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CHINESE THEOLOGICAL REVIEW 32

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From the Editor

The articles in Chinese Theological Review No. 32 reflect to an extent the increasing social engagement of Chinese Christians and the accompanying interest in understanding the meaning of God's immanence by Chinese theologians and religious scholars. Professor Zhuo Xinping's article looks at the "unity between God and humans" in a comparative study of Christian scriptures and Chinese philosophical classics. Using the "Scriptural Reasoning" approach, which has gained popularity as a tool for inter-faith dialogue, his introduction demonstrates the richness and complexities of the ancient Chinese understanding of the "holy" and the difficulties these pose in translating Western religious terminology into Chinese. Zhuo also shows that Confucianism, while widely regarded as a philosophy, has ultimate concerns and its practice leads to self-transcendence which he considers the key to the rejuvenation of Chinese culture. Probing Western sources, Zhuo elaborates on the relationship between God and humans in Christian tradition, focusing on the incarnation. In Christianity, the unity of God and humans represents the ultimate pursuit of humans. In Chinese culture, in the unity of Heaven and humans, the king is "a human being who cultivates virtues and is ordained by the mandate of Heaven." His conclusion is that the unity of Heaven and humans is the highest pursuit and final destination of the religious.

Hu Yingqiang's article: "Bishop Shen Yifan's Social Theology Enlightens Reflections on Christianity zhongguohua" puts a spotlight on the idea of Christian social responsibility. Hu attributes the late bishop's emphasis on

social responsibility to his personal experience of growing up in a Shanghai that had undergone the upheavals of a civil war and radical political changes. Deeply influenced by Chinese theologian, Y. T. Wu, Bishop Shen not only advocated a critical analysis of Chinese traditional culture but also a critical approach to Western theological ideas in the midst of “powerful currents of the times and the Chinese context in which the churches found themselves.”

Connected with his Christology, Bishop Shen’s theological understanding of society affirms the significance of having a social consciousness through a new comprehension of both the transcendence and immanence of Christ. In old China, the church, with its emphasis on personal salvation, often dismissed as “secular” Christian efforts to participate in social reform and to support social justice. Living through the period of dramatic social and political transition towards a socialist system, Bishop Shen personally experienced “the crises of the old theologies and their social practice.” He called for a new vision for the Chinese church and the renewal of theological thinking to keep pace with the times. His central concern was adapting to the new socialist context and leading Chinese Christians towards integrating with the Chinese people. While it was important to absorb the essence of traditional Chinese culture, it had to be done in a critical way. For Bishop Shen, an even more urgent task was how Chinese theological thinking could respond to the tumultuous changes in economy, politics, society and culture in China.

Reverend Xie Bingguo’s paper on “Carrying Out Philanthropic Projects: Observing Laws and Regulations” examines the biblically-rooted tradition of Christian philanthropy and why it has always been an integral aspect of Christian ministry. As such, Christians have an obligation to actively engage in philanthropy in the Chinese context.

Understanding the needs of the people, caring for vulnerable groups, and helping the needy in a timely manner are considered the essential requirements of Christian faith. This engagement is motivated by an inclusive love that emanates from God and reaches all. For Christians, the commandments of loving God and loving neighbor are inseparable.

His paper underscores the legal rights of Christians to participate in philanthropy in China today, based on rules and regulations pertaining to the rights of religious entities to engage in social services. These regulations prohibit the use of public charity as a channel for proselytism. Xie emphasizes the theological basis that cautions against using philanthropy as a tool for “missionary purposes.” Another major concern of his is the need to professionalize Christian social services. “Since charity is an essential aspect of our faith in God, we should devote ourselves to it with professionalism.” Xie urges Christian clergy to improve the quality of church-initiated social service through the practice of professional management methods and systems.

There are three articles in this volume relating Chinese theological thinking to climate change issues. In his article, “Green Mountains and Clear Waters Praise God’s Creation,” Chen Yilu stresses the increasing urgency of addressing the issue of climate change and ecological destruction. Written in 2021, at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic and devastating floods in Henan Province, he strongly urges coordinated, global efforts to overcome these serious challenges. While “ecological preservation” is not a biblical concept, Christian theology has always paid attention to “caring for God’s creation” and Chen uses the writings of St. Francis of Assisi and Bishop K. H. Ting to support his claims. Christian spiritual theology emphasizes the practice of harmonious coexistence between humankind and the environment. He explains that St. Francis’ approach to

God's Creation involved intuition and revelation as well as thinking and reflection. In his perspective, humans are very small in the grand scheme of things and thus need to live in harmony with nature and co-exist with it. Bishop K. H. Ting's ecological theology emphasizes the goodness and holiness of God's creation. His theology is grounded in creationism enriched with the Christology of the Cosmic Christ. Chen Yilu stresses that in Chinese culture, there are ideas such as "the unity of God and man" and "ecological continuity." For Christians, the belief that God created the world should provide even greater motivation to cherish the earth and protect it well.

The article, "Further Contextualization of Chinese Christianity from an Ecological Perspective" by Lin Manhong and Zhou Xuebin identifies three sources that could contribute to the development of a relevant ecological theology: The ecological wisdom in the Bible, the ecological thoughts in classical Chinese culture and the ecological initiative by the state in today's China. The authors show that far from being anthropocentric, Christian theology emphasizes inclusivity. The roots of climate change can be traced to the distorted relationship between humans and nature that has led to nature's over-exploitation for economic purposes and the excesses emanating from human selfishness and greed. Thus the key to environmental protection requires managing the human-nature relationship and restraining uncontrolled selfish human desires. Respecting the heavenly will and obeying the laws of nature have been the cornerstone of Confucian ecological ethics. In Chinese classical culture, it is understood that it is the love for nature that will restrain humans from abusing it. In today's China, the contemporary scientific view of nature underscores the importance of maintaining a harmonious coexistence between humans and nature. Human beings

are required to respect and safeguard nature as they are interconnected members of the common life community, an ecosystem which also includes mountains, rivers, forests, fields, lakes and grasslands.

Some of the climate related activities of Chinese churches include raising ecological themes in sermons and holding special worship services to advocate tree-planting, water and energy conservation. Significantly, there are inter-faith projects for environmental protection such as the Christian-Taoist project in Yunnan to “Safeguard Lake Dian’s biodiversity.” It is anticipated that more exchanges, dialogues and joint projects with ecumenical partners on climate change will enhance the formulation and development of an ecological theology from a Chinese Christian perspective.

In his article “Creation Is for Rest: A View of Moltmann’s God in Creation,” Wang Zuomou explores Jurgen Moltmann’s idea of Rest and the Sabbath as a way of raising consciousness and mitigating the current crisis of overexploitation and destruction of the earth’s natural resources. Wang highlights several aspects of Moltmann’s focus on Rest and the Sabbath such as it being a celebration of God’s creation as well as a process for renewal. The human habitat needs to be renewed into a place of peaceful rest. The Sabbath is called a holy day, which indicates that it has been sanctified. It is both the perfection of creation and the festival of salvation. It is the Creator who appears in the silence of all things. Wang observes that there is no similar concept of rest in Chinese culture. In contemporary Chinese society, there is much “human dynamism and energy” that has powered rapid economic and social development which in turn has given rise to many social ailments, urban diseases, and the ecological crisis. He believes that amidst the ecological crisis of the modern world, it is necessary

and timely for Christians to be mindful of the Sabbath of Creation.

Taken from *Tian Feng* magazine, Liu Yingjie's article on "The Bible's Ethical Teachings about Respect for Women" takes a critical look at the Creation narrative in Genesis and asserts that it establishes the equal status of woman and man rather than the opposite. A pastor in a church in Suzhou, Liu stresses how there are profound ethical lessons to be gleaned from both the old and the new Testaments on the deep respect for women and gender equality. She highlights women's rights embedded in Old Testament laws and lifts up the examples of Miriam, the prophetess, Deborah, the fourth judge of Israel, and Huldah, to demonstrate that highly respected and capable women played leading social and political roles as judges, military strategists and co-founders of nations in biblical times. In his own ministry, Jesus accorded women with a high degree of respect and challenged the religious authorities of the day on gender injustice. Liu believes that the ethical teachings about respecting women in the Bible have been cutting edge and transformative, bearing universal principles that should guide the churches in China today.

The Chinese Theological Review is a publication of the Foundation for Theological Education in Southeast Asia. I am grateful to Dr. H. S. Wilson, former executive director, for his support in the production of the previous issue. For this issue, appreciation goes to Dr. Wati Longchar, the new executive director, for his understanding and support. Much gratitude goes to our contributors and to Dr. Lin Manhong and her many colleagues at NJUTS for their invaluable contributions in translation and editorial work without which the Review could not have gone to press.

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The Relationship between God and Humans in Christianity and the Unity of Heaven and Humans in Chinese Religions¹

基督教的神人关系与中国宗教的天人合一

ZHUO XINPING 卓新平

Abstract. On the one hand, religious people live in space and time, so they cannot go beyond their social contexts. The contextualization of Christianity means Christianity adapts to concrete social contexts. Therefore, we should emphasize the further contextualization of Christianity in China, which connects Christianity to the Chinese social context. On the other hand, the spiritual pursuit of religion goes beyond space and time. At the highest level, it is about speculation on fundamental questions, such as God, holiness, transcendence, the ultimate, and so on. These speculations have prevailed in Christianity since its beginning and are vital to theological studies. Because theological inquiry is open, Christianity should have dialogues with different thoughts in different cultures. In China, this involves the Chinese concept of holiness. Generally, the Chinese emphasize their understanding of *tian* 天 (Heaven). Dialogues with this Chinese God-human ideology, which is about the unity of heaven and humans, are essentially exchanges over theological classics. Recently,

¹ This article is a special lecture delivered by Professor Xinping Zhuo at Nanjing Union Theological Seminary (NJUTS) on November 11, 2020. With the author's consent, it was published with revisions, in *Nanjing Theological Review* vol. 126, no. 1 (January–March 2021): 5–28.

there has been a rise in the use of Scriptural Reasoning, particularly in relation to Christianity, in international academic circles. It involves comparative studies of Western and Oriental scriptures on how holiness and the relationship between the divine and humans are understood. This kind of dialogue provides a transcendent approach to the further contextualization of Christianity in China. When certain connections are clarified in academic studies, we will find that our religions and cultures are not so different from one another. And we will find echoes, dialogues, communication, and possible fusions between them. This is a common intent of scholars and religious people. Also, different traditions carry their uniqueness, which make dialogue and communication a necessity. For these reasons, we seek similarities in differences and unity in diversity, which is a crucial point in Chinese culture and comparative cultural studies. Every religious system has its own tradition and uniqueness, but should be open, like the sea embracing all rivers. Thus, they absorb other cultural elements and provide significant resources to the world.

Keywords. the relationship between God and humans in Christianity; the unity of Heaven and humans in Chinese religions

I. Keywords of Chinese Traditional Religious Beliefs

The keywords of Chinese traditional religious beliefs include *gui* 鬼 (ghost), *shen* 神 (god), *di* 帝 (the Supreme Lord), *tian* 天 (Heaven), and *Dao* 道. (It is a shamanic culture for revering ghosts and serving gods). In the Chinese context, the knowledge of spiritual beings relates to the concept of *ling hun* 灵魂 (soul), expressed in terms such as *hun* 魂 (anima), *po* 魄 (corporeal soul), *ling* 灵 (spirit), *gui* 鬼 (ghost), *di* 帝 (the Supreme Lord), *shen* 神 (god), and so on. All are

about humans. According to the “Lord Zhao” 昭公 chapter of *Zuozhuan* 左传 (*Commentary on the Spring and Autumn Annals*), “When people are born and begin to develop, [they have] what is called a *po* 魄 [or corporeal soul]. Once the *po* has been born, its *yang* counterpart is called a *hun* 魂 [anima].” Kong Yingda 孔颖达 comments on it in *Shu* 疏:

The names *hun*, *po*, *shen*, and *ling* are created based on *xing* 形 (form or body) and *qi* 气 (vital energies). There are differences between *xing* and *qi*, so *hun* and *po* differ accordingly. [It is because] *po* is the spirit attached to the *xing*, and *hun* is the god attached to the *qi*. *Po* means the [sensory] functions of ears, eyes, heart, hands, feet, and mouth, begin when people are born. *Hun* means intelligence, developing gradually.

This comment helps explain that different parts of the human soul return to different places after death.

1. *Gui* 鬼 (Ghost)

According to “The Single Victim at the Border Sacrifices” 郊特牲 chapter of *The Book of Rites* 礼记, “The intelligent spirit returns to heaven, and the corporeal soul returns to the earth.” Ancient Chinese people believed their souls would separate from their bodies after death. The intellectual parts of the soul would become ghosts and spirits, while the corporeal parts would return to Mount Tai 岱山, ruled by the mountain god. The “Wu Yuan Biography” 乌恒传 chapter of *The Book of Later Han* 后汉书 supports this view in the saying: “When Chinese people die, their souls return to Mount Tai.” The original meaning of *gui* 鬼 (ghost) is ‘to return.’ According to *Explanations of Simple and Compound Characters* 说文解字, “*Gui* is the returning of people.” The soul of ordinary people after death is called *gui*, and the place where the soul returns is called *yinjian* 阴间 (the nether

world), which parallels *yang jian* 阳间 (this world). The “Law of Sacrifices” 祭法 chapter of *The Book of Rites* says, “Generally speaking, all born between heaven and earth are said to have their allotted times; the death of all creatures is called ‘dissolution,’ but humans, when dead, are said to be in the ghostly state.” In the same book, the “Meaning of Sacrifices” 祭义 chapter says, “All the living must die, and dying, return to the ground; this is called *gui*.”

2. *Shen* 神 (God)

The Chinese term *shen* 神 (god) consists of *shen* 申 (pictographic character for light in the sky) and *shi* 示 (show). When the powerful or distinguished die, their souls are recognized as heroes among ghosts. For instance, in his “Ode to the State’s Fallen” in *Nine Odes* 九歌·国殇 chapter of *Songs of Chu* 楚辞, Qu Yuan 屈原 sings: “Their bodies were stricken, but their souls have attained immortality; captains among the ghosts, heroes among the dead.” When people with high social status die, such as people of distinction, social elites, heroes, and ancestral kings, their souls were respected as gods and spirits. The ancient Chinese called their dead kings, ancestors, tribal leaders, and family heroes “gods and spirits.” In ancient Chinese religion, the term *shen* (神 god) represents the concept of the divine and the nature of the divine. The “Zen Zi on the Round of Heaven” 曾子天圆 chapter of *Da Dai’s Book of Rites* 大戴·礼记 says: “The fine essence of *yang* is called god, and the fine essence of *yin* is called spirit. God and spirit are the sources of various things.” The term “god” refers to the souls of dead people with high social status, which differs from the “ghosts” that are the souls of ordinary people.

Later on, the term *shen* (神 god) is combined with other characters, representing various and complex meanings. For instance:

Tianshen 天神 (heavenly god): *The Rituals of Zhou* 周礼 mentions “Offering sacrifice to the heavenly god,” and recognizes five *di* 帝 (the Supreme Lord) and the sun, moon, and stars as gods.

Shenxian 神仙 (immortal). The person who attains Dao is *xian* 仙, often called *shen xian*.

Shenqi 神祇 means the gods of Heaven and Earth. *Shen* 神 is the god of Heaven, and *qi* 祇 is the god of Earth.

Shenhuang 神皇 means “the great Heaven,” as mentioned in the *Heguanzi* 鶡冠子.

Shendao 神道 refers to the mystical way of Heaven and Earth. *Yiguan* 易观 comments: “*Shendao* is subtle with no corners, unknowable in reason, invisible under the sun, and unaware of why it comes.”

3. *Di* 帝 (The Supreme Lord)

Di literally means “the Supreme God in heaven”. *Baihu tongyi* 白虎通义 says, “*Di* is the name of Heaven.” That is, *Shangdi* 上帝 (the Lord on High) is the personification of heaven. The *di* of the power of *diwang* 帝王 (emperor) or the *di* of *shangdi* 上帝 in religious usage refers to the soul of the dead king (the heavenly son) of the Yin 殷 dynasty. Wang Guowei 王国维 says, “*Di* 帝 is *di* 蒂; the character of *di* is shaped like a calyx in ancient Chinese language.” “It indicates the flourishing of reproduction, paralleling the word *zu* 祖 that is also like reproduction.” (Wang Guowei, *Guantang jilin* 观堂集林.)

However, the “Qu li” 曲礼 chapter of *The Book of Rites* says:

As ruling over all, under the sky, the king is called the Son of Heaven...On the king's death, they say, ‘The heavenly king has fallen.’ In recalling his spirit, they say, ‘Return, O son of Heaven.’ When the announcement is made of the time of mourning, it is said, ‘The heavenly king has risen on high.

When his place is given to him in the ancestral temple, and his spirit tablet is set up, 'god' is his designated status.'

The original meaning of *di* is to offer sacrifice on a burning trestle to Heaven, that is, to Shangdi. The saying, "Chiseling wood is the most important thing for relying upon god," means that after the king's death, a temple should be built for offering sacrifice, and a memorial tablet should be made for veneration. The memorial tablet is the original meaning of *di*. It is why *di* 帝 is also called *di* 谛. Therefore, *di* refers not only to *Shangdi*, the personification of Heaven, but also the posthumous title of a king, whose merits and virtues could be observed and inherited by later generations.

When ancient Chinese rulers were alive, they were called kings; when they died, they were respected as *di*, who ascended to heaven alongside the *di*. *The Book of Odes* 诗经 says, "King Wen reached high and low, and he was on the left and right of the *di*." The ancestral king is alongside the *di*, so the king has the title of *di*. Later, a king is directly called *di*, so "a sage-king is like *Shangdi*." The term *shangdi* evolved from the term *di*. In ancient Chinese religion, *di* refers to the highest ruler, who held ultimate authority. Nevertheless, when the Qin Emperor conquered the six states, he insisted on using the title of *di* to differentiate himself from other kings, calling himself Qin Shi Huang Di 秦始皇帝. Therefore, the source of the Chinese terms *huangdi* 皇帝 (emperor) and *diguo* 帝国 (empire) differ from Western terms for emperor and empire. The ancient Chinese did not use the term *diguo*. Its earliest use is recorded in *Zhong shuo* 中说 by Wang Tong 王通 (584-617) during the Sui Dynasty: "The countries of force compete for armies, the countries of hegemony compete for strategies, the countries of kings compete for righteousness, the countries of emperors compete for virtue, and the countries of sovereigns compete for non-action." Scholars like Xuan Zang 玄奘, Bian Ji 辩机 and Wang Bo 王

勃 understood *diguo* as countries under the rule of kings. Westerners called China an empire because Chinese rulers were known as emperors.

In the West, China has been called an empire since the sixteenth century. Portuguese historian Joao de Barros classified China as an empire in 1563, insisting that China was the first empire of the Far East, and that neighboring countries bent their knees to “the Chinese empire 中华帝国.”

Matteo Ricci, one of the earliest Catholic missionaries in China, used the Italian word *imperatore* for China’s ruler (*Huangdi* 皇帝). In his *China Notes*, which was written in Italian (some scholars point out that Ricci’s Italian was imperfect), Ricci used the term *regno* (king) but not the term *Imperium* for the *guo* 国 (country) of *Zhongguo* (China). However, Nicolas Trigault translated the notes into Latin, using the term *imperium* (empire) in 1615, considered one of the earliest usages of the term ‘empire’ for China.

In the autumn of 1615, Nicolas Trigault published Ricci’s Italian writing titled *De Christiana Expeditione apud Sinas suscepta ab Societate Jesu* (The Christian expedition to China undertaken by the Society of Jesus). It says, “The empire is located in the East, known in Europe by various names, and the earliest one is *Sina* used in the Ptolemaic Dynasty.” The book also uses *Sinarum ingens imperium* (the Great Chinese Empire), *Sinarum imperium* (Chinese Empire) and *Sinae suum Imperium* (The Empire of China).

In his book *Imperio de la China, i cultura evangelica en èl, por los religiosos de la Compañia de Iesus* (1642), Portuguese missionary, Alvaro Semedo, called China *Imperio* (empire). In fact, the Portuguese term is *reyno da China* (The Chinese kingdom); Faria i Sousa translated the book into Spanish, using the Spanish term *Imperio de la China for reyno da China*.

Since the seventeenth century, the term *Imperium Sinicum* has become popular in Europe. Alvaro Semedo

added the title *Imperador* (Emperor) to Yao 尧 and Shun 舜 and called their country the *Imperio*. At that time, Portuguese translations of Chinese emperor included *Senhor do Mundo* (the lord of humans) and *hijo del Cielo* (the Son of Heaven) or *Filho de Deos* (the Son of God). Their contemporaries, the Jesuits, got used to translating Chinese rulers as *Universitatis huius Dominus* (the lord under heaven), which is similar to the heavenly king in *The Spring and Autumn* 春秋. However, *Universitatis* is not identical to the Chinese term *tianxia* 天下 (all under Heaven) but is closer to the term *sihai zhinei* 四海之内 (within the four seas) because the understanding of *tianxia* in ancient times does not include seas.

The Chinese have used the term *diguo* for empire since the mid-nineteenth century. For instance, Liang Tingnan 梁廷枏 (楠, 1796–1861) used the term *diguo* in his work *Yifeng jilue* 夷氛纪略 (A brief account of the atmosphere of foreign countries). He said, “I think that European countries, whether large or small, empires or kingdoms, do not belong to each other.” In his translation of *The Wealth of Nations*, Yan Fu 严复 transliterated “empire” into *yingbaier* 英拜尔. He explained, “*Yingbaier* is currently translated as *diguo* (empire), or *yitong* 一统 (hegemon), or *tianxia* (all under Heaven). In Asia, there are *yingbaier* such as India, Persia, and Japan. In Europe, Ancient Greece, Rome, Spain, France, Russia, Britain, Germany, and Austria are empires because their rulers are titled emperors.” Thus, the original meaning of the Chinese term *di* differs from the Western term ‘empire.’

The combination of *di* and *shang* (high) or *tian* (heaven) is *shangdi* 上帝 or *tiandi* 天帝 (or *dijun* 帝君), which is the highest God. Therefore, *tiandi* (the heavenly emperor) includes two meanings: being everywhere and domination. The ubiquity of *tian* extends the meaning of omnipresence and universal love, and the domination of *di* extends the meaning of the ruler of heaven, earth, and myriad things. The character of governing all things is personified in the idea that *tian* governs all things.

The character *di* often appears in ancient classics. For instance, “*Di* is might on high; he is the ruler of his people below” (*The Book of Odes*); “Dwell as the greatest god, act as the heavenly Lord” (Xunzi 荀子); Xunzi respected Tianshen 天神 (heavenly deities) by using the term *wu dijun* 五帝君 (five supreme emperors). The place where the heavenly emperors live is called the home of the Supreme Lord.

4. *Tian*天 (Heaven)

In ancient China, the term *tian* (Heaven) has profound meanings. It means not only the heaven (or sky) of nature but also the divine, the ruler of all things who has volition. The religious meaning of *tian* is obvious. Otherwise, there would be no tradition of “revering heaven.” *Tian* was the honorific title for the highest God in ancient China. For instance, “Heaven blesses and protects his people below as their ruler and teacher” (*The Book of Documents*); “Heaven has decreed hierarchy and the five duties for us”; “Heaven has mandated the five levels of the universe, and these give rise to our five rites”; “Heaven has decreed the appropriate rewards to specific virtues and these we signify through the five different sets of official robes”; “Heaven has also decreed how punishments will be measured.” These sayings do not understand *tian* as the natural heaven (sky) but as the will and nature of the divine *tian*. Because of these sayings, the religiously ethical thought of “to treat Heaven with virtues” was developed in ancient China.

