WS11 – Place and role of religions in an harmonious society

Session 1

The Chinese vision

- Important development of religions in modern China, freedom of religion, positive image of the believers, necessity to define which are the acceptable religions, which are the values shared, to maintain cohesion.

- Because of the loss of values and social cohesion in modern China, importance to find an "oecumena", in the sense of shared values between religions and traditional philosophies "oecumena" = shared heritage (concept exist in antic China and Greece) and shared issue for the future.

- Ambiguity of the role of religions in China in matter of peace : elements of pacification (values) and conflicts risks (fragmentation)

- Ambiguity of the role of religions in China in matter of modernization : elements of re-enchantment in disenchanted context and sources of critics and reject of scientific progress

- Necessity to institutionalize the Christian religion : unify diverse tendencies, build capacity in the poor communities to improve their socio-economic situation by themselves otherwise inappropriate attempts, regulate economic activities of churches, avoid the manipulation of the believers by persons with bad intentions.

- The Muslim community is well integrated and a factor of coherence in multicultural areas, core issue: accept certain principle of the modernity

- Necessity to clarify what is understood in the word « religion », because the word is imported from occident and associated to monotheism which doesn't recover the Chinese diversity

The European questions addressed to Chinese

- What is the meaning of a "practical religion" 'religion of practical reason'? Moral principles are practical as well as engagement for values or faith experience.

- What is the responsibility of Christianity in the crisis of values of the modern society ?

- Who wants to « manage » the religions in China ? Who has the power to decide what is acceptable?

- What is the degree of freedom in the choice of a religion in China ?

Session 2

The European vision

- Tension between post-Christian society (= where Christianity is not the principle reference) and maintenance of the idea that Europe is a Christian society. Relation nation-culture-religion

- European multi religiosity and multiculturalism, improved by migrations made of Europe a non homogeneous entity – new issues for Christianity and other religions of Europe

- Christians and other believers must find a new identity not based on the proximity with the power but on the support of values Necessity to define these values

- For the Muslims, necessity to find an Islam concerned by the realities of the countries where it is established and not on a minority's identity

- On big issue in Europe is to create a new concept of citizenship in which each religion and each culture can be respected

- How implement the dialogue between religions and politics: role of religions in society

The Chinese questions addressed to Europeans

- Christian religion support the engagement for poor people, why the catholics didn't support communism?

- Similarities noticed between values of Confucianism and Christianity : gentle heart and self working: to begin to work on oneself, then on the family to get a harmonious society

- Which are the reactions of Christian churches before the diminution of the believers going in the churches and the fact that some Christians are attached in the same time to other religions and spiritual movements (multiple faiths)?

- Common challenge: how to achieve multiple identities (economic, cultural, religious…)? Communautarism based on culture, neoliberalism based on economic identity.

- Challenge for secularization: to preserve purity of religion in the same time to bring democracy, freedom and egality

- In China, religion wars are local phenomenon and just in short periods because of principles of Confucianism. Europeans should learn from that.

Session 3

The convergences between the European and Chinese society

- Both Europe and China are multi-cultural and multi-religious societies, the need for unity is recognized by both sides. Unity is not uniformity.
- How to manage the multiple identities for each human in China and Europe?
- Secularism brings freedom, democracy, peace and in the same time there is a challenge to maintain the purity of religions
- Harmonic society is wished by both Europe and China
- Both in China and Europe faith is a personal experience and religion has a role to play for unity in diversity

The divergences between the European and Chinese society

- The concept of harmonic society is defined by the government in China, not in Europe
- In China a top-down process has defined the concept of harmonic society recently and define the role of religions. In Europe religion is more linked with a bottom-up process
- There were less religious conflicts in Chinese history than in Europe.
- There is an exportation of some religious conflicts from Europe to the world, for example Islam-Christianity
- Muslims of Europe are most of all foreigners, in China they are Chinese since a long time

Session 4