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A Controversy, Made in Manila

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Fr. Antoine Wenger, answering those who argued as though the soutane were "essential" to the priesthood, wrote in *La Croix*: "The sanctity of the priest, that is the essential thing. Woe to the priest for whom the clerical dress would be the sole mark of a consecrated state! Woe to the priest whose spirit of consecration and of detachment from the world were to vanish with the disappearance of the clerical dress! In his relations with people, what is important for the priest is the effectiveness of the witness he gives and the greater or smaller possibility of being present to men."

In a lengthy article on the "tradition" of the soutane, "Une centenaire: La soutane," *Etudes*, July-August 1962, Father Robert Rouquette wrote that in France it was only a hundred years ago, in 1852, that the diocesan authorities of Paris imposed the soutane as the clerical dress. Canon Law, he noted, requires a clerical outfit, but leaves its form to each bishop. He concluded: "In our laical society, the long black robe has become strangely archaic. It does not facilitate contact with the mass of indifferents, and often, in a proletarian and dechristianized *milieu*, it simply repels."

Following closely upon the decree of the Paris authorities was the announcement in January 1963 that Belgian priests from now on would wear a clerical suit and collar in the street instead of the soutane.

NICHOLAS P. CUSHNER

A Controversy, Made in Manila

Dictionaries tell us that the word good-bye is a contraction of the phrase "God be with you!" Still, it would be a bold champion of separation of Church and State who would bring a teacher to court today for bidding her pupils good-bye in a State-owned classroom. The word is no longer, implicitly, a profession of faith in God; it has been voided of its religious content.

But the process of secularization took time. There was a period when those who used the phrase intended seriously to invoke the Deity. Keeping these facts in mind may help one to understand what was at issue in the thorny problem of the Chinese Rites two or three centuries ago.

The publication of George H. Dunne's book, *Generation of Giants*, reviewed by Father Austin Dowd, S.J., elsewhere in this issue of *Philippine Studies*, effected something of a break-through in modern writing by responsible Catholic historians on this question.

The Rites controversy, upon which differences of Jesuit and non-Jesuit mission methods came to converge, derived much of its impetus from interpretations advanced in Manila regarding reports received from China. From Manila the dispute spread to Europe, where it raged with lamentable and destructive bitterness.

It involved popes of Rome and emperors of China, cardinal legates and bishops, theologians, humanists and rationalists. The debate swirled through the academic halls of European universities. It became a *cause célèbre* at the Sorbonne in Paris. Certainly at no time before, and probably at no time since, has any question affecting China been the object of such universal, feverish, even impassioned, interest in the European world. (Dunne, p. 230)

In 1742, Pope Benedict XIV, by the Bull *Ex quo singulari*, confirmed a prohibition of the Chinese Rites, and banned further debate under pain of severe ecclesiastical penalties. For 200 years discussion on the question was frozen. But in a decree of December 8, 1939, the Holy See authorized Christians to take part in the civil ceremonies honoring Confucius, and also to perform the ancient manifestations of civil respect before the graves or pictures of the deceased, or even before tablets inscribed with their names.

No one wants to exacerbate old wounds or to revive long-quiescent animosities. The past, however, can teach us lessons of value only on a solid and fairly broad groundwork of historical truth. After the 1939 decision, research upon, and evaluation of, the elements of the Rites controversy were gradually resumed. Now Father Dunne provides readers of English with a book-length treatment of the question, carefully documented and skillfully presented in a context quite understandable.

Of key significance in the Jesuit position regarding this dispute was the viewpoint formulated by Alessandro Valignano, who reached Macao in 1577. He soon recognized the high level of China's civilization and the rich development of her ethical code. Reporting to the General of his Order in Rome, he maintained that the only way to bring Christian truth and life into China would be utterly different from the methods hitherto employed in other missions of the Orient.