Many compound words of *tian* (heaven) distinguish the heaven of the lord and the heaven of fate from the natural heaven (the sky). In the classics, we often find *huangtian* 皇天 (the imperial heaven), *haotian* 昊天 (the boundless heaven), *mintian* 旻天 (the kind heaven), *shangtian* 上天 (the heaven on high), *cangtian* 苍天 (the blue heaven), and so on. In his *Wujing yiyi* 五经异义 (*On the Different Meanings*)

of the Five Classics), Xu Shen 许慎 explained, “The heaven has five names. Respected as the king, it is called *huangtian* (the imperial heaven). When the original *qi* (vital energies) is vast, it is *haotian* (the boundless heaven). It is *mintian* (the kind heaven) when it shows kindness to people below. When it watches people from high, it is *shangtian* (the heaven on high). It is *cangtian* (the blue heaven) according to the blue sky in distant vision.” Other words like *tianhuang* 天皇, *tianshen* 天神, and *tiandi* 天帝 have similar meanings to “God.” In antiquity, *Tianhuang* was the head of three Sovereigns. Moreover, ancient Chinese religions mentioned the term *tianzhu* 天主 (the heavenly Lord) in instances such as “Eight gods: one is *tianzhu* (the heavenly Lord); or offering sacrifice in *Tianqi* 天齐.” (*Historical Records* 史记).

With the introduction of Buddhism to China, Buddhists called the Lord of Heaven the Heavenly Lord. Similarly, Catholics called their God the Heavenly Lord (*tianzhu* 天主) after Catholicism entered China. Even the term for Catholicism in China is “the Religion of the Heavenly Lord.” All these references help to explain why foreign religions must go through the process of further contextualization in China if they are to be understood and accepted by the Chinese.

There are other combinations of *tian*, such as *tianming* 天命, *tiandao* 天道 and *tianyi* 天意. *Tianming* signifies the decree of Heaven as in: “The gentleman has three fears: the decree of Heaven, great men, and the words of the sage.” *Tiandao* is the volition of the heavenly god on human destiny. “The Dao of Heaven brings good fortune to the virtuous and punishes the wicked. Heaven has brought disasters upon the Xia 夏.” *Tianyi* means the will of Heaven.

There are different dimensions of “heaven” in terms such as: *tian* (heaven), *di* (the supreme Lord), Dao, *tiandi* (heavenly emperor), and *tiandao* (the heavenly Dao). Therefore, “heaven” has many meanings, including natural,

divine, religious, and metaphysical. The divine and religious “heaven” reflect more abstract and metaphysical meanings. They appear later than the concepts of “god” and *shangdi* (the Lord on High), but they are closer to the Western concept of God. They also introduce the concept of *xushen* 虚神 (nominal God). Thus, the religious “heaven” helps Chinese religions overcome the limitations of polytheism and idolatry. It shows the maturity of Chinese religions.

1) The natural heaven means the sky or the vault of heaven, opposite to the earth. “Heaven is the peak, the highest, one, and vast.” (Xu Shen, *Explanations of Simple and Compound Characters* 说文解字). The natural heavens, featuring ubiquity and omnipresence, are vast, remote, and boundless, covering myriad things. This understanding leads to the idea of *qi* (vital force of *yin* and *yang*). The notion of *qi* helps explain the formation of heaven and earth, the order of things, the constancy and “go through” of things, and the eternality of the exchange of *ying* and *yang*. By these points, Chinese people infer there is *li* 理 (reason) in *qi*. Thus, there is a Chinese cosmogony of *qi*. Humans exist in heaven and earth. “Humans are produced [by *qi*] in Heaven and Earth; this is called the fate of humans” (in *Zuozhuan*).

2) The divine heaven means that Heaven has virtues, volition, kindness, authority, justice, and wisdom. Heaven or *tianshen* (heavenly gods) can communicate with people, care for them, teach them, and punish the wicked but bless the good. “Heaven’s net is vast. Though the meshes of heaven are wide, they miss nothing” (Laozi, 73). Heaven in this sense renders no detailed description, but it demonstrates Heaven as being personal as well as divine. It leads readers to grasp the meanings of Heaven as the sovereign, the decree of Heaven, the heavenly will, and so on.

3) Besides the meaning of the divine heaven, the religious heaven also points out where gods dwell. For humans, heaven is on high; it is paradise, the other shore

or Pure Land, a place to which the blessed will ascend after their deaths. In there, they will be with God. *Tiandi* (heavenly emperor) has the meaning of the divine heaven and the religious heaven, showing the divine attributes of majesty, benevolence, kindness, righteousness, justice, the supreme, and the heavenly. The term shifts the understanding from the abstract to the concrete characteristics of the personal divine. This shift helps connect the concept of *tian* to the meaning of God.

4) The topic of metaphysical heaven often appears in philosophy and other areas. The various meanings of *tian* incorporated a sense of ‘the other shore’ and transcendence, which contrast with this limited and relative world. They help extend the metaphysical understanding of heaven in terms of *tianli* (heavenly reason) and *tiandao* (the heavenly Dao), which search for the ultimate meaning beyond humans and myriad things. Thus, in Chinese traditional culture, *jingtian* 敬天 underscores ‘revering Heaven,’ which is consistent with the religious meaning of *tian*. Otherwise, we can hardly explain the veneration and reverence for heaven if we only understand heaven as natural heaven.

5. Dao 道 (Way)

Dao literally means ‘way.’ “Dao is a path for walking.” (Xu Sheng, *Explanations of Simple and Compound Characters*). However, it is indeterminate because it also has the meaning of *tong* 通 (channel) or accessibility. Thus, its meaning includes the accessibility or necessary way of human life and the universe. Based on this understanding, Dao also means rule and principle. Additionally, there are developments of Dao in terms such as the Dao of Heaven, the Dao of humans, the Dao of benevolence, the Dao of loyalty and forgiveness, the Dao of heavenly will, and so on.

In *Daodejing*, Laozi develops the meaning of Dao by connecting Dao to heaven and humans and formulating the wholistic philosophy of the heavenly Dao and the Dao of humans. Laozi's philosophy delves into the metaphysical Dao in the search for the origin of the universe and the essence of myriad things. Laozi explains Dao as primordial existence and creativity by saying that Dao seems "to have existed before the Supreme Lord," "the ancestor of myriad things" (Laozi, 4), and "There was something undifferentiated and yet incomplete, which existed before heaven and earth. Soundless, it depends on nothing and does not change. It operates everywhere and is free from danger. It may be considered the mother of the universe. I do not know its name; I call it Tao" (Laozi, 25). In the saying, "The Tao that can be spoken of is not the eternal Tao," Laozi indicates that the Dao that can be spoken of is the natural phenomena of myriad things. Meanwhile, the important meaning of Dao is the eternal Dao, which cannot be mentioned, the origin of Heaven and Earth that has no name.

The essence of Laozi's concept of Dao is searching for the universe's origin, root, and principle or law in the metaphysical dimension. It is abstract and transcendent, paralleling the thought of "The metaphysical is called Dao" in *The Book of Change*. Laozi emphasizes that Dao exists not only before myriad things but also penetrates them. It is similar to the *universalia* in the controversy between nominalism and realism in Western philosophy, which explores whether it existed "before," "in," or "after" myriad things.

Heavenly Dao is the combination of heaven and Dao. It includes several meanings: the natural Dao of heaven, the divine Dao of heaven, the social Dao of heaven, and the morally metaphysical Dao of heaven. These meanings of heavenly Dao show both the transcendence and immanence of Dao and their applications.

The natural Dao of heaven means the natural law, which is universal, eternal, regular, and orderly in the natural world.

The divine Dao of heaven shows the will of the Supreme Lord. "The heavenly Dao rewards the good and punishes the wicked" (*The Discourses on the States* 国语). For the Son of Heaven, who represents the divine Heaven, "Dao means loyalty to all people and piety to all gods" (*Zuozhuan*); this is the content that the Son of Heaven fulfills Dao.

The social Dao of heaven means the social law for individual relationships and the coexistence of groups. Humans promulgate social Dao as social norms and ways of life. "The rule should be trustworthy, and the officers should be respectful. There are the same of devoting trustworthiness and earning respect between the ruler and the officers. This is the heavenly Dao (*Zuozhuan*)."

The social Dao of heaven formulated, established, and followed by humans are social order and norms existing outside individuals. Because of its publicity and sociality, the social Dao of heaven can restrain, constrain, regulate, and guide individuals. It is similar to Heaven, which has power over humans. While the divine Dao of heaven has eternal rulership and the natural Dao of heaven is unchangeable, the social Dao of heaven is changeable in different ages and societies; it can be developed and improved.

The morally metaphysical Dao of heaven is developed based on the natural, divine, and social Dao of heaven. It means the universality of "the Dao of benevolence," as Confucians emphasized, or as the following thought: "What Heaven imparts to man is called human nature. To follow our nature is called the Dao. Cultivating the Dao is called education" (*The Book of Mean* 中庸, ch. 1).

Mencius also discussed "heavenly Dao," or the Dao of humans, by saying that humans, in witnessing the virtue of Heaven and Earth, would not be ashamed if they had lived

virtuous lives. It is the principle of “knowing the good” and “self-sincerity.” Mencius said, “Sincerity is the Dao of heaven. To think how to be sincere is the way of humans.” (Mencius 6A:12). The idea that “(for) benevolence, righteousness, rituals, and wisdom, heavenly Dao is in humans” helps formulate the morally metaphysical Dao of heaven, underlining the theory of heavenly Dao that the virtue of benevolence is in the human heart.

Later, Chinese intellectuals who were called *shi* 士 (scholars and officers) carried on Confucianism. They became the most important representatives of the spirit of Chinese culture. Confucians cared deeply about the “actual” and their responsibility for the political and social issues of “all under Heaven.” It shows that Confucianism has transcendental or ultimate concerns. This spirit of transcendence helps make Confucianism popular, especially in the ancient tradition of “revering Heaven.” If Confucianism does not have a magnificent concern for “self-transcendence,” “seeing heaven and heaven clearly,” and “the sphere of Heaven and Earth,” it will hardly be transcendent-immanent. The transcendent spirit of Confucianism is wholistic, manifested in Chinese intellectuals through their ideals, ambitions, responsibilities, and missions in the vicissitude of history. Besides the common understanding of Confucianism, we can see the religious dimension of Confucianism from the perspective of comparative religious studies. However, people today shun talking about it.

While Confucianism has had historical limitations, it has nevertheless played the most crucial role in providing the “spiritual power of potentiality” over the past two thousand years of Chinese civilizational progress. It has enabled Chinese civilization to stand tall in the forest of world civilizations. Confucianism has contributed to Chinese historical continuity and remains, today, the classical symbol of China. Throughout its long history, Chinese civilization

continued to exist and flourish because Chinese intellectuals, enduring sacrifice and forbearance, played vital roles even during the most difficult times. If one were to establish a 'brand' for Chinese civilization, Confucianism would be the best choice. There is no doubt that historical existence has its limits. We do not need to romanticize Confucianism, but we should appreciate and protect it. Sometimes, it should be given a necessary "packing box."

In Chinese tradition, intellectuals insist on the organic combination of "inner" and "outer" cultivations. As Mencius has said, "People could serve Heaven" because "They preserved their hearts and cultivated their natures." Only through this kind of "serving Heaven" can the political pursuit of peace, worldwide, be achieved. Intellectuals ought to observe very rigid requirements, including "Restraining oneself and restoring the rites," "keeping their noses clean," and practicing "self-cultivation." The foundation and motivation for fulfilling these social practices not only rely on "serving Heaven," which leads to self-transcendence, they also depend on the "categorical imperative," that people must obey the will of Heaven. In its nature, this kind of commitment represents a religious spirit. This spirit is indirectly shown in the connection between intellectuals, Heaven, and Dao. Thus, it cannot be justifiably said that all elites in Chinese society are secular.

We should understand the current Chinese culture and the spirit of Chinese elites by deeply exploring Confucianism and the spirit of Chinese intellectuals that Confucianism generates. It may be significant for the contemporary context. The possibility of the revival of Chinese society relies on the rejuvenation of Chinese culture, and Chinese intellectuals are primarily responsible for that. The hope for the rejuvenation of Chinese culture depends not only on their actual practices and responsibilities but also the spiritual renewal and revival of the mind of Chinese

intellectuals. Special attention should be paid to the spirit of Chinese scholars in Confucianism from the perspective of the profound history of Chinese civilization. We should also clearly understand our limitations and potentiality. Spiritually, Confucianism should be regarded as the source of Chinese spirituality.

II. The Relationship between God and Humans in Christianity

1. The Doctrine of God in Western Thought

The doctrine of God in Western thought parallels the concept of *tian* (Heaven) in Chinese tradition. For instance, some early missionaries in China identified *tian* or *shangdi* (the Supreme Lord) as their God. Most translated God into Chinese terms such as *shen* (God), *shangdi*, and *tianzhu* (the Lord of Heaven). Before the Rites Controversy [1582-1742], *tianzhu*, *tian*, and *shangdi* were interchangeable with the concept of God. In the middle of the controversy, the Vatican prohibited the use of several Chinese terms for God, such as *tian*, *shangdi*, and so on. Some missionaries suggested using a Latin transliteration of Deus, *dousi* 斗斯 in Chinese, but it is not interchangeable with other Chinese names of God. Catholics used *tianzhu* for God. *Tianzhu* is the name of the heavenly god in ancient China. It is also based on the Confucian idea that “Heaven is the highest place, and the Lord is the most revered.” Therefore, [religious] dialogue must seek the common ground while reserving differences in this plural world.

Various understandings of God exist in different Western cultures and contexts. “God” in English and “Gott” in German are derived from the term *guth* in classical Gothic, which belongs to the Germanic languages. They are comparable to *huta* or *puruhuta* in the Indo-European

language. *Huta* refers to Indra in Vedism. A quarter of *The Rig Veda* praises Indra. Indra is the God of War, believed in by ancient Aryans; he is also named the Lord of Power and Almighty. The original meaning of *guth* and *huta* is 'the one receiving prayer and offering.' Their etyma involve the meaning of "casting," so they refer to the statues of gods. *Theos* (theoi) is the term for god in ancient Greek. It indicates the common natures of deities, such as the most powerful, almighty, and the blessed ones. One of its extended usages is the term "theology" in the West. Ancient Romans call the divine *deus*. *Deus* and *Zeus* of the Greek include the meaning of "heavenly god." This common point of deities entails the image of heaven, and its etyma relate to God's name *Devadevata* in the Sanskrit language in ancient India. The root of *deva* is *div*, which means "to give," "offering," "the one receiving the offering," "the holy one," and so on. The etyma of *Devadevata* includes heaven and the divine. Ancient Aryans called *Devadevata* *Dyaus* (heavenly God). Later, Mahayana Buddhism developed the idea of *Devayana* (Chinese transliterated as *Tipoyanna*).

Since its beginning, Christianity has developed the concept of God in terms of monotheism, formulating the idea of God as creator and savior who is omnipresent, omnifigent, omnipotent, all-good, triune, and so on.

In the West, God is the object of belief. God is eternal and constant, but human understandings of God are limited. Therefore, the concept of God has a history. When Westerners talk about God, they talk about their knowledge of God; they also talk about how God plays a role in human existence, relating fundamental concerns regarding the reality of human existence.

Another related point is that ancient Germanic people call the heavenly God *Tiu* or *Tyr*. Different understandings of *div* and *theos* introduce the terms *adeism* and *atheism*. *Adeism* consists of the etyma *a* (anti or do not have) and

div, which includes the meanings of animistic spirit, personal God, or gods (*Div* is also the name of Deva in the Sanskrit language). Atheism consists of the etyma *a* and *theoi*, which refers to the abstract God or the highest God in Greek thought. Therefore, in the Western context, atheism denies the belief of gods and personal gods in folk religions. Still, it does not argue against the highest God, the abstract and impersonal God. Atheism means the denial of the existence of all types of gods.

The concept of God in Hebrew culture is another vital resource of the Western concept of God. According to the Hebrew Bible, there are two names of God: Yahweh and Elohim. According to Hebrew tradition, Jews would not call God directly, so they only put the consonant JHWH for the name of God in their writings. They often use Adonai (Lord) for God. Later, the consonant part of God's name and the vowel of Adonai were accidentally put together as J-eH-o-W-a-H. This accident introduces the writing and pronunciation of Jehovah. European scholars discovered and corrected this accident in the nineteenth century, especially Georg Heinrich August Ewald in his book *The History of Israel* (1852). However, some denominations continue to use the name of Jehovah for God and it still appears in religious writings. Some Chinese versions of the Bible also use Jehovah as the name of God. Jehovah was originally the God of Rain, who closely relates to the nomadic life of Hebrew people. Gradually, the Hebrew people understood Jehovah as the God of their tribe. By the time of the Babylonian exile, the Jews already held a transformed understanding of Jehovah as the highest God of all peoples. They also understood that their people had sinned, and that God had used other people to punish them, as an act of justice.

In the history of Western religious thought, the concept of God has developed from the ancient Greek and Hebrew ideas of God, eventually arriving at the concept

of the Christian God in the Medieval era. Because of this background, the Western concept of God has two characters or inclinations: the rational and the religious.

The rational concept of God, in Greek, was presented earliest by Plato. He was the first Greek philosopher to use the term *theologia*. He systematically discussed the two basic attributes of God: perfection and immutability. The perfection of God means God is the highest good, most beautiful, all-knowing, and supreme. The immutability of God means that God is the eternal one, unchangeable, infinite and the only one.

Thus, Plato understood God as the world's creator and ruler, meaning that God orders the universe and governs the whole process of myriad things. Aristotle systematized the concept of God in terms of form and material causes. He understood God as the First and Supreme One, immutable and eternal. And he treated God as the first cause, the unmoved mover. Thus, his understanding of God is metaphysical, searching for the universe's origin and essence. Aristotle called his metaphysics the first or primordial philosophy, which relates to theology. He insisted that metaphysics is theology in exploring the ultimate God.

This Greek understanding of God leads to the religious character of Western philosophy. Similarly, the exploration of truth and the essence of the universe lays out the foundation of the concept of the universal God in Western theology. It has the characteristics of clarity, certainty, and rationality by underlining the intellectuals and rational thought.

Ancient Hebrew religion emphasized God as the savior, who is external, transcendent, and personal. God punishes the wicked for their deviation and rebelliousness but rewards the good with grace and love. This concept of God shows the greatness and justice of God and the smallness and sinfulness of humans. It introduces the differences between God and humans in kind. Moreover,

the transcendence of God is beyond human understanding. Underlying affections and physics, this concept of God is more of religiosity and mysticity. It points out the way of confession, conversion, and communication of humans with God, helping in the formation of both mystical and rational features in the traditional thoughts of Western religions.

Christianity synthesizes Greek rational thought and Hebrew religious thought, putting together the abstract and the personal concepts of God in the understanding of God. The Christian God is the God that philosophers have sought and prophets and religious people have revered.

On the one hand, the Christian concept of God adopts reason to explain Hebrew belief and thus makes its concept rational and transparent. On the other hand, it points out the limitation of reason and the transcendence of God beyond reason, leaving enough space for revelation for God's mystics. As a great thinker, Augustine organically synthesized Greek and Hebrew thoughts. He insisted that the knowledge of God is the knowledge of the unknowable. People can know the existence of God only when they feel ignorant. Therefore, he emphasized that faith needs reason: "thinking in faith and believing in thinking." Augustine is the founder of Western philosophy in the Medieval era. His thought is echoed by Nicholas of Cusa, the last philosopher of the Medieval era. In his work *Of Learned Ignorance*, Nicholas underlined the experience of "hope in mystics" and "spiritual experience" to overcome the limits of reason. On the relationship between God, the universe, and humans, Nicholas explained God by using terms such as "absolute infinity," "absolute unity," "absolute immensity," "infinite creativity," and "the source of existence and knowledge." He also pointed out that the nature of the Trinity is in unity, oneness, and relations. The universe is "finite immensity" as an epitome and imitation of God. The universe reflects God's absolute greatness in its maximum possibility; it is the unfolding of God's nature.

Therefore, the universe is the book of God. God indirectly shows himself through the universe. It helps us to understand the knowledge of God as the investigation of nature or the universe in the Western religion, especially the universe that humans have not investigated thoroughly. Moreover, Nicholas of Cusa understood that humans, in essence, have a divine nature. Because God created humans, humans are the “God of the human form.” The spirit of a human is a micro-universe or “God of human form.” Jesus shows this feature intensively. He is the absolute and limited great, forming the connecting point between God and humans. Jesus represents the greatness of humans; only humans can produce this kind of greatness. Therefore, Nicholas believed that humans could know God through exploring the universe; humans finally can achieve “deification.” In this theory, there is an organic integration and unity of the views of God, the universe, and people. The basics of this theory could be found in the tradition mentioned above, although Western religious thought experienced development from the ancient Medieval era to the Modern era.

Since the time of Aristotle, metaphysics in the West has been connected to the Christian theological problem of God, in seeking and knowing the ultimate. However, this kind of metaphysics is not fundamentally separated from the human concern for existence in the natural world. It plays a positive role in understanding the meaning and value of human life in this world. Nevertheless, because it explores the abstract for understanding the concrete, it suffers from some paradoxes and tensions. Theological metaphysics explores and describes the universe as a whole. Its purpose is to understand the relationship between God and humans by searching for the essence, origin, destiny, character, purpose, or meaning of the universe. In short, it seeks to understand the status, meaning, and value of humans in the universe.

The Western metaphysic seeks the principle and truth of “post physics” or “beyond formed materials.” It aims to know the True, the Good, and the Beautiful and their opposites. In Chinese thought, there is another type of metaphysical tradition, which focuses on the exploration of heaven, earth, and the way of humans. In other words, it helps set the social norms of keeping the virtue and formulate moral rules by finding the principle of change in continuous reproduction or investigating the ways of Heaven, Earth, and humans.

2. The Relationship between God and Humans in Christian Traditions

According to Christian tradition, Jesus Christ is the intercessor between God and humans. As the Son of God and the second Adam, Jesus Christ is both divine and human. His nature is the ideal and the epitome of the unity between God and humans. As the intermediary between God and humans, Jesus shows two significant theological thoughts: the Word of God and the Cross of Christ. The Word of God (God’s words) reflects the relationship between heaven and earth and the communication between God and the world. In the Hebrew Bible, the Word of God originally meant “God’s words,” “God’s spirit,” “the breath of God,” “God’s commands,” or “commandment.” The Hebrew term *dabar* means not only “words” or “speaking” but also “event” and “acts.”

The Word of God also means the revelation of God to humans through prophets. The revelation of God is also called “heavenly revelation” or “divine revelation.” It represents wisdom, which is personal. In the New Testament, the Word of God explicitly means “Jesus Christ as the Word (*logos*) of God who saves the world.” The messages of Jesus Christ are called the words of God, that is, the “good news” of salvation from God to humans. In Western dualistic

thought, the radical difference between God and humans has brought difficulties in understanding the relationship between God and humans. The mystics of the incarnation of Jesus Christ as the intermediary is a Christian solution to overcome the incommutability between God and humans caused by Western dualism.

The Gospel of John underlines God's Word (*logos*) by saying: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God....And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth" (John 1:1, 14, NRSV). The author used the Greek term *logos* for the Word of God, stressing that this Word differs from ordinary words. The *logos* inherits the abstract understanding of Greek thought and the religious sense of the ancient Hebrew term *dabar*. In the perspective of existence, the incarnation made the Word the way of life, which can be seen by eyes and touched by hands.

The Cross of Christ shows Jesus Christ as the second Adam, the new person, who in saving the world, is crucified. In the self-sacrifice of Christ, the cross symbolizes the *agape* of God. It also represents God's perfection, goodness, and providence that Christians believe in. The cross vividly shows the relationship and conflict between the ultimate concern and concrete human existence. On the one hand, the cross indicates the eternity, infinity, absoluteness, perfection, and goodness of God. On the other hand, the cross reflects the limitations of human existence in history. Christ reveals his eternity and acts as the perfect exemplar of humans, making communication between the two uncommunicable poles possible. He made togetherness of God's grace and the ultimate concern of humans. Thus, we can see that Christians use the methods of logic and inference to express their beliefs.

This type of relationship between God and humans includes theological ideas such as those below:

First, it is the idea that God created humans. According to the Hebrew Bible, God created heaven and earth, myriad things, and humans. Meanwhile, it points out that, after creation, humans sinned in their disobedience, leading to the ideas of the sinful nature of humans and the origin of sin. Because of these, Christianity insists that salvation comes only after human repentance and a return to God. Thus, God would send a savior to save the world from sin.

