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Chinese Theological Review [Vol. 9, 1993]

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Item Type	Journal volume
Publisher	Foundation for Theological Education in South East Asia (FTESEA)
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Download date	2026-07-07 00:09:24
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/165444

**Chinese
Theological
Review**

Volume 9

From the Editor

The *Chinese Theological Review:9* contains addresses, documents, essays and sermons primarily published during 1993-1994. Selections have been taken from *Tian Feng*, the church monthly published in Shanghai by the China Christian Council and the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of Protestant Churches in China, The *Nanjing Theological Review*, the journal of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary and *Collected Sermons* published by the Zhejiang Christian Council. Individual authors have also generously shared their as yet unpublished work, in the form of conference papers and sermons.

Certain issues crucial to the renewal of the Church in China continue to dominate theological reflection there, be it in church documents, addresses, essays or sermons, whether the writer is a church leader, seminarian, pastor or lay Christian. The necessity to run the church well in administrative and financial terms; the need for a well-defined church order; for more and better-trained personnel, both ordained clergy and lay leaders; the need to raise what is termed the "quality" of faith of rural Christians; and the need to broaden the overall unity of the church, all sound urgently and repeatedly through these pages.

The term "quality of faith" often puts off overseas Christians, for whom it suggests an elitist concept of church membership at odds with the Biblical description of Peter and John - "uneducated and ordinary men" (Acts 4:13). In China, quality of faith refers to spiritual and intellectual maturity, a grounding in basic Christian beliefs without any admixture of folk religion and superstition. Baptism in China, as in the early Church, requires education and teaching, to ensure the Christian knows what faith means.

I would like to express my thanks to the authors whose works are included here for allowing us to share them in translation. Any errors in understanding or misrepresentation are the fault of the editor, not the author.

Once again I am grateful to colleagues in the Publications Department of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary for responding with alacrity to requests for information and prepublication manuscripts in the midst of their own busy schedule. Special thanks are due to Mr. Chen Yongtao, Rev. Wang Weifan and Rev. Chen Zemin.

Selection of sermons and essays, translation, and editing of the Chinese Theological Review are all done in Hong Kong. I would like to thank Rev. Dr. Philip Wickeri, who serves as advisor to the journal through this long and often difficult process. Thanks are also due the translators who have contributed their efforts to this volume: Fr. Peter Barry, Rev. Ewing W. Carroll, Jr., Ms. Gail V. Coulson, Rev. Craig Moran, Dr. Gotthard Oblau, Dr. Lauren Pfister, Rev. Henry Rowold, Mr. Dirk Skiba, Dr. Don Snow, Mr. Oliver Stunt and Rev. Britt Towery. Typing has once again been done by Ms. Eva Lai Woon Ching and layout by Mrs. Cecilia Ip. Rev. Dr. Marvin Hoff, Mrs. Joanne Hoff and the Foundation for Theological Education in Southeast Asia have been generous with encouragement and support.

Janice Wickeri
Hong Kong

TABLE OF CONTENTS

From the Editor	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iii

ADDRESSES AND DOCUMENTS

1. Welcoming Speech for the Fortieth Anniversary of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary – K. H. Ting	1
3. International Ecumenical Relations and Running the Church Well – Han Wenzao.....	7
4. Strengthen the Body of the Church and Run the Church Well According to the Three-Self Principle	12
5. Closing Address to the Joint Standing Committees – K.H. Ting	24
6. Message at the Plenary on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches – Gao Ying..	28

ESSAYS

7. The Old Testament Commentaries of Rev. Jia Yuming – Zhao Qiusheng	30
8. The Christian Church in Its Chinese Context – Kan Baoping.....	38
9. Challenges to Theological Reflection and Education in China – Zhang Jinglong	47
10. Ba Jin's Philosophy of Love and His Humanism – Xu Zhenglin	59
11. Lin Yutang's Journey of Faith – Lou Shibo	67
12. The Passageway to Enlightenment: On Xie Fuya's 'Mystical Union' – Chen Yongtao	78

SERMONS

13. Come, Lord Jesus – Peng Cuian.....	93
14. Creation and Redemption – K. H. Ting	97
15. "Follow Me!" –Kan Baoping	100
16. Friend, Will You Work for the Lord? – Zhang Yongquan	104
17. When the Wine Ran Out – Chen Yiping.....	109
18. "May Your Kingdom Come" – Jiang Peifen	111
19. The Solitude of God – Wang Weifan	114

ADDRESSES and DOCUMENTS

1. Welcoming Speech for the Fortieth Anniversary of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary – K. H. Ting

Nanjing Union Theological Seminary celebrated its fortieth anniversary in November 1992. In his address at the opening of the celebrations, Bishop K.H. Ting stressed the importance of unity based on respect for the diversity of its component parts -a watchword of the Protestant Church of China - and the hallmark of its union Seminary. He also touches upon the critical issue of future leadership of the institution.

We are extremely happy to have gathered here today to celebrate its anniversary so many classmates who have studied at Nanjing Union Theological Seminary over the past forty years. To see us gathered again after forty years have come and gone is a great thrill for me. I would also like to thank all those guests who have come to celebrate with us.

One friend who could not be with us sent a telegram asking me to bring his congratulations to everyone. I am speaking of Luo Zhufeng. I am sure those who were here in those years remember that when Nanjing Union Theological Seminary was first opened, Comrade Luo put a great deal of effort into the task of uniting the dozen or so theological institutions of East China. During these forty years, he has moved from bureau head of the East China Religious Affairs Bureau to other work, but he has always had the welfare of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary at heart.

We have many alumni at Nanjing Seminary, for alumnus is a word with many connotations. One refers to all those who have graduated from the Seminary or pursued a course of study here over the last forty years, whether in the two-year course, the four year course, in the research program, or in a lay training course. But in *many places I have visited, those who have graduated from one of the institutions that came together to form the present Seminary, also regard themselves as alumni of Nanjing Seminary. Thus, Nanjing Union Theological Seminary alumni also include those who have graduated from one of the schools which united with us in the beginning, which includes many alumni of Yanjing Union Theological Seminary in Beijing. Those who are able to be with us today, are only a small fraction of our alumni.*

Here I would like to say a special thanks for the help and counsel given us over these years by the Religious Affairs Bureaus of the State Council, Jiangsu Province and the city of Nanjing, and the National, Provincial and Municipal United Front Work Departments. They have helped us to solve many problems and assisted us in training Christian church workers who love China and love the church.

I do not feel it is necessary to conceal the fact that there have been various dissatisfactions and disagreements among the students at the Seminary from time to time. And perhaps there have been instances where students treated each other unkindly. But today, after forty years, what we remember are the good things. The bad things have faded from memory. I need not conceal either the fact that in the early days of union, thirty- or forty-odd years ago, when our

K.H. Ting (Bishop) is President of the China Christian Council, Chairperson of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of Protestant Churches in China, and Principal of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary.

students went out into the local church, they were not greatly trusted or welcomed. Some people said that our graduates were not fit to be ministers, that they could only preach on three-self and not on the gospel. But today this has completely changed. The understanding of local churches with regard to the meaning of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of Protestant Churches in China (TSPM) is a great deal clearer. Everyone knows that without the TSPM the present situation of our Chinese Christianity might be similar to that of a reactionary secret society. Thus everyone is well-disposed to it. People are willing to listen when our graduates speak about the three-self principle; as for preaching, we have discovered that many of our students are very good preachers. For example, when the China Christian Council and Three-Self Association formed an evangelistic team, I was surprised to find that most of the members were Nanjing graduates.

Of course, our accomplishments are not limited to having trained many church workers who are able to preach. At present there are thirteen centers of theological education in China, and I am very pleased to be able to report to you that among our Nanjing graduates of the past few years, fifty-five are serving as instructors in the other twelve theological schools. Nanjing Seminary must not only train preachers, it must also train teachers. In order to run the church well, people of many different gifts are needed. Today we must train musicians and artists for the church as well as pastors, evangelists and theology professors. We have much to do in the area of publications as well. We did not face such tasks in the fifties. *The Nanjing Theological Review* is an extremely important theological journal, and I am told that its circulation is greater than that of most theological journals in the world. A traditional character edition is published in Hong Kong and sent gratis to the four or five thousand Chinese churches worldwide. By this means, we are able to bring news of our church to every corner of the globe. In addition to this, our foreign friends publish a yearly anthology of translations, *The Chinese Theological Review*, selecting from the more important theological essays appearing in the *Nanjing Theological Review* and other publications, which are then translated into English and published in the United States. Thus we have a growing impact. Works by our professors of theology are well received overseas. For example, our colleagues, Revs. Chen Zemin and Wang Weifan were invited to attend a scholarly conference in America called "Christianity and Culture: A Sino-American Dialogue". The papers they presented at the Conference were warmly received. In such ways, our seminary's influence has grown over these forty years, both at home and abroad.

I am sure everyone finds this very heartening. I do not wish to go on too long, because I will have further opportunity to talk to everyone the day after tomorrow. But before I close, I would like to discuss an issue everyone is very concerned about, but very reluctant to mention-The leadership of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary are all advanced in years, what about the future'? I cannot report on this in detail at present. But I can tell you to put your minds at ease. We have given much thought to this issue. Today I can only say that deliberations are proceeding. The new will also succeed the old in the Seminary leadership. The process has already been begun and I am confident it will carry on.

I am very happy to be able to see you all here today. Some of you I have not seen for thirty or forty years. We will have to introduce ourselves all over again. We must be thankful for these three days together. On behalf of all the staff and students of Nanjing Theological Seminary I would like to give you all a very warm welcome.

Nanjing Theological Review, No. 18 (1/1993), p. 31.
Translated by Janice Wickeri.

2. Remarks at the Close of the Fortieth Anniversary Celebrations – Chen Zemin

Rev. Chen Zemin speaks of the Seminary's fortieth anniversary not only as an occasion for nostalgia, but as a time of summing up and gathering strength for greater achievements in the future. He stresses the contribution of the older generation and the assurance of young people to take their place. In the words of Rev. Wang's poem: "God's mercy abounds, from generation to generation passed."

The exciting activities to mark the Fortieth Anniversary of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary's founding are about to end. For the past three days, some three hundred alumni from over twenty provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions, representing the more than one thousand who have studied at their alma mater over the past forty years, have happily come together to celebrate the school's founding.

In this fine golden autumn, while the seminary grounds are ablaze with beautiful flowers and colorful lanterns, we have sat in the auditorium and classrooms cherishing fond memories of past activities there. On the dry lawn in front of the newly constructed dormitory and tall general purpose building, we have become reacquainted amid happy laughter. The passage of time is merciless, and so many of us have changed, grown grayer, more wrinkled. But as we take a closer look - that youthful vigor of ten years ago and more, the candid, friendly glance, the hearty laugh - is still familiar. We meet, clasp hands, exchange a few words, or gaze wordlessly. After lunch everyone gathers in front of the classroom building for photos, mementos of affection between teacher and student, and the friendship of classmates.

There are so many feelings to express, but too many people. There is so much to say, but too little time. Three days have flown by. There are so many old friends still to greet. So many hands yet to shake. So many inner feelings still to share. In brief, this big family filled with Christ's love, this gathering of sisters and brothers, aunts and uncles, and grandparents, will stay with us as a beautiful memory to savor forever.

Looking back to the past and anticipating the future, this meeting is highly significant. Under the Lord's guidance, it will push us forward, working together with one heart and mind to complete the tasks God has given us: to implement the "three wells", that is, to make the church well-run, well-supported and well-propagated; to put all our effort and energies into further strengthening the church in China, and to have even greater faith, hope and vision.

Forty years ago ceremonies commemorating the opening of this Seminary were held here at Mochou Road Church (formerly Hanzhong Church). At the time over one hundred students and fifty some faculty from East China's twelve seminaries attended the grand opening ceremony presided over by the late Y. T. Wu. Luo Zhufeng, former Director of the East China Religious Affairs Bureau, attended on behalf of the Party and Government, giving

Chen Zemin (Rev.) is Vice-Principal of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, where he is Professor of Systematic Theology. He also serves as Senior Pastor of St. Paul's Church in Nanjing.

his personal attention and guidance. Time passes and "places remain though people move on," but Mr Luo's concern for us remains fresh and vivid in our memories.

Principal Ting, Vice-Principals Cheng Zhiyi and Ding Yuzhang and numerous faculty joined together for that significant ceremony. That union marked a new beginning for theological education in the church in China. Later, in 1961, Yanjing Union Theological Seminary also joined the new Seminary, becoming part of our family along with its more than ten faculty and eighty students. So in fact, today's anniversary includes two seminaries, Nanjing and Yanjing.

During the past forty years, Nanjing Union Theological Seminary has braved many trials and hardships, closing twice and reopening twice. But through the difficult years, along the bumpy paths, the Lord has been our Guide. Thus, we have passed through the valley of the shadow of death, coming once more to lie down beside still waters in green pastures, where our cup overflows.

During the past forty years, previous generations of teachers and alumni traversed this long and winding road. They made many contributions, completed their mission, and have returned to the Lord's arms. On the occasion of this fortieth anniversary celebration, we especially honor and cherish their memory.

We give profound thanks for Vice-Principals Cheng Zhiyi and Ding Yuzhang, and numerous faculty such as Prof. Zhao Hengxiang, Bishop T.K. Shen, Jiang Yizhen, T.C. Chao, and others who contributed much to this Seminary and now rest forever with the Lord. We remember the many alumni who have gone before us, giving their all for the church in China, who now rest their labors in the lord.

We especially thank God for Bishop Ting's leadership during the past forty years. With God's blessing, he has helped the seminary to continuously move forward. We are all pleased to see him with us today. His report on the development of the church in China has greatly inspired and helped us. We pray God will continue to give him good health and long life.

During these forty years, countless brothers and sisters have received the call, given themselves to the Lord and come to this Seminary to be trained. They have given their best years to work full time for the Lord's church. After forty years of trials and tribulation, they have enabled the church in China to reach today's level of restoration. We give thanks and praise God for all their contributions.

At the opening ceremony the day before yesterday, my heart was deeply moved as I looked out over an auditorium filled with alumni and many friends. Although I feel she has faced many difficult twists and turns and presently still faces many problems, the church in China has hope. During these forty years many alumni sitting before me have served the Lord with devotion. Although they have faced severe difficulties, they have not wavered from their earlier commitment, and have given their all for the development of the church in China. Truly, this is the source of our hope.

In recent years, the faculty has been replenished with new blood and new faces. This truly makes us feel a new generation has come forward, and in future the faculty will be greatly strengthened. This will also help train up many more young sisters and brothers,

adding to the vast array of our alumni who will contribute to the development of the church in China.

Before I conclude, the Anniversary Preparatory Committee has asked me to express thanks to all. We are grateful to all levels of the National, Provincial and Municipal United Front Works Department and the Religious Affairs Bureau, who have shown their attention and care, even giving up their personal time to attend these events. Everyone has overcome assorted difficulties and come long distances to join this celebration. For this we are deeply grateful. Many colleagues from various Seminary departments and the students have done much and taken great pains to assure the success of these events. Thank you. We also want to thank the churches of Nanjing and colleagues from the Mochou Road Church for all their efforts. Thanks also to the comrades from several hostels for their assistance. Also, our heart-felt thanks to many colleagues, coworkers and friends.

You all have come a long distance, but for various reasons, our hospitality has not been fully satisfactory. You have not complained but rather have returned warm appreciation. We apologize for our shortcomings and thank you for your understanding. During our reunion, we have heard a number of very good reports, especially this morning's very moving one from Bishop Ting, from which I am sure we have all gained a lot. In our plenary sessions and small groups as well, you all have offered extremely valuable comments and suggestions. I think this is very good. Following our celebrations I am sure our seminary colleagues will give serious consideration to these opinions, thereby enabling our work to improve further in future. This will also enable our alumni work to improve and I hope everyone will offer even more and better ideas to develop our alma mater.

When you were all students here, some were probably unhappy with this idea or that problem. Others probably argued until they were red in the face. But during this gathering everyone has met cordially, forgetting any past unhappiness. I believe people are all like that. In our work we may have faced this or that problem, and had various shortcomings, but following the Lord's guidance we've been able to develop the church in China. In love, we've been able to totally forget about these small matters and work hard together to develop Christ's church.

At this fortieth anniversary celebration, we have not only looked back and remembered the past, more importantly, we have looked at the present and towards the future. Forty years have passed. Before us we still have ten, twenty, thirty years - much time.

In 1952, before Nanjing Union Theological Seminary was founded, the old Nanjing Seminary already had a forty-year history. I am happy to have come to the Seminary in 1950. In 1951 I attended the old Seminary's fortieth anniversary celebrations. Another forty years have passed since 1952 and during these forty years the church in China has experienced the most change ever. Now we see that we have already entered the beautiful land of Canaan. The next forty years will be the time to build the Lord's temple. So the mission before us is even greater, even better.

Before Prof. Wang Weifan and I made our visit abroad, Prot. Peng Cuian gave us an assignment. Since Prof. Wang is a poet, she hoped he would write a poem to commemorate the

Seminary's fortieth anniversary during our trip, and that I would set it to music, so we could sing it together as a fortieth anniversary hymn. Unfortunately our trip was very busy and I did not complete my assignment.

On the plane, just two days before returning to Nanjing, Prof. Wang was suddenly moved by the Spirit and he wrote a few verses, but I didn't finish the music. During our time in Hong Kong we awakened very early one day and he helped me with it, but though I looked at the words and had a little inspiration from the Spirit, I still did not complete the music. I'm terribly sorry not to have completed my task, but Prof. Wang's poem is ready and I would like to read it as the conclusion to my remarks today:

Beneath Purple Mountain, on the Yangtze's shores
God's mercy overflowing, forty autumns, forty springs.

Weak vessel that I am, God casts me not away,
Returning now, I'm washed in grace anew.

Streams of the Spirit billow, fragrant grasses spread
God's mercy unfailing, generation upon generation.

Beneath Purple Mountain, on the Yangtze's shores
God's mercy abounds, from generation to generation passed.

Nanjing Theological Review, No. 18 (1/1993), p. 36.
Translated by Ewing W. Carroll and Janice Wickeri.

3. International Ecumenical Relations and Running the Church Well – Han Wenzao

In this address, given during the anniversary celebrations, Dr. Han speaks of running the church well as the basis of successful relationships with churches around the world. Such interdependence must be based on independence, he observes. While stressing the achievements of the Chinese church in this regard and growing international respect for its three-self stance, he also notes that a more open atmosphere in relations with overseas churches requires a greater commitment to financial and administrative independence.

It is my pleasure today to address our alumni gathered here on the topic of international relations and running the church well. I would like to bring three perspectives on this subject to your attention.

Independence and autonomy are necessary conditions of running the church well.

The form that the spirit of independence and autonomy has taken in our Christian church is the three-self principle: self-government, self-support, self-propagation. The lessons of history teach us that for the church of China to survive, to sink roots in the great expanse of China, and to expand, it must follow the three-self principle. For the three-self principle to be vital it must be expressed in running the church well. Today "three self" has entered a new era, namely the era of the "three wells" - governing well, supporting well, and propagating well. Concerning this point, relevant documents of the third, fourth, and fifth Chinese National Christian Conferences have much to say, which I will not duplicate here. I simply want to cite Bishop Ting's closing remarks at the Fifth National Meeting: "This conference will be remembered for taking as its theme the building up of the church and making the church well run. From now on, making the church well run will not be a slogan which one may oppose or neglect to grasp firmly. It has become a requisite part of the meaning of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of Protestant Churches in China (TSPM). A Three-Self Patriotic Movement which is not enthusiastic about making the church well run is indisputably not a good TSPM. Whoever strives to make the church well run will be loved and supported by the believers. Whoever is not concerned about this, will have no place in their hearts. As a slogan, making the church well run functions like a glue to unite the mass of believers. We must make known to Christians at home and abroad the fact that the TSPM is in no sense a church-destroying movement, but rather a movement which seeks to create the conditions to make the church well run. At the same time, within China, there is no way we can cast aside the three-self principle and succeed in making the church well run."¹

The church of China can only become a witnessing member of the universal church by achieving independence and autonomy, and by living out three-self.

Han Wenzao (Dr.) is General Secretary of The Amity Foundation, Executive Vice-President of the China Christian Council and Chairperson of the Jiangsu Three-Self Committee.

¹ The full text of the address may be found in *The Chinese Theological Review*:1991, p. 47.

The purpose of our church in observing and adhering to three-self lies in realizing the selfhood of the Chinese church, enabling the church in the People's Republic of China to become a Chinese church, just as the church in the United States of America is an American church. Seen from the perspective of ecclesiology, the church is one body, with Christ as its head. The church is the body of Christ, and the churches of each country and region are members together of the body of Christ, joined together and equal. No church of any country or region should consider itself as primary or as supreme over other churches. The Indian theologian, Dr. Philip. after summarizing the historical experience of the church in India and other third world countries, said "No church of any country should be a dot on the mission map of any foreign church." Beginning in the 1950s and 1960s, western churches began to rethink their missiology and came to the view that the mother/daughter-church relationship should come to an end and be replaced by the concept of partner churches.

Observing and adhering to the three-self in no way implies self-isolation. No self-isolated church has any vitality, because no member that separates itself from the body can survive, much less grow. Indeed, the interdependence of members can only be discussed on the assumption of the independence of each member.

The experience of the past forty some years, and especially of the past fourteen years, tells us that only once the Chinese church has its own selfhood and has become an independent, autonomous church can it become a witnessing branch of the universal fellowship. This can be demonstrated from the following evidence.

First, though there may be a number of misconceptions about three-self overseas, in recent years there have been more and more churches agreeing with and even accepting three-self. And we frequently hear our colleagues from overseas describe their own churches as self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating churches. Some time ago, we invited a pastor from an overseas Chinese church, Dr. Kou Shiyuan, to visit. He preached and taught in Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing, Fuzhou, and Guangzhou and mentioned repeatedly that there must be three-self in order to establish a Chinese church, and that only from the perspective of three-self can the Chinese church be run well. Particularly worthy of mention are the comments of the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Runcie: "When in the sixteenth century the English church left the Vatican to become the Church of England, that was in reality a three-self, even though that term was not used then."

Second, the respect and honor that the Chinese church, with its three-self principle, receives from other churches around the world far exceeds anything it may have had earlier. If we look at church delegations from many nations and lands (Europe, America, Asia, the Pacific, Africa) which have accepted invitations from the national Chinese Three-Self Patriotic Movement and China Christian Council (TSPM/CCC) during the past decade and more, virtually all of them were led by leaders from the highest levels. Some leaders of important world organizations, e.g., the World Council of Churches, the Lutheran World Federation, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Baptist World Alliance, have visited China. Not all the visitors have been leaders of mainline denominations; the number of evangelical leaders has been steadily increasing. The fact that all these organizations accepted invitations to visit China proves that our church today has the respect of the universal church.

Let me also share the reflections of a few individuals. In February 1991 we attended the Seventh General Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Canberra, Australia. While I

was present, there were three occasions when the entire assembly arose spontaneously and applauded enthusiastically. Once was when Prime Minister Hawke of Australia entered the assembly hall. The other two occasions concerned us. When we received such overflowing respect and cordiality, I could only silently thank and praise God our Father for caring for and guiding us during these decades.

The first Christmas card I received from overseas this year was from the Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey. I still have not made the Archbishop's acquaintance. This card was not so much an expression of friendship for me personally, but a mark of respect for our church.

