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The Chinese Church and Its Mission: A Dialogue with Moltmann's Ecclesiology

KWOK WAI-LUEN

Abstract

In this paper, I will discuss Jürgen Moltmann's eschatological ecclesiology with reference to two themes so as to explore the mission of the Chinese church in the contemporary context. They are, firstly, eschatological hope and the exodus church; and secondly, the Holy Spirit and the mission of the Chinese church for a deeper integration of Christian faith and Chinese culture. I will start by arguing that the present political combination of ancient Chinese culture and the communist revolutionary idea of "leading everything" are at odds with Moltmann's ecological conception of equilibrium and progress. It is a realized eschatology rather than Christian eschatological hope. By becoming an exodus church with eschatological hope, the Chinese church can keep a critical distance from any version of realized eschatology while demonstrating solidarity with its neighbors. In Moltmann's thought the eschatological messianic hope of the church is realized in a charismatic ecclesiology. Prioritizing an ecclesiology of eschatological hope in the Holy Spirit over an ecclesiology heavily

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shaped by Logos Christology can help the church gain new perspective and vision for its mission in Chinese society.

Keywords: hope, ecclesiology, Jürgen Moltmann, Chinese church, Christianity and culture

1. THE CHINESE DREAM AND MOLTSMANN'S DISCUSSION OF CHINESE CULTURE

Moltmann has praised the recent economic and technological advancements that have transformed China into a modern state.¹ For Moltmann, equilibrium and progress are two important themes to understand the modern Chinese culture.² Moltmann suggested that the traditional Chinese culture, especially its political thought, is a projection of a natural harmonious equilibrium. Everything in the society co-dependes on each other in an ecological balance. This equilibrium reflects the “Tian Dao 天道.”³ Since the early twentieth century Chinese culture has been dominated by Marxism and the industrial revolution, and therefore it has rejected the traditional worldview of natural equilibrium. Marxism and the industrial mode of thought taught Chinese intellectuals and leaders to view the world as “history,” meaning that it is believed to develop progressively in a linear way. In the historical progression, people should struggle with the natural and human constraints that hinder progress and try to overcome them.⁴ Moltmann clearly expressed his deep concern for the aggressiveness and destructiveness of such progressive historicism.⁵ He suggested that industrial progressive historicism should learn the wisdom of natural harmonious equilibrium from traditional Chinese culture to address the ecological crisis.⁶ Moltmann proposed that Communist China has already developed beyond the class struggle stage and that it should have a better

¹ Jürgen Moltmann, *Moteman lun Zhongguo wenhua* 莫特曼論中國文化 [Jürgen Moltmann on Chinese Culture], trans. Deng Zhaoming and Zeng Nianyue (Hong Kong: Logos, 2008), 19.

² *Ibid.*, 20.

³ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 25–27.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

chance at achieving both equilibrium and progress than other societies and cultures. Conversely, the Judeo-Christian worldview, which is also a kind of historical progressivism, cannot easily adopt the harmonious worldview. Moltmann therefore encourages Christians to integrate Chinese culture into their own faith.⁷

Although Moltmann's main argument relates to meeting the challenge of the ecological crisis with the ideas of equilibrium and progress, the combination of these two ideas has its political implications. In ancient Chinese culture, the emperor or ruler was to govern the society according to the "mandate of heaven" (*tiandao* 天道).⁸ In modern society, the Chinese Communist Party governs according to the "progressive" historical worldview. Therefore, one may guess what will happen if two political philosophies come together. We can see that a combination of imperial and communist political thought has recently occurred in China. In his closing speech before the National People's Congress of 2018, Xi Jinping used ancient inventions, myths and literature to stir up national pride, and asserted the Communist Party as "the leader of everything" that could lead China to its "great rejuvenation."⁹ The Chinese Communist Party is now presenting itself as the leader of everything that unites the glorious past culture and the future success of China. It will achieve both "harmonious equilibrium" and "historical progress." At the same time, the Chinese communist government demands that Christian churches in China should be sinicized.¹⁰ Chinese Christianity is considered by the government as living in a mentality of aggressive western ideology and cannot accommodate itself well to the Chinese culture of the communist regime.

Superficially, the government's demand seems to be in line with Moltmann's exhortations for an integration of cultures for the Chinese church to meet the challenge of the ecological crisis. According to Moltmann, confronting the ecological crisis calls for both equilibrium and progress. However, he does not support combining ancient imperial and modern communist political thought. The consequence in reality is a new wave of political persecution and control. The political com-

⁷ Ibid., 36.

⁸ Ibid., 24–25.

⁹ Josephine Ma, "Xi Jinping Tries to Rally Support for Chinese Dream in Nationalist Speech," *South China Morning Post*, March 20, 2018, <http://www.scmp.com/print/news/china/policies-politics/article/2138112/xi-jinping-tries-rally-support-chinese-dream>.

¹⁰ "China Plans Establishment of Christian Theology," *China Daily Europe*, August 7, 2014, http://europe.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2014-08/07/content_18262928.htm.

ination of ancient Chinese culture and the communist revolutionary idea of leading everything is at odds with Moltmann's theology.

