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## Chinese Theological Review [Vol. 14, 1999]

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# Chinese Theological Review: Volume 14

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## From the Editor

Volume 14 marks the renewed publication of the Chinese Theological Review after a year's hiatus. A new beginning is a time for rethinking and new directions. Thus, in response to readers' suggestions, this and future issues will include focus on themes and concerns in the continuing development of Chinese theology. This provides the opportunity to draw on older material that could not be used in past issues for either editorial or space considerations. Two such essays appear in this issue, providing background and insight into the current interest in *shenxue jianshe*, or theological reconstruction.\*

The call for theological reconstruction can be seen as a renewed effort to divest Chinese theological thinking of received viewpoints imported by conservative foreign missionaries in the 19th and 20th centuries. In this it recalls the theological mass movement of the 1950s. Church leaders and educators have long been concerned about the need for more diversity and pluralism in theological thinking in the church while emphasizing adherence to the basic tenets of the faith. This is seen as especially important for a minority church in a developing socialist country, a church that has struggled hard to be identified with the people of China and to make the church better known and more acceptable to the non-Christian populace. Rigidly held views on belief vs. unbelief pose a possible threat to the hard won and increasing space for religious believers in Chinese society. The idea that Christians should not cut themselves out from the people, or from government efforts at unity and stability, reform and openness is reflected in many of the essays in this volume. Theological reconstruction asks that theological thinking be opened up to a variety of viewpoints, new insights from within the church, as well as new ideas from the scholarly study of Christianity outside the church.

In his opening remarks at the second meeting of the Sixth National Christian Conference' held in Jinan, Shandong, 11-18 November 1998. Bishop K.H. 'Ping spoke of the biblical evidence for a continuing and developing revelation that would lead to a more open approach to matters of faith. Following his address, other speakers highlighted the need to intensify theological reconstruction. For Han Wenzao, Su Deci and Chen Zemin, theological reconstruction also involves improving theological education and training intellectuals within the church who can both carry theology forward and dialogue with scholars outside the church. Wang Aiming's recent essay on self-government points toward some of the issues involved in relating theological reconstruction to other urgent concerns facing the church.

In various ways, the first four selections in the Articles & Essays section, and Du Fengying in her sermon, touch on an issue that is very much at the heart of theological reconstruction. This issue has been expressed as belief vs. unbelief: the "saved" and the "unsaved"; the relationship between creation and redemption; how to understand truth, goodness and beauty outside the church; and the practical concern of how to relate to the majority of unbelievers in China. Each of these authors seeks to draw both sides of the equation into the whole of God's creation. For them, as for Xiao Ye, "whether the Chinese church will adopt an attitude of openness to its own people will determine its development and future." (p. 5)

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\* This term has been translated in various ways. In these pages, "theological reconstruction" is used as a working translation, close to the original, and with echoes of past movements and emphases.

Also included in this section are talks and a sermon presented at a consultation on ecumenical partnership between the China Christian Council and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) held in Louisville, KY in March 2000. The joint statement issued at the end of the consultation has also been included. These and other presentations at the consultation offer good summaries for an overseas audience of the ongoing work of the church in China, as well as its commitment to ecumenical relationships with other churches on a basis of true partnership and mutual respect.

I am happy to include the 1999 contents for berth the Yanjing and Nanjing journals, which should be interesting and useful for those who do have access to these publications. Others may be included in future. There is also a page on current (1999) statistics for the Protestant church in China, which will be updated each year.

Volume 13 of this journal carried a number of selections from the then forthcoming English edition of Bishop K. H. Ting's papers, *Love Never Ends*. Copies of the 540-page hardcover book can be ordered directly from the China Christian Council, 17 Da Jian Yin Xiang. Nanjing 210029, China. E-Mail: [cccnjo@public1.ptt.js.cn](mailto:cccnjo@public1.ptt.js.cn). Fax: (86-25) 4419948. The cost is US \$30 by surface mail and US \$35 by air. A limited number are also available for North American orders from the editorial office of this journal at a cost of US \$30, surface mail. Please refer to the address on the copyright page.

I am grateful to the authors of the essays that appear here for allowing their work to be shared through translation. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own. Through the journal, the Chinese term *Lianghui* refers to the "two bodies" - the China Christian Council (CCC) and the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of Protestant Churches in China (TSPM). The English title of Bishop Ting's book, *Love Never Ends*, is used when referring to either the Chinese or English edition. When the reference is not clear from the context, [Chinese edition] appears in brackets.

The editor and publishers would like to thank the Council for World Mission for a three-year ecumenical project grant made to the China Christian Council for the partial support of this journal. As editor, would like to thank the Foundation for theological Education in South East Asia for their renewed and continuing support, and Dr. Marvin Hoff and Mrs. Joanne Hoff for their kindness and support. I would also like to thank our readers for their patience through an uncertain time and their continued interest in this publication. With this issue, all editorial and subscription matters have been moved to San Francisco Theological Seminary. Correspondence should be referred to the editor, using the address found on the copy- right page. I am grateful to the Seminary for providing this home for the publication.

Janice Wickeri  
San Anselmo

## **Theology Reconstruction**

### **Chinese Theology in the Early 1980s - Xiao Yue**

Theology is the church thinking. The history of theology is the history of the church's ongoing thinking process.

1979 is a milestone in the history of China. On it is written a glorious turning point in the life of the Chinese people. Written there too is the witness to the resurrection of the life of the Chinese Christian Church. What did the church think after its resurrection? What did the Chinese church, with all the numerous tasks crying out for attention, think of doing? How were Chinese Christians present, faced with reforms in their nation, their society and the world? What did Chinese church leaders discuss? What new developments were there in Chinese theology?

In 1979, church life had only recently been revived. By looking at and expounding on the important topics in theology for the Chinese church at the time---incarnation, life out of death, the theology of reconciliation, etc. and on the changes and developments in the theology of the Chinese church, this essay will attempt to detect hints of God's revelation and guidance for the church. I will do this through consideration of the special tempering of past decades and an analysis of the new historical period that formed the background to what was happening.

#### **Incarnation**

Through their time of testing, the church in China and Chinese Christians discovered that in times of trouble, the Word may be found in many weak bodies of "flesh," like a treasure in a vessel of clay, and frequently show forth strength and power beyond all expectation. The uncommon Word in the common "flesh" of the Chinese church embodied something profoundly uncommon.<sup>1</sup> The theology of the Incarnation expresses the new experience and new understanding of Christ by the Chinese church in its unique context. "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1: 1) had long been etched at the heart of many Chinese Christians' faith. But the emphasis was on "Word" and "God" "Flesh" and "human" were ignored. With regard to the two natures of Christ, the emphasis was on the glory of the divine nature, ignoring the human nature. People believed in that transcendent and ineffable God, doer of divine miracles, ruler of heaven and earth, not in that God who lived among humans, the Christ who was friend to tax collectors and sinners, able to "rejoice with those who rejoice: weep with those who weep" (Rom. 12:15). But in the early 1980s, people were thinking more deeply about the whole message of the Incarnation.

First, the value of the "flesh" was affirmed. In the past, the faith of most Chinese Christians was marked by a rather strong dualism of good vs. evil. They believed that God was purely sacred and that humanity was purely evil; the Church was pure and clean, the world evil and dark. Believers were all good and upright. Unbelievers were all bad and evil. Some even dismissed the good deeds of non-Christians. People seldom pondered the value of human beings,

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<sup>1</sup> K.H. Ting, "How to Read the Bible," Tian Feng, Inaugural issue, New Series (1980): 47

or the worth of the whole of God's creation. In fact, the majority of Christians at the time were simply continuing the traditions of others; they were not themselves inheritors of faith and truth.

But in the early 80s, these views underwent something of a change. Many church leaders who were extremely fundamentalist in their faith came to affirm the value of the "flesh" through theological consideration of the Incarnation. Jiang Peifen, for example, in her essay "And the Word Became Flesh," writes: "The Incarnation shows how precious humanity is to God ... humans have the moral attributes of God. They have free will and are able to tell right from wrong. ...Our Lord Jesus never grew tired of human life, rather, he cared for everything about it."<sup>2</sup>

The "flesh" not only makes known the value of God's creation, at the same time, because the Word must become "flesh," it also makes clear the unique and important meaning the flesh bestows on the Word. K. H. Ting holds that "The incarnation of God ... tells us something of how we should regard the flesh and material things. Because they are channels by which God enters into the world, flesh and material things are not to be despised. They are worthy, and can become, indeed ought to become, vessels conveying holy love. We believe that God's love and concern for man is all-embracing. Bodily and material life, intellectual development, the socio-political sphere, ethics and morality are all included within the realm of God's love and concern."<sup>3</sup> And Shen Yifan says "The incarnation affirms all just, honest and self-sacrificing efforts in human life and opens up the way for their acceptance by God."<sup>4</sup>

In fact a correct assessment and positive affirmation of the value of the flesh is an affirmation of the whole of God's creation and of God's work of creation, as well as of the value of the church and of Christians. To put it another way, this is a re-valuation of the Chinese church and Chinese Christians, which establishes an image of a Chinese church that affirms of the value of the self and of other people. And from the positive valuation of the flesh we can see the true meaning of that part distinguished as sacred. At the same time, the positive affirmation of the value of the flesh was an important turning point in the theological thinking of the early 1980s, a great contribution. It implies greater opening of the self to acceptance of many others who are as weak in the flesh as oneself, an affirmation as well as participation with them. This is another reason why more people came to understand and accept Chinese Christianity and theology in the early 1980s.

Secondly, God with us. The Incarnation makes clear that God moves to be with people. God is not only the God of Christians, but the God of all humankind. Therefore the Incarnation shows that God identifies with all humanity, to bring all humanity back to God. How was the Chinese church able to discern this about the Incarnation event and take the initiative in identifying with and trusting in even more people in the early 1980s?

It had to begin by breaking through the thinking and attitudes of many Chinese Christians who over-emphasized the other world and despised this world. Jiang Peifen pointed out: "The Incarnation is the union of the body of flesh and blood with that of the Word ... Our faith is a

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<sup>2</sup> Jiang Peifen, "And the Word Became Flesh," Tian Feng, No. 5 (1982): 1.

<sup>3</sup> K.H. Ting, "Another Look at three Self," Tian Feng, No. 2 (1983): 4

<sup>4</sup> Shen Yifan "Theology in the Chinese Church." Nanjing Theological Review, No. 3 (1985): 33.

living faith ... soul and body, eternal life and everyday life, faith and action, are all inseparable, and should be one." And again, "the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ comes into this material world. He does not transcend the world and humanity, but brings humanity the fullness of grace and truth. He brings eternal life. "A spiritual person is not one cut off from reality. The spiritual person lives in the world, works among people ... the Incarnation links God and human, heaven and the world."<sup>5</sup> In her view, the other world and this world become one with the Incarnation, and the normal life of a Christian is the linking of the transcendent with this world. Overemphasis on the transcendent easily leads to the feeling that righteousness is far removed from people, and this goes against the Incarnation.

Then we turn to the reality of the Incarnation, which lies in its direct and profound entry into humankind, showing every consideration for all of life. Some Christians think that Christianity is spiritual and Christians are spiritual citizens of the kingdom of heaven. As such, they should not have any contact with those of the flesh. This is idealism cut off from reality. In the early 1980s, many Christians realized that the Chinese church should begin from reality, because in the Incarnation God is no longer an invisible, untouchable concept of abstract existence, but the real Son of Man living among us. The late Bishop Shen Yifan's interpretation is representative of Chinese theologians: "The experience of Chinese Christians can also be summed up as a process of identification with the Chinese people. In these years we have been sharing weal and woe with our people, we understand that we are inseparable. When the new social system changed the fate of the working people, our spiritual vision was greatly expanded, we felt how greatly the vastness of God's love surpassed what we had imagined it to be."<sup>6</sup>

Next, God's identification with humans implies God taking the initiative in opening himself up to receive humanity and at the same time, to be received by people. Whether the Chinese church will adopt an attitude of openness to its own people will determine its development and future. And the Incarnation brings another revelation to a Chinese church in an open China: the sealed room and complacent thinking are not the revelation. They are not what Christ requires of us. There is no longer an impassable gap between spiritual formation and an enthusiasm for life, between serving and loving the Lord and serving and loving others. This is because the bridge between God and humans, the church and the world, belief and unbelief, Christian and non-Christian is found in the body of the incarnate Christ. As Wang Weifan says, "For more than thirty years Chinese Christians have experienced suffering and joy, distress and comfort, perplexity and hope, weakness and strength, together with our own people. No longer choosing to set ourselves apart but standing firmly within the ranks of our people, Chinese Christians face God anew with deep familial affection for our compatriots and a sense of identity with our nation."<sup>7</sup>

Finally, the body of flesh witnesses to the Word. The Incarnation is to make the flesh become Word. But in the process, there is also a constant process of "flesh witnessing to the Word." The flesh witnessing to the Word calls us to honor God's will in the world, to be salt and light, to glorify God and help people. At the same time, the flesh witnessing to the Word offers our limitations to God and brings God's grace to humanity, witnessing to the might of the gospel

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<sup>5</sup> Jiang Peifen, "And the Word was Made Flesh." Tian Feng, No. 5 (1982): 1-3.

<sup>6</sup> Shen Yifan, "Theology in Pastoral Care at the Grass Roots in New China." Nanjing Theological Review, No. 6&7: 88.

<sup>7</sup> Wang Wei fan, "Changes in Theological Thinking in the Church in China." Nanjing Theological Review. No. 2: 9.

in real life. Wonderfully, the Chinese church has worked hard to make the flesh witness to the Word. As Jiang Peifen pointed out, "In the light and revelation of the Holy Spirit, the Chinese church has turned aside from the mistaken path of isolating itself from the world and from its people. ... We observe the biblical teaching that demands that the church witness to God's truth on earth that all humankind may gain God's saving grace."<sup>8</sup> Truly, the Chinese church in the early 1980s witnessed not only in China, but had a beautiful and faithful witness to the whole world.

### **Out of Death, Life**

The message most often preached from the pulpits of the Chinese church in the early 1980s was the message of resurrection. This was because at that time the Chinese church itself embodied this message of life out of death. The Chinese church had been as one dead during the Cultural Revolution. But when the disaster had passed, the Church flourished, springing up everywhere like bamboo shoots after rain. As the Book of Psalms has it, "Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil" (Psalms 23:4). Thus the church at the time had a dual nature: it was a church that had known death; it was also a witness to resurrection. Chinese Christians remembered the suffering they had been through and felt both blessed by the present vitality and blessing of the church and yet sorrowful remembering the suffering they had been through. They looked forward to the future full of hope, yet it seemed their confidence was inadequate to the tasks ahead. But in spite of all this, Christians perceived abundant theological meaning, the meaning of the resurrection, in the very fact that the Chinese church had regained its freedom.

First, the Chinese church is a church that has been through death. Many of God's servants looked at these ten years of chaos as God's tempering and testing of the Chinese church, a time of burning and purification, whose goal was to make the Chinese church stronger, more vital, able to bear more fruit. Wang Weifan writes: "Christ feeds and waters his church not with the Holy Spirit only; he also sends down fire to burn it. He sends not only grace and pity, but a sword. Always Christ is the refining fire which seeks to purge the dross and bring out pure gold. Like bleach he removes the stains from the cloth, returning it to its original cleanliness. He winnows without rest, separating the chaff and gathering in the wheat. Christ never finishes pruning his trees, cutting of the barren branches so as to bring forth good fruit."<sup>9</sup> As he sees it, the experience of death allowed Chinese Christians to experience the cross. It was a lesson from God for the Chinese church in the theology of the cross. The Chinese church was like a charred log pulled from the fire by God, though burnt, it was not destroyed by the fire. Jiang Peifen spoke from the heart when she said, "Thanks be to God, for thirty odd years, the Chinese church has lived and died with God and has gained new life."<sup>10</sup>

Second, the Chinese church is a witness to the resurrection. If the Cultural Revolution is suffering and death, then the restoration after the Cultural Revolution is resurrection and joy. The Chinese church embodies resurrection, and also witnesses to it. Having experienced resurrection, Chinese Christians are more able to cherish the grace of the cross. The people believed that "the

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<sup>8</sup> Jiang Peifen, 4

<sup>9</sup> Wang Weifan, "Lilies of the Field (4)" Tian Feng. Inaugural Issue, New Series (1980): 29

<sup>10</sup> Jiang Peifen. "God's measuring rod-common tasks," Nanjing Theological Review, No. I: 65.

power of the resurrection not only moved in the apostolic age, in the same way, it lingers on in the church in China today."<sup>11</sup> As a witness to the resurrection, the Chinese church pays even more attention to the message of Christ's resurrection from the dead, because the message of the resurrection and the theology of the cross are equally precious. "If we ignore the Lord's resurrection, we are not preaching the whole gospel, we are leaving something out."<sup>12</sup>

Resurrection implies new life, and the Chinese church is a witness to the possession of new life. The new experiences, new light, new meaning and new future of the Chinese church in the 1980s were like those of the Lord after the resurrection.

Third, the theology of life out of death. Bishop K.H. Ting wrote in the late 80s, "Out of their own experience, Chinese Christians have gained a greater understanding of Christ's resurrection."<sup>13</sup> This shows how the Chinese church had already begun to experience resurrection in the early 80s. Resurrection from death proves the eternity of God and the eternal life of the church. The resurrection from death of the Chinese church proves that God did not abandon his church, that the church possesses the vitality of God's eternal life. No human hand can destroy her. Resurrection from death also proves that God's work of creation continues unceasing. K.H. Ting says, "To have had some experience of dying and rising up again in our individual life, in our national life and in the life of our Church conditions many of us to see that resurrection from the dead is actually the law by which God carries on his work of the world's creation, redemption and sanctification, the principle by which the whole universe is sustained and governed."<sup>14</sup> At that time, the Chinese church was in urgent need of establishing a church order in line with Chinese conditions, national characteristics and cultural context. The resurrection was able to give the Chinese church new revelation. Shen Yifan writes, "... We abide by all that the Bible reveals, but the resurrected Lord also enables us never to rigidly adhere to the interpretations that have come down to us through the ages, but to strive to find the new light and guidance God has for us in the present age." And he went further, "We are heirs to all the precious tradition that has come down to us from ancient times, but the resurrection of the Lord enables us to abandon systems and forms which are corrupt or unsuitable, to strive in our new age to establish a church in line with our national conditions and pleasing to our people."<sup>15</sup> Dying and rising up again is a collective experience of the Chinese church. In the 1980s, people became even more aware that "... We are linked to Christ because of his death and resurrection, this is not only a type of human experience ... this is also the collective experience of the Chinese church ..."<sup>16</sup> From Christ as savior of the individual and savior of the Church, to Christ as savior of a people and even savior of the whole world; from Jesus as personal lord to Lord of the Church, to Lord of the world and lord of the entire cosmos, is not an easy spiritual leap. But we are happy to discover that the Chinese church of the 1980s actually began to move from narrow ideas to a broader spiritual picture, however slow and difficult progress may be.

### **The Message of Reconciliation**

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<sup>11</sup> Zhao Zhi'en, "Witness to Resurrection," Tian Feng, No. 2 (1982): 24

<sup>12</sup> Shen Yifan, "Witness to the Lord who Rose from Death to Life," Tian Feng, No. 3 (1986): 2.

<sup>13</sup> "Bishop K.H. Ting on the Church in China Today," Tripod, No. 47: 11 From an interview with Elizabeth Larson. April 20, 1988.

<sup>14</sup> K. H. Ting, "The froth of the Resurrection," Tian Feng, No. 4 (1983): 37. A sermon preached in Lambeth Chapel. October 1, 1982.

<sup>15</sup> Shen Yifan, "Witness," 3.

<sup>16</sup> Shen Yifan, "Theology in Pastoral Care," 88.

The message of reconciliation was an extremely important theological consideration of the Chinese church in the early 1980s. It set down a very good theoretical foundation for the existence and development of the church in a more open Chinese society.

First, the Chinese church had weathered over thirty years of storms and many Christians had intimate knowledge of the importance and urgency of reconciliation for Chinese Christians and lit the Chinese church itself. Bishop Ting points out: "Theology in the Chinese church has already gone beyond the liberation stage. Our urgent task is to set about rebuilding the temple of the Lord."<sup>17</sup>

In the early 1980s, the leadership and many Christians in the Chinese church were striving to find a new theological path, one that would enable the Chinese church to become in a genuine and real way, in a socialist nation, a church that stands with the people. They wanted to discover the meaning of Christian faith in the social life of new China. At the same time, they recognized that the Church had to involve itself directly, if cautiously, in studying the establishment, management, order, ministry and liturgy of the church, trying all sorts of things, especially in theology, in order to invest these with new meanings suitable to the Chinese situation, the culture and the practical realities of the church. In these trials and explorations, many in the church leadership came to a deeper level of understanding of the message of reconciliation, and a theology of reconciliation grew up in response. Its most representative example was the paper given at the international dialogue with the Chinese church held in Montreal, Canada in October, 1981, by the Vice principal of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, Chen Zemin. The paper was well received by the theologians and church leaders from all over the world who were at the conference.

He writes. "God does not take a neutral stand. He sides and struggles with the people. ...Our point of departure is to opt for the people, to opt for the welfare of our country, and to opt for a social system that is more just and humane than anything the Chinese people have seen in our history of over four thousand years. ... Chinese Christians, while working shoulder to shoulder with our compatriots, are sincerely trying to relate the Christian faith and commitment to the great experience the Chinese people are going through."<sup>18</sup> Thinking such as this was representative of the aspirations and hopes of the majority of Chinese Christians at the time. The theology of reconciliation played a guiding role at the practical level in the Church.

In terms of ecclesiology, reconciliation suggests that the church should be humble, not seeing itself as righteous. According to Chen Zemin. "The church is primarily a *koinonia*, a sharing fellowship, and secondarily an *ecclesia*, the called out."<sup>19</sup> Understanding the primary nature of the church as a fellowship in the spirit of mutual caring and rather than in the traditional sense of a body called out was undoubtedly a great gain in understanding for the church in its special context in China at that time. Such an understanding came in response to the needs of reconciliation. Chen goes on, "The ideal church should make sisters and brothers of the whole ecumenical community."<sup>20</sup> Of course, the Chinese church had no reason to place itself outside its own people. If it did, it would not conform to the ideal of a church. "Traditional

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<sup>17</sup> K. H. Ting, in Chen Zemin, "Some Point of Christian Theology," Tripod, No. 6 (1981): 12-14.

<sup>18</sup> Chen Zemin, "Some Points of Chinese Theology," Tripod, No. 6 (1981): 12-14. "

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

emphasis of evangelism on making converts and increasing the quantity of church membership is shifting to improving the quality of the church's relations with the people. Compassion and service take the place of a self-righteous Jonah Mentality. Mutual respect and a healthy spirit of latitudinarianism have submerged and allayed age-long denominational disputes."<sup>21</sup> The turning point in this thinking was in fact brought about by reconciliation theology. To put it another way, God reveals the church through itself, but also through the non-church, or through secular thinking. Thus the church must both humble itself and affirm others. Chen says, "Aside from historical praxis. We are drawing on what I may call Chinese contemporary secular thinking among academic circles as reflected in the mass media as sources of theological thinking. Discussions on the value of philosophical idealism, on the meaning of life, stress on the "beauty of mind and spirit." controversy on the nature and social functions of religion, and many others, have been very thought-provoking."<sup>22</sup> This does not mean that in order to promote reconciliation the Chinese church would abandon the strictness and uniqueness of faith, doctrine and Christian morals, and become mixed in with other theories, but to show that the meaning of reconciliation theology is not only a matter of identifying with the people in terms of practical experience, but also in terms of theoretical theology, in the mutual search for knowledge that will help and perfect each other.

Second, from liberation theology to a theology of reconciliation. The Chinese church, like so many churches in Asia, Africa and Latin America, has experienced a period of colonial or semi-colonial social history. Consequently, in terms of theology, there are many points where they are close or even nearly the same. But the liberation theology of Latin America is a weapon gained in the social and political struggle by the Latin American churches, and this is entirely different from the experience of the Chinese church. Latin American theology has liberation as its goal, while Chinese theology has already entered upon a post-liberation period of building up the church; its main task is reconciliation. As Chen Zemin says, "Chinese people. Christians included, have been liberated thirty years since, in the sense that political power and ownership of means of production have been transferred from the hands of a minority of oppressors to the people. Our theological task is not liberation as such, in the Latin American sense, but reconciliation to be reconciled to and identified with the Chinese people as a whole, from whom we had been alienated, for the carrying on of our task of liberation for the further betterment of our society; and at the same time to be reconciled to God, from whom the human race has been alienated and with whom we all yearn to be united through the mediating mystery of the incarnate Christ in the endless course of human history-"<sup>23</sup>

We might say this shows how Chinese theology has progressed. In the midst of upbuilding and praxis. reconciliation theology has gradually become more widely known and accepted. And in spite of the fact that "reconciliation" theology is in the midst of this process of upbuilding and praxis, and is not by any means perfect, people could sense that Chinese theology, with its goal of harmony, was much further along than Latin American theology, and possessed the special Chinese cultural characteristic of fullness.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Liu Saimei, "A Reflection on 'Some Points of Chinese Theology';" Tripod, No. 6 (1981):11

<sup>24</sup> K.H. Ting, "Love that Loves to the End," Nanjing Theological Review, No. 9: 61

Third, love seeks reconciliation. Reconciliation, at some level, develops out of Incarnation theology and love is the origin of Incarnation. That love seeks reconciliation was another topic of theological inquiry in the early 1980s. Bishop Ting has a unique understanding of love. He holds that "love is the true meaning of human life, love is the most important truth, love is the most basic attribute of God, love is the essence of the cosmos."<sup>25</sup> In his view, "What makes the gospel lies in its proclamation that God is love, that this God will overcome sin and the power of sin, enabling people to reconcile with God and with each other. To this end, this Word become flesh brought humanity's redemption to completion upon the cross. God opened the door to reconciliation ... God is the fountainhead of reconciliation, he scatters the seeds of reconciliation throughout the world. Though Christ, humankind is reconciled with God and bears witness to reconciliation in the world."<sup>26</sup>

Fourth, reconciliation implies opening up of the self. Gods nature and creation are all part of an open system the Incarnation directly reveals to humankind-God does not desire to close himself oil. So his demand to the church is that it also continually opens itself up. During the 1980s, the Chinese church strove to attempt to open itself. On April 21, 1988, Bishop Ting remarked to a reporter: "One of the most important changes is that China is eager to open to the outside world."<sup>27</sup>

The appearance of this- type of thinking was largely a response to the impact of two facts: (1) after 1979, China's door was open to the outside world; and (2) the Chinese church was undertaking an inquiry into a theology of reconciliation. Since reconciliation implies opening oneself up this experience also comes out of the theological thinking and praxis of the church in China over the past thirty years. Philip L. Wickeri says that his deepest impression of this theological rethinking is that it enabled Chinese theologians to gradually understand that Christianity, which is grounded upon faith in the Trinitarian God, should maintain an open approach to the positive reforms taking place in the broader society."<sup>28</sup> This open approach is not only with regard to social change, but vis-a-vis the Chinese reality and the Chinese people. Wickeri says that in a context dominated by nonbelievers, Chinese theologians have not attempted to define their faith over against the masses of the people, thus isolating themselves from the people. Rather they go among the people, and sacrifice themselves for the people to continue their witness to the omnipotent God. Lord of all. In the process, Christianity has become more acceptable in society and welcomed by Chinese people at every level of society.<sup>29</sup> In his view, this approach furthers the deepening of reconciled relationships and can enable the Chinese church to establish itself in society, to establish a 'human presence' for and through society, strengthening its sense of interdependence with its compatriots.<sup>30</sup>

The open approach of the early 1980s, along with reconciliation thinking, can be said to have directly influenced theological inquiry and self-strengthening in the latter 1980s and 1990s,

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<sup>25</sup> Ting, "

The Message of Reconciliation," Nanjing Theological Review, No. 5: 5.