Instead of attempting to graft itself as a foreign substance upon the resistant and unfriendly body of Chinese culture, Christianity must endeavor, as leaven, to transform it from within. This meant a return to apostolic methods such as originally converted the Roman empire. The Chinese converts should remain thoroughly Chinese, and the missionaries should conform themselves to Chinese ways in every respect not at variance with Christian faith and morals. (Dunne, p. 17)

Valignano's insight was implemented with wonderful breadth of vision, steadiness of purpose, and generosity of spirit by his confreres: Michele Ruggieri, Matteo Ricci, Nicolo Longobardo, Diego de Pantoia, Johann Adam Schall, Nicolas Trigault, Giulio Aleni, Ferdinand Verbiest, and others.

These priests assumed Chinese dress and learned Chinese manners. With genuine respect, inwardly, they tried to make the psycho-

logy and culture of China their own. Several of them so mastered the written language that they produced in elegant style enduringly popular works which opened out Christian thought to Chinese minds. They rendered expert assistance in elaborating the Chinese calendar, in preparing world and domestic maps for the Chinese, in sharing the gains of Western mathematics, astronomy, hydraulics and other sciences with Peking scholars. They even founded cannons for the armies of the Ming dynasty.

They undertook these labors to establish a rapport and confidence which, notwithstanding age-old aloofness and self-sufficiency, won missionaries a degree of freedom to proclaim their message and to form an infant Church of exceptional Christian quality. A striking number of loyal and zealous converts from the scholar class crowned these efforts. The Chinese scholar of that epoch was much more than an intellectual; he had far-reaching social and political influence.

The induction rites by which those who successfully passed exacting examinations attained the dignity and rights of scholars included obeisance to a tablet representing Confucius. Similar ceremonies with ritual bows and the burning of incense were observed by officials and scholars at the new moon and the full moon. Refusal to perform these ceremonies was tantamount to a renunciation of the scholar's status, and an abdication of his influence.

Confucius was regarded as the master of learning, and his teachings were respected as a main font of social harmony and good order in Chinese life. As the primary natural virtue, the axis and exemplar of the rest, he emphasized filial piety. With the obedience, respect, and service of parents which this piety implied, a sound basis for the structure of Chinese society was laid.

At first glance these ceremonies, and others in home and family honoring deceased parents or forebears, were disquieting to Western eyes. Yet the Jesuits came to recognize it as strongly probable that the rites had become transposed into what was simply a tribute of honor to the Confucian code of natural ethics, and an impressive acting out of due submission and docility towards the still living heads of families.

The custom of burning incense, for instance, prevailed widely without religious connotation in Chinese society. A well-bred host received his guests with incense, in accord with an etiquette that gave charm and grace to social relations. The gesture was not reserved to signify worship offered to a god.

Unwilling to impose upon consciences burdens which did not surely come from God, the Jesuits felt they need not insist that Chinese Catholics abandon these usages so central to their domestic, social,

and political life. Discerning familiarity with Chinese culture taught them to distinguish between the wholesome moral teachings of Confucius, and the materialist interpretations of some later Confucianists.

The philosophy of Aristotle, a pagan, was assimilated by Christians, and a statue of Aristotle is often given a place of honor in the halls of Catholic universities. Confucius merits no less honor in China. The explicit atheism of his Sung dynasty interpreters cannot, of course, be syncretized with Christian truth, any more than can Taoist superstitions, which in some places were interwoven with family homage to ancestors. But any blanket condemnation of Confucius and the piety rites seemed contrary to charity and prudence.

Other questions related to the basic policy of missionary adaptation concerned the formation of a native clergy, the choice of terms in the Chinese language for specifically Christian concepts like grace, and the use of Chinese in the celebration of Mass.

Most of the pioneer China Jesuits strongly argued that Chinese were no less fitted for the priesthood than Europeans. The majority of Japan missionaries were opposed to this idea. One report described the Japanese as "secretive, lacking a desire for perfection, wanting in zeal and in the purity of intention required for a religious vocation."