Five years ago, the overseas coordinator of the Amity Foundation, Dr. Philip Wickeri, said in an address to Nanjing Union Theological Seminary: "There are at least three reasons why overseas Christians increasingly feel that three-self is important. 1) Three-self has made Chinese Christianity indigenous, and has become a model studied by many Christians from the Third World. 2) Three-self has contributed to the unity of the Chinese church. There are still many problems in this process, but three-self contributed to the kind of unity described in the New Testament Scriptures, and has commanded the attention of many from overseas. 3) Three-self allows the Christians of China to breathe the same air and share the same fate as the people of the PRC. All of these are contributions of the Chinese church to the universal church."

In addition, I would like to note that our church has received much help from the international relations we have developed, particularly during the past decade. In terms of learning, theological thinking, biblical knowledge, pastoral experience, etc., we have been edified; we have been helped greatly in the development of human resources; in terms of the down-to-earth work of ministry, we have received many skills and much experience; and we have shared in financial and material resources. Our concept of the universal church is gradually being strengthened. Last but not least, the prayers of brothers and sisters from overseas support us, so we can work hard at running our own church well.

We must emphasize the principles of mutual respect, equality, cordiality, reciprocity, and the principle of three-self in overseas relationships.

Over the past ten years, the international relations work of our national TSPM/CCC has followed a policy of differentiation. First, on the basis of mutual respect and equality in friendship, we are willing to relate with Christians of every country in the world to promote mutual understanding and fellowship in the Lord. At the same time, we oppose those anti-China foreign powers of infiltration which belittle the three-self principle. What we demand is mutual respect, respect for the Chinese people's choice of the socialist system, respect for the Chinese Christian three-self patriotic principle. We do not ask for admiration, support, or acceptance and advancement. Of course, should a person admire and support three-self, we would express gratitude. Adhering to the principle of mutual respect has the benefit of expanding friendship. To be obstinate in pressing a person to admire and support three-self would be to impose oneself on a person and to reduce the circle of our friends. I recall the well-known saying of the former leader of Hungary, Janos Kadar: "Anyone who doesn't oppose us is our friend." He did not say that only those who support us are our friends. I find this saying very enlightening. It is said that this saying originally comes from the Gospel of St. Luke (9:50): "For whoever is not against you is for you."

When we speak of the equality between churches, we repeat that Christ is our head, and the church in each country and region is simply a member of the body, which means there should be equality. Please indulge me while I say a few words about relations with churches in Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan. The operative principles here are mutual respect, mutual non-subordination, mutual non-interference. This principle of "three mutuals" in reality corresponds to mutual respect and equality. I would like to share an example. In 1981 the first time a group from the church in China was invited to visit Hong Kong, the then president of the Hong Kong Christian Council, Rev. Peter Wang, expressed the hope that our national TSPM/CCC could set up an office in Hong Kong. The Hong Kong side would supply everything needed for the office. We thanked Rev. Wang for his intentions, and felt that this was a good way to strengthen the churches of both regions. After some consideration, however, we did not accept Rev. Wang's fine intentions and suggestion, lest we give rise to any unnecessary misunderstandings. We feared that the churches and Christians of Hong Kong might mistakenly feel that, already prior to 1997, the mainland church has stuck its foot into the door of Hong Kong, and that they are facing the time when the three-self movement of the mainland church, the elimination of denominations, etc., would be forced on the Hong Kong church. As things appear now, that decision was the right one. Even had we agreed to establish an office in Hong Kong, we would not have wanted in the slightest to subordinate the Hong Kong church to the church on the mainland.

What does it mean to respect the choice of the Chinese people for socialism? This is to say that in international relations, our counterparts overseas should not speak disparagingly concerning our choice of the socialist road. This is a matter for Chinese themselves, and outsiders should not interfere.

What does it mean to respect the three-self principle of Chinese Christianity? Put concretely, this means that should an overseas church group or individual wish to pursue evangelistic activities in China, they should first consult with our national TSPM/CCC, and not proceed unilaterally. Concerning mutual respect for our three-self principle, I particularly want to mention global Christian organizations (e.g. the World Council of Churches, the United Bible Societies, the Lutheran World Federation, etc.) as well as many European and American churches. Some of them produce resolutions, some issue statements, some produce clear expressions of the direction of their work; that is, in pursuing work in China, they must first discuss these with the China Christian Council and the Amity Foundation. We applaud their respect for us, and thank them for their trust for us. However, there are some overseas churches, church groups, and individuals who do not respect us, and take these actions unilaterally, e.g., taking it on themselves to perform baptisms, to ordain clergy, to smuggle Bibles, to send non-resident missionaries, etc. Not only do such approaches violate the principles of mutual respect and equality, at best, they can only be short-term activities. Seen in a long-term perspective, this is harmful to the development of the Chinese church, and will cause the people of China and their government departments to have a very unfriendly impression of overseas Christianity. This kind of unilateral action can be labeled "infiltration." Of course, we don't propose to over-use the word "infiltration," lest we give rise to a phobia - infiltration here, infiltration there - which would affect normal international relations. Presently, our country is much more open than in the past. Visitors from overseas - of every stripe - are on the increase. Money is also coming in abundance. There are quite a few people who suggest we simply take it. In these times, we need to be particularly careful to distinguish what is normal, friendly sharing, which is the custom of the church universal, from its opposite, namely enticement by means of material things.

The three points I have mentioned today represent my own understanding of the way in which international contacts can be related to running the church well.

Nanjing Theological Review, No. 18 (1/1193), p. 26.
Translated by Henry Rowold.

4. Strengthen the Body of the Church and Run the Church Well According to the Three-Self Principle

This document is the annual report (January 1992 -November 1993) on the work of the China Christian Council and the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of Protestant Churches in China, presented at the second session of the meeting of the Joint Standing Committees of the two organizations. It stresses the building up and strengthening of the church, highlighting the organizational structures which need to be in place to assure the healthy growth of a church, in many of whose congregations, new Christians increasingly outnumber "old" Christians. In rural areas particularly, where educational levels are low, superstition tends to become easily mixed in with Christian faith and leadership may be weak or manipulated for reasons of self-interest. The church needs to strive to raise the quality of believers, speed up the training of both lay leaders and ordained clergy, and foster democratic methods and stewardship.

Two noteworthy points are the appreciation expressed for relationships with evangelical as well as mainline (ecumenical) churches overseas and the emphasis on relationships with overseas Chinese Christians and churches, and the affirmation of Christians and meeting points which, for whatever reasons (barring illegal activities), remain outside the TSPM.

This Conference of our two national Christian bodies takes place as our nation's policies of reform, openness and economic construction enter a new phase of development. On the international front, the peaceful environment which prevails around us makes faster development possible; domestically, reform and openness have become the irreversible trend of the times. The worldwide attention China's achievements in economic construction have attracted have provided the foundation for a new leap forward and the struggle against corruption has also made pleasing gains. As Chinese Christians, we thank God for his great grace in all of this.

The Chinese Communist Party and the People's Government continue strenuous efforts in implementing the policy of religious freedom. The recent conference on national united front work in particular, pointed out that in the situation prevailing in the new era, it was even more important to bring into play the unique superiority and function of the united front. In his speech, Chairman Jiang Zemin emphasized the importance of doing ethnic and religious work well and stated his view that religion could be compatible with socialism. All this is highly encouraging for us.

The slogan of the Fifth National Christian Conference, "Run the Church Well on the Three-Self Principle," drew an enthusiastic response from the masses of fellow believers and church workers. As our nation strides forward on the path of constructing socialism with Chinese characteristics, taking new steps in every area of endeavor, we Chinese Christians are faced with a new challenge: Is the Church manifesting the glory of God for today? Is it fulfilling the expectations of its members? Do people in general view it positively? In a word, does the image our church is building up match the ever-changing image of our nation? We have clearly seen that if we cannot provide a satisfactory answer to this question, then the church in China does not have a firm foundation and a pleasing image, cannot fulfill the expectations of Christians and will not receive the affirmation and respect of the larger society. It will also find contacts with overseas church groups and individuals on an equal and friendly basis difficult;

and these things will in future be big obstacles to the better implementation of the religious policy. These considerations led us to take "Strengthen the Building up of the Body of the Church and Run the Church Well on the Three-Self Principle" as the subject for this Conference.

Construction of the Church is Ongoing

Since the National Conference, the two Christian bodies in every province, city and autonomous area, as well as local churches and believers, have done much to further three-self and running the church well and this has brought about a new situation in building up the church in China. I would like to make a simple report of the work that has been done on the national level by the China Christian Council (CCC) and the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Churches of China (TSPM).

In the past two years, while strengthening propagation of the TSPM, the two national bodies have, through the new specialized committees, done much to further work in all areas and continue to develop the building up of the church.

November 4th this year was the centenary of the birth of the leading founder of the TSPM, Mr Y.T. Wu, and a conference was held on his life and thought. Many of the papers enthusiastically submitted by numerous colleagues showed keen insight. Our knowledge of Y.T. Wu's thought was deepened through this event and a determination formed to further spread the spirit of Mr. Wu's motto: Love country, love church.

To welcome the hundredth anniversary of the birth of Y. T. Wu as well as the opening of this meeting, a volume entitled *Selected Essays on the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Churches in China* was published. This book will help fellow Christians and colleagues to better know the TSPM: its just nature, its necessity and historical inevitability, its political significance and its theological basis, and to understand its contributions to Chinese church and society.

Last year's (1992) National Conference established nine specialized committees, each comprised of responsible colleagues from the national and provincial levels of the two bodies as well as colleagues and fellow Christians from the grassroots church and theological institutions, women and young people. Except for the minorities work committee which was set up somewhat later, each committee met for the first time in the summer of 1992 and the theological education committee held a second meeting in July 1993. Committee members conscientiously discussed, planned and carried forward the work of building up the church. The literature committee exchanged publishing experiences with the provinces and theological schools, formulated literature and publishing guidelines for the church and took the first steps in formulating regulations for literature and publishing.

The rural committee focused its work on the training of lay workers in the rural church and on the publication of reading materials for rural Christians. This year the rural committee assisted in organizing training courses in Heilongjiang, Jiangxi and Hebei, offering courses and summing up experience in the organizing of such training courses, while at the same time doing a certain amount of information gathering on rural churches. A collection of sermons from the countryside is being edited for publication.

In 1992, the Bible publication committee published a total of 920,000 Bibles in all editions; including the large character edition, the total comes to 1.6 million copies. In the area of Bible distribution, in addition to four national distribution centers, thirty local centers have been set up throughout the country, to open up distribution channels and make buying Bibles more convenient for Christians. A revised, simplified character edition of the Bible Concordance has been printed in a modern horizontal format and has been warmly welcomed by readers. In addition, a daily calendar of Bible verses and a bilingual Chinese-English Bible-verse desk calendar have been printed.

In order to strengthen and raise the level of theological schools and seminaries, the theological education committee has made great efforts to standardize theological education and has drafted and revised "A Plan for Standardizing Chinese Theological Education: Circulating Draft". The committee called upon each school and seminary to work out a seven-year development plan for the years 1993-2000 for their schools on the basis of this Plan, formulating outlines for teaching, as well as drafting programs for professional evaluation for teaching staff and awarding of graduate theological degrees. In July this year we will hold a conference on Chinese church history, to promote research in this area. After a hiatus of four years, Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, with the authorization of this committee, will once again send theological students overseas.

The church governance committee has begun a push to spread and publicize the "Draft Church Order for Trial Use" which was passed by the Joint Standing Committees and accepted by the National Conference and has seen some achievements in the area of regularizing church life.

The hymnody committee printed 840,000 copies of *Hymns of Universal Praise (New Edition)* in 1992 and this year printed another one million. *Stories of 'Hymns of Universal Praise (New Edition)'* edited by Bishop Wang Shengyin and "The Anointed One", a choral work by Prof. Ma Geshun, have been reissued after revision. In order to help local choirs raise the standard of church music, the committee has prepared a video: "Seminar on Conducting Church Music with Prof. Ma Geshun". The committee is currently engaged in editing a book of anthems urgently needed by city and rural churches.

The *Tian Feng* editorial committee guided and assisted its editorial department in summing up experience, improving and enriching context and strengthening guidance to Christians in matters of faith and thinking.

During these two years, the committee on overseas relations has concentrated on opening contacts with churches in the nations and regions of Asia: exchange visits have been undertaken to Korea, Indonesia, the Philippines, Hong Kong and Macau, for example. In September 1993, the estrangement across the Taiwan Straits was breached and for the first time two of our colleagues visited churches in the Taiwan region. While continuing to develop friendly relationships with foreign mainstream churches, we have also strengthened our contacts with evangelical churches and overseas Chinese churches. With the encouragement and coordination of the committee, local churches are conscientiously making a distinction between normal religious contacts and infiltration by hostile foreign religious groups, striving to develop the former and resist the latter, unceasingly developing a new phase in overseas relations.

The minorities work committee was not set up until May, but has already begun gathering information on churches among national minorities throughout the country.

In addition to the work of the committees, the two national Christian bodies undertook other work as follows:

(1) Literature work. We continued publication of Bible study and devotional books as well as simple readers. Recent publications include *Orders of Worship and Prayers for Home Gatherings*, edited by Rev. Peng Shengyong.

The magazine of the two Christian bodies, *Tian Feng*, has increased the columns readers enjoy, a move which has been welcomed by readers: in the last two years subscriptions have increased from 50,000 to over 80,000. *Tian Feng* also sends editors and reporters out into the local church from time to time, to forge closer links with its readers and to gain an understanding of the experiences and existing problems which occur in the course of building up the church.

(2) Production of audio cassettes. In addition to cassettes of hymns and sermons, we have produced and distributed a set of twelve "Sermons on Tape for New Believers", which has sold 27,000 sets and has been very well received by colleagues and fellow Christians. With the aid of donations from overseas, this year our two national bodies set up a recording studio with plans to continue in the production and publication of tapes of Bible readings, hymns and anthems.

(3) Library work. Libraries administered by the two national bodies have received assistance from overseas in adding microfilm equipment, including photography, viewing and copying equipment, which will be useful in preserving some old and rare books, thereby helping to better serve our readers.

(4) Relief and social service work. In the summer of 1991, some areas of Jiangsu and Anhui suffered serious flooding and many churches were damaged. Responding to an appeal from the two national bodies, local churches leapt to assist in the repair of affected churches and meeting points. A total of 1.58 million *yuan* was collected and has been distributed to needy churches and meeting points. In addition to this, the two national bodies have contributed to the social welfare work and educational work of the National Foundation for the Handicapped, the Amity Foundation, and the Shanghai Special Education Foundation.

(5) Investigatory work. In order to understand the situation of local churches throughout the country, and aid the Party and government in better implementing religious policy, last October the two national bodies, together with the United Front Work Department and the Education Ministry of the State Council, organized study teams to visit Shaanxi and Yunnan provinces. Their findings and reflections on local conditions and problems and their recommendations for improvement received attention from all sides.

(6) Correspondence and visitation work. This work is the major channel of communication between the two national bodies and colleagues and fellow Christians. From January last year to August this year, we received over 2000 letters from colleagues and fellow Christians throughout the country and received over ten visitors, among whom were some who were reflecting problems in the implementation of the religious policy.

We promptly referred these views to the government departments and provincial levels of the two bodies concerned. We also published a "Sampling of Letters Received" to share common problems with relevant groups. The problems included some which were taken very seriously by the government departments and provincial Christian bodies, who initiated prompt investigations into them and gave feedback.

Although the two national bodies have gone some way to follow the three-self principle in running the church well, there is still quite a way to go to reach objective demands. We hope all our committee members and colleagues and fellow Christians will give us their views, critique us, make suggestions and supervise us.

Tasks in Running the Church Well

There has been quite a lot of progress in the building up of the church over the last two years. Yet, if we want to make the church well-run, we still have quite a few large tasks before us. In order to bring the church a step closer to being administered well, propagated well and supported well, I will first mention seven points, in the hope that every member, colleague and fellow Christian will take them under consideration and plan together to carry them out.

(1) Strengthen the work of ministry, and strive to raise the quality of be levers

As was noted in the Fifth National Conference and in the work report of the last Standing Committee, one of the greatest issues facing our church today is the raising of the quality of the thinking and faith of Christians. Experience of the past two years bears this out even more clearly.

At present the local church is developing rather quickly and worship gatherings are always packed to the rafters, the number of those being baptized never ceases to grow. So many people are thirsting for the true way of the gospel. After conversion their witness continues to mount up to the benefit of humankind and the glory of God. This is the work of the Holy Spirit and is also the fruit of the many sincere prayers of colleagues and fellow Christians who enthusiastically spread the gospel.

But we must also see that in many places in our churches the number of new Christians has surpassed, in some places greatly surpassed, that of old Christians. These new Christians have simple hearts filled with love for the Lord, but many of them have a low educational level and their grasp of the Bible truth is rather limited. They are prone to mix Christian faith with folk superstition, and to be influenced by heresy or infiltration by groups from overseas.

At present there exist in some places phenomena which offend against the truth of the Bible, lead to emotional excess, are harmful to mental and physical health and disrupt the social order; there have even been tragedies of "collective ascent to heaven" (suicide), as well as incidents in which groups wander blindly about because they expect Jesus to return at any moment. There have been frequent occurrences of propagation of heretical dreams and visions, fabricating rumors to mislead people and even self-proclaimed Messiahs. Invasive forces from overseas, using money and goods as incentives, spread counterrevolutionary thinking and incite a mood alien to Chinese society. They have deceived and entrapped some Christians. We must give our careful attention to such matters.

Christians are our sheep. They must be fed and watched over. If they have no pasture, no warmth, they will not be choosy about where their food comes from, they will follow erroneous teachings and be led astray. All levels of our Christian bodies and colleagues of churches and meeting points must have the hearts and minds of shepherds, establish a high level of responsibility in ministering to Christians, love and care for all the Christians with whom we are in contact and seek out those with whom we as yet have no contact to train them painstakingly in the truth of the Bible and patriotic and law-abiding thinking, lead and pastor them, ceaselessly raise the quality of their faith and thinking, unite them around the two bodies and the church and lead them upon the correct path of love for God and love for humankind, love for country and love for church.

(2) Speed up the training of personnel for the church, so there will be dependable people to take over the work of building up the church.

For over ten years, China's theological schools and training courses have been fostering church personnel so that the problem of a serious lack of clergy could begin to be addressed, but whether in terms of quantity or quality, our pastors and evangelists are far from meeting China's needs, and with the passage of time, the problem grows more and more acute. This should arouse a sense of crisis in us. Whether we can train more and better church personnel today will be decisive for the future of the church and for whether our building up of the church can continue to progress according to three-self patriotic principle. This is an enormous issue which all of us colleagues and Christians who love the country and love the church should be concerned about.

In order to speed up the training of church personnel, we must run well all levels of theological schools and lay training courses. At present our theological schools at all levels -- post-graduate, regular, tertiary and secondary, all need to continually raise their level of teaching, strengthen their staffs, improve their facilities and living arrangements, increase their teaching resources, enrich their libraries and conscientiously implement the guidelines for theological education in China, and turn out more teachers and pastoral and evangelical workers who are well rounded spiritually, morally, intellectually, physically and in community life. The work of lay training courses throughout the country is not a matter of running courses in political study nor of spiritual discipline. A constant process of summing up experience should be carried out, to work out a path of training lay personnel who love the country and love the church. Outstanding young people among them should be chosen for further study in seminary.

To speed up the training of church personnel, we must also conscientiously promote those with potential. Through a thorough process of understanding and investigation, we must choose young people who meet the requirements spiritually, in their thinking, morally and physically. We must painstakingly train them, whether in theological schools or after they have taken up positions in the church. We should conscientiously foster all of them, helping and supporting them in a continual process of growth. We must earnestly love and care for them in the difficulties they encounter in thought, study, work, homelife and every aspect, and do our utmost to help them solve problems, enabling them to serve free from anxiety and so reduce loss of personnel. We should do all we can to promote them; that is, we should always make use of and put forward our young colleagues and temper them through work, so they can gradually take up the heavy responsibility of building up the church.

(3) Spread democracy, strengthen order, and do a good job of governing the church.

In recent years, with the restoration and opening of a large number of churches and meeting points, the question of how to govern the church well becomes daily more prominent. In the beginning, because of the restoration of churches and meeting points or the establishment of new ones, everyone was united in heart and mind. With the restoration of church life, the issues of administration and moving the church forward will give rise to differing opinions; this is normal. If we are good at handling differing viewpoints, interpersonal relationships will be harmonious. If not, contradictions will appear, along with rivalries and all sorts of divisions. At present the latter phenomenon is growing and in different places has reached serious levels; we are very concerned about this. Handling differences of opinion well depends upon developing democracy and strengthening order.

We must make use of all sorts of channels to develop democracy in the church. We must develop active participation in the running of the church by all colleagues and fellow Christians in order to draw on the collective wisdom and to achieve oneness of heart and mind. No matter whether it is the church council or the church affairs committee, collective leadership and delegation of responsibility should be instituted. Matters arising should be circulated and discussed together, agreement reached and then acted upon. Christians' mood should frequently be ascertained, their reactions and opinions taken into account and correct opinions accepted and acted on. In the case of incorrect views or those which cannot be promptly acted upon, explanations should be given to the masses. In all meetings, both committee members and others should be allowed to speak their minds and fully express their views. We should be good at focusing and coordinating opinion. All types of elections should be held at the time stipulated, and there should be full deliberation beforehand, nothing should be done without consultation. Finances should be public and accounts should be published when due. They should be available for inspection by the laity or their representatives.

Democratic life must be protected by an explicit system. For the masses, the system will consist of self-restraint on the basis of democracy. Extreme democracy with each going his own way must be guarded against; for responsible colleagues, the method should be self-restraint overseen by the masses, to guard against individual tyranny and "lord of the manor" attitudes. In meetings, the system should guarantee that the laity and their representatives exercise their democratic rights, that the leadership group carry out collective leadership and handle matters by democratic deliberation. A financial system is helpful for democratic supervision, to guard against individual monopolies and possible corruption. The personnel selection system, such as the selection of representatives and committee members, of teachers and elders and other ordained positions, should follow an explicit system and regulations. In this way we can guard against favoritism and cliques and ensure that the church's reputation is sound, inside and out; among our Christians are prestigious people and they should be selected and used.

(4) Develop a sense of responsibility toward the church among Christians and do the work of self-support well.

One of the achievements of the TSPM is the great growth among Chinese Christians of the spirit of stewardship, the strengthening of

independence and the pride of not relying on outsiders, and thus the willingness to give happily and enthusiastically, to support all the needs of the church. This spirit must be continually promoted and developed.

Self-support in the church relies primarily upon donations from Christians. This is an obligation Christians must fulfill to the best of their ability. Pastoral workers and responsible persons in churches and meeting points should lead the way. In sermons and leadership classes we must frequently promote stewardship and the important Biblical teaching that the wealth of this world should be entrusted to the Lord. Naturally such giving must be done willingly and happily as the Bible says, it should not be forced or apportioned in set amounts. We have seen that in places where there is unstinting love and pastoral care for believers, believers are very active in giving donations of all kinds to the church, be it money, materials or labor.

Mutual financial support by local churches is in line with Biblical teachings and should be promoted. But the work of developing the church must begin from the real strengths of Christians in a place. It is not suitable to seek donations everywhere, to rely excessively upon donations, or to bring difficulty upon Christians in other areas.