<sup>26</sup> Ting, "Bishop K.H. Ting on the Church in China Today," Tripod No. 47 (Oct, 1988): 8.

<sup>27</sup> Philip L. Wickeri, "Human Presence and Christian Participation." I in Chinese Nanjing Theological Review. Nos. 6&7:27-30.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

and was also helpful to furthering the development of theological education in the Chinese church.

*Nanjing Theological Review, No. 3 (1997), p. 66.*

## Looking Back, Looking Ahead: Chinese Theology in the 20th Century - Tang Tu

Humankind has come to the end of a century almost unawares and perhaps the beginning of the next century will slip past us in the same way. For those of us who find ourselves betwixt centuries, our place is a gift of God's grace. It is also a challenge and an opportunity. Following on the liberation and independence of our people, Chinese Christianity has undergone earthshaking changes in the past hundred years. In this century we have known suffering and we have known joy. This was the century in which Chinese intellectuals truly began to do their own theology. As we stand at the advent of the third millennium, it is necessary for us to look back at the course of our church's history, and to look back at the labors of the theological pioneers of our church. Although I am one of the younger generation, I will venture, within the larger framework of global theological developments in this century, to map the course of Chinese theology and attempt to assess where we have been.

The reconstruction and development of Christian theology has never been separate from the development of the church and the times in which it exists. On the contrary, it is a response in the theological realm to the development of the church. Good theological thinking is helpful to the development and reconstruction of the church, just as bad theology is an obstacle to it. Nor can the development of theology in this century be separated from the concrete context in which the church exists. Thus a simple description of the overall context and trends in the development of the church in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is necessary. According to the American church historian Justo L. Gonzales, three areas have had profound and far-reaching impact on the development of the church in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The first is the rise of the movement for church unity. In the 1920s and 30s, denominational unification had become a fundamental task of indigenization for Chinese theology: in 1924, the China Continuation Committee was formed; in 1927, Presbyterians, Congregationalists and others joined together in the Church of Christ in China; in 1958, basic union was achieved, ushering in the post-denominational era. The China Christian Council was formed in 1980, completing organizational restructuring in the post-denominational era. The move for unification among worldwide Protestant churches began with a flourish in the World Council of Churches (WCC), with about 100 member churches from various nations and regions.<sup>1</sup> Since Vatican II in the 1960s, the Roman Catholic Church has also entered into conversation with various churches and denominations. In the last twenty years, a kind of trans-denominational, even trans-religious ecumenical movement has been growing, and the ecumenical theology corresponding to it has become more and more compelling. Ecumenical theology emphasizes that humanity is one body, that the cosmos is a whole, and that God's creation and care extends to the whole cosmos.

The second aspect is the church's separation from political power (not from politics). The situation in which church power existed on a level with, or even surpassed, the secular power of the state changed with the Reformation. But the true conclusion of this task of separation only

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<sup>1</sup> Chen Zemin, "the Chinese Church and the Church Ecumenical," Nanjing Theological Review No. 2 (1998): 42.

See K.H. Ding, "The Cosmic Christ," Love, 408. 29

came with the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The separation of church power from state power enabled the church to be a religious organization that cares for people and is focused on social reality. It also ensured that Christianity no longer lorded it over other religions, making equal dialogue between religions a possibility.

The third aspect is the rise of churches from the developing nations of Asia, Africa and Latin America. Especially since the Second World War, independent churches have been flourishing in the wake of peoples' independence movements. The theology that has emerged from these movements has also been developing rapidly. In today's world, indigenous and contextual theologies that do not follow the Euro-American model flourish: liberation theology from Latin America, Black theology from Africa, Minjung theology from Korea, the theology of the suffering God from Japan and Taiwan wisdom theology.

### **Theological Developments in the 20th Century**

With his injunction to "know thyself", the Greek philosopher Socrates made philosophy a branch of knowledge concerned with human life. The Renaissance raised the banner of rationality, again focusing humankind's gaze on itself. In theology, the Renaissance brought two major changes: the first was a suspicion toward tradition; the second was a rethinking of traditional ontology. The impact of these developments carried over into this century with the development of science and technology and the calamitous effects of two world wars on humanity.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century is truly a great century. Unprecedented growth has taken place in world culture, science and technology. Advances in science and technology are beyond anything our forebears could have dreamed of. For the first time in history, humans are able to transform on a large scale the environment in which they exist. And yet, the interchange among peoples that scientific and technical developments have brought about has also brought unprecedented suffering. Especially since the 1960s, this century of daily increasing pluralism of peoples, cultures and politics has also seen an endless stream of theologies representing every opinion and interest. Over all, we can say that theological development in this century is characterized by pluralism and complexity. Within this general framework, we can identify six trends and characteristics.<sup>2</sup>

#### *Focus on the human environment*

Theologians' concerns and objectives have changed throughout the ages, and we can trace the channel of theological development through these changes. In general, in the first 500 years of church history, theologians were concerned with the reconstruction and regulation of doctrine. Two large-scale theological disputes broke out: the argument over the Trinity and the Christological dispute. These disputes shaped the basic faith and doctrine of Christianity during its first 500 years. For the following thousand years, theological reflection proceeded within this framework. During the Middle Ages, which extended for nearly a thousand years, theological enquiry underwent two stages. During the first stage, theology mainly served to build up the

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<sup>2</sup> See Zhuo Xinping, *Modern Western Protestant Theology* [in Chinese] (Shanghai Joint Publishing, 1998), 395-399.

church and increase its authority. It was claimed that "there is no salvation outside the church," and "whoever does not take the church as his mother, cannot have God as his father." These efforts enabled the church to concentrate both secular worldly power and "heavenly" power in itself. In the mid-and later Middle Ages, theology was mainly concerned with demonstrating the transcendence of God, in order thereby to attain its objective of a humanity in absolute obedience to God. In sum, theology in the Middle Ages was concerned with the building up of divine and ecclesiastical power, a situation that held until the Reformation

Martin Luther's justification by faith was an attack on the authority of the church. From then on Protestant theology was mainly concerned with humanity and the relationship between God and human beings, recovering for this relationship independence from the church (bishop) as intermediary. Returning to a concern with humans themselves, theology focused on the question of personal salvation.

In the 20th century, theologians have begun to break out of this exclusive concern with personal salvation and have broadened their field of vision to society as a whole. These theologians were not content with a faith that was selfish or concerned only with the individual. They sensed that God was not merely a God of the individual. God is the God of humanity. The social gospel is representative of this type of theology.

In the 1960s, theologians discovered that focusing only on societies made up of individuals was still too narrow, the purview of theology must be broadened to include the whole world, the whole cosmos and the environment in which both humankind and nature exist. We can see in the Bible that the ideal human society is not world of people only, but a great harmony in which all creation dwell together.

### *Indigenous Theology*

Indigenous theologies are Third World theologies that differ from the Euro-American tradition: Christians in Asia, Africa and Latin America who explain Christian truth through the culture of their own peoples. For 500 years, western missionaries spread western culture along with the gospel in Third World countries, such that people in those countries could not help accepting western culture when they accepted the gospel. In the course of the establishment of nation and churches in these countries, Christians discovered that the gospel in western garb often irritated or angered their compatriots. This was not helpful for the spread of the gospel or for the church's self-understanding of the gospel. Thus, Christians in the Third World (along with some western theologians) began to think about issues in the gospel using ways of thinking from their own ethnic cultures, peeling away western culture from the Christian message and explaining the gospel in terms of their own culture. Such theological reflection were more than scattered, individual actions-their reach is global throughout the Christian world.

The significance of indigenous theology is not limited to the theological sphere, it is in fact a response to the ideological impact of the church's throwing off of western mission board control. Church independence movements and the reconstruction of indigenous theology complemented each other and depended upon each other. Under the impulse of church independence and indigenous theology, Third World Christians fought to gain a position on an equal footing with

the western church, making it possible to enter into dialogue with them. In fact, for the past thirty years, the situation in the world church has been changing in the direction beneficial to Third World churches. We have reason to believe that in the next century we will grow even stronger vis-a-vis western churches.

### *Two forces appearing in the church*

At present the majority of world theology is liberal in form, but this theology does not present itself as the only correct theology. It does not reject other theologies. Dialogue has replaced hostility: unity has replaced separation. But there is another, more traditional, tendency. This is the evangelical movement, represented by the new evangelicals. They criticize non-evangelical churches, promote traditional doctrine, and keep a distance from non-evangelicals. In other words, the historical distinction between a Christian theology centered on creation and one centered on salvation, is even more obvious today and the contradictions between the two more intense.

### *A greater focus on reality*

Sacred and secular, belief and unbelief: these contradictions no longer occupy prominent positions in theology today, and no longer exacerbate the contradictions between the church and a secular society. After all, the world God has created is one. The Bible does not tell us that God created two different worlds. A Christian's role in the church vs. his or her role in society is no longer the main issue that concerns us. In this century, the church is more concerned with society and emphasizes Christianity serving society, caring about social justice and peace, and calling for a reshaped Christian social ethics and human value system adapted to developments in the world situation. Thus Christianity is no longer an independent kingdom far removed from the rest of humanity and Christians no longer a group removed from their fellows, a group that detests the world and its ways.

### *New direction for ontology*

Among intellectuals in the church, ontology continues to develop, and it has drawn even closer to modern philosophy. Its main expression is found in theological aesthetics, theological linguistics a theological semiotics. A two-thousand year tradition in Christianity, ontology has enabled theology to maintain a close relationship with academic circles in society. Christian theology has always been helped in its development by forward trends of thought in every age.

We should note that this type of theology is always somewhat distanced from faith. This is perhaps one reason for the appearance in China today of culture Christians. We see that in these culture Christians the content of the traditional faith appears in a new form. I will have more to say on this issue below.

### *The return of devotional theology*

From this writer's viewpoint, the goal of Christian theology (primarily expressed in systematic theology) can be roughly divided into three types:

- 1) the apologetic;
- 2) the speculative, which is doctrinal in form, the very image of a religious philosophy, and in the main a response to philosophic views of Christianity. This type responds to the issues raised by the life of faith in the church, and is strongly practical;
- 3) what may be called hermeneutical, a kind of systematized biblical theology.

After the Second World War, people felt overwhelmed by the changing theological tides, and there was a feeling that a thorough-going overhaul was needed. There was a call for a return to the traditional origins of the faith, a return to the Bible. Theology is no substitute for faith and reading theological works cannot supplant reading of the Bible, nor can theological reflection take the place of devotion. Devotional theology arose to respond to this call; however what meant by devotional here is not devotion in the traditional sense.

### **Chinese Theological Thinking in the 20th Century**

World developments in theology inevitably have an impact on the Chinese church. After one hundred years of the gospel in China (beginning in 1807), the Chinese church is beginning to develop its own intellectuals, and it is these intellectuals who are beginning to reflect on Chinese theology. The anti-Christian movement, in the 1920s especially, spurred Chinese Christian intellectuals to make use of Chinese culture and ways of thinking to reflect conscientiously upon theological issues. Thus, they took the first step in constructing a genuinely Chinese theology. Looking at the situation as a whole, for all sorts of reasons, some achievements have been made in Chinese theology in the 20th century, but no breakthroughs. Below, we will take a brief look at the history of Chinese theological reflection in the last hundred years.

#### *Two Trends of the 1920s and 1930s*

The issues facing the first generation of Chinese theologians in the 1920s and 1930s were entirely different from those of today. The majority of intellectuals at the time were anti-Christian, so church theologians had to respond to issues on two fronts:

- 1) the contradictions between Christian faith and scientific reason;
- 2) the relationship of Christianity to the Chinese people, in the midst of national peril.

Church intellectuals could respond to these issues only through conscientious theological reflection. Two intellectuals in the church may be taken as typical: T.C. Chao (Zhao Zichen) and N.Z. Zia (Xie Fuya) They approached interpretation of Christian faith from a basically rationalist and modernist standpoint, in their early theology tending to reject the biblical supernatural revelation and miracles. Christianity as they understood it was basically a religion of ethics. As T.C. Chao put it, "Christianity is a kind of ideology, one that comes out of an affirmation of the existence of the individual and society, a kind of new life, that Christ is already a reality."<sup>3</sup> Of course, Chao and Zia differ dramatically in their theological thinking, the latter having an intensely mystical hue. But this is not to our point here.

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<sup>3</sup> From Shao Yuming, "The Attitude of Chinese Intellectuals 'toward Christianity in the 20'h Century," [in Chinese] in Liu Xiaofeng, ed., *Logos and Pneuma The En- counter of Chinese Diasporan Culture and Christian Culture* (Shanghai: Joint Publishing, 1995), 283.

Other intellectuals were more concerned with traditional Christian faith and the inner life of the individual in their responses to Chinese intellectual circles. They did not really promote interaction with society, but emphasized personal devotion and Bible study, producing the earliest devotional theology joined to Chinese culture. The main proponents of this type of theology are Jia Yuming and Robin Chen (Chen Chonggui). Jia Yuming also wrote many devotional hymns.

These two trends were born in China of the debate between creation theology and salvation theology.

### *Mass theological movement of the 1950s*

Bishop K. H. Ting has said, "1949 was a special year for China. From one standpoint the United States 'lost' China in that year and, from another, in that same year the Chinese people won our liberation."<sup>4</sup> Bishop Zing has pointed out that "There were two things which greatly jolted us Chinese Christians upon liberation. First, through direct contacts with revolutionaries, we found them on the whole very different from Chiang Kai-shek's KMT officials, and far fir the caricature made by some missionaries and Chinese church leaders. They were certainly not the monsters and rascals they were said to be, but quite normal human beings with idealism, serious theoretical interests and high ethical commitment."<sup>5</sup> Second, while Christians found themselves surrounded by contradictions of belief vs. unbelief and good vs. evil, foreign missionaries had taught them that God punishes, not on the basis of good vs. evil, but of belief vs. unbelief. But what the Christians were seeing and experiencing the time was utterly confusing to them: there were people in the church who were thoroughly evil, while in society at large (primarily among the Communists) many people behaved in an exemplary way. Could it be that God would really punish these people (unbelievers')? These two situations compelled the Chinese church to reflect, but the reflection began among ordinary Christians: "Participants in this movement of theological rethinking were at first mostly rank-and-file Christians and clergy at the grass roots."<sup>6</sup> This reflection had a profound impact on the development of Chinese Christian theology. "The mass of believers in the church were themselves raising many theological issues and even today these still have great practical significance."<sup>7</sup>

### *Three trends of the 1980s*

In the early 1980s the church experienced restoration and rebuilding. Beginning in the mid-80s, the Chinese church began a new round of theological reflection. Generally speaking, this reflection took place along the lines of that of the 1950s, but was unable to shake off the model of the 20s and 30s: it was locked in the framework of western missionary theology. With the 1990s, three notable trends appeared:

First, there is an emphasis on theology compatible with socialist society. The thinking underlying this type of theology was shaped in the 1950s, but has experienced some

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<sup>4</sup> K.H. Ting, "'theological Mass Movement in China," *Love Never Ends* [Chinese edition] (Nanjing: Yilin Press, 1999), 137.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 137

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 139

<sup>7</sup> See Chen Zemin, Foreword to Ting, 22-31.

breakthroughs in terms of theory and theological reconstruction. On the one hand, theology is not distanced from the church's concrete environment; on the other hand, it emphasizes the relationship between church and society, opposing theology that would place church and society at odds with each other. We see this type of thinking expressed especially in Christology and most prominently in Bishop Ting's "cosmic Christ." which emphasizes Christ as Lover of the cosmos and God's love permeating the whole of the universe, in no way limited to the church. This is a theology founded on the larger human spirit, breaking through the church's traditional wall of belief vs. unbelief, providing a theological foundation for blending church and society.

Second, there is an effort to bring Christian theology and Chinese traditional culture together in an indigenous theology with an emphasis on seeking theological inspiration in traditional Chinese culture and using traditional Chinese culture to interpret Christian theology. Western theology in reality uses western culture to interpret Christian theology. It is the theology produced when western peoples, in the course of accepting the gospel, reflected on the Christian message through their own culture and thinking. Because the spread of the gospel around the globe began from Europe, western (including many non-Euro-American Christians) believed that western-style theology was the only correct theology. When we eastern people accepted the gospel, we had to accept western culture at the same time. We had to use the western model to understand the gospel. This is of course a principle of inequality, as well as being against the teachings of the Bible. Indigenous theology is a reaction against western chauvinism. Chinese culture is ancient and well established. That theology should draw nourishment from Chinese Culture is not only beneficial for the reconstruction of Chinese theology but also for the enrichment of the treasures of global Christian theology. The important issue in undertaking such theological reflection is how to grasp the essence of Chinese culture and absorb the scholarly research on traditional culture that will impart to Chinese theology the spirit of the times.

Third, efforts are being made to connect the church and intellectuals in the larger society. As everyone knows, for over ten years there has been a 'religion fever' among Chinese scholars, which has produced a group of scholars who study Christian theology. The efforts have served to fill in, to a degree, some blanks in church theology, such as research into western theology since the Enlightenment, and the introduction of modern western theological trends and works. However, from another angle, they present a challenge to theology in the church because their theological research is, to a larger degree, separate from Christian faith. To some extent their research has created confusion in church theological thinking. The church must have persons within it who can respond to this situation. To make comparison that is not entirely accurate, this type of theology is kind of apologetic, and strongly speculative in nature. On the one hand it responds to the challenge, on the other it draws nourishment from these scholars' research, emphasizing the blending of Christ and culture and promoting cultural adaptation.

### **Chinese Theology in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

No one can predict what Chinese theology will be like in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but this writer will make the attempt and present what he feels should be future concerns of Chinese theology. It is unlikely that there will be any one dominant Chinese theology in the next century, but in general, the three trends mentioned above cannot be fundamentally reversed. Below I will

discuss my personal view of issues that must be taken into account in the process of theological reconstruction.

*Attention must be given to the real context*

Theological reflection can never take place outside a particular context. Those involved in theological reflection must strive to grasp the Chinese national essence and become very familiar with our context. They must consider not only our domestic context, but the international context as well. For theology, context is not only material that must be absorbed during reflection, it is also a prerequisite for the existence and development of theology. For example, if Chinese theology since the 1950s had left behind the essence of the Chinese reality, not only would it have been unable to bring forth any theology, it would have been very difficult for it to genuinely serve China's own theological reflection. Therefore my point that theology must be attentive to reality. Proposals and actions to set the church and theology apart from society are completely unacceptable.

*Strive to raise the quality of believers' faith*

The goal of theology is to serve the church. The greater part of inspiration for theology also comes from the church, from the masses of believers. Thus the level of faith of believers to a certain extent decides the direction and success of theology. This is indeed a worry at present with the quality of believers' faith rather low across the board. Believers in rural churches tend to be old ladies whose educational level is rather low. Though there are rather better educated believers in urban churches, in general, the quality of education and faith the Chinese church is in urgent need of a general uplift, to enable mass of believers to have a solid and realistic grasp of the central meaning of Christian faith.

*A holistic understanding of the Bible is needed.*

The Bible is the source of Christian faith, and the wellspring standard of theology. Thus study of the biblical text is of the highest importance. The Bible is God's revelation to humanity and so we must have a well-rounded understanding of it. We must be able witness to the Bible, not that the Bible witnesses to us. In traditional Chinese culture, there are many methods of textual study which be used as guides, methods that have been developed over the centuries in the study of Chinese classical texts. If we want to constitute our own Chinese indigenous theology, the creation of a Chinese hermeneutics is an absolute necessity and the traditional Chinese methods of textual study should be a place of nourishment for us.

*Emphasize the building- up of ecclesiology*

The Chinese church has its own context, with its own specific traits unlike those of the contexts of other churches in other countries, and it goes without saying that we must have our own ecclesiology. At present ecclesiology is very weak in China. While absorbing the strong points of western ecclesiology, we should at same time be using these, by every sort of method, to create our own Chinese ecclesiology.

*Unearth Chinese traditional culture*

The Chinese people have five thousand years of civilization, thus the useful things that can be uncovered in traditional Chinese culture are essential to the study of Chinese theology. But in this writer's view, this not a matter of applying traditional Chinese concepts willingly. It is the essence of the culture that must be grasped, a full understanding of how Chinese patterns of thought differ from western ones. We especially need to become familiar with our national cultural essence to the point that contention ceases.

Though this writer has been following theological reflection in China since the 1980s, partly due to a paucity of materials and my own limitations, what I have said here is hardly exhaustive. Nevertheless my goal is to show that Chinese theological reconstruction has already achieved a level from which there is no turning back.

*Nanjing Theological Review*, No. 2 (1999), 68.

Tang Tu gained his M.Div. at Nanjing Seminary and now teaches at Sichuan Seminary.

## **Old Style Theological Thinking Needs Revision and Renewal - K. H. Ting**

Speech to the Meeting of the Joint Committee on National Minorities and Religion at the Second Meeting of the Ninth CPPCC

I am a Chinese religious believer, a Christian. I have been pondering the issue that is my topic today ever since Chairman Jia Zemin's proposal many years ago to "bring about the mutual adaptation on religion and socialist society." I know that socialism is best social system to have appeared in human history, and there can be no better subject than bringing Christianity and socialism under harmony with one another.

There are different levels of adaptation, and ours cannot stop at that of public declarations. Our adaptation should be based in thought and ideological understanding. This suggests that old-style theology needs to be revised and renewed to some degree. Some things unsuitable to socialist society that were drawn out of faith in the past should be set aside, or at least be downplayed, while at the same time, we should as much as possible draw out things which can be beneficial to a socialist society. And this is why today we are promoting theological reconstruction.

Let me attempt an example: There are many places in the Bible that speak of God's care for, love for and blessing on all of humanities including those who believe in Christ and those who do not believe in Christ. This is normal religious faith. But there are some in the church who make purity of the faith their personal mission, exaggerating the gap between belief and unbelief. They say that believers will be saved and go to heaven after death, while unbelievers will be damned and go to hell. On this basis, they put all their strength into evangelism, urging people to believe. This makes Christianity into the religion that sets believers and unbelievers against each other. This is contrary to so many passages in the Bible, and it is not an instance of adapting to socialism. China's own theology, even now being constructed, cannot countenance the heedless propagation of the antagonism between belief and unbelief, a theological view that would be very harmful to the greater unity of the Chinese people.

In the past few months, the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of Protestant Churches in China and the China Christian Council have called upon Chinese Christians, and theologians in particular, to take seriously the issue of political orientation in theological reconstruction, and to hold a series of national and local meetings devoted to consideration of the logistics of theological reconstruction. The response to this has been rather good. One reason for this is that quite a few of our educated pastoral workers who have studied and reflected on these issues over these years, also feel that they can no longer preach much of what they have been accustomed to preaching, that they should not stick to conventions in their preaching. That is to say, they have become conscious of the need to liberate theological thinking and to be bold in innovation.

The following passage from Marx and Engels affords me quite a lot of theoretical support: "With every great transformation of the social order, there will also be a transformation in people's religious views and ideas. This is to say, people's religious ideas will also be transformed." We hope that some years hence the face of Chinese Christian theology will be

thoroughly renewed so that it will be more truly compatible with our nation's socialist society, and will be able to act as light and salt in Christianity worldwide.

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Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.

# **God's Self-Revelation in the Bible and Our Slowness in Grasping It - K. H. Ting**

Address at the Second Meeting of the Sixth National  
Christian Conference November 11-18, 1998, Jinan<sup>1</sup>

My title is rather long, but not at all complicated. Because God reveals things to us in the Bible gradually, revelations are not single events over and done with. In the same way, human understanding of God's revelation does not come all at once either, but unfolds increases gradually.

From its earliest sections to the most recent, the biblical records over one thousand years of history. Over this long per God has many times and in many ways corrected people's misperceptions of him, and led them step by step to understand better. As it says in Hebrews 1:1: "Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets..."

Jesus' own words in John 16:12, 13 express the same idea: "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth."

Why should this be so? Why doesn't God tell us everything has to tell us all at once? Why spend over one thousand years of Bible telling us? Because we would not understand all at once, and if we could, we could not bear it. Apart from our sinfulness and weakness, each of us absorbs so much in terms of culture and tradition that has been shaped by those who came before us. Our ideas viewpoints, the way we think, all this comes from our families, parents, teachers, neighbors, friends, classmates, and colleagues. And much more comes to us from novels, movies and television. Once they have taken shape, these ideas, viewpoints, and ways of think become ingrained, and are very hard to change.

We know that God's love extends beyond the Israelites to many other peoples. God made this explicit to people early on in many and various ways in the Old Testament. He announced it in Amos 9:7: "Are you not like the Ethiopians to me, O people of Israel? says the Lord. Did I not bring Israel up from the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor and the Arameans from Kir?" And again in Isaiah 19: 25: "...whom the Lord of hosts has blessed, saying, 'Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my heritage.'" However, by New Testament times, many people still had not taken in what they had heard, maintaining that God was God only of Israel, that God loved only the Israelites. This being the case, it would naturally take a very long time for God to correct the Israelites' misperception of him.

You remember that when God used Peter to enable the gospel of Christ to break through the bonds of Jewish ethnicity and spread to all the peoples of the world, the first thing he required was that Peter receive the gentile Cornelius. Peter's resistance to this was great (Acts 10). It had been ingrained in Peter that he should not come into contact with "unclean things" and this was an obstacle to God's wonderful will. God had to use other means to gradually turn Peter's thinking around. Later Peter's thinking did change somewhat, but he was still rather stubborn. In the church, too, there were some who still clung to tradition, changing not a bit.

There was a very long period when, in the eyes of the Israelites, God was only God of Israel, the one who led them into Canaan. The Israelites believed that God wanted them to slaughter the original inhabitants of Canaan. Today we see this as a barbaric and inhumane act, something that could not be the will of God. But at the time, Joshua and others felt that this was "God's righteousness". Many such views of God can be found preserved in the Old Testament books of Deuteronomy and Joshua. Let us consider two such passages. "But as for the towns of these peoples that the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance, you must not let anything that breathes remain alive. You shall annihilate them—the Hittites and Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and Jebusites just as the Lord your God has commanded" (Deut 16,17). "So Joshua defeated the whole land, the hill country and Negeb and the lowland and the slopes, and all their kings: he left no one remaining, but utterly destroyed all that breathed, as the God of Israel commanded" (Joshua 10:40). Such views persist a long time, right up until the exile. Psalm 137: 9 still calls for Babylonian infants' heads to be dashed against the stones. Jonah is another example. Coming from a narrow ethnic background, he was only too anxious that the people of Nineveh not repent so that could call down the wrath of God to destroy the city. But Go, merciful God. God told Jonah, "And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from left...?" We can see from this that the Israelites' misperception of God died hard.

