern for the common good and the sense of meaning it bestows on one's work all are constructive assets in the cultivation of high-minded personalities. The Christian religion, therefore, can provide a great deal of support in the building of China's spiritual civilization.

Furthermore, Zhuo recognizes that Christianity is more than a moral code for human goodness. As a religion, it is also concerned with transcendence and holiness. This provides very fundamental perspectives on humanity and helps people understand human life and the course of society from a strategically advantageous position. "People with such radically different and critical viewpoints may approach society more objectively and more actively, and thereby give valuable contributions in the fight against human failure and social shortcomings."

Inspite of his sympathetic view of Christianity, however, Zhuo keeps his scholarly distance. "I am not a Christian," he emphasized. "As an outsider, I have the privilege of being eclectic. I can choose what fascinates me, affirm what I find helpful, but I can also leave behind a lot of the baggage which burdens believers."

Gotthard Oblau
"No Mass Conversion Of Chinese Intellectuals To Christianity"

This was the prediction made by Li Pingye of the Chinese Association of Religious Studies in a paper presented at the International Consultation on Christianity and Modernization. The following text is a translated excerpt from the last part of her paper. The complete article will be included in a consultation report prepared by the Amity Foundation.

Although the number of Christians has grown quite significantly in recent years in comparison with the years before the Cultural Revolution, they remain a small minority when compared to the population of China as a whole; and Christian intellectuals are a minority within this minority, so hat in name as well as reality they are as Mao said in a different context) but "a small measure." And not only are they a tiny minority now, they will not become a majority of the Chinese population even in the future. Since the beginning of the period of reform and openness, quite a number of intellectuals who began with a scholarly interest subsequently became "enthralled" with Christianity, but they could still not say that this was their faith or foundation for being. Christianity is, for them, a rational object for investigation, like philosophy, history, literature, art and other disciplines.

The greatest mental block in Chinese intellectuals' unwillingness to accept Christian faith lies in the influence of traditional Chinese culture. Even though it has been vigorously attacked as the dregs of feudal society since the time of the May Fourth Movement, the several thousand years of cultural tradition have touched intellectuals to the marrow of their bones, so much so that traditional concepts and ways of thinking have been bred into them, making it impossible for any external or materialistic criticism to completely negate it and wipe it away...

Even those intellectuals who have already become Christians have been steeped in the Confucian cultural tradition over a long period of time. Although some of them have accepted Christian faith, they do not strictly observe traditional Christian disciplines and rituals, they are not very enthusiastic about the church and its pastors, and they do not expend much energy on religious rituals and activities such as worship, religious observance, Bible study, and prayer... They believe in Christianity with the Confucians' attention to the practical and the concrete, and with Taoism's free and easy style, a Christianity unconstrained by external forms and without dogma, but still a Christian faith which is tenaciously taken to heart. For Chinese Christian intellectuals, faith is a matter of the spiritual realm for the satisfaction of their own spiritual needs. It is part of their search and it is their choice, and it can be completed by their own efforts. This is perhaps the difference between the faith of Chinese Christian intellectuals and Christians from Western Christian cultures.

(Translated by Philip Wicker)

Christianity And Modernization: A Consultation Report

A consultation report of approximately 80 pages is being prepared by the Amity Foundation. Among other things, the report will contain the English versions of six selected papers presented by Chinese participants - Chen Zemin: Modernization's Challenge to Chinese Christianity; Duan Qi: Contextualization in the Contemporary Chinese Church; Li Pingye: A Preliminary Analysis of the Attitude of Contemporary Chinese Intellectuals Towards Christianity (see excerpt in this Newsletter); Sun Li: The Present Situation of Christianity from the Viewpoint of Young Christians: the Example of Shanghai; Sun Shanling: Popular Christianity in China; Zhuo Xinping: The Concept of Original Sin in the Cultural Encounter between East and West. The report will be available from the Overseas Coordination Office in June.
Memorial Fund To Present Awards To Rural Teachers

The Amity Foundation's Education Division established a Lynn Walters and Mose Kimata Memorial Fund which will present awards to outstanding teachers and rural health workers in the townships and villages of Ganzhou Prefecture in southern Jiangxi Province. The fund was named after two foreign language teachers who died in Jiangxi over the past two years while they were serving China under the Amity teachers program. Their spirit of self-sacrificing dedication and the work they left unfinished will continue to bear fruit through the memorial fund. At a time when many young Chinese professionals are moving to urban centers and coastal areas in order to profit from the country's booming economy, the fund will aim at acknowledging and encouraging the commitment of those who stay behind in the hinterland.