At present the standard of living in China is still relatively low. While encouraging Christians to give, we should not excessively increase their burden. At this very opportune time of reform, openness and economic revival we should encourage local Christian councils and three-self associations and churches to set up some self-support businesses which will serve society and also supplement the economic needs of the church, and promptly share and spread worthwhile experiences in this area. Due to the fact that most of our church personnel are unfamiliar with market economics and lack managerial experience, the church's own funds are limited and because of this self-support enterprises from small to large must develop slowly and avoid losses to ensure that the church receives solid benefit. In general it is not suitable for pastoral workers and evangelists to be directly involved in such endeavors. All self-support enterprises should depend upon reliable people with managerial experience. Church members with the requisite skill, who love the Lord and are loyal to the church should be in charge. The church's self-support enterprises must be well-organized, law abiding, offer outstanding service and protect the image and reputation of the church. Local churches should also develop social welfare work in accordance with their own qualifications and strengths, such as orphanages, kindergartens, old people's homes, etc.

(5) Implement the principle of mutual respect toward different beliefs and liturgies; strive to strengthen unity.

Christ is the head of the church, the church is the body of Christ. Thus the church is one body and cannot be divided. This is our faith which we must maintain from beginning to end.

Christ's body is unique, but each part and limb have differing spiritual views and experiences, differing devotional practices and liturgies, differing fellowships, and so on. All this witnesses to the richness of God's mercy. We cannot try to force everything into the same mold. Today the more we wish to preserve the oneness of the church, the more we must preserve the richness of God's grace, and respect the plurality of church life, as well as preserving the oneness of the body of Christ. To demand uniformity in devotional practices or liturgy would on the contrary lead to contradictions and divisions; this is evidenced by a wealth of facts.

We thank God that he has led the Chinese church into a period of post-denominationalism. We have already made great strides in overcoming strife and factionalism. We must continue to oppose putting ourselves forward and looking down on others, attacking each other, creating divisions and all other phenomena opposed to the new command of Jesus (Jn. 13:14). In the case of special characteristics in matters of faith and liturgy, the majority should not disdain the minority; the minority should not attack the majority; there should be mutual respect and mutual tolerance, in order to be able to serve together in the one body of Christ. Mutual respect does not only involve Christians' differences in faith and liturgy. In some places it also involves their work and the arrangements of venues for worship. Such arrangements should be made after full consultation, with the prerequisites of mutual concern and benefit to unity. Only in this way can colleagues and fellow Christians from different backgrounds be of one heart, "with all humility and gentleness, with patience, with bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:2-3).

(6) Conscientiously aid the Party and government in implementing the religious policy, unceasingly promote the compatibility of the church with socialist society.

If we are to run the church well, we must conscientiously aid the Party and government in implementing the religious policy in order to create the external conditions for running the church well. Because history and the people have chosen, China today is led by the Chinese Communist Party and is a country which follows the socialist system. We Christians, like our people in every sector of society, uphold the Party's leadership and the socialist system; our church, like all social groups, upholds the Constitution, laws, regulations and policies. All this is our unshirkable duty.

We should see that the guiding thought by which Party and government implement the policy of religious freedom is clear, since the chaos was put down, great achievements have been made in implementing the religious policy. At present some problems still exist, but if all parties adopt sympathetic and reasonable attitudes and pool their efforts, the prospects for further implementation of the policy are excellent.

As we aid in the implementation of the policy, we should promptly reflect matters which clearly run counter to the Constitution, the laws, regulations and policies and demand that they be conscientiously corrected. When all parties do not agree on the policy decrees or have divergent views of the issues, we should, after mutual discussion and exchange of views, try to come to an agreement. With regard to some recurrent problems, when local discussions do not achieve a solution, the dispute can be referred to the two national Christian bodies which will consult upon a solution with the relevant central authorities. With regard to church property problems, we must strive to protect the interests of the church and to bring about a good solution at an early date.

What must be pointed out here is that while requiring the Party and government to implement the policy of religious freedom, we in the church must at the same time do our own work well, conscientiously lead Christians on the path of loving the country and loving the church, be the light and the salt, and make positive contributions to the construction of the two civilizations. If activities carried out in the name of Christianity disrupt the social order, if people calling themselves Christians give people the impression of ignorance and of not fitting in with the future of the society, it will be very difficult for the society to understand

Christianity and the implementation of the religious policy will become more difficult. This point should be given our attention.

(7) Continue to develop overseas relationships and sharing

The Chinese church upholds the three-self principle and promotes the independence of Chinese Christians and self-run churches, but the Chinese church certainly does not urge self-isolation. The Christian Church is an ecumenical body, of which the Chinese church is but one member. We must be in contact with churches in all countries in order to be nourished and encouraged by the ecumenical body and in order that the Chinese church makes the witness it should within the ecumenical fellowship.

Our attitude toward churches overseas is this: whatever country or region a church is from, whether mainstream or evangelical, we are willing to establish relations on a basis of mutual respect, equality and friendship, and on a basis of mutual understanding, undertake all kinds of exchanges, sharing and cooperation. In the same way, we are willing according to the principles of mutual respect, non-subordination and mutual non-interference, to open up all sorts of exchanges and cooperation with churches in Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan. We oppose only hostile overseas forces which make use of religion to undertake infiltration and activities damaging to China.

All cooperation is mutual, done by common deliberation; it is not a unilateral action. Such cooperation should be open, legal, sincere and beneficial to the healthy development of the church in China. Some international organizations and overseas church groups, in their resolutions or formal documents openly state that any work involving China must proceed through the China Christian Council, some actively support the Amity Foundation which was begun at the initiative of Chinese Christians, and we welcome such actions.

In the situation of openness, we should even more establish an example of democratic integrity and safeguard our people's dignity in international exchanges. We are happy to accept the sharing of resources by churches overseas and unconditional donations which are useful for our work. But if we held out our hand for alms, we would be harming the dignity of our people. Even less can we cast aside righteousness in pursuit of profit and accept donations from anti-revolutionary overseas groups, thus opening the door for their infiltration. The two national Christian organizations provide information about and news of churches overseas.

To do a good job in overseas relationships, we must fully mobilize the Christian bodies and churches throughout the country, continue to train and enlarge our team to welcome visitors, improve and raise the level of our hospitality, and strengthen mutual links and exchanges.

Members of the Committee, colleagues, fellow Christians. Of the seven tasks enumerated above, five are directly concerned with the strengthening of the Chinese church, while the sixth and seventh are also related to this task. I hope that through the discussions at this meeting, we can all pool our knowledge and greatly further the building up of the Chinese church.

All levels of the CCC and TSPM must strengthen themselves

The local church throughout the country faces the vast task of building up the church and much of the work is difficult to undertake alone. Uncoordinated efforts are not useful to the

witness of the church in the whole society. All levels of the two Christian bodies must earnestly turn to the grassroots, play a guiding role, and make running the local church well the focus of our work. To do this, our two bodies at all levels must first strengthen our own faith and build up our thinking and organization.

Our two organizations are Christian bodies, and the service of the CCC and TSPM is directed toward Christians. The common goal of our work is to run well a self-administered, self-supported and self-propagated church. The natural link between our two Christian bodies and believers is our Christian faith. Thus if our two bodies are to do their work well, then their responsible persons must first deepen their own spiritual lives, recognize clearly the commitment they have been entrusted with by God, understand the faith needs of Christians and help the church to develop normal religious activities. Those Christian councils or Three-Self Associations who consider themselves "administrators" and are not sincerely concerned with running the church well, will find it very difficult to secure Christians' support and are in danger of being cut off from them.

In some areas there are Christians or meeting points with which the two bodies have had little or even no contact. As long as they truly believe in the true Christ, even though there are misunderstandings or gulfs between them and the two Christian bodies, we should still see them as limbs of the body. We have a responsibility to help them. By no means can we be biased against them or have the attitude that "it's not my problem".

Those in authority in the CCC and TSPM must be clear in their thinking. Running the church well must be done according to the three-self principle. In conditions of openness, the more we are in contact with churches and persons overseas the more we must uphold the path of independence. Only in this way can we enable our church to carry out our ministry in Chinese conditions, suitable to our cultural traditions and compatible with socialism and according to God's will.

The CCC and TSPM must continue to strive to encourage Christians to work harder for material and spiritual civilization in China and to move the church to emphasize witness to society and make a contribution to the nation.

The CCC and TSPM are organizations which love the country and love the church, which accept the political leadership of the Party and the supervision of the People's Government. At the same time, within the purview of the Constitution, the laws, regulations and policies of our country, we should also take up responsibility and actively supervise our own church affairs (including church activities, personnel, finances, property, etc.) well. In the relationship between the Party and government departments and the church, to stress the church's independence in internal matters but oppose policies and decrees is mistaken; it is also mistaken to stress government supervision and interference in the independence of the church in internal matters. The document related to religious policy stipulates: "All patriotic religious groups should accept the guidance of the Party and government, Party and government cadres should also be happy to support and help religious organizations to solve their own problems and should not try to take over", "the purpose of supervision of religious activities is to bring such activities into the purview of the laws, regulations and policies, not to interfere in normal religious activities and internal affairs of religious bodies." We should work together with Party and government cadres, according to the spirit of the policies and regulations, clarify the

responsibilities of Party and government organs and church groups respectively, so that the religious policy may be thoroughly and correctly carried out.

If we want to be able to take up our task of helping the church to be well run according to the three-self principle, then all levels of the two bodies must perfect their own organizations. There must be definite guarantees in the areas of personnel and resources. Some provincial organizations lack the money and office space to carry out their work. It is very difficult for them to develop their work and some of the city and county Christian bodies under them, especially those which are better off financially, have a duty to offer their support. In the case of distinguishing property and offices belonging to the city and province respectively, we still uphold following the spirit of the "Minutes" of the 1988 national conference on self-support in Fuyang, Zhejiang: unified planning with due consideration for all concerned; concrete measures to be taken should be decided after consultation.

The key to doing the work of the two Christian bodies well lies in finding suitable leaders. At present the most outstanding problems at all levels of the two bodies throughout the country are the aging of personnel who cannot adapt to the heavy and varied work needs, and the reluctance to make use of the young and the middle-aged. We must ensure that they have work and rights, and opportunities to realize their potential.

Leadership teams should be elected democratically and those elected must be in good standing and genuinely love the country and love the church. Phenomena such as infrequent change of personnel, or change without proper consultation, or empty elections of persons who never appear to do actual work, are all abnormal. We must actively help local churches in formulating feasible regulations. The two Christian bodies must first of all lead the way in conscientiously following the rules and draft order. We cannot have regulations which are not followed, or situations where one person calls the shots. Members of the two bodies have a duty to set an example of treating people sincerely, mutual unity and mutual understanding and sympathy, and avoiding quarrels and struggles, in order to play their role to the fullest.

When the ancient Israelites returned to the land from which they had been carried off, they were thrilled, and filled with high spirits and vigor they rebuilt the city wall of Jerusalem and the ruined temple. As the Israelites began on this great work, they cheered, "Let us start building!" (Neh. 2:18). Today we Chinese Christians also face the difficult and glorious task of running the church well on the three-self principle. Let us all, too, with one heart and one mind shout out together, "Let us start building!" We are confident that "the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6).

Translated by Janice Wickeri.

5. Closing Address to the Joint Standing Committees – K.H. Ting

Bishop Ting highlights problems of grassroots churches and meeting points, particularly organizational problems found in rural areas. Bishop Ting emphasizes that the Christian church must be well and democratically run. He discusses his own ordination in order to draw attention to the need for regularized procedures for this important aspect of church life.

He also highlights the unity of the church, and the need to unite with all Christians, both inside and outside, the TSPM. The major criterion for unity is not membership in the TSPM, but that Christians serve Jesus Christ as Lord and gather in his name.

Our promotion of the phrase "run the church well," has made the great majority of believers very happy and other sectors of society have also responded sympathetically.

Christians have come to know that the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Churches of China (TSPM) is a movement concerned with running the church well, that the Movement is not indifferent to the way the church is run, and this gives them a new hope and new encouragement. But *if* the phrase turns out to be nothing but a slogan, mere words on the lips or on the page, then Christians will still be disappointed. However, we are not out to cheat believers!

There are two standards for running the church well: one is having the good will of people in general (Acts 2:17) and the other is having the good will of Christians.

All that we have been about over the past forty years -- running the church independently, undertaking education in patriotism and socialism, involving ourselves in the construction of material and spiritual civilization in our nation-has directly or indirectly earned the good will of the people.

We have also done much to earn the good will of Christians - recovering and building churches, printing the Bible and hymnals, opening seminaries and theological schools, publishing books and periodicals, training lay workers - all this is nurturing the flock.

China now has thousands of churches and tens of thousands of home gatherings and meeting points. Whether these grass roots churches can be well run is crucial.

Most of these grassroots churches and meeting points are increasingly well run, but some are not and some are really in a mess, which is very distressing to Christians. We have received many letters from believers reflecting the problems of these grassroots churches and meeting points. Some of them express great dissatisfaction with those in positions of leadership, criticizing them in very strong language, calling them "no more than bandits," and worse.

Though my remarks are billed as the "closing address", I do not wish to deal with anything other than running these grassroots churches and meeting points well.

I would especially like to emphasize the principle of a democratically run church.

The democratic principle is implicit in Christian faith. We are all sinners in need of salvation, and before the cross all people are equal; all of us are children of God, loved by God. The Reformation of Luther and Calvin, in stressing justification by faith and opposing the hierarchical church system, was in step with the democratic revolutions in Europe. They restored the democratic tradition of Christianity. It was unfortunate that Christianity split into so many denominations, but each denomination and sect had its own fairly democratic system of order. To take the Anglican tradition with which I am familiar as an example, in spite of the fact that some people feel that in the Anglican Church the Bishop has the final say, it is not really like this. The Anglican Church has a detailed set of church regulations and the Bishop's power is limited by a Council, the Bishop can by no means simply act as he pleases.

In some places there have been cases where the clergy has not followed the democratic procedures set out in the church order, and have thrown things into chaos. Let me tell you how I became an Anglican priest (which is an ordained clergy). First of all, it goes without saying, I was baptized and confirmed. The first step to ordination was to apply to the diocesan committee for permission "to prepare for holy orders". The second step, at least a year after being accepted, was to apply to "receive holy orders," and not until three years after being accepted for that was I able to take the third step - applying to be ordained a deacon by the bishop. At that time one had to pass a test given by the examination committee, before the Bishop would consent. At least another year after passing that test, I had to pass another test before the Bishop would ordain me as a priest.

I say all this, not to suggest that all sorts of obstacles should be placed in young people's way as they prepare for ordination, and even less to suggest reviving the Anglican system, but in order to oppose the very grave error currently found in certain places of allowing people without proper standing in the Christian community to become ordained on the say-so of one or a minority of persons. Of course holding ordinations according to church regulations does not preclude praise or condemnation of the candidates by Christians or friends outside the church on grounds of politics, faith or morality. We should welcome such expressions of opinion, value and consider them well. What I wish to stress is this: a church order can only be revised by a legal process, before it has been revised, its authority is not lightly challenged. So-called "exceptions to the regular ordination process" are a clear and deliberate breaching of church order. We have evidence that in one place, someone who had been baptized only a few days earlier was ordained as a pastor. In another place, some pastors were invited to dinner and after dinner casually ordained someone. These are not normal practices and cause grave damage to the church.

I have been speaking thus far about problems with ordination. Other personnel questions in the grassroots churches and meeting points should also follow the democratic principle. Elders, Deacons and committee members should be created through a process of consultation and election.

When someone goes to serve as a pastor in the grassroots church or meeting points, the two Christian bodies at the grassroots, along with the churches and meeting points concerned, should have a process of consultation. If someone is sent by these two bodies alone, that is too concentrated a use of power and contradictions are bound to arise, if the decision lies solely with the meeting point or church, things are too dispersed and that is not good either. Both sides should have frequent contact and consultation with each other in order to work together. In the past, the Anglican Bishop did not have the power to send someone to serve as a pastor in the

grassroots church on his own either, although neither could the church council reject a priest sent by the bishop.

Church finances should be public. The church's money is given by its members at a sacrifice to themselves in order to carry out the church's ministry. Like the widow's mite, it should not be misused. When members know that the church cannot afford something, such money should not be spent; if it cannot be avoided, then thorough explanations must be given. The accounts should regularly be made public and checked by representatives of the congregation. Where accounts are not made public it will be difficult to avoid abuses and unhealthy tendencies, and we should not blame members for their suspicions. If grassroots churches and meeting points and the two bodies at the grassroots spend the members' donations on fine meals and sightseeing for which they apply to be reimbursed, of course this will cause discussion and criticism among the members.

Church buildings, properties and similar matters of daily routine should be administered by someone chosen by and from among the members; the pastor should spend more time on Bible reading, devotions and other reading to raise his or her spiritual and intellectual level and improve pastoral work, in order to become a mentor and friend to the members and aid them in loving the country and loving the church. Sermons should be thoroughly prepared so that each one provides members with the opportunity for learning and improvement and helps them rise above ways of thinking tinged with superstition and strengthens their resistance and opposition to heresy. A well-prepared sermon need not be sixty or seventy minutes long. A long sermon may be evidence of faulty preparation. Worship and the sacraments (Holy Communion, baptism by sprinkling or immersion) must be done thoughtfully and solemnly, drawing worshippers into an attitude of devotion; it cannot be last-minute or cursory.

Lay training classes are being held everywhere and this is a good thing. The goal of lay training is to aid the trainees in becoming good lay workers, and good lay workers should take as their task running the grassroots church well. Lay training should include running the church democratically, enabling those who become lay leaders to supervise the lay Christians in grassroots churches and meeting points. At times they must also be a frank and outspoken friend to the pastor; a good pastor cannot be without such a friend.

We must respect and not exclude our brothers and sisters who differ from us in matters of faith or liturgy. Uniformity in faith or liturgy is not part of TSPM. TSPM means patriotism in matters of politics, and self-administration, self-support and self-propagation in matters of religion. Some three-self associations want to make everything uniform - faith, liturgy, personnel, preaching, the pulpit, finances - if someone mentions respecting differences, they become annoyed, they suspect that person of harboring ulterior motives and accuse them of wanting to revive denominationalism. This is wrong of them. We have a common basic faith, we ask only that upon our common base of patriotism and basic faith, we achieve an overall unity; differences in matters of faith will be respected. In this way, no one will incur difficulties in faith matters and all can happily unite within the two Christian bodies.

At present some family-based home gatherings, home meetings, home worship groups, and house churches exist on the fringes of the grassroots churches and meeting points. Many Christians who worship in the church, go first to these gatherings, and find them very helpful, while some who worship there have no contact with the church. As long as these people serve Jesus Christ as Lord and gather in the name of Jesus Christ, they are our brothers and sisters.

Unless they are involved in illegal activities, then we should serve them, help them, protect them, and unite with them. Mr. Y.T. Wu and his colleagues even went to Wang Mingdao's home to try to unite with him. We can in no way see these people as our enemies. Even if they have criticisms of three-self organizations or persons involved in three-self, even if they misunderstand or distance themselves, still we should serve them, help them, protect them and unite with them. In some places some people want to get rid of them; if we in the two Christian bodies have no way to prevent this sort of mistaken action which goes against the Constitution, we should at least not be part of it; otherwise our prestige will plummet.

Because some churches and meeting points at the grassroots are not well-run, are in fact very poorly run, Christians are worn out with waiting for things to improve; they are disappointed and they drift away. Most of these are good Christians who are not happy about leaving, but they really are fed up with the church, they feel it is no longer the church. Just because there are still a lot of people coming to church, we should not feel that it doesn't matter if others leave. We must pay attention to any centrifugal tendency and unite well with every Christian.

In grassroots churches and meeting points, some colleagues preach only "leading people to the Lord", they seek only to increase the number of believers; they are not interested in the quality of the church. We certainly have no quarrel with "leading people to the Lord." However, the number of new Christians a church can absorb and nurture so that they grow and bear fruit during any given period is subject to many limitations. If we want only to develop the church and not to run it well, then the number of members will certainly grow and many superstitions and mistaken beliefs will come along with them. We will not be in time to "sterilize" them and the quality of the church will fall: can we then be called loyal servants of the Lord? In promoting the idea of running the church well, we wish to raise the quality of the church. I hope to have a sobering effect on those who want to increase numbers at all costs.

There are two standards for running the church well: one is the pleasure of the people in general; we should do nothing which is not well received by them. The second is the pleasure of Christians; we should do nothing which does not please them.

Between these two boundaries, there are many things we can do. We ask God to bless us, guide us, and enable the Chinese church, from the grassroots to the national level, to be united in all it does with the great mass of Christians under the truth of the Bible, in love for country and love for church with all glory to God and acceptable to God.

Translated by Janice Wickeri.

6. Message at the Plenary on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches – Gao Ying

The China Christian Council became a member of the World Council of Churches at the Seventh General Assembly held in Canberra in 1991. Here, Rev. Gao Ying reflects on bringing a post-denominational and non-European outlook to various Council meetings. There are echoes in her remarks of the Chinese approach to unity, which gives due consideration to diverse backgrounds and beliefs.

I am Gao Ying, from China. This is the first time that the China Christian Council is able to send an official delegate to the World Council of Churches Faith and Order Conference.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude on behalf of the Chinese Church for the invitation to attend this conference.

On the other hand it is a somewhat awkward feeling to be the *only* delegate from a country with more than one billion inhabitants.

Due to the isolation of our Chinese Church in the past we are not very knowledgeable about the ecumenical movement or Faith and Order.

As a representative of the Chinese Church, I come with an open heart to learn, to listen and to share. Through the presentations, materials and discussions I have learned a lot. To me, these were inspiring and stimulating. I am grateful for that.

However, I have realized that, probably due to our absence from the ecumenical movement for a number of years, I did not really feel included in the Faith and Order agenda. I belong to a church which considers itself to be a postdenominational church. This does not mean that we regard denominations as irrelevant.

But through the experience of recent years, we have discovered a *koinonia* which transcends denominational barriers. We have been brought together and now face the task of being the Church of Jesus Christ in China. This is our Faith and Order task today. The problems we encounter in fulfilling this task are rather special.

Faith and Order materials may be of help. But we do not yet see how and there has not yet been a real effort to relate the Faith and Order movement to a situation like ours.

Here at this Conference, European and western categories of thinking seem to dominate. In many ways, this is understandable. European and North American churches represent a mainstream of Christian tradition and look back upon centuries of Christian experience.

Gao Ying (Rev.) is a 1988 graduate of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary. She now serves the Chongwen men Church in Beijing and is Vice-Clericperson.

But at the same time we need to be reminded that we are here to give shape to the worldwide ecumenical movement. We should therefore give due attention to the diversity of situations.

Some in this Conference felt left out. In our Asian and Pacific regional meeting many reacted negatively to the exclusive attitude toward the experience of others. How can we talk about koinonia while marginalizing others' experiences? For this reason I would advocate that Faith and Order in future adopt a more regionalized approach to unity.

In 1927 at the World Conference on Faith and Order, the Church of Christ in China was represented by one of our best theologians. At that time he made a passionate speech saying that unity can be obtained only by responding to the challenges of the day. Though this was almost seventy years ago, I would like to echo his plea today.

12 August 1993, Santiago de Compostela, Spain.

ESSAYS

7. The Old Testament Commentaries of Rev. Jia Yuming – Zhao Qiusheng

Jia Yuming (1879-1964) was an influential and widely-respected evangelical pastor. As a young man in Shandong, he joined the Presbyterian Church and served churches there for twelve years. Following this, he worked in various seminaries and theological schools, including Jinling Women's Seminary in Nanjing, where he was Principal for seven years. In 1936, he moved to the China Theological Seminary which had been newly established in Nanjing and followed it to western China during the war years, returning when the institution finally settled in Shanghai after 1945. In 1948 he attended the World Evangelical Conference in the Netherlands and was elected a Vice-President. At first hesitant about the Three-Self Movement, he later joined and was elected a Vice-Chairperson in 1954.