However, through a long period of revelation and teaching from God, the view that God's love extends to all peoples and became widely accepted. Finally, in I John 4: 16, we read, "God is love". We might consider this as the height of biblical revelation about the nature of God. It can also be considered the pinnacle of human understanding of God. It is many years from Deuteronomy and Joshua to I John. God felt that humanity had progressed to such an extent that some people, at least, could embrace this revelation that God is and so he spoke this simple and clear truth through I John. In words, only after a long passage of time would there be some people able to understand, accept and take up this simple truth that God is love.

And so some say that there is internal development in the Bible. I would say that we have no reason to oppose such a view.

"God is love." Love is not a sometime attribute of God. Love is not merely one attribute of God among others. Love is the foremost attribute of all God's attributes. This is the gospel. John 3: 16 begins "For God so loved the world," and only then says that God sent his only son into the world to complete his plan for redemption through the Incarnation, giving eternal life to those that believe in him. Without love on God's part, God could be seen simply as a deity absorbed in his own perfection, unconcerned for the human beings. If we speak only of God's righteousness, and do not speak of God's love, then the image we give of God is that of a punisher. Christian faith then becomes a religion of fear and dread, brought down to the level of common primitive folk religion. In fact, righteousness is derived from love. Only with love as the prerequisite can there be talk of righteousness.

There are four children in my family, including me. Once my parents had to be away from home for some time and my father knew that we would quarrel over food, so he made a rule: one of us must cut whatever we ate, be it cake or fruit, into four pieces (one each) and let the other

three choose first, taking the last piece for him or herself. This made it much fairer and we didn't quarrel. I have always remembered this and have always thought my father the wisest and fairest of fathers. He loved us four children and his love never changed. His fair-mindedness and righteousness were expressions of his love.

When love reaches many people, the just nature of love will be made manifest.

During World War II, Hitler put all the Jews in Germany into concentration camps and sent them to places specially constructed to kill them. They were stripped of their gold teeth, their hair. Their clothing and locked into windowless rooms where they were gassed. Over five million died. This cruel and barbaric act is called holocaust. Some supporters of it claimed that the Jews were guilty of murdering Jesus and should be punished for their crime. They quoted the Old Testament, using as evidence the Israelites' attack on Canaan and their "holy war" against weaker peoples, saying the massacres were God's command. They negated the love of God in the name of God's righteousness, thereby extinguishing God's love and portraying God as a hater of humankind and a brutal punisher. We must shout at those who hold such a view of God that God is not Satan. Nor is God a fascist! The holocaust is condemned by all who speak of righteousness in this world. When we speak of God's righteousness, we must not for a moment forget that it must be founded primarily on God's merciful love.

When China was invaded by the Japanese Military Empire, 40 million soldiers and civilians lost their lives. There were people in our church then who said that this was God's punishment of China. But many people in the church also asked why God would punish the Chinese victims and not the Japanese invaders. God is love. God righteous, but this righteousness must be under the rule of God's love.

God is the cosmic Lover. With a heart of merciful love, he is constantly creating and redeeming. This teaching has been the decisive revelation for my own spiritual journey. It has deepened my faith, my hope and my love.

This view of revelation has helped me to attain a more complete and consistent approach to the Bible. I would like you to ponder the following: Is there development taking place in the view of God and other concepts in the Bible? Can this understanding help us to better discover the treasures hidden in the Bible?

The God of the Book of Joshua and that of I John do not seem be the same God, but there cannot be two Gods in the one Bible. I can only say that due to human obtuseness, God's revelation must progress gradually, it must develop, moving from low to high. The view of God of people in the Bible also evolves gradually, until it reaches perfection. If we deny that the view of God in the Bible changes and develops, what other means have we to reconcile the supposed contradictions in the Bible? Let us humbly await wisdom from God, and may the Chinese church gain a view of God and the Bible that will be pleasing in God's sight.

*Nanjing Theological Review*, No. I (1999), p. 3

Also translated in Amity News Service as "Statement by Bishop K.H. Ting, vol. 18.1/2 (Feb., 1999).

<sup>1</sup> Referred to hereafter as the Jinan Conference. "The main topic of the Conference was the strengthening of theological reconstruction in the Chinese church the Conference asked the Chinese church to enliven its theology on the foundation of maintaining the essentials of the faith, loving country and loving church, and to undertake helpful theological explorations, in order to guide Christians' spiritual and everyday lives. The publication of *Love Never Ends* [the Chinese version -- ed.] is undoubtedly a great event for theological reconstruction in the Chinese church. Last year, in issue No. 4, we published a call for manuscripts, in hopes that colleagues and other Christians and friends, in the church and outside, would send us their own reflections on reading the volume. The response has been overwhelming and two of the manuscripts received are included in this issue. We would welcome further submissions." [Note from the editor of Nanjing Theological Review.]

## On Strengthening Theological Reconstruction - Han Wenzao

This assembly has passed a resolution on this topic, and much has already been said of the great importance of strengthening theological reconstruction for the building up of our church. I won't add feet to the snake by adding to the discussion. Rather, I would like to add my own personal views to those which have been reflected during our discussions.

(1) One delegate said that theological reflection should be grounded in the Bible and evidenced by two creeds: The Apostles (iced and tire Nicene Creed. Someone else observed that faith is unchanging, but theological reflection can be diverse I agree with both these views. This is in no way to imply that our meeting has stopped focusing on the Bible using the two creeds as evidence. But this comment serves as a good and important reminder to avoid giving rise to misunderstandings in the grassroots church.

(2) Another delegate said that we must be cautious in our work of theological reflection. We must be concerned for believers' ability to accept it. But another delegate felt that this potential difficulty on tile believers part should not be used as a reason to hinder the development of theological reflection. I think these vies are also important reminders. Naturally we must take the believers' actual situation into account and we must be cautious, but not overly cautious; over-caution becomes capitulation. Our direction must be clear; then our methods should be appropriate. We must not speak in terms that could be easily misunderstood or lead to giving way. We do not want to give way, instead we must train and educate.

(3) It was also said that thinking theologically is something done at seminaries and there should be a professional team to do it. Seminaries should play a leading and guiding role in promoting theological reflection, going one or even several steps ahead. According to the work report from the Sixth National Chinese Christian Conference. The central issue is, on what kind of theological thinking shall we base our theological education?" I hope the leaders of every seminary and bible school will highlight this statement, refer to it frequently, assess, inspect and guide our work of theological education on its basis. But it cannot be said that theological reflection is the business of seminaries only. The pulpit also has a role to play in guiding theological reflection. Problems in the church, especially in the rural church, should perhaps be addressed theologically.

As for a professional team, I would hope there could be one. But realistically speaking, this is something we cannot achieve at present.

(4) One delegate felt that the agenda for this meeting was too vague. My Feeling is that we can't just immerse ourselves in work. The reality is that we also have to look up from our tasks and urge theological thinking forward. This may be a bit vague, but it is very important.

(5) One delegate suggested that the national *lianghui* should learn from the government, setting concrete goals each year, which are assessed at year's end. This is a fine idea. I, too, promote concrete accomplishments for the church. I have already suggested to the General Secretary of the CCC and the Secretaries General of the TSPM that at the end of this year or the beginning of next year, they should absent themselves from the minutiae of day to day work and spend several

days drafting a three-year plan for running the church well. The first year would be spelled out more concretely and the last two years in a more general way.

(6) A few delegates very much fear that promoting theological education will be like mounting a (political) movement, or a big criticism. I think such fears are groundless. What is important at present is creating an atmosphere tolerant of theological reflection. We must promote mutual respect and oppose branding people as this or that. Only once we have mutual respect will we be able to learn from each other, share and go forward together.

(7) Another delegate said that the goal of enlivening theology shouldn't be simply to enliven theology for its own sake, but to address theologially on the basis of the two creeds, problems the church is facing leaving no openings for heresy, splitting hairs or getting into more and more abstruse topics

As for adapting to socialist society, I mentioned this in my opening remarks. For the ongoing existence and development of the church, we must take the initiative in this regard, not that others want us to adapt, but that we want to adapt. We must adjust those theological views that are not compatible with socialism. This is very necessary.

Adapting to a socialist society does not of course mean just echoing current ills, just the opposite I applaud what some delegates said, that we should speak to problems in the voice of the prophets.

*Nanjing Theological Review*, No. 2, (1999), p. 4.

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## Intensify Theological Reconstruction in the Chinese Church - Chen Zemin

Address at the Jinan Conference

I was very inspired by the speeches given by Bishop Ting and Rev. Su Deci. One of the main themes of this conference is strengthening theological reconstruction in the Chinese church, a theme I find very important and one I would like to address today.

We might consider this second session of the current National Christian Conference here in Jinan a "midterm exam" for this present five-year term of the Conference -a retrospective on achievements and experience in our work during the two years since the present term began in 1997, and a look forward at the direction and tasks we must strive for in the next three years. It is also the last meeting of the *lianghui* in the present century. Soon we will celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of Protestant Churches in China. And in 2000, during the third meeting of the Standing Committees, we will be standing with all the people of China on the threshold of the 21st century and that will be the first meeting of the new century. To use seminary language, this "midterm exam" is a preparation for the "final exam" and the start of the new semester (historical period). Thus alluding to the task of strengthening theological reconstruction in the church is of tremendous historical significance.

During these two days, each delegate has received, in their packet of materials at registration, a thick, hardcover copy of *Love Never Ends*. This is a gift to each member from the *lianghui*. My foreword to the book has already appeared in *Tian Feng* and in the *Nanjing Theological Review*, but the book itself came out only a week ago. We in Nanjing, privileged as those who live near the water are first to see the moon, already have the book. It is extremely topical and pertinent to the subject of this conference.

A year ago, Bishop Ting gathered some of his papers from over the past twenty years, over eighty pieces in all, put them in order and edited them, with a view to publishing them as a selection of his works. He asked me to read them and to write a foreword. I was both anxious and pleased. Anxious because I was afraid I did not completely understand his thinking, that I had not digested the profounder meanings of his essays, and was not up to writing a foreword, and pleased because it gave me the chance to read his selections first. After reading through them all conscientiously, I felt that they could serve as a general summing up of the several decades of experience of the Three-Self Movement of our church. They contained views that were theologically innovative and creative, worth our conscientious consideration and study. I wrote my foreword based on what I understood of my reading, my main purpose being to aid the reader (including intellectual circles outside the church) in understanding the history and present circumstances of the Chinese church, and to serve as background for reading the volume. I asked Bishop Ting to read and edit my draft and circulated it among some friends, both in and outside the church, for their comments. When I had my final draft, at Bishop Ting's suggestion, I first published it in *Dan Feng* and the *Nanjing Theological Review*. When *Love Never Ends* was published, I read my foreword as it appeared there and discovered that two sentences I considered important had been edited out. They should appear beginning on line 2 of page 3. I would like to read them now and ask you all to pay particular attention to them:

"Bishop Ting is a man with a strong sense of mission and a great devotion to his work. As a church leader, his whole life has been closely linked to the fate of the church in China and reflects the issues and challenges which the Chinese church has faced in different periods, as well as the church's response. On this level of meaning, his explorations of theological issues Before publication of *Love Never Ends*, Bishop Ting considered *My Explorations into Theological Issues* as a title, were also the church's investigation of and pondering of its limes, future and destiny. The publication of *Love Never Ends* has great historical and epochal significance for the Chinese church."

This passage is a good general summary, very pertinent and precise. It was not my own (I'm not that good at generalizing), but was added to my draft by Dr. Li Pingye of the Central Religious Affairs Bureau when she read it. She is an old friend of Bishop Ting, well versed in Christianity, who has a great understanding and care for the Chinese church. Her addition of these sentences to my draft is very important and apropos and functioned to "dot the eyes of the dragon." They show that the publication of *Love Never Ends* raises a challenge to our expressed need to consider theological reconstruction seriously and point out a direction for the future. When the book was published without these two sentences, I asked Bishop Ting about it and found that he had felt the passage placed too much importance on his own role. Out of humility, he asked that they be deleted.

Please permit me, as the author of the foreword and with Dr. Li's permission to beg Bishop 'fine's indulgence for rereading the passage. And I would like to take this opportunity to suggest that this book be made a required text for seminary students and a reference for theological and pastoral workers. The publication of the book can be said to be an important milestone in the history of Chinese theology. Today you each have a copy, a gift from the national *Lianghui* I would like to take this opportunity to suggest that you read it carefully and make some of the proposals and views therein topics for your discussions. Of course, there will be differing understandings and views. Our essential Christian faith is one, with the Bible as its foundation. Theology is an understanding and elucidation of faith, it can and should develop in diverse and abundant ways according to different social backgrounds and cultural conditions. For two thousand years of theological history, it has never been unchanging or defined by one voice. There must be differences in order for comparison, exchange, discussion, mutual learning, supplementing to take place, in order to have development and progress. This conference encourages the idea that there cannot be one voice in theology and that space for all kinds of theological thinking, mutual respect and learning should be permitted. In this way only can our theology flourish and abound, only then will there be progress. The publication of *Love Never Ends* offers us rich topics and views for theology; there may be some which are not v cry similar to some old-fashioned views. I hope that careful reading and consideration of these essays will enliven our theological thinking.

Some at this conference have said that current Chinese theology is backward. How should we view such an assessment? Others say that in comparison with mainstream foreign Christian denominations' theology, we are backward. And others say that friendly evangelicals overseas, after coming into contact with us, say we (our theology) are fifty years behind them. Some people think that the theology expressed in our pulpits does not get beyond the negative world-weary theology the western missionaries preached in the late 19th

century or the 30s and 40s of the 20th century. Many spread fundamentalism-premillenarianism-dispensationalism (these three were nearly identical in American usage; they belong to the same trend). At the time, China was variously caught up in the battles among warlords, the war of resistance against Japan, the war of liberation. The people were frequently subjected to the disasters of war, uprooted and suffering, pessimistic and without hope in their feelings toward their reality. This made them very receptive to this type of negative, otherworldly thinking-characterized by waiting for the end of the world, the Second Coming, the "rapture," and by pious thinking focused on personal salvation. This type of theology was mainly brought by English and American "fundamentalist" missionaries in the early part of this century, and through elaboration and agitation by some "revivalists" and "evangelists" (like John Song, Ji Zhiwen and Zhao Shiguang) had a broad and deep impact among Chinese clergy and believers. It came to be thought of as "orthodox" Christian theology and became the "mainstream."

There were also some "modernist" missionaries, whose theology was more open, mostly teaching at seminaries and universities, scorned as "liberals" and "social gospellers" by the fundamentalists, who thought them too concerned with reason, social responsibility and moral behavior. Their impact was limited to some intellectuals. Most of those who initiated and took part in the Three-Self Movement at the beginning were from this group. The fundamentalists thought their faith insufficiently "pure" or "spiritual." To strengthen unity, the Three-Self leaders promoted mutual respect in matters of theology, on a political basis of patriotism, unity and cooperation. In the early Liberation period (the first half of the 1950s) there was a period of mass theological movement. Some rather obvious errors in political thinking and speech were criticized through these discussions, but since the principle of mutual respect was maintained, the theological thinking and speech of fundamentalists and premillenarian-dispensationalists was basically unmoved. From the latter 1950s to the late 1970s, China was basically cut off from the outside world. Due to many political movements and the influence of ultra-leftism, church life ceased and theology was stagnant. In the last twenty years, religious policy has been implemented, church life has been resumed, and the church has developed rapidly. During this time, the theology of fifty years ago, almost unchanged, began to flood the Chinese church. This could facetiously be termed "no change for fifty years." But Chinese society in these fifty years has undergone reform and openness, has undergone an unprecedented transformation, entering the initial stage of socialism. There are many concepts and thinking in the church which are not compatible with socialism and cannot adapt to it. When theology lags behind social reality, we can say that compared with the consciousness of the Chinese people today, we are indeed backward. During this fifty years, world Christianity has undergone many changes as well. There have been many new and important developments in theology, among them some which deserve to be drawn on and studied. It is only in the last decade and more of reform and openness that we have learned a bit about these. In this sense, we are indeed several decades behind compared to Christian theology beyond our borders. Furthermore, knowledge of Christianity among Chinese intellectuals has also undergone an important change in the last twenty years. Many academics have studied Christianity and have a deep understanding of it, surpassing us in terms of theological thinking. They have written many books on Christian doctrine and theology which are much deeper and more advanced than our own. In this sense, compared with intellectuals sympathetic to Christianity, we are tremendously backward.

Whether or not we recognize our church's backwardness in theology (whether or not backward in the senses outlined above), it is an important issue for strengthening theological reconstruction in the church. In August of this year, Bishop Ting spoke on the backwardness of Chinese Christian theological thinking today at a meeting of the CPPCC in Xi'an, and called for a revisioning and striving for adaptation to and compatibility with socialism. 'this speech's (published in the *CPPCC News* and *Religion*) appearance generated a great deal of discussion. This shows that some people are very unwilling to admit their thinking is backward and cannot tolerate different voices. The publication of Bishop Ting's book may represent another voice, a kind of challenge for some people. I hope that careful reading of this book will act as a catalyst to our theological reconstruction and enliven our theology.

We stand on the threshold of a new century. What will Chinese Christianity look like as it enters the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Will we be able to adapt to socialism? To a great extent, this will determine our theology. I believe that the publication of *Love Never Ends* can aid us in conscientiously dealing with the issue of theological reconstruction. I would like to suggest here that careful reading and study of this book will not be unworthy of the kind intentions of the national *lianghui* in giving each of us here this gift.

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*Nanjing Theological Review*. No. 1 (1999), p. 5.

1 A play on the phrase, *wushi nian bubian* (no change for fifty years), used to describe Chinese policy in maintaining the status quo in Hong Kong.

2 See p. 30.

## Emphasize Theological Reconstruction and Training - Su Deci

Recently, I have often been inspired by Bishop Ting's remarks about the importance of strengthening the reconstruction of theological thinking. Like my colleagues here, I have done much hard thinking about this.

I'd like to begin by speaking of what I know about the subject. We all talk about the need for such strengthening, but why? I think there are several reasons at least, which I'll discuss below.

First, people's knowledge *of* concepts goes through a process, moving from emotion to rationality. Varying degrees *of* knowledge produce discrepancies in this state of things, one spontaneous, the other conscious. We can borrow these philosophical concepts to describe human beings' knowledge of and relationship to God. "I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you"(Job 42:5). ... "because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen..."(2Cor. 4:18). People always see theology as something *of* the mind rather than of the spirit. Actually, this is not so. Theology is a kind *of* knowledge, but it is also something which can be practiced. It is a knowledge *of* things *of* the spiritual realm, it is also the practice of the spiritual life: both require inspiration. Theology is both the sum *of* the church's spiritual experience and the guiding thought and theory for its forward journey. Theological reconstruction and theoretical formation illuminate how people's knowledge of God proceeds from fragmentary, superficial and passive to systematic, internal and self-directed. We can say that theological activities show the church in the act of thinking and growing and our theological level shows the church's level of maturity. By the grace *of* God, the Chinese church has accomplished a great deal *of* work over the past twenty years. But we must not content ourselves with the status quo, for the grace and life of God are enormously abundant, and God wants us to sail our boats to deep waters to draw even more grace, to enter into an even more abundant level God is perfect, "with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change" (James 1:17). Except for God, all else is in flux. In what direction is it changing? To change in accord with the heart of the Lord means to know God more surely and love God more deeply. It his requires of us that we use the intellect, emotion and will we have from God, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to enter into all Truth and grow in the grace and knowledge of God. Therefore, on the foundation of our basic faith, to move toward theological reconstruction is inevitable and necessary.

Second, a look at church history shows that in no society was the church ever in stasis, without forward movement. A vigorous church is a dynamic one. Any society is multilevel. The relative weight of the various levels all depends on development and change in the society. The Chinese church as a whole has never placed particular emphasis on theology. Therefore, the very mention of theology causes misunderstandings, even conflict, for many. And from another angle, because the church lacks theology a substantial portion of society, especially the ever-increasing intellectual circles, never enters the church door, in spite of their interest in Christianity. Should the church shrink the "majority" of believers in the countryside and expand the "minority" of believers in the cities? This touches on the question of what sort of church it is. Theological reconstruction requires us to be more intellectual, more rational, in explaining and propagating our faith. "The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the

firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge" (Psalm 19: 1-2). "It is he whom we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom" (Col. 1:28). "G the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge oh God!"(Rom. 11: 33). Thus, we pray for "the spirit of wisdom and revelation" to guide us into all truth, that we may truly know God. (Eph. 1:17; John 16:13) Faced with a society that is rapidly developing economically, technologically and culturally, we must understand theological reconstruction in high strategic terms of whether or not the church is able to sustain its development deeply and broadly.

Third. the past two thousand years of church history has been a history of churches in different periods continually adapting to the societies in which they are situated. How to adapt itself to a socialist society with Chinese characteristics is the important task facing the Chinese church and it is one which must be well resolved. This is also the task for theological reconstruction. Our theology must be indigenized and contextualized. We know that even when a transplant operation is successful in all aspects, rejection can negate all that came before. Therefore a simple transplant is not enough, fusion and adaptation must occur here, too. Adapting Christianity to our socialist society to ensure its healthy existence is the bounden duty we co-workers in the Chinese church bear, otherwise, we must answer to God. China is at present exploring and building a new society, one which has never existed before in our history, one in which cultural construction must accompany economic and political reform into a newly ordered new era. The slogan, "let the old serve the new and the foreign serve the Chinese," requires that we search the long river of history and the vast ocean of the world to find the essence that can serve to make up our new culture.

Since ancient times, Christian culture has stood at the heart of western culture. Therefore, as we absorb the riches of human civilization from western culture for our own use, do Chinese Christians sense this as a kind of challenge-what will we bring forth from it? Will it play a minor or a leading role? Will it function negatively or positively'? Do Chinese Christians sense this as an opportunity to make some contribution? I hope we can all grasp this opportunity and while maintaining our basic faith, make a conscious effort to dare to ponder, to excel at it, conscientiously studying the truth of the Bible and social knowledge, building a bridge between the eternal word of God and a changing society, and shifting from a passive, unthinking adapting to adapting actively and consciously, both taking the time for self-adjustment and striving to raise our own worth. Flux is an even more significant task of theological reconstruction.

And while we are exploring theological reconstruction and invigorating theological thinking, we should analyze the reasons for stagnation in theological reconstruction in the Chinese church. I believe this will be helpful in creating an atmosphere for invigorating theological reconstruction and accelerate the creation of conditions conducive to it.

I believe there are at least the following reasons for stagnation:

1. The large-scale introduction of Christianity in China took place during a period when the fundamentalist-modernist controversy was at its peak in the western church, especially in the American church. The result of the controversy was to drive each side to its extreme position. The missionaries, who left their own land for the East and a culture and living

conditions so vastly different from their own, were for the most part zealous evangelists, fundamentalist and more conservative in their theology. To a greater or lesser extent, consciously or not, they mostly proclaimed a more negative, otherworldly, submissive thought, which made a great impression on Chinese Christians who, in terms of their faith understanding, were more narrow and biased than not. Many even believed that theology was of the mind, secular not spiritual, and therefore more damaging than beneficial to faith.

2. Theology developed rapidly in the ecumenical church after World War II, augmented by many new areas and fields of study, and a great deal of new results were gained through research. But China, closed off for nearly thirty years, knew practically nothing of these new achievements. In the 1980s, when the religious policy was once again implemented, the church put its main strength into reopening churches and similar work of rebuilding, with neither the time nor the strength to put theological reconstruction on its agenda. And so, not much progress was made in theology, to the point that in many aspects the disparity with the rest of the world even increased.

3. From the mid-1950s in China, 'leftist' thinking gradually assumed a leading place, and subjectivism became the main method of reasoning, reaching its peak during the Cultural Revolution. Because leftism was not thoroughly critiqued after the Cultural Revolution, this kind of abnormal thinking inevitably influenced understanding of faith and theological reflection, falling into extremes and narrowness, never forming an atmosphere of freedom of theological inquiry.

4. Traditional Chinese theological education did not place much stress on the teaching of literature, history and philosophy. The teaching in seminaries and Bible schools was often limited to practical theology and Bible, the social sciences were not taught. Thus students were rather lacking in ability to do theological reflection and comprehensive analysis. In the 1980s, since most students came from the countryside, their educational level was rather low, and they had a one-sided emphasis on spirituality, and in general slighted or were terrified by theology. Another reason theological reconstruction could not be undertaken rapidly was that these newly reopened or renovated seminaries and schools lacked teaching staff.

5. With openness and reform, the intrusive activities of anti-China groups among overseas Christians grew in intensity. Their cry was "We cannot leave 1.2 billion souls to the atheists, we must use the gospel to reform China, we must use the Lord's Second Coming to spread the gospel." For the last ten or more years, they have been illegally disseminating many eschatological works and other books that have long been criticized or repudiated by fundamentalist scholars and pastors overseas. These actions harm believers, blur right and wrong disturb society and put obstacles in the way of theological reconstruction in the Chinese church.

Theological reconstruction is a major agenda item at this meeting and everyone has been discussing the topic with enthusiasm. It is a long-term task, and I hope we can use this meeting as a turning point to open up a new situation. In this regard, I would like to raise a number of points for your consideration.

1. The nature of theological thinking is spiritual: it is also scholarly. Currently, in order to invigorate theological thinking, we are advancing theological research, encouraging the

publication of theological views, and building an atmosphere of scholarly freedom. Of course, we should make firmly grasping the larger direction of "love country, love church, go forward in unity," and upholding the three-self principle our prerequisites in this.

2. In general, there are three restraints on theological thinking: biblical evidence, upholding the doctrinal orthodoxy of the church, and adapting to the nature and direction of a given society. Therefore, although something may be an individual view, it may gradually receive the approbation of the whole church. There are doctrinal types of views believed and maintained by believers which have general recognition in the church and which the church treats as supplementary to church doctrine. This is frequently seen in church history and shows the development of church theology. Therefore in the garden of theological thinking, we should promote the "hundred schools", not the domination of one school. To do this, we must request of every researcher and thinker a broad vision and a great toleration. Individuals should be humble of heart, seeing others as stronger than themselves; they should also have respect and not put themselves down. They should be bold to publish their own views, good at absorbing others' strengths, brave enough to correct their own failings. I believe that the Holy Spirit will be at work among such groups, and give them abundant knowledge and great revelation

3. Theological reconstruction is a long-term task requiring planning and orderly progression. The national *lianghui* should formulate plans for the short-term, medium-term and long-term. I hope the church self-strengthening planning group can get speedily to work.

4. Theological reconstruction is one aspect of the work of self-propagation. To highlight this work, I suggest that the Self-Propagation Study Group be upgraded to a Research Committee. With this committee leading the way or serving as liaison, we can use the transmission and implementation of the spirit of this meeting as an opportunity to promote the organization of pluralistic discussion at all levels so that the whole church comes to know the importance of theological reconstruction

5. The crux of theological reconstruction in the Chinese church lies in the training of theological personnel. We must expend a great deal of effort in this regard. The church exists in a multilevel society, so it is also multilevel. Thus it must train various levels of personnel. Let me explain.

(1) Churches and meeting points below the county level lack clergy with theological training, yet the majority of believers are found at this level. At present, the most urgent method is also the most effective—the training of large numbers of lay workers: lengthening their training, strengthening the content and pace of their training. The Rural Work Committee has done a great deal of effective work in this area. Last year, the national *Lianghui* received news of a teaching team formed with support of a provincial level *lianghui*: this is one means of intensifying the pace. The key training given at this level should be in basic doctrine, preaching and pastoral work.