Second, it is the idea that “God loves the world.” This represents a common thought among many religions. In the Hebrew Bible, there is the idea that Jehovah loves Israel by considering them as the chosen people. The New Testament [however] underscores the idea that God loves all people.

Third, it is the idea of communication between God and humans. The New Testament stresses that everyone can interact and communicate with God. It includes the interaction between humans and God, humans and the Holy Spirit, the inspiration from God, and the working of the Holy Spirit in human hearts. Jewish theologian Martin Buber calls this direct communication between humans and God, the relationship of *I* and *Thou*, that is, the *I* of humans and the eternal *Thou* of God.

The *I-Thou* relationship involves relativity, encounters, and dialogues. It transcends the *I-It* relationship, which produces alienation and estrangement. It achieves intimacy and immanence through mutual interaction. Thus, it reflects the relationship of communication, trust, and correspondence in mutual exchange and fulfillment. Buber’s concept of God is unlike Rudolf Otto’s understanding of God as the transcendent one who is *mysterium tremendum* or *numinous* (holy). It is similar to Augustine’s understanding of God as the immanent one who is deep, profound, and pervading everywhere. God is the eternal *Thou* who is

omnipresent in time and space, knowing and caring for everything. He is located deeply in the heart of the human *I*, speaking and thinking with *I*. Therefore, the contemporary Catholic theologian Romano Guardini insists that authentic religious languages are not recondite, nuanced arguments or inferences but prayers and words from human hearts. In these discussions of the interaction between God and humans, the *I-Thou* relationship represents the kernel and the fundamental relationship of trust, showing mutual affinity and great affection in the spiritual dimension.

Christianity emphasizes the *I-Thou* relationship between God and humans. The corresponding poles of God and humans are reflected in some interactions and contrasts of *Thou* and *I*, such as God and the world, the heavenly father and humans, the savior and the chosen people, Christ and apostles, lord and servant, teacher and student, the holy Spirit and spiritual persons, shepherd and sheep, bridegroom and bride, and so on. In the sixteenth century, Martin Luther described this organic contrast and mutual communication of belief in terms of “the reliability of God” and “the believing of humans.” He underlined the interaction and transmission of the “reliability” and the “believing” as the psychic precondition and the soul of the faith. Moreover, the *I-Thou* relationship represents the mystical experience in the communication between God and humans and the consecration of human life in mystical experiences. Buber concludes, “If you explore the life of things and of conditioned being you come to the unfathomable, if you deny the life of things and of conditioned being you stand before nothingness, if you hallow this life you meet the living God.”² In this kind of communication, *Thou* is the benevolent

² Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, 2nd ed., trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1958), 79.

father, close friend, and soul mate of *I*, and the *I* of humans is weak, humble, and dependent but seeking understanding, help, and salvation. Therefore, this kind of interaction shows the feeling in the religious psyche regarding the idea that religion is about the heart of humans and not about rational inference in the philosophical dimension.

Fourth, it is the idea that God supervises human worship. The Old Testament describes the tradition of offering sacrifices, and the New Testament also insists that humans should show their faith in rituals. Christians understand the death of Jesus on the cross as the sufficient sacrifice of the world to God, so they only need to rely on Jesus in their hearts with personal conversion, that is, salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

Fifth, it is the idea that God punishes the wicked and rewards the good. In Judaism, God punished those Israelites who disobeyed God. Christianity emphasizes punishment in hell and the last judgment. These ideas aim to show God's authority and justice, reflecting God's direct involvement in the punishment of the wicked.

Sixth, it includes the idea of the unity of God and humans. To unite with God is the highest pursuit and final destination of the religious. In Christianity, the unity of God and humans represents the ultimate pursuit of humans. It undergoes communication between and the integration of God and humans, arriving at the transformation and transcendence of humans. While humans are relative, temporal, and limited, they only find meaning in pursuing the absolute, the eternal, and the infinite. Therefore, the unity of God and humans is the ideal of spiritual liberation and mental happiness for humans. It is significant in overcoming the dualism of the subject and the object.

Contemporary Christian thinker Paul Tillich understood religion as the ultimate concern of humans. Exploring the ultimate and absolute meaning of life in the concepts of

Heaven and God, humans show the transcendence of the human spirit in nature, the self-pursuit of the infinite, and the ultimate concern of humans. The most crucial point is that humans understand life from a transcendent perspective. They clarify it in terms of the relative and the absolute, the part and the whole, and the temporal relationship and the eternal in philosophy. They also emphasize it in their attitude toward the limitation of human existence and spiritual transcendence. Thus, they understand life as the transition from the temporal to the eternal. These views go beyond the self and nature, the subject and the object. They help humans explore the meaning of life, the space-time of the universe and its meaning, and the fundamental relationship between humans and the ultimate. They are the crucial contents of the religious understanding of life, history, and cosmology. Without these metaphysical pursuits and the ultimate concerns of humans, religion will lose its soul.

Nevertheless, the ultimate concern and the metaphysical pursuit of humans are inseparable from the concern of humans in their material existence. The former cannot be separated from the latter: the inconstant world and the moment of concrete existence in time and space. The two are closely correlated or strongly interlinked. While human existence involves the ultimate, absolute and metaphysical, it introduces humans to the realm of religion. It is embodied in the pursuit of Truth, Beauty, and Goodness of societies and individuals, especially in politics, philosophy, art, and science. From the perspective of the transcendent and holy in terms of Heaven and God, all human beings are relative, limited, inconstant, and imperfect. Christianity highlights the ultimate concern and the metaphysical pursuits of humans. It introduces the ideas of relativity, the separation of powers, democracy, and diversity to modern and contemporary Western society. It also aids the

development of a pluralistic understanding of the world in country, society, politics, and culture.

Because humans are relative and limited, they must rely on God's authority, which is ulterior and transcendental, to guide their ultimate concern. In the meantime, humans need the method of covenanting as the fundamental principle for a group, society, and country. The idea of a covenant plays a vital role in the modern and contemporary world, which has adopted democracy for education and politics. Democracy restrains, supervises, and adjusts the words and actions of "limited" humans, so as to effectively prevent the return of aristocracy or theocracy. Besides, the relationship between God and humans introduces humans not only to an acknowledgement of their limitations but also to have hope in their concrete concerns for the future. The pursuit of the ultimate provides spiritual impetus and social norms to humans in this world. It helps humans see not only the unity of the world but also its diversity or contradictions. Epistemologically, it allows humans to understand both the limitation of their pursuit and the necessity of this persistent pursuit and ultimate concern.

III. The Unity of Heaven and Humans: The Core Value of Chinese Religions

In the long history of feudal dynasties, ancient Chinese culture gradually treated the king as an intercessor between humans and Heaven. The king is considered the Son of the Heavenly Lord, or the Son of Heaven. The heavenly Lord does not become incarnate as a king. A king is a human being who cultivates virtues and is ordained by the mandate of Heaven. On the one hand, a king represents the governance of the heavenly Lord over all people. On the other hand, a king represents all people in offering sacrifices to the heavenly Lord. Because of this special role, only a king

can offer sacrifices to Heaven, communicate with Heaven, and represent Heaven in the administration of justice. Kings replaced the role of ancient shamans in the communication between humans and spirits, playing the role of an actual intercessor of humans and Heaven after “the separation of heaven and earth.”

A king who practices the heavenly virtues is called a sage-king. Some people understand the “outer kingliness” of a sage-king as the fruit of “inner sageness.” The virtues of a king determine the mandate of Heaven, so it is called “the mandate of Heaven has virtues.” If the heavenly virtues are not constantly manifested, the mandate of Heaven is discontinued. Therefore, the image of a sage-king as the intermediary between Heaven and humans is critical. A king would be a trustworthy ruler if he possessed profound virtues. A king could not be in that position if he did not show virtues. In Chinese history, only a few kings fulfilled this requirement. There were honored sages and virtuous persons, but they did not often consider themselves as the intermediators between Heaven and humans. Instead, they “restrain themselves and restore the rites for benevolence” and have more interest in the life of this world. Through the proposal and promotion of Confucianism, kings have focused more on the politics of humans rather than on their religious role between Heaven and Earth. This represents a shift from the “rule of the divine” to the “rule of humans,” from “following the mandate of Heaven” to “serving the people.” This shift has greatly influenced the character of Chinese society and religious life.

What is the primitive Chinese faith in the unity of heaven and humans? Below are some points that I try to sort out:

1. Heaven Produces Humans

In ancient China, people understood that “Heaven produces humans.” For instance, “Heaven produces people and also sets rules for things” (*The Book of Odes*). “Heaven produces humans, but the mandate of heaven is a lie” (*The Book of Odes*). “In the beginning, there was heaven and earth. And then there were myriad things produced” (*The Book of Changes*). “Only Heaven and Earth are father and mother of myriad things” (*The Book of Documents*). The greatest virtue of Heaven and Earth is production. These sayings emphasized that Heaven produced humans.

According to Mencius, human nature is good, so people can reach heaven to become sages through their hearts. The life of a human is originally from heaven, so humans have heavenly dignity. It indicates that Chinese culture is better at speaking about the status and value of humans than Western culture, which says that humans lost the image of God after their first ancestors sinned.

2. Heaven Loves People

The idea that “God loves the world” is universal for many religions. Ancient Chinese culture also has this idea. For instance, “Heaven loves people,” “Heaven has mercy on people of the four directions, and he has changed the mandate of Heaven from Shang to our Zhou Dynasty” (*The Book of Documents*). “People of the four directions” means all people. The relationship between Heaven and humans reflects the connection between “the will of Heaven” and “the heart of people.” In a way, “the heart of people” is understood as “the will of Heaven.” “The seeing of people is the seeing of Heaven, and the hearing of people is the hearing of Heaven” (*The Book of Documents*). The idea that “Heaven loves people” introduces universal love and equality

as ideals of human pursuits, which emphasizes benevolence, justice, unity, and “all are family.” It provides the religious foundation for the ideas of human equality and democracy. Therefore, the ancient Chinese view of the unity of Heaven and humans has the core content of democracy.

3. The Interaction of Heaven and Humans

In traditional Chinese thought, Heaven interacts with the ordained kings. Kings follow the will of Heaven in establishing their kingdoms and maintaining their sovereignty. “Respect is like rain in time, and righteousness is like sunshine in time” (*The Book of Documents*). These sayings point out that the king’s ability to govern well can even make a difference in the weather. It introduces the idea of the integration of Heaven and humans. Because Heaven is communicable and interactable, Heaven can interfere with human issues, and humans can interact with Heaven. If human hearts are pure, they can reach Heaven even in silence. Kings need to serve Heaven in establishing standards of reward and punishment. Because of this, Confucius said, “If one offends Heaven, there is no way to pray.” Later, Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 proposed the interaction between Heaven and humans. Observing the interactions between Heaven and humans, Dong understood that this interaction corresponds with *yang* virtue and *ying* punishment. Beautiful things will arise under Heaven if the world is peaceful, just, and harmonious. If the world is chaotic, unjust, and in conflict, natural and heavenly disasters will follow. This kind of interaction between Heaven and humans restrains the arbitrary power of rulers.

4. Heaven Supervises Human Worship

People revere Heaven by offering sacrifices in religious rituals. In ancient China, people appealed for the grace of Heaven through the offering of sacrifices. The ancient Chinese also understood that “The heavenly Lord enjoys the cultivation of virtuous kings.” “Only the virtues of good governance can affect spirits and gods. They do not enjoy the fragrance of sacrifices. Rather, they look for the fragrance of virtues” (*The Book of Odes*). These sayings stress the importance of having virtuous rulers. Therefore, “Heaven supervises worship by humans” means that Heaven has volition from the perspective of religion in traditional Chinese thought. Heaven is not blind and does not ignore people. Instead, Heaven supervises, cares, and responds to people. “The heavenly Lord supervises people” (*The Book of Documents*).

5. Heaven Punishes the Wicked and Rewards the Good

In ancient Chinese religions, there is a doctrine that the heavenly Lord punishes the wicked and rewards the good. The heavenly Lord punishes the wicked indirectly. For instance, the heavenly Lord gives a warning to the vicious king. If a king did not repent, Heaven would change his appointment and punish the unrepentant king. This kind of punishment is shown in the withdrawal of the mandate of Heaven. In addition, there are rewards from Heaven for good and virtuous kings. The understanding of punishment and reward relies on ethics and the theory of retribution. It leads people to have a relationship with Heaven, not only in a natural way but also from an ethical perspective.

6. The Unity of Heaven and Humans

The unity of Heaven and humans is the highest pursuit and the final destination of religious people. It is similar to the unity of God and humans in Western Christianity. Meanwhile, they also have some differences. The unity of Heaven and humans is less of religious speculation than the unity of God and humans as the former has more humanistic concerns. The foundation of the unity of Heaven and humans has two dimensions. One is the harmony between humans and nature, and another is the adaptation of individuals to the collective. The psychical basis is a pragmatically rational spirit promoted by the Confucian system of benevolence.

The unity of Heaven and humans is also called the unity of virtue and the interaction between Heaven and Earth. Da Yu 大禹 established the foundation for governing the world through his success in taming rivers. He attained harmony between Heaven and Earth, such that, "The great harmony is under Heaven, and people are peaceful." According to *Huainanzi* 淮南子, "Heaven and Earth are communicable in their movements, so the sum of myriad things is One." Later Daoist philosophers systematized this idea. Chuang Tzu said, "People are heaven"; "The myriad things and I are One." Mencius said, "Sincerity is the Dao of heaven. To think how to be sincere is the way of humans" (Mencius 6A:12). In *Han Shu* 汉书, "The justice of Heaven and Earth is the Dao of the ancient and present." *Huangdi Neijing* 黄帝内经 said, "If someone is good at talking about Heaven, he must know people very well...If someone is good at knowing people well, he must know the transformation of Heaven and Earth well. If someone is good at talking about transformation and change, he must know the nature of gods." Zhang Zai 张载 pointed out, "The vital force of Heaven and Earth fills my body, and the movement is my nature." Zhou Dunyi 周敦颐 said, "The sage integrates into (with) Heaven in

virtues.” Cheng Yichuan 程伊川 said, “If it is in Heaven, it will be called fate. If it is in humans, it is called nature. If it is in righteousness, it will be called reason. In the body, it is the heart. All unite in Oneness.” Zhu Xi 朱熹 said, “Heaven is humanity, and humanity is Heaven.” Lu Jiuyuan 陆九渊 insisted, “The universe is my heart, and my heart is the universe.” Qian Mu 钱穆 underlined, “The most significant contribution of Chinese culture in the past was exploring the relationship between Heaven and humans....The idea of the unity of Heaven and Earth is the most crucial contribution of Chinese culture to the world.”

Qian Mu said that the ancient Chinese conception of humanism originated from the understanding of the Dao of Heaven. In the *Book of Change*, the “moving” in “heaven is moving vigorously” refers to the pathway of the heavenly Dao. To know the pathway of the movement of Heaven is called astronomy, which explores the path of the heavenly Dao. The eight diagrams created by Fu Xi 伏羲 are the primeval explorations of astronomy. Qian Mu understood there is no difference in direct and indirect interaction between Heaven and humans. The unity of Heaven and humans is a religious belief about life in ancient Chinese culture. It is also an important content of ancient Chinese astronomy and humanism. It recognizes human life as the mandate of Heaven. There is no impediment between them. Therefore, the meaning of life is to find the mandate of Heaven, to find the authenticity and truth that humans should have. Thus, ancient Chinese religion uses the idea of the unity of Heaven and humans to underscore the nature and destiny of humans. There is no need for an intermediary because there is no hindrance in the communication between Heaven and humans. However, the righteous Dao is vicissitudinous. The development of human history creates impediments, making the unity of Heaven and humans ambiguous. Our responsibility is to find

the primordial and simple unity of Heaven and humans to rejuvenate Chinese civilization.

Since the movement of “Banning All Schools of Thought except Confucianism 罢黜百家、独尊儒术” in the Han Dynasty, “the interaction between Heaven and humans” and “the unity of Heaven and humans” proposed by Dong Zhongshu have had a widespread impact. Meanwhile, because of their implications for exploring the relationship between Heaven and humans in understanding the vicissitudes of history, the heaven-human ideology has been the “patent” of Confucianism, which is also the perennial theme of Chinese philosophy. In the history of Chinese civilization, it is that which provides wisdom to Chinese people for their social life. The unity of God and humans represents the ultimate pursuit of humans. Through communication and integration with God, humans achieve their transformation and transcendence. The unity of Heaven and humans is also the ideal of human spiritual liberation and happiness that can be achieved despite their limitations. In the past, we often treated religion as superstition. Through the “unity of Heaven and humans,” we may find an open, positive, and renewed understanding of religion for Chinese people.

Meanwhile, we must admit that folk religion is always very active. Zhuan Xu 颛琐 retrieved the power of religion from the ordinary people in the reformation of “the isolation between Heaven and Earth,” but the “mix of gods and people” or “family as shamans” has not been fundamentally changed. On the contrary, folk religion is pervasive and thriving. Because Chinese religions are diverse, there is hardly a standard to distinguish the “official” from the “civilian.” Even Confucianism is diverse. Since the ancient Chinese considered “revering Heaven and honoring ancestor” as a core belief, the “official” and the “civilian” have inherited the belief, although in different ways. While the “official”

seems to emphasize “revering Heaven,” the “civilian” focuses more on “honoring ancestor.” The two approaches show the complexity of Chinese religion. Today, however, “revering Heaven” disappears in the metaphysics of philosophy, and “honoring ancestor” degenerates into superstitions and idol worship.

The status of Confucianism is ambiguous. There are still controversies about whether or not Confucianism is a religion. Similarly, there are also controversies regarding the studies of Confucianism. Because of these, Confucianism receives different treatments between the “outside” and the “inside” (the Confucius Institute, the Image of Confucius, the Name of Confucius). As Confucius says, “The Dao is not acting, so the world seems to be drifting in the sea.” Therefore, the reconstruction of Chinese civilization should begin with studies of Chinese culture centered on Confucianism while simultaneously going beyond Confucianism in examining the values and the religious origins of Chinese culture.

Professor Zhuo Xinping is a distinguished research fellow and the former director of the Institute of World Religions at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. He is a member of the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress and the chairperson of the Chinese Association for the Study of Religion. He has dedicated himself to Christian studies for more than forty years, establishing good relationships with Bishop K. H. Ting, the founding president of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary (NJUTS), Professor Chen Zemin (the late NJUTS vice-president) and Professor Wang Weifan. Since the 1990s, Professor Zhuo has actively participated in reconstructing Chinese Christian theological thinking, working with other scholars to initiate and deepen the study of the Further Contextualization of Christianity in China (基督教中国化 *jidujiao zhongguohua*). This has gained resonance and active response at various levels.

BISHOP SHEN YIFAN'S SOCIAL THEOLOGY ENLIGHTENS REFLECTIONS ON CHRISTIANITY *ZHONGGUOHUA*¹

基督教中国化的神学思索——来自沈以藩主教社会神学的启迪

HU YINGQIANG 胡应强

Abstract. This paper uses the perspective of social theology in expounding on Bishop Shen Yifan's theological quest for the further contextualization of Christianity in China (or Christianity *zhongguohua*) and its illumination for our times.² Bishop Shen's thoughtful deliberations in social theology provide valuable resources for the ongoing reconstruction of Chinese theology. His careful use of the theological correlation method in cultural integration and mutual learning that closely links Christianity with Chinese culture (including fine traditional culture and the core culture of the times) has uniquely created an effective theological methodology for the further contextualization of Christianity in China. Bishop Shen's dedication to the

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- 1 This article is a revision of a paper delivered by the author on September 22, 2020, at a seminar held by the Shanghai Christian Council to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the launch of the Three Self Patriotic Movement of Chinese Christianity.
 - 2 Christianity *zhongguohua*, as one of many attempts at translating the Chinese term “基督教中国化 (*jidujiao zhongguohua*)”, has appeared in recent academic publications. This paper adopts it alongside “the Further Contextualization of Christianity in China” to refer to the transformation from “Christianity in China” to “Chinese Christianity” by adapting the major aspects of the Christian faith to the Chinese context.

construction of Chinese social theology, expressed in the spirit embodied by the poem “A spring silkworm may not stop spinning silk until death, a candle’s tears dry only when it’s burned down to ashes,” and by the saying “endless pursuit of life,” has left us with precious spiritual wealth for promoting the further contextualization of Christianity in China. Bishop Shen’s elaborate blueprint for the development of the churches in China also offers theological guidance and a vision of the development for Christianity *zhongguohua*.

Key words. Further Contextualization of Christianity in China (*Christianity zhongguohua*); Bishop Shen Yifan; social theology; correlation methodology of cultural integration and mutual learning

Introduction

On the occasion commemorating the 70th anniversary of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) of the Protestant Churches in China by Christian churches in Shanghai, we sincerely honour our Christian predecessors who made great contributions to the TSPM in church practice and theology. Among them, Bishop Shen Yifan was one of the most outstanding figures. The touching witness of Bishop Shen’s adherence to the Three-Self Principles and his love for church and country has been remembered and written about by many; his reflections on contextual theology have also been studied and reviewed by scholars. Bishop Shen’s social theology and its impact on the further contextualization of Christianity in China, however, has not been studied by the academia or Christian circles either at home or abroad. This paper intends to articulate Bishop Shen Yifan’s quest and his moving witness in promoting Christianity *zhongguohua* from the perspective of his social theology.

The first part of this paper expounds on Bishop Shen's theological understanding of the further contextualization of Christianity in China and Chinese society. The second part examines his sense of social responsibility in relation to his life and in his social theology. The third part briefly analyzes the definition and structure of social theology. The fourth articulates in detail the main content of Bishop Shen's social theology, and the final part is a reflection and summary of how his social theology throws light on Christianity *zhongguohua*. The author hopes that this article can encourage experts, scholars, and fellow co-workers to undertake further studies of Bishop Shen's social theological thinking with Chinese characteristics and to carry forward his adherence to the Three-Self Principles and his life-long practice of loving the church and the country, so as to engage diligently in Chinese theological exploration and to contribute to the construction of a Christian Church in China that is commensurate with the great socialist motherland and favored by the Chinese people.

1. Bishop Shen Yi'fan's Thoughts on Christianity *zhongguohua* and Chinese Society

Dating from the Tang Dynasty, there have been four important encounters between Christianity and Chinese culture, but unfortunately, Christianity failed to take root in Chinese soil. Bishop Shen Yifan studied in depth the history of Christianity in China and discovered that the main cause of such a historical phenomenon was that Christianity in China had difficulty in overcoming its foreign nature. Bishop Shen frankly admitted that Christianity came from outside, but after its introduction to China, it had to overcome its foreignness; otherwise, Christianity would not take root in China.

In his theological lecture on “The Evangelical Ministry of the Chinese Church,” Bishop Shen pointed out that Nestorianism was first brought to China by Persian priests, and that it was outlawed by Emperor Wu Zong of the Tang Dynasty in the 9th century when he also crushed Buddhism. According to the literature of the time, Emperor Wu Zong considered these to be foreign religions including Western religions. The Nestorian monuments and other documents show that the human and financial resources used in Nestorianism at that time belonged to foreign churches and were, therefore, inevitably regarded as pagan. During the Yuan dynasty, Nestorianism and Catholicism were only popular among the Mongols, who were in a dominant position, and among the Scythians in the West. Since Christianity did not take root in the Chinese population at large, once the Yuan dynasty was overthrown, Christianity was immediately eliminated. During the Ming Dynasty, the Jesuits, such as Matteo Ricci and John Tong, made many efforts to integrate Catholicism with Chinese culture, even allowing Chinese believers to still honor Confucius and perform ancestral rites, but unfortunately, other Catholic religious orders, such as the Dominicans and Franciscans, strongly opposed this and appealed to the Holy See, which eventually ordered that Chinese believers be forbidden to observe traditional Chinese customs. Thus, although the Emperor Kangxi of the Qing Dynasty was initially favorable to Catholicism, the decision of the Holy See evoked a strong reaction from him. He ordered the expulsion of all foreign priests who did not observe traditional Chinese customs, causing a major setback to evangelization by the Catholic Church. At the time, Christianity had many conflicts with Chinese society and culture, resulting in numerous so-called church incidents.