In *Theology of Hope*, Moltmann criticizes Marxism for its inconsistency and lacking vitality for the realization of its ideal.¹¹ Marxism, in contrast to the Christian eschatological hope, is a failed "realized eschatology." In *The Trinity and The Kingdom*, Moltmann explicitly points out that the doctrine of the Trinity means that Christian political theology is "bound to criticize political monotheism."¹² His Trinitarian theology will not support political monotheism and authoritarian government. *Tiandao* is "the way of the heaven" or the natural equilibrium of the universal order for Moltmann, while ambitious rulers in China claimed to be the sole representatives of *tiandao*. His positive assessment of China was based on the assumption that the Chinese Communist Party had gone through the "class struggle" stage which it technically has. However, the party-state has not become less authoritarian or politically dominant. Moltmann's statement is prescriptive for Chinese ecological theology, but does not apply to the political. Deeper integration of faith and Chinese culture while remaining faithful to the gospel is a difficult task for the church.

The Chinese church is now experiencing repression of religious freedom and a dispelling of hope for further reform and opening up. The Reform and Opening up policy of the last forty years has not brought religious persecution to an end. The persecution and controls have been steadily increasing since 2014. Christianity has been condemned by the government as a Western political threat.¹³ For Moltmann, reflecting on the *mission* of the church through *hope* is the most appropriate action in the midst of hopelessness and loss. He stated that,

"Christianity" has its essence and its goal not in itself and not in its own existence, but lives from something and exists for something which reaches far beyond itself. If we would grasp the secret of its existence and its modes of behavior, we must enquire into its *mission*. If we would fathom its essence, then we must enquire into that *future* on which it sets its *hopes* and expectations. If Christianity in

¹¹ Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 318.

¹² Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and The Kingdom: The Doctrine of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 198.

¹³ Liu Hui 劉慧, ed., *Guojia anquan lanpi shu: Zhongguo guojia anquan yanjiu baogao, 2014* 國家安全藍皮書：中國國家安全研究報告 (2014) [Annual Report on China's National Security Studies, 2014] (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2014), 81.

the new social conditions has itself lost its bearings and become uncertain, then it must once again consider why it exists and what is its aim.¹⁴

I will engage with Moltmann's ecclesiology by way of two themes in order to reveal a sense of mission and hope for the Chinese church. They are, firstly, eschatological hope and the exodus church; and secondly, the Holy Spirit and the mission of the Chinese church for a deep integration of Christian faith and culture. By becoming an exodus church, Chinese Christianity can recover the resources to engage with the recent political challenge and achieve a deeper integration of faith and culture. Eschatological hope provides the church with resources to keep a critical distance from any version of realized eschatology, while still expressing solidarity with its community. According to Moltmann's thought, the eschatological messianic hope of the church leads to a charismatic ecclesiology. Prioritizing an ecclesiology of eschatological hope in the Holy Spirit over an ecclesiology heavily controlled by Logos Christology can help the church gain new perspective and vision for its mission in present-day Chinese society.

2. ESCHATOLOGICAL HOPE AND THE EXODUS CHURCH

Moltmann is well aware of the marginalization of religion in modern industrial society. It creates a mass organization of conformity on one hand and isolated, lonely individuals on the other. In the name of progressivism, the church ceased to be *cultus publicus*. It becomes a *cultus privatus*, a voluntary, private activity, concerned with inward, individual and private religiosity and has no role nor social duty in our public life.¹⁵ For the Chinese church, the state allows the freedom of religious faith, but not the freedom of religion. The state therefore tolerates religion as a *cultus privatus*, thereby relegating it to the private realm. Under the heavy hand of the state, the churches are under pressure and have developed in three directions among others: 1, become a stagnant organization sanctioned by the government's regulations; 2, become a

¹⁴ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 325.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 310.

political dissent sect in the name of Calvinism; or 3, become a fanatical folk religion.

The first direction is the result of a total assimilation of the church into the state's bureaucratic system. Since 2013, the state has implemented the policy of “*wujin* (五進; literally ‘five penetrations’ or ‘five introductions’) and *wuhua* (五化; literally ‘five transformations’).” *Wujin* specifies that “policies, laws and regulation [of the party-state] must be introduced into churches; health and medical treatment should be introduced; the culture of popular science should be upheld; [the concept of] supporting people in need should be endorsed in the churches” and “[the idea of] the construction of harmony must be defended.”¹⁶ *Wuhua* refers to “the localization of churches: the regularization of the management of churches; the *bendihua* [本地化; indigenization] of theology; rendering transparent the finances of churches and rendering church doctrines *shiying* [適應 compatible].”¹⁷ One may expect that when the policy is implemented fully and successfully, the church will be an extended organization of the state, rather than an independent organization with its own belief and value system.

The second direction for the church is to become an organization of Calvinist political dissent. Fredrik Fällman found that Chinese intellectuals have recently begun to favor Neo-Calvinism, which shows a keen interest in social involvement and political criticism.¹⁸ In the recent political adversity, we can notice that Pastor Wang Yi 王怡 of Early Rain Covenant Church in Chengdu has openly called for resistance.¹⁹

¹⁶ Willy Lam, “Xi’s Obsession with ‘Cultural Renaissance’ Raises Fears of Another Cultural Revolution,” *China Brief* 16, no. 3 (February 8, 2016): 4.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 4–5.

¹⁸ Fredrik Fällman, “Calvin, Culture and Christ? Developments of Faith among Chinese Intellectuals,” in Francis Khok Gee Lim, ed. *Christianity in Contemporary China: Socio-cultural Perspectives* (Oxon: Routledge, 2013), 153–68.