Rev. Jia wrote over twenty volumes of Biblical exegesis and theology and edited four hymnals. His many hymn lyrics are based mainly on Biblical texts. Five of these are to be found in the Chinese Hymns of Universal Praise (New Edition), nos. 55, 58, 64, 129 and 152.

Rev. Jia Yuming is an influential figure in the modern Chinese church. From the beginning of the century until the 1960s, he devoted himself to the sacred work of spreading the gospel and building up the church. It may be most accurate to say that his influence owes more to his pastoral work than to his theological thinking. Rev. Jia Yuming's theology is essentially evangelical theology, and did not contain many new ideas or developments, but his pastoral work bore much rich fruit. He spent most of his life on the campuses of theological schools, over the years working at North China Theological College, Jinling Women's Seminary, the China Theological Seminary and others. As a result, he not only trained many outstanding church personnel, but also left us many works of Biblical exegesis.

In the Chinese church today, Rev. Jia Yuming's works still exert an influence that cannot be overlooked, an influence that is especially evident in the grassroots church. Therefore, I believe that engaging in some analysis and critique of Rev. Jia's approach to Biblical hermeneutics will be beneficial in helping us accurately deal with his works of Biblical exegesis. Due to my own limitations, this article will confine itself to Rev. Jia's Old Testament exegesis, primarily the Old Testament section of his *The Essential Meaning of the Bible (Shengjing Ya(yi))*. Special attention will be given to his (Vol.): *The Pentateuch (Moxi Wujing)* because in my opinion his hermeneutical approach to the Old Testament highlights the principles and methods used in his commentary more clearly than does his work on the New Testament. Also, this section of his *The Essential Meaning of the Bible* presents his exegetical principles and methods in a concentrated form.

1

Zhao Qiusheng is a 1993 graduate of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary now working with the Correspondence Bible School.

We should first we should examine Rev. Ra's view of the Bible because this forms the foundation and presuppositions of his Biblical exegesis. Once we understand his view of the Bible, we will better understand his exegetical principles and methods. The main aspects of Rev. Jia's view of the Bible will be dealt with below:

1. He holds firmly to a view of plenary inspiration. He states: "The entire Bible came through the revelation of the Holy Spirit, and was without error in the original; there is no higher authority for my faith and life."¹ His view of the Bible is extremely fundamentalist; he believed that every word of the Bible was inspired directly by God, that in the original the Bible was inerrant, and that it was only as a result of errors in copying and translation that a few errors have appeared.

2. He lifts up the Bible's spiritual authority. "The Old and New Testaments of the Bible are the classics of the Christian faith, a complete plan of salvation, a storehouse of truth, a vivid portrayal of life; they are the path of the all-seeing God, a revelation given to the whole earth of God Himself and of His unlimited moral power and saving grace ."²To him, the Bible is decidedly not a product of history or a collection of literary works, but rather a complete and authentic revelation from heaven.

3. He emphasizes that Christ is at the center of Scripture, and that salvation is its purpose. "The main idea of the entire Bible is deliverance, that is, the complete plan of salvation prepared by God for humankind with Christ at its center and the Cross as its main theme. In all of the Old Testament there is nothing which does not return to the Cross; in the whole New Testament, there is nothing which does not emanate from the Cross. There is no book, no chapter, no page of the Bible in which Christ's image cannot be seen."³

4. He believes that the Bible is coherent and consistent. For him: "The Bible is a book that is consistent and orderly from beginning to end. From the Creation to the coming of the New Heaven and New Earth, the Bible is a unity authored by revelation of the Holy Spirit."⁴ Additionally, in emphasizing that the Bible is consistent from beginning to end, he not only indicates consistency in the revelation of the Bible, but also in the arrangement of the content. For example, he believes that the arrangement of the first four books of the Pentateuch has an internal unity and order. "The first book, Genesis, centers on origins and the fall; the second book, Exodus, on salvation; the third book, Leviticus, on service, and the fourth book, Numbers, is about our spiritual pilgrimage. This nicely fits the arrangement of the Bible because people first need to be aware of their fall before needing salvation; they must receive salvation before being able to serve; and they must have communion with God before being able to embark upon a spiritual journey."⁵ His understanding of the order of the wisdom books is similar. Perhaps we can say that for him the Bible not only has unity as a whole but also has unity in its parts, and the thread that holds it together is salvation.

5. Rev. Jia places extreme importance on the usefulness of the Bible for people. "We can use [the Bible] to recover our true natures and raise our standing before God in order to share

¹ *Shengjing Yaoyi, Di Yi Juan: Moxi Wujing (The Essential Meaning of the Bible, Vol. 1: The Pentateuch, p. 2.*

² *Ibid.*, p. 1.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 320

His love; to share in His richness, virtue and blessing."⁶ This kind of thought forms a characteristic of Rev. Jia's Old Testament exegesis, namely that his hermeneutics revolve around two focal points. One of these is God's saving grace, the other is human acceptance of that grace. His hermeneutics are not a purely scholarly activity, but are rather always concerned with the personal spiritual lives of believers. The purpose of his commentary is not only to have people see "the way of the all-seeing God", but also to lead believers to follow that way.

2

Now let us take a closer look at Rev. Jia's primary exegetical methods:

Spiritual exegesis: First we should explain what "spiritual exegesis" is. In his *Bible Research Primer (Shengjing Yanjiu Rumen)*, Rev. Mu Deci says: "So-called 'spiritual meaning' exegesis gives the exegete or hearer spiritual aid according to the spiritual meaning and caching of the text" (p. 118).

From Rev. Jia's Old Testament exegesis we can see that spiritual 'exegesis is one of his most frequently used approaches. As noted earlier, Rev. Jia feels that the Bible is a "complete plan of salvation." Therefore, when doing exegesis, his emphasis is not on the literal meaning of the words of the text, but rather on striving to find the spiritual teaching in the text. When he reads the Old Testament with the eyes of a Christian and from the standpoint of saving grace, spiritual exegesis is a necessary tool. In this way, Rev. Jia fuses the content of the Old Testament, the teaching of the New Testament, and Christian spiritual discipline. This makes the content of the Old Testament not only the history of the experience of the Israelites with God, but also the meeting place of every Christian with God.

Let us now take a look at several examples of the kind with which Rev. Jia's hermeneutics are replete.

In *The Essential Meaning of the Bible: The Pentateuch*, pp. 55-56, Rev. Jia uses this method to explain the five books of Moses as five phases of a believer's spiritual journey. "Genesis presents God's selection ... in Exodus we can see how the chosen people are rescued and experience deliverance ... Leviticus and Hebrews discuss the doctrine of the Tent of Meeting, and like Colossians, discuss the doctrine of sanctification ... The main idea of Numbers is to make clear for believers in today's wilderness the path God wants us to walk. In holding to the Law,... a true Israelite, or a true Christian, is one whose life of observing the Law has been transformed by love." Such an explanation means that the Pentateuch is no longer relegated to the distant past, but that every believer is placed in its midst; the Pentateuch is transformed into the context in which each believer's spiritual pilgrimage takes place.

Spiritual exegesis not only expounds the spiritual meaning of a text, but is also intended to give the reader or listener spiritual help. That is to say that hermeneutics is not purely a personal cognitive activity, but is more a means to help the person gain spiritual attainment. Rev. Jia takes pains to link the spiritual teachings of the Bible with the life of the believer. Exodus 15:22-25 records the story of Moses throwing wood into the midst of bitter water, turning the bitter water sweet. With regard to the spiritual meaning of this text, Rev. Jia says:

⁶ Ibid., p. 1.

"What was this piece of wood? None other than that which humankind considers foolish - the Cross. Only the Cross of Christ can make the bitterness of the human heart sweet." After this, Rev. Jia ties this to the believer's spiritual life: "If the reader encounters bitterness today, is the response to complain? To pray to Moses? Undoubtedly, the only way to make bitter water sweet is through the Cross of Christ. When you meet with bitter waters, throw the Cross into them to turn them sweet."⁷

Topological exegesis. Another method typical of Rev. Jia's Old Testament exegesis is typological exegesis. This is "a special kind of Old Testament exegesis. This method is based on the unity of the Old Testament and New Testament, and on the belief that some people and events in the Old Testament [types] allude to or reflect people and events in the New Testament."⁸

We have already seen that Rev. Jia stresses that Jesus Christ is the focal point of the Bible, and even feels that "in every book and every chapter, there is no place where Christ is not seen."⁹ Typological exegesis is the best way to see Jesus in "every book and every chapter." In the Overview section of *The Essential Meaning of the Bible: The Pentateuch*, he lists Jesus' appearances in each book of the Old Testament, primarily relying on typological exegesis.¹⁰

Rev. Jia also puts his personal stamp on his use of typological exegesis. First, his use of "typology" is very broad. He can find types of Christ or the church in almost every chapter. For example, in Genesis alone he finds seven prefigurings of Christ, and this is only to "briefly mention a few" of the many found in Genesis.¹¹ Second, he tends to find a complete reflection of that which is foreshadowed rather than attending to the outstanding points of correspondence. For example, when he speaks of Joseph as a type of Jesus Christ, he feels that "the personal details of his life foreshadow Christ." Furthermore, he lists ten points at which Joseph's life corresponds to that of Jesus.¹² Third, of the types he mentions, some are "innate" while others are "inferred."¹³ Of course, Rev. Jia does not overlook those types which are pointed out in the New Testament; however, a substantial amount of the foreshadowing which he discusses is not pointed out in the New Testament, and is based entirely on his own deductions. For example, he feels that "Adam is a type of Christ (Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:2()-23, 45-49), and Eve is a type of the church."¹⁴ Certainly, the idea that Adam prefigures Christ has New Testament support, but to conclude from this that the wife of Adam is Christ's bride - a type of the church - is entirely his own deduction. Likewise, because the natural movement of the moon shares some similarities with characteristics of the church, he concludes that the moon represents the church.¹⁵

⁷ Ibid., p. 190-191

⁸ Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, translated by Zhan Zhenyi, p. 208-209.

⁹ *Shengjiing Yaoyi*, p. 16

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 13-14.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 71-76.

¹² Ibid., p. 136-37.

¹³ Fairbairn divides typology into two kinds: innate and inferred. Innate typologies are those which are explicitly labelled as such in the New Testament. Inferred typologies are not mentioned as such in the New Testament, but according to the principles in the New Testament it can be inferred that these are foreshadowings. See *Jidujiao Slnjingxue*, p. 211-212.

¹⁴ *Shengjiing Yaoyi*, p. 85.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Exegesis based on the significance of names. This is another exegetical method frequently used by Rev. Jia, and involves reasoning his way to spiritual teachings from the significance of names. These can be names of people, places, mountains, rivers and so forth. In these names, Rev. Jia always finds spiritual teaching.

In one text, he deduces teaching on spiritual gifts from the names of the four rivers that flowed through Eden. He says: *Pishon* means 'increase', 'expand', 'freely granted'; *Gihon* means 'valley of grace', 'bosom', 'bounty'; *Tigris* means 'powerful current'; *Euphrates* means 'sweet water', 'bearing fruit'. This indicates that God's grace is freely given and bountiful, and that people who draw on the power of the spirit can bear much fruit."¹⁶

In his commentary on Ruth, we could say that Rev. Jia's use of this approach is particularly concentrated. He draws teaching concerning deliverance, doctrine and spiritual growth from the names Ruth, Naomi (Marsh), Elimelech, Judah, Boaz, Bethlehem and so on.¹⁷

Mystical exegesis. This is one point which cannot be ignored. It is especially important in his interpretation of some numbers and colors.

Basically he believes that many numbers in the Bible have special significance. In *The Essential Meaning of the Bible: The Pentateuch*, pages 206-207, he lists the numbers 1 through 12 along with their significance for readers' attention. For example, "Three is God's complete number seven is the complete spiritual number ten is the earth's complete number" and so forth. Thus, when explaining scripture he pays attention to the implications he sees in these meanings. For example, in his discussion of the Ten Commandments, he says: "Ten is the earth's complete number, and also the complete number of responsibility, so the Ten Commandments are a full and complete indication of the responsibilities of humankind. With regard to both God and humankind, if these can be completely followed, people are considered to have fulfilled their duties."¹⁸

This kind of mystical exegesis also appears in his interpretation of some colors, for example, in his explanation of the colors blue, red, and purple in Num. 4:4-13. He explains blue as "the color of heaven, hence indicating Christ's time in the wilderness"; red as "the beauty of godliness outshining human nature"; violet as the color of ultimate respect for the king, hence indicating the relationship between sacrifice and honor."¹⁹

beyond numbers and colors, Rev. Jia also uses a mystical approach in his explanation of certain verses. Again we will take Num. 4:4-13 as an example. Num. 4:5-6 describes how the Levites handled the Ark of the Covenant when moving camp. Explaining this text, he says: "In order to cover the Ark, they must use the shielding curtain; covering the ark with the curtain indicates the covering of God's nature with human nature. The further placing of the hides of sea cows on top is to thwart the influence of the wilderness - that is, the world."²⁰

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 282-283.

¹⁷ See Shengjing Yaoyi: Lishi Shu (Shang), "Lude Ji Yaoyi" (The Essential Meaning of the Bible. Books of History, Vol./, "Outline of Ruth."

¹⁸ *Shengjing Yaoyi*, p. 205-206

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 341.

²⁰ Ibid.

In the examples above, Rev. Jia's approach is obviously not an example of exegesis based on implied or spiritual meaning because he directly affirms that there is a stable, confirmed, internal link between the text and the interpretation. But this link is unsupported by the words of the text, doctrine, or evidence in the Bible. We can only describe this as a mystical approach.

The four methods described above are the main approaches Re Jia uses in his exegesis. However, the purpose of this article is not simply to list Rev. Jia's methods, but to explore them further.

3

It is no accident that Rev. Jia's interpretations of the Old Testament are beloved in the Chinese church. In general, we can say that this is because Rev. Jia is a genuinely Chinese Christian. The distinguishing features of his faith, his patterns of thought, and his model of interpretation are all signified, and have fundamental and broad points of contact with the Chinese temperament and ways of thinking. Specifically, this can be seen in the several ways described below.

His interpretation of the Old Testament derives completely from a reverential faith background. From his exegetical works, we can easily see that Rev. Jia's attitude toward God and God's word is one of reverence and zeal. In matters of faith, Chinese have always stressed "sincerity of the heart", and the basic expression of this sincerity is complete human reverence and obedience toward God. As a pious Christian, Rev. Jia embraced this reverential adoration and humble obedience in his exegesis of the Bible, exalting the Bible's spiritual authority. I once saw a commentary on Romans written by an English theologian and scholar in which the author boldly criticizes the views expressed by Paul in Rom. 9:19-23 as inappropriate. Such rationalistic and humanistic tendencies could hardly be found in Rev. Jia's works.

His Old Testament hermeneutics proceed entirely from a Christian perspective in which the New Testament is the key to the Old Testament. In essence this is to "New Testamentize" the Old Testament, making it into spiritual nourishment for Christians. We have already seen that in his interpretation of every book of the Old Testament he takes salvation as the theme, Christ as the center, and spiritual growth as the purpose. This coincides with the Chinese emphasis on practicality. Some western Bible scholars and theologians enthusiastically engage in purely scholarly discussion of the Bible. But the concern of the great majority of Chinese believers is not focused on what was recorded in the past, but on the significance of that which was recorded for their lives today. For Chinese Christians, the Bible is "a letter which the Father in heaven wrote to His earthly children."²¹ With regard to the Bible, the goal of Chinese believers is clear: "Through reading the Bible, we can see God's word, understand his intentions and God himself, and through knowing Christ can gain eternal life."²² Rev. Jia's interpretations of the Old Testament satisfy these needs of Chinese Christians.

The basic factor in determining how a person interprets the Bible is, of course, a person's theology. Therefore one of the reasons Rev. Jia's Old Testament commentaries have been warmly received is that their theology is that one which is accepted and welcomed by many Chinese Christians. For example, Rev. Jia's view of the Old Testament and New

²¹ K.H. Ting, *How to Study the Bible*, p. 1.

²² *Shengjiing Yanjiu Rumen*, p. 17.

Testament as "consistent and orderly from beginning to end" would be welcomed by the great majority of Christians in China. Additionally, emphasis on Christ as the focal point of the Bible, salvation as the Bible's theme, the Bible's high spiritual authority, and the importance of the Bible to the spiritual lives of believers would all be views which coincide with most Chinese Christians' faith and theological demands.

Rev. Jia's personal faith endows his exegetical works with an inner vitality. The piety of Rev. Jia's faith, the warmth of his love for Christ, and the depth of his spirituality make him a model for us. His highest goal in life was spirituality. I once heard a student who was at the China Theological Seminary when Rev. Jia was president say that even though he was president, Rev. Jia arose every morning at five a.m. to go to the campus and pray with the students. In the course of Rev. Jia's life of service, he accumulated much spiritual experience. Additionally, because Rev. Jia stressed the value of the Bible in shaping believers' spiritual lives, he paid close attention to kneading his rich spiritual experience into his explication of scripture; this kept his explanation of Old Testament texts in close touch with the spiritual lives of believers, and made his work helpful and useful in guidance.

Rev. Jia's explanations of the Bible are rich in feeling and beautiful in language. In his youth, Rev. Jia was moved by the Spirit to develop a heart of loving reverence toward the Bible. Looking back, he says: "I recall when I was 18 years old, and finished reading the Bible for the first time. At the end I wrote 'Praise God! My heart is more satisfied with this treasure than if God had granted me the whole world.' From that time I determined that no matter whether I was rich or poor, safe or in danger, at a dead end or making smooth progress, experiencing success or adversity, I would be willing to take the propagation of this Bible and the saving grace of its Christ as my sole life's work."²³ So his exposition of the Old Testament was not only an intellectual activity, but also involved his heart. When people read his works of Old Testament interpretation, they are not only facing white paper and black print, but breathing the vital air of life.

4

On the other hand, we see that in his Old Testament hermeneutics there are also inadequacies and flaws. These may arise from the limitations of his times, or from subjective factors. I will discuss the main inadequacies and flaws below.

His view of the Bible as verbally inerrant is not accurate. Even though this view is intended to maintain the Bible's spiritual authority, it lacks a Biblical and logical basis. Rev. Su Deci has made a thorough and rational analysis and critique of this view of the Bible.²⁴ This inaccurate view of the Bible necessarily has a negative impact on Rev. Jia's exegesis, sometimes resulting in subjective guessing and forced interpretations. For example, he concludes that similarities in the pronunciation of the word "man" and "woman" in Hebrew show the close relationship between Adam and Eve. This kind of interpretation obviously does not derive from the literal meaning of the words. Similar guesses and forced interpretations are also apparent in his use of typology in Old Testament exegesis.

²³ *Shengqing Yaoyi*, p. 2.

²⁴ See *Shengqing Yanjiu Rumen*, p. 16, 19-20.

He ignores some fundamental principles of hermeneutics. My point is that he does not attend to important background relevant to the interpretation of the Bible. Bishop K.H. Ting has said: "The more we understand the background, the better we understand the Bible." An understanding of the background of the Bible - particularly of that of the Old Testament - is a necessary precondition to accurate exegesis. Prof. Ramm states: "No matter what people write, it is written according to their own cultural background So study of cultural background is essential to Biblical interpretation."²⁵

However, in Rev. Jia's exegesis of Old Testament texts, we almost never find attention to the cultural background. Instead, because he believes that the entire Bible is inspired by God, he consciously or unconsciously removes the Old Testament from the cultural and historical background which formed it. In his interpretation of the Old Testament he uses a set model of faith to interpret all scriptural texts. This makes it easy for his interpretations to fall into subjective assumptions, and also detracts from their profundity and accuracy.

In the four exegetical methods of Rev. Jia previously mentioned, there was no mention of exegesis on the basis of the literal meaning of texts. This is not an omission, but is due to the fact that Rev. Jia almost never used this most basic and necessary approach.

"So-called 'literal meaning exegesis' involves interpreting Bible texts according to the literal meaning of the words unless such an interpretation is impossible."²⁶ Rev. Jia places great stress on Christ as the central focus of the Bible and salvation as the Bible's theme (of course I do not think this is inaccurate), so the emphasis in his exegesis of every text is on the discovery of spiritual meaning surrounding this focus and theme. Thus, he essentially ignores the literal meaning of Old Testament texts. Despite the fact that this approach can help believers toward spiritual maturity, it is a regrettable drawback vis a vis a complete and accurate understanding of the Old Testament. This neglect of the literal meaning of Old Testament texts also results in the suspicion that his explanations of some texts are far-fetched and overly subjective. For example, with regard to the decree in Lev. 6:16 that Aaron's sons could eat the grain offering, his interpretation is that: "Only males could eat the offering because males are strong while women are weak. This signifies that spiritually strong believers in the assembly may have a share of the sacrificial food; the spiritually weak in the assembly have no part."²⁷ This explanation is obviously not the original intent of the text, neither can it be termed accurate.

The result of this neglect of literal interpretation and this tendency to explain texts from a certain set theological angle is that the original significance of the Old Testament becomes limited and veiled in various ways.

Additionally, Rev. Jia's neglect of the results of archaeological studies - in fact, his resistance to them - is also a weakness in his Old Testament exegesis.

Nanjing Theological Review, No. 18 (1/1993), p. 110.
Translated by Don Snow.

²⁵*Jidujiao Shijingxue, p. 139.*

²⁶*Ibid., p. 39*

8. The Christian Church in Its Chinese Context – Kan Baoping

Mr. Kan broadens his perspective on the crucial issues facing the Chinese church from the practical concerns of running the church well to the prophetic stance a church should adopt vis a vis culture and society. He describes China as changing from a morality-based culture to an economy-based one and the church as being under pressure both from within and without. In responding to society, the church risks being overwhelmed by the effort to adapt; within itself it faces challenges of rapid growth and weak ecclesiology as well as the revival of denominationalism. In facing up to these challenges, the church must be both reconciled to society and play a prophetic role within it, gaining strength from an inner theological renewal.

An awareness of the relevance of church to society is crucial to a Christian theology. That is to say that it is crucial for a Christian theology to be relevant to social issues and to take up these issues, since society is the church's mission field and the church as a "sociological entity"¹ is an integral part of society. Surely a theology can be without such an awareness of or relevance to society if it does not consider human beings as social beings but only as a small being in contrast to God as the capitalized Being. Such a theology, however, will not be effective in today's world where people are struggling for economic equality, political liberation, racial equality, and so on.

Since the Chinese church was reopened, it has been growing fairly fast. Consequently a theological reconstruction is on our agenda. In this paper, I will analyze our context in which our church is struggling for its survival and for its mission, and explore the relationship between our concrete existence in our Chinese context and the meaning of being Christians in China. I will also raise some issues which challenge our church to take action.