Some scholars pointed out that an important reason why the friendly exchanges between Christianity and

Chinese culture had been disrupted many times was because Christianity had never achieved a relatively stable social status in China. Whether it was during the feudal dynasties or before the founding of the New China, Christianity, as an alien culture and belief system, did not encourage many Christians in China to actively understand and respond to the specific social challenges of the times, nor did it closely integrate with the existing social reality.

When reflecting on the spread of Christianity by Western missionaries in China, Mr. T. C. Chao also believed that the inability of Christianity to closely integrate with Chinese social reality became a setback to the process of building up Chinese churches.³ Therefore, today when it comes to Christianity *zhongguohua*, I believe that we should not, on the one hand, overlook the specific social, cultural and political situation in which Christianity in China has survived; on the other hand, we need to reflect theologically on the social context of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era. Christianity in China today finds itself in a period of fine development. However, in the current new era, can it be said that it has achieved its proper place in the social structure of a socialist society with Chinese characteristics? Has post-denominational Christianity in China established its own identity with an ecclesiology that responds well to a socialist society with Chinese characteristics in the new era? The social theology of Bishop Shen Yifan can provide answers to these questions.

2. Bishop Shen's Sense of Social Responsibility

Bishop Shen Yifan was always conscious of the concept of social responsibility in his theological thinking. Such

3 Zhao Zichen, "The Meaning of the Christian Church" (1948), in *Zhao Zichen's Collected Works* Vol. 4 (Beijing: Commercial Press, 2010), 84.

consciousness was derived from his experience of growing up in Shanghai. Though the old Shanghai was more prosperous than other parts of China, it was deeply affected by colonialism, imperialism and bureaucrat capitalism. There were foreign concessions in Shanghai where foreigners bullied the Chinese and regarded China as the “sick man of East Asia.” All these made a deep imprint on Bishop Shen’s mind. What could a Chinese Christian do for his compatriots? What could Christianity bring to the Chinese nation? It was with these quests in mind that Bishop Shen chose, without any hesitation, to major in theology at university.

In his theological thinking, Bishop Shen’s sense of social responsibility had been deeply influenced by Mr. Y. T. Wu. During the time of the Anti-Christian Movement and the New Culture Movement in the 1920s, some Chinese theologians, seeking the indigenization of the Church, made attempts to integrate Christianity with traditional Chinese culture. Bishop Shen expressed a certain affirmation for what they did, but at the same time, he keenly pointed out that the integration of Christian thought with Confucian ideas had to take the social context into account. Due to that fact that Confucianism was then being severely criticized in Chinese cultural circles, he made a thought-provoking statement that Christianity in the aftermath of the May Fourth Movement would segregate itself from the trend of mainstream thinking and would make no progress in its theology without critical analysis of its integration with traditional Chinese culture. At the time, a large number of prominent and perceptive Chinese Christians had devoted themselves to the establishment and writing of indigenous theology through combining Christianity with Chinese traditional culture. Despite this, and due to the limitations of Chinese Christian thinkers at the time, they failed to establish an acceptable foothold for the indigenization

movement, leading to great difficulties for the movement and its eventual failure. Bishop Shen, however, acutely discovered and learned from what was achieved by Mr Y. T. Wu, who opined that it was necessary to critically evaluate and absorb Western theological ideas while also critically evaluating what traditional Chinese cultural thoughts ought to be inherited. Even more important, attention had to be paid to the powerful currents of the times and the Chinese context in which the churches found themselves, and to explore its theological meaning. This is still of great significance in guiding Chinese theological thinking at the present time.⁴ Bishop Shen agreed with Wu's insight and applied it to his theological thinking. He pointed out that it was important for Chinese theology to absorb the essence of traditional Chinese culture, but what was more urgent was how Chinese theology could respond to the great changes taking place in the politics, society, economy and culture of modern China.⁵

Bishop Shen mentioned that the church was not only the Body of Christ in a spiritual sense but even more so, it was a social reality. The church, being a social organization, could not evade, at any time, its social responsibility, which was to "proclaim release to the captives...to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (Luke 4:18-19) This was directly related to Bishop Shen's appreciation of contextual theology in the 1980s. It was this kind of social and political consciousness that prompted Bishop Shen to carry out realistic theological reflections on the situation in China before and after the founding of the

4 Shen Yifan, "Confucianism and Theological Reflections in China Today" (1988), *Forum Voices -- The Collected Works of Shen Yifan*. (Shanghai: China Christian Council, 2000), 75-79.

5 Shen Yifan, "The Chinese Church in Theological Reflection" (1998), *Ibid.*, 54.

New China and to actively explore the potential and new interpretations of the continuing presence of Christianity in socialist society. Since this was an issue the ecumenical churches had never encountered before, Bishop Shen developed his social theology with Chinese characteristics based on his own understanding of social responsibility.

3. The Perspective of Social Theology

Using Wang Shouchang's words about social philosophy, we may define social theology as theological reflection "on the social process relating to social structure and social function."⁶ Efforts in understanding social structure and social change from the perspective of Christian theology can be traced back to the early church, and to Augustine who was the most important figure.⁷ The focus of this paper is not to sort out the concept of social theology from a historical perspective but to analyze the relationship between the churches in China and the current social context of China by borrowing Wendy Dackson's understanding of social theology. Dackson believes that social theology includes three most important issues: (1) How to understand a theology of society from a theological perspective in order to build a society that God wants? (2) What is a theology of society that can guide the church to serve society? (3) In a specific society, what kind of theological self-understanding should the church develop so that it will be enabled to influence the non-Christian environment and gain its own

6 Wang Shouchang, "Translator's Preface," J. Feinberg, *Freedom, Power, and Social Justice: A Modern Social Philosophy*, translated by Wang Shouchang and Dai Shu, (Guiyang: Guizhou People's Publishing House), 1998, 1.

7 On Augustine's social theology, see Miikka Ruokanen, *Theology of Social Life in Augustine's De civitate Dei* (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993).

social legitimacy? Responses to these three questions can basically help establish the framework for a theology of church in society.⁸ This paper argues that Bishop Shen's social theology in responding to the above-mentioned three questions can enlighten us on how to better understand the relationship between Christianity and socialist society with Chinese characteristics in the new era and to realize Christianity zhongguohua in a sociological sense.

4. The Main Points of Bishop Shen Yifan's Social Theology

a. The Theological Understanding of Bishop Shen

Bishop Shen Yifan's theological understanding of society was actually inseparable from his Christology. First of all, Bishop Shen affirmed the significance of society in this world through his new understanding of the transcendence and immanence of Christ and opposed the reclusiveness preached by Western missionaries that only paid attention to the transcendence of God and the salvation of the soul while overlooking social responsibilities. God's transcendence usually refers to the incomprehensibility of God's holiness and the distance between God and human beings. However, Bishop Shen, from the perspective of love, understood God's transcendence as the inexhaustible love that God sends to all creatures, and God's immanence as God's abiding with all creatures with his transcendental love. In this sense, for Christians who are co-workers of God's continuing creation, bearing social responsibility had the same significance from a faith perspective. The sacred and secular boundaries in traditional Christian social concepts

8 Wendy Dackson, "Anglicanism and Social Theology," *Anglican Theological Review* 94, no. 4 (September 2012): 616-617.

were also bridged by the continuing creation of this loving God. Although the depravity of human beings had an impact on the world, Bishop Shen believed that the world was still a world of the Heavenly Father, a world with God's universal love and God's rule. Christianity in China, especially after the founding of the New China, faced the following social facts in the new social and historical environment of socialism: (1) The fate of people at the bottom of society that had lasted for thousands of years had been transformed. The Chinese people, once regarded by the Western world as the sick men of East Asia and lacking in the spirit of cooperation, had been united and inspired to make progress in order to catch up with the developed countries and to build a prosperous and strong New China. (2) Many social evils opposed by Christians had been greatly reduced and suppressed with the change of social system, that is, the establishment and implementation of the socialist system in New China. (3) A noble character with a spirit of selfless devotion toward serving the people were exhibited in many true revolutionaries and builders of socialist society. (4) After the founding of New China, Chinese society had experienced twists and turns including during the time of the Cultural Revolution; nevertheless, after these difficulties had been overcome, China entered a new period of development with the recovery of social construction, reform and opening. Was God's love limited to the people God redeemed, or was it universal to all the people? (5) The whole of the new socialist society in China had become more united and had a common goal. The Chinese people were trying their best to carry out the socialist experiment and its practices. After a tortuous process, they began experimenting and developing the socialist market economy, making remarkable achievements. We had to build well the churches in China in this new era of socialist society.

Bishop Shen made his theological reflections on the progress and development of Chinese society. Under these conditions, how should Christians understand God's creation and salvation? Bishop Shen understood it from the perspective of a continuing creation. If we recognize the continuity of God's creation, we have to associate salvation with this continuity. If we recognize that social progress is a part of God's continuing creation, how do we view the relationship between people who made contributions to and even shed their blood for social progress and God's creation and salvation? In this particular society of China, it was an issue that Chinese Christians had to ponder about.

b. Not to be Served, but to Serve: Bishop Shen's Theology of Social Service

Through his theological reflections and church practice, Bishop Shen set an example to show that Christians and theologians not only had the responsibility to spread the gospel but, even more so, to assume social and political responsibilities. During the national crisis of the 1930s, Bishop Shen reflected on the situation of Chinese churches and pointed out that Christianity in China could not evade the challenges of the times and only pay attention to the salvation of human souls. If the stigma of colonialism and the foreign image of theologies brought by Western missionaries could not be removed from it, Christianity in China would only become more alienated from Chinese compatriots and remain unacceptable in Chinese society. Reflecting on the development of Chinese churches before the founding of New China, Bishop Shen opined that Western missionary policy had made Christianity a religion distant from Chinese social reality because its focus was to set up mission sites of their own denominations rather than to deal with the issue of establishing a church in China that was relevant

to Chinese culture and traditions. The missionaries only brought to China the theologies, church models and the faith they considered true. After the founding of New China, when Chinese Christians began to manage their own churches, they discovered that they faced many disharmonies, the most prominent of which were the incompatibilities in theology. Most noticeably, they found that missionaries had brought the old theologies into the Chinese context: Chinese Christians had directly inherited these theologies of focusing on the impenetrable divide between church and society derived from the Western context. What the Chinese believers wanted to emphasize was to “witness to the resurrection of Christ,” which was the “central message of the gospel at any time.”⁹ Especially after the founding of New China, how were Christians to address the fact that people all over the country were building a socialist motherland with unprecedented enthusiasm? Bishop Shen Yifan pointed out that “what the church needs today is to witness to the almighty power of Christ’s resurrection through the new life of repentance and rebirth of the believers.”¹⁰

In order to bear witness to the resurrected Christ, the churches in China had, first of all, to be resurrected with vitality. Under the new situation, the churches in China seemed confused and helpless because the theology they had could not meet the needs of this new situation. In old China, the church had only emphasized personal salvation, and efforts to participate in social reform and to support social justice were simply regarded as “secular.” The way to salvation was only through personal spirituality, while waiting for the Second Coming of the Lord. “In history, the church has often become a conservative force, maintaining

9 Shen Yifan, “No longer living for themselves, but for the Lord who died and rose again on their behalf,” *Tian Feng*, 1954 (14 &15), 8.

10 Ibid.

the status quo, and admiring the past,” criticized Bishop Shen.¹¹ The former theology of spirituality and the principles of running the church obviously could not meet the needs of the people, including the majority of believers, and were already “disassociated from the people’s social movement,” and thus, they eventually did not know how to view and to respond to “the victory of the Chinese revolution” and the socialist society of New China. Hence, how to enable Christianity in China to play a role in the socialist construction of the motherland and how to enable the church in China to make a new and living witness to the resurrected Lord in the socialist society of New China became the issue of greatest concern to the vast majority of the clergy and lay people at the time.

Having lived through the period of systemic social transformation and experienced the changes in the church in China during a time of transition, Bishop Shen perceived and witnessed the crisis of the old theologies and their social practice and deeply felt the call of God for the church in the socialist society of New China. He pointed out that Christians needed to be confident in the socialist society of New China, rather than be confused and pessimistic. He thus spoke out with great foresight that the church in China needed to bring forth new ideas, update its theological understanding, keep pace with the times, and to grasp and keep up with the main theme of the times which was building a socialist society in New China. With great deliberation, Bishop Shen considered the eschatological theology spread by Western missionaries which was once popular in the churches in China:

The eschatological belief, that was commonly understood as the end of history and the destruction of everything, was not in conformity with the Lord’s teachings.

11 Ibid.

When the Lord mentioned his Second Coming, he indicated that on the one hand, it would be the end of the old era, and on the other hand, it would be the beginning of a new era. All the descriptions about the disasters of the world and how even the powers of heaven would be shaken, were meant to imply that the power, order and tradition of the old days were about to collapse. This did not signify the end and destruction of everything; on the contrary, people needed to see relevant signs and to know that a new era was gestating and coming... Therefore, the main theme of the teachings regarding the eschatological hope in the Bible was not a comfort of pessimism, disappointment, and helplessness, but a call that was full of joy and full of hope leading us to the journey running towards the Lord...The eschatological hope did not make us nostalgic or hesitant to advance. Rather, it could release us from the bondage and influence of the old era and let us embark on a happy journey in the new era prepared by the Lord. ¹²

Bishop Shen felt firsthand the call of God to the Chinese Church in the new Chinese socialist society, and he also witnessed the crisis and defects of traditional Western theology spread by Western missionaries and once popular in the Chinese Church. He believed that Chinese Christians should have faith in the new Chinese socialist society, rather than be pessimistic, confused and disappointed. Therefore, he spoke out and called for a new vision for the Chinese church, making a push for new ideas, and a renewal of theological thinking to keep pace with the times.

From 1955 to 1958, Shen served as the secretary of the Executive Committee of the General Assembly of the Chinese Episcopal Church, vicar of the Primate of the Chinese Episcopal Church, and was ordained as a priest in 1958. His pastoral experience during this period enabled

12 Ibid.

him to have a deeper understanding of the churches and believers. As a vicar of the Primate, he had the opportunity to observe and analyze the development of the churches in China from a broader perspective. The social reality of China in 1958 prompted the Church in China to make a decision on its direction of development. Was it to break through the shackles of old ideas and help the church move forward with the times, or to be conservative and continue walking along the old path? Was it to actively enter the social life of a socialist society to witness to Christ, or to isolate themselves from the world and protect their own interests? In those early days, the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Churches in China, advocated by insightful people among the Chinese Christians, laid a foundation for the former choice. Only a few people chose the latter, believing that the church, so as to retain its sanctity, should not participate in society. Bishop Shen analyzed the theologies of the latter in depth and pointed out that they did not conform with the truth of the Bible. "Up till now, the gospel has been distorted as the pursuit and satisfaction of individualism. The gospel has actually been relegated to this, to such a pathetic extent, that Christian faith has been used as a steppingstone to attain some happiness for the body and soul in this life and after. However, God's love is first to save us from our personal selfish desires. If the gospel preached encourages the pursuit of personal gain, we cannot but say that it is a serious distortion of the gospel."¹³

It was undeniable that every believer had a personal spiritual life. However, individual spiritual pursuit did not mean religious individualism, nor did it mean that Christians had to stay away from society to achieve "positive results." The life of Jesus and his words and deeds set an example

13 Shen Yifan, "Four Points on Meditating on the Life of Christ," *Tian Feng*, 1958, no. 1, 22.

for us that the Christian's life had to be self-sacrificing and loving in serving others and society. Such dedication was not limited to devoting oneself to the church by leaving the world or isolating oneself from the world, but to make society more aligned with the will of God as it was at the beginning of Creation. In devoting themselves to the church, Christians bore good social witness in their lives. What Bishop Shen was outspokenly critical about was the attitude of focusing only on one's personal spiritual life and not participating in social life. Such an attitude was obviously inconsistent with that of Jesus who, for the most part, made friends with the sinful, fed the hungry and cured the ill. It was also inconsistent with Jesus' attitude of condemning the false piety of the Pharisees and opposing the Jews' rigid views of Old Testament commandments.

Bishop Shen's central concern was how to guide the church in China to adapt to the socialist context where it survived, and how to correctly lead Chinese Christians to integrate with and to become one with the Chinese people who loved their socialist motherland, so that they could become both good citizens and good believers, loving church and country. As a result, Bishop Shen never separated theology from the love for China, but always persevered in linking them closely. He spoke frankly: "At the altar where we prayed, we often prayed and gave thanks for the people of our motherland. Our prayers sometimes neglected to give thanks and ask blessings for our country. This was not because our 'spiritual path' was too high, but because our love was inadequate...May the Lord inspire us to have unlimited love for the people, so that we can always pray and give thanks for our motherland and draw strength from our prayers and thanksgivings, so as to devote ourselves to a more prosperous future of our motherland."¹⁴

14 Shen Yifan, "Let's Rise Up and Build!" *Tian Feng*, 1958, no. 19, 22.

Bishop Shen's spiritual theology and practice was not a utopia behind closed doors, nor was it just some impractical ideas of a bookish scholar, but a thoughtful insight that closely related his personal spiritual experience to the social practice of the broad masses of people. He did not honor any isolation from the world but saw that most people "work selflessly at the expense of sacrifice" to build a new China and "realized all the more how weak and poor his own life was which was in a heavy bondage."¹⁵ Undoubtedly, his spiritual practice, attitude and ideas of spiritual theology met the needs of social development at that time, which was not only for the purpose of serving society's needs but expressed the theological vision of someone who was forward looking, with a vision of the church in this new era. With a humble heart, he tried not to look at things from a self-righteous perspective but tried to avoid spiritual pride and to "strive for being sensitive to and without any prejudice against all new things and the signs of the times, and from which to understand the guidance of the will of God." We needed to obey God's will in our own social context and to listen carefully to God's direct words to us, without being hindered by our past experience or replacing God's will with human preference. This was the principle of Bishop Shen Yifan's spiritual theology and practice. Unfortunately, with the launch of the Cultural Revolution, the churches, schools and research institutes were closed down.

In 1981, after the end of the Cultural Revolution, Bishop Shen served as the senior pastor of Shanghai Community Church. With years of contemplation, his theological thinking became increasingly rich, profound and fruitful. The early and mid-1980s was a time when churches in China were most actively engaged in theological thinking and bearing abundant fruit. Bishop Shen was one of the outstanding

15 Shen Yifan, "The Power of God," *Tian Feng*, 1959, no. 2, 23.

figures who actively promoted theological thinking at the time.

What most of the mission societies brought to and carried forward in China was simply a replication of their respective churches, and therefore, the churches in China in terms of their denominational structures, liturgies, church buildings and especially their theological thinking, were essentially replicas of the churches in the West. As a result, until the churches in China launched the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, Christianity in China had long been known as a “foreign religion.” One of the main purposes of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement was to change the image of Christianity as a “foreign religion.” Chinese churches had become aware of its image as a “foreign religion” a long time ago and had endeavored to make changes, but most of these efforts were limited to “externals” such as the church architecture or liturgies. In-depth theological reflections on the churches were rarely developed. The TSPM broke away from previous patterns of westernized theological thinking and began to study the system of theological thought from the perspectives of Chinese Christians and the churches in New China. Mr. Y. T. Wu once pointed out that one of the main goals of the TSPM was for the churches in China to explore the treasure of the gospel of Jesus himself, to set itself free from the bondage of Western theologies and to create a Chinese believers’ own theological system. At the same time, it should be noted that when the TSPM was launched, the churches in China, together with socialist China, were still in the early stages of development. As a result, church workers were then very busy carrying out various specific ministries. In addition, many church practices and theological ideas were in a new period of exploration. All of these meant that it was only in the early and mid-1980s that churches in China could develop a “theological self.” What was the most urgent issue that had to be tackled in the old theological system?

Bishop Shen believed that “we need to absorb nutrition from the past and present Chinese culture to establish our own system of theological thinking.”¹⁶ He not only pointed out the direction for the development of Chinese theology, but also studied and proposed a methodology for its construction, “Chinese theology must first remove the stigma of colonialism...The theology in the early years of the New China was challenged by extremist views. The feature of these views was dualism, which separated God from the world, and the soul from the body. It held that the world was completely dark in opposition to the light of God. It advocated an attitude that was hostile to the world and therefore to all non-believers.”¹⁷

With the efforts of the Three-Self Movement and the experience of sharing weal and woe with the people throughout the country during the Cultural Revolution, the churches in China were gradually understood and accepted by the Chinese people. The problem of belief and disbelief, however, was not fundamentally resolved in Chinese Christians’ theological thinking. Some believers, overlooking the context and historical background of the Scriptures, held the idea that “those who believe and those who do not believe cannot be yoked together.” Could believers and non-believers, who constitute the majority of China’s population, work together to build a socialist motherland? Could both make joint efforts in the historical journey of developing China? The experience of the Cultural Revolution solved the above-mentioned problems. Thus, in the early 1980s, “identification” and “reconciliation” were some of the important theological themes widely thought about and broadly discussed in the church in China. This theological

16 Shen Yifan, “Theological Reflections on Christianity in China,” *Nanjing Theological Review*, No. 3, 1985, 33.

17 Ibid., 30-31.

theme stemmed from the experience of the vast number of Chinese believers and non-believers who mutually helped one another to overcome difficulties during the Cultural Revolution. This personal experience of sharing weal and woe brought a deep realization among many Christians that only when they share joys and sorrows with most of the Chinese people can the gospel message be understood and accepted by them so that Christianity can take root and thrive in Chinese soil. Bishop Shen frankly admitted that the sharing of Christ's gospel was indeed a challenge. In its essence, to face this challenge requires us to rely on love and service, rather than on confrontation and conviction.¹⁸ He once said emotionally: "He (Christ) made us jump out of the narrow personal circle, made us open-minded and forward-looking, told us not to follow the conventional standards, not to be over fastidious in wording, and not to be conservative in a closed circle, but to always be vibrant and constantly transformed in spiritual life and church life, and strive to seek the light and revelation that Christ was increasingly renewed."¹⁹

In the following years, Bishop Shen's theological articulation went even deeper and firmer as reflected in his published essays. His theological perspective and positioning were also outstanding: "First of all, for many Christians in China, we are united with Christ because of the death and resurrection of Christ, which is not just a personal experience...This is also the collective experience of the churches in China...The experience of Chinese Christians can

18 Shen Yifan, "Some Theological Reflections on the Pastoral Work of Grassroots Churches in New China," *Nanjing Theological Review*, Vol. 6&7, 1987, 88-89.

19 Shen Yifan, "Witnessing to the Lord who died and rose again," *Tian Feng*, 1986, no. 3, 3.

also be summarized as our identification with the Chinese people.”²⁰

These sentences summarized Bishop Shen’s theological reflection for decades. They were also a summary of Chinese Christians’ experience of sharing weal and woe with the people over the decades.

In June 1988, he was consecrated as one of the first bishops of the Protestant churches in New China because of his years of faithful service, and his excellent character and learning. Since then, adhering to the high moral integrity of being a “pastor among the pastors and servant among the servants,” Bishop Shen continued his theological thinking and pastoral practice. In November of the same year, Bishop Shen published an article entitled “The Churches in China in Theological Thinking” in *Nanjing Theological Review*. In this article, he pointed out that the Church was the Body of Christ and the bride of Christ, and so it was incarnational in nature and was, to an extent, the continuation of the Incarnation. Hence, the Church had to be rooted in the nation and society where she resided and to share the joys and sorrows of her own compatriots. This was an important theological foundation for the Chinese churches to implement the “Three-Self” principles.