¹⁹ Wang has written a long article to call for a strong resistance against the new regulations on religious affairs. The following is an excerpt of his article, which highlights his fighting spirit:

Despite any of the regulations’ administrative decisions and possible punishments for me and my church, my conscience constrains me to reject these regulations. I shall use any nonviolent, legal means necessary to urge the government to reconsider: whether by litigation, appeals, lodging complaints, or submitting a constitutional review of the regulations before the National People’s Congress. I oppose these regulations’ serious infringement of citizens’ freedom of religion, and I oppose their illegal restrictions of Christianity. Not only that, but I encourage every Christian loyal to the gospel and the cross of Christ, and every church loyal to the lordship of Christ, to prepare yourself. For the sake of the gospel and your con-

The third direction can be recognized through the rapid growth of Charismatic and Pentecostal groups within China. Daniel Bays points out that the many Charismatic and Pentecostal Christian groups in China are a hybrid mix of Pentecostal features and other elements (drawn from either non-Pentecostal Christianity or traditional popular religion). Also, they have a strong “sectarian impulse,” which is a continuing problem for Chinese Protestantism.²⁰

However, if we follow Moltmann’s eschatologically-oriented ecclesiology, the church cannot be controlled and confined by the state’s regulation, folk religious miracles, nor modes of resistance. The church is a group of people being called, sent, justified, and sanctified by the risen Christ. And Christ “gathers, calls, and sends them into his eschatological future for the world.”²¹ In the three directions described above, the church is not fully liberated from the power of history—a fixed anticipation of the future hope. Moltmann delineated messianic future by referring to the future in the power of history. According to him,

The messianic interpretation of the experience of the moment that ends and gathers up time is the *redemption of the future* from the power of history. The power of history is exercised by the mighty.

science, be willing on the one hand to respect and submit to the government’s authority to enforce the law—and be willing on the other hand to peacefully resist these wicked, anti-Christian, anti-constitutional laws. Have no part in this wickedness which would oppose our faith and violate citizens’ rights, but be willing to endure harm to our interests and injury to our bodies. Moreover, I encourage all Christians who work in law, politics, public welfare, education, and related fields, to either bravely speak out with a loud voice, or to quietly advance the abolishment and change of these unlawful laws. To this end, I thank the one true God with a reverent heart, that through this plight he would allow the church in China such a chance for a revival of the gospel. As it suffers gladly and refuses to back down, the church has an opportunity to give witness to society of the Lord’s kingdom and order. It has an opportunity to testify that Christianity’s freedom of conscience and gospel of souls are higher than all earthly authority.

Wang Yi, “My Five Views on the *New Regulations on Religious Affairs*,” ChinaSource, January 30, 2018, <https://www.chinasource.org/resource-library/chinese-church-voices/why-christians-in-china-must-prepare-themselves-for-the-new-regulations-on-religious-affairs>. The Chinese Communist government’s imprisonment of Pastor Wang is totally unjust and unacceptable. It is obviously an instance of religious persecution that all Christians should oppose. They should speak out in support of the freedom of Pastor Wang and members of his church.

²⁰ Daniel H. Bays, “Chinese Ecstatic Millenarian Folk Religion with Pentecostal Christian Characteristics?” in *Global Chinese Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity*, ed. Fenggang Yang, Joy K. C. Tong, and Allan H. Anderson (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 40.

²¹ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 325.

They have to extend their victorious present into the future in order to augment and consolidate their power. *Their* future is without an alternative, and devoid of surprises. It is no more than the prolongation of the present state of possession, and its expansion. *Their* future is therefore extrapolated from the tendencies and trends of *their* past and present. *Their* future is planned and projected future, for only the person who has the power to implement and enact can plan and project.²²

Conversely, the messianic church should opt for the radical openness of hope.²³ In the “messianic moment,” “the laws and forces of the past are no longer ‘compulsive.’ God’s messianic future wins power over the present. New perspectives open up.”²⁴

The messianic future forbids the church to become a tamed institution of the state. Moltmann asserts that

the task of Christianity today is not so much to oppose the ideological glorification of things, but rather to resist the institutional stabilizing of things, and by “raising the question of meaning” to make things uncertain and keep them moving and elastic in the process of history.²⁵

The gospel calls Christians to break out of their socially fixed roles. The church must venture into an exodus for a new life rather than preserving the status quo of the modern industrial society. The messianic future keeps the church away from the temptation of becoming an apparatus of the power of history. The church should not become a subordinate or political device of the state. Only an exodus church can help the society to appreciate the value of messianic redemption and offer appropriate ministry to it. Without venturing into an exodus, the Chinese church can only become a *cultus privatus*. In this way religious belief will only intensify the loneliness and isolation of individual lives.

²² Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 45. Italics his.

²³ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM, 1992), 247.

²⁴ Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 45.

²⁵ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 324.