Chinese society at large is changing rapidly through the impetus of economic reform, which is characterized by the gradual application of a market economy. As a result, traditional Chinese culture is faced with a challenge, or a crucial potentiality, of transformation from a morality-based culture that emphasizes harmony to an economy-based culture focused on laissez-faire. The Christian church in China as a special social community in society is in a crisis of self-identity. On the one hand, our church is under pressure from a changing society. Can the church be compatible to the changing culture and changing society? Does the church have to renew itself in order to offer its vision to the renewing society? On the other hand, the church is under pressure from within: from a traditional theological understanding, mainly brought by western missionaries, which corresponded to the desire to escape the miserable reality of old China. This kind of other worldly understanding of theology has been taken as traditional and therefore orthodox. It pulls the church's concern back from beyond itself to a focus on itself. For such a theological understanding, God is static, because He never changes. Therefore, the church should not change either, and it should keep its distance from society, otherwise it may succumb to the secular trends in society. Can the Chinese church survive this double pressure? How can the church find its way out? Douglas John Hall's *Has the Church a Future?* raises a serious issue in its very title. He analyzes the situation of churches in North

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¹ This expression is used by Paul Tillich in his *Systematic Theology*.

America, pointing out not only the dangerous situation of the churches in North America, but the critical situation of the churches elsewhere in the world.

In today's world, almost every individual church finds itself on several boundaries, and the church in China is no exception. In fact, we are on many boundaries, and none of them allows us to fence-sit. Has the Chinese church a future?

Boundary 1. The church as minority. China is a big nation in which the dominant culture has never been and may never be "Christian." In the past, Christianity met with strong resistance in China. Part of the reason for this is that the missionaries brought Christianity to China as a culture, especially a western culture, in the name of so called "Christian culture", but not as GOSPEL. This is why, for some missionaries, their first task in China was to undermine traditional Chinese culture. They were strongly convinced that Christian gospel could not take root in China in the soil of a Chinese culture. The crucial issue, however, is: can we juxtapose gospel and culture, or can we equate gospel with culture? If we take either position, we shall necessarily put ourselves in a very awkward position, and will be faced with a dilemma. On the one hand, if we juxtapose gospel and culture, we have to decide to abandon either gospel or culture since they are antagonistic to each other. If this is the case, when a Chinese becomes a Christian, he or she can no longer be Chinese, since the two are contradictory. When the Greeks received the Gospel, however, they became Greek Christians, and Europeans became European Christians. This shows that people become Christians in their particular cultural settings, thus they do not need to decide to keep one and discard the other. On the other hand, if we equate the Gospel with culture, it will necessarily lead us to the position that the "Gospel culture" or "Christian culture" is antagonistic to any other culture. If this is the case, the supreme task for the Christian church must be to destroy any culture in order to make the Gospel popular worldwide. Church history and history as a whole, however, prove that this is impossible.

Gospel is a message from God revealed to different people in different cultures. Certainly Gospel transforms a culture but does not simply replace it. How can we replace a culture with Gospel if gospel is not a culture? Does it sound realistic to say that a nation does not need a culture since Christian Gospel is enough?

Christians are a minority in China over against the huge population, and the impact of the church upon the society is rather weak over against the rich culture with its thousands of years of history. In such a context, how shall we survive? How shall we confess our faith in our society and profess our faith to the society? How and what shall we prophesy to our people who might have never have heard about Christianity? Will they welcome western-style Christian jargon? Can they be satisfied by an other-worldly interpretation of their present life and the meaning of their existence? Would they be willing to be Christians, but not Chinese any more? These are the crucial issues with which we are faced and have to wrestle: all issues concerning the indigenization of the Chinese church. We have certainly achieved some progress in the process of making the Christian church in China a real Chinese church, which means to make the church take root in the soil of Chinese culture while remaining faithful to the gospel. But it is only the tip of the iceberg and we still have a long way to go.

Boundary 2. Christianity is the least influential but the most exclusive of the major religions in China, which include Buddhism, Taoism and Islam, as well as folk religions. In China, religious conflicts have never been so serious as to cause wars. Religions in a Chinese society

which sees mutual respect and tolerance as virtues have shown great respect and tolerance for each other. When Christianity came in, however, the situation changed. Christians claim that Christianity is the only real and authentic religion, while all others are false. Believers of other religions will go to hell if they do not convert to Christianity. If this is so, how shall we understand God's willingness to save all human beings and Christ's effort to atone for the whole human race? Can we assume that Christianity is superior or more real than other religions? What is the basis for this kind of claim, except for our Christian scriptures which mean nothing those who believe in other religions? How can we expect to convert large numbers of people from other religions firmly rooted in and even identified with Chinese culture, and which have had a much stronger impact upon the society than Christianity? Is it possible for us or anyone to Christianize or colonize the whole world and the whole human race in a Christian way? This is a very ambitious plan but I have to say that it sounds a bit like it comes from an ivory tower. Such self-centered claims to truth imply a belief that God is limited since there is only one way for God to save the world.

Some Christian scholars have predicted that the Christian population of Asia will remain small in Asia. The most optimistic prediction says that the Christian population will not exceed six per cent. One of the major reasons for this is that native religions are very strong and inculturated in Asia. This is true of China. In recent years, the Chinese church has been growing, but at the same time Taoism, and especially Buddhism, are becoming more popular as well. Buddhist and Taoist temples are mushrooming and their believers flock to them. This being the case, it would be foolish to make claims about the authenticity of Christianity against other religions that are better inculturated and more influential than Christianity is.

A large proportion of Chinese Christians is under the influence of traditional theologies of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries brought by western missionaries. They tend to be narrow-minded, since they fear that God may also be merciful to those of other beliefs. They feel that it is unfair of God not to punish non-Christians, or in other words, they feel non-Christians do not deserve God's mercy. God should save his love for Christians only and then maybe only for certain Christians who are more pious than others.

Jurgen Moltmann points out:

It is only the cosmic dimension which gives the human, historical experiences of Christ their all-embracing meaning. We can only think of Christ inclusively. Anyone who thinks of Christ exclusively, not for other people but against them, has not understood the Reconciler of the world. And yet a narrow, personally-centered and church-centered Christianity does exist, with its tragic incapacity to discover Christ in the cosmos ...²

Moltmann is right. If we imprison God in Christian circles, we shall fail to understand God's all embracing love. It is rather common for Chinese Christians to make the kind of testimonies which claim that, in an accident, the Christians survived but the non-Christians died, or at least were badly injured. They offer their appreciation to God, for God loves the Christians only. They try to convert their neighbors by terrifying them into thinking that if they do not believe in the Christian God, they will be punished. Martin Luther criticized such methods of making converts. Some people may argue that that they have not invented these methods, that they are biblical and traditional. In a sense this argument is correct: such beliefs are an extension of the Israelis' Old Testament faith that God is on their side as a nation and will strike down other nations. This belief is a reflection of Israeli culture at that time rather

² *The Way of Jesus Christ*. London: SCM Press. English version, 1990.

than the Gospel, as is much more clearly manifested in the New Testament. In the Gospel of Mark, chapter 12, verse 30-31, Jesus clearly claimed the transition from Old Testament belief to New Testament faith: mutual love overcomes any rules and differences.

In Buddhist belief, Buddha saves all sentient beings, not just Buddhists, by extinguishing suffering. A Buddhist saying goes: I shall go to hell for other people's sake. In contrast, for some Christians, God will only send people like themselves to the Kingdom of God, while all those who are different from them will be sent to hell. The Christian hell is much larger than the Buddhist one and our Christian God seems to be a narrow-minded and calculating God. Such a God is a tyrant who has no capacity for love. According to the portrait in the gospel stories, Christ is more of a Prometheus, than a Zeus figure. Zeus represents all kinds of tyrants - political, religious and economic - who are not merciful but powerful, and whose omnipotent power is only demonstrated in punishment. He relentlessly punishes anyone who dares to question him, or who is against his will. Prometheus, however, is a tragic and heroic figure who rebelled against Zeus and sacrificed himself for the human race, to open to them the course of civilization. The religious symbol in this myth is quite similar to that of the Christ event in which Jesus sacrificed himself that the human race might have quality of life. We can in no way equate Christ with Prometheus because Christ brought real change in the existential status of the human race and a promise of both immanent and transcendent expectation. Prometheus brought the human race only the possibility of human civilization. Moreover, Christ came into the world according to God's will but not against his will. In a word, God is not Zeus, for he loves his handiwork; that is, the creation. To spread the gospel is to demonstrate the love, and thus peace and hopes from God. Where there is genuine love, there will be harmony, the harmony among people who have different kinds of belief, who are from different cultural backgrounds, who have different complexions, and who have different world views or ideologies.

Douglas John Hall raises some issues vital to the church:

[d]oes commitment to the Christian faith—to this particular religious tradition—necessarily result in exclusivity? Why should the decision to pay serious attention to Christian foundations produce an attitude of Christian superiority and a posture of rejection where all other claims to truth are concerned?³

Christian theology is constructed on the basis of a recognition of the proclamation:
For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord.
For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.⁴

A claim of absolute truth by Christians neglects the message delivered in this proclamation. God, ontologically speaking, is not simply a projection of human beings' wills. The image of God depicted by some Christians, however, is the projection of human wills, such as the will to power - the power to control, to dominate, to manipulate and to punish the rest of the human race; the will to conquer, for security, for the certainty of this life and next life, and the will to go beyond its finitude. In this way, God is emptied and squeezed into the conceptual framework of the human mind. Thus God is reduced to a concept, and those with certain type

³ *Professing the Faith*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993, p. 17.

⁴ Isaiah 55: 8-9

of Christian faith become the real gods, the god at work, or at least the high commissioner from God to other people. According to the Holy Scripture, however, God created the whole human race on an equal basis. The human mind is not able to exhaust God as a mystery, therefore it will not be against God's will for human beings to search for the ultimate truth from different perspectives in their concrete existence. It is vitally significant for the Church in China as a minority to be aware of this. It is time for us to renew our theology. We should open ourselves up and learn to appreciate God's creation and his continuing work in his creation together with other people. This is not simply for the sake of survival, but also for the message contained in the Gospel which tells us to bring people together in harmony and not to divide them for any reason.

Boundary 3. We are a church with a notorious history in Chinese society. During the Opium War of the nineteenth century, the western imperialists opened China with their gunships. Christian missionaries from the west then came to China backed by these foreign gunships and protected by unequal treaties signed by the Chinese government at gunpoint. Churches and foreign missionaries enjoyed extraterritorial privileges in China. Because of this background, it has been difficult for the Chinese people to be sympathetic to a Christianity that takes a foreign form. Chinese Christians used to be called "imitators of foreign devils". It has been difficult for Chinese Christians, too, to reconcile with our own people.

The sad thing is that we are not always aware of our situation. We do not realize how unapproachable we are. On the one hand, we tend to be self-righteous and see ourselves as "the Israelis" and other Chinese as "the pagans". On the other hand, others do not really understand us and see us as worshippers of foreign religion or superstition. For many Chinese Christians, salvation is once for all. As soon as one is baptized, he or she is saved. This kind of understanding of an instant salvation is the Chinese version of Calvin's concept of the perseverance of the saints. Salvation is personal, and, therefore, Christian faith is purely "a private yearning". Such an approach to Christian faith limits the capacity of Chinese Christians to share with others in society and to fulfill our social responsibilities, even though Calvin also taught that Christians as citizens must fulfill their social responsibilities. In order to remove obstacles and achieve reconciliation between Chinese Christians and the rest of society, we must first of all identify ourselves with our fellow Chinese; that is, we are Christians and Chinese at the same time. We are part of our people, therefore we are obligated to identify ourselves with our people, to seek to understand our people and to be understood by them, and to reconcile with our people. We shall seek for common grounds instead of differences between us. Reconciliation can be achieved on the common grounds on which we can share our life experiences and our visions of our common future. This kind of mutual sharing can, on the one hand, enrich both sides and on the other, form a bridge between us leading to mutual understanding and reconciliation.

Certainly, by the efforts of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of Protestant Churches in China, our church has been successful in changing its foreign image to a certain degree, but this is an unfinished task which we must carry on. We should constantly remind ourselves that we are Chinese Christians and therefore we are an integral part of our Chinese people. Seeking a common ground means to explore common goals in our shared existence. This common goal unites us with our Chinese people and encourages us to strive to achieve it together with all Chinese. At present, one of our common grounds is to make contributions to the construction of our socialist China. It is true that we do not yet have a final definition of socialism, but we are searching for it. This is also our common

ground. We have many common grounds that are sufficient for us to come together, work together, and share together with our fellow Chinese people. In the end, we shall be able to demolish the obstacles, barriers and gaps between us.⁵

Boundary 4. We are caught between being a post-denominational church and facing the challenge of the revival of denominationalism. In the fifties, the Chinese church entered into its post-denominational era, the dream of many Chinese Christians and Christian leaders for many years. The bitter but rich experiences of the Cultural Revolution strengthened our belief that unity is the witness to the Gospel and that unity is the source of energy in our church. In recent years with the development of the economic reforms, Chinese society at large has been undergoing rapid changes. China is in transition from a stereotypical socialism to a new form. Chinese people have much more freedom, and visitors from abroad travel much more easily in China. For some people from different church circles abroad, the time is ripe to realize their dream: to restore their missionary camps in China and to reassert control over the Chinese church. Various kinds of Christian denominations and sectarian groups are flocking into China publicly or secretly and trying to convert Chinese Christians to their particular Christian faith, which they claim as "the real faith". Some Chinese Christians are confused and a large number of them have become fed up with such teachings that tend to be more ideological than biblical. These people are trying to sell their philosophy rather than to spread the Gospel. Their intentions put the Chinese church in a very difficult position.

The China Christian Council is by nature a church rather than a council, and the local Churches are individual members of the Council. In recent years, the Council has tried to shift its focus from three-self - that is, self-administration rather than administration by overseas organizations or personnel; self-support rather than reliance on foreign resources; and self-propagation rather than being a dot on the missionary map - to three-well, that is to do well the tasks of self-administration, self-support, and self-propagation. Such a shift involves an ecclesiastical indigenization and a theological contextualization. This strategic shift is vitally significant to the future of our church and it is widely supported by Chinese Christians. Some special people from abroad with their own agendas have not been very happy about what the China Christian Council is doing, because it does not meet their requirements. For them, a real church in China must be underground and must be opposed to our present communist government. The China Christian Council is neither underground nor opposed to our government; therefore they do not call it a real church but an "official church;" that is one controlled by the government for show. Neither are the nearly eight million Chinese Christians who are members of the China Christian Council, "real" Christians; therefore they are not going to be saved. Such people come to China and start their "real churches"; that is, underground and opposed to our government. They teach that real Christians must do away with the China Christian Council and join their "real churches". They support some sectarian groups to split away from China Christian Council. In short, according to their teachings, salvation and the final judgment are the only things Christians need concern themselves about because they are the whole meaning of the Gospel. At the final judgment, God will save some people and send the rest to hell. The measure by which to differentiate the saved from those to be punished is ideology. In one word, for these people, justification is not by faith but by ideology. All of these attempts create confusion, turmoil, conflict, and division in the Chinese church. Will the Christian church in China, as a minority, have a future if it is split

⁵ This is the perspective on Christian faith reflected in Shusako Endo's novel *Silence* .

into pieces'? Can a divided church in China bear witness to the love of Christ and unity in Christ'? We must stand firm, maintaining our church in unity, and fight against those who try to divide the body of Christ in China.

Boundary 5. We are a fast-growing church without a well-formed ecclesiology. Ecclesiology or church-ology is a subject that is not taken seriously by Chinese Christians. I have mentioned above that the China Christian Council has entered into a new era. It has shifted the focus of its work from three-self to three-well. There is no doubt that the shift is very significant for the regularization and self-construction of our church. I ask, however: is a theological basis necessary for such an ecclesiastical movement? If the answer is yes, then what is its theological basis'? These two questions concern both a practical and a theoretical issue. There is no argument about the necessity to run our church well. The issues are: how we shall run our church, which is a practical issue; and what the theological reflection is upon which our practice is based, which is a theoretical issue. Some people may argue that the newly-published *Church Order for Trial Use* is an effort to shape an ecclesiology. I suggest that it is rather a practical suggestion to solve problems and to settle certain controversial issues in the church, rather than the result of a serious theological articulation. It does not touch the central issue of church order and function.

The China Christian Council is not a power center. It is only a decision making body of some sort, but it does not have the authority to enforce its decisions in local churches. What kind of ecclesiastical polity shall we have? What is the role our church should play in our society? Can we run our church well without an effective ecclesiology, which is supported by a finely articulated theology? We should construct our ecclesiology according to our context. This is not an easy task. In doing this, we have to consider social, historical, and cultural factors, and of course a theological reflection is the axis for all these considerations.

In conclusion, we are on the boundary between renewal and decay. Society is changing rapidly. If the church remains in its own small circle as it is, it will lose its vision. A church without vision will decay no matter how popular it is. Ever-changing reality does not leave our church much time for hesitation. It is time for us to rethink our past. We cannot be satisfied with the present numerical growth of the church, because numerical growth may jeopardize the future of the church if theological reflection does not run parallel to it. We should constantly remind ourselves what we have gained and what we have lost in this growth. We should be aware of what kind of prophetic role our church should play in our society.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this paper, Chinese society is undergoing a rapid change. This change is motivated by economic reform. To some extent reform has been very successful. The Chinese people's living standard has improved a lot. High-rises under construction are everywhere in cities. Disco bars and karaoke clubs are as numerous as the saloons in Geneva before Calvin arrived. Commercials for all kinds of consumer goods fill nearly one-fifth of total TV air time. I heard of an American gazing out at the wonderful night view from the top floor restaurant of a tall building in Shanghai; after a sip of beer, he said: "Gosh, there's more money in Shanghai than in New York." All this is only one side of the picture - the pleasant side. If we look at the picture from the other side, however, we may have second thoughts. Prostitution, drug traffic and drug abuse, hardly heard of from the early 1950s to the late 1970s, have started to disturb people's lives again. Crime is increasing, the inflation rate is skyrocketing, and the gap between the rich and the poor is growing. A famous slogan of the past, "serve the people," has been replaced by a general

attitude of "serve the People's Money".⁶ What will our church do in the midst of such a whirlpool? Shall we simply go with the flow, shall we struggle to get out and leave it there, or shall we stand against the stream?

The gradual application of a market economy raises some serious issues for our society and for our church as well. Certainly the stereotype of planned economy has its limitations for economic development, but the issue is, what kind of a market economy shall we have? Is the North American type of market economy the only choice for us? Will it work in China? This topic is too large for me to cover in this paper and it needs an economist to deal with it. What I am going to suggest here is that the axiom for the North American type of market economy is *laissez-faire*, which may mean cut-throat competition. The philosophy on which the *laissez-faire* theory is based is the belief that human beings are by nature free beings and economic beings. According to this belief, to choose freely is the way to become fully human. The more material goods one possesses, the more choices one has, and therefore the more freedom one has. Accordingly, in order to become a real human being and to fulfill one's end, one must try wholeheartedly to possess as many material goods as possible. Such an understanding of human nature implies that human beings are basely material beings, and that the spiritual dimension of their being is based on the fulfillment of its material dimension. It is true that human beings are free beings, and God by His love gives us free will to choose. According to God's commandment, however, the path to becoming fully human does not lie in the choice of material possessions, but in choosing to love. This is what Jesus did, and this is what God requires us to do.⁷ Surely we don't have to choose between "a clean but not merciful society" as Geneva was after Calvin's reform and a "merciful" but not clean society as it was before Calvin. It is necessary to improve the quality of people's life, but the quality of life does not simply imply its material dimension. Human beings are not only material beings but also spiritual beings. Quality of life indicates both the material dimension and, even more, the spiritual dimension of life. The mere piling up of material goods cannot fill people's inner emptiness. The whole issue in the business of reform toward modernity is what modernity really means, and is its final goal. If modernity simply means cars, highways, high-rises, and Coca Cola - as we see in North America - then the result of modernity is the end of the world, because the world's resources cannot meet such great demands.

Modernity does not necessarily lead to civilization. When some political leaders from the western countries call their part of the world the civilized world they refer to a materialized world where people have great access to material goods but may not have quality of life. This fact is always ignored and this is what the church should offer to society in its vision. This is the time for the church to play its prophetic role in society. "Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it?"⁸ If a church is not able to offer its vision to society, or if it cannot play a prophetic role in society, it is no longer a church but only a social organization. If a church is willing to fulfill its obligation in society, it must be aware of social issues and be brave enough to take them up.

It is time for the Chinese church to make up its mind to renew or decay. Our church can not pretend not to be in society anymore. To isolate ourselves from society does not make us holier, but more foolish. A church cannot gain its vitality unless it is willing to empty

⁶ The Chinese term for Chinese currency is *reminbi*, which means The People's Money.

⁷ Matthew 25: 35-45.

⁸ Mark 9: 50.

itself humbly and take the form of a servant, rather than a savior, of the world. The future is always open to a church that is ready to open itself to society and participate in society. Paul Tillich rightly points out: "...in the cross of the Christ the divine participation in existential estrangement becomes manifest..."⁹ The cross is a symbol of God's participation in "the suffering world". Christ came to the world to fulfill God's will. The incarnation event contains both the coming of Jesus Christ and the revealing of God's genuine love for the whole human race through what Jesus did and said in the world. This is the way of Jesus Christ, and this is the way for the church to follow Jesus Christ. To follow Christ is to take up the cross, which Jesus took up by participating in the society. In doing this, a church must keep its sensitivity in the society. The Chinese church must renew. It must renew its way of thinking, its theology and its attitude toward society. As a result of this renewal, it will be able to participate in society, to become an integral part of society, to be reconciled with our fellow Chinese people, and be able to play its prophetic role in our society.

⁹ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*. University of Chicago Press, 1967. vol. 2, p. 174.

9. Challenges to Theological Reflection and Education in China – Zhang Jinglong

Chinese society and the situation of Christianity in China have undergone great changes since Liberation. Yet as the new century looms, even greater changes beckon. In exploring what these new challenges may mean for theological education, Mr Zhang Jinglong calls for the church to initiate an historical and theological encounter with current philosophical and economic trends in Chinese society in order to bring its message of Christ's hope to modern Chinese society. To do so, theological education must be both pragmatic and farsighted, rooted in Chinese soil and responsive to global concerns.

It seems indisputable that God has placed us in a unique era of great challenges and numerous opportunities. Like it or not, all sorts of changes are taking place around us, exerting a tremendous impact on our everyday life, whether individually or communally. We are standing at the threshold of a new age. Signals of the impending twenty-first century are both exhilarating and puzzling. Sometimes we may feel excited and encouraged as the light of the new millennium breaks into our life and the horizon of new age dawns upon us, bringing new hope and promises to the people of God in China; sometimes we may feel confounded and disoriented as it seems hardly possible for us to find a sure anchor as the twentieth century phases into the past.

Surrounded by challenges of all kinds, we cannot help asking questions about the future church in China - our true self-identity both as Christians and Chinese in a rapidly changing society. Somehow it seems necessary that our historical consciousness be derived from the Scriptures and our concrete historical existence aroused. We need to continue to search for self-identity in our own culture and social context. We need to perceive the changes toward the twenty-first century against the mirror of Christ who is the center of our faith, love and hope.

Theological preparation for the new millennium in China appears to be of primary importance especially at this very critical juncture of history. Is a sense of crisis or a sense of urgency needed? Definitely! The movement of the Spirit in our existence and history never awaits our pleasure for fulfillment. Rather, the Christ standing ahead of us in our eschatological hope constantly enlivens and galvanizes us to orient ourselves towards those movements, to meditate on them, to participate in them and to be renewed by the Spirit of Christ which reigns in them.

My paper, though limited in scope and content, will deal briefly with the following areas: (1) a retrospective of changing theological perspectives in the church in China after 1949; (2) the situation of the Chinese church in recent years and the radical social changes confronting it; (3) three major trends in contemporary Chinese philosophy and a preliminary response.