This article was the representative work reflecting the development in his theological thinking and indicative that it had reached a high academic level. This was the first time for him to systematically and comprehensively expound on his theological thoughts formed over the past decades, and it was also his first exposition from the perspective of contextualized theology at a higher level. At the beginning of the article, he wrote, “theological thinking

20 Shen Yifan, “Some Theological Reflections on the Pastoral Work of Grassroots Churches in New China,” *Nanjing Theological Review*, Vol. 6&7, 1987, 87-88.

cannot be separated from its real context, in other words, all theological thinking should be contextualized thinking.”²¹ Then, he analyzed in depth the real situation of the churches in China and argued that the churches in China had to make a choice based on such a situation. It was important for Chinese theological thinking to absorb the essence of traditional Chinese culture, but what was more urgent was how Chinese theological thinking responded to the great changes in politics, society, economy and culture in modern China. In the new social and historical context, Chinese Christians were faced with the following reality: Chinese society was constantly progressing and developing rapidly in a positive direction. In this situation, how should Chinese Christians understand God’s salvation? Bishop Shen looked at salvation from the perspective of “continuing creation.” If we recognize the continuity in God’s creation, we need to associate salvation with this continuity. If we recognize that social progress is a part of God’s continuing creation, how should we view the relationship between those who had made contributions to and even shed their blood for social progress and salvation? In this specific context of China, this was what the Chinese Christians had to further ponder and explore.

c. *Bishop Shen Expounded on the Self-Understanding of the Church in Society from a Theological Perspective*

What has been discussed above has been Bishop Shen’s social understanding and his theology of serving society. Some of the later parts of his social theology dealt with the self-understanding of the church in society, specifically involving its social identity and the ecclesial identity of the

21 Shen Yifan, “China in Theological Reflections,” *Nanjing Theological Review*, no. 9, 1988, 18.

post-denominational church in China, that was still in the process of being built up. This could not also be separated from the issue of the legitimacy of religions in China. Have the churches in China already become Chinese? Did the churches in China respond to the challenges, both internal and external, with its own ecclesiastical confidence?

Let us first look at the social identity of Christianity in China. The Three-Self Principles were first proposed by the Western missionaries Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson in the 1850s. It was intended to enable Christians in missionary areas to establish churches based on self-governance, self-support and self-propagation of the gospel, so that foreign missionaries would no longer hold the leading positions in theology and church administration, eventually allowing local churches to be built up. Under the severe critical discourse brought by the nationalists and in the wave of all-round social reintegration of New China in the 1950s, Christianity in China had to undergo political adjustments and organizational changes in order to enable Christianity to exist in the new social system as a legal social institution. In 1950, Christianity in China launched the TSPM, with the aim of enabling churches in China to break away from Western missionary control, remove the colonial color of the West, and realize the independence of Chinese churches so as to reflect the sovereignty of the country. Finally, in 1958, the churches in China embarked on the journey of union worship with the characteristics of post-denominationalism. This experience was a great challenge and a painful transformation for church leaders at the time, but Bishop Shen believed that the churches in China had begun a new stage of development from then on. In other words, the churches in China had entered a new historical era in which Christians independently ran the church according to the Three-Self Principles. At the same time, the

churches in China had their own independence and realized their national identity through the TSPM.

After the Cultural Revolution, China entered a period of development with reform and opening. Bishop Shen carefully thought about the development approach and direction of Christianity in China from a macro perspective of building a Chinese church commensurate with the new outlook of China's socialist society which was carrying forward reform and opening. "In a fundamental sense, the TSPM was not only to get rid of the control of foreign forces over the churches in China, but also to build a church that was commensurate with the great socialist motherland. It was also to build a church that associated with the broad masses of the Chinese people, with the excellent history and traditional culture of China, and with the Chinese people who were striving for the magnificent cause of socialism today. If our church achieved independence on the one hand, and on the other hand, the church we built was divorced from or even opposed to most of the Chinese people, and the believers we led were indifferent to the actual struggles of the motherland or even yearned for the West, was not such a church still under the control of foreign countries in spirit? How could such a church exalt the Lord's gospel in our socialist motherland, and fulfill its spiritual mission?"²²

During this period, the focus of Bishop Shen's theological thinking was moving towards the building of a Chinese church that would be compatible with the national context: a socialist China that was engaged in reform and opening and a church that was in accord with the interests of the Chinese people. When Bishop Shen talked about the independence of the churches in China, he referred not only to the self-governance of the church,

22 Shen Yifan, "Imbuing the Spirit of the Three Selfs among Grassroots Congregations," *Tian Feng*, No. 2, 1983, 24.

but also the construction of a Chinese theology, and even more. David Bosch, a famous theologian, has pointed out that in the modern Christian world, an important criterion to discern whether a church was mature in her church life and theology, besides being independent, was her theological self-understanding. In other words, the maturity of a church depends on whether it has developed its own theology. It was obvious that in the 1980s, Bishop Shen had already pondered over how to build a Chinese church and further develop the Three-Self spirit from the perspective of building up a Chinese theology. He pushed the churches in China towards establishing a theological self-understanding.

5. Bishop Shen's Social Theology and Christianity *zhongguohua*

Bishop Shen not only envisioned the direction and goal of constructing a theology of self-understanding for the churches in China, but also elaborated on its methodology, so as to build a system of Chinese theological thinking centered on the Incarnation and closely integrating Christianity with fine Chinese culture, both traditional and contemporary. On the theme of Incarnation, the focus was on "identity." The first aspect was cultural identity. He believed that the biggest challenge encountered in the development of Christianity in China was in overcoming its "foreignness,"²³ which included both the "stigma of colonialism" and the elements of foreign culture. He stressed that Christianity had to "enter" Chinese culture and identify with it. This was the only way the churches in China could be run well. However, he also pointed out that we had to deal with the issue of Christianity's taking root in Chinese culture in a dialectical

23 Shen Yifan, "The Missionary Ministry of the Chinese Church", a draft of a theological lecture he was invited to give in Hong Kong in 1993.

way: “Our identification with Chinese culture was not blindly retrogressive. We also needed to inherit our culture in a critical way. We needed to preserve the excellent parts of Chinese culture which could and had to communicate with Christianity. We needed to adopt the forms in traditional culture that could be adopted by Christians. Emphasis on culture and morality, and respect for humanity in traditional Chinese culture were all valuable and could help remove the cultural barriers and further promote Christianity *zhongguohua*.²⁴ Besides, Bishop Shen further pointed out that while it was important for Chinese theology to absorb the essence of traditional Chinese culture, what was even more urgent was how Chinese theological thinking could respond to the great political, social, economic and cultural changes in modern China.²⁵

Bishop Shen closely related Christianity with Chinese culture (including excellent traditional culture and core culture of the times) to conceive the methodology for his social theology, providing an effective theological method for Christianity *zhongguohua* that has been persistently pursued by the churches in China today. The rich social theology carefully conceived by Bishop Shen also provided us with one of the most important, rare, and valuable resources to construct Chinese Christian theological thinking. The poet says, “a spring silkworm may not stop spinning silk until death, a candle’s tears dry only when it’s burned down to ashes.” Just like the silkworm and the candle, Bishop Shen spent his entire life dedicated to the construction of a Chinese social theology. His spirit will always inspire us. In commemorating the 70th anniversary of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Churches in China,

24 Ibid.

25 Shen Yifan, “The Chinese Church in Theological Reflection” (1998), *“Forum Voices - The Collected Works of Shen Yifan,”* op. cit., 54.

we need to humbly study Bishop Shen's social theology and the correlated theological methods from the perspective of further contextualizing Christianity in China. We do this with a view to carrying forward the prayers of "running the church well" of our predecessors in the Chinese churches, including Bishop Shen, and to construct the kind of church envisioned by Bishop Shen as soon as possible. "In a fundamental sense, the Three-Self Patriotic Movement was meant not only to remove the control of foreign forces over the churches in China but also to build a church that would be commensurate with the great socialist motherland. It was also to build a church associated with the broad masses of the Chinese people, with the excellent history and traditional culture of China, and with the Chinese people who are striving for the magnificent cause of socialism today."²⁶

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26 Ibid.

Carrying Out Philanthropic Projects: Observing Laws and Regulations

依法依规开展公益慈善活动

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Abstract: Christian engagement in philanthropy is one of the legal rights of Christians in China. At the same time, Christians' philanthropic activities are supposed to be conducted in accordance with corresponding laws and regulations. This paper examines the theological rationale for Christian engagement in charity and proposes approaches to effective philanthropic work for the churches in China to make their due contributions to the public welfare of the country.

Key Words: The Measures for the Management of Religious Professionals; philanthropic projects; professionalism; public well-being

Introduction

This paper reflects on the following three aspects in the implementation of philanthropic projects by Christian clergy: Firstly, it should be made clear that philanthropy

¹ *The Measures for the Management of Religious Professionals* aims at establishing the norms for the management of religious professionals. Article 5 of the *Measures* clearly stipulates the legal rights enjoyed by religious professionals, including the right to "carry out philanthropic projects."

is an obligation of Christians in the world, with faith and love as the core motivating force. Secondly, philanthropy is a right granted to Christians by the state that should be exercised under the guidance of laws and regulations so that it conforms to the interests of the country. Thirdly, a higher level of professionalism in philanthropic projects is necessary for better public services that promote the public well-being.

1. Love God and Love People: Inherit the Fine Tradition of Public Welfare and Charity

Engaging in philanthropic activities is a fine tradition of Christianity. We tend to equate “public welfare” with “charity,” which shows that both have shared implications. “Public welfare,” also called the “common good,” which means public interest, as opposed to “private interest,” is the common well-being of a society, a nation, and a country. The concept of “common good,” which is part of Hellenistic philosophy, is not directly put forth in the Bible, but it is full of “philanthropic” ideas and advocates the good value of “sharing.” “Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common” (Acts 4:32). The incarnation of Jesus Christ is, first of all, God’s kindness to the world and God’s generous gift of love. In both the Old and the New Testaments, God repeatedly calls for his people to help the poor and condemn those who are rich and inhumane. “Whoever gives to the poor will lack nothing, but one who turns a blind eye will get many a curse” (Proverbs 28:27).

Bishop K. H. Ting holds the view that Christians should “be courageous to shoulder social responsibility and have (the) ethical practice of love.” Carrying out philanthropic activities is not equal to “doing irrelevant business,” and

Christians are by no means exclusively concerned with personal salvation with little regard for real suffering. Understanding the needs of the people, caring for vulnerable groups, and helping the needy in a timely manner are the essential requirements of our faith. Even though we are not rich, following the example of the widow in the Gospel who donates “two pennies” (Luke 21:1-4) is also a charitable act of “accumulating wealth in heaven.” Jesus also points out the inseparability of “loving God” and “loving our neighbor.” “Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” (Matthew 25:40). Love is the driving force of Christian charity. Philanthropic activities are responses to Jesus’ love for us and a testimony to the world of God’s great love for humanity.

2. Promote the Pure Spirit of Charity While Abiding with Laws and Regulations

As far as religious philanthropic activities are concerned, one thing that we should pay attention to is the separation of charitable activities from missionary activities.² This separation should not be regarded as a form of restriction, but rather, as a demonstration of the true meaning of public welfare and philanthropy. The good deeds of Christians bear witness to God’s grace, but the charitable activities of Christians should not be used as a tool for evangelism; otherwise, it will violate the generosity inherent in philanthropy.

¹ Article 12 of the *Measures* points out that it is prohibited to “use philanthropic projects as means of religious propaganda.” Thus, the *Measures* endows religious professionals with the right to carry out philanthropic activities in line with laws and regulations, and at the same time sets out the responsibilities involved in religious philanthropic projects.

The essence of philanthropy is its being unconditional. The targets of philanthropic activities identified by the clergy include all kinds of vulnerable groups and people suffering from natural or other disasters. The kindness of Christians is shown to those in need of help regardless of their profession, region, status, and so on. Whether it is helping the poor, undertaking disaster relief or providing medical treatment, the purpose of charitable activities is to promote the well-being of those being served, and religious beliefs should not be taken as the implicit premise of providing aid. Jesus says, "Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them...But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you" (Matthew 6:1-4). Here Jesus not only requests a correct attitude in doing good deeds, but also reminds us to reflect on the meaning of doing charity. Some believers may argue that if charitable aid fails to convert people, then good deeds will have been done in vain. This is really a misunderstanding of the spirit of charity as well as the Christian faith. From the perspective of practical effect, the attitude of "taking advantage of charity to preach" will make the recipients feel instrumentalized, which will lead to criticism of Christianity.

Therefore, separating charitable activities from missionary activities will not only meet the requirements of national policies and laws, but will guarantee that we can fully exercise our right to engage in charitable activities. It will also help us in understanding the selfless spirit of charity, reject utilitarian thinking, and give full play to charitable activities that are based on our belief in God and a genuine love for people.

3. Charity Work Must be Enhanced by Professionalism

Since charity is an essential aspect of our faith in God, we should devote ourselves to it with professionalism. At present, the charitable activities carried out by the clergy are often temporary, emergency-driven, and sporadic. We cannot afford to recruit high-level professional management talents and are often faced with such problems as insufficient manpower, high levels of personnel turnover, and a low level of specialization. The development of Christian charitable activities has been greatly affected by the lack of professionalism and the inadequacy of resource development and utilization.

Christian clergy should focus on how to make more effective use of social resources in carrying out philanthropic activities. We need to understand that the application of professional management methods and systems does not mean “secularization,” because churches and disciples, as “stewards of God,” are supposed to properly utilize social resources. Therefore, church clergy should abandon “small circle thinking” when doing charity. Like any organization that undertakes social services, Christian philanthropy should be open to the public and accept their supervision. It is necessary to actively train or recruit professionals in public welfare and charity so as to improve the expertise of those engaged in charitable activities within churches. We can hold various training programs and seminars, improve working mechanisms, and optimize management structures. We can also exchange views and share experiences with other religious and non-religious philanthropic organizations to seek ways of resource sharing and cooperation, all for the purpose of better serving society and the people.

“Transformation of the achievements in the construction of theological thinking” also involves “offering theological impetus for engaging in public welfare and philanthropy.” Thus, there should be solid theological support for the practice of public welfare. Church clergy should strive to make the philanthropic activities of the churches more professional, institutionalized and standardized, in order to contribute to national stability and public well-being, and truly bear witness to God’s blessings to the world.

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Green Mountains and Clear Waters Praise God's Creation

绿水青山颂创造

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Abstract. This paper discusses Biblical teachings on the environment by introducing the ecological ideas and theology of St. Francis of Assisi and Bishop K. H. Ting. It points out that Christians and all humankind should take practical actions to protect God's creation so that the beautiful images of green mountains and clear waters can become paeans to God's creation.

Keywords. creationism; ecological environment; ecological theology

Introduction

The 21st century is one that has attached great importance to ecology and environmental protection, as well as to a sustainable environment for human beings. In particular, the Paris Climate Agreement, adopted on December 12, 2015,¹ has declared to the world the urgency of ecological protection, and its goals have become action guidelines for

1 The Paris Climate Agreement is an agreement adopted by 195 countries at the Paris Climate Conference, which sets out the arrangements for global action on climate change after 2020, intending to limit global temperature rise to 2 degrees Celsius in the 21st century and 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels.

environmental protection in our post-industrial society,² while at the same time becoming a weathervane for human civilization.

Christian theology has always attached great importance to the issue of the ecological environment. In this regard, the Bible gives us clear teachings. First, it points out that the essence of the ecological environment emanates from God's creation; therefore, to protect the ecological environment is to protect God's creation. Secondly, Christian spiritual theology emphasizes the practice of harmonious coexistence between humankind and the environment; for example, monks love nature and believe that nature is the "second Bible" inspired by God. Moreover, contemporary Christian theology explores the issue of ecological ethics in this industrialized society and how we can protect God's creation.

1. Biblical Teachings on Ecology

The concept of "ecological environment" is not a biblical concept but a contemporary one. When talking about this issue, the Bible typically applies terms like "all things," "heavens," "the creation," "heaven and earth," and so on. Of course, certain specific expressions in the Bible such as mountains, seas, wilderness, skies, rivers, etc. are applied to represent the concept of ecological environment.

The Bible declares at the very beginning that all things in heaven and earth come from God's creation: "In the

2 "Post-industrial society" is a service-based society; the most critical factor is not manual labor or energy but information. Therefore, it is also called an "information society." This concept is based on the book *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society: A Venture in Social Forecasting*, written by American sociologist Daniel Bell in 1973. It divides societies into primitive, agricultural, industrial and post-industrial societies.

beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). This verse is not only an expression of "origin" but also a statement of "relationship." In other words, all things come from God's creation, which is the root of all existence; all things are created by God, including human beings; therefore, human beings and all things are closely correlated. And together, they form a community of existence. This is the root of the ecological issues.

All things are God's masterpieces, created for God's glory, and revealing God's will. "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork" (Psalms 19:1). Both Psalms 8 and 19 express such biblical thoughts, which provide the theoretical basis for natural theology, as well as ecological theology. Not only this, the idea of a love for nature and contemplation in spiritual theology is often based on this as well.

We could divide Thomas Aquinas' theory of revelation into: revelation by grace (salvation in Jesus Christ) and revelation by nature. In other words, corresponding to the Bible, all things natural are often referred to as the "Book of Nature"; that is, humans can know God from all created things. This was also a theological theory that was highly valued by the medieval monk St. Francis.

Third, humans need to learn from all things in nature. For example, Jesus teaches us to learn from the birds of the air: "Look at the birds of the air, they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?" (Matthew 6:26). Jesus also teaches us to learn how to judge the time from the fig tree: "From the fig tree learn its lessons: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates" (Matthew 24:32-33). Besides, the book of Proverbs teaches us to learn from the ant's labors: "Go to the ant, O sluggard; consider

her ways, and be wise" (Proverbs 6:6); and from raising cattle to learn "dialectics": "Where there are no oxen, the manger is clean, but abundant crops come by the strength of the ox" (Proverbs 14:4); and Proverbs 30:15-33 also teaches us to gain wisdom from animals. In short, the Bible records abundant zoological and biological knowledge while reminding humans to learn from other animals, and indeed, much of our knowledge and wisdom comes from animals.³ Humans would be "foolish" to live without animals, and a world in which animals cannot survive is a world in which humans cannot survive. Humans are also in danger of watching many animals die and disappear due to ecological degradation, so we must protect God's creation.

Fourth, the whole creation has been sighing and groaning together with humankind. Romans 8:18-25 is a profoundly thoughtful scriptural passage. From the perspective of the traditional interpretation of the Scripture, after humankind sinned against God, all things were also distorted, destroyed, and suffered together with humankind. From an ecological perspective, after humankind sinned against God, they became much more selfish and self-centered. To merely satisfy their desires, they began to plunder natural resources excessively thus destroying nature and bringing suffering to all things. Nature, in turn, punished humankind with a silent "sigh and groan." On the one hand, humans are destroying nature; on the other hand, climate disasters are punishing humankind. Fortunately, humankind has woken up and begun to apply the idea of protecting the environment, to guide humankind toward changing the situation wherein "all of creation are sighing and groaning together" in an environmentally friendly way. In fact, at

3 Many human design concepts have been inspired by animals, such as the Chinese National Stadium, the "Bird's Nest", designed from a bird's nest in nature.

the time when Apostle Paul wrote the book of Romans, the world then had not yet experienced industrialization or the idea of ecological protection; nevertheless, the Bible seems to have predicted the direction in which the earth was heading and the long-range perspective for human life. Today, in the 21st century, this scriptural passage is a central idea in ecological theology. The hope of humankind lies in the salvation of their souls from selfishness and self-centeredness; the present hope of humankind lies in saving the earth and making it a livable place for human beings; the hope of humankind lies in living in harmony with all things and restoring the glory of God when He created the world. As the Bible states, "God saw that it was good" (Genesis 1:10).

Fifth, the earth has participated in the dispute between God and humans. It is written in Micah 6:1-2, "Hear what the LORD says: Arise, plead your case before the mountains, and let the hills hear your voice. Hear, you mountains, the indictment of the LORD, and you enduring foundations of the earth, for the LORD has an indictment against his people, and he will contend with Israel." The particularity of this passage is that it points to the earth's participation in God's dispute with humans. Although the earth says nothing, it quietly watches the result of the dispute between God and humans. If humans listen to God and return to the right way, the earth will be better, and human life will be better too; if humans do not listen to God, with a greedy heart, they will turn away from God, destroy the earth, and eventually punish themselves.⁴

Ecological protection is a controversial matter, and each country has its interests to consider; therefore, the

4 Some people often see natural disasters as God's punishment of humankind, but in fact, they are consequences of humankind's ecological destruction, and therefore we cannot blame God for them, God is constantly restoring nature. This understanding is in line with Christian theology.

Paris Climate Agreement is a consensus reached after a long debate, and its implementation today is also full of various “disputes.” No wonder protecting the ecology and promoting environmental protection is a task full of difficulties.

2. The Ecological Thoughts of St. Francis of Assisi

Since it is a Christian belief that God created all things and all things are praising God’s work of creation, great importance is attached to the ecological environment, especially in Orthodox monasteries, where people and the environment are one. To this day, countries where Orthodox Christianity is widely practiced are doing a better job of protecting the ecological environment and are generally “slow-living” countries.

Western Christianity built monasteries as “spiritual gardens” and pursued an organized “paradisiacal” life,⁵ so that monasteries and the environment are generally in harmony, fully expressing the idea of a beautiful relationship between people and the environment. Beginning with St. Benedict,⁶ the idea of “humility” embodies the restraint of human beings in the exploitation of the environment; the abiding of humans to their position as created beings expresses the spirit of St. Benedict as conveyed through the “Twelve Steps of Humility” and the “Rule of St. Benedict,” and reinforces the depth of spirituality and the effectiveness of stewardship. St. Benedict’s idea of “humility” is carried forward in the “Little Brothers” of St. Francis.

Some incorrectly believe that ecological theology in the West began from the post-Renaissance era because

5 The Cistercians of Saint Bernardino of Siena are representative of this approach.

6 Also translated as “Saint Benedict of Nursia”, a Christian monk of the 6th century.

they have not studied St. Francis. Others incorrectly believe that the “grandfather” of ecological theology is St. Francis because they have not read the works of monks like St. Benedict and do not understand their spiritual theology. Of course, regarding its influence on modern times, St. Francis’ ecological theology is remarkable, profound, and highly influential, so this paper focuses on the connection between St. Francis’s thought and ecological theology.

St. Francis of Assisi, also translated as “Sheng Fangji 圣方济” in Chinese, has even been called “St. Stigmata” (“Sheng Wu-shang” 圣五伤). He was the founder of the Franciscans in the 13th century and was canonized by the Roman Catholic Church in the 1980s as the “Patron Saint of Ecology.”⁷ The Franciscan Order that he founded has always been a famous Catholic monastic order, of which the present Pope Francis is a member.

St. Francis of Assisi is a legendary figure with many vivid stories. Therefore, numerous books have been written about him with similar content. This article is mainly based on Felder’s *The Ideals of St. Francis of Assisi*,⁸ which is a book with history, and to be specific, this article will focus on St. Francis’ ecological theology.

Frankly speaking, in St. Francis’ “ideals,” there were neither “ecological” nor “theological” concepts. As for the former, it is because the environment had not been destroyed by humankind at his time. The subtext of the word “ecology” is that the environment has been destroyed and needs to be protected so that everything can live in a good state again. This is a term that emerged only after the industrial age.

7 Zhang Li-Yan, *The Spiritual World of St. Francis* (Taiwan: Yage Press, 1988), 33.

8 Hilarin Felder, *The Ideals of St. Francis of Assisi* (NY: Benziger Press, 1925).

Strictly speaking, St. Francis of Assisi did not have many “theological” concepts either. This might be because he did not study that much and lived a self-indulgent life until he was 26 years old. Later, he repented and turned toward living a monastic lifestyle; he was fascinated with the idea of godly poverty, chastity, and humility, and founded an order which was named as “the little brothers” or “the humble brothers.” St. Francis of Assisi’s thoughts are mainly about humility, godliness, and peace, and the focus of his thoughts is not on epistemology but on practice and application, emphasizing that action is of greater importance than knowledge. The other ideas of the Franciscans and how this order was able to become a famous monastic order have been attributed to the second president, Bonaventura (also translated as “St. Wende” or “St. Wendu” in Chinese 圣文德).⁹ Bonaventura reconciled the relationship between knowledge and action, godliness and knowledge (theology), and, through his administration, the “Little Brothers” was transformed into the great Franciscans or the Greyfriars, which, along with the Black Friars (Dominican Order),¹⁰ became the two most famous orders of the Middle Ages.