If the church is in exodus, it will inevitably come into conflict with the society, and in the Chinese context, with the state. But it does not mean that Christians are in enmity with or separated from the society and its people for their radical difference. Instead, the radical difference offers a hope for a new life.²⁶ This hope allows Chinese Christians to “enter into a conflict-laden, but fruitful partnership” with the society.²⁷ In this light, the messianic eschatological hope of the church helps Christians avoid a decline into mere political activism. The hope of the church is not for establishing a new earthly political power. Rather, the church, which is the body of the suffering messianic Christ, should *embody the suffering and hope* of the people.²⁸ The church is the harbor, the hospital and the refuge of the suffering people. We should identify with the marginalized, the underprivileged and the oppressed in China, suffer with them, and bring them hope through service and prayer. These spiritual exercises lead Christians to become a spiritual community for the world and not merely for itself.²⁹ Then we can realize that not only Christians, but also many Chinese compatriots are suffering. The messianic church’s ministry thus meaningfully connects the Chinese church with the Chinese people, society and culture. In the early church, Jesus was remembered as a compassionate and suffering “embodiment of the anguish of those rejected by the dominant culture.”³⁰ The compassion and solidarity of the messianic Christ enabled the church to break through the lifestyle of the dominant culture and offer new possibilities for the people.³¹ In this way, the Chinese church can offer a new and meaningful understanding of the integration of harmonious equilibrium and life possibilities (not mere historical progress) to the Chinese people. Political ambition cannot help the church to break away from the hopeless life of the modern industrial society with Chinese characteristics. The crises in Iraq, Liberia and Syria have also shown us that Christians should not build our hope upon political and military uprisings to bring about the collapse of totalitarian regimes.

²⁶ Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 83.

²⁷ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 324.

²⁸ Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 352–61.

²⁹ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 325.

³⁰ Walter Bruggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 40th Anniversary ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2018), 91. In this book, Moltmann’s influence on Bruggemann can be seen in Bruggemann’s use of Moltmann’s works.

³¹ Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 286–87.

However, the dominant political power will not tolerate the church, for it turns away from the consciousness of the dominant culture. One can expect that more persecution and suffering will come. The pain and hardship constantly test the church's resistance to becoming a quasi-secular political movement. Moltmann's eschatological ecclesiology offers us important insight for overcoming this temptation. The church will realize that it should suffer and bring hope to the people through prayer. He reminded us that,

Prayer for the Spirit makes people watchful and sensitive. It makes them vulnerable and stimulates all the powers of the imagination to perceive the coming of God in the liberation of man and to move into accord with it. This prayer therefore leads to political watchfulness, and political watchfulness leads to prayer. The spiritual fellowship with Christ grows up between solitude with Christ and fellowship with others.... We cannot "make" a messianic way of life. It is not practice that makes perfect here; it is suffering and hope. This way of life is created by the Spirit...³²

With prayer for the Spirit, the Chinese churches will understand that it is not their "work" that counts. In prayer, the church will firmly cling to its Christian identity with political watchfulness, and stay in solidarity with Chinese compatriots in suffering and hope in the midst of difficult political circumstances.

Furthermore, the Chinese church will recognize that, as an eschatological community, it is "the new creation of the Spirit." *Charismata* in the spiritual community means, "the *energies* of the new life." These gifts of grace are not mystical or magical powers, but lead to courteous service.³³ More importantly, a true sign of a spiritual community is its unity. Moltmann emphasized that,

The *unity* of all the charismata is fore-given in Christ... All the members of the messianic community have the gift of the Spirit and therefore "office-bearers." There is no division between office bearers or the "leaders" and the people. There is no division between the Spirit of the ministry and the free Spirit.³⁴

³² Ibid., 287.

³³ Ibid., 295.

³⁴ Ibid., 298.

Therefore, we should reject a naïve charismatic manifestation that may lead the Chinese church to become a folk religion. At the same time, the church as an eschatological community should beware of the paternalistic leadership in the Chinese culture and the authoritarian political requirements. In our worship, rituals, sermons, ministries and Christian life, we should let the Spiritual energies flow. With the fulfilment of the Spirit, we have the power to keep the church away from the powers of principalities and evil minds. When Chinese Christians are able to break away from the magical power of folk religions, paternalism of traditional culture, and authoritarianism of present political progressive historicism with the gift of the Spirit, we may offer a better understanding of benevolence (仁, *ren*) in the Chinese culture with the gospel's message of love and compassion.

In other words, the eschatological hope sets the church as a participant in Christ's messianic mission and the creative mission of the Spirit. Since the church is in God's mission, we cannot say "*what* the church is in all circumstances and what it comprises in itself. But we can tell *where* the church happens."³⁵ It does not matter whether it is a Three-Self church, a Pentecostal rural church, or a Calvinist intellectual urban house church. Our mission for the people testifies whether we are the Christian church in China. Indeed, we can claim that there is a church whenever a Three-Self church, a Pentecostal rural church, or a Calvinist intellectual urban house church serves and suffers with Chinese people.

One may argue that the challenge faced by the Chinese church is not suffering brought on by political oppression, but serious division within itself. This division is mainly caused by theological controversies and doctrinal disagreements. Then, one may worry that Moltmann's radical openness to the eschatological future may be considered another version of "liberal" theology and be rejected by some Chinese Christians. How can we demonstrate the value of Moltmann's theology in a church with deep sectarian tendencies? It is a challenge for us to employ Moltmann's insight in the Chinese setting. Nevertheless, the challenge can only be met by theological exchange and discussion among Christians with different positions. In the following section, I will attempt to engage in a dialogue with Moltmann and the Chinese theology that is inherited from the missionaries' Logos Christology to find a direction for future ecclesial endeavors.

³⁵ Ibid., 65.