More Village Doctors Upgrade Their Skills

With the support of the Amity Foundation, 12 one-year training courses for village paramedics are held in six different provinces of Western China. Under the program, which is now in its third year, funded by the German-based Protestant Association for Co-operation in Development (EZE) and the Church of Sweden Mission (CSM), a total of 1,450 trainees from remote rural areas (mostly inhabited by ethnic minorities) study preventive and basic clinical medicine to upgrade their diagnostic skills and their performance in community health work. Courses are taught at county and district-level medical schools in the provinces of Yunnan, Guizhou, Guangxi, Sichuan, Gansu and Qinghai. With a financial contribution of 1,650 yuan (US$196) per person, Amity covers the trainees' tuition, textbooks, medical kits and part of their living allowances.

From 27 to 29 December, Amity held a seminar in Nanjing for people involved in the organization of the training courses. Among the participants, who came from the above six provinces, were administrators from provincial and regional health departments, and medical school leaders as well as hospital superintendents. Together with the Amity coordinator of the program, (Ms.) Li Enlin, they evaluated experience from previous courses and discussed ways to further adjust the curriculum to local needs and to create a follow-up program for trainees after graduation. During the evaluation process, careful consideration was given to a report by a group of international experts who visited the training courses on an EZE-initiated fact-finding tour earlier last year.

An additional 100 village health workers are under training in Amity courses in Shandong and Jiangsu provinces. Amity also initiated courses for 500 township doctors.

Blindness Prevention Programs To Be Expanded

Under the coordination of the Amity Division of Blindness Prevention and Special Education and in close cooperation with the international aid agency Christian Blind Mission, 40 training courses in basic ophthalmology and primary eye care are planned for 14 different provinces and ethnic minority areas, mostly in western China. Over 1,100 township and county doctors as well as rural paramedics will be trained in the prevention and treatment of blindness. Courses will cover a broad spectrum of issues, ranging from the performance of cataract operations to methods of community-based rehabilitation for the blind. The program will benefit from the year-long experience Amity has gained from organizing similar courses in various parts of China. In 1994 alone, Amity spent a total of 1.3 million yuan (US$154,000) on blindness-related training programs for over 700 trainees.

Wells And Trees Ensure Drinking Water Supply

To assist villagers in gaining new and convenient access to clean drinking water, Amity's Rural Development Division sponsored 48 projects in Guizhou, Zhejiang, Henan, Anhui, Jiangsu and Shandong during 1994. A two-year program is under way in arid parts of western Henan Province, where 20 villages were selected to receive improved access to ground water. One of these villages will also see an afforestation program, which is intended to demonstrate the importance of tree planting in preserving soil and ground water and diminishing vaporization.

Rural women and children: new ways of empowerment (Photo: Kathy Call)
New Ways To Empower Rural Women And Children

In 1994, the Amity Foundation became involved in two new types of rural development projects. In four different counties in Guizhou, Shandong and north Jiangsu, the Amity Foundation initiated technical training courses for rural women. Under the program, to which Amity contributed 110,000 yuan (US$13,000), 1,500 women earned machine and hand embroidery. The program was carried out in cooperation with local branches of the All China Women's Federation, the Association of Industry and Commerce and local companies. Another program activity was geared toward school children. In Guizhou and Yunnan, as well as in the mountains of Jiangsu and Shandong, Amity helped 1,015 children to return to school. They had dropped out of school because their families could no longer afford to pay the school fees. In the first year of the program, Amity provided a subsidy of 90 yuan (US$11) for each of the children, who were orphans or from households below the official poverty line or from families with at least one disabled or seriously ill person. Priority was given to girls, handicapped children, those from national minorities and from extremely poor villages.