(1) A Retrospective of Changing Theological Perspectives in the Church in China after 1949

Over the past few decades, the Protestant Church in China has been endeavoring to adapt herself to the changing situation in order to play a positive role and to gain public recognition while maintaining her Christian identity. Obviously, the Chinese church has accomplished a lot

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in living down the long-standing foreign image which plagued Chinese Christians for centuries. One of the by-products of this de-westernization process was the emergence of the post-denominational structure of the Chinese church in late 1950s, which has drawn tremendous attention on the global scene.

Earlier in the 1950s, as we have noted, some Chinese Christian scholars and ministers began to reflect on the devastating impact the missionaries had on the minds of Chinese converts, which evidently had much to do with the Evangelical Awakening and Revivalism in nineteenth century America. In consequence, the majority of Chinese Christians searched desperately for a life thoroughly different from that of ordinary Chinese. The religious life was considered to belong to the "spiritual" realm and thus regarded as superior, was permeated by self-righteousness and self-glorifying triumphalism. Being "spiritual" meant to escape from real life and reject all earthly hopes.

The "ideal" life was to be found in a "locked garden" or a "closed well". This exclusivist and dualistic theological mindset was one of the factors which made Christianity in China a narcissistic entity, a crypto-western community or a "kingdom" within the Middle Kingdom. Her foreign image intact, the Chinese Church showed no sympathy for the people's movements and was apathetic toward their sufferings and joys, nor was she willing to play a positive role in cultural, social or national reconstruction.

That was why Y.T. Wu (Wu Yaozong) vehemently declared in 1948: "It is not we who have borne the cross, but we have forced it upon the shoulders of other men. As true Christians our hearts should feel only grief and repentance".¹ The dualistic mode of thinking described above led the vast majority of Christians to make sharp distinctions between the sacred and the profane, the religious and the secular, the spiritual and the physical. In so doing, they surrounded themselves with a divine aura and became an elite stratum in society.

The tragedy was that not only believers and unbelievers, heaven and earth, but even Christ himself was forcibly divided into two distinct realms, one virtually excluding the other. Some Chinese Christians were eventually challenged to examine the conventional dichotomous Biblical view which was shown to be detrimental to the image of God and Christianity, and which had been an obstacle, rather than an aid, to the gospel message in China.

The late Rev. Wang Zhen, an influential evangelical minister, had this to say: "Spiritual life and physical life are constantly bound in interaction. If appropriately balanced, they can be mutually complementary in growth.... To be holy does not mean self-complacent isolation from the secular world ... One's love of the Lord necessarily involves one's concrete deeds, not sitting doing nothing.... The growth of life for a Christian cannot be expected to take place in a green-house or a cradle, but in real life."

Bishop Shen remarked: "When Jesus preached about the Kingdom of God, he frequently cited all kinds of thing from our earthly lives to illustrate what he was speaking about.... Christ drew out spiritual teaching and meaning from things which we could understand in our ordinary lives in the world."

¹ The Present-Day Tragedy of Christianity," in Documents of the Three-Self Movement, New York: National Council of Churches, 1963, p. 5.

One of my colleagues in the Seminary expresses it this way: "we cannot but say that the missionaries' evangelization in China without first respecting this ancient culture was rude behavior, as it ignored the cultural milieu in the midst of which our nation and compatriots had been brought up and cultivated... Some missionaries went so far as to teach us that what mattered for a Christian was not his deeds or behavior, but his faith. This represented a dichotomous separation of faith and deeds. In fact, faith and deeds are parts of an indivisible whole. It was hard for a people who had been fostered for centuries in such an ethical-moral oriented culture and tradition to accept this very logic of dichotomy. Further, the division of the pious from the secular, the spiritual from real life, the eternal from the historical as well as what belonged to Heaven from what belonged to the world, is not only rejected by the oriental nations, but is also contradicted by Biblical truth. Actually, all those polarizations have been overcome in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ."²

However, theological reflection upon and research into this subject turned sour and came to a virtual halt due to the overwhelming influence of ultra-leftism toward the end of the 1950s and its continued predominance, especially during the Cultural Revolution. Discontinuity in the normal functioning of the church in China for over a decade as well as the unexpected boom in the Christian population immediately following the Cultural Revolution has left the Chinese church with all sorts of practical concerns. In addition, the traditional cyclical pattern of thinking and the lack of historical consciousness coupled with the conventional practical or pragmatic orientation on the part of Chinese Christians at large has meant that the theological pursuits mentioned above have been mainly confined to a few enlightened church leaders and scholars.

(2) The Situation of the Chinese Church in Recent Years and the Radical Social Changes Confronting It

The Cultural Revolution period (ca. 1966-1976) was a trial and a nightmare for the Church and Christians in China. It was a nightmare because the Church, as an institution, seemed to be entirely eliminated from the scene. Many, if not all, believed at the time that the Revolution sounded a death-knell for Christianity in China. It was a trial for a large number of Christians who were forced to apostatize and work on farms or in factories. In spite of all this, they kept the faith in their hearts and minds, and gathered for prayers, worship and the sharing of Bible verses from memory, since the Bibles had all been confiscated or burned. Many Christians endured agonies and hardships, but never lost hope in Christ. They strongly believed in God's providence and the work of the Holy Spirit in this land even during the most difficult period of persecution. Looking back, Chinese Christians experienced the suffering Christ in their midst together with their compatriots during the Cultural Revolution. Christians found for themselves the paramount importance of earning their Christian and national identity by sharing weal and woe with the people.

The post-Cultural Revolution days witnessed a general feeling of emancipation, particularly when the Chinese government laid down a series of policies in favor of the overwhelming majority of the people and began to open up to the outside world. The policy of religious freedom was reaffirmed and guaranteed by the Constitution. Churches and seminaries started to open and reopen, Bibles and Christian literature were printed. The Christian population

² Oriental Culture and the Chinese Church," The Nanjing Theological Review, No. 5 (12/1986), p. 9.

increased rapidly with each passing day. Again, Chinese Christians experienced the resurrected Christ who breathed into the Church a spiritual renewal unprecedented in Chinese history.

Yet, economic reform and the rapidly changing society which accompanies it poses a big challenge to Christian churches in many parts of China. Opinions toward the ongoing changes vary from church to church, from Christian to Christian. Some take the changes for granted and endorse them across the board; some regard the changes as demonic and denounce them from the pulpit; others feel confused and disoriented, not knowing what to do, or even go so far as to retreat into their "safe and comfortable" religious cocoons. Thus, the complexity of history, of society and of human existence, compels us to carry on our search for self-identity in the midst of the whirlpool of rapid but precarious social change. This search requires a serious exploration of the Scriptures, theology and ecclesiology in correlation with our culture and social context. Close attention ought to be paid to the changes taking place and to potential changes in the process of modernization. The Church needs to be visionary, encouraging dialogue and encounters between Christianity and cultural trends in China. This may not yield immediate or visible results, but will prove to be of extraordinary significance in the long run. Otherwise, the Church will find herself bogged down in the flux of change, neither rooted in Chinese soil nor able to communicate the Gospel in our culture and context, not to speak of bringing Christ's message of hope to people around us.

Because of this, the furtherance of theological education is absolutely indispensable for the Chinese Church. The question is how and in what way shall we proceed to undertake this difficult and gigantic task. In China, school-based seminaries or theological training centers are virtually non-existent. This is due to the fact that the church leadership has laid a great deal of emphasis on the practical side of theological education, whose importance no one can deny.

The traditional Chinese concept of "harmony" or "balance" along with pragmatic reasoning has played a significant role in our thinking and routine work. Not unusually, people count on the so-called principle of "seeking truth from facts". Normally the positive evaluation of a minister or a seminary student depends to a large extent, if not entirely, on his or her techniques in preaching and praying, or ability to deal smoothly in matters of human relationships. This type of "practical orientation" is pervasive in the church and is compatible with traditional Chinese pragmatism.

Another reality for the Chinese church at the moment is that of "greater harvests, but few workers." Therefore, much of the work of the ministry is fulfilled by the laity. Recently, I had the chance to visit some churches in Wenzhou, a coastal city in Zhejiang Province, where about ten percent of the population are Christians. We were surprised to learn that there are well over one thousand churches concentrated in that area. Since full-time ministers are few, there is a heavy dependence on lay leaders in church work. With their faithful commitment, shared fellowship, sound administrative system, inexhaustible energy for God's ministry, unquenchable thirst for the Word of God and the caliber of their preaching, nurturing and Biblical teaching, the laity has contributed tremendously to church growth there. The church people told us that as economic advances propel young people to improve themselves intellectually, the educational level of new converts was rising. The younger generation demand a more advanced training in Scriptural studies and theology. Furthermore, the open-door policy of the government and modern means of communication have brought about a wider exposure to resources of Biblical and theological studies. At the same time, heretical teachings have slipped in, causing quite a bit of confusion and discord among the Christians.

Thus, more than ever before, theological education has become imperative and has to be conducted on a multi-level basis.

The fact that a correspondence department has been set up in our seminary which admits a thousand students each year largely from rural home meeting points for a three-year training program, speaks clearly of the urgent needs and practical orientation of the Chinese church in terms of theological education. On the other side of the coin, theological education ought to be a dynamic and creative process which covers a broader spectrum of church life in the world. Apart from the practical or pragmatic orientation in matters of theological education, the Chinese church leadership has also recognized the importance of sending young scholars abroad for further studies. This makes it possible for theological education not to be confined to a particular geographical locality but to acquire global characteristics. In my view, theological education is in itself a complicated process which takes place in the complexity of historical and human situations. No theological education should happen in a vacuum or an ivory tower insulated from a reality which is both specific and universal in character. Even in our concrete and specific context, reality for us cannot be naively imagined or interpreted.

Reality can be viewed by us as being immediately present, linked with the past, and as what is foreseen in the future through our vision enlightened by the Spirit moving in our midst and attested in the Scriptures. As God's servants, we need to prepare ourselves daily with an increasingly in-depth understanding of the Scriptures which bind us to the past, yet without fossilizing the center of gravity in the past. As immediately present, our reality compels us to adopt a practical orientation in doing church work and to have more capable people trained theologically to meet the urgent needs and challenges from within the church.

Moreover, our reality is closely associated with the rapidly changing society in which material improvements, scientific and technological developments are well under way yet inevitably accompanied by newly emerged social problems and corruption, which challenges us to reflect theologically. It is in the midst of this paradoxical and complicated reality that we continue to search for self-identity, which necessarily has to do with our past history and culture in and through which God revealed himself to our forefathers and predecessors. Viewed from the perspective of Scripture, God has revealed himself in a linear fashion, because God is "the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end" (Rev. 22:13). The linear dimension of God's reality injects into our life a strong sense of God's history which is a constant dynamic process: this does not allow humanity either to maintain the status quo, to repeat past history, or to simply rest upon its laurels. Our past may serve pedagogical and meaningful purposes for us since we can learn from it how the Church has communicated God's message through nurturing the young, teaching and educating the younger generation, and how through faithful witnesses and humble service the Church has developed and become more mature. From the past we learn of the errors the Church has committed and realize how the present church ought to avoid making the same mistakes.

The Christian Church in China, with a view not to detach herself from the past, should also keep a close eye on what is occurring around us in the church and society as a whole. Practical reasoning may be helpful in that it enables us to settle some of our current problems. However, practical reasoning does have its limitations. Since globalization has become the immediate reality across the inhabited world nowadays, we can hardly describe a national system which is not linked somehow with the economic systems of other countries. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) cannot be considered without exports and imports, which means linking it to

international and global business. Economically, the national development of the Third World countries, or any country in the world, can no longer be planned, or even envisaged, without reckoning with global factors and influences. Culturally speaking, our life-style has been very much influenced by other cultures. Food and beverages, which used to be specific to each country or region, have been swapped cross-continentially. Coca-Cola and Sprite are known to almost everyone in the world. Kentucky-fried chicken and hamburgers are catching on in China. The buffet dinner has become popular in Asia and is favored by many Orientals. The same thing is true of dress and music. The globalization of life-style is chiefly the product of the growing world economy, telecommunications and commercial advertising. Journalist John Walcott comments: "In this age of global media, global marketing and global migrations, the boundaries between civilizations are becoming harder to find." Consequently, practical or pragmatic reasoning in the church must take into account the reality of globalization; namely, to see local issues in a global perspective and global issues within the scope of local relevance.

Moreover, if too much stress is placed upon practical reasoning for the immediate present in theological education, the church will suffer a "future shock" sooner or later, as she will be ill-prepared for novelty or the changing needs of mission and social witness. Yet, if too much weight is put on the future, we may get lost in "utopianism" which casts us into an unreal and impracticable future. Such being the case, our future vision must relate to the experiences of the past and the present, for obsession with the future can be perilous if we do not maintain some realistic consciousness of past and present. Thus viewed, our time-honored and habitual practical or pragmatic reasoning and ways of handling church affairs ought to be compensated by an ontological or existential reasoning as well as an eschatological perspective in theological education.

The popularization of theological training for immediate church needs here and now does not have to preclude the formation of "think-tanks" for the future church in China. Owing to the fact that Chinese culture and society are rapidly changing and developing into the future, our strategy for evangelism will have to be adjusted and readjusted. More and more, the gospel message we bring to the people will necessarily touch upon our changing culture, society and the paradoxical reality of human history and existence. Our theological education will unavoidably encounter conflicts and points of contact between aspects of traditional western culture contained in Christianity and those of oriental cultures. It is very likely that the future reality will force us to reconsider an incarnational approach to our culture more than ever before. Perhaps, the Chinese way of "sagely within and kingly without" will help us to preserve a consistency between personal inner transformation and our outer involvement in social transformation. Undoubtedly, tensions will remain in this process because personal inner transformation somehow rests upon detachment whereas social involvement is motivated by activism or attachment to the world. Both aspects find their source in the person of Jesus Christ, and neither can be separated from the other. The dualistic approach can easily lead us to extremes by totally denying either personal detachment or social attachment. In the person of Jesus, God and man, detachment and attachment, this-worldly and other-worldly, transcendence and immanence, words and action are in a beautiful harmony although paradox and tensions will always exist in this life on earth. According to the traditional Chinese Doctrine of the Mean, "Nothing is seen in itself as a completely independent and separate entity, but as correlated with others."

Tensions reflect the paradoxical nature of human existence. Lack of historical consciousness and the linear perspective of God's salvation in history can make churches numb and fossilized in thinking and practice through endless repetition and re-enactment of the past. The unusually

strong influence of feudalism which has plagued quite a few churches in China is very much related to this cyclical pattern of life deprived of the vital dynamism of becoming. Yet, we have also been aware, through our sufferings and the lessons of history, that stability of being is required as well and there cannot be passage from sheer novelty to novelty without the order provided by repetition. The concept of "perpetual revolution" repeatedly stressed during the Cultural Revolution in China plunged the whole country into tragic chaos and darkness. We, then, have to be careful not to fall into the traps of dualism or extremism, but to preserve the paradox and tensions between the linear and cyclical patterns of life, to perceive through the spectacles of oriental wisdom and the existential reasoning developed in the west the interconnectedness and reciprocity of those two patterns of reality. Only by so doing shall we be able to contribute more to the ecumenical body of Christ on earth.

In order to fulfill the mission God intends for us toward the twenty-first century despite problems and challenges of various kinds, our continued search for self-identity will guide us to heed and correlate with the most recent and ongoing cultural trends in China.

(3) Three Major Trends in Contemporary Chinese Philosophy and A Preliminary Response

Since the first quarter of the 1980s, a renewed interest and enthusiasm in the study of Chinese culture surfaced among Chinese scholars, which culminated in a "culture craze" toward the middle of the decade. By then, lecturing on or talking about cultural matters had become a band wagon onto which people from all walks of life wanted to climb.

In the beginning, we saw a resurgence of "introspective criticism". This was a radically critical stance toward the value of traditional philosophy. Scholars of this inclination relentlessly attacked traditional Confucian culture as a case of ultra-conservatism strangling individuality. Some were convinced that traditional culture could not be looked upon as a norm for absorbing and assimilating new cultural elements because the old culture was thoroughly unsuited to a changing society. Rather, endeavors should be made to create a modern system of Chinese philosophy and culture. To advance tradition, one has to counter the stale and regressive Confucian tradition.

Some other scholars asserted categorically that traditional Chinese culture was a closed and self-sufficient system which could by no means be renewed by virtue of self-criticism. By and large, introspective criticism mercilessly slashed traditional culture for its negative aspect, and inertia. Yet, at the same time, it gave rise to inflated sentiments.

Almost parallel to the above-mentioned cultural tendency, there was the emergence of the school of "selective inheritance". As an academic trend, this apparently stood in opposition to introspective criticism. Holding tit-for-tat views and opinions, the advocates of selective inheritance generally affirmed the spiritual values of traditional philosophy and culture, and intended to make a positive appraisal of them to justify the inheritance, selection and absorption of those traditional values. Scholars of this school openly propagated the revival of Confucianism. Frequent international cultural exchanges among scholars of different nations and regions since the opening-up of China after the Cultural Revolution have spread the influence of this school from overseas to many parts of China. The advocacy by those scholars of a return to the fundamental Confucian doctrines of mind and nature, and of the opening up of new possibilities for democratic politics and for science and technology, became increasingly known to people, and their interpretation of the concept of the "cultural identity of

the Chinese nation, along with their advocacy of a conscious, integrative, and critical inheriting and of a traditional culture evoked a considerable response among Chinese scholars.

Some others seriously challenged the Weberian explanation of the Confucian ethic as one of making "adjustments to the world", and persuasively demonstrated that the dilemma of a typical Confucian, caught between self-cultivation and social service, was likely to generate an internal psychic dynamism comparable in intensity to that generated in the Calvinist under the influence of the Puritan inner asceticism. The Confucians shaped the world according to their cultural ideal. They did not simply submit themselves to the status quo. They wrote articles and offered lectures, asserting that it was absolutely necessary to maintain traditional values for the sake of cultural identity, and to purge away the feudalist dross so as to make an effective response to the challenge from the West. Yet this orientation of the Neo-Confucians was not accepted by those who viewed the "selective inheritance" in a wider perspective. They were inclined to see the basic elements of traditional values set in the broader context of the entire cultural system, not just confined to the sphere of Confucianism alone.

The third philosophical trend was called "synthetic creation". Scholars who favored this trend considered "introspective criticism" and "selective inheritance" one-sided and narrow in perspective. Dr. Zhang Dainian, a chief advocate of this theory, urged Chinese thinkers "to reject rigid and ossified thinking - namely, the idea that things Chinese and things western are mutually antagonistic and the idea that substance and function are separate from each other." One should "conduct a scientific analysis and choose carefully from the components and structural forms of both ancient and modern, Chinese and foreign, cultural systems with an open-minded and tolerant attitude, and carry forward our nation's subjective consciousness to create a new and highly developed socialist culture that is distinctively Chinese and which fully embodies the spirit of the times, through dialectical synthesis, according to the real needs of China's modernization." He further indicated emphatically that "We must take the road of convergence of Chinese and western cultures, the road of synthetic creation."

It seems to me that if the Chinese church wants to acquire rootedness in this soil for the next century and make her message relevant and truly evangelical, she will have to enter into a historical and theological encounter with these cultural trends. It would be unwise for theological educators in China, like ostriches burying their heads in the sand, simply to look for practical or pragmatic excuses for overlooking or neglecting those tendencies.

If we turn our attention to introspective criticism, we may notice that this school is super-critical of the Confucian tradition. It is true that, even at first glance, we do not find it difficult to come to terms with the view that traditional Confucianism has had a negative influence on Chinese culture and society. Such feudal dross as paternalism, nepotism, parochialism, and lack of democracy has been detrimental to the evolution of a sound Chinese culture and social system. The feudal influences, which have plagued the society for thousands of years, have also found favorable conditions for growth in churches in China. Much of the tension existing in many churches in China is actually derived from feudalism. For instance, ordination of young people in the churches has met with obstinate resistance because the patriarchal structure of many of them is so egocentric that it no longer sees the church as the body of Christ or the communion of saints, but as personal properties or something to be manipulated at will. Deeply aware of this lethal obstacle, Bishop K.H. Ting and other Chinese church leaders have made great efforts recently to have more young people ordained and take on important responsibilities in the Church.

Nepotism has become a fairly common practice in churches as feudal kinship or quasi-kinship has been deemed primary and crucial. Churches indulging in feudal practice are usually less tolerant of those with opinions different from their own. Moreover, a very weak sense of ecclesiology and theology among ministers has contributed to the already weak understanding and practice of democracy in the daily life of those churches. Again, an absence of linear perspective in comprehending Christianity and history has made many accustomed to a taken-for-granted cyclical pattern of life, which results in human inertia and fear of novelty or change. The unchangeability of God has been misinterpreted as God's immunity against change in modern society.

At times, Christians from overseas may be appalled to find that there is pervasive influence of Confucian humanism reflected in ministers' Sunday sermons. A church leader from overseas once remarked, "It seems that Chinese ministers are too preoccupied with the issues of human relations, why not go beyond this to search for a relation with God who is our supreme norm and ultimate concern." Previously, some of us might have had a sharp response to such a comment, terming it "imperialistic arrogance". Yet, to be honest, it is high time we started to ponder it in a serious manner. Obviously, secularization in the form of human greed for money or material possessions should draw our attention and should be denounced as demonic, as many ministers in China have done. But at the same time, secularization ought to be further explored on the cultural and existential level. Secularization in a discreet feudal garment in the church can be perilous and detrimental, especially when people outside religious circles become more progressive and democratic in thinking and practice, and more ready to embrace positive changes in society. Any church buried in a cyclical pattern of life and preoccupied with fossilized tradition, is bound to lose its cutting edge and prophetic voice, let alone its ability to serve as light and salt on earth.

Yet, however much introspective criticism can help us see the problem of inculturation and secularization due to long-standing feudal influence, it is one-sided and can be easily misguided by exaggerated sentiment. Introspective criticism is apparently less constructive than the two other philosophical schools. If we go a step further into the problem culturally, we might hesitate to make the sweeping generalization that traditional Confucianism is responsible for all the negative elements in both ancient and contemporary China. In fact, a good many noble ideas in Confucianism merely remained a scholarly interest in the past, and hardly found fulfillment in real life. In everyday life, ordinary people and the ruling class were largely affected by sub-cultural elements which had more to do with pragmatism and utilitarianism. It is no wonder, therefore, that Chinese Christians have also been under the sway of the penetrating influence of those sub-cultural elements sometimes intermingled in complex ways with Confucianism. This is why today's neo-Confucianisms try to recover and develop fine Confucian virtues to counter a total westernization process in Taiwan, mainland China and Singapore. In retrospect, the Cultural Revolution turned out to be a so anti-cultural that it eradicated almost all the good elements of our traditional culture. The excessive emphasis on class struggle and perpetual revolution made human relations warped and morbid, devoid of genuineness and honesty. True relations of love, mutual respect and trust gave way to hatred, disrespect and distrust.

On the contrary, we find in traditional Confucianism a glaring contrast of ideas. In the *Analecets*, "Tzu-lu asked about the noble man. The Master said, 'He cultivates himself so as to make others feel secure and at ease'. Tzu-lu then asked again, 'Is that all?' To which Confucius

responded, 'He cultivates himself so as to make all people feel secure and at ease'" (XXIV. 45). During the Cultural Revolution, the idea and practice of self-cultivation were severely criticized as being feudal and revisionist. What made it worse was the fact that the reverent attitude towards others, making "others feel secure and at ease," was replaced by the egocentric and exclusivist idea of "my being right - whateverism". Confucian humanism was taken over by ultra-selfish power-centered egoism which gave rise to intense corruption in society. The downfall of the Gang of Four reminded the Chinese of a well-known western motto, namely, "Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely."

