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CHAPTER 12

FACTORY EVANGELISM IN TAIWAN

by Kuo-Shan Tsai

I. THE CONDITION OF FACTORY WORKERS IN URBAN CITIES

During the last three decades, Taiwan has experienced incredible social change because of rapid industrialization. According to the information provided by the Council for Economic Planning and Development of the Republic of China in 1983, we can begin to understand the facets of accelerated industrialization in Taiwan today.

From 1952 to 1982, the industrial sector experienced the most accelerated growth. Structural transformation over the same period has also been rapid. Industry's contribution to the net domestic product rose from 19.0 to 43.9 percent while agriculture fell from 35.9 to 8.7 percent. Reflecting the same sectoral change was the redeployment of labor from the agricultural to the industrial sector. Between 1952 and 1982, the average percentage of employment in industry rose from 16.9 to 41.2 percent of the total work force. Today there are about 4 million industrial workers in Taiwan. Among the 4 million industrial workers, 78 percent or 3 million are factory workers. In order to promote factory evangelism, we must carefully understand the condition of factory workers in urban cities.

Factory Workers As Migrant People Groups

It is clear that industrialization and urbanization are interacting processes. When one exists, the other is also found—at least most of the time. During the last thirty years, when Taiwan did her best to promote industrialization, there were so many "excess laborers" in rural areas that they moved to urban areas in order to find new jobs in

factories. Information about available jobs was always provided by relatives, friends and fellow villagers before they left the village. According to the statistics of the Executive Yuan of the Republic of China, during the short period of four years from 1970 to 1973 the loss of agricultural population increased rapidly to 62,000 persons. Most migrant factory workers tended to live together in five major cities and fifty towns of suburban areas in Taiwan. Furthermore, they joined together as people groups to perform some of the same religious ceremonies as they did in their home areas. Single migrant workers in urban factories often kept their families in the villages, visiting them on festive days. In other words, most factory workers are members of migrant people groups from rural areas. Even today, most of them are not fully identified with the city and need some cultural or religious symbols of their uniqueness. Hence they often return to old cultural symbols to maintain their own identity.

In accordance with the reasons mentioned above, whenever we wish to understand the factory workers in Taiwan we should know that they are both migrants and people groups from rural areas.

As the Neglected Lower Class

Relationships to the means of production are much clearer for the lower class than for the upper class in Taiwan's society. Generally speaking, the lower class sells its labor or combines the value of that labor with the capital of tiny enterprises to maintain a steady living standard. The representatives of the lower class in Taiwan include industrial workers and some agricultural farmers. As a result of rapid industrialization, the industrial workers who migrated from rural areas have become the major part of the lower class.

Although the 3 million urban factory workers have played an essential role in Taiwan economy, they have been curiously neglected by both the management and the government in Taiwan society. Even though martial law was abolished by the government in July 1987, the condition of the laborers' rights and security is improving very slowly. Compared with that of other countries such as Japan and the U.S.A., the social benefits and social security available for the factory workers in Taiwan are very disappointing.

Furthermore, during the last twenty years, between 1960-1980, most Christians in Taiwan have also undergone a lift

and have moved up into the middle class or the upper class of Taiwan's society. The existing congregations of most churches are made up largely of white collar or professional persons employed by private or government institutions. Therefore, the urban factory workers still escape the attention of the church and remain largely unreached.

Too Much Pressure to Keep Up with Work

Before, at home or at school, the factory workers often viewed a factory job in urban cities as a new and exciting experience. Then when they actually began to work in the plant, it was a great disappointment. On the one hand, they feel uncomfortable because the plant is **too noisy**, and it is usually **uncomfortably hot**. On the other hand, since the technical training portion of the orientation program does not try to bring their skills up to the level required by their jobs, most of them are not prepared for the rapid pace. Moreover, overtime and three daily work shifts also make most factory workers feel very pressured to keep up with the work.

Many single women workers are reluctant to work overtime. Nevertheless, they must adjust themselves to such a situation if they want to continue to work as so-called "factory girls." Generally speaking, it is very difficult for the factory workers to **manage much leisure activity, family life, or other social activities**. In such a situation, the highest frequency of leisure activities for most factory workers is exposure to mass media, such as watching TV; the second highest is for pastimes such as chatting with friends or doing house work.

In a sense, too much pressure to keep up with work has become an important reason for dissatisfaction among the factory workers in urban cities.

