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The Middle Wall of Partition

The following communication from the Rev. David M. Paton, a C.M.S. missionary in Foochow, has reference to an article by Canon J. E. Fison in the issue of THE CHURCHMAN for March 1949. The delay in its publication is due to the time that periodicals take to reach occupied China.—Editor.

IN his remarkable article in THE CHURCHMAN of March 1949, Canon J. E. Fison observes ". . . It seems quite clear that the *punctum stantis aut cadentis ecclesiae* in the Acts of the Apostles was its attitude to 'the middle wall of partition'. . . . The touchstone then (and now) was the table at home even more than the Table of the Lord . . ."; and goes on to suggest that "the continued refusal to face the issues involved [in reciprocal love between members of different races] seems to me to be invalidating the whole Protestant missionary cause throughout the world".

Canon Fison has here put his finger upon one of the two most serious difficulties of missions. (The other is that bewilderment about eschatology to which Dr. Warren addressed himself in *The Truth of Vision*.) We are being frustrated—yes, even "invalidated"—by the lack of the "common table", by a middle wall of partition. But I venture to think that this is—at all events in China and probably India*—not only or even principally a matter of racially mixed marriages. My own impression from a number of conversations with Chinese friends on the subject is that once they are assured that the Westerner has no racial prejudice on the subject, they share generally the belief that such marriages are usually undesirable because the great cultural differences make adjustment more difficult, and the prevalence of racial and cultural prejudice in the world at large creates difficulties for the children. At the same time my own acquaintance includes at least half-a-dozen such marriages, and it seems to me that these are accepted normally and happily by all concerned.

It is quite otherwise with the question of the difference in standards of living, which I submit to be now the real "middle wall of partition", and which remains to plague us after power in the Church has passed to Chinese hands. It has so passed in the Diocese in which I serve; this is however not true of all the dioceses of the Sheng Kung Hur, nor of the other churches at work in North Fukien. Where missionaries continue to exercise control of the Church in larger or smaller measure, and this control is unsusceptible of rational justification and is deeply resented, the problem is, of course, greatly accentuated. I do not wish to exaggerate. I know of no house here, and few elsewhere in the country, where Chinese are not welcome either on business or on pleasure; and of no missionary who does not have considerable social intercourse with Chinese colleagues and friends. But when that is

* I have chosen to speak of China which I know to some extent; a little experience of India suggests that much the same holds good there also. Of other areas I do not venture to speak.

said, and when the drastic cut in the purchasing power of missionary allowances compared with ten years ago is taken into account (for the C.M.S. it is probably more than 50%—but what is the size of the cut the Chinese have suffered?), it remains true that the standard of living and the economic security enjoyed even by the more or less impoverished British is wholly out of proportion to that of their Chinese colleagues.

I do not know any one who is happy about this ; and I do not know any one who sees clearly what to do. The "obvious" course is the reduction of missionary standards till they approximate to Chinese standards. I did this myself—or something fairly like it—during the war, as did many others, as a very healthy, single young man ; and three years left me seriously undernourished. I think that a general pursuit of this policy would produce a serious medical problem and a considerable wastage due to illness. Neither would be so serious as they are among Chinese ; but since recruits are now very difficult to get and the overheads of missions in the way of training, passages and whatnot are so high, the Societies cannot be blamed for not being over-eager. Some people can do it (and *do* do it : I am thinking especially of some of the single people who after years of experience know just where they are with food and climate) ; families could not, unless we are prepared to countenance a rather high child mortality rate. (In another Mission in another province this is, for reasons of climate, already about 30%). The alternative is celibacy, which would mean that there would be virtually no missionary clergy, since the vocation to celibacy is not at present common among curates and theological students.

These difficulties seem to me to be real ; but I have an uneasy feeling that there were good arguments among St. Paul's opponents—such as doubtless appeared cogent to St. Peter when he wavered on the issue—who were none the less taking the wrong side. I should like to be sure that what I have written above is not psychological rationalisation. However that may be, it is clear that we are losing moral and spiritual authority because of this social and economic wall of partition, especially in areas like this, where simplicity of life and economic equality are now the official policies of government.

I make no apology for commenting at some length, and with a frankness which is inspired by Canon Fison's directness and objectivity, on what may seem to some a domestic problem of missions, suitable not so much for the pages of THE CHURCHMAN as of the *International Review of Missions*, or one's Annual Letter to C. M. House ; partly because the missionary outreach of the Church has been at the centre of the Evangelical Movement and Evangelicals should be the last to allow Missions to be, in the modern specialist manner, the concern of those expert in the matter, and partly because I am fairly sure that similar middle walls of partition are "invalidating" the work and message of the Church of England at home.

Foochow, Fukien, China.

DAVID M. PATON.