

CATHOLIC EDUCATION IN CHINA

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THE scope of this present article is to treat of educational development, not as portrayed in the general history of the Church in all nations, but in that budding flower of the Orient, the Catholic Church, in China. China is synonymous for conservatism. With a history dating back over four thousand years, and a civilization antedating that of her European neighbors she has a glory that is of yesterday, and of today, and, it is hoped, of tomorrow. This must be kept in mind in any consideration of educational development in China.

For centuries China has tenaciously held to the traditional teachings of her ancestors. Her policy has been the exclusion of all that was not Chinese. Like a pool of water, into which no fresh stream flows, and with no outlet, China has become stagnant, and this to such a degree that new China realizes the need of educational intercourse with the outside world. The immediate occasion of the awakening was the Chino-Japanese war of 1895. And in 1898 the emperor Kuang-hsu was convinced that China must adopt a more progressive system of education. Since then till the present day much has been accomplished, mostly due, however, to the untiring efforts of Christian missionaries, which were approved and seconded by the leaders of the Chinese empire.

Catholic education in China for centuries has always been linked up with and bound to the missionary endeavor of Catholic missionary priests and sisters. Missionaries were expected not only to preach the gospel of Christ, but also to educate the young in the rudiments of science and learning. They understood fully that just as to educate without religion has a tendency to make men criminals, so also, to evangelize without education is apt to make them superstitious. Hence the first thing the missionaries did after establishing the faith was to build and conduct schools wherein could be taught the reasonableness of this faith.

Despite the noble work of the early missionaries in China, the history of Catholic education is pitifully meagre. The total number of students attending Catholic schools of all grades, according to latest statistics is 101,772. With the new impetus created in the modern mind of China by the World War, and by the opening of her ports to foreign civilization, a vast field was opened up for Catholic as well as Protestant missionary activities. The work of educating China must needs be slow, but now that the gates have been opened it will be sure.

Side by side with this golden opportunity of saving China to the Faith of Christ lies a danger that threatens the civilization and culture of China. With the fall of the Chinese empire in 1911, there is no restraining force to hold the people of China to the ancient traditions, and to preserve its ancient literary treasures and art. This state of affairs is partly due to the industrialism of modern trend of thought and partly to adverse activities in China itself. For China is disrupted by military governors, terrorized by Bolshevism, and confused by Protestant missionary activities. The work of educating must be along modern lines, but at the same time it must preserve the ancient traditions and culture that is so characteristic of China. This work is the providential sphere of the Catholic Church.

The Catholic Church, from the earliest ages, over and above her divine commission to preach the Gospel to all nations, has ever been a lover and guardian of true science. It was due to her far-seeing and unbiased interest that the classics were preserved for us. Her ancient cathedrals are a living testimony of her love for art. Side by side, down through the ages, have walked Plato and Augustine, Aristotle and Aquinas. She has been the instrument in the hands of God that has preserved for us the truths of faith and science alike. By her restraining hand she has held in check the various errors, which if let run their course would have destroyed true science. By her equal respect for Scripture and Tradition she has inspired in her members a similar respect not only for the Sacred Sciences but also for the profane sciences. The Church, aided by the illustrious Order of St. Benedict, has been the civilizer of Europe in the time when Europe was being overrun by the barbarian hordes from the North and the East. With civilization and culture at the mercy of these hordes, who seemed to threaten even the very foundation of the Church itself, God raised up St. Benedict. This founder and father of monasticism in the West, by his

noble brotherhood, brought the civilizing and Christianizing influence of the gospel of Christ to the conversion of the pagans of his time. By their untiring efforts in cloister and in school-room they taught the rudiments of Christianity and science to the children of the nobility and poorer classes alike.

Again in the twelfth century God raised up St. Dominic and St. Francis to combat the errors of Albigensianism, and in the sixteenth century St. Ignatius Loyola, to bring to naught the ragings of the so-called Protestant reformers. Thus, as different needs arise, God in His all-watching Providence inspires men and women to bring to the front religious organizations to combat the schisms and heresies both in faith and science that would rent the seamless garment of the Church. Cardinal Gasquet in his introduction to Montalembert's *Monks of the West* notes that few nations of the modern world have been converted to Christianity or tutored in the arts of peace, except through the medium of monasticism. Now again in this twentieth century a similar need arises in China to preserve its glorious past, and, as in the fifth century, Christ's vicar, the Pope, calls upon the monks of the Benedictine family, to preserve for future generations that culture of China which has endured for ages, and which is now threatened with destruction.