(2) The clergy in city churches has for the most part had theological training. The focus for fostering at this level should be the younger generation who graduated in the 1980s. Intellectuals are concentrated in cities, and at the same time, the challenges to be faced there are more conspicuous. For the reasons I mentioned in the second part of this presentation, we

should provide the younger generation with further opportunities for study. I hope they can progress to a higher stage in their profession, in the study of biblical theology and practical theology as well as in peripheral fields of knowledge.

(3) Seminaries and Bible schools are bases for educating personnel and we should continue to raise their standards and strengthen them. Teachers who are B.D. graduates should within a specified time be raised to the level of M.Div. Through assessment, they must adapt to the needs of the developing circumstances, revising teaching plans at all levels and enriching courses in theology. Each institution must strictly distinguish each level and rank, to ensure the quality and effectiveness of education. Recruitment of students must also be improved, emphasizing the students' cultural and educational foundation. When necessary, we should consider holding preparatory courses with the main purpose of raising the educational and cultural level.

(4) There is an urgent need to train high level personnel capable of conversing with international theological circles and Chinese intellectual circles and taking positions as leaders in the church's program of theological reconstruction.

(5) Next year we must re-start our work of sending students overseas to study. I hope every provincial *lianghui* will undertake a conscientious selection process and promote outstanding individuals. The national *lianghui* must draft education and training regulations, including those for overseas study, to avoid going ahead blindly or arbitrarily.

Emphasis on theological reconstruction means accelerating training and education, and this requires accelerating theological reconstruction. This will be a long historical stage. There is an ancient saying, "Great oaks from little acorns grow, a nine-story terrace is built from the first story up, and a journey of a thousand li begins with the first step." We have already begun, let us move steadily forward.

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1 As the famous phrase has it, "Let a hundred flowers bloom and a hundred schools of thought contend"-a description of intellectual diversity.

## **Self-Government in the Light of Church Dogmatics - Wang Aiming**

The development of Chinese Christianity demonstrates that in the future theological system of the Chinese church, the three-self principle of self-government will be the practical principle for understanding ecclesiology. The absence of ecclesiology is now a rather urgent issue for the fellowship of Chinese Christians, one that the current move toward theological reconstruction will encounter very shortly. I low to understand the intrinsic nature and work out the effective limits of the fellowship of Chinese Christians-what is expressed in the everyday phrase Chinese church-comprises the subject of this essay. As an idea, the principle of self-government is not at all abstruse or involved, but to elucidate its real meaning and make it practicable, one must begin from church dogmatics. I will proceed by first clarifying how an understanding of self-government inevitably touches on the issue of ecclesiology. Then I will analyze the contention that Chinese Christianity faces a potential crisis, to determine whether such a claim is justified in ecclesiological terms on the level of church dogmatics. Finally, I will return to the practical significance of the principle of self-government for Chinese Christianity.

### **Ecclesiology is Essential to Christian Fellowship**

The fellowship of Christians worldwide is under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Since the time of the apostles, this has guaranteed the unique sacred nature of the fellowship of believers, that is, the church. In his letter to the church at Ephesus, Paul said, "Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Savior" (Eph. 5: 23); "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Eph. 5: 25); "Because we are members of this body" (Eph. 5: 30). Furthermore, in his letter to the Colossians, he wrote, "I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church" (Col. 1: 24).

These Bible passages express the nature of a church that confesses Christ as Head as a basic article of faith. Consequently, the holiness of the church has become, from apostolic times on down, the intrinsic determinant of the fellowship of Christians worldwide. This long widely-acknowledged situation will be our point of entry for analysis of the Chinese church today. This is to say, how shall we understand the varied significance of the ecclesiology and incomplete state of the fellowship of Chinese Christians?

In order to broaden our vision to take in the whole life-world of Christian faith, we must proceed from the basics by clarifying the meaning of "church" in theological linguistics and dogmatics. Only in this way can we analyze the current situation of Chinese Christianity in ecclesiological terms and thus make clear the significance of ecclesiology in constructing for our Chinese Christianity an effective mechanism for self-government. Put another way, under what circumstances can self-government be considered to already have begun to appear in the management of church affairs in a post-denominational China Christian Council?

#### *The linguistic meaning of "church"*

An interpretation of the term "church" must begin with its western language roots. Its forms in the romance languages, *Church*, *Kirche*, *kerk*, come from the Greek word meaning

God's palace. The Latin *ecclesia* comes from the Greek *ekklesia* (a gathering, the gathering of Athenian citizens, etc.) extended to "a gathering of Christians" and "church," such as the French *eglise* Paul uses the term church 65 times in the New Testament. It also appears twice in Matthew, 23 times in Acts; once in James; 3 times in John 3; and 20 times in Revelation. In the majority of these cases, it indicates a church in a specific locale. For example, "house church" (Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15; Philemon v.2); or a worship gathering of believers in a certain place (1 Cor. 14:19, 28, 34); and at times in the sense of the catholic church, as in "the house of God" (Gal. 1:3; 1 Cor. 15:9). "The fellowship of God" is the most basic connotation of "church."

Paul is certainly not the originator of the term. He found the true value of this theological descriptive in the clear tradition of a "fellowship of God's chosen," among the earliest groups of Jewish Christians, because this term embodied the "new covenant" God had concluded with them, and the renewed divine promise with its Messianic implications. And precisely because of this, Paul extrapolated church from God's church as many as 11 times, as in 1 Cor. 1:2; 1 Tim 2:14; 2 Tim.1:4. Paul also uses "all the churches of Christ" (Rom. 16:16); and "the churches of Judea that are in Christ" (Gal. 1:22). In New Testament hermeneutics, "church" carries the exclusive meaning of "Christian fellowship" because it serves Jesus Christ as lord, and in this is distinct from the Jewish synagogue.

According to our linguistic lesson in Paul, "church" is first of all a real entity in the world. Its more profound inner nature is that Christ is at once Lord of Heaven and Lord over all that is in this world. Thus, "church" becomes Christ's fellowship in the world, the fellowship of the divine redeeming grace, righteousness, the suffering, resurrection and ascension of all the saints together with Christ. All living things, through the faith and holy baptism in Christ return to a purified fellowship (Acts 2:38). Humankind thus comes to comprehend that it must first gain holy and unqualified grace before it can hope to be chosen. That is to say, "to love God," is in itself a prerequisite of being blessed and this sort of grace has truly existed in the created cosmos in many aspects of truth, goodness and beauty for a long time (Rom. 8:28-30; 9:10-16; 10:5s; 2 Tim. 2:13s). Through the grace of God and the special action of their own free will, human beings become members of the "church". In this way- narrow factors that determine traditions of religious faith, such as race, ethnicity and family or blood ties are separated from the universal faith in Christ (Gal. 3:28). As the apostle says, "In that renewal, there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free, but Christ is all in all!" (Col. 3:11). In Paul, the catholicity of the church with Christ as its head still lies in its being a chosen group in Jewish eyes, rather than in its function as Yahweh's bridge with gentile sinners (Gal. 2:15-21). This divine bridge between Jewish Christians and gentile converts enables God's fellowship, the "church" to become the place where hope for all humankind resides. In this sense, Paul uses words most familiar among his fellow believers in calling the "church" "God's Israel" (Gal. 6:16; Rom. 9:6). We should note that though "God's church" becomes the most important phrase for the "church" in Paul's terminology, he very seldom uses "God's kingdom" to mean the "church." As for the relationship in Paul's theological terminology of these two important phrases, we must wait for specialized research from the field of New Testament hermeneutics.

From this biblical exegesis, we have seen that for us today, the apostles' determinations about "church" that have had the greatest impact are concepts such as "the church is the body of Christ." "For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members of one another" (Rom. 12: 4-5). Similar passages are found at I Cor. 6: 12-20; 10: 14-22; 12: 12-31. Research in patristics shows us that Paul's use of "the church is the body of Christ" gained the broadest response at the time: All those who would follow Christ, no matter whether they were male or female, slave or master, foreigner or native. They were all different limbs of the mysterious body of Christ, all taking upon themselves different responsibilities because of the different gifts bestowed by God, but all as different limbs joined together in one body, all belonging to one head, Jesus Christ. A biblical exegesis of the term "church" would show a deeper level of revelation in all churches worldwide all belonging to one body with Christ at its head.' This is the biblical revelation of the doctrine of the church's unity within diversity. I will deal with the basic interpretation of this in the next section.

In sum, theological terminology as a path through biblical understanding of the word "church", enables us to see the biblical expression of the church of Christian believers. We can say without hesitation that on the basis of biblical revelation, the "church" is the fellowship of God, the fellowship of those who believe and serve Jesus Christ, the mysterious body of God Christ, the body of God with Christ as head.

### *The meaning of "church" in dogmatics*

From the ground of dogmatics. Church Councils throughout the ages have never doubted the tradition of the first Council (325) and the four marks of the church set down there in the Nicene Creed. these four marks come from article nine of the Apostle's Creed, "I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic church." In the understanding of Yves Congar, outstanding Roman Catholic theologian of the 20th century:

"The unity of the body of Christ binds the members together in the fellowship of the church. It is thus something essential to the church by its very nature. In the 'Nicene' Creed of Constantinople (831) the attributes of holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity go hand in hand with unity. These four attributes of the church mutually imply one another, but it is no accident that unity comes first, for it is directly given with the being of the church as the fellowship that is grounded in the participation of believers in the one Lord Jesus Christ. We may thus understand the other three attributes as implications of the church's unity as one that is grounded in Jesus Christ. The further definitions of the church as holy, catholic, and apostolic elucidate this fact."<sup>3</sup>

According to the Augsburg Confession of 1530, article 7, "the church is the congregation of the saints, in which the gospel is correctly taught and the sacraments are properly administered."<sup>4</sup>

In his 1522 Christmas sermon, Martin Luther said that whoever would find Christ must first find the church. The church, he went on, is not brick and stone, but is the congregation of the saints, where the gospel is correctly taught and the sacraments properly administered.'

In his *Institutes*, Book 4, chapter one, article 9 on the “church” John Calvin wrote: writes “taut respecting the congregation itself, we must form a different judgment. It they possess and honor the ministry of the word, and the administration of the sacraments, they are, without all doubt, entitled to be considered as a Church.

A study of the documents of the Reformation shows us that the tradition of “church” confession of faith going back to the Nicene Creed had a deep impact on the Reformers, the mainstream theological tradition of Protestantism. Specifically, the third section of the Creed, from the third *credo* to the seventh *credo*, perfectly illustrates the relationship among the Spirit, the Church and the Saints. The reformers who shaped the Protestant tradition firmly held that the church does not exist in and of itself, it is in no way born of the subjective will of any person. Luther believed that she is creature *verbi divini* (created through the Logos and gospel of God). Thus, he maintained that God’s Logos and the church of God’s people were intimately joined together. Such thinking has guided the mainstream of the Protestant theological tradition.

To be specific, several such concepts have formed the hermeneutical traditions of Protestant doctrinal theology:

“God’s Logos” is the foundation of the church;

The essence of the church lies in the fellowship that links all believers;

Christ is the head of the church, and the church is the body of Christ;

the church as a fellowship of believers guarantees that God’s truth and the mission established by Christ will be proclaimed and enacted:

the church is both the reality of the spirit and the embodiment of that reality;

we can distinguish in the church with Christ as its head both the visible and the invisible church. The true church is the outward expression in the visible church of the spirit of the inner invisible church;” the believers who have been called are the sanctified protectors of the church, and thus the safeguard of absolute obedience to Jesus the Head is a prerequisite for an ecclesiology of a church which is a fellowship of believers.

And this is what makes the emergence of a theory of church government inevitable, or to put it in everyday language, the management of the church is a responsibility of Christians living in the fellowship of faith in Christ.

To sum up, the ways in which “church” has been understood show us that the issue of ecclesiology includes propositions such as “the church is the body of Christ.” Thus, in the study of any doctrinal question in Christianity, especially those that touch directly upon questions of the doctrine of ecclesiology, such as self-government, we must first make clear that “the church is holy because Christ is its head.” This is an absolute judgment. From this, we can then enter into an analysis and understanding of our Chinese Christianity.

### **The Ecclesiological Predicament of Chinese Christianity**

In his 1988 speech “Three-Self and the Church: Re-ordering the Relationship,” Bishop K.H. Ting said: “As we know, the goals of the Three-Self Movement are only to promote patriotism and to promote self-government, self-support and self-propagation within the church. Its aims are quite limited; it is not within the boundaries of its goals and responsibilities to manage or direct the church. No version of the constitution of the Three-

Self organization ever stated that its task is to run the church.” Later, due to the specific political background, the Three-Self organization moved to “a position side by side with, or even above the church. It became a management department, like a church and yet not really a church; like a government yet not really a government.”

This will be our point of entry for knowing and understanding the present ecclesiological predicament of the Chinese church.

It is evident from the situation, that in practice the Three-Self Patriotic Movement Committee of the Chinese Protestant Church (FSPM) and the China Christian Council (CCC) manage all the business of Chinese Christianity. Post-denominationalism begins from this ground. There is no way to come up with a logical interpretation of this from dogmatic precedent and denominational tradition. All large mainstream denominations which might serve to draw people together were abolished; especially forbidden were those with dioceses as their basic unit which might have had a self-contained existence comparable to that of the early government departments. Therefore, to join all Christians in the special people's organization of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement Committee of the Chinese Protestant Church had about it a special political inevitability in the atmosphere of the early 1950s. "From the beginning of this movement there has been an important emphasis, and made clear to co-workers and believers, that the Three-Self Movement was not to lead or supervise the church. It is only to call Chinese Christians to love their country, and at the same time to insist that the church in China should not be dominated by churches of other countries."

Along with the development over 50 years of the new political authority, and especially with the substantive transformation in China's international status- unprecedented in its hundred year history of humiliation since 1840, once China regained its standing as a world power, an unprecedented transformation took place in the world of spiritual phenomena as well. With regard to Christianity adapting to the social structure of civil society, the primary question is how to influence mainstream social values through active participation, because the marginalized existence of Christianity in China has been self-evident in modern times and right up to the present. A startling phenomenon is that while China as a whole began to modernize, Chinese Christianity, in many aspects, languished in a special stagnant period, "under government protection." With civil society and the rule of law, the clearing up of corruption, and especially with the establishment in the government system of all sorts of honest and highly effective benign mechanisms, the new Chinese Christian management structure, the *lianghui*, had no effective recovered internal mechanisms comparable to those in society. Within a considerable scope, there is no way to shape a substantive relationship of supervision and control between the national *lianghui* and local *lianghui*. However, aided by the government policies of reform and openness, which brought about flourishing development, the number of Chinese Christians rises daily and churches appear everywhere. Consequently, the fellowship of Chinese Christians and the Chinese church become in reality the objects of leadership and governance of the *lianghui*. Do those persons at every level of the *lianghui* who take up this concrete work have an ecclesiastical church consciousness? This is the key to becoming a recognized and effective mechanism for leading and administering the Chinese church.

According to Bishop Ting, "Our work in the church needs to have an adequate basis in faith and theology. The church is a social organization. But from the perspective of a Christian's faith, thinking and frame of mind, the church is different from social organizations such as the Women's Federation and the Red Cross. It is not like any other organization. It has its sacred dimension. The church is not only a spiritual fellowship of believers, it is the household of God, the temple of the Holy Spirit - It is the body of Christ with Christ as its head. ... Precisely because of the *place of* the Church in Christian doctrine, Christians find it uncomfortable and out of order to have any other organization set above the church. They would feel uneasy if the position of Christ as head of the church were taken away. The church will remain always, while movements and their organizations are to serve the church. The essence of Christianity is the church and not any movement. From time to time it is necessary to adjust the functions of a movement. A time of adjustment has arrived. The nurture and preservation of the church (Ephesians 5) must be carried out by the church in the church's own way. No other organization can take its place."

If we compare Bishop Ting's view with the reality of the Chinese church, we find that the difficulty for Chinese Christianity is its ecclesiastical weakness. Let us turn to a consideration of the main features of this weakness.

1. Mainstream denominations, that is, those founded on the Catholic tradition of the reformation period, were heirs to a tradition in which autonomy in church affairs was completely suppressed by the administrative structures, even to the point that remnants of the tradition in homiletics and dogmatics have been completely lost;

2. All kinds of smaller aggressive denominations took advantage of government policies aimed at promoting stability to expand their influence and establish national structures. The dangers inherent in this situation have yet to make themselves known.

3. The fact that the mainstream denominations are heirs to the Catholic tradition from the apostolic age in their dogmatics is a source of collective anxiety for the Chinese government and people who have had their fill of western imperialist aggression and harm in modern history;

4. The preponderance of indigenous denominations is founded precisely on this type of collective unconscious anxiety, and the political-style administrative structures of the *lianghui* are defense mechanisms in response to the situation. Consequently, it is impossible for effective ecclesiological restrictions to operate in the administration of church affairs in the Chinese church today;

5. Certain illegal behavior and corrupt phenomena that now exist in administrative organs of the *lianghui* are not present in church tradition, but have not yet expanded to the point where they would continue to exist and worsen at a deeper level in all conditions of civil society;

6. The renewal of ecclesiology is an urgent task for reconstruction of theological thinking in the Chinese church.

Consideration of these six points may aid in recognizing and understanding the predicament facing the Chinese church. I set out to understand their practical significance for the Chinese church from the angle of the principle of self-government.

### **Self-government as a Practical Principle for the Chinese Church**

When English missionary Henry Venn, against the background of 19<sup>th</sup> century non-western mission fields, proposed the three-self principle: self-government, self-support, self-propagation - a substantive turning point in the history of the missionary movement of world Christianity took shape. Up until 1949 the mission concept of mission boards in China was founded on a goal of each one enlarging its own area of mission. Establishment of an independent Chinese church of Chinese Christians was never a genuine guiding principle for the work of western mission boards in China. In 1952, the political authority of new China had been functioning for nearly three years. A group of denominational leaders from all over China with Y.T. Wu at its head decided, using the mass movement method peculiar to the time, mobilized Chinese Christians on a political level to throw off their dependence on western mission boards and actively involve themselves in the people's progressive endeavor. They proposed "self-government, self-support and self-propagation" as the principle and slogan to unite the masses of Chinese Christians on the path of loving country and loving church. What is more, they used this principle to set up a real governing body for the Chinese church the Chinese Christian Three-Self Reform Movement Committee, which became the Chinese Christian Three-Self Patriotic Movement Committee.

The significance of the principle of self-government, seen from the west's approach to the history of global evangelism, emphasizes the issue of indigenization of churches, that is, in non-western nations and regions the church must be shaped by local Christians themselves. Western mission boards must not interfere in local Christians governing their own church on their own authority. In fact, for all the mainstream denominations formed in the 16<sup>th</sup> century reformation the Protestants-self-government *of* their churches was the primary feature *of* their ecclesiology. From Augustine's thinking on the three components of authority Bible, tradition, and the church-and the patterns of understanding the relationship among the three, the mainstream Protestant denominations were entirely the heirs *of* a tradition based on biblical revelation, shaped by the church fathers' understanding of that revelation, one which, through the holy and catholic church, safeguarded the holiness and catholicity of the word *of* God in its preaching and pastoral work." The morphology *of* historical development shows that the mainstream churches that appeared in western countries during the reformation era took the three-self principle as the working principle for their own church work. Indigenous churches not under the authority *of* Rome held to the Bible as the highest truth, and, founded on the apostolic tradition, churches in the various nations were able to shoulder all responsibility for the holy and catholic church.

Self-government is a prerequisite for self-propagation, and is the foundation *of* self-support. Anyone with a respect for the apostolic heritage will agree that the Jerusalem conference recorded in Acts 15 was an apostolic council establishing the principle of self-government. From the apostolic age on down, the guiding church principles established by successive Councils were in substance all principles *of* "self-government," and progressively,

by a process of centralization, shaped the right of arbitration in church affairs into the Roman papacy. The teaching authority of the Catholic Church and the codes of the church ensured the administrative authority of the church based on the two aspects of traditional authority and legal authority." Even in our times, on January 25, 1983, the Roman Catholic Church issued a new edition of *Code of Canon Law*, the principles- and regulations for the governance of the Roman Catholic Church worldwide. At the same time, the 90 articles and decrees of the *Documents of Vatican II* regulate and restrict the clergy and laity of global Catholicism through governance of church affairs.

Speaking of the large mainline denominations formed during the Protestant Reformation, the establishment of the essentials of the faith, the catechism and church regulations was a matter of the church deciding for itself, as part of self-government, how to go about the concrete tasks of self-propagation. Thus the mainline denominations, which hold the leading place in world Protestantism, all have their own "codes", and furthermore at their conventions and assemblies all adopt church laws which function as constitutions. At the same time, all establish similar organizations, administrative and arbitral bodies to supervise and implement these laws.

To illustrate the unshakable nature of the self-governing principle, mainline western Protestant denominations, having learned the profound historical lesson of the Catholic Church's overstepping church authority into secular authority, established from the very beginning, based on the concept of self-government, a set of new theories on church-state relationships to deal with issues of rights and justice between the state and those citizens who are both citizens and Christians, as well as between the government and the fellowship of Christians and persons responsible for the governing of the church. The universal existence and development of civil society has led both the church and the government, in their value orientation and in the life of the spirit to clearly respect the constitution. The church relies on the traditional implication of self-government, meaning that the church has the right, within the laws of the nation, to administer all questions relating to its own affairs. At the same time, the church has a responsibility to give over to government departments all criminal cases and church members suspected of crimes outside church matters that offend the laws of the nation. In Calvin, for churches in the reformed tradition, the relationship between the church and the government is given a more complete understanding from a self-government perspective. The heritage has shaped churches in the worldwide Reformed tradition, which are by no means inferior to the Catholic tradition in their ecclesiology and achievements in church governance - (18 Bishop Ting has written "In all we do we should consider how we can benefit the upbuilding of the Church of Christ and unite Christians under the banner of "love-country. love-church." Therefore all that is improper for the church and displeasing in the sight of Christians should be firmly rejected, no matter who has initiated. ... But many co-workers have wondered, as we find it necessary today to re-order the relationships within our church, how far can we go toward solving the problem if we do not also re-order the relationship with the government? ...I believe that we can anticipate the principle of church-state separation being put into greater effect." From Bishop Ting's train of thought we see that genuine self-government in the Chinese church will be a huge subject, the whole of which will involve a basic understanding of church-state relations.

In my view, it is absolutely necessary for the construction *of* the Christian Church in China to resolve the issue of the responsibilities and obligations of citizens and believers from the angle of church-state relations. This will entail two aspects, system and tradition. Autonomy for the church will gradually emerge from a correct interpretation and compliance with the principle of self government. A Chinese church corresponding in autonomy and self-sufficiency to civil society will be a social group honest and noble in structure, because its innate character is honored and observed through and in interaction with its external structure. This is the church returning to taking Christ as its Head. The church is the mystical body *of* Christ and herein lies its holiness.

The practicality of the self-government principle for the Chinese church lies in the church's need for self-regulation and for using the rules and regulations of church tradition to realize self government and restraint. The catholicity of the Christian Church determines its spirit of universal love in service to society and people. Thus, all governments with a constitutional structure use encouragement and value affirmation within the principle of justice in approving the church's openness and involvement vis-a-vis the people. The Chinese church, under the principle of self-government, must do more to interpret the noble truths of Christian faith-exhorting people to do good, to love others as oneself, and that Christ loves all people then the Chinese people will come to a greater understanding and acceptance of Christian faith. If the Chinese church always looks to government departments (from the internal (church) to the external (government)) to deal with corruption within the church, how can the holiness of the church fail to be thus compromised in the eyes of the non-Christian populace? Can such a church still be the "Church of God" for Chinese Christians? Dependence on government administrative directives will not lead to the construction of a church for Christians-this is the effective meaning of the apostolic in the history of the church. The self-government of the church must follow the laws shaped by church tradition.

### **Conclusion**

In a sermon at Community Church, Shanghai, on April 7 this year, Bishop Ting summarized the development of Chinese Christianity since 1949 in 3 periods:

- 1) The unifying of the Christian masses to shake off western mission board control and establish the Three-Self Patriotic Movement for an independent, self-run church in the early 1950s;
- 2) The early 1980s when the remnant of the Chinese church which had endured the Cultural Revolution, proclaimed "Running the Church Well on Three-Self Principles" as its guiding principle; and
- 3) The autumn of 1998 when the Jinan Conference formally adopted the historic task of "Intensifying the Reconstruction of Theological Thinking."

Looked at from this macro level, the present direction of putting all efforts into advancing the reconstruction of theology in fact includes two basic trains of thought. One is to sort out and ponder what has been gleaned from the historical lessons and experience of Christianity in China in the 1950s and therein trace the orbit, gain and loss of the Chinese church itself in order to take stock and sum up in accordance with God's Holy Word. Second, given that the three-self principle is not an essential of faith of the Chinese church, but a practical principle

of our task of witness, to reflect biblically and dogmatically in order to shape achievements in theology and homiletics that possess the special characteristics of Chinese Christianity that will usher in the new age that is about to begin.

The topics I have dealt with in this paper are those which have begun to take shape against the background of theological reconstruction in the Chinese church. How to understand the past and present of the Chinese church from the viewpoint of upholding the three-self principle is of course an essential question for theological reconstruction. A biblical studies and dogmatics based interpretation of self-government is the first order of business, a historical understanding and judgment comes second. We have seen that, relative to the missionary era, the Chinese church, under the leadership and administration of the *lianghui*, has become completely self-governing. Moreover, it is precisely because self-government has become the practical principle for all overseas work that our Chinese church has been able to have a completely equal partnership with the ecumenical church. At the same time, proceeding from the three-self principle, we respond to other churches or persons within the church who do not respect this equal partnership with confidence and dignity in terms of faith and dogmatics, dealing with them by advice, avoidance and even rebuke.

The issue at hand is that the principle of self-government has not been realized in the internal affairs and work of the Chinese church. This is not to say that responsible colleagues at all levels of the church are powerless to deal with the internal affairs of the church, but to say that within the Chinese church, the principle of self-government has not yet been effectively established according to the model stipulated in the church constitution, nor has it shaped a regulatory structure. Observation shows that across the board at every level of the *lianghui*, government religious affairs offices' directives or policies are used as "regulations" and precedent in dealing with internal affairs *of* the church. Consequently, we have the following scenario: *if* the local cadres of government religious departments administer the laws and policies of the nation relating to religious affairs justly, then the local church flourishes; it is honest and orderly.

The reverse is also true: state and religious authority can join to harm the nation and the church, though in fact such cases are extremely rare. However, just as there is a great deal of murky water between the sweet and the muddy, between administrators of high moral character, who practice self-denial in public service and those who administer the law in order to break and profit from it, it is undeniable that there are many simply marking time in government service. If the internal affairs of the church were entirely run by government bureaucrats who took as their primary duty government of the nation and benefit *of* the people, and in the majority of circumstances, simply responded by formulating principle, there are very few nationwide who, in spite of being professional cadres in government religious affairs departments, genuinely possess even the most rudimentary knowledge of religious affairs. Much less, given the fact that for the Chinese government, such principles as were formulated would be, in terms of dogmatics and church-state relations, a particularly westernized Christianity.