In the last chapter of *The Ideals of St. Francis of Assisi* (Chapter 19),¹¹ which is devoted to the title “Francis and Nature,” the writer Felder says of St. Francis, “In him were

9 He is a famous theologian, and his representative work is *Journey of the Mind to God*.

10 Grey clothes are clothes without dye, representing simplicity and humility. Black clothes are dyed clothing, representing the “adding of some material into something,” meaning learned; black also symbolizes dignity, seriousness and mystery. Now, the learned robe is the extension of the Dominican tradition.

11 Stigmata refers to the five wounds on Jesus’ body when he was crucified on the cross. The legend says that St. Francis was so deeply in love with Jesus before he died that he had the same five wounds as Jesus, thus earning him the title of “St. Stigmata.”

united all the qualities of the thoughtful observer and sensitive friend of nature: the innocent eye of a child, the lively fancy and the heightened sensibility of a poet, and the joyful, loving, godly heart of a saint. Important as the two first qualities are, the third, nevertheless, is the very root of his joy in the things of nature and of his love of nature. His entire relation to nature is essentially religious.”¹² Even though St. Francis and the Chinese philosopher Zhuangzi share a common love for “*Free and Easy Wandering*,” unlike Zhuangzi who merely expressed a humanistic sentiment in his writings, St. Francis expressed a religious relationship, that is, if, according to Schleiermacher, “religious relationship” should be more appropriately described as a “godly feeling,”¹³ such as his reverence for the Creator and his love for created things. Secondly, Zhuangzi’s thought on nature is primarily a philosophical epistemology, as expressed in his *Discussion of the Equality of Things*.¹⁴ On the other hand, St. Francis’ thought is practical, his love for nature is mostly reflected in his life stories, and if we talk about his writings, we could look at the “Canticle of Brother Sun.” Incidentally, St. Francis’ writings are not “discussions,” but rather “canticles” such as the “Canticle of Brother Sun,” “Canticle of Peace,” “Canticle of Virtue,” and “Canticle of Jesus,” etc. A “canticle” is a religious or liturgical song or chant that can be emotion-filled, heartfelt, and a reflection of the inner life. In contrast, Zhuangzi’s thought is opaque and difficult to understand and has been debated throughout the ages. Furthermore, St. Francis’ thought is clear and of great

12 Hilarin Felder, *The ideals of St. Francis of Assisi*, 314.

13 Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Religion and Feeling*, trans. Xie Fuya (Shanghai: CCC Press, 2006), 62.

14 About Zhuangzi’s *Discussion of the Equality of Things*, there is a lot of debate about what “equality” (qi), “things” (wu), and “theory” (lun) mean. See Yang Keqin, *Zhuangzi and James* (Shanghai: East China Normal University Press, 2009), 307-312.

influence. It has become a benchmark for practicing godly poverty, being frugal, cherishing things, and emphasizing environmental protection, which is meaningful to modern ecological and environmental theology — no wonder that in 1980, the Roman Catholic Church canonized him as the “Patron Saint of Ecology.”

St. Francis loves nature so much and treats all things as brothers and sisters because he holds this belief: “From the Creator to the created and from the created to the Creator”; this is a two-way pattern, a pattern about the origin and flow of all things, and a pattern of revelation, that is, nature is the “second Bible,” which reveals what God is like and what we can know about God through nature. Indeed, this is a two-way pattern, which Bonaventure discusses profoundly in his book *The Journey of the Mind to God*, giving a significant theological place to getting to know God through nature.

First, the belief that God created all things is a fundamental doctrine and the most essential reason for cherishing all things and caring for ecology. When Friedrich Schleiermacher speaks of “our godly self-consciousness” and discusses the relationship between the world and God expressed therein,¹⁵ he says that the world can exist only because it is dependent on God, and the original expression of this relationship in the Church’s doctrines can be divided into two propositions: (1) God created the world; and (2) God protects this world. This doctrine is the basis for a godly religious life. The Chinese also often say that “things have a master”, and the more profound idea of expressions like this is to point to the fact that the final master of all things is God. The fact that God maintains the world; or favors the world indicates a relationship in which all created things coexist in the world and need to care for one another. The world belongs to God, and at the same time, it is also God’s

15 Schleiermacher, *op. cit.*, 396

gift to humankind. If humankind considers all things to belong to others, he will plunder and possess them; but if he considers them to be his own, he will protect and cherish them. Further, if the “things” belong to the “emperor”, he will respect and cherish them and protect them even more carefully. St. Francis believes that all things are God’s and that we should cherish and protect them wholeheartedly, so he loves nature and protects all living things.

St. Francis believes that nature was God’s “true handwriting” — God’s divine masterpiece; therefore, man could know God through nature. Christian theology before St. Francis was influenced mainly by Platonic philosophy, especially by Augustine’s “theory of mind”, which is an epistemology that mainly emphasizes that we should know God through our mind. After the 12th century, although Aristotle’s ideas were prevalent at that time, the Church believed that Aristotle’s ideas had been altered and distorted by the Arabs. It was only after the correction of the Dominican monks that the Church gradually accepted Aristotle’s ideas and later came to have theological masters like Thomas Aquinas.¹⁶ Obviously, Aquinas accepted the idea of natural revelation, and he also constructed the theological model of “natural revelation + revelation by grace”. St. Francis himself had no systematic theological education, he had no theological thoughts, his knowledge of the Bible was limited, and his method of interpreting the Bible was even simpler, but he received numerous revelations from nature, and he had an “intuition” about “nature” and was able to perceive God’s revelation through it. Theology is first, “intuition” or “revelation” and second, thinking and reflection. Spiritual theology is more of an “intuitive” theology, while systematic theology is more of a “thoughtful”

16 See chapter 17, “Franciscan Science” of Hilarin Felder, *The ideals of St. Francis of Assisi* (New York, Benziger, 1925), 286-305.

theology. St. Francis received God's revelation "intuitively" from nature. This is vividly evident in the *Canticle of Brother Sun*.

Second, St. Francis believes in leading us human beings to praise the Creator and to go through this journey of faith — "from the created things to Creator."

The life of St. Francis is full of legendary stories, such as preaching to the birds, the fish, the wolves, and so on, as if he were a preacher of all things, a teamster of animals, and an idyllic poet. These moving stories show that his faith is an experience, experiencing "from the created things to Creator." This journey of the heart is to lead all things to praise God, who is the Creator. St. Francis is kind to all things like a brother is; as expressed in the *Canticle of Brother Sun*, he believes that humans and all things constitute a community of life and that he wants to practice a godly life in all things.

The original text of the *Canticle of Brother Sun* is very exquisite in Italian, and there are many later versions. I find the Chinese version of *Canticle of Brother Sun* in the book *The Ideals of St. Francis of Assisi* by Felder and translated by Gan Shenyang 甘慎言 very beautiful,¹⁷ and here is an excerpt:

Most high, omnipotent, good Lord,
 Praise, glory and honor and benediction all, are Thine.
 To Thee alone do they belong, Most High,
 And there is no man fit to mention Thee.
 Praise be to Thee, My Lord, with all Thy creatures,
 Especially to my worshipful Brother Sun,
 The which lights up the day, and through him dost Thou
 brightness give;
 And beautiful is he and radiant with splendor great;
 Of Thee, Most Hight, signification gives.

17 Hilarin Felder, *The Ideals of St. Francis of Assisi*, trans. Gan Shenyang (Macao: St. Francis' Folly, 1952), 346-349.

Praised be my Lord, for Sister Moon and for the Stars,
 In heaven Thou has formed them clear and precious and fair.
 Praised be my Lord for Brother Wind
 And for the air and clouds and fair and every kind of weather,
 By the which Thou givest to Thy creatures nourishment.
 Praised be my Lord for Sister Water,
 The which is greatly helpful and humble and precious and
 pure.
 Praised be my Lord for Brother Fire,
 By the which Thou lightest up the dark.
 And fair is he and gay and mighty and strong.
 Praised be my Lord for our Sister, Mother Earth,
 The which sustains and keeps us
 And brings forth diverse fruits with grass and flowers bright.
 Praised be my Lord for those who for Thy love forgive
 And weakness bear and tribulation.
 Blessed those who shall in peace endure,
 For by Thee, Most High, shall they be crowned.
 Praised be my Lord for our Sister, the bodily Death,
 From the which no living man can flee.
 Woe to them who die in mortal sin;
 Blessed those who shall find themselves in Thy most holy
 will,
 For the second death shall do them no ill.
 Praise ye and bless ye my Lord, and give him thanks,
 And be subject unto Him with great humility.
 Amen.¹⁸

The *Canticle of Brother Sun* was composed by St. Francis during his illness, in which he was not merely concerned with his suffering but saw the loving heart of God, the vast breadth of all things in the universe, that man is a “little self” in the vast universe, no more than a member of the “brothers and sisters” among all things. It is God who cares for all things and feeds us human beings.

18 Felder, op. cit., 427-428.

St. Francis expresses three major thoughts in his *Canticle of Brother Sun*: (1) praise the greatness of God; (2) the beauty and wonderfulness of all things connected as brothers and sisters; and (3) the need for us humans to be humble. This was the original idea of the *Canticle of Brother Sun*. Today, many people can read “eco-theology” and “eco-ethics” from the *Canticle of Brother Sun*, which are ideas that have been “read into” it by later generations, and these interpretations have enriched the ideological scope of the *Canticle of Brother Sun*.

Third, St. Francis believed in the humility of humans. Humility, lowliness, and poverty were the hallmarks of St. Francis’s life and his main thoughts. Like a poet, after looking up at the starry sky, St. Francis exclaimed, “what are human beings that you are mindful of them” (Psalms 8:4); he even advocated that a human is very small in [the grand scheme of] nature and that humans must live in harmony with nature and coexist equally with all things so that humankind can continue to exist in perpetuity. In addition, he believed that human beings have no “ownership” of all things in the world but only the “right to use” them. The “ownership” belongs to God, the Creator; therefore, humans should not usurp all things and plunder them. When a human has a strong desire to possess, he or she is not humble anymore and this destroys the relationship with all things and the ecological environment. And when a human humbly regards the sun as his brother and the moon as his sister, the world becomes one nice inclusive family, which is also the current idea of ecology.

St. Francis emphasized that humility must also be practiced in human relationships. At that time, when a conflict arose between a bishop and a mayor, and even when the two sides were about to enter into a big fight, St. Francis went to them to reconcile them, exhorting them to humble themselves and to live in peace with one another, for which

he wrote the famous *Canticle of Peace*. The *Canticle of Peace* was based on the *Canticle of Brother Sun* with the addition of this paragraph,

Praised be my Lord for those who for Thy love forgive
And weakness bear and tribulation.
Blessed are those who shall in peace endure,
For by Thee, Most High, shall they be crowned.

After the intercession of St. Francis, the bishop and the mayor finally humbled themselves, ceased their confrontation, confessed their faults, and made peace with one another, thus achieving peace in that city and putting into practice Jesus' teaching of "loving each other." It became a beautiful story.

St. Francis exalted God and praised Him in all things. He was good at heart, wise in word, and humble in manner. His life manifested an old saying in China — "when one has no lust, he or she will have a higher standard of morality." St. Francis' life was convincing and endearing, just as the book of James says, "But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace" (James 3:17-18). Like the apostle James, St. Francis opposed oppression, exploitation, hypocrisy, and faith alone without deeds. He attached great importance to the deeds of faith and the actions of love, and he "exegeted" the book of James through his life and deeds.

In general, in his system of thought, St. Francis claims creationism in theology, advocates "the unity of God and man" in philosophy, and emphasizes worship, humility, godliness, and poverty (that is, non-possession) in monasticism. His vision of the world as a vast, interactive, and symbiotic world is a valuable inspiration for ecological theology.

3. The Ecological Theology of Bishop K. H. Ting

Bishop K. H. Ting's thought is rich in ecological theology. As early as January 1990, at the "Global Consultation on Development and the Environment" in Moscow, Bishop Ting delivered a speech on "Caring for God's Creation." He made his point clear from the beginning by saying: "We Christians affirm the universe and all it contains as God's creation. This affirmation means that the created world is good and holy. The world is not under the occupation of any evildoer. The work of creation is ongoing; in the end, it will overcome primitive chaos and the sinful harm humankind has done to the creation and bring both natural and human history to a condition where love, justice and reason are universal."¹⁹ In this paper, we could divide Bishop Ting's speech into the following aspects:

First, the world was created by God and was originally good. This is the knowledge of the origin of the world, which is the conviction of creationism, and it is the foundation of environmental protection. Belief in creationism is also the foundation of Christian theology as proclaimed in the *Apostles' Creed*.

Bishop Ting's theology is first grounded in creationism, which extends to Christology, and then enriches creationism with Christology. In his article *The Cosmic Christ*, he says: "(1) the universal extent of Christ's domain, concern and care, and (2) the kind of love which we get a taste of in Jesus Christ... being the first and supreme attribute of God and basic to the structure and dynamic of the universe, in the light of which we get an insight as to how things go in the world."²⁰

19 K. H. Ting, *Love Never Ends*, ed. Janice Wickeri. (Nanjing: Yilin Press, 2000), 399.

20 *Ibid.*, 411.

Secondly, both primitive chaos and destruction in development are not good. The “Garden of Eden” has been lost, and there is no way for humankind to return to it. If human beings do not develop, it means that they will be stuck in a primitive state and will always be unenlightened, while excessive exploitation and destruction of nature in the development process are damaging to the ecology, which is also bad. Nowadays, the world’s forests have been excessively denuded, and the carbon emissions are excessive, causing the “greenhouse” effect which leads to the rise of global temperatures. These are the unavoidable consequences of ecological destruction. Bishop Ting said, “Ignoring the ecological balance is destruction of God’s creation; it leads imperceptibly to the deaths of countless innocent people. The natural world is suffering and cries out to us. I believe that people’s concern with the ecology today is God’s way of showing his care for and response to this concern.”²¹ Bishop Ting specifically called for developed countries to take more responsibility for environmental protection to take care of less developed countries. From this perspective, it seems that today’s “Paris Climate Agreement” also contains a share of Bishop Ting’s voice and wisdom.

Thirdly, the world is changing, and more precisely, it will become a better place if it operates according to the Christian “principle of love.” Despite all the evil in the world, the destruction of nature, and all the disasters, the hope of the world in the love of Christ will make the world a better place. In his article *Creation and Incarnation*, Bishop Ting says, “God is the Lord of Creation and his work of creation continues today. The goal of this creation is a world of harmony that will embrace both the present world and the world to come...With this goal in mind, and after a long period of revelation, discipline, education and inspiration,

21 Ibid., 401.

God nurtured a small group among all humanity – that rebellious, barbaric, clamorous and disobedient humanity who showed no consideration for the will of the Father...”²²

This is precisely one of the purposes of Christ’s Incarnation, and Mary is such a person who offers herself, “Yes. Mary is first of all a representative of the best in humankind. She stands in our midst and with her love, her dedication, her cooperation, brings our lord Jesus Christ among us.”²³

Bishop K. H. Ting believes that Christ’s salvation continues God’s creation, which in turn has remedied the drawbacks in the process of creation. As long as we believe that God is sovereign over the world, the world will move toward a better condition. History is like the Yellow River, the mother river of our Chinese people, which has many bends and sometimes even floods, but the Yellow River must be good for the Chinese land. If we can pay attention to environmental protection and strengthen greening and sand fixing from the source, the Yellow River will become better and better.

Bishop Ting’s speech represents the aspirations of the Chinese people, and more importantly, the hearts of Christians in general. In our Chinese culture, there are ideas such as “the unity of God and man” and “ecological continuity.” We Christians believe, even more, that God created the world, and that we must cherish the earth and protect it well. As Bishop Ting says, “Let us join together in hoping and praying for the coming of a world of love, harmony and beauty.”²⁴

22 Ibid., 288.

23 Ibid., 290.

24 Ibid., 401.

Conclusion

Contemporary ecology has developed into a “major discipline”, as Bill Gates insightfully discusses in his book *How to Avoid a Climate Disaster*.²⁵ Although he focuses more on the economic aspects, the study of ecology today includes ecological economics, ecological ethics, ecology and technology, ecology and policy, ecological and environmental practices, and so on. Ecological theology is both a classical discipline and a fundamental one, focusing on religious sentiments, life practices and concerns for the future of humanity. Today, people may be more concerned about the ecological economy, which has great prospects for development. President Xi Jinping’s famous phrase “green mountains and clear water are equal to mountains of gold and silver” is a perfect illustration of the relationship between ecology and development, contributing the wisdom of the Chinese model to the cause of environmental protection. This has led to the rapid development of China’s ecological and environmental protection projects, which have already yielded remarkable results!

This article was written at the time of the floods in Henan Province and the pandemic outbreak in Nanjing. The year of “combined floods and pandemic” is a significant reminder of the importance of climate disasters and health issues. COVID-19 and climate disasters are challenges that humanity will be facing for a long time to come. These challenges will demonstrate once again that human beings are great and will triumph over all the changes, but also that human beings are feeble and fragile. Therefore, human society and nature must become one inclusive family, as described by St. Francis of Assisi, and humans need to take

25 Bill Gates, *How to Avoid a Climate Disaster: The Solutions We Have and the Breakthroughs We Need* (New York: Knopf, 2021).

action to protect God's creation so that "green mountains and clear water, in praise of God's creation" can become a beautiful reality!

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Further Contextualization of Chinese Christianity from an Ecological Perspective

生态视角下的基督教中国化

LIN MANHONG AND ZHOU XUEBIN 林曼红、周学斌

Introduction

Scholars have pointed out that many of the causes of the current ecological crisis are largely rooted in anthropocentrism, the human alienation from science and technology, consumption alienation, the capitalist system, and religions.¹ What lies behind these causes is the distorted relationship between human beings and nature, the over-exploitation of natural resources in the course of the development of human society, and the excesses emanating from human greed and selfishness. To properly manage the human-nature relationship and to restrain uncontrolled selfish human desires is a key to environmental protection and human development, which can also be understood as ecological sustainability. This paper's main aim is to propose a relevant ecological view from a Chinese Christian perspective by drawing on resources from the biblical creation story, the ecological wisdom of ancient Chinese philosophers, and the current Chinese theory on the construction of an "ecological civilization" to contribute to the global Christian discourse on ecological sustainability. Constructing such a theory and encouraging Chinese

1 Wang Xiaobin, Responsibilities of religions in Ecological Crisis [Shengtai weiji zhong de zongjiao zeren] in *Religious Studies*, [Zongjiao Yanjiu] no. 3 (2015): 279.

Christians to assume their ecological responsibilities can also be regarded as an effort in fostering the further contextualization of Chinese Christianity from an ecological perspective.²

I. A Chinese Christian's Integral Ecological View

From the movement towards the Reconstruction of Theological Thinking launched by Bishop K.H. Ting in 1998 till current efforts in the further contextualization of Christianity in China, Chinese Christian churches have been engaged in the process of renewing theological thinking so that the “basic [Christian] faith will be expressed in terms that are more accessible and more reasonable” to Chinese Christians.³ Theological reflections on ecology, rather than undermining the faith tradition of Chinese Christians, will in fact strengthen their faith in God and have it transformed. This is accomplished by integrating the ecological wisdom in Chinese culture and the theory of the national ecological civilization into a Christian view of God's relationship with all of God's creation.

2 The term “further contextualization of Chinese Christianity” in Chinese: 基督教中国化 (*jidujiao zhongguohua*) refers to the process of making the Chinese Christian Church Chinese in such areas as doctrine, church governance and ministry. Although alternative translations such as “Sinicization of Chinese Christianity” are often seen in publications, the official translation adopted by the CCC is the “further contextualization of Chinese Christianity.”

3 K. H. Ting, “Theology Adapting to a Changing Culture,” in *God Is Love: Collected Writings of Bishop K .H.Ting* (CO: Cook Communications, 2004), 451-452.

1. Roots in the Ecological Interpretation of the Bible

As mentioned earlier, religion is deemed as one of the root causes of the ecological crisis. Among religions, Christianity has been additionally accused of providing theoretical support for anthropocentrism particularly through its creation story. Some Christian eco-scholars have made self-reflections on this accusation. For instance, Lynn White, an American historian, states that the Christian theology and culture of the Middle Ages where God was thought to be external to the creation process, makes available an unholy material space thereby justifying the utilitarian view of nature as a resource pool.⁴ Jürgen Moltmann also points out that the root of ecological crisis lies in the “modern view of God.” According to Moltmann, since the Renaissance, due to the lopsided emphasis on divine omniscience and omnipotence, God has withdrawn to the transcendental realm after having created the heavens and the earth and alienated himself from creation. Consequently, human beings, bearing the image of God, have mistakenly claimed themselves to be God-like masters of nature. The ever-increasing desire and power of humans to distance themselves from nature, have even caused them to be in opposition to nature.⁵

4 Michael S. Northcott, “Ecology and Christian Ethics” in Robin Gill, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 221.

5 Jürgen Moltmann, *Sushi zhong de shangdi* [Gott im Projekt der modernen Welt], trans. Zeng Nian Yue (Taiwan: Ya Ge Publishing, 1999), 12; Li Lei, “Shengtai wei ji de zongjiao gen yuan--Moerteman shengtai si xiang lunshu” [The Religious Roots of Ecological Crisis--Jürgen Moltmann’s Ecological Thoughts], *Ziran bianzheng fa yanjiu* [Studies in Dialectics of Nature], (September 2004): 17.

Does the creation story indeed support anthropocentrism or has it simply been misinterpreted? How do we leave the “modern” view of God and establish a “proper” view of God that is conducive to eco-sustainability? To answer these questions, we must revisit the biblical creation story for a brief investigation of the God-human-nature relationship.

First, according to the order of creation in Genesis, nature was created before human beings, and therefore nature and all creatures could not have originated from human will, nor can human beings be the center of the world. Meanwhile, all created things of every kind are good in the eyes of God (Genesis 1: 11-25). Thus, nature derives its intrinsic value from the fact that it demonstrates the beauty and goodness recognized by God the Creator. It is also endowed with the inherent right to survive and to thrive. Moreover, rather than being at odds with one another, all creatures are embraced in the inclusive love of the creator, which is also a kind of beauty and goodness rendered not by human will but by God the creator.

Second, God cares for all creatures in a covenantal relationship. After the flood, God makes a covenant not only with Noah’s family, but also with all the living creatures that come out of the ark (Genesis 9: 9-11). Although God graciously gives human beings all kinds of living things as food, it does not mean that human beings have the right to treat animals abusively. Rather, human beings are supposed to “know the needs of their animals” as the righteous would (Proverbs 12:10). Human beings should “govern” the whole earth like servants, with awe in their hearts towards God’s creation, for God is the common master of humankind and nature.

In addition, the teaching of sabbath in the Bible also reveals God’s love for all creatures. The sabbath is proposed by Moltmann as a way out of the ecological crisis. Moltmann believes that the sabbath has three mutually related layers

of implications. God's sabbath is God's rest from his work and God is dwelling in all things and all things in God; God's sabbath also makes all things in heaven and on earth rest; the sabbath of all things allows all creatures to live in the way that they are meant to, befitting their own kinds and following their own needs without being threatened and assimilated by nothingness.⁶ As a result of the sabbath, the land is preserved, animals and plants are cared for, human strength is renewed and the entire ecosystem develops in a harmonious manner.

Thus, the ecological stance represented in the biblical creation story is far from being anthropocentric. God the creator, the sole master is truly, fully and impartially present with all creatures including humankind. There is a continuous, purposeful, and ultimate salvific relationship between God and the whole creation implied in *sabbath*. The ecological view for Chinese Christians should correspond to such ecological revelation in the Bible.