3. *THE CHURCH IN THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT*
AND THE MISSION OF THE CHINESE CHURCH
FOR THE CHINESE CULTURE

In this section, I will attempt to discover how Moltmann's eschatological ecclesiology can help the Chinese church to face political challenges, especially the rhetoric condemning Christianity as foreign to the Chinese culture. Since the early twentieth century, Chinese Communists and non-Christian intellectuals have promoted a political rhetoric of national salvation and patriotism. They have shaped their supported ideology as the salvation and hope of the Chinese culture. The rhetoric also promises a utopian, if not eschatological, "Chinese dream." When they faced a rapid growing Chinese Christianity, they portrayed Christian faith as unscientific, superstitious, imperialistic, foreign, and thus, unpatriotic. Being atheist is always a preferable and better choice for good Chinese. I will argue that Logos Christology inherited from the missionary enterprise cannot meet this challenge. To a certain extent, it is fueled by the belief of a dichotomy between Chinese culture and Christian faith, which has contributed to the unbelief of contemporary Chinese. Because the challenge can be traced back to the early twentieth century, I will offer an analysis using historical examples.

In 1900, the Boxer Uprising showed that many Chinese had a strong anti-Christian sentiment, and they intended to drive Christianity from China by force. Interestingly, the two decades that followed the Boxer Uprising were a period of unprecedented growth for Christianity in China. However, the growth did not mean an end of anti-Christian ethos in China. In April 1922, the 11th annual general meeting of the World's Student Christian Federation was held for the first time in China. The meeting place was Tsinghua University at Peking. The conference received wide public attention before it took place. On March 9, 1922, a group of students in Shanghai announced the formation of the Anti-Christian Student Federation and issued a manifesto. They sent telegrams to urge students all over China to prevent the meeting of the Christian Federation from taking place. On March 20, they published a booklet entitled *Why we oppose The World's Student Christian Federation*. The movement promptly received support in Peking. On March 21, the Great Federation of Anti-Religionists issued a declaration that religion and human beings

could not co-exist and claimed to purge society of the poison of religion. On April 9, a conference of the Great Federation of Anti-Religionists was held at National Peking University. At the conference, the chancellor of the University, Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培, and an influential Kuomintang leader, Li Shizeng 李石曾, gave lectures. On April 15, students from National Peking University, Chao Yang University, Communications University, Nankai University, Tung Tsai Commercial College, Peking Higher Normal College, Peking Normal School, Southeastern University and the Peking Government Technical College also issued anti-Christian manifestoes. All of these were government institutions. In Canton, Nanking, Hangchow and other places, anti-Christian organizations were also established.

Science, rationalism and patriotism were the main grounds for attacking religion and thus Christianity. *The Manifesto of the Great Federation of Anti-Religionists* of March 21, 1922 claimed that:

We swear ourselves to sweep away the poison and harm of religion on behalf of human society. We profoundly deplore the fact that in human society religion has spread a poison which is, ten times, a hundred times, a thousand times worse than floods or ferocious animals. If there is to be a human race, religion must not subsist. Religion and mankind cannot both exist. The origin of mankind has been through evolution; but in religion it is explained with bias that man and all things were created by heaven or earth. In the beginning men were free and equal; but this is distorted by religious explanation; thought is restrained, personality is ruined, idols are worshiped and one man is adored as master.³⁶

The Federation declared that its aim was “solely to remove the yoke of religion and to enhance the truth of science.”³⁷ That the Christian Church was an unpatriotic and imperialistic organization was another main point of the accusation. *The Manifesto of the Anti-Christian Student Federation* of March 9, 1922, which is the first document of the Anti-Christian movement, reads as follows:

³⁶ C. S. Chang (Zhang Qinshi 張欽士), *Guonei jin shunian lai zhi zongjiao sichao* 國內近十年來之宗教思潮 [Religious Thought Movements in China During the Last Decade] (Peking: Yanjing Huawen xuehui, 1927), 193–94.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 196–99.

We know that the modern form of social organization is capitalistic. In this capitalistic social organization there is on the one hand the property holding class which eats without working, and on the other hand the proletariat which works but is unable to eat. In other words, [there is] on the one hand a looting and oppressing class, and on the other a looted and oppressed class. Christianity and the Christian church of the present time are devils who support and help the former, and loot and oppress the latter. We recognize that such a cruel, oppressive and miserable capitalistic society is unreasonable and inhuman, and that we must plan a different [social] construction. Therefore, we recognize these devils who help tyrants—modern Christianity and the Christian church—to be our enemies with whom we must not avoid a decisive battle.

The world's capitalism which has grown and matured is now on the verge of collapse. Accordingly, capitalists of every country—whether in England, America, Japan or France—have become panic-stricken, and they have used all possible means to seek a bare chance of survival. Whereupon they have flocked to China one after another, and carried out an economic invasion. Modern Christianity and the Christian church are the vanguards of this economic invasion.³⁸

In August 1923, C. S. Chang published in the *Chinese Recorder* an article about the Anti-Christian movement, in which he summarized the main points of the movement:

(I) Attacks on religion itself

(a) Religion is out of date; (b) religion is unfavourable to human progress; (c) religion has no connection whatsoever with morality; (d) religion is not necessary for mankind.

(II) Attacks on Christian teaching

(a) It is too unscientific; (b) it is contrary to logic; (c) it is contrary to social theories; (d) it is not at present adaptable.