Thus there are two situations for those responsible at all levels for the government *of* the real-life church:

1) Basing themselves on the tradition of biblical and doctrinal studies, they will need to understand and comply with the good intentions of government cadres, and administer directives according to their own conscience in dealing with concrete church affairs while at the same time, for the good of the nation and the public, revising in practice certain articles or directives of religious policy from government administrative offices that might fall short;

2) Administrators with individual or family self-interest take advantage of the lack of expertise or ignorance of individual cadres in government religious affairs offices, or even cater to them for their own ends, setting up secret mutually beneficial deals, forming individual or family fiefdoms within the church in the name of the government. At the same time, using the government policy of stabilizing and enriching the nation as an excuse, they claim that to conduct church affairs entirely in line with believers' wishes will be harmful to stability, pressuring the local government so that it can only support the local church to the advantage of these religious dictators. Thus, for a substantial number of believers, especially intellectuals, the hardest thing to accept are these church administrators who basically have no faith, who are surprisingly able to gain the favor of the local government and join the local People's Political Consultative Conferences and People's Congresses. These people do little except shout political slogans like "love country, love church," "uphold the three-self principle," uphold and protect the leadership of the Party and government;" basically living off religion and cheating religion, and in the end, cheating the government and harming the nation. In consequence, accusations like "The three-self church is unsaved," take on a ring of truth for local Christians.

In fact, church tradition has determined that church self-government is in no way equivalent to believers "democratically" ruling on all church matters by a show of hands. As I said above, the ecclesiology of Christ as the Head determines the church's holiness and purity. In guaranteeing the principle of self-government in dealing with church affairs, church tradition has gone through a long evolutionary process. After enduring the tempering and testing of the storms of all sorts of heresies in the early period, the self-government principle in church tradition soon became an inseparable part of ecclesiology. This is to say that the church itself had a set of self-governing methods founded on biblical revelation and apostolic tradition. This is something no government administrative regulations can in any way equal or replace, and this is amply illustrated by church-state relations throughout history, in China and elsewhere. Similar to what Bishop Ting said in his talk of April 24, 1995, in Nanjing, "Government supervision of religion is mainly concerned with politics and the law. It supervises activities that transgress the Constitution, laws and policies; it does not supervise church affairs. In church affairs, the government should respect the faith of the church and the good tradition and system of democratic supervision which the church has formed over time. Supervision should be done according to the law. There should not be criminal actions such as beatings and arrests, seizure of Bibles, hymnals or church property, or arbitrary collection of fees or imposition of fines. Church personnel should follow church regulations. Legal supervision of church affairs does not include decisions on church personnel being made outside the church ... Church finances should also be handled in this way.'" And, "(Let) the church . be managed well in its own way."

Thus, the issue before us is how to make the principle of self-government part of the governing charter of the Chinese church, so that it becomes an internal regulation, and not a high-sounding advertising ploy.

As a topic for consideration, against the background of a Chinese church promoting with all its might the theological reconstruction proposed by Bishop Ting, on the eve of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, research on three-self is a primary topic for Chinese theological reconstruction. It touches upon the past, present and future of the Chinese church. I believe that if we truly want to do an effective practical reflection upon the three-self principle, we must begin from the three fields of biblical and doctrinal studies and church history. In this way, we can see that theological reconstruction is a historical event in the history of Chinese Christianity and will inevitably become a historical turning point.

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1 Oscar Cullmann. *I Unity through Diversity* [in French] (Paris: Cerf, 1986), 5-12.

2 For the Nicene Creed, see *Creeds of the Church through the Ages*, Zhao Zhonghui et al trans. (Taipei: Reformed Translation Group, 1998), 10.

3 Quoted in Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, Geoffrey W. Bormiley, trans. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, Ltd., 1998), 405-406.

4 *La Confession d'Augsbourg, 1530*, (Paris-Strasbourg: Editions Lutheriennes, 1948), 25.

5 Martin Luther, *Epître de la grand'messe du jour de Noël*, MLO, X (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1967), 298.

6 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book IV, John Allen trans. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1949).

7 Luther, *De la Captivité babylonienne de l'Eglise 1520*, MLO, II (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1966), 245.

8 From Augustine to Luther and Calvin to Zwingli, how to distinguish the "true church" has been an important question for doctrinal understanding. In Matthew 13:24-30, Jesus' parable of the Sower and the Seed and in chapter 22:14 "for many are called, but few are chosen," have served as biblical evidence for the formation of the church from the church fathers to the founders of Protestantism, i.e., that not all members of the visible church are part of God's chosen. In the church there are good believers and there are hypocrites, that is, there are those who take up the mission to which they have been called, and there are those who only pretend to be spiritual in order to cheat others. Therefore we have no right to call ourselves holy. In 1520, Luther wrote that there are two churches, the first type is natural, essential and true. It is the inner spirit of Christ's mystical body. The second is a constructed church and is external. This is the visible, external body of Christ. [*De la Papauté de Rome*, MLO, 11 (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1996), 2] Thus the Reformed tradition believes that any word or action that goes against God's Logos sullies the purity of the church as the mystical body of Christ. At the same time this tradition maintains that secular truth, goodness and beauty do exist only in the visible external church. In this way, the solution to hypocrisy and fallenness, corruption and evil in the church becomes a primary issue for dogmatics in the ecclesiological tradition because it directly relates to the purity of the church.

9 K.H. Ting, "Three-Self and the Church: Re-Ordering the Relationship." *love Never Ends: Papers by K.H. Ting* (Nanjing: Win Press, 2000), 340, 341.

10 Ibid., 340.

11 Ibid., 342-343.

12 F. Cayre, *Patristics*, vol.2, Wu Yingfeng, bans. [in Chinese] (Taipei, 1981), 608.

13 Henricus Denzinger, *Tianzhujiao xundao wenxian xuanji*, 2nd ed., Shi Antang. trans. (Taipei, 1981).

14 Ting, 345-346.

15 Ting. "A Look Back at the Way We Have Come," 498-499.

16 Ting. "Three-Self and the Church: Re-ordering the Relationship," 347.

## Essays & Articles

### Further Thoughts on Creation and Redemption - Kan Baoping

In our day to day lives, we often face dilemmas similar to that of the ancient philosopher Mencius when faced with a choice between fish and bear paws. Christians encounter even more questions like these; for example, an imperfectable human being vs. the quest for perfection; a limited human attempting to fathom the limitless One; human rationality vs. the absolute profession of an ineffable truth, etc. All these are the inevitable result of testing our faith against reality. Perhaps one of the meanings of faith is that in the process, we discover these questions, face these dilemmas and overcome them. But when we push each side of a question to its extreme, we face dilemmas that seem insuperable- absolute contradictions. The relationship between God's creation and God's redemption is one of the critical questions facing the Chinese church at present. Are these two separate or co-existent? Are they works of God that look place at different times or two different expressions or sides of God's work? Our understanding of this question relates to how we regard our faith, the relationship between Christians and non-Christians, how we see our social responsibility, how we witness to the gospel in our context, and how, because of our faith, we make our society more harmonious and not more conflicted.

#### The Wholeness of Humankind

God created humankind and God saw that it was good,' moreover God loved humanity so much that he sacrificed his own Son for it. God as creator and humankind as the created are located in a whole creation. Furthermore the faith history of Christians proves that God is willing to pay any price to keep humanity within this whole.' But the tragedy of humankind is that it does not yet know this community; it does not yet know that God is love. The greater tragedy is that when humankind does come to know God and professes him as creator, it is no longer willing to tolerate this community. Humans sometimes are at great pains to set God and humans against one another, as if unless one acknowledges that the two are at odds or even absolutely opposed, one cannot be a person who truly belongs to God. This is essentially an attempt to separate God from his creation. and make God's creation sufficient unto itself (though this is impossible). This is one aspect. Another aspect is that such an approach also seeks to divide humanity, to make Christian and non-Christian an absolute contradiction, with faith as the boundary line dividing humanity into two fundamentally opposed camps, as if the difference were a substantive one.

First of all, the attempt to separate humanity from God does not arise out of human remorse for their own loathsomeness, but out of loathing for God's authority. Humanity cannot stand for an external authority threatening its individuality. And so, out of a kind of regretful despair, raises itself to a position of equality with God.<sup>3</sup> These methods can be used to deny that existence may take a transcendent, ultimate form; it may take a sacred form, but in essence, this is a denial of the sacred. Essentially, the denial of the sacred and the formation of an independent self must be accompanied by a cutting of the ties between the self and the ultimate. This "free" self then replaces the resurrection that comes of the union between the self and the ultimate self-contained being.' About this last, Jesus clearly said.

"Not everyone who says, lord, Lord..."(Matt. 7: 21). No matter what firm experiences like this take, none are in any way religious experience, because they are self-contained.

Secondly, the effort to isolate humanity in this way is not due to any perceived inadequacy in human life or character, rather it is a type of jealousy and insecurity that leads to narrowness. It is the reason for Jesus' criticism of the Pharisees. Their piety is nothing more than a whitewashing of their inner rebellion. Through a sublimation of the self, they attempt to banish their anxiety over their rebellion against God. Jesus never tried to convince them to change their religious viewpoint, for it was not that they did not know how to be pious in a piety that is one with God, but that they did not desire it. They used religious concepts as their ultimate authority, in place of that true authority which might question their existence. But they knew their own authority was not genuine, and because of the anxiety this caused, they lived in the midst of contradictions. This made them willing to take up any form of authority to resist that authority which could be an ultimate threat to them. Not only did they in fact rebel against authority, but in the name of authority and in an effort to preserve their own, they blocked others from drawing near to and knowing authority. They also strove to cause humanity to lose confidence in itself, to lose the thirst for ultimate authority and to completely give over their futures to them.

Yet the basic separation takes place in creation theory. Some people believe that God created two kinds of people: those destined to be saved and those destined for punishment. The tendency toward dualism in Greek and Hebrew culture has, to a very large extent, been inherited by Christianity. This idea is given a detailed explanation and development in the war chapter of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Under God or Satan, humanity goes to war, there is no other choice. But does this truly reflect reality?

Last year we heard news reports about the many PLA soldiers fighting the floods who, without regard for their own safety, protected people's lives and property. We also heard of many Christians expressing solicitude for the soldiers. This is a picture of harmony between God and people. But the controversy that resulted was a symbol of a split between God and humankind. The final issue in this controversy was not who made the greater contribution, but seeing creation either in terms of harmony or of disjunction. If self-sacrifice among humanity does not emerge from the sacred, then what is left of the sacred? If Jesus' great Christian character is not praised by his sacrifice, was his praise for the Good Samaritan satire?

When the U.S. bombed Iraq, some people prayed for them. They saw it as a holy war, a war of two groups clashing over faith. In the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, some people did not hesitate to stand with Israel, because the Israelis are God's chosen, the sanctified people. This way of dividing humankind by religious faith and the religious damage that results-is this in service to the sacred? If we legitimize Israel's genocidal treatment of the states on its borders, should we also censure Nazi treatment of the Jews? Is such an understanding in line with the concept of God as love? What does God's punishment of Cain for the murder of Able tell us? How shall we understand the description of God and humanity together in Revelation 21: 3-4, an eternity in which suffering shall be no more? Can this ever be the result of "holy war"? If on the one hand we take all that happens as God's doing, and on the other legitimize because of faith every action of various camps who claim this as their motivation, we may have to redefine God's "righteousness" and God's "love". And how shall we understand the phrase "God does not show preference?" Niklas Luhmann's pungent critique is that people habitually divide the world into

different times and places and think that God is especially good to people in specially defined times and places. He believes that the real gospel means that all definitions have meaning only in a distinct context; thus we must be ready to discern what sort of distinction these arise from.' Groups of people, discerning the meaning of the same action, do so on the basis of pre-existing standards.

### **The Wholeness of Creation and Redemption**

The attempt at two divisions described above is an effort to separate creation and redemption based on their origins. The idea is that God's creation was completed in six days, after which God undertook no more work of creation. The tragedy of all times which took place in Eden became the watershed between creation and redemption. Bishop K.H. Ting criticizes this approach thus: "The New Testament knows Christ as Creator as well as Redeemer. He is the same Christ, not two. Creation and redemption are one, they are not opposed to each other and there are not two gods, one in charge of each."<sup>9</sup>

Sometimes, we forget the faith journey we have made and even now continue to make: the journey from unbelief to belief; from shallow faith to deep faith. We automatically despise as evil those who do not yet know the gospel. They are the enemy. We forget the care and strength we have received from those who do not yet know the gospel, as if we already belong to another people and have no further need of them. Issler's critique of this attitude is: "We have become accustomed to discarding our possessions when they are no longer useful or needed. Inevitably, such a consumer-oriented perspective is being directed toward people. " There is no basis in the Bible for treating neighbors like this. The self-righteous attitude of the Pharisees on this issue reflects the distance between the human quest and Jesus' teachings.

Is our task today to determine how we differ from the rest and express that by keeping our distance? Or is it to find our commonality with others? Is it to seek a richer humanity or to abandon our quest for human perfection because of our thirst for the sacred'? " The redemption brought by Christ's sacrifice is of course to enable humans to return, and the goal of returning is God. But the way to do this is by eliminating differences. Eliminating differences does not mean the denial of the many sorts of differences that exist among people, or to banish difference for good, but to recognize the common ground of difference and, through this, to seek the unity within it. Paul, too, stressed the need to pull down "the walls that divide us" (Eph. 2: 14). If redemption cannot dispel the conflict that differences create, where is the practical significance of Christ's sacrifice? If redemption has no practical significance, what impact can it have on humanity's return? The crux of the issue is whether or not these differences are absolute. Are these ultimate differences? Simmel notes that modern human beings can neither devote themselves to a readymade religion, nor intentionally and soberly term religion simply humanity's absurd dream, one that humankind will gradually awaken from. However, faced with this fact, modern human beings fall into a great insecurity: they discover that though in the course of its historical development, there has been a world of difference between religion and the mysteries of metaphysics, emotional value, ethics and spiritual meaning, these differences have only touched on the content of religious faith and not on the principles by which it deals with reality. 12

Clearly, Simmel is not advocating impiety in modern faith, but explaining a type of human predicament. He believes that people can come to know the immediate significance of faith gradually, in the realities of their everyday lives. People need to rethink their faith and the religious doctrines that emerge from it, in the midst of reality.

Of course, the sacred and the non-sacred are by no means indistinguishable. What we need to ask is, where is the line between them and what is the point of the boundary?" The goal usually determines the result. The competition among the opportunities we face in life unconsciously affects our attitude toward redemption. Especially because extreme traditional theologies that stress limited salvation cause some people to be particularly fearful of losing the ideals they have striven so hard for. They then adopt an attitude of hostility toward others, as if the smaller the number of those saved, the more sure they are of their own salvation. What, after all, is God's redemption? Is God's redemption expressed only in a final judgment which has no relation at all to creation? This is not what Troeltsch thinks: "In Protestant Christianity, salvation depends on a fully pious faith in the mercy and holy love of God, in pushing the soul toward a higher inner strength and a conceptual realm." "This is not the Pharisaic quest for redemption: it does not arise from a utilitarian mindset and it is absolutely unselfish. Rather it is a quest for the perfect human being, a perfect human modeled on the example of Christ." But the prerequisite for this quest is a "fully pious faith in the mercy and holy love of God." There are some whom faith makes not more loving, but more narrow. This is because they have not been able to found their faith on God's holy and merciful love, but have established it on the self.

If we were to say that God's creation fell as soon as it was finished, we are undoubtedly saying that the very moment God's creation work drew to a close, it failed. Quite the opposite, God's creation is a never-ending process and through this process, he brings his creation ever closer to perfection. Whether the goal is to transcend the self as God caused the Israelites to do through an experience of self-reflection in Exodus," or the "change of heart" that comes from victory over the self, as Paul stressed in Romans, both are interpretations of the same subject. As Jesus explained again and again, it is in the very process and approach that the value of faith is found.<sup>17</sup> Redemption is part of God's creation. Through redemption, God causes his creation to develop toward perfection. Since God has been compared to a skilled potter, he must know how to transform his creation from clay to porcelain in the production process. It is not a matter of producing inferior porcelain and then repairing it. Or we might say that redemption is God's method of creation. God's redemption means that in the production process God envisions and molds the existential consciousness of forsaken humanity into awe and faith in God.

### **The Wholeness of Faith and Morals**

Christianity is a religion that emphasizes the moral significance of human behavior, but this does not imply that Christianity consists of nothing more than demands for moral behavior. One of the Pharisees' errors was to lead religion in the direction of pure moral theory by requiring all who desired to be religious (or perhaps this was optional) to become moral teachers as well." Byrne poses the question: "We must ask what kind of religious faith the moral interpretation is able to support." (Matt. 11: 12). The crux of the issue is not one of moral standards, but of religion.

We usually see only religion's power to regulate everyday behavior, while ignoring its other, more important, function. Troeltsch sees redemption as humanity's noblest moral quest because it leads humans to know the source of moral demands. Religion is a net woven *of* meaning. Only by explaining the interrelatedness of these meanings, can we discover its meaning. Morality is an inseparable part of religion, as Van der Ven said, "serving as a criterion as to whether an individual, social group, or community is in fact religious at all." The lofty moral function *of* religion is its wholeness in terms of redemptive meaning. If we understand the moral demands of Christianity merely as fastidiousness in personal behavior, religion loses its integrity of meaning and redemption thus becomes a judgment on human action or pathetic wishful thinking.<sup>20</sup> This in effect negates the moral significance of religion. Of course, this negation is a denial of the significance God's actions have in the real lives of human beings, and a denial of the positive role of the redemption of Christ in human character. People misunderstand the meaning of redemption and separate it from creation. This causes them to think there is a possibility of gaining self-fulfillment in transcending reality before they have cast off worldly things. Thus, whether this appears as moralism, or as a denial of morality, both in substance break the link between the grace of God and human effort.

In the process of sanctification, the perfection of human character naturally ("naturally" with Christian faith as a prerequisite) is not simply the fruit of individual moral striving, but it is by no means unrelated to it. Never in the Bible did God force moral perfection on anyone, rather there are many instances recorded in the Bible of people who in the end lost God's grace because of their own moral failings. Byrne points out that "sanctification, no matter where it comes from, must work through human beings; whatever language like "deity" refers to, if it has any meaning, it must be the basis of our being, capable of manifesting the strength *of* our individual lives..."<sup>21</sup>

The life that comes with the moral strivings of the inner self that Byrne speaks *of* is the same sublimation of the soul that Troeltsch says comes with redemption. Religious faith that brings no moral power is unthinkable. But this has happened at times in Christianity. <sup>22</sup> A religious faith without the restraining power of morality (or Perhaps any faith) cannot carry a person from vulgarity to holiness, rather, it can make some vulgar people even more vulgar, perhaps turning them into outcasts in the end.

The redemption Jesus announced was not meant merely as a comfort for a people writhing in despair, one that would enable them to have courage to the last breath. He was telling them of a future reality. But they would have to walk the road to this reality by themselves (though he could help them). This announcement broke through ethical conventions that negated ethics and pietistic forms that kept piety sealed off. Thus piety and ethics became the center of Christian ways of behaving. Simmel sees human character through human being's social nature and this human character has a social significance. Thus Christian ethics breaks open the confines of personal ethics and is significant for social ethics.

No matter what, each and every person bears a responsibility for the sins of others ... these internal Christian phenomena manifest themselves in a profound and strong sense of character; or perhaps this is a type of untrammelled feeling, however, it forbids an isolated human existence- for-itself. <sup>23</sup>

Though Simmel is aiming at the ideal of everyone as sisters and brothers in Christ, the interrelatedness of human character he describes can be greatly extended. From the three-part analysis above, we can see that our understanding of creation and redemption cannot be separate. Any attempt at breaking this harmonious relationship places Christian faith in crisis. If, in the Chinese context, we cannot enable Christians and pastoral workers to gain a right understanding of the relationship between creation and redemption, it will be difficult for us to explain our social significance in this rapidly developing society. Of course, we did not adopt a plan for rights and interests in order to be accepted by the Chinese people, but because this is Jesus' teaching. It is also the goal of decades of effort by the Three-Self Movement. Currently in the Chinese church, people understand the doctrines of creation and redemption as divided, as unrelated.

If they do see a relationship, it is as the heritage of the traditional doctrine of predestination: the individual's future decided by God before creation, an eternally unchanging decision of God against which human effort cannot avail. Set aside, for the time being, redefinition of the traditional concept. It may be that no one can speak of humans changing a decision of God before our terminology has been redefined. But the question is this: What is the systematic biblical evidence for such an understanding? Many people are concerned only with eschatological questions and have no idea that the whole system of Christian doctrine is interrelated. Ignorance of the doctrine of creation in particular has affected the self-building of the Chinese church. Their experience of the Cultural Revolution made many of the older generation of pastoral workers realize the importance of the common base of humanity. But the younger generation of pastoral workers, who have not had this experience, must begin by teaming about and understanding the experience of the older generation. If we cannot understand that creation is a prerequisite to redemption, we will inevitably fade Christian truth into a utilitarian quest. And this is one of the biggest difficulties facing the church today.<sup>24</sup>

We must not fall into the creation vs. redemption debate, because that is the same sort of error. The watershed between the two is human-made, yet the event of the Incarnation and the miracle of the resurrection both show that redemption is the continuation of God's creation, because these two events are in substance no different from the placing of Adam and Eve in the garden or the exodus.<sup>25</sup> Decades of experience have shown that one of the reasons that we have been able to develop is because we have been able to share weal and woe with our people. "This ability comes from seeking the common ground and not from emphasizing individual differences.

The Chinese church has developed very rapidly, but this does not mean that it is grounded on a firm foundation; i.e., biblical research and doctrinal understanding. Thus, we cannot be satisfied with ourselves, we must search our souls and reflect on the path we have come. We must make theological preparations for the long future development of the Chinese church. If we become self-satisfied, content with the status quo, we will once more lose the foundation the elder generation established in past decades. While our church is in a period of rapid development and, as the 20<sup>th</sup> century draws to a close, looking back to reflect anew on our faith, the understanding on which it is founded and the praxis based on our understanding of faith, will be of tremendous assistance to the church in China.

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1 God saw that the humanity he had created was good, but this does not necessarily imply that humans are complete. God's warnings to Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden announces this. Of course, there are two sides to the meaning of "complete." One means complete in abilities; the other complete in character. The announcement in the garden of Eden warns humankind that it is still incomplete in both character and abilities.

2 Whether we are talking about the parable of the Prodigal Son, which clearly tells humankind of God's forgiveness, or of Cain's lot, which suggests to humanity God's patient forbearance, both illustrate one thing: God is waiting for humanity's return, whether from obscurity, rebellion, or from despair.

3 In fact, in these circumstances, we humans know our limits. We know we are fooling ourselves, but this kind of self-knowledge gives rise to a deep sense of sinfulness, which is so oppressive that it must be resisted in order to prove that one will not be despised and has one's own potential. But due to the anxiety and the insecurity dependence brings, our sense of sinfulness intensifies, and this leads to an even more despairing resistance. The story of the garden of Eden is precisely this sort of psychological portrayal: the first revolt is overstepping human boundaries; shifting the blame is the second.

4 Using sacred forms to deny the sacred is the most thorough denial of it, because such an attitude must lead to a denial of any external authority in the life of holiness of the self, and even to a denial of the influence of any transcendent power on the self's life, and finally to making oneself the ultimate sacred and showing off before others. This type of self has no ultimate worth, but it has ultimate form, the final resurrection then becomes the realization of the meaning of the self. This is a process of self-deification, but also one of undeifying the self's existence. Though strong promotion of the sacred might be possible, the sacred is simply a substitute for the self. This approach places strong emphasis on the authority and power of God and denies human initiative, while in fact emphasizing the authority of the self. This was why Jesus criticized the Pharisees.

5 Love is the concrete expression of this harmony between God and humankind and humanity has only to follow God's will to be in a place of mutual love, and embody this holy harmony to the fullest.

6 Some people think that the spirit of sacrifice is a concrete expression of the existence of the sacred. But they differentiate among sacrifices, believing that some come about because there is simply no alternative. They recognize only that individual holy persons may be truly moved by the sacred to acts of love, or worthy self-sacrifice.

7 The Old Testament is full of examples of the Israelites doing God's will by slaughtering all the male members of other nations, taking all the females and children into captivity and plundering

livestock and wealth. In Numbers 31, Moses is angry because his generals haven't accomplished a total slaughter, he wants them "to kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman who has know a man by sleeping with him." In Deuteronomy 2, Moses, in describing the war with King Sihon of Heshbon, says, "At that time, we captured all his towns, and in each town we utterly destroyed men, women and children. We left not a single survivor" (Deut. 2: 34). How should we understand the support of German churches for the actions of Nazi Germany and their search through the Bible for legitimizing evidence against such a background?

8 Niklas Luhmann, *Religious Dogmatics and the Evolution of Societies*, Liu Feng and Li Qiuling trans. (Hong Kong: Research Center on Chinese Christian Culture, 1998), 228. The author quotes a story Luhmann tells, which is omitted here.

9 K.H. Ting, *Love Never Ends* [Chinese edition](Nanjing: Yilin Press, 1999), 27.

10 Klaus Issler, "A Response to Scott B. Rae," in J.P. Moreland and David M. Ciochi, ed., *Christian perspective on Being Human* (Michigan: Baker Books, 1993), 257.

11 Naturally, this depends on how we see human nature. Can we as Christians believe that human nature is essentially depraved? If so, how do we understand Jesus' human nature? Or looking at it from another angle, if God sees the humans he created as good, what does this suggest to us about understanding human nature?

12 G. Simmel, *Modern Man and Religion*, Cao Weidong et al trans (Hong Kong: Research Center on Chinese Christian Culture, 1997), 46.

13 Distinction here differs from that posited by Luhmann.

14 Ernst Troeltsch, *Christian Theory and Modernity*, trans. Zhu Yanbing et al (Hong Kong: Research Center for Chinese Christian Culture, 1998), 195.

15 Saucy places special stress on human's social nature, he feels that humans are made in the image of God, and only because of this do humans become social beings. And because of this, humans must form relationships with others based on their image (God's image). And "it is only through his or her relationships that a person lives out the existential meaning of the image of God. Only in this way, can Jesus become the true model of human nature."

16 Robert L. Saucy, "Theology of Human Nature," *Christian Perspectives on Being Human*, 26.

17 Jia Shiqin, *Philosophy of Religion*, trans. Wu Zongwen (Hong Kong: Seed Press, 1983), 8.

18 Karl Barth, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. Wei Yuqing (Hong Kong: 1998), 558-559.

19 Many Christians and clergy have a dualistic understanding of this issue. On the one hand they are extremely picky about others' personal behavior, as if Christians had to have a behavior and life pattern distinctly different from others: on the other hand, they deny the importance of Christian deeds, as any emphasis on Christian behavior or life(style) would seem to lead directly to a conflict with the doctrine of justification by faith. Such a dualistic understanding makes faith look pallid in the midst of social reality.

20 Peter Byrne, *The Moral Interpretation of Religion* (Holland, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 150.

21 Johannes A. Van der Ven, *Formation of the Moral Self* (Holland, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998). 13.

<sup>22</sup> Byrne critiqued Kant's supposed pure moral ground. He felt that Kant's moral teaching led him into contrariness ... "Either human beings are capable of moral improvement through their own efforts or they are not. If they are, there is no need of an external agency, let alone a transcendent one, to explain how this is possible, and, furthermore. Kant's account of human beings as sunk in radical evil loses its force. But if human beings do need external moral agency to save themselves from evil, Kant's objections to traditional religious doctrines on the grounds of inescapability of moral autonomy are mistaken", 151.