This was a harsh judgment to pass upon a people many of whom would in the next twenty years suffer martyrdom, some of whom had already died bravely for the faith. . . . Among a people to whom faith is new, where time and tradition have not had a chance to develop a deep understanding of the severe demands of priestly life, the problem of a native clergy is much more difficult than some on occasion have realized. . . . The first vicars apostolic in Cochin-China learned this to their cost when, filled with enthusiasm for the cause, they ordained catechists who were wholly unsuited for the disciplined and celibate life of the priesthood. (Dunne, p. 167)

This darker view prevailed in directives from Rome for China; but before the policy had congealed, the Jesuits succeeded in winning from the Holy See permission for Chinese priests to celebrate Mass and recite the Divine Office in Chinese. The genesis and later history of the brief *Romanae Ecclesiae Antistes*, which Pope Paul V issued to this effect in 1615, makes timely reading in our present period of widening liturgical horizons.

Father Dunne claims that the difficulties which arose between Jesuits, Dominicans and Franciscans in China had their roots more in differences of national temperament than in differences between religious orders. For reasons historically understandable, the Iberian mind was less open to respect for the wholesome potential of natural human talents and virtues than the Italians and northern Europeans enriched by Renaissance humanism. Spain and Portugal had imperialist interests in the Orient to promote or defend. Italy was not yet a nation; Schall's Cologne and Trigault's Douai were little concerned with conquests of new lands as such.

Manila is rather consistently the villain of the piece in the part of the China mission story that tells of attempts at adaptation. Some-

thing of the contrast between Manila and mainland mission mentalities is reflected on a page of Fr. de la Costa's *The Jesuits in the Philippines*. "Bishop Domingo de Salazar, in 1585, suddenly decreed that all Chinese must cut off their queues before baptism and wear their hair in the Spanish fashion thereafter. Many Chinese took great pride in their queues and finding this requirement an insuperable difficulty stopped going to the catechism classes" (*op. cit.*, p. 69). Reasons for this decree are advanced; but it seems that the Chinese of the time cut neither their hair nor their finger-nails, unwilling to mutilate the heritage they had received from their revered ancestors. A sensitive apostle would respect this. The essential demand of monogamy was a heroic condition of baptism for many; accidental elements such as the hair-do could have been overlooked.

When about fifteen thousand Chinese were massacred in and near Manila in 1603, the resultant resentment in China embarrassed the missionaries. But another Manila malaise, chronic character-assassination, practised at the time against Jesuit missionaries and their Order in isolated China, proved in the long run more devastating.

It is sobering, and even appalling, to read how hasty observers, with a human impulse to justify their failures against extremely complex resistance, misinterpreted and misrepresented the wise and devoted mission policies of men long hard at work in the field. The returned missionary, with a bleeding heart, with time on his hands, and with an audience perversely more ready to believe evil than good of others, is too often an unreliable witness and not a messenger of good will.

With access to Fr. Dunne's book, honest English readers will no longer be tempted to repeat canards unjust to the memory of great men, saying that they lightly suppressed integral points of Christian morality, or failed to preach Christ crucified, or indulged inordinate ambition for positions of human influence and material comfort. None of us will have an excuse for over-simplification of the truly difficult and conscience-searing question of the Chinese Rites as it was posed variously in the provinces of China from 1600 to 1650.

The book *Generation of Giants* leaves something of an impression that the Philippines were evangelized by Friars who waved the crucifix in hand, rang bells by the roadside, and preached mainly hellfire to be feared. Were the articles of the Creed tamped down unwilling throats by Toledo steel, to the distant echo of Spanish guns? Such a picture, also, would be an over-simplification, untrue in substance, unjust and damaging in its effects. The bias in this respect is slight, however; an informed reader will correct it. In many matters we are indebted to Fr. Dunne for new information and stimulating instruction.