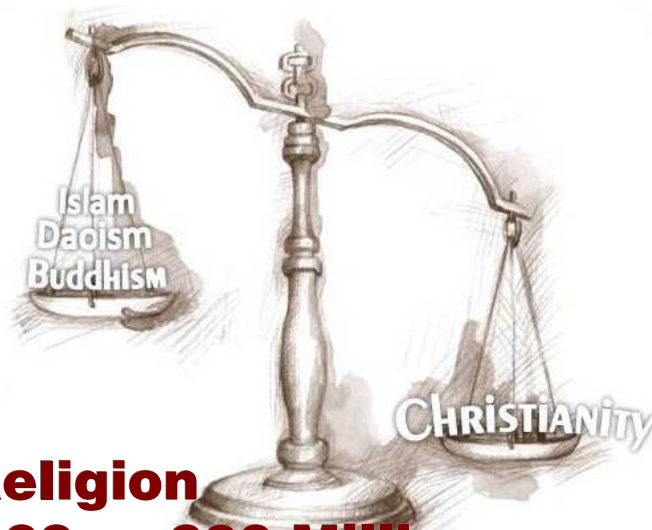


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PART III



“When a Religion Reaches 200 or 300 Million CAN IT BE CONTROLLED?”

Translated by Tony Lambert

In our March-April edition I translated the first part of this important article which was first published in Beijing in June 2010 by the China Social Sciences Press. The article is entitled: “An Analysis of the Reasons for the Rapid Growth of Christianity in Today’s China”. In Part II I conclude the translation that includes some amazing and breathtaking statistics which show that the experts advising the Chinese government at the highest level recognise the enormous growth of Protestant Christianity as a fact and predict that this growth will be so explosive in the coming decades that it may well change the face of China.

“But the 4 above factors [see Part I] are insufficient to explain the rapid growth of Christianity in China; we need to seek causes internal to Christianity itself. Christianity is one of the great world religions. As a type of faith it has many superior qualities, which is why it has the most believers in the world. But for all sorts of reasons Christianity has

formed a whole system of missionary expansion, especially in the modern era. Accompanying the growth of Western political, economic and military power, its propagation has seen some new characteristics causing it to spread throughout the world. This is one reason why Christians are to be found across the globe. Thus, the expansion of Christianity is connected to its character and its method of propagation. In China we see that the propagation of Christianity has distinctives very different from Buddhism, Daoism and Islam, and from these we can see how, since the Open Door Reform Policy [in 1979], it has enjoyed explosive growth.

Firstly, Christianity is absolutely exclusive. All religions stress they have the absolute truth, but this is particularly apparent in Christianity. It is monotheistic and rejects other faiths such as Daoism. With the growth of capitalism, Western culture enjoyed a revival with Christian culture at its heart. The combined strength of the

Western powers increased Christianity's sense of superiority even more. From claiming to have the only truth it became conceited, and this fed its ambition to 'export religion'. On a global scale it promotes 'universal values' and a political system with Christian culture at its heart, thus fulfilling the Western World's 'Great Commission', led by the United States. Through all kinds of political, economic, military & cultural means, it promotes its values throughout the world and fulfils its strategic objectives.

Secondly, Christianity makes mission its sacred calling. This is why a tiny country like South Korea has more than 30,000 missionaries.

Thirdly, the propagation of Christianity has the political power of the great powers behind it, and there

is a certain element of church and state mixed together. In modern times there have been two ways in which Christianity has been spread in China: first, reliance on military power; secondly, using economic power. As some people petitioned the Emperor [in Qing times]: "The heavy guns and the Bibles fly together, and good works and missionary work are intertwined." The present writer does not approve of this rude juxtaposition of Bibles and guns, but this was the feeling of the masses when China was opened up at gunpoint. Before 1949 the propagation of Christianity in China was not unconnected to the gunboats. Since the Open Door policy it has relied more upon economic power, charities and using money to smooth its path. The relatively poor Chinese believers could not have built so many hugely expensive churches without overseas help.

THE DANGER OF A CHRISTIAN MONOPOLY



Since the beginning of the Open Door policy, the explosive growth of Christianity in China is an unquestionable reality. The theory that 'religions have become unbalanced' [in their growth] is widely received. Common sense tells us that when a religion grows ten-fold and more in a short space of time this is abnormal. Researcher Duan Qi points out that the non-institutionalised church has thrown off the restrictions placed on evangelism by the TSPM and Christian Council, believing they have received the 'Great Commission' from Jesus to spread Christianity. They have ignored government prohibitions; so the government has found it hard to control them, and they have gained a great number of converts. We can see that one of the reasons for the growth of the house-churches is they avoid government control.

Mr Lu Daji points out that we must resist the hegemony of Western Christian culture and reaffirm Chinese culture and religion, passing on the best parts of the religious and traditional cultures of the Chinese people so that the broad masses of people will find a spiritual home in their own traditional religious culture.

So, is the theory of a 'loss of balance between religions' harmful? I believe it to be so, in both theory and practice. The consideration of the rapid growth of Christianity makes people worried about the speed and method of this growth. Very soon Christianity will be 'one religion with a monopoly' or even 'one religion with a hegemony' which will produce a series of unfortunate results.