23 Ibid.

24 Many Christians do not come to church seeking the meaning of faith, let alone looking for truth, but to get some benefit for their lives. This includes some seminarians who actually think that faith is for gaining some good thing for their lives. This utilitarian approach to faith is easily influenced by unhealthy thinking or sects, because ordinarily sects emphasize immediate gain. The pragmatism brought by the market economy makes believers' faith even more susceptible to utilitarian influences. So for them, redemption has a dual meaning: benefit for the here and now and insurance for the hereafter. Such an understanding may be possible, but it has shifted people's quest for the knowledge of God to a quest for individual benefit.

25 This is just like Christianity developing out of Judaism into a world religion. The separation from Judaism was not because Judaism lacked anything, but because Christianity was in the process of developing.

## **In Response to My Readers - K.H. Ting**

*Please explain what you mean by "semi-finished products."*

I would like to respond to this question on the basis of light gained from Bible reading.

Our God is the Creator. Creation is a long process, not something God finished in six days and has been resting from ever since. The first chapter of Genesis tells us that God was pleased with what he created in these six days. But how primitive this world would be and how immature our knowledge of God if we were to think that God's creation is limited to these six days and that after this he stopped creating. God said of those first six days that it was good, but from then on. God's creation had to deal with human sin, it had to resolve the question of human sinfulness. Creation was not as simple and easy as in those first six days. But God is the Lord of creation, yesterday, today and tomorrow. God never quits halfway. Creation is continually in process. And this creation will certainly be carried to completion. The created world is a semi-finished part of God's overall creation, It is a work-in-progress. It is being transformed, but still needs work. The term "semi-finished product" is not found in the Bible, neither is "electric light" or "television." But "semi-finished product" may be an effective term for people in modern industrial societies.

As for us, in addition to statements about humans being in sin without any merit, the Bible also says, 'What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor' (Psalm 8: 4-5). These different views of the Bible are not contradictory. The meaning is simply that in the process of being created, people experience reversal, difference, before and after states. Works-in-progress are those that are not yet finished, not seconds or rejects. To be semi-finished products in God's hand is honor and glory, but we must be humble, know our own shortcomings, and not imagine that we are already complete.

On the evidence of many passages in the New Testament, it seems quite appropriate to say that we are "semi-finished." For example:

"When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known" (I Cor. 13: 11-12).

"Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3: 12-14).

Even the Incarnate Christ, while living as a human in the world, underwent a process of growth: "And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor" (Luke 2: 52).

Biblical theology is a comprehensive field of study. It would be erroneous to say that the Bible's assessment of humankind is based on only one passage. Personally, my view is that if

we see everyone-Adam and Eve, the elder son and the younger son in the story of the Prodigal Son, Peter and John. Rahab who helped bring the Israelites into the land of Canaan, and Man' Magdalene, as well as Priscilla and Aquila, teachers of theology and theological students, scientists and producers-all as works-in-progress in God's great enterprise of creation, we can avoid raising humankind too high, but also avoid scoffing at it. This would be a more moderate approach.

*Do you favor replacing religion with morality?*

I cannot speak for other religions, but as for Christianity, I do believe that Christianity should lift up ethics and morality. But this is in no way to suggest that Christianity is concerned only with ethics and morality and even less to suggest that Christian faith be replaced with either.

Both Christianity and its forerunner, Judaism, have a tradition of placing great emphasis on ethics and morality. Six of the ten commandments both profess are matters of ethics and morality, such as honoring ones father and mother, not stealing, avoiding sexual sin and so on. The Bible is a book with a great deal to say about ethics and morality. The Old Testament prophets extended the scope of ethics and morality from matters of individual behavior into the social and political arenas.

In spite of this, ethics and morality are not equivalent to Christianity and cannot supplant it. The core of Christianity is faith and doctrine. Christian faith and doctrine are contained in the Apostles Creed and the Nicene Creed, both ancient creeds. Ethical and moral concepts change slowly, moving with the times. Neither is theology the same as faith and doctrine, rather both ethics and theology explain faith and doctrine, and inevitably change according to people, time and place. There is only one Christianity, but there are many and various theological views within Christianity. Even within the one Bible, there are many theological viewpoints, as well as different ethical and moral concepts.

Any advanced religion values ethics and morality. Einstein once said, "A giant leap in the historical evolution of human religion takes place when religions of fear turn into religions of morality", and I agree.

An essay published in Hong Kong recently stated that any Christian who emphasized ethics and morality was denying the uniqueness of Christ. This writer even went so far as to say that Christians on the mainland spoke *of* ethics and morality in order to curry favor with the Communist Party. Does this writer not know that for thousands of years before there was a Communist Party on earth, countless ancient sages like Confucius, Mencius, Mo Tzu, Socrates, and Paul, along with nearly every writer included in the Bible, held ethics and morality in high esteem? All this about currying favor with the Communists only goes to show that the focus for this author lies in opposition to the Communist Party, and that failure to oppose it is tantamount to favoring it.

You made the courage and spirit of sacrifice of the People's Liberation Army infighting the floods widely known, and praised the soldiers highly, pointing to their actions as an expression of love. But we Christians know that compared to the holy love of God, this love

is hardly worth mentioning. Christians should glorify God and spread God's holy love, they should not praise humans. What is your reaction to this?

I have thought of such questions often since the floods. Let me explain my views further

I understand why some Christians feel that only God's love is true and holy love. Perhaps because they have seen or been deceived by people who use love as a cloak for their actions in order to achieve their own selfish ends. Simple souls have suffered at the hands of such people, and the experience has left them bitterly disappointed, feeling that all human love is false and unreliable. They feel that God's holy love is the only thing they have to rely on.

I sympathize with those who have been deceived, but as a Christian I firmly believe that behind the whole cosmos and the created world, there exists God the Father, the Lord of creation. Love is the impetus for all his movements and work, it is his most basic attribute. God is the invisible hover in the cosmos. His justice emerges from his love, rather than being opposed to it. God is even now in the process of creating. I believe the three persons of God are one, for this process of creation includes the Son's moving example and redemption, and the Holy Spirit's revelation and sanctification. This three-in-one God is now in the process of gradually transforming the obstacles to his work of love and his work of the kingdom into helpers and co-workers worthy of him. In this long process one can imagine that there are some works-in-progress coming to completion, while others turn their backs on God, choosing destruction instead.

Years ago at Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, I spent half a day each week for several weeks introducing liberation theology, the theology of Teilhard de Chardin and process theology. Theologians in these three areas, along with theologians in many other fields, all praise God's love. They see it as God's most basic attribute and believe that this is the pinnacle of revelation in the Bible. Some religions, especially less developed ones, view justice and discipline as God's highest attributes, seeing God as one who rewards good and punishes evil. The judge and avenger who holds life and death in his hand. People easily see such a god as one who would destroy for revenge and punish the innocent with the guilty. This tendency stands out in some parts of the Old Testament, in spite of the fact that in some passages very beautiful language is used in describing the love of God (for example in Hosea where he uses his personal experience to speak of God's bands of love). But in the New Testament, we meet the Incarnate Son in the Four Gospels, in whose person God is pleased to show forth his love, or a loving God. Paul's justification by faith also points to that Christ who, prompted by love, was raised up on the cross, thus liberating humanity from the bonds of the law. Later in I John 4:4, the New Testament language is very direct: "God is love."

In more and more countries today, beatings, revenge and punishment are no longer the principles for dealing with crime. Rather the guiding principles are education, persuasion and reform. Some countries have even abolished the death penalty. Yet among us Christians, some are still hostile to others (non-Christians), threatening them with the day of judgment when they will be punished and Christians vindicated. We should give much thought to how this relates to our Christian concept of God.

During television coverage of the floods, we saw a five or six year old child clinging to a branch, about to be swept away. Without a thought for his own safety, a PLA soldier guided his small boat over, grabbed the child and took her to safety. This act, braving death to save another, is love. I cannot believe such love to be very small, hardly worth mentioning. I believe this is a great and holy love, and that the creator of this love is God. Seeing love like this, God is most certainly pleased, and we Christians, too, should be thankful for it and should not demean it. Can it be that we as Christians should criticize and demean even the good actions of others? Is this normal? Can our Christianity have no common language with the rest of our people? John 3: 16 tells us "For God so loved the world..." May we know the will of God and see the world with loving hearts.

*Nanjing Theological Review*, no. 2 (1999), p.50.

A partial translation also appeared in Amity News Service as "Bishop Ting Responds to Questions," 99.7/8.4 (Sept., 1999).

## **Chinese Christians' View of the Bible - Yin Wen**

The Bible is the Christian's highest standard for faith and behavior. Reading and interpreting it is the most basic problem all Christians of all times, ethnic and cultural backgrounds face in common. This question-how Chinese Christians today should understand and explain the "essential meaning" of the Bible in a "moderate" manner-is one which contemporary clergy and theologians of the Chinese church should approach with the greatest of care, because it is closely related to the question of how the Christian religion, born in the Middle East and grown in the west (meaning European culture with its Greek and Roman heritage) will be able to exist and develop in a contemporary Chinese society influenced by the ancient culture of China.

Christianity made several attempts to enter the vast land of China, but several times failed miserably and took its leave. Speaking of the modern and contemporary Chinese church, it has been precisely in these short decades since the founding of new China (minus the many historical "movements" and the Cultural Revolution) that the membership of the church has grown and grown again. The quality of the church has also continued to rise, until today we look upon the moving scene presented by a thriving church in China. Searching for the reasons behind this, we must acknowledge that it is inseparable from the unceasing search for a characteristically Chinese hermeneutics done by Chinese Christians within their own post-Liberation reality. In this process of development and change, the establishment of the three-self principle was a correct decision with broad significance and profound impact. We have reason to believe that it is in line with the will of God and the teachings of the Bible. In the Bible (especially in the New Testament) God did not make the early church in Jerusalem the only model of a Christian church. Nor did the early leaders of the church deny Paul's faith and the church he founded because his understanding and explanation of the Christian gospel came out of a Greek cultural background. Just the opposite, Peter and James and the rest saw in his genuine faith the abundance of the power and love of God.

Now as in the past, it is in a different and specific historical context-for Chinese Christians, this happened only after the founding of new China-that we truly began to attempt and ponder a hermeneutical principle arising from our own context. The establishment of the three-self principle enabled the Chinese people for the first time to have a sense of identification, of familiarity and belonging with Christianity, and enabled Jesus Christ for the first time in China to shed the "blond and blue-eyed" image brought by western missionaries, becoming the Lord Jesus Christ for the Chinese people themselves. An example of this today is the "Christianity fever" that has risen among middle-aged and young intellectuals from a cultural understanding. It is not difficult to see that since Liberation, and especially since the implementation of the policies of reform and openness, Christian exegesis and reading of the Bible has gradually been identified with and accepted by more and more of our compatriots.

But at the same time, the Chinese church, as a church which can adapt to a socialist society under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, has from the beginning been subject to criticism, opposition and even imprecations on all sides. And the majority of the

opposition comes from within the church itself, those so-called "brothers and sisters" (whether Chinese or not). This, it must be said, is a great tragedy for the church.

Not long ago, in the Hong Kong *Christian Literature News*, I happened to see a piece entitled, "Biblical Research and the Chinese Social Context" (which I will refer to below as "Research and Context"). The article attempted an analysis of the social context of the Chinese church since Liberation (in fact of the political context, of the fact that China is a socialist country under the leadership of the atheist Communist Party) and its relationship to biblical research. The article's aim was to establish (or at least to hint at) the hermeneutical principle and direction of Christians in China today. The article summed up contrastively the so-called "two obviously different trends in social context and biblical research since the founding of new China. These two represent two types of theological viewpoint and methods..." In a negative tone, the article first described the so-called post-Liberation "hermeneutical method for exegeting the Bible that arose from the political context" in mainline Chinese churches; and went on to describe, in an appreciative tone, the minority of so-called "evangelicals" whose hermeneutical method sought to know the biblical context by beginning with the Bible. Leaving aside for the moment the author's limited knowledge of the issue of context, I would like to deal with the author's analysis and comparison of so-called different hermeneutical views within the church in new China.

First, while reading the article conscientiously, one always has the feeling that it is not an exploration of theological issues of the "different trends in social context and biblical research," but more of an illustration of an individual's political tendencies and an expression of political sentiments. There were many differing opinions in the Chinese church when new China was founded regarding how to view religious issues in a nation under the leadership of an atheist Communist Party like ours. I believe that as Christians these different ways of understanding arise from seeing the issue from different biblical angles. I do not want to critique any concrete viewpoint here. But one point should first of all be clarified, and that is that it was this very unbelieving Communist Party that led the Chinese people, for the first time in modern and contemporary history, to regain the dignity and self-esteem stolen from them by force by western powers made up of believers. In "Research and Context," the author always wants to label those Christians who supported and commended the leadership of the Party as "politicized," while deliberately throwing a mantle of so-called conforming to the highest traditions of the Christian Bible on those Christians who are opposed to or are dissatisfied with socialist China.

Secondly, the author's bias and conclusions are not a matter of happenstance, but seem to bear the marks and odor of colonial culture. Modern Chinese Christianity is a religion brought from many places (including Europe and North America). What, after all, should Chinese Christians glean from this heritage? Should it be an indiscriminating wholesale acceptance of the cultural and political views that come with (or are forced upon us) along with the biblical truth passed on? I believe that this is truly an issue worthy of our-we modern Chinese Christians- pondering. Some proud and narrow-minded western Christians from developed countries, due to their own ignorance of real conditions in the Chinese church and Chinese society, rely on subjective views made up of ideological conjecture and arbitrarily believe that people in the Chinese church, in its context under the leadership of the Communist Party and adapting harmoniously with it, have all deviated from the so-called "traditional Christian faith". The reason for this is that they have no conception of the reality of the Chinese church.

This is the only way they are able to persist in their narrow belief that only they represent the whole of the Christian faith and church.. Or perhaps their attitude arises from hostility toward China. But if these judgments and viewpoints come from Chinese Christians themselves, this may perhaps demonstrate an even more lamentable and weak sort of understanding.

It is my belief that Christians' hermeneutical principle should be founded on the gospel and linked to context. "Research and Context" purports to be discussing issues of biblical hermeneutics. It is in tact an illustration of a personal political viewpoint.

*Yanjing Journal of Theology*, No. 1 (1999), p.49; reprinted in *Nanjing Theological Review*, No.4 (1999), p. 68.

The author is a co-worker in the Beijing church.

## **Another Look at Mutual Respect - Wang Weifan**

On this very quiet evening, I was looking through the April 1954 issue (No. 2) of the *Nanjing Theological Review*. The last article in that issue was titled "Introducing Nanjing Union Theological Seminary." It was a two-part article; the second part was subtitled "Mutual Respect". This was a fundamental principle of the Seminary Board for dealing with all the differences and varying backgrounds among students and faculty at the time:

"With regard to differences in theological viewpoints, and in matters of faith, order, organization and liturgy in churches, Nanjing Seminary applies the principle of mutual respect."

The proposal of this principle is associated with Comrade Luo Zhufeng, then Chief of the East China Religious Affairs Office, who promoted the union of seminaries and bible schools in eastern China. At the East China Forum on Theological Education held in the summer of 1952, Luo said that since there is freedom of religion, there is also freedom of theological viewpoint. "Mutual respect" was also written into the constitution of the Chinese Christian Three-Self Patriotic Movement in 1954 and was then used to promote and develop the great unity in the Chinese Christian church founded on patriotism. We might say that the principle of mutual respect is founded on patriotism, and at the same time, functions to strengthen that foundation.

From the 1920s and 30s to the 1940s, there was a conflict within the Chinese church between the so-called "new faction" and the "old faction", which was in fact the modernist-fundamentalist conflict. In fact, the conflict between the two was simply a "disease", "caught" from the United States. Like denominationalism, it was a calamity inflicted on the Chinese church by the American church. Without care, an old disease can recur and an old calamity resurface.

The modernist tendency with regard to political and social issues is to pay attention and join in, while the fundamentalist tendency is to stand aloof and avoid these issues. From the 1920s on, China was undertaking a new democratic revolution under the leadership of the Communist Party. The reconciliation, the social gospel, and national salvation through morality propagated by the modernists was inevitably stamped as reformism. The otherworldliness propagated by the fundamentalists, their rejection of the world, the non-cooperation between believers and unbelievers, etc., inevitably became obstacles to the revolution

The establishment of the People's Republic and the development of the Chinese Christian Three-Self Movement set both on a love country, love church, independent path of initial adaptation to socialism. This is the political foundation for mutual respect, co-existence and mutual honor among those who differ theologically and liturgically. When Nanjing Union Theological Seminary was founded on November 1, 1952 the purpose of the principle of mutual respect was not to ensure that "the well water won't mix with the river water." Rather both were to co-exist peaceably, each got what they wanted, and this led to further exchanges; each brought out the best in the other. And in the leadership of the whole Chinese

church at all levels, there appeared pious modernists and open-minded fundamentalists. It became difficult to distinguish between the "new faction" and the "old faction".

It must be pointed out that after the Cultural Revolution, the faith of the majority of Chinese Christians was fundamentalist or evangelical. This has led some to say that the mainstream of the Chinese church is evangelical. In this special characteristic, the situation in China is unlike western Christianity and this is a reality that the leadership of the Chinese church and its theologians must respect. To offend the feelings of this mainstream does not help Three-Self, nor does it contribute to the broader unity and stability. For one voice or one faction to hold sway and turn a cold shoulder, avoid, or even exclude those who differ, is even less suitable. It is not good to react to various extremist views in an extreme manner, as long as they are not blatantly reactionary or heretical.

"Development is our firm principle." We must speed up development of China in the 21st century, call for unity and stability, for mutual understanding on all differences, for mutual respect, and for unity of purpose. Can the Chinese church, making a supreme effort to build up its internal structure and its strength in theological studies, do without mutual understanding, respect and unity of purpose?

*Nanjing Theological Review, No. 2 (1999), p. 9.*

*Rev. Wang Weifan is retired from Nanjing Union Theological Seminary where he was Professor of Biblical Studies and Chinese Theology.*

## **The Church in China Today - Su Deci**

I would like to share with you what the church in China has experienced in the past, its present condition and its future.

First of all, I bring greetings on behalf of the China Christian Council and our brothers and sisters in China to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and to the churches and our brothers and sisters in the United States. May the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you! I hope all participants in this Consultation will share with each other in the Lord, so that our mutual understanding will be deepened, and our hearts united in our love, care and help for each other. Each of us is a part of the body of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I will share about the church in China in three parts:

### **Necessary Background**

To understand today's Chinese church and comment on it, we need to understand the context of the church, especially the historical background. Some overseas friends have many questions about Christianity in China. I will raise three points for your reference that I hope will be helpful.

First. China is a civilized country with a long history. Three of the four most ancient civilizations have either vanished or been alienated. China is the only country able to maintain and renew its tradition over its 5000 years of history. Monotheism has a place in our tradition and culture: the notion of Divine Right of Emperors was utilized to safeguard imperial authorities in all the past dynasties in China.

The doctrines Confucius formed about 2500 years ago, while recognizing the existence of a conscious God, also emphasized humanism, in order to expand imperial power at the expense of theocratic power. The history of religion in China gives evidence of religious beliefs, but seldom of systems of religious thought. "Human ways" were promulgated in the name of "heavenly ways". Therefore, traditional religions are primitive in that they have no theological underpinnings. Hence the equivocal attitude of the majority of Chinese towards the concept of God and religious faith. Even though this attitude to theism and religious faith has been consistent, atheistic propaganda in the last half century has been ineffective. More often than not, atheism has a voice, but theism is still practiced. On the other hand, theologized religions were considered alien and were rejected as well.

Second, the concepts of rule of law, human rights, and separation of church and state, were promoted in the western world by bourgeois revolutionists in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Religious freedom has been one of the basic rights of citizens, protected by constitution and law. China lagged behind for 200 years, but in 1912, the year the Republic was founded, the Provisional Constitution stipulated that "the people have the right to believe in religion." In the ensuing years, there were the promulgation of the Covenantal Law for the Period of Political Instruction and the Constitution. Following the founding of the People's Republic of China, the Common Guidelines were followed by several versions of the Constitution. Even so,

recognition by the whole people of religious freedom as a basic right of a citizen has been a long process. Some positive steps are being taken to popularize this view.

Third, Protestant Christianity has a history of nearly 200 years in China. During the 1960s and 70s, religious phenomena were almost extinguished under the ultra-leftism of the so-called Cultural Revolution. The church in China that you see today is the result of 20 years of restoration. So the various kinds of work *of* the church in China are still in their preliminary stage and set for rapid development.

The background described above is quite different from that *of* churches in America and the western world. I hope you will not forget to consider this background information when doing study and research about the church in China.

### **The Historical Experience of the Chinese Church**

First, Christian missions to China can be traced back thirteen hundred years. In the 7th century, during the Tang Dynasty, Christianity in a Nestorian form, called *Jingiao* in Chinese, was brought to China. It largely disappeared 200 years later. In the 13th century, during the Yuan Dynasty, Nestorian Christianity spread into China again, this time under the Chinese name *Yelikewen* and disappeared a second time one hundred years later. At the close of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, Catholic missionaries came to China and enjoyed some success, but were banned by the authorities at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Not until the Opium War did Christian missions to China resume with the signing of the unequal treaties.

What caused these ups and downs in Chinese Christianity? I think the main reason was that missionary presence depended on the favor and power *of* the imperial authorities. Once out *of* favor or at the change *of* ruler or dynasty, the church found itself at once in a precarious condition. The rulers of the Yuan Dynasty were ethnic Mongols. When they lost power, *Yelikewen* Christianity was considered an alien religion and suppressed. There was a time when the Qing Dynasty forbade missionary activity and missionaries then relied on the power of their native countries to infiltrate into China and conducted underground missionary activities, resulting in massive suppression and confrontation. Such practices were detrimental to the image of the church and of Christians.

The question is, mission by peaceful and lawful means, or mission through authorities and militaries? The question concerns our faith in God. The gospel of Christ is not by might nor by power. but by the Spirit of God. We firmly believe that the Word of God is the Word of eternal life. and can only be disseminated in the economy of God. The methods of flesh and blood do only disservice to the church. The history of the church in China proves that development by human ways can be demolished by human ways. Today having gone through many ups and downs, God's church in China still exists and is growing. We feel deep in our hearts that this manifests the power of God.

Second, it's been fifty years now since the founding of the 'Three-Self Patriotic Movement. Some friends do not quite understand the Three-Self Movement or have

misgivings about it because of things they have heard. I feel the perception of this movement will be decisive for the attitude to and comments on the church in China today and I would like to share my thoughts about it with you. If we can reach a consensus in this way, we'll be closer to each other.

As I mentioned before, from the mid-19th century on, Christian missions in China were more and more dependent upon the might of the western powers and the superiority of missionaries in China as a result of the unequal treaties. While a cultural confrontation between East and West was inevitable, there were various ways to ease the tension. Some at that time recognized that Chinese traditional culture had tremendous vitality. It flourished in its own soil; its existence was inevitable. Thus it was better to inculturate as far as the fundamental doctrines of Christianity would allow. Others saw a strong West and a weak China and feared how the weak might adapt to the strong.

These are two absolutely different approaches, with different consequences. Unfortunately, the latter dominated at the time. As a result, Christianity was not accommodated to local culture and society and was rejected as an alien religion by the great majority of Chinese people. In the 1940s, as revolution was progressing toward success, every social entity in China was faced with a more explicit choice, and the Christian church was no exception. While many things about the Communist-led revolution were difficult to understand, its objective won the hearts of the majority of the people—to deliver the Chinese people from the humiliation and poverty of the past hundred years. With such a serious issue before them, Chinese Christians should not focus only on otherworldly concerns, turning a blind eye to the world we live in. Only when our destiny is knitted to that of our compatriots can we communicate with them and channel the Good News to them. Whether to be deported along with the foreign forces as an alien religion, or to be faithful to God and stay in the land to continue to spread the seeds of Gospel and the Word of eternal life: Chinese Christians were at the crossroads.

The Three-Self Patriotic Movement was established on this basis. Its significance lies in two areas. First, politically, it manifested our love for the nation and our co-existence with the people. Theologically, it meant dependence upon God and independence from foreign powers, bringing down the wall between God and humankind: thus, face to face with God. Although the church later on suffered from the so-called Cultural Revolution because of leftist influence within the Communist Party, when darkness finally faded away and light dawned, the church in China had cast off its image as an alien religion, rising as the Chinese people's own church and religious faith. We have stuck to the principle of self-government, self-support and self-propagation, relying on the grace of the Lord to restore the Body of Christ in China. I believe you will also agree with our conclusion as to the necessity and rationality of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, *if you* consider our situation.

In the last two decades, under the grace and guidance of God, the church in China has developed rapidly. Yet, there is before us a long and strenuous journey and we will uphold the three-self principle.

However, three-self doesn't mean self-isolation. We firmly endorse the oneness of the church. There is one Christ, so it is with the body *of* Christ. The church is also indigenous and individual. Catholicity is manifested in the communion of churches *of* different places and nations. Hence the richness of the truth *of* God and the comprehensiveness *of* the grace *of* God.

### **Challenges and Direction**

In the last twenty years, the church in China has experienced the richness of God's grace. In divine eternity, twenty years is as fleeting as the blink of an eye. What is required *of us* in the divine plan is that we should be diligent in our efforts, straining toward what is ahead, spreading God's grace to the people around us. The church in China is still in its preliminary stage, rising from the debris *of* the past, and burdened by many problems, among which I will state the major ones:

*First, the imbalance between pastoral and evangelistic work.* The ratio of theologically trained pastoral workers and believers is 1:4000. The Great Commission that Jesus gave us has two aspects, namely, evangelization and pastoral work. The two aspects should be synchronized and balanced like our two legs: when the left leg takes a step, the right leg must take another step so that we can move forward in balance. Now there seem to be many channels for evangelism, for example-overseas broadcasting programs, secret missions and even various heretic teachings from abroad-but pastoral work is lacking. This one-sided emphasis on "evangelization" leads to "a blind man guiding a blind man" and causes splits in the churches, a surge in heresies, and disturbances harmful to the church.

*Second, China was traditionally a backward agricultural country.* In the last half century, industry developed rapidly, but rural population still constituted 80 percent of the total population. In the last two decades, the economy has grown very fast, and the rural population now makes up 70 percent of the total population. In one *of* China's provinces, the urban population now surpasses its rural population. urbanization seems to be accelerating, but the majority *of* Chinese Christians still live in rural areas. Lay church workers trained in short-term programs are now serving in churches due to the shortage of pastors. With further urbanization, the current practice will not be appropriate. We should be prepared for a modal shift from rural Churches to urban churches.

*Third. urban churches are faced with the issue of adaptation to social development.* Since the state called for revitalizing our country with science and education and moving toward a technological economy, people's education level has been raised. Many pastors of the older generation are more than 30 years of age. and we cannot ask them to update their knowledge. On the other hand, the younger generation of seminary graduates since the 1980s were not well equipped at school. but are now busy with administrative work and lack opportunities to renew their knowledge. After the Second World War, pastoral theology was renewed with the fruits of modern psychology. New disciplines such as pastoral psychology and pastoral care are almost barren areas in China. So intellectuals and young students often come to church because they are spiritually hungry, but are disappointed and leave the church.

