

# Chairman Mao and the Parish Revolution

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‘Eat up your dinner’, my mother used to say. ‘Think of the starving millions in China.’

That was before 1949. When 1949 came round, no one bothered to tell me what had happened. The ploy simply changed to ‘Think of the starving millions in India’.

Even at that age I knew there was something funny about this argument. Whether I ate my dinner or not, the starving millions weren’t going to get a whiff of it.

It is interesting, especially after nearly two years in China, to look back and laugh at my mother’s trick. More interesting, though, to realize that the new generation in the West has still not grown out of thinking in my mother’s terms.

‘What is to be done about Vietnam?’ people say, in intervals between working at their meaningless jobs, or keeping up with the Joneses. ‘And what about India?’ And now that the Cultural Revolution is in full swing in China, such people might add ‘And poor China. . .’.

There is no end to the ‘problems’ that confront Western suburban man. He revels in solving (in his head) the population explosion, the bomb, famine and flood, war. It seems to be little more than a game, an entertainment to take his mind off himself, off the apparently insoluble problems of his own society.

There is much truth in the joke about the man whose friend asked him:

‘Hey, Jack. Who makes the important decisions in your family?’

‘I do, of course. My wife deals with run-of-the-mill stuff, like what school the kids will go to, what to do with my wages, when to buy a car, when to move house. . . .’

‘They sound pretty important decisions. What’s left for you?’

‘Oh, I handle the really thorny problems, like whether China should enter the United Nations.’

We should call Jack’s bluff. From an armchair in the suburbs, what can be done about Vietnam, India, China? What can be done to alleviate suffering, to make the world better?

It is tempting to answer ‘Nothing! Just get on with your own life, try to make it as Christian as possible, try not to hurt anyone, help others where you can.’

Take China, where I happen to be at this moment. There’s a great upheaval taking place here, which the Chinese call ‘The

Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution'. Whole cities, including Shanghai with a population approaching Australia's, have been mobilized to fight against the 'black line', the opponents of Chairman Mao, the 'handful of bourgeois reactionary authorities who are taking the road back to capitalism'.

People are being hurt; spiritually more than physically, but perhaps that is worse. Truckloads of Red Guards pass my window, displaying high-hatted 'monsters' and 'freaks' to the people. The walls are inches thick in Big-Character Posters, denouncing Party members for what seem to me the most arbitrary reasons.

I can do practically nothing to influence this. Some of the foreigners here, including English, have joined in, become Red Guards, rush round flaunting their armbands and shouting 'Long Live Chairman Mao!' and 'Down with social misfits of all kinds!'.

I cannot in conscience do this, so I am powerless. You in your suburban living-room on the other side of the world must feel a good deal more helpless than I. You can do nothing to help or hinder the Red Guards in their witch-hunt.

Or can you?

Let's assume you are a Christian. I want to call your bluff. Are you really worried about China? I don't mean about the fate of Chinese Christians; they are too few and too removed from what is happening in China to count. That sounds cruel. But we have attended churches here, and never seen anything so dead, so socially impotent, as Chinese Christianity. The missionaries can no doubt explain this—not that it's their fault, it's the society that produced them that is to blame, the kind of Christianity they represented here.

Let's forget the Christians. Think of the 700 million Chinese people, caught up in an almighty attempt to make everyone think Mao, do Mao, be Mao, One quarter of mankind, being asked to put on the thought of one man.

What can you do about it?

The way I see it, you can do two things.

First, you can study China, past and present. Find out not only what she is like today but *why* she is like that. Why Mao's thought is considered so vitally important.

With luck, you will see that China is as she is, partly *because of* what she was before, partly *as a reaction against* what she was before.

That's a beginning. Then you might go further. Discover the part *Europe* played in causing change in China. Distinguish between the good influence she had and the bad, both of which were considerable. See what the businessmen and politicians, the soldiers and missionaries did here.

Note that we are getting closer to you. Europe is you. The Europe of fifty years ago has not changed out of sight. You can still talk to your grandfather, for instance; in China, unless Grandad has

thoroughly 'remoulded' himself, the young Chinese has little in common with him.

Europe is you. You play a part, however small, in what is called 'Western society'. There you have influence—an influence that can reach right across to China.

This is the second way to have some effect on the world: you must work, in your own environment, to eradicate the evil features of your society which were represented in China and elsewhere in the bad old days. These features have not changed their nature.

I am not talking only about Europe's aggressiveness in the past, her merchants' lust for profits, her ambassadors' tricks, her missionaries' attempts to implant a highly compromised kind of Christianity. I am thinking of the sources of such evils: selfishness, greed, pitilessness, lack-love, etc. These things we can all fight, anywhere.