Firstly, it will seriously damage the balance of religions in China and worsen the religious environment. Some researchers point out that in the last 3 decades Christianity has expanded enormously, 'increasing by one million converts every year', to become the first and largest religion in China [chengwei Zhongguo diyi dajiao]. Collating all the statistics, we estimate the number of Protestants to be around 40 million on average, so with one million converts annually over the last 30 years, in another 20 years we give a conservative figure of about 60 million, but after 50 years conservatively there will be over 100 million Protestant Christians. As there is the tradition in Christianity of 'everyone can be an evangelist', as the number of believers multiplies so does the number of evangelists, so even more people become believers. So a moderate estimate is that, in 50 years time, the number of Christians will be 150-200 million. Mr Lu Daji estimates that in just the next 20 years there will be 200 million and even 300 million Christians (in his paper presented in 2008 to the United Front Research Group).

We can see proof of this in the growth of Christianity in South Korea, which is similar to China in being a country with a traditional culture centred on Buddhism and Confucianism. In South Korea beginning in the 1970s, in just a short period of three decades, the Christian population grew to become 35% of the total population and to become the largest religion there. From this we can see that our estimates are no empty talk – they are even rather conservative. Christianity can expect an even faster rate of growth which will

destroy the balance between religions in China and create a crisis in the religious situation.

We can say with certainty that it is not a case that the 'loss of balance between religions' has rescued Christianity, but rather that the rapid growth of Christianity has already destroyed, or will very soon destroy, the present situation of a balance between religions. It is not that a decline in Chinese Buddhism, Daoism or, in particular, folk-religion, which has 'created' this rapid growth of Christianity, but rather that the 'monopoly' or even 'hegemony' of Christianity has already, or will very soon, produce a further blow to folk-religion, Buddhism and Daoism. It is not that the government's religious policy has led to the so-called loss of balance between religions, but rather that illegal Christian evangelism has challenged the government religious policy and finally brought about the break-up of the religious situation in China.

Secondly, this [rapid growth] will affect national security. The traditional view of national security stresses economic, political and military security, but does not pay much attention to ideological or cultural security. But against the background of globalisation, cultural and ideological security can be often ignored, so that ideological & cultural aggression easily gain the upper hand. Western powers, with America at their head, deliberately export Christianity to China and carry out all kinds of illegal evangelistic activities. Their basic aim is to use Christianity to change the character of the regime in power in China and to overturn it. As some Western analysts have pointed out, this is 'a battle to gain the very soul of China'. 'The confrontation between America and China is in essence an ideological one between socialist atheism and Christian theism, a confrontation between traditional Confucian pragmatism and the Christian spirit of seeking the heavenly kingdom, also between a renewed Buddhism and Christian opposition to idolatry. It is a confrontation between the international system of Christian values and the values of traditional nationalism and Marxism. It is a contest between American Protestantism and Chinese Communism, and a contest between American Christians and China's traditional forces.' (Yu Ge, *America's Essence*, 2006, Modern China Publishers.) David Aikman points out that when more than 30% of China's population become Christians, then China will become a Christianized nation; in fact, the greatest Christian nation, and the lamb of Jesus will overcome the dragon of China. (*Jesus in Beijing*, 2003.) Thus, if we do not take notice of how the West uses Christianity to westernise, split, Christianize and 'gospel-ize' China,

1 It will seriously damage the balance of religions in China and worsen the religious environment.

2 This (rapid growth) will affect national security.

3 This will change the religious map in China causing social contradictions and clashes in some areas.

then this will create a great blow to our national security.

Thirdly, this will change the religious map in China causing social contradictions and clashes in some areas. Some areas previously without Christians will now have a large number; many people who previously believed in other religions will now become Christians; some areas with few Christians will now become totally Christian. This will challenge the government's control of society and its public services, and create confrontation and clashes between Christian culture and traditional culture, and between Christians and believers in other religions. These situations are happening continuously already. For instance, in one area where there were no Christians, and so no churches planned, now there are many Christians who are demanding a church built in the city centre. But the government temporarily has no place to give permission, so there are a large number of house-churches who rent premises to carry out religious activities, which thus poses a problem for the government wanting to manage religious affairs according to the law. Or in another place when Muslims hold funerals, Christian evangelists give out tracts arousing great opposition from the Muslims.

Some people estimate that there are at present between 35 and 50 million Protestants. If we take away 16 million believers in the institutional [TSPM] church, then the non-institutional church [house-churches] have grown to between 19 and 34 million, far outnumbering the institutional church. Mr Lu Daji has pointed out: 'When a religion has reached 200-300 million believers, can it be controlled any longer?'

With so many Christians not recognising the 'Three Self' principles as the policy to manage religion, our policy of maintaining independence and self-reliance in religion will be challenged. If we are unable to hold the

line here, this will damage our independent foreign policy and cause the government to lose control of religion in accordance with the law, and make Christianity once again a political and spiritual tool of control for the West, and make Christianity [in China] a pawn of the Western church.

Faced with this abnormal growth, we must undertake State interference, and to take legal and administrative means so that religion does not have a free market and expand out of control. This interference has two sides: firstly, undertaking every kind of work to strengthen our foundations, and heighten our joint national strength, strengthening the racial pride and self-confidence of the Chinese people. Also, strengthening the system of core socialist values and propagating the superior cultural traditions of the Chinese people and eliminating the present fertile bed causing the disorderly expansion of Christianity, as well as resisting infiltration from abroad which uses religion. Secondly,

as regards Christianity's growth inside the country, we must use the method of combining government policy leadership to control it according to the law and undertake ideological education, so gradually the Christianity fever calms down and we can establish normal religious order.

The present rapid growth of Christianity destroys the religious balance and is a negative influence on the State and society and Christianity itself. Thus, we must formulate a strategic plan and take comprehensive action to resolve the problem.

[End of translation.]

The reader will see the importance of this article as revealing the kind of advice currently being given by researchers to the government at the highest level. It may explain why there is no thaw in religious policy and continuing pressure on the house-churches.