2. Drawing on Chinese Traditional Ecological Wisdom

The formulation of an ecological view by Chinese Christians needs to draw on the ecological ethics of excellent traditional Chinese culture. Two aspects of ecological thought in Chinese traditional culture can be found in Confucian and Taoist classics:

Firstly, Chinese traditional culture emphasizes the harmonious coexistence between human beings and nature, in compliance with the laws of nature. For instance, Confucian ideas of "knowing the heavenly will" (知天命 *zhi tianming*) and "fearing the heavenly will" (畏天命 *wei*

6 Li Lei, "Shengtai weiwei de zongjiao genyuan-Moerteman shengtai sixiang lunshu," 18.

tianming) not only pertain to human ethics but also reveal the ethics of heaven, earth and nature. The “heavenly will” proposed by Confucius refers to the laws of nature, including the laws of heaven, earth and humankind. It is fundamentally an objective and irresistible natural law. Therefore, “knowing the heavenly will” means the same thing as “abiding by natural law.” A wise person’s behavior is, according to Confucius, aligned with the time of day as well as the movement of the sun and the moon. A wise person does not rely on divination to tell fortune from misfortune but simply follows the laws of heaven and earth.⁷ Knowing, respecting the heavenly will and not violating the laws of nature constitute the theoretical cornerstone of Confucian ecological ethics.

Additionally, “knowing the heavenly will” and “fearing the heavenly will” are applied to distinguish the virtuous person (君子 *junzi*) from the small person (小人 *xiaoren*) as “the superior person is quiet and calm, waiting for the appointments of Heaven, while the small person walks in dangerous paths, looking for lucky occurrences [sic].”⁸ Virtuous people, who are in awe of heaven, behave cautiously in order to stay in harmony with other human

7 Tomohisa Ikeda, Annotations on the “Yao Passage of the Mawangdui Han Silk Manuscripts of the Book of Changes Mawangdui Hanmu boshu Zhou Yi zhi yaopian shiwen xia], tran. Niu Jianke, *Zhouyi yanjiu* [Studies of Zhouyi], no. 2 (1997):11.

8 Confucius, “Ju Yi,” in *Zhong Yong* 14 [The Doctrine of Mean 14], trans. James Legge, <https://www.sacred-texts.com/cfu/conf3.htm>. As regards the translations of “君子 *junzi*” and “小人 *xiaoren*,” there are quite a few translations in English publications such as “superior man,” “gentleman” and “noble man” for “*junzi*” which denote the moral character of a person who follows the heavenly will; “inferior person” and “petty person” for “*xiaoren*” which refers to someone who behaves against the heavenly will. In this paper, “*junzi*” is translated as “virtuous people” and “*xiaoren*” as “small people” except for their equivalents in direct citations.

beings and nature. In contrast, small people have no fear of heaven. As a result, small people, desperate to achieve their selfish ambitions, disregard the laws of nature and wantonly harm the relationship between human beings and nature. Therefore, it is justifiable to suggest that most crises in today's world, including the ecological crisis, have something to do with the absence of fear for the heavenly will or the heavenly decrees.

Hsün-tzu (荀子 ca.298 – ca. 238 BC), another representative figure of Confucianism, also stressed that people should respect the laws of nature. He put forward the ecological thesis that “the natural law is constant” (天行有常 *tianxing youchang*). He wrote, “Natural law is eternally constant. It does not survive for the sake of Yao (尧), nor does it cease to be because of Jie (桀). Fortune will come about when the natural laws are observed in governing nature, otherwise misfortune will fall upon the land.”⁹ That is, nature operates according to certain laws, and does not depend on human will. (It) Things will be auspicious and smooth if one adapts to the laws of nature with the right governing measures; if nature is treated with the wrong measures, severe disasters will follow.

Much like Confucianism, Taoism declares that people should conform to nature. Lao Tzu claimed that “the knowledge of constancy is enlightenment.” (知常曰明 *zhichang yueming*.) He said, “All things work together. I have watched them reverting and have seen how they flourish and return to their roots. This is stillness, a retreat to one's roots, or even better, a return to the heavenly will, which is to constancy. The knowledge of constancy is enlightenment

9 Hsün-tzu, “Tian Lun” [On Heaven], available at <https://ctext.org/xunzi/tian-lun>. Yao is one of the five worthy tribal leaders of the early ancient times. Jie is said to be a cruel and corrupt king of Xia Dynasty (ca.2070-ca.1600 B.C.).

and not knowing it is blindness that works evil.”¹⁰ For Lao Tzu, “knowing the constancy” (知常 zhichang), that is, knowing the laws of nature, generates wisdom whereas ignorance of the natural law leads to confusion and disaster.

At the same time, Taoism highlights the mutual symbiosis between humankind and nature. In Lao Tzu’s words, “The Tao is great, and so are the heaven, the earth, and the human. Within the realm, these four are great; the human but stands for one of them. The human conforms to the earth, the earth to the heaven, the heaven to the Tao, and the Tao to its own nature.”¹¹ Lao Tzu believed that the Tao is the noumenon of all things and is the reality that cannot be sensed. It follows its own nature. Nature is not only a moral law but also a universal law that governs heaven, earth and humankind. Therefore, the Tao, the heaven, the earth and the human are all equally noble and belong to the realm of the cosmos, which drastically differs from what anthropocentrism implies.

Secondly, in Chinese classical culture, human beings are not thought to be passively related to nature but using it in a restrained manner out of human love for nature. The Confucian saying that “The wise find pleasure in water; the virtuous find pleasure in hills” (知者乐水，仁者乐山 zhizhe leshui, renzhe leshan) reflects this ecological sentiment and is employed as one of the Confucian moral codes to cultivate the character of a virtuous person. Moreover, Confucius’ view of ecological conservation is explicitly demonstrated in sayings such as: “The Master angled, but did not use a net. He shot, but not at birds perching [sic]” (钓而不纲，弋不射宿 diao er bugang, yi bu shesu) and “He who aims to be a man of complete virtue in his food does not seek to gratify

10 Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching* 16, trans. R. B. Blakney (NY: New American Library, 2007), 89.

11 Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching* 25, 89.

his appetite, nor in his dwelling place does he seek the appliances of ease [sic]" (君子食无求饱，居无求安 junzishi wuqiubao, juwu qiu'an). In Confucius' view, it is against benevolence (仁 ren) to fish with a net and to shoot birds in a nest as these will lead to the depletion of natural resources, thereby endangering the survival of those who make a living by fishing and hunting. Similarly, if people eat too much and live too comfortably, they will inevitably overconsume land, space and building materials.¹² To put the above sayings in modern words, human behavior like these violates the sustainable utilization of ecological resources.

Likewise, Mencius's idea of benevolence for people and love for things (仁民爱物 renmin aiwu) also calls for human charity towards nature. Mencius argues that the concrete performance of benevolent people lies in being able to "Treat with the reverence due to age the elders in your own family, so that the elders in the families of others shall be similarly treated; treat with the kindness due to youth the young in your own family, so that the young in the families of others shall be similarly treated" (老吾老，以及人之老；幼吾幼，以及人之幼，laowulao, yiji ren zhilao, youwuyou, yiji renzhiyou).¹³ In the same way, loving things is construed as giving grace to all things in the world, as a result of which the view of sustainable utilization of resources is proposed in Mencius' writing. On one occasion, Mencius says to King Hui, "If the seasons of husbandry be not interfered with, the grain will be more than can be eaten. If close nets are not allowed to enter the pools and ponds, the fishes and turtles will be more than can be consumed. If the axes and bills enter the

12 The Confucian quotations in this paragraph are taken from *Confucius Analects*: 6-21, 7-26, 1-14, trans. James Legge, available at <https://ctext.org/analects>.

13 James Legge trans., *Liang Hui Wang Shang* [King Hui of Liang 1A.3], <https://ctext.org/mengzi/liang-hui-wang-i>.

hills and forests only at the proper time, the wood will be more than can be used.”¹⁴ That is to say, if we farm according to the farming season, fish properly and cut trees according to the rules, there will be an inexhaustible supply of grain, aquatic products and timber.

Taoism also bears such ecological wisdom of conservation. Lao Tzu says, “The mean man pays the highest price; the hoarder takes the greatest loss; a man content is never ashamed, and self-restrained, is not in danger: he will live forever [sic].”¹⁵ 甚爱必大费，多藏必厚亡，故知足不辱，知止不殆，可以长久 (shenai bi dafei, duocang bi houwang, gu zhizu buru, zhizhi bu dai, keyi chang jiu). Lao Tzu believes that only when a person knows how to be content with what is given can he or she not be humiliated; when a person knows enough is enough, he or she will not encounter danger, so that long-term peace and sustainable resources will be maintained.

To conclude, like the ecological wisdom of the Bible, Chinese traditional culture represented by Confucianism and Taoism emphasizes the mutual symbiosis between humankind and nature under the rule of the common heavenly will or natural law. Moreover, Chinese traditional culture expresses the deep love of human beings for nature and the ardent pursuit of harmony with all things in nature, which is particularly evident in Chinese traditional art such as classical brush painting and gardening. The common ecological themes in the Bible and Chinese culture provide Chinese Christians’ ecological engagement with a rationale and a vehicle for articulation.

14 James Legge trans., *Liang Hui Wang Shang* [King Hui of Liang 1A.7].

15 Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching* 44, trans. R. B. Blakney (NY: New American Library, 2007), 114.

3. The Theory of the National Ecological Initiative of China

The ongoing ecological initiative of the Chinese government, especially its theory, enriches Chinese Christians' understanding of ecological protection. The theory of the national ecological initiative is composed of a scientific view of nature, green development, ecological livelihood, ecological system, ecological legal system, and the ecological common interest of the world.¹⁶

The scientific view of nature promotes harmonious coexistence between human beings and nature. Human beings are required to respect and safeguard nature as they are interconnected members of the common life community, an ecosystem which also includes mountains, rivers, forests, fields, lakes and grasslands. The scientific view of nature is an extended connotation of the common destiny of humankind as well as a further interpretation of the law of natural development from the perspective of ecological civilization.

The view of green development is derived from the "Two-Mountain Thesis" of President Xi Jinping, who metaphorically compares the relationship between development and ecological protection to that between "gold mountain, silver mountain" (金山银山 *jinshan yinshan*) and "green waters, green mountains" (绿水青山 *lushui qinshan*).¹⁷ Scholars further elaborate on the three layers of implications of the thesis. First, environmental

16 Li Xin and Cao Hongjun, "Xi Jinping shengtai wenming sixiang de hexin goucheng ji qishi dai tezhen" [The Core Structure of the Ecological Thoughts of Xi Jinping and Its Character], in *Hongguan jingji yanjiu* [Macroeconomics], no.6 (2019): 5-15.

17 President Xi Jinping first put forward the "Two-Mountain" thesis in 2005 when he was then Secretary of the Zhejiang Provincial Committee of the Communist Party of China.

protection should be balanced with economic development, and one must not lose sight of the other. Second, when contradictions occur between socio-economic development and ecological protection, decisive choices must be made in favor of the environment. Third, environmental protection contributes to enhancing human livelihood. A sound ecological environment constitutes part of the welfare of the people. Not only is it required to meet the people's social and economic needs, but also to ensure the people's opportunities and rights to thrive.

To achieve the national ecological vision, the rule of law must be implemented. This view of the ecological rule of law is the concrete embodiment of the principle of governing the country by law in the construction of ecological civilization. Meanwhile, the ecological initiative in China calls for global collaboration and reciprocal participation in addressing regional and global issues such as climate change, deforestation and environmental justice for the sustainable development of the world.¹⁸

Overall, the current ecological initiative in China inherits the wisdom of ancient Chinese ecological ethics and responds to the requirements of the new era. The

18 This section on the theory of the national construction of ecological civilization is based on the following materials: Lian Fu, Zhao Jianbin and Mao Lixia, "Xi Jinping shengtai wenming sixiang de hexin neihan, jianshe zhixiang he shixian lujin" [the Core Implications, Visions and Paths of the Ecological Civilization Thoughts of Xi Jinping], in *Xibei nongling keji daxue xuebao* [Journal of Northwest Agricultural & Forestry University (Social Science Edition)], (January 2021):1-9; Wu Huaiyou and Chen Xinkang, "Xi Jinping shengtai wenming sixiang de hexin yaoyi" [The Core Meaning of the Ecological Civilization Thoughts of Xi Jinping], *Zhongguo shehui kexue bao* [Chinese Social Sciences] (June 24, 2021, Special Edition); Li Xin and Cao Hongjun, "Xi Jinping shengtai wenming sixiang de hexin goucheng jiqi shidai tezhen" [The Core Structure of the Ecological Thoughts of Xi Jinping and Its Character].

harmonious coexistence between human beings and nature rejects the anthropocentrism and the overcorrection of naturalism in theory. It acknowledges the need for wholesome development of human beings and brilliantly represents the dialectical relationship between socio-economic development and environmental protection. Obviously, the national ecological initiative provides Chinese Christians with opportunities for further engaging in environmental protection and fostering the process of the further contextualization of Chinese Christianity.

II. Upgrading the Ecological Engagement of the Chinese Christian Churches

The ecological wisdom in the Bible, the ecological thoughts in classical Chinese culture and the ecological initiative in today's China all contribute to the Church's development of ecological theology and practice in the process of further contextualization of Chinese Christianity.

The Chinese Protestant Churches have been exploring approaches toward integrating biblical and cultural resources into church ecological teachings. For instance, in 2019, the CCC&TSPM set "Cherishing God's Creation and Building a Better Life Together" as the theme of sermon exchanges for the preaching team in promoting the Reconstruction of Chinese Theological Thinking. The preachers delved into the scripture for ecological wisdom and helped believers understand that the harmonious coexistence with nature was as important as personal salvation. More than that, the preachers were encouraged to explicate on the ecological teachings of the Bible in a way that Chinese audiences would find easier to accept by employing materials such as Chinese sayings, philosophical quotes and folk stories.

Additionally, churches, seminaries and regional CCs&TSPMs have regularly launched environmental programs and actively participated in and contributed to the national and regional ecological initiatives. For instance, some churches have highlighted special days like Tree-planting Day, International Water Day and Earth Hour on the church calendar for prayer meetings and special worship services to enhance ecological awareness among congregations. A number of urban churches have regularly hosted charity sales, flea markets and church donations for congregants to recycle supplies such as clothes, books and printers. Christian churches regard these programs as both environmental projects and church discipleship programs, helping church people lead a simple and yet caring life.

Chinese Protestant Churches also reach out to social programs of ecological protection. Chinese Christians are often seen reaching out to street cleaners especially on hot summer days, offering them beverages and towels to pay their respect to those who work hard in harsh conditions to ensure agreeable surroundings for all. Meanwhile, Chinese Christians participate in inter-faith projects for environmental protection. In July 2019, Christians and Taoists in Yunnan Province launched the “Safeguarding Lake Dian (滇池 Dian Chi)” program. They walked side by side along the lake to pick up trash left on the lake bank, inspiring citizens to jointly protect the environment.¹⁹

In the future, Chinese churches should go further to incorporate ecological protection into international exchanges. They need to share more with overseas church organizations and friends the theories and practices of

19 Daojiaozhiyin[the Voice of Taosim] (1 July, 2019), “*Yunnan sheng Daoxie xietong sheng Jidujiao liang hui kaizhan zhiyuan xunhe huo dong*” [Joint Voluntary Lake Patrol by Taoists and Christians in Yunnan Province], <https://www.daoisms.org/article/sort028/info-39779.html>.

China's ecological civilization initiatives and the churches' involvement. At the same time, Chinese churches should continue to learn from the experiences of overseas partners through ecumenical dialogues and global projects of such organizations as the World Council of Churches in areas like climate change, water conservation, and biodiversity. Moreover, Chinese churches should also become more conscious of eco-injustice and eco-imperialism which Bishop K. H. Ting had referred to as an "unjust state of affairs" when rich countries develop and safeguard their own economic interests at the expense of the developing countries' natural resources and environment.²⁰

III. Conclusion

The formulation and development of the ecological view is of great significance for the Chinese Christian churches to engage in for the further contextualization of Christianity in China. Ecologically speaking, it is a process that involves renewing the Church's theological reflections on ecology by synthesizing the ecological wisdom in the Bible, the gems in Chinese traditional culture and the theory of the national ecological civilization while preserving the Christian uniqueness. This integral view of ecology advocates the reasonable and sustainable use of natural resources as it promotes the interdependence and interconnection between all creatures of God including heaven, earth and humankind, which follow the universal will of the heaven.

As Chinese Christians become more aware of their ecological calling to be the caretakers of the earth, they are getting increasingly involved in the national and regional ecological initiatives as well as ecumenical dialogues and

20 K.H.Ting, "Caring for God's Creation," in *God Is Love: Collected Writings of Bishop K. H. Ting* (CO: Cook Communications, 2004), 341.

collaborations on environmental issues with a view to making contributions to the global Christian discourse on ecological sustainability through their distinctive theological reflections and dynamic church ministries.

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CREATION IS FOR REST: A VIEW OF MOLTSMANN'S GOD IN CREATION

创造是为了安息——从《创造中的上帝》管窥
“安息”的现实意义

WANG ZUOMOU 王坐谋

Abstract. “Rest” and “Sabbath” are high-frequency words in the Bible holding the Sabbath in high regard and calling it the Holy Day. Rest on the Sabbath is consolidated in the form of Law. However, Jürgen Moltmann believed that traditional theology did not pay enough attention to Rest and the Sabbath. Since the Renaissance and the Reformation, a regard for anthropocentric theology and philosophical approaches have rationalized humans’ unbridled domination and exploitation of nature. Moltmann perceived an insufficiency of critical reflection on the doctrine of Creation, which resulted in a series of natural disasters and social problems emerging from the West’s Industrial Revolution. Moltmann’s *God in Creation* dealt with the issues related to the Sabbath and the concept of Rest; in doing so, he developed an independent system of striking a correlation between the two to shed some light on social life in practice.

Key Words. creation; sabbath; rest; Moltmann

Introduction

“Rest” (שָׁבַת *šābat*), mentioned as a verb in Hebrew, is found in the Biblical narrative of Creation; the seventh day is set as

a day of rest and worship.¹ As a noun, “Sabbath” (שַׁבָּת *šāḇaṭ*) is the fourth or the third of the Decalogue, with variations depending on different denominations. Israel regards this day as a custom and an eternal covenant.² “Rest” in its modern sense of “taking a rest” also means that the act of “resting” is accompanied with “fragments” brought about by “suspensions.” While the “Sabbath”³ is frequently mentioned in the Bible, this concept has not attracted enough attention compared with other doctrines. Its appearance is always connected with the day, that is, the Sabbath. In other words, if there is no specific record of the Sabbath, it will be difficult for us to discuss the topic of rest effectively. Therefore, Moltmann believes that if we can give some thought to the crises caused by excessive human plundering of natural resources, it may be beneficial in overcoming the exploitation and destruction of the earth and in bringing about some new liberation and transformation.⁴

Moltmann believes that Western civilization, in which Christian faith is culturally embedded, is facing crises in areas such as technology, morality, values, beliefs, and nuclear conflict. Therefore, he believed an Earth Day ought to be set up on a global scale to reposition and understand the relationship between humans and the earth and all

1 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sabbath>: (as the verb שַׁבָּת *šāḇaṭ*) is first mentioned in the Genesis creation narrative, where the seventh day is set aside as a day of rest (in Hebrew, *shabbath*), and made holy by God (Genesis. 2:2-3).

2 Ibid. It is one of the Ten Commandments (the fourth in the original Jewish, the Eastern Orthodox, and most Protestant traditions, the third in Roman Catholic and Lutheran traditions). Most people who observe the Sabbath regard it as having been instituted as a perpetual covenant for the Israelites (Exodus 31:13-17).

3 Hence onwards, there will be no further use of closed quotes for the terms rest and Sabbath due to their high frequency use.

4 Preface of Moltmann's *God in Creation*, Chinese translation by Bingyan Song (Beijing: Joint Publishing, 2002), 21.

things in it, just like the covenant between Noah and God in the Old Testament. Therefore, he proposed the doctrinal idea of building the Earth's Sabbath⁵ to mitigate the plundering and destruction of natural resources resulting from the rapid development of modern society through the help of rest on the Sabbath.

The theme of the Sabbath and rest can be found in most chapters of God in Creation, except Chapter 11, which is dedicated to its discussion. It shows its significance in the book. Therefore, it is necessary to summarize all mention of the Sabbath in the book to show its significance in relation to the ecological crisis.

1. Rest in Rest

Moltmann believes that the natural beings created by God are alive and can interact with human beings. God's creation is purposeful and meaningful. It is created for his glory and is to be finally actualized in the "Kingdom of God's Glory." This Kingdom is like the home of the world. It is quiet and peaceful, and God is willing to dwell in it with people so that people and all beings can unite together and become one, no longer separated.⁶ "In the tempestuous ocean of time and toil, there are islands of stillness where man may enter a harbor and reclaim his dignity."⁷ This day is the Sabbath, which keeps people from agitations and enables them to retrieve inner peace.

According to the Old Testament tradition, God's creation is purposeful. He did not create for creation's sake but to lead humanity into rest, to end being busy, and to replace it

5 Ibid., 23.

6 Ibid., 8-12.

7 Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath, Its Meaning for Modern Man* (New York: Noonday, 1994), 29.

with a calm and happy state. In rest, God appreciates what he has created. This rest is realized by establishing and celebrating the Sabbath day in the Old Testament.⁸

The advancement of modern society, the convenience of transportation, the development of information exchange and technology are undoubtedly helpful in liberating people from burdensome labors for more leisure. However, when all these advancements and conveniences are superimposed on us, they aggravate people's anxiety. With the acceleration of the pace of life, people lose their due rest under all kinds of tangible and intangible pressures.

In the New Testament, Jesus heals openly on the Sabbath day, and he points out that the Sabbath is set for people and that Jesus himself is the Lord of the Sabbath. So, the Sabbath, or the day of Rest, turns from focusing on the day to focusing on Jesus. In contrast, Jewish tradition has always emphasized the day itself and nothing else. However, if people are in danger, they can temporarily overlook many laws concerning the Sabbath. On this point, there are differences between the New and Old Testaments, but they are both accommodating where human welfare is concerned.⁹

It was not the intention of Jesus to abolish the observance of the Sabbath but to fulfill it. Those with physical ailments were thereby obliged to eliminate the physical and mental distress caused by illness and pain. In this case, only through physical healing can rest be first granted.¹⁰

Of course, if we go beyond those obstacles that prevent people from having rest, we should focus on Jesus, the

8 Heschel, *The Sabbath, Its Meaning for Modern Man*, Chinese translation by Yuanwei Deng (Shanghai: Joint Publishing, 2013), 12-14.

9 Song, op cit., 393.

10 Ibid., 393-394.

ultimate implementer of Israel's "dream of completion."¹¹ "Israel's sabbath is a unique foretaste. Jesus' proclamation of the imminent kingdom makes the whole of life a sabbath feast."¹² The purpose of creation is to let all beings, God, and especially human beings, enjoy real rest.

2. Renew in Rest

From the perspective of Moltmann, due to the intervention and termination of the Sabbath, God's creation has been continuous, which means that creation is constantly in the process of renewal. However, as far as humankind is concerned, the progress of science and technological development has undeniably brought about adverse effects, resulting in various crises in the natural and human environments.¹³

This crisis is the initiator that brought a sense of ruin, and the author believed that "it started in the modern industrial countries, which developed in the civilization formed by Christianity."¹⁴ He believes it is necessary to "use new methods to explain the belief of creation according to its true origin."¹⁵ Therefore, we need a new understanding and perspective to treat nature respectfully, change the previous idea of arbitrary manipulation and slaughter, and build on new ideas to overcome the current dilemma.¹⁶

11 Ibid., 394.

12 Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation*, English translation by Margaret Kohl (London: SCM Press, 1985), 292.

13 Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation*, Chinese translation by Bingyan Song (Beijing: Joint Publishing, 2002), 31.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid., 31-32.

The increase in high population density, environmental overload, anxiety, anomie in emotional and behavioral management, and the distortion and disruption of moral standards and belief in life, all these present an urgent need for renewal and the establishment of a new order. The human habitat needs to be renewed into a place of peaceful rest.¹⁷ It is different from the separation caused by the dichotomy of subject and object, between man and other beings in the past. It is adjusted to the view that humanity is also a part of nature. The community between human beings and things is established to reduce the weight of human possession and domination of nature.

Everything seems to be anticipating a release: "It is enslaved and yearns to be liberated because it is ephemeral and hopes for a permanent residence."¹⁸ As the Creator, God wants to save all things through new creation and guide them into the future, meditating on God's glorious creation through the Sabbath.