Another passage which also well represents the Confucian human relationship model is: "Let the noble man never fail reverently to order his own conduct, let him be respectful to others and observant of rites (decorum); then all within the four seas will be his brothers" (Analects XII.5). Therefore, traditional Confucianism is not something entirely outdated or old-fashioned. The revival of Confucianism can and should have healing effects, at least to a certain degree, in today's China beset by the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution as well as new problems in human relations generated during the modernization process. It is quite understandable that the emergence of "selective inheritance" is appealing to many Chinese. The Church should learn to appreciate this cultural trend before she can respond to it biblically and theologically.

Of course, the philosophical trend of "selective inheritance" is not limited to Neo-Confucianism, whose major concern is harmony of moral human relations. Those who carry forward the Taoist tradition by stressing harmony between man and nature, also merit our attention. In many of our churches, the biblical message conveyed by ministers or lay leaders is mostly concerned with personal mystical experiences or ethical and moral human relations. God's salvation is still interpreted as having solely to do with individual believers, and healing is narrowly understood to be concerned with the physical sickness of individuals only. The Taoist concept of harmony in relation to our Christian understanding of the preservation of the integrity of God's creation has been extremely weak in many of our churches. Christians are preoccupied with the traditional claims that the image of God makes man different from nature and closer to the Divine, and this is misinterpreted as the analogy of being, not as the analogy of relation. They have failed to see that nature cannot be subjected and exploited by humans without humans destroying their own basis of life and themselves. In certain areas in China where industry and the economy have developed very quickly, pollution has become severe. Christians seem to be quite insensitive to the already polluted environment and drinking water which are tragically endangering the totality of God's created life. They have not quite realized from their accepted tradition that God's intention of wholeness for creation, for the eco-system of the earth, cannot be easily set aside. In Chinese culture, one's native place or hometown is identical with the garden of mulberry and catalpa trees. Human life and nature are understood to share the same life source. The author of the *Book of Poetry* stated that "Heaven is the father and the earth is the mother of all things. Man, Heaven and Earth share the same life and therefore are one. The great mission of man consists in his promoting the amorous unity of the universe on the foundation of universal love and righteousness." Zhuang Zi (399-295B.C.) once remarked, "Heaven, Earth, and I are living together, and all things and I form an inseparable unity" (*Zhuang Zi*, 2). This cyclical view of cosmic harmony can contribute in a positive way to our Christian understanding of the absolute necessity to preserve the integrity of God's created universe.

Yet, "selective inheritance" certainly has its limitations, because neither the Confucian principle of "sagely within and kingly without" nor the Taoist cyclical view of human history and society can guarantee a legal structure to curb feudalism and enable people to transcend the status quo. The third trend of "synthetic creation" evidently has its advantages in that it is more inclusive and creative, while at the same time maintaining the distinctively Chinese cultural heritage. Both linear and cyclical world views may converge into a dialectical and mutually compensated whole without necessarily antagonizing each other. Hopefully, the process of "synthetic creation" will yield a healthier and more balanced culture in China where a reasonable marriage between subjective self-cultivation, social transformation and the objective legal system to correct or prevent possible feudalism and corruption are its natural products. "Synthetic creation" can encourage us to carry on our search for self-identity in a creative manner in the midst of cultural and social changes, and can give an impetus to the globalization process of the whole world of which China is a part as a result of what Alvin Toffler calls "the third wave civilization". Modernization is a very complicated process which is shaking traditional feudalism to its foundation, but it is also causing tension and anxieties in society and human existence which demand healing. Both society and the Christian Church will have to go through a process of mutual transformation. Feudal world views and practice, egocentrism and nepotism, parochialism and exclusivism in the church are a hindrance to the Gospel message in China, and should not be part of our heritage. They have been proved to be destructive and demonic, standing in the way of Christian evangelism, koinonia, marturia and diakonia. They are like an erosive acid gradually but devastatingly destroying the church's unity in diversity. Jesus Christ attested in the Scriptures was, is and still will be the Liberator of humanity from the bondage of egocentric feudalism, pharisaic parochialism and legalistic exclusivism.

In this epochal and rapidly changing society, the questions constantly haunting us are: How can the Church preserve her Christian identity and cultural identity at the same time without contradiction'? Shall we literally follow the changing tides or simply go our own way, ignoring what is really happening in our cultural and social life'? Or shall we take the initiative in starting dialogue and correlation with the current philosophical and economic trends in China'? Without doubt, we believe that God in Christ has placed us in a unique but critical historical moment with challenges from all sides, both from within and without, both from ossified traditional forces and from the New Being in Christ who has drawn all truth, goodness and beauty from the past tradition into his present, leading them into his future and renewing them unceasingly by the Spirit. In our paradoxical life situation, we confess that Christ is the crucified Lord of the world, and we share the painful pathos of God's saving will in changing history. We feel as if our "Soul is in turmoil" (Jn. 12:27) before the end of this millennium, like a woman in travail (Is.42:14), but at the same time we find this moment full of hope and exciting opportunities provided by God as we are led by him toward the twenty-first century. We are fragile and powerless, but it is in this very fragility and powerlessness that we feel strengthened and empowered by the Spirit because our faith in Christ tells us that only God is our Ark.

Also, as individualism has gained entry into the life and market economy of China, as the heterogeneity of third wave civilization is combating the homogeneity of first and second wave societies in the present modernization process, how can we preserve the post-denominational structure of the church when we are sandwiched by the centrifugal forces of feudalism, parochialism and exclusivism from within and the growing heterogeneity of the pluralistic

structure and life pattern from outside? We do need a solid theological preparation which may engage us not only intellectually and intuitively, but also physically, mentally and emotionally.

To conclude, I'd like to quote a few words from Dr. Walter Brueggemann who reminds us in his book, *Genesis*, that "the future of God's goodness is open to those who trust themselves to that future, seeking neither to hold on to the present nor to conjure an alternative future for their own.... for faith is reliance on God's promise of overcoming the present for a new life". The "not yet" nature of God's promise is propelling the Church in China to continue her search for self-identity which is her unchanging task intended by God in this unprecedented and rapidly changing society. We are ready to follow Christ as always by pouring "new wine into new wineskins" (Mt. 9:17), for our Lord Christ who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making everything new" (Rev. 21:5).

10. Ba Jin's Philosophy of Love and His Humanism – Xu Zhenglin

Ba Jin (Li Feigan, 1904 -) is one of China's great modern authors, whose long and prolific career spans much of the history of modern Chinese literature. His first novel, Extinction, appeared in 1929. A native of Sichuan, Ba Jin was an avowed anarchist until the 1950s and suffered under various political movements in the People's Republic, especially the Cultural Revolution. Like many writers of his generation, Ba Jin was attracted to Christian ideals of love and sacrifice. In his essay, Xu Zhenglin shows how this attraction revealed itself in his early stories and novels. Like the piece which follows, the essay reflects the continuing concern among Chinese Christian scholars with the tension between Chinese identity and Christian faith - between Christ and culture-and the search for a new synthesis.

Olga Lang sums up Ba Jin's religious consciousness brilliantly: "Pa Chin's (Ba Jin's) attitudes and views had many features which one could expect of a real Christian: his acute awareness of human suffering, his desire to help his fellow man, and his insistence on self-sacrifice, the basic tenet of his moral philosophy."¹

In his world outlook, the young Ba Jin was still anti-religion. In September 1921 he wrote in "Patriotism and the Chinese People's Road to Happiness" that slogans like "God is omnipotent" or "God created the world" were spiritual pillars to shore up feudal autocratic government and private property. He strongly argued that if there were a God he should have destroyed them. By the end of the 1920s Ba Jin's critique of religion became even sharper. In "From Capitalism towards Anarchism" he noted: "Christian preaching is nothing but lies to cheat the people. The church does not fully practice what it preaches. It propagates a gospel, knowing that nobody will be able to practice and rely on this gospel, because in many respects it has already lost touch with the human world. For instance, the spirit of passive non-resistance only leads people into destruction."² It is very likely that Ba Jin's anti-religious thinking during that time was shaped by the very influential atheist movement between 1921 and 1927 when religion was judged only on political and emotional terms.

After he had translated Kropotkin's *Ethics* and become familiar with the Bible, his outlook changed dramatically: "Christianity was a religion of the poor, a product of opposition to the evil of the ruling class of the Roman empire." It is a religion which (1) advocates love for the oppressed; (2) sees social well-being as the central tenet of life; (3) propagates equality; and (4) maintains forgiveness of "those who trespass against us". This does indicate his early positive assessment of Christianity. In addition, Ba Jin's thinking and his works from that time on also show that he had not only adapted the idea of forgiving "those who trespass against us," but all of Christian thinking.

There seems to be a contradiction between his earlier and later thinking, and indeed there is, or to put it more accurately the contradiction lies within Christianity itself which through the contradiction between its theology and its doctrine of humankind produces a dialectical

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¹ Olga Lang, *Pa Chin and His Works*, quoted in Louis Robinson, *The Double-Edged Sword: Christianity and 20th Century Chinese Fiction*. Hong Kong: Tao Fong Shan Ecumenical Centre, 1986.

² *From Capitalism toward Anarchism*. Shanghai, 1930, p. 101.

outlook. Many cultural pioneers of the May-Fourth era maintained this dialectical outlook of Christianity, as we can see in Lu Xun's "Toward a Refutation of the Voices of Evil," Chen Duxiu's "Christianity and the Chinese People" and Hu Shi's "Christianity and China".

But there were specific, subjective causes for the radical turn in Ba Jin's thinking. The environment and the experiences of his youth were sufficient to initiate his shift towards Christianity. According to his memoirs, an English doctor at the Four Saints Hospital in Chengdu cured the second of his younger sisters, and therefore "mother became friends with this English missionary". He also "liked the leather covered clothbound Mandarin translation of the Complete Old and New Testaments". In *God, Spirits, Men* he remembered his youth: "As a child, I went with Mother into the spacious hall where I followed her in praying to God. Mother told me that God was the utmost, God was selfless. ...We knelt down and I touched the floor with my forehead as she did. To this deity, this clear mirror of everything, I prayed piously: I asked him to bring happiness and peace to everyone and asked him not to let anybody cry. But God seemed not have heard my prayer, because maybe his throne was too high, much too high." He summarized his early thinking with the words: "Mother taught me love, the sedan-chair bearer Old Zhou taught me loyalty and my friend Wu taught me self-sacrifice." The spirit of mutual help, the morality of universal love, and the spirit of self-sacrifice which are expressed here could have led him to become a devout Christian.

Ba Jin of course never became a baptized Christian, but his personality and his works are nevertheless permeated with a profound religious consciousness.

The Philosophy of Love

Ba Jin wrote in *My Youth*: "What raised me? ... When I ask myself this question, the first word which drifts into my brain is 'love', parental love, love for blood-relatives, human love and the warmth of family life. I was certainly a beloved child. ... I loved all creatures. I ingratiated myself with everyone. I wanted to wipe the tears from every face. I hoped for a smile on everyone's lips."³ This is a typical statement of "Everyone loves me; so I love everyone," the Christian spirit of universal love. This spirit of "love" became his lifelong faith, as well as the motive for his self-sacrificing character. It was also an inexhaustible well for his creative work and in particular the life-force of the characters in his works.

"Love" is the strength of Ba Jin's own character as well as the strength of character extolled in his writing. As he writes: "Late at night when everyone is quiet, it is not a feeling of sorrow which inspires me to write under the pale lamplight, it is love, love for humankind. This love can't die. In fact love for humankind exists as long as humankind itself exists. Thus my writing life won't end either." He also wrote: "The female protagonist in my work *The Dead Sun* repeats over and over the idea that: "Love conquers death." Yes, I confess that my love has already conquered the dark shadows. My love for humankind inspires me and gives me the strength to contend with everything."⁴

As a theory of ethics, this spirit of "universal love" doubtless has religious implications. It also inevitably assumes the coloration of an abstract theory of human nature. According to the Christian view, two forms of human love exist. One is called EROS which means

³ *Zhuanji*, vol. 1, p. 125.

⁴ *Research Material on Ba Jin*, vol. 1. Haixia Publishing House, 1985, p. 301 ff.

"desire," love which is aroused by the pleasing nature of the beloved. The cause of this kind of love depends on the lovableness of the other. It is manifested in the love between men and women or the love of children. EROS differs from AGAPE, which is an unconditional general love. One loves another in this way, not because of any special qualities, but simply because he or she exists, just because the other is there and is human. The essence of AGAPE lies in this way of evaluating people which leads to striving actively for the other's greatest possible happiness and perfection. EROS and AGAPE here express a fundamental difference between worldly and religious love. Of the two, "love", for Ba Jin, is obviously expressed by the latter. The character Li Jingshu says in *Extinction*: "Now we should call on people to love each other. Everybody should love one another as a father his son, as brothers or as members of a family." This religious spirit of universal love causes his works to show sympathy for the tragic fate of young people under the old family system or old society and sympathy for those of the lowest social status. But he also expresses a sense of repentance over the death of those like Master Gao, who are responsible for many tragedies. He feels deep sympathy with and hope for such corrupt and parasitic characters as Yang Laosan. But, when we take "to conquer the world by means of tender love" as a description of an ideal society, it takes on an even more positive significance. Ba Jin said in *Extinction*: "We should use our love to make them holy, to wash away their sins. ... That is the only way to establish a world of love; that is the only way to realize a free and equal, perfect society on earth; that is the only way to abolish sins so that the sun of happiness shines upon the world."⁵

This idea became the topic of the novel *Ward Four*. Ba Jin wrote in his postscript about doctor Yang Muhua that she was an "honest and friendly female doctor, who always eagerly helped others to get rid of their pain, to muster up their courage and who wanted them to `become a little more kindhearted, unselfish, a help to other people". Although she is described in this novel as an ordinary person, she had a high moral character. Such "love" embodies Ba Jin's philosophy of "love". He once stressed: "Only because I received love do I know love myself. I realized that I had to share love with others and thought that I should do something for people. The word "love" also connects me with this society. This is the foundation of my whole character."⁶

Faith

The praise of faith as a topic seems to permeate the early works of Ba Jin. He said: "Faithful people are certainly happy. In my novels many people of faith appear and they are all happy, which makes me happy.... There is nevertheless a distance between faith and religion."⁷ The content of "faith" obviously does not refer here to the Christian "God", nor does the form bear a Christian meaning. But the faith of strength of character that he always emphasizes, is permeated with religious meaning. In his letter to the Romans Paul says: "For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, `the one who is righteous will live by faith'" (1:17). In Luther's religious ethics the impact of faith on character is even more strongly stressed. Luther believes that a person's salvation does not depend on striving to become holy and pure in God's eyes; it simply depends on the belief that Jesus was crucified to save us from our sins. "Humanity's salvation depends only on faith, not on good works." Luther goes further in considering that faith is everything for humans. It is our life. If one has faith, one need not be bound by laws and strictures, does not

⁵ *Complete Works*, vol. 4, p. 151.

⁶ *Research Material*, vol. 1, p. 79.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 351.

need good works or redemption in order to attain the righteousness of Christ and eternal life. Faith enables us to cast off all outward restrictions. We are all master of our own faith and the subjects of our own spirits. Therefore the independence of individual faith determines the independence of the individual character. For Luther the essence of the human being is faith.⁸

When considering the eternal value of faith, the free nature of faith and the personal significance of faith, Ba Jin's concept of faith is identical to Luther's concept of religious faith. The difference is that Luther's faith points to the life hereafter, whereas Ba Jin's faith is for this life. To quote from *Extinction*: "In the near future that great day will come, when crying will cease, no one will have to suffer, and every family will have a home, every person will have enough to eat, everybody will have clothes to wear. People will pass their days in tranquillity."⁹ To put it briefly, Ba Jin longs for an ideal society where people are equal, free and at ease, one where everyone's character can be fully developed, where individuals can regain human dignity, and no one will be oppressed or cheated. No one will do harm to anyone else, but all will live in harmony and mutual support. The society described represents a consummate philosophy and ethics with a strong utopian coloring, but the actual life he is yearning for is the life of this world.

This secular faith does not conceal the form of faith itself, the shining radiance of human character. The topic of Ba Jin's early novels is thus young people on a pilgrimage of faith. In *Extinction* their common faith and concept of life arouse a deep admiration in both Du Daxin and Li Jingshu. Faith that might lead to imprisonment or even death, meant Du Daxin, unable to love boldly, experienced deep inner suffering. But finally, in order to be an "avenger for the many who suffer", he stood before Li Jingshu's room and said in a wretched voice: "Shu, I'm leaving!" In *New Life* Jing Mei entered a factory because of her belief. A shadow was cast upon the deep love between Zhang Wenshu and Li Leng, because the latter couldn't accept the former's faith. The new life of Jing Mei and Wen Shu, mature but also cold, made Li Leng understand the power of love. Facing death, Li Leng's belief is: "After death I will be resurrected in the hearts of the people who love me." This sublime and firm faith enabled Li Leng to overcome nostalgia for life and the fear of death. The relationship between the characters in this novel is particularly expressed as the relationship of faith and love, faith and friendship. Faith is also the center as far as the value and the consciousness of human life are concerned.

Although *Fog*, *Rain* and *Electricity* are termed a "love trilogy", tender love appears only as a kind of background to the novel, whereas the prevailing topic of three is still faith, which reaches its climax in *Electricity*. Wu Renmin and Li Peizhu find true love in the struggle of their common task. Love strengthens their faith, making them fearless, filled with confidence in life and enthusiasm for work, thus throwing the topic into sharp relief: "I am not afraid. I have faith".

In order to emphasize "faith", biblical passages are repeatedly quoted in *Electricity*. The revelation through "light" also echoes the topic of "faith". In the Bible: "The light has come into the world ... Those who do what is true come to the light" (John 3:19,2 1). "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life" (John 8:12). "I have come as light into the world, so that everyone who believes in me

⁸ Compare Li Pingye, *The Appearance of Man: Martin Luther and the Reformation*, p. 129ff, 147.

⁹ *Collected Works*, vol. 4, p. 130.

should not remain in the darkness" (John 12:6,7). "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die" (John 11:25,26). Ba Jin boldly disregards the definite connotations of theological revelation of the vision of "light" as enlightenment, choosing its positive meaning as a didactic of faith to hint to young people that they should dare to give themselves wholly for an ideal human society and seek the eternal value of life. This "light" of faith and the search for "light" is also profoundly expressed in the works of other contemporary authors like Cao Yu and Ai Qing, but this linking with a consciousness of life is characteristic of Ba Jin alone.

Consciousness of Life

If religion is the highest form of human consciousness of life, thoughts about the riddle of life and death and the search for the everlasting value of life can hardly avoid taking on a religious aspect. This is expressed when people bewail the short duration and the pain of actual life, and would rather seek a glorious death, in order to obtain an eternal life of spiritual value and lofty eternal character, i.e., the perfect other life. In Christianity, the whole revelation of Jesus' character lies in this. This is also the topic of Ba Jin's novel *New Life*. The final part of the novel is nothing but a revelation from the Gospel of John: "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (12:2). Those words, as the subject of the novel, reveal a specific concept of consciousness of life.

Ba Jin's consciousness of life is a well-organized system of subjective logic. His starting point is: "A human being has only one life and can lead only one life. Therefore everybody strives to make the best of it." ("From Capitalism towards Anarchism") His final point is: "Death is the gate of eternal life" as it is the "symbol of life" (Death). This can be expressed by a formula: "Life - Death - Eternal life". On this "chain of life" "death" is of decisive significance. Ba Jin feels: "The goal of life is an abundant, full life, just as the French philosopher Guyau (1885-1888) said: Consumption is a condition of life....The individual life should be extended towards others and when necessary even sacrificed for others. ...This sacrifice is the primary condition for true life." Therefore "death" becomes in life an absolute judgment of value and a weight that balances the scale between a negative and a positive life.

Ba Jin builds the ethical basis of his philosophy of life on repentance, human love and deep faith. Li Leng says in *Extinction*: "We call people to love, but our own life becomes a fountainhead of enmity of the poor. Such a life must now come to an end. We who are rich must end the crimes we have committed. We take an oath that from now on our family will redeem our crimes; we will sacrifice all the joys and pleasures; we and our families will atone for our crimes to the people and we will help them."¹⁰ Ba Jin comments: "At that time young people like us all had the same idea of overthrowing the present social system in order to atone for the crimes of the last generation."¹¹ Here a process starts with being loved, arouses the consciousness of "original sin" which leads to a higher level of loving the people and then to a faith which strives for the happiness of the people and a hero's death. This represents the highest realization of human potential and its most perfect expression. Ba Jin's notion that "death is enlargement of the `self', to die implies to be reborn" (*Dream and Drunkenness, Death*) contains the same profound meaning. Ba Jin's entire philosophy of life is

¹⁰ Collected Works, vol. 4, p. 89.

¹¹ Research Material, vol. 1, p. 179.

full of religious ideas. A veil of Christianity is drawn over the notion of redemption, the spirit of love, the aspiration for an eternal life and the idea of resurrection.

The central significance of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection lies in the revelation that through self-sacrifice in suffering, one is transformed by love of others and faith in the afterlife, and is thus enabled to rescue the world. Du Daxin became a revolutionary because he "loved his oppressed countrymen to the utmost". He restrained all personal desires and his pent-up feelings of love in order to die with resolution. Ba Jin's estimation of this was: "A curtain seems to have been lifted from his heart to reveal a world unseen by ordinary people. All worldly thoughts had earlier been wiped away. In his heart burned only a sublime ideal. He felt that he was to reach the land of joy and eternal peace, and he felt pity for those who were to remain in the world of pain. Worldly love and hate had already retreated completely. He was as if completely bathed in the light of a lofty ideal. Under the pure moonlight he became almost a magnificent holy effigy."¹² There are strong similarities here to the experiences of a pious Christian who awakens to the excitement of the "other world", leaving behind and transcending the secular world. This sublimation of the soul in the twinkling of an eye derives from a lofty faith and a spirit of dedication. We might consider that Ba Jin's praise of Du Daxin is top-heavy with individualism, but this is the major characteristic of a religious idea of life: the search for the value of life from within a human subject.

We want especially to emphasize here that our former understanding of Ba Jin's thinking as anarchist or "terrorist" was a simplification. Ba Jin's anarchism and terrorism include repentance, the deep meaning of love of humankind and a lofty faith and also a guarantee of a Christian character of self-dedication.

Dedication of Character

The human quest for the eternal value of life implies dedication of character. Human life has both an animal and a rational form, but true human consciousness of life comes with the awakening of rationality. It is this kind of rational consciousness that reveals the present and the past to the individual and, what is even more important, it reveals other individual lives as well: the interaction between these individual characters is inevitably the cause of everything. Pain and death are the negation of the quest for individual happiness which mark the animal life. This fact provides an important proposition for life in itself: Individual happiness alone is impossible, because there is a different kind of happiness apart from that of the individual. With this realization, true life begins, which rises to a higher plane and overrides animal life. From this high plane humans realize the illusion of their animal lives and pursue the birth of the spirit. The mark of this spirit is the perception that human life does not lie within the animal body of the individual but exists in the happiness of others: altruism conquers egotism. Life surpasses time and space and even all forms of emotion and radiates light. This kind of life is intrinsically expressed as "love for God and all God's creatures. This love leads people to happiness". This takes shape as dedication of character and it runs through all the works of Ba Jin, for example in the image of the revolutionary like Du Daxin, Chen Zhen or Li Na in his early novels.