(III) Attacks on the Christian Church

(a) She has committed many sins in Europe; (b) she supports capitalism and opposes radical ideas; (c) she is the vanguard of Western exploitation, capitalism and imperialism; (d) her methods and devices

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 187–88.

of evangelism are morally bad; (e) Christians usually live by low moral standards. They are “rice Christians” and hypocrites.³⁹

In other words, unbelief is a virtue. Conversely, Christians are unpatriotic and corrupt. One can easily realize that this rhetoric is still common among contemporary Chinese political elites.

Unfortunately, Chinese Christians, from the Republican period to the present, have not been able to effectively respond to the anti-Christian sentiment. Chinese Christianity, as an heir of the Western missionary enterprise and the revival movement, has been taught to believe in a dualist cultural message: Christian versus heathen. Christianity is the only true religion and all other cultures are “evil.” Griffith John, a famous missionary and evangelist of the London Missionary Society, in the General Conference of Protestant Missionaries at Shanghai in 1877, stated that,

As missionaries we believe that we are in China in obedience to the command of our Lord; and the purpose of our mission is to disciple, or make Christians of, this great nation. Whatever others may do, this is our work. We are here, not to develop the resources of the country, not for the advancement of commerce, not for the mere promotion of civilizations but to do battle with the powers of darkness, to save men from sin, and conquer China for Christ.⁴⁰

The missionary mentality was a result of the Christian church’s overwhelming emphasis on the salvation of the incarnate Christ. The Word of God *is* the *Logos*. Jesus Christ *is* the incarnated *Logos*—God, and the only way to salvation, and the mission of the church is to bring salvation to the world. Chinese people can only be saved by Jesus Christ through conversion. More importantly, it implicitly means that Chinese culture is valueless and evil, and thus “conquer China for Christ” is the only meaningful and legitimate task for missionaries. Because the Chinese church is heir to the nineteenth-century missionary enterprise, their teachings have led most Chinese Christians to believe that there is a great divide between Christians and non-Christians.

³⁹ C. S. Chang, “The Anti Religion Movement,” *Chinese Recorder* 54 (1923): 463–64.

⁴⁰ From *Records of the General Conference of the Protestant Missionaries of China Held at Shanghai, May 10–24, 1877* (Shanghai: American Presbyterian Mission Press, 1878), 32–33.

Under the missionary influence, the responses of both conservative and liberal Chinese Christians to the challenge of the anti-Christian movement were limited by Logos Christology. For example, Chang Wen Kai (張亦鏡, Zhang Yijing), the editor of a popular conservative Christian magazine, *The True Light Review*, wrote that Christianity taught Christians to be good citizens, and New Culture had been brought into China through Christianity rather than scientism and Communism.⁴¹ He then defended the historicity, divinity and sole salvation of Jesus Christ—a typical apologetic strategy of Logos Christology. Chang rejected the accusation that Christianity was narrow and exclusive, but he did not support the teaching of universal salvation. He emphasized that Christian evangelism of only one savior was an expression of love. Chang stated that, “Every person is the son of God by creation and everyone should receive the salvation of the designated Savior. So, we have to preach the Gospel without reservation. If there is no preaching, there is no love.”⁴² As for Chinese culture, Chang argued that the wisdom and truth in Jesus Christ’s teaching was like the sun, while Confucius’s teaching, though valuable, was like the moon. Jesus Christ was far more excellent than Confucius.⁴³

The root of Chinese anti-Christian sentiment comes from the assumed mutual exclusivity of Chinese-ness and Christianity. However, Chang responded to the unbelievers’ anti-Christian challenges with a conservative Logos Christological discourse. It cannot address the question of a dualistic view of faith and culture that contributed to the Chinese rejection of Christianity. Chinese culture and scientific knowledge are viewed as insufficient, if not in opposition to the Christian faith.

On the liberal wing, T. C. Chao (趙紫宸, Zhao Zechen), a leading liberal Chinese theologian in the Republican period, taught in 1918 that Christianity was,

⁴¹ Zhang Yijing 張亦鏡, “Yu Chen Duxiu Xiansheng shuo Jidujiao yu Jidujiao hui” 與陳獨秀先生說基督教與基督教會 [Discussion with Mr. Chen Duxiu regarding his ‘Christianity and the Christian Church’], in *Piping fei Jidujiao yanlun huikan* 批評非基督敎言論彙刊 [Answering Attacks Upon Christianity] (Shanghai: China Baptist Publication Society, 1927), 195–96.

⁴² Zhang Yijing, “Bo Wang Jingwei de Zongjiao Du Min Lun” 駁汪精衛的宗教毒民論 [Rebutting Wang Jingwei’s “Religion as Poison to the People”], in *Piping fei Jidujiao yanlun huikan*, 122–23.

⁴³ Zhang Yijing, “Ye Ru bian” 耶儒辨 [A Debate on Christianity and Confucianism], in *Zhenguang cong kan, Biandao wen* 真光叢刊·辯道文 [True Light Review Collection, Apologetic Works] (Shanghai: China Baptist Press, 1928), 32.