The reconstruction for glory is a kind of renewal, "Just as the creation was created for rest, human beings were created in the image of God for the glory of God."¹⁹ This creation is fresher than before.

3. Complete in Rest

Whether time is like a circular repetition without an end or a linear trajectory without ends, it does not matter whether it is from the future to the present, continuously flowing to the past; or it is the past flowing through the present and finally emerging into the future. Or, perhaps, time is only a process of movement? Either way, if there is no termination or completion, it will make people and the creation unbearable.

¹⁷ Ibid., 34-67.

¹⁸ Ibid., 97.

¹⁹ Ibid., 311.

It is like Sisyphus' rolling stone in Greek mythology. It is endless. When will it end? Or should repetition be the case? Common sense seems to be the same, but Moltmann believes that "The goal and completion of every Jewish and every Christian doctrine of creation must be the doctrine of the sabbath; for on the sabbath and through the sabbath, God 'completed' his creation."²⁰ However, Moltmann believes that the tradition only pays attention to the "six-day work" and ignores the "rest" of the Sabbath. It leads to the fact that "the meaning of their lives is identified with work and busy activity; and rest, the feast, and their joy in existence are pushed away, relegated to insignificance because they are non-utilitarian."²¹

According to the Priestly Source, creation has a suspension, followed by a segment of "rest." God realizes rest through creation and "realizes completion through rest."²² God rests from his works, facing his creation, and appreciating the results of his creation. God rests from what he has done, and he returns to himself by doing so. It is a kind of artistic conception full of Poetry:²³ Static, stop, rest, filled with joy and pleasure.²⁴ God is with beings. This co-existence enables the occasional, transient, and limited beings to obtain some kind of a reality, infinity, and some degree of eternity and sanctity. God lets his creation "be what it is on its own account"²⁵ through the creation of rest. "In his rest they all acquire their essential liberty."²⁶

20 Song, op. cit., 373; Kohl, op. cit., 276.

21 Song, 374; Kohl, 277.

22 Song, 376.

23 Harold Fisch, *Poetry with a Purpose*, Chinese translation by Xiujian Lin (Hong Kong: Chinese Bible International Limited, 2011), 34–36.

24 Song, 377.

25 Ibid.

26 Song, 378. Kohl, 279.

“In the works of creation, created beings, through their existence and their modality, ‘experience’ the power and wisdom of God.”²⁷ In creation, he completes, he rests, he faces the work, and lets the work rest. The ongoing creation makes God leave himself, rest lets God return to himself. He spoke in silence persistently, revealing his eternal glory in tranquility, and achieving the “the dream of completion” in rest. It indicates an opening of the eternal glory, the restful end, and the glorious opening.²⁸ It is an unexpected completion and a promising start.

4. Enjoy in Rest

After God finished his creation, how would he continue to function in the world? According to Moltmann, “It is the sabbath which manifests the world’s identity as creation, sanctifies it and blesses it.”²⁹ It is through a tranquil and peaceful way, including external environment and inner peace, the sanctity of this peace, “But this divine peace encompasses not merely the soul but the body too; not merely individuals but family and people; not only human beings but animals as well; not living things alone, but also, as the creation story tells us, the whole creation of heaven and earth. That is why the sabbath peace is also the beginning of that peace with nature which many people are seeking today, in the face of the growing destruction of the environment.”³⁰ So, the creation is blessed through the Sabbath.

It is a difficult doctrine to understand, but Moltmann believes God’s blessing is obtained through the Sabbath.

27 Kohl, 279.

28 Song, 378-380.

29 Ibid., 373.

30 Ibid., 375.

God also stopped the work of creation and blessed the Sabbath day. God did not give blessings through frequent interventions but through the day that enabled all beings to multiply and proliferate, ensuring the competence of procreation. God blesses all visible things through invisible time, and through tranquility, all beings are blessed with rest. Suppose we avoid the discussion of whether the day itself has a mysterious power. Can it be understood that people receive God's blessing by contemplating the idea of rest, and by practicing it, the same blessing is channeled to all beings? The author did not give any clues or hints on this matter.

Moltmann once again stressed that "The sabbath preserves created things from obliteration, and fills their restless existence with the happiness of the presence of the eternal God. On the sabbath all creatures find their own place in the God who is wholly present. The world is created 'out of nothing,' and it is created 'for the sabbath'; so on the sabbath it exists 'in' God's presence. This is the sabbath blessing."³¹ God blesses the invisible and formless days rather than the actual creatures directly, which is nothing more than to awaken the joys of all creatures' existence and call it "joining the rest of God."³²

Israel has cultivated feelings and passion for the Sabbath. For example, it addresses the Sabbath as a sister, brother, bride, and queen. It shows how Jews treat the Sabbath with an intimate attitude and practice their faith daily. Susanna Herschel, Herschel's daughter, describes how her father died peacefully on the Sabbath day. She

31 Ibid., 381; 282.

32 Ibid., 382.

believes this is a special honor given to her father by God.³³ The unique Jewish feelings towards the Sabbath can be told from this. It is doubtless to say that the idea of the Sabbath or God's rest has a special significance and status for the creation.

5. Sanctified in Rest

The Sabbath is called the "festival of creation"³⁴ and refers to "this day".³⁵ This day is called a holy day, which indicates that it has been sanctified. Interestingly, other cultures will emphasize the sanctification of space and geographic region, but the Bible accounts that the Sabbath day is sanctified. Some even hold that the sanctity of the Sabbath day is the same as the name of the Holy One, which cannot be called at will.³⁶

The sanctification of time means that it is not a visual object but an experience that can only be sympathized with a contemplative mind. Space, territory, enclosure, and all tangible property are limited and belong. When the day "Sabbath" is sanctified, it is infinite and targeted at all creation.³⁷

The sanctification of other cultures is the expression and visualization of space, region, and patterns, but the sanctification of the Sabbath "is the presence of God without pictures or figuration."³⁸ The specific time corresponds

33 Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man*, Chinese translation by Yuanwei Deng (Shanghai: Joint Publishing, 2013), 135-147.

34 Ibid., 375.

35 Ibid., 383.

36 Ibid., 33.

37 Song, op. cit., 384.

38 Ibid., 384.

to relative things and events, and the time of God's sanctification is the Sabbath. The "Sabbath" belongs to the basic structure of creation itself, so the Sabbath is the most sacred moment in Israel - more sacred than all other festivals.³⁹

The Sabbath has nothing to do with other periodic and recurrent natural objects or events because "The sabbath is Israel's holiest time, because it is the first thing that God sanctified: holy is God and holy is his Name, sanctified is the sabbath, sanctified is the people, and sanctified is the land of Israel. The sanctification is in that order. The sabbath comes before people and land".⁴⁰

The Sabbath has been mentioned in all Judaism's reformations, which shows its importance in the Jewish nation's collective memory, cultural tradition, and belief heritage. "God sanctified the Sabbath because on that day he rested from creation."⁴¹ Rest is not only for people, but also other beings; it is not only for the master but also the servant. Humanity's bearing of the image of God is not a result of restless acts but because of rest. Only in this way can we venerate the Sabbath with recollections and gratitude for the present. For the sake of rest, people exemplify themselves as good stewards, so that they can live and sense, know the benefits of all things, and be thankful. The sanctification of rest means seeking detachment from pursuit and endless acts, treating God's established rest with praise and appreciation, and permeating this idea of rest into daily works.⁴²

The sanctification of the Sabbath is expressed as the remembrance of the past and the expectation of the future

39 Ibid., 385.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid., 386-387.

through suspension and segmentation. Moving out of the repression from external binding and entering the internal rest and tranquility, cease exertions, and eliminate the extra burden of life to “find the peace of the sabbath in God’s presence.”⁴³ Therefore, sanctified rest is not obtained by pursuing it but by observing it.

6. Saved in Rest

The Sabbath is the perfection of creation and the festival of salvation. It is the Creator who appears in the silence of all things. He does not reveal himself in the activity of creation but makes his face appear through the rest of the Sabbath. This kind of salvation is a new creation. It unites revelation and creation and puts an end to the activity of affairs.⁴⁴ In order to commemorate the past in the Sabbath, it is more important to look forward to the “eternal Sabbath” that will eventually be realized.⁴⁵

On the Sabbath, people cannot walk for long distances, foreigners can tarry, and many families take this opportunity to receive travelers from afar. In modern society, family members spend much less time together. The establishment of the Sabbath, in a sense, can contribute to enhancing the intimacy among family members. In terms of natural ecology, six days are for work, and one day for rest, and six years are for cultivation, while on the seventh year, cultivation is suspended. In terms of social ecology, there is a “year of God’s Jubilee” occurring every 50 years during which each person should return to his/her homeland. There is the cancellation of debts, a suspension of economic transactions, and the restoration of freedom to the enslaved. The crops in

43 Ibid., 388.

44 Ibid., 399-389.

45 Ibid., 389.

the fields should not be harvested.⁴⁶ Its purpose is to provide remuneration for migrants. It will be particularly effective in preventing the rich-poor gap from widening, as well as the crystallization of social classes. Care for the vulnerable and the redistribution of social wealth are undoubtedly positive measures.

For those in trouble, efforts should be made to enable them to overcome their situation: “to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives...”⁴⁷ This ideal state cannot emerge suddenly. Indeed, it remains an unrealized and unfinished dream. Salvation must therefore point to Christ, to the future, and to the eventual realization of “eternal rest”!

7. From the perspective of Chinese culture

In Chinese cultural elements, there is no concept of rest. Confucianists believe that “Once the aim of perfection is attained, is a man able to set the orientation of his ambitions. After setting his orientation, he will not waiver in his ambition and will be satisfied with his position. Satisfied with his position, he will be able to ponder well. Being able to ponder well, he will be able to achieve all he wants.”⁴⁸ Buddhism’s “Zen”⁴⁹ is a state of contemplation. As far as individuals are concerned, during China’s Spring and Autumn period, the Chinese ancients emphasized “work at sunrise and rest at sunset” so that they can “be happy and contented between heaven and earth.” Only those

46 Ibid., 390.

47 Ibid., 391.

48 Confucius, *The Great Learning*, in *Database of Chinese Classic Ancient Books*, accessed August 15, 2020, <https://publish.ancientbooks.cn/docShuju/platform.jspx>

49 Anonymous, “Zen,” in *Chinese Dictionary*, accessed August 15, 2020, https://www.chazidian.com/r_zi_zd7985/.

who know the balance of work and rest, can get a sense of happiness like immortals.⁵⁰ In the Warring States period, the anonymous poet's description of "At rise of Sun to tend to the farm one goes, his job done in the evening one starts to repose. For water he has dug a well by hand, and he makes a living by tilling the land. In fact, nothing to Yao at all he owes!"⁵¹ According to Taoism, "there is no way to express one's ambition unless one is indifferent, and there is no way to go far unless one is quiet."⁵² Only when you are in a state of rest and quiet can you accumulate and make achievements. In governance, Zhu Yuanzhang adopted the recuperation strategy of "building walls high, accumulating grain widely, and slowly becoming king."⁵³ In the military struggle, there is a combat strategy of "waiting at one's ease for an exhausted enemy".⁵⁴ One of the secrets of winning the war is that the army can take proper rest to deal with the tired division, which is key to victory. It shows the importance of rest. "The general's affairs should be quiet and peaceful,"⁵⁵ and the general's requirements should be clear, deep, and unpredictable (to maneuver) and be invincible.

The Chinese are positive and peace-loving people. Currently, China is in an era of globalization, urbanization,

50 Zhuangzi, "Declines Politely the Throne" of *Zhuangzi*, in *Database of Chinese Classic Ancient Books*, accessed August 15, 2020, <https://publish.ancientbooks.cn/docShuju/platform.jspx>

51 Anonymous, *Playing the Clay Shoe*, in *Database of Chinese Classic Poetries*, accessed August 15, 2020, <https://so.gushiwen.cn/shiwen/21c484c79935.aspx>

52 Huainanzi, "The Ruler's Techniques" of *Huainanzi*, in *Database of Chinese Classic Ancient Books*, accessed August 15, 2020, <https://publish.ancientbooks.cn/docShuju/platform.jspx>

53 Shi Bu, *Ming History*, in *Database of Chinese Classic Ancient Books*, accessed August 15, 2020, <https://publish.ancientbooks.cn/docShuju/platform.jspx>

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid.

and industrialization. The dynamic energy in Chinese society far exceeds its static energy. On the one hand, this high-speed flow of social energy has brought about rapid development. On the other hand, it has also given rise to many social ailments, urban diseases, and ecological crises. With the premise that the dynamic is greater than the static, it is necessary to bear in mind the need for tranquility. While the western industrial revolution has resulted in modernization, in the process of development, it has also been accompanied by the excessive domination of nature by human beings, resulting in merciless retaliation from nature, in the form of earthquakes, floods, tsunamis, and the relentless recurrence of natural disasters. Social problems such as the polarization of the rich and the poor have also emerged in the process of rapid development. The Chinese have achieved what the West has attained in a comparatively shorter time. Nonetheless, it is necessary to be calm and prudent in order to avoid the social problems and many environmental crises that have emerged in the West during its march to progress. We should learn from the past for present-day use and take note of the benefits of foreign experience for China. The essence of western theology can be absorbed with the attitude of sublation so that religion and theology can be enculturated in China.

7. Conclusion

Since the dichotomy of subject and object in Descartes' philosophy and the rise of natural theology, nature has been regarded as the object of conquest and transformation. The excessive emphasis on the transcendence of God undoubtedly intensifies the momentum of the wanton plundering of nature. While the industrial revolution and modernization have brought rapid development to society, they have also caused irreversible damage to the natural

environment. In addition, environmental pollution and the ecological crisis caused by brutal human domination and excessive development compelled Moltmann to frequently mention the concept of rest in the context of modern society. He roused people's attention and thinking by presenting the sabbath as a means of raising awareness of the long-neglected "rest."

Moltmann said, "The ecological day of rest should be a day without pollution of the environment - a day when we leave our cars at home so that nature too can celebrate its sabbath.... In the ecological crisis of the modern world, it is necessary and timely for Christianity too to call to mind the sabbath of creation."⁵⁶ The Sabbath opened a new beginning. The creation and establishment of the first Sabbath is the rest obtained by commemorating and observing the Sabbath day. Also, the eschatological rest is realized through Jesus Christ and the Messianic Kingdom. Whether it is the present world or the final rest and creation, it is to let people and all beings enjoy rest and finally realize it in the new heaven and earth. Today, the COVID-19 pandemic is rampant all over the world. In such situations, we need to be proactive. However, if it is necessary to be quarantined at home, silence and rest are other forms of proactiveness.

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56 Song, 400.

The Bible's Ethical Teachings about Respect for Women

浅谈圣经中关于“尊重女性”的伦理教导

LIU YINGJIE 刘颖杰

Abstract. God's revelation as illustrated in the ethical teachings of the Bible bears the imprint of the times but beyond that, it has its transcendent and universal value as well as significance. This paper aims to investigate the significance of the ethical teachings in the Bible on "respecting women" by analyzing relevant biblical passages.

Key Words. Bible, Ethics, Respecting Women

1. Creation and Gender Equality

God made Adam from the dust of the earth and used Adam's rib to create woman. Some then assumed that since men are created before women, the latter is subordinate to the former from the gender perspective. However, Genesis 1:27 says: "So God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." It implies that both the masculine and feminine traits are parts of God's image. Neither one is superior to the other. Besides, the word "Adam" that originates from the Hebrew "*adham*" is a generic term for humankind, not specifically for males. It was only after God took a rib out of "*adham*," that gender came into being. The rib was taken from an '*ish* (man)', who was called "*adham*" and was made into an

“*ishshah* (woman).”¹ Therefore, gender is a relative concept. In God’s creation, gender differences do exist, but both genders are equal without preference.

Equality does not mean completely eradicating the differences between male and female, nor forcing females to be assimilated into the social value system dominated by males,² where “males” are seen as the standard for evaluation,³ and females become alienated and have inadequate recognition of their own gender identity. All these are the consequences of the arbitrary distortion of “gender equality,” which even leads to notions of “masculine” women and “asexual” women.

The core of what gender equality means lies in the truth that men and women shall be entitled to equal rights and obligations both in their social lives, in the public sphere, as well as in their family lives, in the private sphere. At the very beginning of Creation, God had asked both man and woman to keep and tend the Garden of Eden, and to manage the earth and all living creatures in it. God gave vegetables and fruits of all kinds to them for food. In this way, equal rights and responsibilities were bestowed on male and female. Meanwhile, both of them, without exception, would receive punishment as the consequence of their sins, without absolute equalitarianism. God punished women with pain in childbirth, and men with hard toil. All these acts manifest the gender equality in God’s creation.

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- 1 Zhang Rongjian, “Gender Discrimination in English Naming and Female Names in the Bible,” *Foreign Languages in Fujian* (2000): 11.
 - 2 Yang Ying, “About Gender Equality and Gender Justice,” *Journal of Chongqing University of Science and Technology (Social Sciences Edition)* 16, (2010): 47.
 - 3 Min Dongchao and Liu Weiwei, “Questioning, Challenging and Reflecting - From Equality Between Men and Women to Gender Justice,” *Journal of Chinese Women’s Studies* 5, (2010):6.

2. Safeguarding Women's Rights in God's Law

God's law embodies the cultural values and moral ethics of ancient Israel. It also helps preserve social order. There are many legal provisions [in the Bible] that protect women's rights. For example, "Do not profane your daughter by making her a prostitute" (Leviticus 19:29); "None of the daughters of Israel shall be a temple prostitute; none of the sons of Israel shall be a temple prostitute" (Deuteronomy 23:17). God has made it clear that prostitution is prohibited in the law that he gave the Israelites, which not only commands them to pursue a life of holiness, but also to preserve women's bodily integrity.

Also, in Numbers 27, it is mentioned that Zelophehad's daughters have the right to inherit property. According to tradition, however, daughters were excluded as heirs to their father's property. A father would prepare a dowry when his daughter got married, but his land and other property could only be inherited by the sons. If the man had no sons, then the property of the deceased would be given to their closest male relatives. Therefore, in this case, the land of Zelophehad would have a new owner and his name would have been forgotten as well. Considering this, a new law was created for the Israelites that recognized a daughter's right to inherit the land.⁴ The Israelites attached great importance to land and saw it as a gift from God, representing the covenantal relationship between God and everyone in Israelite households.⁵ Thus, land was not merely about the woman's right to inheritance, but also had implications for

4 See the commentaries of the Chinese ESV Study Bible (Shanghai: National TSPM & CCC, 2017), 233.

5 Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for The People of God*, trans. Huang Longguang (Beijing: Central Compilation & Translation Press, 2014), 206.

her religious status. Even though Old Testament law failed to completely and thoroughly protect the rights of women, it was still a trailblazer during that era.

3. Respect for Women in Biblical Images of Female Figures

There are many prominent female figures in the Bible, such as the prophetess Miriam. She was the daughter of Amram and Jochebed, and the elder sister of Aaron and Moses. The young Miriam was courageous and resourceful in assisting her mother in saving her younger brother's life and in helping him return to his mother. Moreover, the Bible describes Miriam as a gifted and multi-talented woman. She was the first female musician mentioned in the Bible and a Hebrew heroine who led the Israelites out of Egypt together with her two younger brothers Aaron and Moses. Although she was not flawless and was once punished by God, her name was remembered along with Moses and Aaron in Micah 6:4, "For I brought you up from the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of slavery; and I sent before you Moses, Aaron and Miriam." The biblical narrative of Miriam's deeds demonstrates the importance of women in God's redemptive plan. Another similar example is Deborah, the fourth judge of Israel and the first judge to have a detailed account in the Bible, who led the Israelites to defeat Sisera, the Canaanite army commander. Deborah was one of the most faithful judges. She was a prophetess and a "mother of Israel." Many went to her to have their disputes settled under the "Palm Tree of Deborah." She instructed Barak on how to fight battles and wrote the ode to victory, the Song of Deborah (Judges 4-5). In contrast, other judges like Gideon, Jephthah and Samson acted poorly.⁶

6 See the commentaries on Deborah in the Chinese ESV Study Bible (Shanghai: National TSPM & CCC, 2017), 348.

Huldah was another influential prophetess. Instead of seeking advice from Jeremiah or Zephaniah, the priests of Josiah went up to Huldah. She spoke for God and greatly influenced Josiah's religious reform. Obviously, religious affairs and congregational activities then were open to women, who could even hold certain positions in them.⁷

The female figures portrayed in the Bible demonstrate the recognition and respect for their social status and the roles they played in the religious context.

4. Jesus Cares for Women's Mental and Physical Health

The New Testament continues and surpasses the ethical teachings revealed in the Old Testament. Some scholars believe that Jewish teachers in the first century saw woman as the sole culprit to be blamed for man's sexual arousal. Thus, a sober man was supposed to reduce his exposure to women to the fullest extent in order to conquer his own sexual impulses. As a result, a social system was established to restrict women's activities in public spaces and limit their personal freedom. The solution was for men to shun women, seclude themselves from their female counterparts and to ask women to cover their bodies from head to foot.⁸ Women were the ones who were mostly punished rather than their male counterparts if they were involved in an illicit sexual relationship. A typical example of this is the woman caught in adultery, which fully demonstrates the existence of a double standard for males and females. Yet, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus put the blame on males for lust

7 Li Huxiao, "Anti-Gender Discrimination in Biblical Discourse," *Literature Education*, no. 7 (2017): 88.

8 Glen H. Stassen and David P. Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, trans. Ji Rongzhi, Wu Guoxiong and Liang Weiye (Hong Kong: Bookfinder 2014), 456.

and adultery.⁹ Some scholars believe that Jesus asked his disciples to beware of themselves rather than of women.¹⁰ His revolutionary teaching challenged the religious authority of the day. He pinpointed the vicious cycle of lust and argued that men should take responsibility for their own behavior.

Jesus also valued the sanctity of marriage. For Jesus, men should not divorce their wives at will. He intended them to break out of the chain of the old mindset that women were attractive but dangerous and that they were disposable sexual tools.¹¹

During his time on earth, Jesus healed women with no hesitation. He did not reject the women who touched him. The woman who suffered from chronic bleeding received his blessings; the ill-famed woman who anointed Jesus' feet was accepted by him; a poor Samaritan woman rejoiced as she talked with Jesus from whom she obtained salvation. Additionally, the first person who witnessed the resurrection of Jesus was a woman. These all add to the evidence that Jesus respected women and protected both their bodies and souls, enabling them to enjoy their new roles and freedom in the kingdom of God.

5. Caring for Women in the Early Church: Lessons for Us

The early church was a period to practice and interpret the teachings of Jesus. Women played a vital role in the life of the early church. For example, since the Greek-speaking widows were neglected in the daily distribution of food, the disciples chose seven qualified and trustworthy people to work as the deacons responsible for the task. The early church did not

9 Ibid.

10 Glen H. Stassen and David P. Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, 67.

11 Ibid., 456.

suppress or ignore the voices of widows; instead, measures were taken in response to women's claims which helped to perfect church governance.

Not only are the voices of female believers heard in the Scriptures, but their ministries are also recorded. Among the examples is Priscilla, who together with her husband explained to Apollo the way of God more adequately (Acts 18:26). Paul also referred to names of women in his epistles and extended greetings to them, two of whom, Euodia and Syntyche, had "struggled beside me in the work of the gospel" (Philippians 4:2-3). Paul also articulated the ideal that the wall between human beings was to be broken down so as to promote human unity: "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:27-28). These are all evidence of the care given to women in their lives and ministries during the early development of the Church.

Conclusion

In conclusion, when studied as a dynamic development, the ethical teachings about respecting women in the Bible are trailblazing in comparison with then existing social customs. In the meantime, the principles and theological connotations behind these biblical teachings are of universal significance, which still offers us guidance in today's world. As Chinese Christians in the New Era, we are to delve into the Scriptures for the right interpretation of the biblical teachings as the Spirit leads us (See 2 Corinthians 3:6 & 2 Timothy 2:15) so that we may serve as salt and light of the world, making our due contributions to the fulfillment of the Chinese dream.

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