Integrated Project Targets Eleven Villages In Guizhou

An integrated rural development project is under way in Ruding County, Guizhou Province. With an average annual per-capita income of 306 yuan (US$36), the county is on the national list of poor counties. However, development aid from the central government, which is mainly spent to support large-scale infrastructure projects and the county administration, does not directly help the poorest in the county. The Amity Foundation decided to direct its support to 11 mountain villages in two selected townships with an average annual per-capita income of 252 and 242 yuan (US$20 to 30) respectively. Programs include soil conservancy, slope-terracing, afforestation and fruit planting, the construction of irrigation, drinking water and bio-gas systems, animal husbandry, the training of village paramedics, income generation for women and incentives for children's school attendance. The entire project scheme, which received a first input of 360,000 yuan (US$42,700) in 1994, will be implemented over a three-year period and cost approximately 11 million yuan (US$1,305,000). Of the 41,000 beneficiaries, more than one-third belong to ethnic minority groups.

Farmers Brave Drought With Amity Pumping Stations

Despite an unusual 1994 summer drought in northern Jiangsu, news of good harvests was reported from three villages where a year before farmers had built two Amity-sponsored electric pumping stations to improve irrigation. While many villages in the area had minimal yields which barely replaced the seeds sown, the villages of Zhangzhuang, Fangwan and Tongxing braved the disaster and in part achieved even better results than in 1993.

Amity Advances WCC Campaign Against Climate Change

At the request of the World Council of Churches, the Amity Foundation translated into Chinese and published a study document entitled “Accelerated Climate Change - Sign of Peril, Test of Faith.” Produced by the WCC Program Unit on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation, the document describes the scientific evidence for the threat of an impending climate catastrophe, reviews international responses, explores related theological issues, proclaims ethical imperatives and proposes actions for churches worldwide. Intending to alert Christians to the causes and consequences of the global problem, the paper also provides a foundation for dialogue and advocacy with governments, non-governmental organizations, industry, scientists, economists and international agencies.

The Chinese edition of the paper will be distributed through the China Christian Council as well as the Hong Kong Christian Council to Christian churches and other organizations on the Chinese mainland and in Hong Kong respectively. Chinese copies are available also from WCC headquarters.
Your Twenty-Five Dollars Make A Difference
Through Amity's Special Needs Fund

On the threshold of our second decade, we have created a new path for our friends to contribute to China's social development.

While working in partnership with larger communities, we have discovered that it is also essential to meet the needs of individuals, families and Christian meeting points head on. The costs are low but the impact profound. In response to this new challenge, the Amity Foundation has established the Special Needs Fund.

Through this fund, we channel limited but well-directed support to people who, in connection with their greater communities, take part in our efforts for a better future. In most cases, this fund takes care of the individual side of our large-scale, integrated projects.

The Special Needs Fund offers an avenue for individuals and congregations inside and outside of China to give donations in a transparent and purposeful way. Any amount, small as it may be, is much more than a drop in the ocean. As a sign of Christian love and presence in China, your donation makes all the difference in the world - for somebody, somewhere, in the category of your choice.

**With US$25.00, you can help a child return to school.**
Every year in China more than four million pupils - up to 30% of students in some counties - drop out of school because their parents cannot afford tuition or textbooks. This problem is amplified for disabled children and girls, and in cases where a family member is suffering from a physical or mental disability or a parent has passed away.

**With US$25.00, you can buy two goats for a poor family.**
Shortages of food, energy, housing and water have led to the destruction of the ecological balance. New forms of subsistence must be found. Goats can graze on otherwise unfertile land and will supply livestock products and organic fertilizer.

**With US$100.00, you can provide a hearing aid and training for a deaf child.**
In China, one million pre-school age children are deaf. Eighty percent of these children have residual hearing and if early diagnosis and intervention is possible, a large number of these hearing-impaired children can be brought back to the world of sound.

**With US$100.00, you can offer a year's training for a village health worker.**
Health care workers, inadequately trained and often only semi-literate, may be seen laboriously copying characters from a list of common prescriptions, at times making fatal mistakes. Because 75% of the Chinese population lives in villages, health care workers are responsible for the majority of China's patients. Amity training programs focus on grassroots needs, covering preventive medicine, diagnosis and treatment of communicable ailments, gynaecology and obstetrics as well as the knowledge of when to send a patient for outside treatment.

**With US$1,500.00, you can support a medical clinic run by a rural church.**
Between eight and nine percent of all peasants in China live in poverty caused by disease. Often accommodate in extremely simple compounds of mud houses in remote areas, local church clinics may be the only places where poor farmers can receive medical treatment. Local churches are living out their faith as congregations offer money and labor, retired doctors offer skills, and young people renounce lucrative careers to help meet the neighbours' physical needs.

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