As Rev. J. A. Walsh, in his *Observations in the Orient*, writes, "The battle of Christianity and Paganism is being rapidly transferred to the schools." With the Church in China most unfortunately placed in regard to Christian education, the need of a school of higher Catholic education for the Chinese youth becomes imperative. China must govern herself through her leaders; these, in turn, must govern and educate the masses. The education of China must not, however, be foreign, it must be Chinese. This is absolutely necessary for the preservation of Chinese culture. Abel Bonnard in his admirable book *In China* sums up the situation in these words: "Many of those who go abroad for education only develop an acid and jealous disposition towards the nation they are visiting in proportion as they lose their feeling for their own country. In the present state of affairs of the world there is no nobler end to be adopted than that of preserving the different separate spirits of the world in their integrity."

Catholic education along higher studies, then, is most imperative, because Catholic education alone is possessed with that vitality and completeness which alone can save the culture

and civilization of China according to the modern methods of American and European civilization. This is the reason why a Catholic University for China is the one means of saving the true faith and true science there, and this, without destroying the ancient glories of the past.

The need for a Catholic University was first voiced in an appealing letter sent to the Holy Father, Pius X, in 1913, by the late Mr. Vincent Ying, Catholic journalist and scholar. The remedy suggested by His Eminence Cardinal van Rossum, Prefect of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, was "that the Order of St. Benedict, which during the Middle Ages saved Latin and Greek literature, should found in the city of Peking, an institute of higher Chinese studies, as the most apt means of fostering a more vigorous growth of our Holy Religion in the vast territory of China."

Thus was begun a work of higher education in China. The real work of establishing and assuming responsibility was not yet completed. The details and arrangement were to take form on August 7, 1923, when the American Cassinese Benedictines met in General Chapter in Lisle, Illinois. They agreed to accept the suggestion of Propaganda. The time ensuing till June, 1924, was spent in preliminary arrangements. On June 10, 1924, Archabbot Aurelius, of St. Vincent Archabbey, directed two monks of that abbey to proceed to China at once. On October 1, 1925, the new university was formally opened. From that time till the present day it has been functioning under the title of the Catholic University of Peking. At first it was suggested to name it the Benedictine University, but, as the Archabbot Aurelius pointed out, the work was of such great importance and would take on such vast proportions, as to engage not only the co-operation of the Benedictines but that of other religious orders and organizations; and hence it seemed more appropriate to name it the Catholic University.

A great work was thus begun, a work whose influence will be felt throughout future ages in China. Its purpose is to educate China in a Chinese fashion. It must be borne in mind that this new enterprise is not for the purpose of inculcating foreign national ideas into the youth of the land, but to educate China along her own scale. It is not the first attempt, since the Jesuits have already two institutions of higher learning established in the country, both of which are in a promising state for the future.

Interest in China and in things Chinese is growing. At the present time the press is overflowing with literature on China. Missionary activity has taken on renewed vigor. Men and women, filled with the zeal for the salvation of souls, are daily multiplying. Just as the Saviour has arisen out of the East, and has extended His influence towards the West, so too does His saving Word of Truth move from the East and travel toward the West, and move on toward a great people. This people has a great future before it, if it perseveres in the way of justice and order, as our Holy Father, Pius XI, has stated. Who knows but that some day China shall be the leader in thought and civilization. For the effect of this great educational factor on things Chinese can readily be judged from its effect upon the barbarian tribes that at one time overran Europe. From pagans they were converted into Christians, from vandals into educators and scholars. So shall China from the darkness of error and superstition burst forth into the light and freedom of the gospel. Error cannot be driven out by error. This work is the work of the Catholic Church, that church founded upon the rock of Truth and whose influence shall endure forever. To her alone was given the commission to teach the gospel to all nations. She alone shall be the salvation of China.

China's whole salvation depends upon her acceptance of this Catholic Faith. This acceptance must be wholehearted, it must extend not only to the Catholic conversion but to the Catholic education of her youth. Religion without education will evangelize China, and save her for Christ, but religion and education will save China for herself. This great work now begun shall either be with Christ unto salvation, or without Christ unto perdition.

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