Some like to think of these as personal faults, a matter for oneself and God through the medium of the confessional. This is not so, of course. There is no such thing as a purely personal sin. All evil affects all men, because evil damages you as a person, making you less of a force for good in your contact with others.

No one can escape his society's faults. In Europe, despite two thousand years of 'Christianity', selfishness and ambition are more deeply woven into the fabric of society than they ever were. Every child is offered the view that Satan gave Christ on the mountain-top: 'All that, I'll give you. If you will fall down and worship me.'

Few react as Christ did. Few are Christian. Our society gives us two choices, both fairly ridiculous—we either work at some dull job for a wage all our lives, letting ourselves and others be exploited; or we make others work for us (or money, which represents the work of others), and be an exploiter.

There is no need to dwell on this. Most people feel there is something wrong with the capitalist system. For someone who wants to help China or India or Vietnam, however, it is essential to know that capitalism, with all its built-in antichristian characteristics, played a major part in provoking the victory of Communism in China, is still having a big and deleterious effect on India, and is largely responsible for the Vietnam war.

In Vietnam, the situation is clearer. Vietnam is India becoming China. That is a gross over-simplification; but has enough truth to be worth saying. Vietnam is India becoming China, and for much the same reasons. The only thing you can do about it is to first understand it, then help by helping in your own society, by changing your society to one where injustice is not an accepted everyday practice, where moneymakers are curbed, foreign investments that do not help other countries banned.

You laugh. It would take a revolution. . . . All right. Let's have a revolution! It could be fun.

There are two kinds of revolution. One—call it the Leninist way—

involves taking state power, probably (though not necessarily) by armed force, then decreeing the changes you want from on top. This, thank God, does not seem to work. The experience of the Soviet Union and China shows it to be far too expensive in terms of human life, in terms of the hatred sown by the original violence (which feeds on itself), and in terms of the periodic upheavals needed to get back to the enthusiasm of the revolution itself. It is a very tempting way, nevertheless, especially for countries that are economically bankrupt. In countries like England, which are economically still solvent, but spiritually nearing bankruptcy, mere possession of state power is no help. A socialist government, for example, has no effect whatever on the morality of the people.

The other way to have a revolution is much more exciting. Call it the Maoist way if you like, though Mao would not think much of it. Or call it the Christian way for that matter, since Christians are about the only people who could pull it off.

It is very simple. It involves working for social change from below, from among the people in the street, parish, job, club, family you live in. It means using love as a weapon to fight evil.

You say you have been doing just that all along! But you haven't been doing it perhaps with Vietnam *in mind*, with China and India *in mind*. You haven't been fighting against big money and corruption and apathy and racism with a view to stopping your society's evils affecting other societies.

Nothing short of this world-view will do.

Notice that violence plays no part, nor is there any idea of a sudden upheaval that purifies by its very ferocity. What we must start is a guerrilla war, to be waged in the streets and lanes, offices and workshops and churches all over our country, with the final aim of sapping the strength of the powerful and the corrupt, who do untold damage in the world, the businessmen, politicians, war-mongers, reactionary clergy, anyone in a position to influence many people, who is prepared to sacrifice the ultimate welfare of the people for the vested interests of the establishment.

Such a guerrilla would learn a lot from the Communists, but its aim would be to *teach* the Communists, especially to teach Mao. If it could be proved that love is at least as powerful a weapon as hatred, and does not leave the scars that hatred does, then Chairman Mao's terrible vituperations against imperialism, his fear of anything bourgeois or Western, his utter contempt for 'the enemy at home and abroad', would have no reason to continue.

If you, and millions with you, could change your society for the better, without anyone being shot, how could the Chinese fail to be affected? How could the Vietnamese and Indians and everyone in the world fail to be impressed?

This is the only way to be Christian in the modern world, the only way to be a missionary, an apostle, the only way to spread Christian-

ity. Mere continuation of the old ways, with nuns and priests in fancy dress and even fancier ideas, will lead to more Chinas. If you could see what has happened to the old Christianity here, and, more important, to the wretched Christians who were saddled with it, you would know what I mean.

At the moment the Chinese have nothing but contempt for you sitting in your armchair reading this magazine. Not because you are a Christian, but because you *think* you are a Christian. You 'mouth fine words', they would say. You feel sorry for the people of exploited countries, but in fact, by tacitly supporting your own social system, which still has its tentacles out all over the world, and still resorts to armed violence, or supports that of others, at the drop of a hat, you are personally working against the exploited peoples!

Mao wants to make things better by bloody revolution. He wants this, not because he is a bloodthirsty devil, but because his own experience has shown him no other way. We Christians are the only people in a position to make another way work. Are we using that position, or are we letting it slip away from us?