II. WHAT THE CHURCHES CAN DO TO PROMOTE FACTORY EVANGELISM

In order to meet the felt needs among factory workers, the mission department of the churches can suggest that their denominations or local churches organize Industrial Evangelism Committees. These Industrial Evangelism Committees can concentrate on promoting factory evangelism. For example, they could invite some advisers to help the churches to understand the migrating workers through field studies.

During the last eight years, between 1979 and 1987, planting new churches among the industrial workers has gradually become one of the goals of church growth for the churches where they feel comfortable and culturally at home themselves. According to Swanson's observation,² most churches which are located in the industrial areas in Taiwan have experienced rapid growth in 1985.

III. WHAT THEOLOGICAL SCHOOLS CAN DO TO PROMOTE FACTORY EVANGELISM

In dealing with the promotion of factory evangelism, we should also pay attention to the significant role of theological schools. Theological schools have the opportunity to teach their students how to develop their theology and how to establish their methodology to reach factory workers. According to the lessons from the failure of industrial evangelism promoted by the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan during the 1960's, I suggest that theological schools should take three key points into consideration as follows:

1. The Practice of Contextualization in Strategy

In urban settings, most migrating industrial workers experience feelings of insecurity, loneliness and rootlessness. Therefore, they tend to organize so-called regional associations for the purpose of solidarity and protection. They also try to organize religious associations for spiritual needs. In such a situation, industrial evangelism must pay attention to both the physical and the spiritual needs among the industrial workers.

Therefore, theological schools should help their students to realize the felt needs and the animistic world view among the factory workers. For example, theological students can experience the life of the factory workers during the summer vacation when they voluntarily work as short-term factory workers. If theological students really understand the factory workers and identify with their felt needs, then the message preached by those students will be relevant to the daily life of the working people.

In summary, the strategy of industrial ministry should be developed in an indigenous context. In addition to field study, theological schools can equip their students by means of appropriate courses such as Urban Anthropology, Missiological Implications of Social Change, Innovation and Communi-

cation, Indigenous Church Planting, and Holistic Evangelism. The practice of contextualization in strategy is very important for theological schools to equip their students as effective witnesses among the factory workers.

2. The Application of Biblical Truth to Holistic Evangelism

According to the lessons from the failure of industrial evangelism during the 1960's promoted by the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan, we discover that the industrial evangelism led by the Industrial Evangelism Committee endorsed the prioritization of social action. In other words, the Committee confused "concern for social responsibility" for "evangelism." Christian social action is important in its own right. Ministry does not mean neglecting the urgent need of the masses at the cost of preaching the gospel of Christ. But it is tragic that the church in Taiwan failed to reach and convert the industrial workers during the 1960's when the numbers of factory workers increased so rapidly. This is also one of the major reasons why folk religion in Taiwan had a revival during the 1960's. I do not mean to be overly critical of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan, which was the only group to even attempt to address the great needs among Taiwan's newly emerging industrial workers.

What I want to emphasize here is that theological schools should carefully review their own theology of missions so that it is relevant to factory evangelism. Donald McGavran's insight is a good reference point for us to develop our theology concerning factory evangelism. I summarize his helpful insight for the theological schools today as follows:

Holistic evangelism is—and has been—an essential part of Christian Mission as revealed by the Bible.

However, in framing the doctrine of holistic evangelism we must take seriously our Lord's words in Mark 8:36, "What does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul?" (NASB)

Many other biblical passages make it clear that this—worldly improvements in and of themselves—are in no sense salvation.

This truth excuses no Christian from sharing food, spreading health information, or removing unjust and oppressive structures of society.

They are not the gospel. They are good acts enjoined upon the Christian by the Lord.³

In order to promote factory evangelism, theological schools must endorse both the evangelistic and the cultural mandate. Then, theological students will be able to reach effectively and convert the factory workers.

3. The Promotion of Factory Evangelism
among Local Churches

Theological schools can be a catalyst among the local churches to promote factory evangelism. For example, theological schools can provide the pastors of local churches with some activities such as seminars or retreats relevant to factory evangelism. Theological schools can also emphasize the significance of factory evangelism through literature. They can also send some seminary students to other countries for further study on factory evangelism. Furthermore, the promotion of holistic evangelism among church leaders is also pragmatic for theological schools in promoting factory evangelism.

NOTES

1. Charles H. Kraft, Christianity in Culture (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979), pp. 116-120.
2. Research Department, Chinese Coordination Centre of World Evangelism, Diaspora Chinese Church. Volume I: Republic of China (Hong Kong: Logos Book House Ltd., 1986), p. 24.
3. Donald A. McGavran and Arthur F. Glasser, Contemporary Theologies of Mission (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1983), pp. 100-112.



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