*Fourth, with the rapid pace of Chinese society toward modernization, cultural restoration and re-integration have entered a new period.* There has been an influx of cultural influences from the West, including Christian culture, in the wake of the adoption of the guidelines "using the antique for today and using the foreign for China." According to a report, approximately one thousand books on Christianity have been published. Some universities have established research centers on Christianity and many scholars are doing research comparing Christian culture and Chinese culture. This phenomenon helps more people to know about Christianity; it is also a challenge for the church. Because we lack church scholars in dialogue with scholars outside the church, there isn't much research on the integration of Christian thought with Chinese culture. If we can voice our opinion and contribute to the new round of cultural integration in our country from a Christian perspective, it will raise our value in society.

*Fifth, the church in China has entered a stage of post-denominationalism.* Although denominational structures no longer exist, traditional features of the denominations are respected and maintained. In recent years, however, some overseas organizations have emphasized denominationalism while visiting China, and this has led to embarrassing consequences. We understand that missionaries set up their respective denominational structures, and we respect history. But when churches in China came together under new circumstances and in a time of financial and personnel difficulties like-mindedly sought God's guidance and way of unity, they were in accordance with biblical teachings and were successful in overcoming difficulties. This was good in the eyes of God. I hope our brothers and sisters of various denominations in the world will respect this reality and thank God for our unity in the Lord.

*Sixth, the latter half of the 20th century was a time of awakening of the nations.* Oppressed and humiliated countries raised the flag of independence one after another. Every nation has its national consciousness and will maintain its self-esteem, and every state has its state consciousness and will safeguard its sovereignty. This was China's situation, and the church in China also received the concept of sovereignty through God's revelation. A missiology of our own is in the making though China was formerly considered a mission field. We believe churches in every country are responsible to spread the gospel to the people in their respective countries. When we are invited to visit churches overseas, we are there to exchange opinions, learn from them, make friends and help each other instead of conducting missionary work, unless we were invited do so. The missiological theory of 19th century colonial expansionism is out dated, otherwise trouble unrelated to religion could arise. However some overseas missionary organizations carry on so-called "underground missions" - in China by illegal and clandestine means. This is dangerous and inappropriate behavior, which has unfavorable consequences for the church in China, the Holy Name of Christ and believers. We are worried about this. We hope to carry on friendly dialogues and exchanges with more friends in Christ. Nevertheless we should follow the principles of equality, openness, sincerity and legality.

*Seventh, we should not take the various challenges easily.* We will continue to rely on God's power to respond to these challenges. There are many things to do, among which I feel two things are of first priority.

1) Stepping up the training of personnel at different levels in different aspects of the church's ministry. When the Lord Jesus began his work on earth, he first called the disciples and trained them. God's work on earth is accomplished through human efforts. For historical reasons, the church in China faces a severe shortage of personnel, so priority is given to the training of personnel. A multitude of God's workers are needed for our times. Horizontally, we need to train pastors and personnel in areas such as Christian literature publication, administration, theological education, research in theology and related disciplines, and overseas relationships, etc. Vertically training is needed at high, middle and low levels. In the 18 seminaries and Bible schools, we have the graduate program, the undergraduate program and two- year training program. In addition, there are lay training centers in the provinces. We thank overseas churches, including the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), for providing scholarships to help us train personnel. We plan to increase our capacity to train graduate (M.Div.) students, and in the future those sent abroad to study will work toward doctoral degrees or master's degrees in some specialized fields. The curriculums of the training centers need to be substantiated. We expect training centers to become accredited through gradual enhancement of faculty.

2) Step by step we are emphasizing and strengthening theological building up order to form a theological system for the church in China.

Theology is the thinking of the church. Some have figuratively termed it the head and brain of the church. Every church has its own theological thinking which indicates its maturity. In the 1950s, God revealed to us the three-self principle and building up the church independently in those conditions. Thereby, the Body of Christ in China has become a truly Chinese church. During the 1980s and 1990s, the church in China was restored to new life and revival. In the last two decades, emphasis has been put on opening or reopening churches, Bible publication, opening theological schools, ecumenical relationships and so on. Through the years, the church in China has accumulated experience in the grace of God.

Theology is also a summation of the experience of the church in a certain period, which will be the guidelines for the church. Therefore, the Plenary Meeting of the China Christian Council, led by K.H. Ting, adopted the Resolution on Strengthening Theological Reconstruction in November, 1998. In the last year we have engaged in this work and an atmosphere of theology has been formed. Beginning with reflection on context, there have been theological discussions on creation and redemption, church and society, faith and reason. women's status in society, biblical studies and hermeneutics. We hope that through these discussions a variety of flowers in various beautiful colors will bloom in the garden of Chinese theological thinking. In order to bring our efforts to fruition more effectively and more quickly, we will make short-term, intermediate and long-term plans, dealing with various themes at all levels. We believe that, through our efforts, with time, a theological system that is revealed by God and reflects the special experience of the church in China will be soundly founded, and will be a part of the theology of the ecumenical church, reflecting the fullness of God's grace, wisdom and glory. To this end, we will have more exchanges with churches worldwide, teaming from each other and praying for each other.

A talk given in Louisville, KY, at the Consultation on Partnership between the China Christian Council and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 19-22 March 2000. English text.

Rev. Su is a Vice-President and General Secretary of the China Christian Council.

## **Update on the Church in China - Bao Jiayuan**

I am so thankful to God for giving me this opportunity to be with you today. It is so wonderful and exciting to see so many old friends of the Chinese churches here and at the same time to make many new friends. I have known many of you for years. I know you have prayed for China and for the Chinese churches with hearts of deep love. We have been encouraged and always feel your support through this true partnership. Through these various ministries with you we are together on God's mission. I am here today to share with you about the church of China.

China is a vast nation, which is home to one-quarter of the world's population—a population of more than 1.2 billion people. Ninety-one percent of the people are "Han" Chinese and the remaining nine percent belong to 56 minority nationalities. China is undergoing social reform and tremendous changes toward the outside world in its rapid economic development. The rate of economic growth in China is miraculous. Chinese people on the whole are content with their standard of living. China is developing and changing as the Chinese church is growing and changing.

The Chinese church is a church of the resurrection. I Peter 1:3-8 is a perfect example of the faith and witness experience of the church. The faithfulness of the believers was tested in the years of trial and persecution during the Cultural Revolution. With more than twelve years of recovery behind us, the church now emphasizes internal restructuring and evangelism. The church in China is going through a consolidation process.

### **Two Christian Organizations Work Together for One Purpose, One Vision**

The first organization is the TSPM (The Three-self Patriotic Movement). It is a purely Protestant organization that came into being in the 1950s. The purpose of its creation was to bring to an end the control of the foreign mission boards. The TSPM was responsible for raising a sense of dignity, self-respect and patriotism among Chinese Christians. The TSPM, according to Bishop Ting, was not an invention of Chinese Christians, much less of the Communist Party. The first person to put the three-self principles of self-propagation, self support and self-government into practice was Henry Venn, the head of the Church Missionary Society in England. Since 1980 the TSPM has played an effective role as liaison between the church and officials of the Religious Affairs Bureau to negotiate for church properties confiscated during the Cultural Revolution.

The second organization is the China Christian Council. It was founded in 1980 to assist churches in China with spiritual and administrative matters and relate to the outside world. The CCC has a network of churches and meeting points at the county, prefecture and provincial levels. Its work is carried out through 12 commissions church administration, rural work, national minorities, overseas relations, publications, sacred music, theological education, women's work, *Tian Feng* editorial committee, propagation of the gospel and promotion for self-support.

The CCC and the TSPM are like two hands of the body. The two organizations work cooperatively for the same purpose—church unity—in this post-denominational period. Dr. Wenzao Han, president of the CCC, at the sixth National Christian Conference held in 1997

called all Chinese Christians to give concerted efforts to building up the Body of Christ and to fulfill God's mission in China "by believing in and practicing the three-self principles". The new emphasis given to the three principles of governing well, supporting well and propagating the gospel by ourselves has been widely welcomed and supported by the churches.

*What are the challenges in this area?*

1. To assess past experience on the 50th anniversary of the formation of the TSPM in the year 2000 in order to give impetus to a new vitality in the life of the church and her ministries.
2. To encourage the younger generation to ask additional theological questions and gain better understanding in strengthening the selfhood of the church and formulating its witness in the new context of a changing society.
3. To renew our commitment to self-sacrifice in order to face many internal problems, difficulties and challenges within the churches themselves. We take encouragement in this from the New Testament churches.
4. To provide leadership training for church organizations at all levels.

### **The Churches Keep Growing in Mission**

Today there are over 13,000 Protestant churches in China as well as 25,000-30,000 meeting points. We define a meeting point as a place of worship without full-time pastors or church leaders. Three churches were begun every two days from 1979-1989, and from 1990 to the present, five churches have been either re-opened or newly established somewhere in China every two days. This is a considerable achievement and testimony to the reality of God at work among us. Appropriately 70 percent of the churches are newly established. The membership of congregations varies from place to place, from dozens to thousands. In the seacoast provinces, where the economic situation is much better, there seems to be a competition in building large church buildings. This is a sharp contrast with the poor inland provinces where Christians are gathering in simple venues and at times, even in the open air, to worship. According to partial statistics, there were about 5 million Christians in China in 1991, about 7 million in 1995, and over 10 million in 1997. Today there are about 13 million Christians, making up about 1 percent of the population.

The Christian population has multiplied almost 19 times in the last 50 years. Many people believe there are even more than 13 million believers in China.

It is interesting to recall that when the first missionary, Robert Morrison, came in 1807 to China, he spent 7 years before he saw one convert. Then he won 10 more in the following 20 years. By 1900 there were about 95,000 Christians and in 1949 there were about 700,000 Christians, about 0.15 percent of the whole population. There are reasons why the church in China has developed and is developing so fast. But nobody would deny that the effective testimony of a Christian life in the new context, being salt and light, has made a difference. It is exactly like the church at the time of the apostles "praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47).

Chinese Christians experience the gospel as a source of empowerment, for meaning in life and hope, not only for themselves, but also for their country. The China Christian Council challenges all Christians with the motto "Be a good Christian and a good citizen."

A church that bears no witness cannot glorify God, and a church that has no testimony is separated from the people. So when farmers were required to dig irrigation ditches, those dug by Christians were dug well and deep. Christians had the best grain when paying the compulsory grain tax. In most villages Christians are law-abiding citizens. Some government security officials have remarked that if all the people were Christians they would be out of jobs.

A testimony from Henan Province is as follows. A truckload of coal was dumped on the ground and was stolen by local villagers. After some investigation, it was clear that no Christian had been involved in stealing the coal. This fact was circulated with great appreciation. There are many testimonies of how Christians have good relationships with neighbors. An elderly couple bought a chicken. A young couple in the apartment below them raised chickens, but one went missing. The older couple bought and cooked a chicken, but when the smell reached the young couple's apartment, they charged upstairs, accused the elderly couple and despite the older couple's protestations seized the chicken, and ate it themselves. As they were sitting down to eat, to their embarrassment the missing chicken emerged from under the bed. Greatly embarrassed, the young couple went back upstairs. They found the elderly couple very understanding. Amazed the young couple said, "Why are you so kind?" The reply was, "We are Christians."

As the Bible story tells us, the miracle of resurrection itself spoke when Lazarus sat with Jesus. He did not say anything, but from John 12: 11 we know "it was on account of him that many of the Jews were deserting and were believing in Jesus."

*What are the challenges in this area?*

1. Church growth has also been accompanied by internal tensions over power, leadership, theology and church ministries. The current and projected numbers of believers and churches have extended beyond the existing capacity of ordained ministers, trained lay leaders, pastors, evangelists, seminary faculty and church educators. Therefore, we face the challenge of how to deal with internal problems.

2. There are quite a number of Christians in China who have been strongly influenced by the fundamental belief that personal spiritual growth must be pursued above all else. Therefore they tend to separate their Christian faith and witness from society. This creates a major challenge for the church and her leaders.

3. The third challenge is the sharing of resources among the rich and poor and among urban and rural churches. Christians need to be educated and understand that it is more blessed to be a giving church than a selfish one. They need to realize the blessing of sharing financial resources to enlarge church buildings in rural areas.

### **Theological Education Has Been Intensified on the Church Agenda**

Today there are eighteen seminaries and Bible schools open in China under TSPM/CCC leadership. These can be divided into three categories.

1. National level: The Nanjing Union Theological Seminary with 150 undergraduates and 18 graduate students is the only one in this category. The Nanjing Seminary grants the B.A. and M. Div. degrees. The Extension Department at the Nanjing Seminary also provides a 3-year correspondence course in which more than 1000 students enroll each year.

2. Regional level: There are five seminaries (Northeastern, South-central, Eastern, Central and North) in this category. Students come from area provinces. For example, Beijing (North) has students from across north China, as far away as Xinjiang, from ten provinces and autonomous regions.

3. Provincial level: There are six seminaries in this category: Zhejiang, Fujian, Shandong, Guangdong, Anhui, and Yunnan. There are six Bible schools, in Shaanxi, Jiangxi, Jiangsu, Inner Mongolia, Henan and Hubei.

In the past 12 years, over 4000 students have graduated from these seminaries and now work in churches all over the country. Currently there are about 1200 full time theological students enrolled in the seminaries and Bible schools throughout the nation. At least 10 out of the 18 schools have expanded their capacity and facilities or moved to newer and bigger campuses since 1992. Many local Christian Councils are planning to operate local Bible schools or lay training centers to cope with the shortfall in lay training.

### ***What are the challenges in this area?***

1. The nation has approximately 2,000 ordained pastors: of these, one-sixth are women. Rarely do you see one pastor shepherding 4,000 Christians elsewhere in the world. The challenge is to equip a new generation of leadership and bridge the big age gap caused by many years of inadequate theological training.

2. The largest seminary library is in Nanjing Seminary with a total of 50,000 books. All the other seminary libraries have a total of only 100,000 books. Thirty-five percent of these are in foreign languages which most of the students cannot read. A major challenge is to equip the libraries with more books and modern computer facilities.

3. Another big challenge is to train the seminarians in a variety of extracurricular activities to balance growth physically, intellectually, socially, morally, emotionally and spiritually, in order that they might be effective ministers of the gospel in and outside the church walls.

4. Theology in China has generally followed the theology brought by western missionaries in the late 19th and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. As a result it has not always fit the context of a changing Chinese society. The Church in China must DARE to leave the insights and theology of other nations and ages, and allow our own spiritual experience to blossom and bear fruit in our culture. Therefore, the challenge is to widen our theological ecumenical perspectives and stimulate students to have their own theological thinking.

### **The Laity play a Major Role in the Life of the Church**

Due to the limited number of ordained ministers in the churches, the priesthood of all believers has become the prevailing feature of the church. The influx of new converts into the churches has created

a major shortage of pastors. Lay leadership has become strong and active in the Chinese church.

However, the situation in rural China, where 70 percent of the population, and probably a similar percentage of Christians lives, is rather different. Lack of trained church workers has become a serious problem.

One county in Anhui Province with a population of 60,000, of which there are 30,000 believers in 68 churches. has only one woman elder and she is not theologically trained. Christ said, "I know my sheep and my sheep know me." In China the sheep may know the minister but the minister cannot know all the sheep.

So, the emphasis on lay training at the grassroots level is very important for the formation of the church. No one can give an accurate number of training classes initiated and sponsored by the Christian Councils or local churches, or the number of believers at different levels who attend these classes each year. You must believe that there are hundreds of the short-term courses going on here and there every day. Actually some training classes are like attending a theology class or like attending an elementary or intermediate Bible school class. In some backward areas the national TSPM and CCC support local lay training by providing finances, facilities. teachers and textbooks.

The Commission on Rural Church Work assists lay leadership training programs through the following approaches:

1. Compilation of a series of teaching materials in accord with the area's context and educational levels.
2. Organization of evangelistic preaching teams to conduct training sessions for short-term training courses, as requested.
3. Providing financial support for facilities, teaching materials and books for lay workers.
4. Establishing more Bible schools and training centers as long-term support to meet the needs of basic biblical training.

*What are the challenges in this area?*

1. The majority of the churches and meeting points are situated in rural areas where pastoral care is very weak. The churches are not able to respond to the issues arising from the present context, and their teachings are not always relevant to the daily life of the people, so the congregations are easily misled by wrong teachings and heretical doctrines. The challenge is better education and training.

2. Many churches and meeting points in poor areas need funds to repair or construct their collapsed church buildings and enlarge their venues. The second challenge is providing adequate church buildings.

3. Financial support is needed for pastors who are working in poor areas with low incomes and for seminary and Bible school graduates who return to their hometowns in

remote and mountainous areas. The third challenge is to encourage and provide financial support for these church leaders.

### **The Chinese Nicodemus Phenomenon**

Bishop Ting has said, "Chinese culture is more open to Christianity today than it has ever been in the course of its thousand years' encounter." this interest in Christianity is experienced at a variety *of* levels, among farmers in the countryside, and intellectuals in the cities, among young people excited by China's opening to the world, and older retirees reflecting on the meaning of life, among women of all ages, and among minorities from the southwest to northeast. Many intellectuals are very sympathetic towards the Christian faith, Christian ethics and its values, and have helped in the past 12 years or so in the translation of hundreds *of* Christian theological books and classic writings. They do not like to observe the church traditions, nor are they church goers. Some of them do not even accept baptism. Dr. Philip Wickeri commented:

"What Chinese intellectuals have found in Christianity is a new way of putting their world together based on something very close to a classical understanding of the Christian faith. They are more interested in the formative and the constructive vision of Christianity. than the social expression of a Christianity which offers a moral vision open to all. It is inspiring to see that both Chinese farmers and Chinese intellectuals have rediscovered something in the formative and the transformative power of the Christian faith which has often been forgotten in the churches of the West."

*What are the challenges in this area?*

1. The so-called "Christianity fever" has challenged the church to maintain a dialogue with the intellectuals, which could be an essential ingredient for the inculturation of Christianity in China.

2. In today's more congenial environment, the church should be more open and tolerant in finding ways to approach those who are seeking the truth, join them in responding professionally and effectively to social ethics issues, and problems such as growing individualism, dogmatic materialism, the market economy, and economic globalization, etc.

3. The third challenge is that the church of China is called to present the Christian faith in a spirit of hope, service and witness and in ways that challenge contemporary morality.

### **Ministry of Christian Literature and Publications**

The situation has completely changed from that of the 1970s when Bibles were scarce and were often laboriously hand-copied. The Amity Printing Company in Nanjing produces Bibles every year and hymnals as well.

In March 1999 the CCC celebrated the printing of 20 million Bibles at the Amity Printing Company. This considerable achievement has been made possible with the help of the United Bible Societies who have provided modern printing presses. Bible paper and technical aid. The Bibles and other Christian literature are distributed through 65 distribution centers across China. The centers were established and are operated by the CCC in order that believers may have the opportunity to purchase and order Bibles and other Christian

literature at low prices. The most popular (printed in the simplified script which is used everywhere in mainland China as opposed to the traditional script which is only used by older people) costs only 12 yuan. Minority Bibles are printed in the following languages: Korean, Miao, Jinpu, Lahu, Wa, Lisu and Yi. The Amity Printing Company started printing Braille Bibles in 1997. Bibles come in a variety of sizes and the leather Bible with gold trim symbolizes the quality printing now being done at the Amity Printing Company.

Here are statistics for Bible printing from 1992-1999:

1992	969,147
1993	1,657,431
1994	2,307,737
1995	2,613,430
1996	3,307,279
1997	2,215,160
1998	2,913,112
1999	2,581,129

China is one of the largest Bible printing and distributing countries in the world. About 10 million copies of the Chinese hymnal have also been published and distributed for use throughout the country. The hymnal has some 400 hymns, one-fourth of which are indigenous Chinese hymns. Recently, a bilingual version of this hymnal has been published in Chinese and English. In addition, several Praise Hymnals and Scripture Hymnals have been written and published and widely used by local congregations.

Millions and millions of all kinds of devotional books, Bible commentaries, concordances, Study Bibles, Bible dictionaries and Bible encyclopedias as well as the *Tian Feng* church magazine have been published and used in the country. There is also an audio-visual ministry. The publication of the annotated Bible compiled by Chinese pastors, which contains favorite notes on Biblical teachings, has received a favorable response from lay workers. The Bible Commission, under the supervision of the CCC/TSPM, issues Bibles to all Christians in China wherever they meet. From March 1992 to 1999 about 1.52 million Bibles have been sent to meeting points and Christians who are not affiliated with the CCC. The CCC makes great efforts to provide various services for the churches in order to meet the needs of the believers.

*What are the challenges in this area?*

1. First, to enhance and develop the distribution network in seeking to serve the people in the country, and to strengthen the Free Bible ministry in poor and remote areas.
2. Second, to support the Bible translation ministry for the minority languages.
3. Third, to equip churches, CCC offices, etc. with more modern communication and publication equipment.
4. Fourth, to publish more spiritual and devotional books, theological and biblical studies books and training materials for church workers to widen their theological perspectives and to prevent heresies from spreading in the churches.

## **Religious Policy Is Gradually Being Based on the Rule of Law**

The Chinese government respects and protects the citizens' free choice of religious belief, adopting a policy of religious freedom guaranteed by law. In 1954 the first constitution established religious freedom. This constitution has been revised several times; the present one was adopted in 1982 after soliciting opinions from various religious circles.

*Citizens of the People's Republic of China enjoy freedom of religious belief. No state organ, public organization or individual may compel citizens to believe in, or not to believe in, any religion; nor may they discriminate against citizens who believe in or not believe in, any religion.*

*The state protects normal religious activities. No one may make use of religion to engage in activities that disrupt public order, impair the health of citizens or interfere with the educational system of the state. Religious bodies and religious affairs are not subject to any foreign domination.*

The significant steps taken by the Chinese government since 1978 toward the establishment of the rule of law have led to the gradual development of China's legal system and an environment of increasing social stability and order. Various regulations and guidelines have been introduced in recent years to strengthen and clarify laws on religious freedom, dealing concretely in Document 144 with "The Administration of Religious Activities of Foreigners within China," and in Document 145 of "Administration of Places of Worship," and so on. The recent signing by China in 1997 and 1998 of the UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural rights is taken seriously by the Chinese government. The Chinese Government is in the process of examining what steps are required for ratification of the policies, which will have profound implications for the Chinese society, and the rule of law.

It is clear that the state follows the principle of separation of church from politics and education. The state treats all religions equally and religion does not occupy any special position. On the other hand all religions in China practice the principle of independence and self-administration without foreign control. The religions in China are no longer regarded as opiate, but as positive moral factors in society. China is a large country and sometimes it is quite difficult for the policy of the central government to be implemented clearly and fairly on all levels throughout the nation.

All officials do not have the same level of understanding of religions or religious freedom. Hence, it is not surprising that we sometimes hear reports from some regions concerning violations of religious policy. When these violations occur, one of the main responsibilities of the religious organizations is to present the case to the relevant governmental department. Usually, the problem can be quickly resolved. However, some problems are not solved and dialogue continues. China is pursuing its own way toward a legal society to change the old concept "Man is to rule the Law."

We are happy to see that today the overall religious situation is greatly improving. It can even be said that the present time is the most auspicious ever in the development of religious freedom in Chinese history.

*What are the challenges in this area?*

1. There is no massive persecution of Christians in China today. A lot of what is being reported as "persecution of Christians" could better be termed "religious persecution" because it is directed toward cultic groups and activities. Other cases reported as persecution are actually cases of Christians who are penalized for violating the country's laws or regulations. Those laws may not be religious laws at all. If the same case happened in the US, the media would say it is "law and order". The challenge is to educate overseas Christians to understand the China situation and be able to understand the differences between correct and false reporting on the Chinese church.

2. It is true that government law requires registration for religious venues. That is a continual on-going process. It is also a fact that some Christian groups for various reasons meet and worship in unregistered venues. This can and does lead to harassment and occasional mistreatment at the local level because these groups are not registered and are therefore not guaranteed social status or religious protection.

The so-called house church movement or underground churches, persecuted church, and the government-sanctioned church are expressions used in the West and not by Chinese ourselves. These terms are easily misunderstood and misleading. Many reports in the west say that the CCC encourages and gives guidance in the persecution of the house church movement or so-called underground church. This is as far from the truth as it can possibly be. The challenge is to help our overseas brothers and sisters in Christ understand that these issues stated above are issues to be dealt with by Chinese Christians and not overseas Christians. We ask that you pray for us and let us handle our own internal church problems.

### **The Chinese Church is Part of You**

It is not enough and not good for a church to be preoccupied constantly and narrowly with its own selfhood. The selfhood of any one church is bound to be impoverished if it does not originate in and relate to the universal church which gives particular churches spiritual nourishment. Universality and particularity means the two dwell in each other and enrich each other, to the end that the church throughout the world and throughout history enters into the full richness of Jesus Christ.

The China Christian Council desires to be related to any overseas church or church organization which respects our three-self principle and treats us as equals for the purpose of strengthening bonds between Chinese Christians and Christians abroad. We welcome true partnership with a heart of openness and by a way of legality, so that the collaboration will benefit both of us spiritually, theologically and financially.

We are seeking a true partnership - a partnership for "God's mission in Christ's image" to proclaim the Good News of love, justice and reconciliation; not an organization or relationship which comes from an outdated pattern of missions which plagued, bound and blinded the Chinese church for over a century.

When Dr. George Carey, the Archbishop of Canterbury, visited China he remarked that evangelism in today's world should be *responsible evangelism*, which assumes an

understanding of the culture in which it is set. But it does not mean to go everywhere just simply repeating what one has heard elsewhere. What might work in North America may not work in China or what is authentic to Britain may not be true to China.

Responsible evangelism will oversee and understand what is happening in a society through the eyes and mind of Christ.

*What are the challenges in this area?*

1. First, aggressive intervention of foreign groups outside China continues to advance their own political and religious agendas within our churches. In some areas such missionary activities have caused division and tensions among our churches and a revival of denominationalism. The challenge is for us to find effective and creative ways to communicate what methods and approaches are best for today's China.

2. Second, to reflect on missiology with a new perspective in a new century and find a constructive manner for doing the Lord's work in different countries around the world.

3. And thirdly, to strengthen the fellowship with the universal church in bonds of love through Jesus Christ. As St. Paul said: "But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love" (Eph. 4:15-16).

The Message says it another way, "God wants us to grow up, to know the whole truth and tell it in love-like Christ in everything. We take our lead from Christ, who is the source of everything we do. He keeps us in step with each other, His very breath and blood flow through us, nourishing us so that we will grow up healthy in God, robust in Love" (Eph.4: 15-16).

Talk given in Louisville, KY, at the Consultation on Partnership between the China Christian Council, and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 19-22 March 2000. English text.

Rev. Bao is an Associate General Secretary of the China Christian Council and a member of its Standing Committee.

## **Ministry to Women, Children and Minorities in China - Wu Mingfeng**

In the name of Christ, I bring you greetings from China, particularly from the Korean minority in China.

My topic is the ministry to women, children and minorities in China. It would take at least three hours to deal thoroughly with these three subjects, so I am not even going to try to present a comprehensive, formal report. Instead of speaking on the topic from the perspective of an academician or a historian, I want to share with you from my personal experiences as a young woman and a minority Christian in China.

In China we say that women hold up half the sky. Indeed, the role of women in all walks of life is critically important in China today, and there have been tremendous changes in this role during the past fifty years. We believe that women and men are born equal in the image of God. Yet in reality, there still exist quite a few barriers to realizing gender equality in China.

In old China, women were treated almost as non-beings. The practice of foot-binding was indeed a disgrace. Women were confined to their homes. Less than ten percent of the women were educated. That means that ninety percent of the women could not read or write. More seriously, they were isolated from the external world, limited in their outlook, and ignorant of their own value.

