

Dissertation Abstract

John C. H. Wu: A Prodigy in Synthesizing East and West And a Prophet for the Evangelization of China

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This dissertation investigates the contribution of Dr. John C. H. Wu (1899-1986) to the inculturation of the Gospel in Chinese culture. The question of how to relate the Gospel message to Chinese culture has engaged the minds of both Chinese and Western intellectuals for several centuries. To the mind of the Church, it is evident that such a culture, among the most ancient and celebrated in the world, should be Christianized in depth. Faced with this enormous and seemingly impossible task, this dissertation argues that Wu's writings and personal witness can be a model for the Church's mission *ad gentes* in China.

Fr. Matteo Ricci, S.J. (1552-1610), an Italian Jesuit missionary to China, entered into a ground-breaking dialogue with Confucianism and opened a door for the Gospel to enter into Chinese classical culture. Following the footsteps of Ricci, Wu's writings on Chinese culture and Christianity go beyond the classical dialogue with Confucianism and include Taoism and Buddhism. The unique contribution of Wu to Chinese Catholic theology is his insight that Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism *together* constitute the heart of traditional Chinese culture. Moreover, Wu argues that the evangelization of China and other Asian countries must pass through an inter-cultural dialogue between East and West. As a Catholic layman, Wu is thoroughly Chinese and imbued with Chinese culture, and at the same time an eminent scholar in Western literature and culture. The genius of Wu is that he allows an encounter between the Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist traditions in China and the Judeo-Christian and Greco-Latin tradition in the West *in Christ*. Like some of the Church Fathers in regard to Greek culture, Wu is convinced that faith in Christ will bring no harm to Chinese culture, but will heal, enrich and perfect it.

The key for Wu's "prophetic synthesis" is that he simultaneously demotes and promotes the religions in China: on the one hand, he interprets these traditions not principally as rival religions to Christianity, but as profound, "natural" human cultures, and thus, on the other hand, this means that they can be raised up in grace as dimensions of a full Catholic vision and existence. Wu looks to St. Therese of Lisieux's science of divine love (*divini amoris scientia*) as a model necessary to inculturate the faith in China. Inspired by St. Therese's teaching, Wu is able to welcome the wisdom in all of China's traditions—the Confucian teaching of filial piety, the Taoist insight on the importance of humility and lowliness, and the Buddhist yearning for the absolute—and turn it into fuel for the furnace of Divine Love. Wu's remarkable knowledge of the Chinese and Catholic traditions enables this noted scholar to blend the East and the West in a way no other Catholic writer has ever done before. Therefore, Wu contributes not only to the meeting of cultures, but also to the navigation of the challenges of opening the East to Christ and bringing the West back to its own Christian heritage.