

**‘Our Church in the Pandemic – Uniting in Christ and Building Together’**  
**Rev. Canon David Chee, Taiwan Diocesan Convention, March 5, 2021**

‘Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth’ refers to the earth, our world; the setting of our fundamental concern. It is not for us to just sit and pray, but to be actively engaged with God’s kingdom on earth. The Lord’s Prayer has been said by Christians for 2,000 years, so we must affirm what we see today to have entailed the answer of God, the work of God’s Spirit, all in a still-ongoing process.

Impacts and Responses of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

1) 9/11, the ‘opening scene’ of the 21<sup>st</sup> century affected the whole world. The physical collapse of the towers was not just due to external impact, but also an implosion - our eye-opening reminder, resulting in worldwide support for the US in its subsequent anti-terrorism actions, leading to the loss of thousands of innocent lives, but that has continued even today, and taken on other developments less supported. We need to be aware of a correct attitude towards ‘religion’.

2) The Covid-19 pandemic has happened just as humanity is proudly marching into the future with full faith in the capacity of science and technology. Covid-19 reveals the ills of humankind: alienation and conflict, exercise of self-interest, egoistic power, all sinful. Even the development of vaccines is subject to all kinds of sinful socio-political and economic manipulation. The world seems a mess.

3) Global warming and climate change is a reality the world must face, yet many powerful people believe this to be an unscientific farce, including a lot of western conservative evangelicals & extreme right fundamentalist Christians. Most Chinese Christians are conservative evangelicals or fundamentalists and simply take the pious attitude of just leaving this to God.

4) An explosion of information overload resulting in the confusion of minds, conveniently allowing the pandemic to become an instrument of political manipulation. In this context, we have to deal with the reality of the rise of China. Whether the rise of China poses a problem is another question, but one that is deeply engaged and propagated by the West. Christianity is the religion that gave rise to western culture; as Chinese Christians, we are indeed caught in this quagmire. Politically, in Taiwan, all talk on this subject is practically taboo over fear of breaking relationships, so many live a disintegrated life in which the Christian life of faith, social life and values, can all go separate ways. Ingredients for implosion.

What does the pandemic hitting planet earth mean for us Christians? With no in-person worship in many US Episcopal churches for a year; ironically, digital communication has come just at the right time for online worship. But as a liturgical and sacramental Church, we now need to clarify our theology and educate our people. We find ourselves returning to the times when the church practiced 'beholding the Host' (the Chinese term for RC terminology, "attending Mass" – "look only"). Church income has been seriously reduced; loyalty of membership tested. In Taiwan, we have continued our in-person worship and activities, so we probably don't feel much of that. The question is, should we thank God for this?

It seems like we are in a new 'Tower of Babel' period. The development speed from the BB Call since 9/11 in 2001 to 5G cell phones in 2021 is a sky-rocketing acceleration curve. Sky-rocketing, touching God, in a world growing smaller and smaller, first talking and understanding each other, and then all speaking in different tongues, alienated. Are we Christians now speaking in (only) our own tongues? Are we going to be like the US Amish communities in 10 or so years' time? Can we Christians speak a language that allows communication between all the languages birthed at Babel, between civilizations, cultures, religions, and societies?

What should be our Christian Response? With the Prayer that Jesus taught us, anything that is of the earth 'for God's sake' concerns us, yet we are a small diocese. Our ancestors had this proverb: "If Heaven wreaks havoc, one can still live; but if one wreaks havoc oneself, one would not live." That is implosion. We should recognize the imploding elements amidst us: some say the virus would not affect 'real' Christians, or the virus situation is bluff, and begs the question of whether religious faith and organized religion have any bearing on the high-tech world of today.

As Anglicans, our spiritual guide is the 'via media', the Middle Way. This is very significant to us as Chinese Christians, it is in our classics, civilization and culture. The Middle Way is not fence-sitting, but holding two sides, all sides together: left, right, front, back, up, down. With reason, we Episcopalians seek to maintain a cool head, rational intact, and a fiery warm heart. We are not lukewarm. We may be a small church, but we are part of a much larger universal body where some of our functions are carried out at a different level. We also share our lives. The testimony of our faith is in the life of our members and our clergy. So it is that we must spend this time to identify, reflect on, our gifts. And we have one particularity. We are a Chinese church in a universal church, and what does that mean? And with the rise of China, what does that mean? Our 'Duty is heavy and our Dao is long' (Chinese idiom).

A Recheck of Our Mission in this Era: Bishop James Pong in the 70s referred to 'small is beautiful,' (top-selling book title) to encourage our diocese, to the consternation of some parishioners and clergy who saw that as a cop-out for growth. We live in a conflicted and polarized era; self-centered individualism is the order of the day. The pandemic has opened up and instigated more racism in the US; TEC has been working for years against racism. In this Tower of Babel times, Love is the only language that can become a common language.

With such a background of turbulent times, we now approach our diocesan theme of 'Working together as one in Christ to build the Church'. We need to be aware that separation and alienation are elements for implosion. What are the characteristics of 'together as one' and how do we get there? We have to recognize that 'God's kingdom and will on earth' is not crystal clear; that is why we need the light and guidance of the Holy Spirit, revealing each step. We need to remember we are only 'tools' and 'stewards' in God's project, and special Chinese tools at that; Chinese with our particular civilizational history and cultural depth. And on this, we need to pay attention to what we have that is seemingly absent in the English language.

The language of love is Harmony 和諧, '和' for peace. Unlike in English, it is found in so much of our everyday language. We use it daily, for ours is a language of harmony. Chinese idioms see harmony bound with prosperity in the family, the home, and things universal. Harmony is reconciliation with the origin or an original condition, or the respecting of a conflicting stance, and to use the English equivalent, 'Harmony is the best policy' 以和為貴, literally, harmony is the most precious.