... a type of consciousness, a definite personal-social experience and a new life that has its origin and realization in the person of Jesus Christ. In other words, Christianity means a Christ life, or a Christ consciousness, the content of which is a definite relation of men as children to God as Father, with all that it involves.⁴⁴

Chao's statement is explicitly Christocentric. It is very similar to the liberal theology of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (for example, Albrecht Ritschl). Also, we can find that it focuses on the impact of the person of Jesus Christ on us. Jesus Christ is the highest revelation of God to humanity. According to Chao,

It was not as God or the Son of God that Jesus attracted me; rather, He commanded my attention and interest because He was a thoroughly human being.... Consequently, when Jesus declared Himself to be the Son of Man, whatever else that term may mean, I was glad, because here I could have ground for assurance that what He taught was true, for He was human.⁴⁵

Logos Christology—that Jesus Christ as the ideal and exemplar of everyone is Chao's theological basis and it enables his program of the social reconstruction of national life. God was the "objective reality of our life," transcendent yet immanent in the entire universe. Jesus, the supreme revelation of the divine reality, saw God "in all men and in all things."⁴⁶ Chao is different from conservative Logos Christology in considering Jesus's virgin birth and body resurrection to be unscientific.⁴⁷ However, in accordance with Chang, Chao asserted that Chinese culture is insufficient because it lacks an awareness of God.⁴⁸ By the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937 and his imprisonment from December 1941 to June 1942, Chao had given up his liberal theological position. He declared that we could only be saved by

⁴⁴ T. C. Chao, "The Appeal of Christianity to the Chinese Mind," *Chinese Recorder*, 49 (1918): 287.

⁴⁵ T. C. Chao, "Jesus and the Reality of God," *Zhenli yu shengming* 真理與生命 [Truth and Life] 7, no. 5 (March 1933): 1–2.

⁴⁶ T. C. Chao, "Yesu de Shangdi guan" 耶穌的上帝觀 [Jesus's Conception of God], *Shengming* 生命 [Life] 2, no. 2 (September 1921): 1–15.

⁴⁷ T. C. Chao, "Duiyu Xinjing de wojian" 對於信經的我見 [My View on Creeds], *Shengming* 1, no. 2 (November 1920): 5.

⁴⁸ T. C. Chao, "Christianity and Confucianism," *International Review of Missions* 17 (1928): 598.

faith through Christ, for human beings are sinful and helpless.⁴⁹ However, Chao's spiritual awakening deepened his assertion that Chinese culture was ruined and fallen.⁵⁰ In other words, Chinese culture and Christian faith are still in opposition to each other. The mission of "bringing salvation" in Logos Christology turns out to be a kind of self-separation from the Chinese culture.

K. H. Ting (丁光訓, Ding Guangxun), the then leader of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, employed the theological views of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin to put forward a cosmic Christology for making Christian faith compatible with Communism.⁵¹ In many ways Ting's theology of the cosmic Christ attempted to break through Logos Christology. However, it failed to be faithful to the Christ event in history as a messianic event. In his theology, Ting implied that communist political thought, but not the messianic event, becomes the denominator of understanding salvation and the hope of the Chinese people. Despite this, Ting's thought helps us to find a Christology that can embrace world events other than the singular event of the incarnate God.

One may look to Spirit Christology for an answer. Geoffrey Lampe suggests that Spirit Christology is a Christology of inspiration, indwelling, and possession. The Christ event designates not only the incarnation of an existent divine mediator, but more importantly, also the personal union of the human Jesus with God as Spirit—that is, God in personal and active outreach to the world. Through the Spirit's indwelling, inspiring, and possessing Jesus, we understand that Jesus is truly God and authentically human. Then, conversion is not achieved by missionary force and efforts, but by the attraction of the beauty, good, and love of the Spirit's work in human beings and in Jesus Christ.⁵² The Christological mission and the pneumatological mission work are distinguishable from each other. In particular, the pneumatological mission can be manifested specifically in history. We can qualify the cultural manifestation of the good, the true, and the beautiful as

⁴⁹ T. C. Chao, *What Do I Find Myself Believing These Days* (Peiping: Yenta Christian Fellowship, 1940), 3–9.

⁵⁰ T. C. Chao, *Cong Zhongguo wenhua shuodao Jidujiao* 從中國文化說到基督教 [Speaking of Christianity from the Perspective of Chinese Culture] (Shanghai: Guang xue hui, 1946), 10–11.

⁵¹ K. H. Ting, *Love Never Ends: Papers by K. H. Ting*, ed. Janice K. Wickeri (Nanjing: Yilin Press, 2000).

⁵² Geoffrey Lampe, "The Holy Spirit and the Person of Christ," in *Christ, Faith and History*, ed. S. W. Sykes and J. P. Clayton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 124.

the works of the Son and the Spirit⁵³ while this beauty and goodness are revealed in the common good of non-Christian social values as well. Chinese culture can be understood as the work of the Spirit and evaluated by the Christ event, which is the same Spirit's work in history.

With Spirit Christology, cultural heritage and its future advancement can find a place in theological teaching. In this sense, we can have a better chance to know whether the Christian faith is compatible with Chinese culture and scientific knowledge, which is a constant challenge to Chinese unbelievers. Also, in response to non-Christian patriotism, Christians can answer that Christianity is not an import of Western ideology, but an interaction and mutual learning process for people's good. We do not need to eschew Chinese culture or forsake our Chinese identity. We only need to give up the self-centered attitude towards other thoughts and ideas.

The difficulty of Logos Christology is that its emphasis on a fallen world and a saving incarnate God deepened the dichotomy between faith and culture. An ecclesiology based on Logos Christology will inevitably lead to the perceived "foreignness" of Christianity in the eyes of Chinese non-Christians. Spirit Christology can help us gain a new understanding of salvation-history. It teaches us to reflect on salvation as the ongoing mission of the Son and the Spirit. In this way, the Christ event is not only a messianic event, but also a Trinitarian event. A Spirit Christology without a strong Trinitarian reflection will become a process philosophy. It will lead us to define the church's mission according to a secular agenda. Ting's theology of the cosmic Christ mentioned above is an example of this danger.