Since the founding of new China, the situation of women has improved. One hundred ten million women have become literate. Twenty million women in the countryside have learned to read in the 1990s. Yet, there are still one hundred million women who are illiterate.

The church has grown tremendously in China since the 1980s. There are more than thirteen million Christians in China today, and seventy percent of them are women. Most are scattered throughout the countryside and many are illiterate. The goals of the ministry to women are to help these women study the Bible through weekly meetings and to raise their cultural level as they study the Bible. Many churches are running Bible reading classes. The China Christian Council has published a series of books on basic Christian doctrine that help the reader not only to learn the basic teachings of Christianity, but also to recognize 1000 words, the minimum requirement for reading the Bible or a newspaper. Thousands of women have been benefited from this program.

Women have kept their faith in Christ, even in the difficult times of trial and tribulation in the 1960s. In China today women share pastoral leadership with men. The church I serve is Xita Church in Shenyang, a large city in northeastern China. It has earned the nickname "Church of Mary" because its membership is over eighty percent women. The senior pastor is a woman, the Rev. Wu Ai'en, who is a second generation Korean-Chinese. Rev. Wu provides leadership to the local congregation and to the church at the provincial and national levels as well. She serves as one of the vice-presidents of the China Christian Council.

During the difficult days in 1948 and during the 1960s, all the men left the church. Rev. Wu and the few remaining women deacons prayed without ceasing. At the time of the so-called Cultural Revolution, Rev. Wu was taken to a steel mill where she was assigned to hard

labor. She was mocked and persecuted. When the pressure became unbearable, she would cling to God in prayer. She held onto her faith in Christ even though she was physically abused and injured. She still carries the scars from that trying time on her body. In the late 1970s, when she was released from hard labor, she immediately returned to Xita and began to pray again with the women. Working with a few committed Christian women, she reclaimed the Xita Church that she loves so well. Now Xita has a membership of over 2000. Rev. Wu is a living example to us young women pastors in China.

Rev. Wu had two women friends at Yanjing Theological Seminary in Beijing in the late 1950s. All the members of the graduating class were called to serve in churches except these two friends. Finally, by the time of graduation, the two women were called to serve in Qinghai in western China. Qinghai has a large population of Muslims and very few Christian communities. There were disturbances in Qinghai, and people were involved in demonstrations. During the crackdown on the demonstrators, the police arrested hundreds of people, including some who were innocent. The two women were among those arrested and put in prison. They had scarcely begun their ministry when this happened. They were to be in prison for 20 years. Although they were unjustly put in prison and suffered a great deal, they did not give up their faith in Christ. One died in the collapse of a prison building. The other woman, Rev. Wei Anru, survived. She was finally released in 1980.

During her time of incarceration, hundreds of young criminals were sent to Qinghai. Rev. Wei lived with these young criminals and learned much from them. She learned to listen and talk with them. She became an expert in criminal psychology. She worked with these young people and ministered to them in prison. After she was released from the prison, she continued to minister to the troubled young people. A week ago, when I talked with Rev. Wei Anru, she was still busy and had spent the whole day counseling young people. She also ministers to young and old, to sick people in the hospital and to those in prison, even to the death row inmates.

While she was unjustly imprisoned, Rev. Wei experienced anew the love and care of God even as he used her to offer a compassionate ministry to young criminals. There are many such devoted women pastors who are an inspiration to us young pastors in China. They are the true pioneers *of* faith who teach us through their good examples. We give thanks to God for them. By the *grace of* God, the church in China is growing fast, and many of the new members are women. The Psalmist says, "The Lord gives the command; great is the company *of* the women who bore the tidings"(Psalm 68:1 1).

By the end of 1994, 387 women had been ordained as pastors. Women account for one-sixth of the total number of men and women pastors in China. Many of these women pastors are serving in rural churches. Of the theological seminary students in China today, fifty-six percent are women. Among the seventeen top national church leaders, six are women. Women serve as principals of seminaries and many women hold faculty positions at the seminaries. Women also work as senior engineers, doctors, nurses, teachers, managers and politicians in China.

China is in a transition from a planned economy to a market economy. With the change comes pressure on the family. Traditional family values seem to be undermined by rampant materialism. Women used to care for the children and elderly people, but now they are a part of work force outside their homes. Chinese Christian women are challenged to provide a ministry to children in these changing times.

China enjoys a relatively high rate of schooling for school-age children. According to a report issued in 1990, there are 290,000 kindergartens and one million elementary schools in China. *Jihua shengyu*. one child per family, is the policy in China today. While this policy has helped control population growth in China, it also presents new challenges in the areas of education, family nurture, and socialization of children.

1) Education. According to the Chinese saying *Wangzi chenglong*. parents want their child to become "a dragon". This means that all parents hope that their child will receive the best possible education and become an outstanding person. So, the parents enroll their child in extra classes, such as music, foreign language and other special studies. Because of the heavy load of study placed on them, children sometimes rebel against studying or become afraid of studying. Such family pressures prevent the child from achieving a balanced development in body, mind and moral character.

2) Family nurture. The home is the first elementary school where a child experiences education. A mother is a child's first teacher as well as the most important teacher. Mother's face is the living textbook for a child, her lap is child's schoolroom, her words are the child's nourishment, and her hands are a child's heaven. However, in China today, a mother does not have time to provide the nurture for her child because she has to work outside the home. Children are either sent to child care facilities or cared for by grandmothers. We would like to learn from the mothers of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A) how you provide nurture for children.

3) Socialization. As a result of the shift to a market economy, people are enjoying a higher standard of living. Parents do their best for their one child by providing an abundance of clothing, toys, and books. Because there is only one child, the parents treat him or her as a king or a queen. Children do not do chores at home. In fact, they are not allowed to do chores. Parents seem to exist for the child (his mistaken attitude of the parents creates an egotistic and self-centered attitude in the child. Paul says, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honor your father and mother' -this is the first commandment with a promise"(Eph. 6:1-2). But in today's China, it seems that "honor your child" is the first commandment. Such a practice makes our children selfish and keeps them from serving others. We are deeply concerned about our children's future. We hope that you can suggest ways to resolve the problem.

We in the church in China provide training for young parents with a particular emphasis on education for mothers. A study was conducted of 657 women teachers, pastors and seminary students in China as to how they became Christian. Fifty-seven percent indicated that they became Christians when they were young through the influence of their mothers. Reaching the younger generation with the teachings of Christ, particularly the children, is the best education. This is the challenge before the women in China today.

Lastly, let me briefly share with you about the minority nationalities in China.

China is a unified, multi-ethnic country, with fifty-six nationalities. The Han people account for ninety-two percent of the total population of the country, leaving eight percent for the other fifty-five ethnic nationalities. The principle that guides relationships among ethnic nationalities is equality, unity and common prosperity. The law prohibits discrimination against and oppression of any ethnic nationality in China.

In old China, severe ethnic minority discrimination and oppression existed over a long period of time. However, since the founding of new China in 1949, discrimination against and oppression of minority people have been abolished. There is now a system of regional autonomy for minority nationalities. Structures of self-government have been set up in the regions where the minority nationalities are concentrated, and the minority people handle their own internal affairs. At present there are 159 national autonomous areas. These autonomous areas exercise all the rights of self-government including the handling of local financial, economic, cultural and educational affairs in accordance with the laws of the country.

China's law stipulates that all minority peoples have the freedom to use and develop their own spoken and written languages. The government also preserves and encourages the traditional cultures of the various ethnic nationalities and promotes education for them.

Whereas the one child per family policy is applied to the Han people, the minority couples are legally allowed to have two.

As for religion, the ethnic minority people practice Buddhism, Islam, Taoism and Christianity. Among the fifty-five minority nationalities, seventeen follow the Christian faith. The China Christian Council reaches out to minorities. The Council has published both the Bible and the hymnal in seven minority languages because it is important for people to be able to worship and praise in their own language. There are also theological seminaries for the minorities. The one in Yunnan Province in the south of China has eighty-seven percent minority students. North China (Dongbei) Theological Seminary in Shenyang, where I teach, has fifty-seven Korean students.

The China Christian Council is actively promoting the training of leaders for the minority churches in China. I was one of these. endorsed by the Council for study outside of China. With the rapid growth of the Christian communities, including the minority people, our most urgent task today is to train new leaders. I ask for your prayers for the church in China.

Talk given in Louisville, KY, at the Consultation on Partnership between the China Christian Council and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 19-22 March 2000. English test.

Rev. W u Mingfeng is associate pastor of Xita Church in Shenyang.

## **Toward a Common Understanding of Partnership**

*"See, I am making all things new. " (Rev. 21: 5)*

We, representatives of the China Christian Council and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), met in Louisville from 19-22 March, 2000 to celebrate relationships that we have with one another within the worldwide body of Christ. We prayed and worshiped together, we discussed the work of our churches together, we reviewed our cooperation over the past twenty years and we planned for the future. We can say with the apostle Paul that "a wide door for effective work has been opened" for us.

We give thanks to God for the fellowship we share in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. During the course of this consultation, we have been able to renew the ties that unite us, and explore the partnership which we share in building up the body of Christ. We are amazed by the rapid growth and development of the Chinese church, which testifies to the tremendous work of evangelism being done by Chinese Christians. We realize that we have a long term commitment to one another. The psalmist writes, "How very good and pleasant it is when sisters and brothers live together in unity" (Psalm 133: 1). We live out this unity in our commitment to God's mission.

Present at our consultation were a diverse group of Presbyterians, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) offices and related organizations: Chinese-Americans, Korean-Americans, African-Americans, and Anglo-Americans; the Medical Benevolence Foundation, the Presbyterian Frontier Fellowship, The Outreach Foundation and China Connection. The China Christian Council delegation included representatives from the national staff, the Amity Foundation, Provincial Christian Councils, Chinese theological students in America and institutions of theological education in China.

Representatives of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) have reaffirmed their statements regarding relationships with Christian Communities in China made in 1983 ("Relations Between the Christian Communities in China and the United States") and 1988 ("The China Program Policy Statement"). We hope to build upon and develop the understanding expressed in those statements.

Representatives of the China Christian Council give thanks for their partnership with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) as part of the church ecumenical.

On the basis of our discussions we say these things together:

(1) Our relationships are based on openness and mutual respect. We embrace the growing cooperation between the China Christian Council and the Amity Foundation and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in a wide range of areas including:

- Bible printing and distribution in China, which has now reached over 23 million copies;
- The Amity Teachers Program;
- The building up of the Church in our contexts;
- Health work and disaster relief through the Amity Foundation;

- "Theological education and exchanges; - Leadership development in our churches; - Study tours to promote mutual understanding;
- Peacemaking and reconciliation between the Chinese and American peoples:
- Cooperation in ecumenical sharing.

In the years ahead, we will work for more face-to-face contact and improved co-ordination of projects, making use of new means of electronic communication. We will also endeavor to give the work and witness of China Christian Council and the Amity Foundation more visibility in the USA.

(2) We affirm the three-self principle as appropriated and deepened by the Chinese church. The development of relationships between our churches is based upon self-government, self-support and self-propagation in the Chinese Christian community. We respect the priorities of the Amity Foundation and the China Christian Council which include:

- Support for Amity projects in education, health work, disaster relief, social service and rural development;
- The printing and distribution of the Bible;
- Building up rural churches and leadership development;
- Theological education and the development of a Chinese theology;
- Study opportunities overseas for new church leaders:

(3) We commit ourselves and our churches to full consultation and dialogue on all issues and concerns affecting our peoples and churches in the spirit of mutual respect. We need more opportunities for learning from one another, and greater sensitivity to the issues which divide our peoples and our churches. We need to give much more attention to education in our churches so as to overcome the misunderstandings about one another which continue among our peoples.

(4) We endeavor to deepen understanding and friendship between our peoples and churches within the context of a globalized economy and cultural plurality. Globalization promises greater unity for the peoples *of* the world, but at the same time, it threatens the sustainability *of* the earth, cultural diversity and marginalizes and excludes the poor and weak in our societies. We live in an increasingly pluralistic world with different cultural, historical, political and economic understandings. This plurality pushes us to accept and to value the cultural diversity *of* Christianity in our different contexts.

(5) We celebrate emerging people-to-people exchanges, and look forward to the forging *of* deeper and more extensive exchanges especially among young people in China and the U.S.A. We must create more opportunities for meetings among our young people, and prepare a new generation of leaders who understand each other's language, culture and society.

The details and implementation for the program areas mentioned above will have to be worked out through a careful process of consultation between the staff of our two churches.

As our consultation ends, we realize that we must prepare to risk something new in our encounter with one another. We have not already reached the goal of full partnership, but we

press on to make it our own, because Jesus Christ has made us his own in the mission of the worldwide body of Christ.

The China Christian Council and Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Joint Statement from a Consultation on Ecumenical Partnership in Louisville, KY.

March 22, 2000

## Partners in a Common Calling - Wenzao Han

*For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body-Jews or Greeks, slaves or free-and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. (1 Cor. 12:12-13)*

As I did my Bible reading one morning before coming to the States, some passages from the first epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians drew my attention, especially verses 12-13 of chapter 12. I asked myself, what shall I learn from these verses at this particular moment? For these verses are familiar to us all.

In his letter, Paul elaborates on the relationships between various spiritual gifts from God. When he says "body", it is obvious that he has in mind the church as the body of Christ.

Verse 12 is about the unity and diversity within the body. Verse 13 tells us that the unifying factor is the baptism of the one Spirit, regardless of race, social status, or any other background. Even though there were at that time Jews, Greeks, slaves and free men and women in the church, they were all at the receiving end of the outpouring of the Spirit-"all made to drink of one Spirit."

What comes next is the most beautiful picture of the oneness and interrelatedness of the Church: "Indeed the body does not consist of one member but of many. ... If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior members, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it." And St. Paul goes on, "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it."

I'm sure this picture so wonderfully painted by the apostle must include the church in China and the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., together with churches all over the world.

In obedience to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Paul responded to the call of Macedon, and could then envision the result of spreading the gospel to the gentile world. What he said about the relationship of the various parts of the body is still applicable to that of various churches around the world. If two Christians here today, one from the church in China and one from the PCUSA, are inspired by the same Spirit that inspired Paul and can see our two churches as the apostle Paul would see them, the two will naturally be partners in a common calling.

In the original Greek, the word "partner" has to do with *koinonia*. In some places in the Scripture, the word translated as "partner" is the Greek word *koinonos*, which implies commonality. What partners in mission primarily have in common is that they are all parts of the body of Christ, a relationship derived from this commonality.

According to Paul's teachings here, we know that partners in mission are required to respect one another. Paul has convincingly spelled out the kind of equality that exists among all parts of the body. In his mission practice, there was no intention to have the final say to the newly established indigenous churches. Instead, he and Barnabas, after appointing elders in each church, "with prayer and fasting, they entrusted them to the Lord in whom they had come to believe," as it is told in Acts 14: 23. The apostles were well aware that respect shown to the new church is really a manifest of faith and respect for God who sends the Holy Spirit to be with the church. Paul went about planting churches in the Roman world, a great evangelist and church planter indeed, yet he said, " I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth" (1 Cor. 3: 7).

On the basis of mutual respect, true partnership also means:

1. Listening to one another in genuine dialogue aimed at overcoming misunderstandings, and understanding one another's context and distinctiveness;
2. Encouraging, strengthening and complementing one another in an ecumenical spirit, including prior consultation as to the possibilities of cooperation and common witness;
3. Willingness to learn from one another's spirituality, theological insights, enthusiasm and civic involvement;
4. Avoiding the creation of unnecessary obstacles or hurdles in the course of being in partnership in Christian work; and
5. Resisting the temptation to be superior-the superiority complex of the rich or giving member-and overcoming the inferiority complex of the poor or receiving member in the course of mutual sharing of resources.

Let me share a story with you. Once a kind king constructed a road and invited his people to travel the road as they wished. Some walked, walking quite fast. Others ran. Still others jumped along. Finally, all of them reached the end of the road, and came, one by one, one after another, to where the king stood receiving them with a smile. Then everyone began to complain, every one of them making the same complaint. They complained of a pile of stones in the road that inconvenienced them as they traveled along the road. Just then, along came a man-or perhaps it was a woman-carrying a large sack. "Your highness," this person said, "as I was traveling along the road, I came upon a large pile of stones in my path. When I moved them so they would not inconvenience others who might come after me. I found this large sack under the stones. It is a sack of gold. Please return it to its owner," The king smiled his broad smile and said, "You are the owner. The sack of gold is yours, because you cleared the way for others to follow."

I believe this consultation has done the same thing in the same spirit; that is, to clear the way, to show how to be in true partnership to coming generations of leadership to follow. And so I am grateful to the PCUSA for holding this consultation. It has been a session of mutual sharing, mutual learning and mutual enrichment. I was deeply touched listening to our long time friend Tommy Brown [G. Thompson Brown, as he summarized the essence of

past PCUSA statement on relations between the Christian communities in China and the United States approved by the General Assembly in 1983.

Tommy said, "it was seventeen years ago. What did we say then?" Tommy's summary is worth remembering. To make such a statement seventeen years ago was not an easy thing. It is a brave and bold statement, a prophetic statement, a statement with justice. As a young and weak church, we were greatly encouraged by it. I believe it is also an encouragement to the coming generation of the leadership of our church. I am grateful to Tommy, also, for mentioning Newton Thurber's role in preparing this statement. We remember Newton with deep respect.

I am also grateful to the new leadership of the PCUSA for not only continuing the guiding principles laid down in the 1983 statement, but also for developing and implementing a new concept of missiology.

Today, as we gather together in a spirit of true partnership, pondering God's loving kindness for our two churches, we from the church in China are grateful for being clothed with honor and treated with respect by our Lord and our partner. In partnership, we find a greater Christ than we might have thought to find when we were without it, and in partnership, we can all be anchored solidly to our rock in the midst of the swirling sea.

The church in China, having weathered every wreck, is sailing into the waters of promise. Being partnered with one another, we Chinese Christians and Christians here in the U.S. become partakers of that promise. I sincerely hope our two churches can enter a new chapter of partnership in this new century.

May glory be to God. Amen.

Sermon delivered at the closing worship of a Consultation on Partnership between the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the China Christian Council in Louisville, KY. 19-22 March 2000. English text.

Dr. Wenzao Han is President of the China Christian Council and General Secretary of The Amity Foundation.

## Sermon

### Justification by Faith - Du Fengying

Romans 3: 21-26

Though Paul wrote the Book of Romans as a letter to the Christians in Rome, it is really a letter to all humankind. The gospel it announces, of Jesus Christ's redemption of humanity, is universal, a message for people through the ages. It is not a gospel just for Jews, but for everyone. Paul opened up the walls around Judaism, spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ quickly and widely among the gentiles. Gentiles as well as Jews must rely on the grace of God and believe in the redemption in Christ Jesus before they can be acceptable to God. This is because "without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would approach him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him"(Heb. 11:6).

Why must we believe in Jesus Christ in order to be saved? The Bible says: "Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). Whether you admit it or not, you cannot escape punishment for sin. This is first of all the death of the body. Why can we as humans not escape the power of death? Why can we not live forever? The Bible tells us, "The price of sin is death." Because all have sinned, all must die. Second is the judgement after death. "And just as it is appointed for mortals to die once, and after that the judgment..." Death in this world is the final end of human beings, but for each one death is only the beginning. The Bible says, "On the day of wrath ... he will repay according to each one's deeds" (Rom. 2:5, 6).

Since ancient times, human beings have sought all kinds of ways to escape the wrath of God, but all to no avail. The Jews thought reliance on the Law would save them, but the Law could not protect them. The Jews were very clear that they had failed in many ways. Without the merciful heart of God, and his tolerant judgment, they would certainly have been destroyed. Paul was a Jew and devoted to the Law, he knew well its role. But under the bonds of the Law, he cried out: "Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" (Rom. 7: 24). The Law cannot rescue a person from the dominion of death. Abide by the Law, but sin is still in control. The Law calls upon people to admit their sin; it also defines sin. When people know what sin is they should be able to do good and keep far from any contact with sin. But humans' corrupt nature becomes sin's opportunity. It acts within, calling people to greed and arrogance and all manner of evil. We could say then that sin lives. Thus the commandment calling people to life becomes the stipulation to death. Paul says, "For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do" (Rom. 7: 19). The things we do are always contrary to our wishes. We intend to do good, but sin dominates us, controls us (our inner desires as well as external influences), and thus whatever we do comes from that evil one. A battle is going on within us and this battle, with our conscience's censure, is more painful than death. Thus Paul's cry: "Wretched man that I am!"

Thus we see that the Law is unable to help people cast off sin. How then could circumcision fend off the wrath of God? Circumcision was a sign of the covenant God made with the Israelites. The Jews believe that this mark of God is tantamount to entering into a hidden

refuge. In response to this, Paul pointed out that even circumcision could not protect them from God's wrath. Circumcision is only effective in conjunction with keeping the Law; the Law and circumcision are closely linked. And so circumcision cannot help one evade God's judgment either.

It is in a place like this, at the end of your rope, that you come suddenly to clarity: "Thanks be to God. We rely on our Lord Jesus Christ!" Yes, relying on our Lord, a brand new thing has today entered into human history, and that is God's righteousness. This is a joyous message. The New Testament has supplanted the wrath of God from Old Testament times with the rule of God's present righteousness. God's righteousness is not a righteousness that comes from the Law, it appears "outside the Law". God's righteousness is the righteousness of "faith", it is the righteousness that comes from belief in Jesus Christ. "The righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe." In the original language, this phrase means given to and descending upon all who believe. Here, "descending upon" refers to something that comes from above and descends upon a person's physical body, possessing and guiding that person. Thus, descending upon all who believe means that because we believe in him, we gain the righteousness that God gives unto us. It is not some sort of quality within ourselves, but an initiative that enters us from God, through which God changes our existence and renews our environment.

In the past God's wrath came down from heaven to pursue humans. Humans were destined for death. Now, because of Christ, righteousness and life have descended upon the heads of all who believe. Because of God's grace, humans now are included in God's own righteousness. Wrath is a kind of external power, using its strength to destroy people. In the same way, God's righteousness is an external power, using its strength to realize redemption and enable people to gain eternal life.

You need only "confess with your lips ... and believe in your heart ... you will be saved." Our faith comes without conditions of any sort. Some may say: "Faith is essential to salvation, without faith, the gospel has no power for a person." I believe that a person's faith is a witness that the gospel is already working its power within him or her; that is the gospel's power, to enable one to believe. When Paul said, "The gospel is the might of God, that will save all who believe," he never thought of assigning to God or to humans required contributions to saving grace. For a person who has accepted Jesus as savior, this is faith that has been called up within him or her by the gospel. Thus, if we believe, we must be saved, have life and be justified. Therefore, I dare to affirm that in the moment when we believe God has forgiven our sins it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. He causes us to die to sin and live in righteousness. Before, we lived under the Law, and this made us even more subject to it and put us under the rule of sin. Paul said, "The power of sin is the Law." The Law, like sin, belongs to the former age. When Jesus has become our Lord, we are no longer under the Law, but in the midst of grace. And living in the midst of grace, we have "cast off sin." Though we still live "in the flesh", the Spirit of God lives within us, enabling us to walk with the Spirit, doing all sorts of good, and to bear the fruits of righteousness.

Yet this word "belief," so easy to write, is very difficult to confess from the heart, because such belief is not of the mind only, but of the soul. This confidence enables us to act out our belief. Many people, because they are unwilling to believe, lose God's vast grace. Some,

though they strive to perfect themselves, fall into suffering, wandering towards despair like Nietzsche. Some others think to rely on human strength, wealth and authority, but none of these can enable a person to cast off his or her bonds, only reliance on our Lord can do that. "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved" (Acts 4: 12). Thanks be to God faith in Christ is the one way to salvation.

"Justification by faith" is the new and living road God opened before us when we were in a place of danger. God's grace covers our sins and makes us children of God, sharing in the abundance of God's grace. We must not only thank God for this, but witness to God in our real lives, that our every action speaks of new life and our actions reflect the grace we have been given.

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## **Statistics for the Protestant Church in China: 1999**

The Christian Church is flourishing in China, witnessing to the presence and grace of God for the Chinese people. International journals and newsletters have published widely divergent figures for the numbers of both Protestant and Catholic Christians. "China ministries" overseas have claimed especially high figures, some as high as 100 million for Protestant believers alone. Estimating the actual numbers of Christians and churches in China is a difficult endeavor. With this in mind, a statistics page will become a regular feature of the *Chinese Theological Review*. Our figures are based on those of the China Christian Council and other church sources.

In 1949, when the People's Republic of China was established, there were less than one million Protestants in the entire country. Today, the rapid increase in believers has led pundits to use the term "Christianity fever". The provinces of Zhejiang and Jiangsu provide cases in point.

The population of Zhejiang is 2.8% Christian, probably the highest percentage on the mainland. Its Christian population doubled in the last ten years, from 600,000 in 1988 to 1.3 million today. Nine percent of the population of the city of Wenzhou and 12% of Dongtou County is Christian. If all of China had the same percentage of Christians as Zhejiang, there would be 33 million Protestant Christians in China.

In Jiangsu, the number of Protestant Christians increased sevenfold in the decade between 1985 and 1995, from 125,000 in 1985 to 400,000 in 1989, to 900,000 in 1995. Today, there are one million believers in the province.

Yet growth is by no means uniform throughout the country. In spite of rapid growth in Jiangsu, Zhejiang, and other provinces such as Anhui and Henan, there has been less or no growth in other areas, such as the far west.

Statistics about the church in China should be used with care. Given the combination of rapid growth and a shortage of clergy, definitions may be difficult to pin down. As the Amity News Service notes: "It is difficult to define who should be counted as a Christian, as, due to a severe lack of ordained ministers, large numbers of long-term believers are not baptized. Our figures include both baptized Christians and what in China are called 'seekers', people who have been attending church regularly for some time and who aspire to be baptized as soon as there is an opportunity. ... Similarly, there are many groups who use the name Christian but have limited understanding of the Christian faith, such as those who have only heard that prayer in the name of Jesus heals the sick. Should they be counted as Christians, or should one wait until they have a better knowledge of what Christian faith entails?"

## **Statistics for the Protestant Church in China: 1999**

13,000	Churches
27,000	Meeting points
13 million +	Protestant Christians (not including those not yet registered.)
500,000-600,000	New baptisms per year
3,000	Seminary graduates
1,000 plus	Seminary or Bible college students
1,300	Pastors (300 women)
1,000	County-level lay training programs
300	I Provincial level lay training programs

**Notes on the statistics**

A meeting point is an informal congregation of believers without a regular pastor. Often, local church pastors visit regularly to preach and administer the sacraments. Some meeting points are larger than many churches. The figures here indicate that since churches started reopening the late 1970s, six churches or meeting points have opened each day.

Lay training programs are crucial for a church with a pronounced shortage of clergy. In 1999, there were 120,000 participants in the 1000 county-level programs and 20,000 participants at the provincial level.

The church in China rejoices and thanks God for the growth it has been blessed with. Yet the majority of Protestant Christians live in the Chinese countryside where education standards tend to be low. Thus the church itself been less concerned with numbers and more with building up the body of Christ in China so that the church may be well run and assist believers in attaining a more mature faith. Concerns for raising the "level" of believers, for more and better training for clergy and lay leaders, and for more effective church structures, are reflected in many of the essays in the *Review*.

1 Figures from *Amity News Service* website.

2 Ibid.

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