Therefore, Moltmann's pneumatologically-driven eschatological ecclesiology opens a path for the deep integration of Chinese culture into the Christian faith. Moltmann articulated the church's mission in the Spirit through a Trinitarian framework, stating that, "[i]t is not the church that has a mission of salvation to fulfil to the world; it is the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father that includes the church, creating a church as it goes on its way."⁵⁴ In this ecclesiology, our messianic hope is a communion in the Spirit. The messianic future is important for the church to grasp its own mission, but it is a future

⁵³ Ralph Del Colle, *Christ and the Spirit: Spirit-Christology in Trinitarian Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 207.

⁵⁴ Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 64.

for creation's liberation in the Spirit through the Father. In this liberation, human beings will unite with one another, with nature and with God. In the Spirit, the church gives itself to and serves others through love and sufferings and there will be joy of fellowship.⁵⁵ The church living in the power of the Holy Spirit will not understand itself alone; it can only truly comprehend its mission, its meaning, its roles and its functions in relation to others.⁵⁶ In the principle of relationality, the church is in a communal life with fellow human beings. For the Chinese church then, we are in a communal life with our compatriots. "If in a community," Moltmann writes, "we take over responsibility for others, these others exist in a certain way *in us*." "In human community we mutually open up for each other the spaces of freedom through love, or we close them through intimidation. We are presence, space and dwelling for one another."⁵⁷ In other words, Chinese people are not only targets for conversion, we are called to be responsible for and dwell with one another. For the Chinese church, this communal unity does not only mean a unity among Christians. It also means solidarity with the Chinese people. The church's mission is not to "save" the fallen culture from the world "outside," but to be in solidarity with the community and its culture as its member, for the sake of messianic hope. It does not impose a dichotomy between faith and culture.

In the present Chinese church, it is strange that our motto is "Back to Jerusalem." We are keen to be a significant player in the global missionary movement. However, the demolition of crosses and churches in China has shown that most Chinese people do not care about the destiny of the church. It is puzzling that the demolition of massive church buildings has not earned Christian the sympathy and support of their neighbors. Indeed, it is a serious warning signal that the church is a "stranger" in the Chinese society. It indicates that the church has not served our community well and is out of touch of ordinary Chinese people. Although the party-state restricts social participation of the church, we may ask how individual Chinese Christians, as the bearers of the Spirit, can bring the gift of the Spirit to their fellow Chinese. With their good works, the solidarity of the Spirit and a real harmony of life can be witnessed in the Chinese society. The Chinese church can bring messianic hope to the Chinese society only through solidarity of

⁵⁵ Ibid., 65.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 19.

⁵⁷ Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 301.

love and compassion with their compatriots. Only solidarity can counter the political rhetoric on the “essential foreignness” of Christianity.

Also, as members of the Chinese community, we should furnish our culture with the aesthetic beauty of the Spirit.⁵⁸ The beauty of the Chinese culture should be shown in our worship, rituals and daily Christian life. If there is persecution of Christians in China, the Christian resource for meeting the challenge is nothing other than the pneumatological hope of the resurrection. This hope “makes people ready to live their lives in love wholly, and to say a full and entire Yes to a life that leads to death. It does not withdraw the human soul from bodily, sensory life; it ensouls this life with unending joy.”⁵⁹ Persecutions should not alienate Chinese Christians from their culture. Christians should say “Yes” to our life, which is embedded in the matrix of Chinese culture. We should live our life with love and beauty. In hope, Christian life can show its compatibility and complementarity with the Chinese culture.

Finally, in response to Moltmann’s call for an integration of Chinese culture and Christian faith, I would suggest that the concept of immanent transcendence in Moltmann’s pneumatology could lend the Chinese church a direction of reflection, because the Confucian idea of the union of Heaven and human beings is also an ideal for immanent transcendence. While Confucianism points to the everlasting and ever-creating *Dao*, Christianity refers to the Spirit. However, can Christianity allow for recognizing *Dao* as a work of the Spirit? Moltmann’s pneumatology provides a basis for this possibility:

Every experience that happens to us or that we have, can possess a transcendent, inward side. *The experience of God’s Spirit* is not limited to the human subject’s experience of the self. It is also a constitutive element in the experience of the “Thou,” in the experience of sociality, and in the experience of nature.... It is therefore possible to experience God in, with and beneath each everyday experience of the world...⁶⁰

In this way, Christianity and Chinese culture can achieve a deep integration through recognizing the work of the Spirit within us. Foreign-

⁵⁸ Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 109–12.

⁵⁹ Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 73–74.

⁶⁰ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 34.

ness is not the result of our different beliefs, ideas and cultures; it is the result of enmity and hatred—the result of our sin. Chinese culture can be understood as the work of the Spirit and be evaluated by Christ’s messianic event. More importantly, Moltmann’s Trinitarian approach will help us to avoid the pitfall of subsuming Christ’s messianic event into the political agenda of earthly powers. In the messianic event, the church is called to serve the Chinese compatriots and to be in solidarity with them through suffering.

When we engage with Moltmann’s theology, we will realize that the most important mission of the Chinese church in the present time is not “conversion,” but being in solidarity with our people.