Jue Xin, the protagonist of *Family, Spring, Autumn*, also shows this dedication of character. During the War of Resistance against Japan, Ba Jin was trapped in Shanghai, the "Orphan Island", and deeply affected by this kind of character. Ba Jin followed the path of the disciple

¹² Collected Works, vol. 4, p. 144.

Peter who devoted himself to preaching, what he called "the spirit of re-entry into Rome". Olga Lang analyzed Ba Jin's attitude during that time: "... his acute awareness of human suffering, his desire to help his fellow man, and his insistence on self-sacrifice, the basic tenet of his of his moral philosophy."¹³ There are indeed good grounds for such an opinion.

In *Pleasure Garden* Wang Shaohua says: "Long ago I heard a sermon in church. A female medical doctor from England spoke Chinese and quoted a verse from the Bible: "The greatest happiness is found in sacrifice". I couldn't get the meaning of that sentence at that time. But now, I understand that it means to help others, to give away one's possessions, to make the sad laugh, the hungry full and the cold warm. Isn't the laughter and the joy on the faces of those who receive help the best reward?" "Tian Huishi", the third part of the novel *Fire*, is an important source which focuses on probing into the dedicated character. The novel reveals that love in this dedicated character has the same value for both believers and nonbelievers. The character Tian Huishi says to Feng Wenshu: "Christians and Non-Christians are the same. If you believe in love and truth, if you are willing to spread the seeds of life, encourage others to pursue life, what difference is there between us?" Tian Huishi represents Ba Jin's ideal of a dedicated character. He became a Christian not for the purpose "of entering paradise himself, but to rescue others from the sea of suffering". When he read the *Good News*, the passages which most attracted him were those on love and bringing a better life to others. Unlike the heroic character of Du Daxin, who sacrificed his life, or Li Na, who forsook her family, Tian's dedication of character expresses itself in hard work. He founds the magazine *Bei Chen* and publishes articles such as "Record of the Bloody Battle at Lianyun Harbour", which "moved an unknown number of readers". He overcomes various problems, even going so far as to pawn personal belongings, in order to bring it out on time. When his beloved son is killed by bombs from enemy aircraft and he is wracked with grief, he still continues to proof-read the magazine. This self-sacrifice, the spirit of sacrificing oneself for others is based on Christian ethics, though it also has aspects of universal social mores about it.

Humanism

Ba Jin once called a collection of his short stories *Cleaning Rag*. In *Aunt Yang* and *Second Mother* he portrays two mean and unhappy females. Aunt Yang works as a maidservant and Second Mother is a prostitute. In his "Preface" Ba Jin notes: "Here I publish two stories about people trampled upon and insulted by others. Such people are despised by "high-class Chinese", they live in places seldom touched by sunlight. Their way, from swaddling-clothes to grave, is marked only by insult and pain. It is a way of poverty and has no name. I would like to use my powerless pen to shed a little sunlight on their graves." Ba Jin hopes that those stories will be like a cleaning rag cast aside into a corner, "shedding rays of light in the darkness".¹⁴ The portrayal of insulted and abused people of low status is a combination of artistry with humanism reminiscent of Dostoevski. Although trod underfoot, this dirty cleaning rag (the characters), "still hides precious feelings in its folds".

Since his youth Ba Jin had humanistic leanings. Small cold-blooded animals led him to wretched servants, who led him to the unhappy young people in big families. Through his translation of Kropotkin's *Ethics* he became aware that religion (Christianity) means love for the oppressed, propagates equality and regards the well-being of the society as the central tenet of life. Then he established his own concept of religious humanism.

¹³ see footnote 1.

¹⁴ *Selected Works*, vol. 8, p. 3.

Subjectively, he probed the question of how to be an upright person acting for others. He sympathized with others in their misfortune, understood their pain and tried to wipe the tears from their faces with his warm hands, to the extent of being willing to sacrifice himself for them. As he has pointed out: "My present creed is to fight when necessary, love those who are in need of love and hate those who destroy love. The human being is the only God I believe in. I am ready to devote all I possess to Him."¹⁵ Objectively, Ba Jin looked forward to an ideal society of equality, freedom and happiness, where each person can fully develop his or her own personality and regain his or her human dignity; where no one is oppressed or treated harshly and no one infringes upon others; where people live in harmony and help each other. Thus we find that Ba Jin's religious humanism is by no means a mixture of humanism and religious consciousness, but that he has developed humanism to a religious consciousness. Therefore a French scholar said: "He has one God and this God is the happiness of human beings. This is a religion of humanism. Everything is done for humans' sake, the human being has been deified."¹⁶

It is indeed this religious humanism that gave Ba Jin's novel compassion, equality and the spirit of the common people. The humanistic feeling led him to "decry the miseries of the whole world in *Revenge* and "curse the love-destroying force" in *Brightness*. *He* was sensitive to the pain of the insulted and the violated, and tried to show the sorrow and death of women from the lowest class of soviet like Ming Feng, Qian Er and Aunt Yang. His hope is that each family will have its own home, each person will have enough to eat, each soul receive sufficient education and each one's wisdom be fully developed.¹⁷ The humanism of Ba Jin reflected in his literature is not only a kind of sympathy, but an ideal. Because of that the French scholar quoted above feels: "The humanism which other poets praise is not the humanism of Mr. Ba Jin, because what they think about and hope for is related to the past, while Ba Jin places his hope on the future."¹⁸

Ba Jin's religious consciousness is reflected in various aspects such as his philosophy of love, his faith, his awareness of life and the dedicated character. These aspects are related to each other and united in the spirit of humanism. Ba Jin created his own character and a unique spirit in his literature.

Nanjing Theological Review, No. 18 (1/1993), p. 12.
Translated by Dirk Skiba.

¹⁵ *Miscellanies from a Sea Journey*, p. 57.

¹⁶ *Research on Ba Jin Overseas*, Hunan, 1986, p. 243.

¹⁷ *Ba Jin on Writing*, Shanghai, 1983, p. 8..

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 243

11. Lin Yutang's Journey of Faith – Lou Shibo

Lin Yutang (189.5-1976) grew up in a mountain village in southern Fujian, the son of a local Presbyterian minister. After graduating from St. John's University in Shanghai, he went to the U.S. to study, where he received his M.A. from Harvard University. He later studied in Europe as well, living nearly half his life overseas, devoting himself to cultural exchange between China and the rest of the world. His thirty or forty English works and over ten in Chinese won him a reputation in international literary circles and he was nominated several times for the Nobel Prize for Literature. His best known works in English include My Country and My People, The Importance of Living and From Pagan to Christian. A growing interest in him has recently developed in China. His rather dramatic and thought-provoking faith journey is, however, seldom addressed, in spite of all he wrote about it..

I. Introduction

Unlike most converts who forsake a received system of thought and embrace new beliefs, Lin Yutang was over thirty when he left behind the Christian faith of his early years. When he returned to it, he did, however, speak positively of the truth which also subsisted in the "pagan" world of his experience. Furthermore, on returning to Christianity late in life, in addition to a complete acceptance of the simple, profound teachings of Jesus Christ and the relevance of his life on earth, Lin Yutang evidently maintained a critical approach to the element of traditional theological doctrine in faith.¹ From this, and as far as some guardians of traditional faith are concerned, his reconversion to Christianity may still beg one question: had he truly "returned to the fold", as he claimed?² According to Lin, however:

... religion is, first and last, an individual facing up to the astounding heavens, a matter between him and God. It is a matter for individual growth *from within*, and cannot be "given" by anybody.³

In the same way, therefore, a person's faith is not something an outsider can simply pass judgment on. In tracing the "doubts and perplexities ... and [] explorations"⁴ of a modern Chinese cultural figure of such formidable repute, one must particularly guard against sinking into subjective surmise and inference.⁵

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¹ This conclusion is based on *From Pagan to Christian* (Heinemann, London, 1960).

² *Return from Humanism to Christian Faith*, in Zhang Minggao and Fan Qiao, eds., *Selections from the Writings of Lin Yutang*, Zhongguo Guangbo Chubanshe, 1990, p. 483.

³ I hear that there are people overseas who have written pieces discussing and commenting on Lin's faith -- unfortunately they have not been available to this author.

⁴ *From Pagan to Christian*, p.13

⁵ *From Pagan to Christian*, p.14

⁵ I hear that there are people overseas who have written pieces discussing and commenting on Lin's faith -- unfortunately they have not been available to this author.

Fortunately, Lin Yutang addressed his own faith in many of his writings.⁶ In *From Pagan to Christian*, he specifically discusses its process of transformation, stating clearly at the outset that he is not "writing for smug Christians".⁷ Elsewhere he also points out cautiously: "I do not lightly change what I have always believed".⁸ It is precisely these frank and honest, gripping yet earnest personal elevations which have encouraged the writing of what follows in an endeavor to explore the sea change in the course of Lin Yutang's faith.

II. The perplexities of a "child of the mountains"

It is virtually impossible to ascertain the exact years when Lin Yutang left Christianity. There are quite a number of issues which touch on his faith in the article "Traces Worth Seeking", in his autobiography of the mid to late 1930s as well as in other relevant material, and it was in these "[long-winded and tedious]" murmurings that it looked as if, on the face of things, the "apostate" Lin Yutang, though he clung to his original beliefs, underwent several spiritual conflicts and struggles before reluctantly taking his leave.

In 1935, Lin Yutang mentioned in a brief autobiographical piece that the changes to his religious beliefs took place amid "the lung and difficult process of parting from Christianity as well as the heartbreak of this process."⁹ Due to "being a most ardent disciple during childhood, even enrolling in the seminary while at St. John's in preparation for a future of dedication to Christianity",¹⁰ and in spite of "*having abandoned the larger part of [his] theological beliefs*",¹¹ he wrote:

*... my religious experience was nevertheless a profound one, and a world without God is inconceivable to me. I simply feel that if God did not exist, the entire universe, and human life in particular, would disintegrate. It is wholly through reason that my convictions arose, and it is also through reason that they are exhausted; there is nothing but my love, and a sort of spiritual bond which remains. This feeling is the hardest one to tear myself away from.*¹²

In Lin Yutang's case, Christian faith and the childhood dreams which stayed with him all his life were undoubtedly one and the same:

There were tears shed during childhood. Those times of great joy or deep sorrow, or a carefree moment's admiration of an idyllic scene, all are eternally engraved on my memory.¹³

Throughout his life, Lin treasured his memories of the mountains and would quote a line from his autobiographical novel *Lai Bo ying*: "They were awesome and inspiring; enticing mountains

⁶ In 1935 Lin, in response to an approach from an American publisher, compiled his autobiography, which involved much reflection on his early faith; in 1939 he wrote *My Faith*. Both are included in Zhang and Fan's *Selected Works*. Together with *From Pagan to Christian* and *Return from Humanism* (both written in 1959), these sources reveal most about Lin's personal beliefs.

⁷ *From Pagan to Christian*, p.15

⁸ *From Pagan to Christian*, pp. 52-3

⁹ See "Religion", Ch.5 of Lin's autobiography, in *Selected Works*, pp. 439-40

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ See Ch.1 of Lin's autobiography.

- peak after peak - mysterious, remote, powerful."¹⁴ They entered into his blood and "once a child of the mountains, he was always a child of the mountains."¹⁵ His words and deeds were bold and sought freedom. This mountainous scenery shaped his character, and made this child of the mountains feel continually close to God and his magnificent creation. As a child, he clearly imagined God as being a few inches above his head during times of prayer, and would ask himself why grace was said before meals.

Lin Yutang was born into a third-generation Christian family and the strong religious atmosphere at home was replete with Christian love and devotion. His father, much respected among Zhangzhou Christians, was a Presbyterian minister who preached in the villages in the valleys and hills of Fujian. Each evening, the children, having read the Bible in turn, would kneel on a bench, heads bowed in prayer.¹⁶ No quarrels ever broke out between them and there was mutual respect between younger and elder; Father was solemn and Mother was kind- Lin Yutang received all the love that a child could be shown at home and this time of happiness was inextricably linked to Christianity. Was it possible for such faith, which had forged so many sweet memories, to be given up so easily?

Furthermore, the primary and secondary schools and later, the St. John's University which Lin attended, were all religious establishments, and many of those he came into contact with were foreign missionaries and teachers. Church spires and the peal of distant bells were commonplace, and these enriching experiences permeated his devout spirit with religious concepts such as sin and eternal life (salvation). There emerged an almost irrepressible awe and curiosity. To Lin, reverence for and the exploration of life was the true essence of a religious mind.

However, Lin Yutang eventually had to separate his Christian faith from his fond memories. We can but ask: What was this "bundle of contradictions" that even Lin himself was unwilling to face up to? In *The Importance of Living* Lin discusses what caused him to turn and take the "pagan road". The virtual torrent of words causes readers to wonder whether it was written with them in mind, or rather in order to persuade himself to attempt to break from the ideological and emotional struggle born of distancing himself from the Christian faith of his youth.

"I am a pagan. The statement may be taken to imply a revolt against Christianity; and yet "revolt" seems a harsh word and does not correctly describe the state of mind of a man who has passed through a very gradual evolution, step by step, away from Christianity."¹⁷ Lin also remarked: "In this conflict of emotions and understanding, I gradually arrived at a position where I had, for instance, definitely renounced the doctrine of redemption, a position which could most simply be described as pagan."¹⁸ But "Great pagans have always had a deeply reverent attitude toward nature. We shall therefore have to take the word in its conventional sense and mean by it simply a man who does not go to church (except for an aesthetic inspiration, of which I am still capable), does not belong to the Christian fold, and does not accept its usual, orthodox tenets."¹⁹

¹⁴ See "Childhood," in *Eighty Conversations with Myself*, Baowentang shudian, 1990. See also Shi Jianwei, "Lin Yutang Abroad," and Zhang Kebiao, "Lin Yutang in Shanghai."

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ See "Relationship to God", in *The Importance of Living*, Heinemann, 1977, p. 387.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 388.

Lin's sincerity and openness can be seen in his explanations and it emerges that the most basic reason for his leaving Christianity lay in the antiquated dogmatism of orthodox denominations. This can perhaps be said to be what originally lured Lin away from Christianity: "These dogmas were produced by scholastic minds, treating spiritual things as material things, and even equating God's justice with man's justice. ... Many of these dogmas were irrelevant and obscured the truth of Christ."²⁰

It was while still at St. John's reading theology that Lin's faith in doctrine began to waver.

"The conflict during the collegiate-adolescent period, which, as usual, was my most religious period, between a heart which felt the beauty of the Christian life and a head which had a tendency to reason everything away, was taking place."²¹ "But the doctrines were slipping away terribly."²² Lin challenged the resurrection of the body, the virgin birth and original sin, and proposed that "if there were no original sin, there would be no need of redemption."²³ He also said, "what I find most dissatisfying about religion is the emphasis on sin; I do not see myself as deeply sinful ..."²⁴ "Many people substitute different sorts of more meaningful eternal life - those of race, attainment or influence-for the eternal life of the individual ... these are better, more rational, more selfless ..."²⁵ As for revelation, Lin saw this as "the revelation of a special mystery or divine scheme given to a prophet ... a special, patented monopoly of salvation."²⁶ Intellectually, this is how the fundamental Christian convictions Lin Yutang believed in were utterly destroyed.

From this it occurred to me that, as modern children of the enlightenment movement, we are saturated by its spirit of doubt, and our own religious faith has inevitably been subject to the weighty analyses and blazing trials of the age of reason. The perplexities which this, in turn, engenders are precisely what Lin Yutang was confronting in his time. But belief has a dimension of its own which transcends reason which, in turn, affords empirical verification and recreation. Thus is the credibility of faith diminished.

But it had been unnecessary to inquire into such insoluble theoretical questions as the irrational elements of faith. In old age, Lin's position on these questions of faith still echoed the words of the psalmist: "my heart is not haughty, my eyes are not lofty, I dare not approach the great and the unfathomable..." (Psalm 131)-an attitude of pious devotion. Lin consciously abandoned the arrogant questioning and searching into the mysteries of God.²⁷ Besides, sustained faith need not necessarily depend on theological doctrine or creed. But a moment's

²⁰ See "The Grand Detour Begins", *From Pagan to Christian*, pp. 43-4.

²¹ See "Relationship to God", *The Importance of Living*.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ See the article Xinyang [*Faith*].

²⁵ See "Relationship to God", *The Importance of Living*.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ In later life, Lin did not bring up the orthodox Christian doctrines which had so perplexed him. Had he then solve the problems or did he deliberately evade them? I am somewhat undecided as to whether or not it is necessary to touch on this. During this dilemma, it so happened that the renowned minister from Taiwan, Zhou Lianhua came to deliver a lecture at my college. Fortunately, Dr Zhou was the minister at the church in Taiwan attended by Lin in old age. When I consulted Dr Zhou on this matter, he affirmed that Lin had not raised these issues and nor had he ever doubted the difficulty of such inquiry. He assured me that there was no need to look into these hypothetical questions. These words suddenly enlightened me, and enabled me to drawing the above conclusion.

thought tells us that Lin Yutang's reasons for giving up his Christian faith surely go beyond this. Let us look for a moment at his own explanation:

"From the moment I began to decipher everything through reason, all that remained in my heart was love and fear: an ardent hope was able to depend on an omniscient God and without such comfort in my heart, I could not have felt such joy and peace. ... It was this feeling rather than any intellectual belief - this feeling of dropping into a world without the love of God - that really scared me till the very last moment of my conversion to paganism; I felt, like many Christians, that if a personal God did not exist the bottom would be knocked out of this universe.²⁸

This was exactly like "the terror of falling into an orphaned world". So Lin lost his firm convictions, but nevertheless clung tightly to the God's constant paternal love. This spiritual bond could only have been nurtured in a home replete with Christian love. His whole childhood, which had been such a great influence on his moral being, often seemed to ring in his ears.

To Lin, being a Christian was summed up in the words of a deeply-cherished elder sister, close to tears, on leaving home to get married: "be a good man, a useful man and a famous man." And there came a day when Lin said to a Confucian colleague, "if we didn't believe in God as our Heavenly Father, we wouldn't be able to love our fellow men. We would soon see the world as one of total confusion, wouldn't we?" "Why is that? We could still be good and charitable for the simple reason that we are human, and that is exactly the way humankind should live." It was this response, in its reverence for the dignity of human life, which severed Lin Yutang's last remaining links with Christianity. "We should be able to just look at each other and love each other without being reminded of a third party in heaven."²⁹ For a considerable period after that, Lin Yutang found fulfillment in the philosophy that faith in human reason is sufficient to change oneself and the world for the better - a embodied in the Confucian principles of social morality, loyalty, a sense of responsibility and a solemn approach to life. "What does man seek in God?" It was only upon his return to the Christian faith in his later years that he began to ponder the question anew.

Accompanying the above factors were both opposition to the emerging face of Christianity at the time, and the awakening of national consciousness, and even a longing for the unknown uncharted realms of thought, constituted an important factor in Lin Yutang's departure from Christianity. A neglect of any one of these would distort the reality of his life of faith.

As a learned and cultured man, Lin was keenly aware of the many Chinese believers of the day who were of the opinion that the God of Christianity is like the Buddha image in any temple - capable of curing illness and improving one's fortunes. And that, of particular importance to the general rural population, was the bestowal of many sons on a family, and thereby good luck and prosperity through a multitude of descendants. As they saw it, without these perquisites, Christianity was meaningless even to those who lived righteously because they wished to go to heaven. Conversely, in the absence of heavenly incentives and the deterrents of hell, those "religious" people who did not live good lives developed an almost pitying disdain for them (there is no shortage of such parasitic, utilitarian, business-minded "Christians" in the Church in present-day China - author's note). There was, besides, the

²⁸ See "Relationship to God", in *The Importance of Living*.

²⁹ See the Chapter, "Religion," in Lin's autobiography.

conflict between the progressive theology within the Church (at that time liberal theology was prevalent, which to Lin, then a committed humanist, would of course have been something very advanced) and the stale doctrinal sermonizing from the pulpit. The impression Lin had of this preaching can only be described as one of dishonesty - even "hypocrisy". Most Christians expressed dissatisfaction and arrogance. Their self-importance led to a conviction that God would necessarily listen to His indeliberate creatures, that He would calmly handle prayers for anything (Lin's observation on this point was only one aspect of it). This amused Lin, who was familiar with modern astronomy: people in the universe had still not realized that they were but a drop in the ocean, and comparable to plankton born at dawn and perishing at dusk. (Though God still loved man, this level of meaning Lin Yutang, having decided to leave the Church, was unwilling to re-experience.) Ultimately, what I wish to say is that at the time, there were people going to church for protection and gain, and this is an indisputable fact in the recent history of the Christian Church in China. And this alone was enough to arouse in Lin a fierce antagonism to the church.

Lin first came into contact with the western way of life in Xiamen where missionaries and warships both excited and threatened his childhood. Having been exposed to the Church from an early age, it was natural for him to adopt a Christian standpoint, and he had not the slightest suspicion that there might be a link between the two. He had been unable to comprehend how those who opposed Christianity could harbor such hatred of Chinese Christians. But once his field of vision had encompassed both modern Chinese society's concern with the "Opium Question", as well as the awkward position of Chinese Christians on ancestor worship, Lin's awareness of national consciousness was strongly enlivened, and began to interfere with his religious views. The Opium Wars had brought about deep feelings of humiliation and a hostility towards the West, and the link between missionaries and the Opium Wars, fuelled similar discontent among many Chinese with Christianity.

As for ancestor worship, where the Chinese of the day were concerned, it was associated with honoring one's forefathers, and was the manifestation of a timeless kinship system which drove the Chinese people's will to survive. If one regards Confucianism as a religion, it could be said to be its only discernible ritual. The scholar worships Confucius in a Confucian temple: this is the standard for all his desires to be a good man, his pursuit of glory, advancement and social success. But the Church forbade Chinese Christians to engage in ancestor worship. In Lin's view, this was tantamount to ostracizing oneself from Chinese society, and substantiated the charge of "swallowing Christianity". But Lin Yutang was tied to the Christian teaching of his childhood, and because his church followed the strict Calvinist canon, children were not only prohibited from watching Chinese plays, they were not even allowed to listen to the folk legends of blind minstrels. Lin was over thirty when he first heard stories which every Chinese child knows. On the odd occasion thereafter, he came across them in all manner of books, and was possessed by enchanting thoughts his childhood years had been devoid of.

"Who, then, was able to sympathize with the indignant resentment in my heart, with the feeling of being utterly deprived of the right to familiarity with Chinese myth? I was livid - I had been cheated of my national heritage. This was what a good Puritan Christian education could do to a Chinese child, and I determined to plunge into the great stream of our national consciousness."³⁰

³⁰ See "The Grand Detour Begins," in *From Pagan to Christian*.

When Lin Yutang, as a Chinese Christian, lived in what he would have called a genuine Chinese world (that is, when he was teaching in Beijing), his eyes and mind were opened wide, and he was pained by an acute sense of shame. As any knowledge he had of the classics had little to do with Chinese culture, and had been acquired through paternal instruction at home, even this smattering of a "national heritage" was all but lost by way of absorption into the western culture of Church schools. He felt he had grown up within the protective shell of Christianity with the result that, in many respects, he was to all intents and purposes a vagrant deprived of nationality; that this alienated him from the society of his own Chinese flesh and blood. Whatever the case, he was unable to tolerate having been "swindled" out of ancient Chinese culture. In Beijing, he became acquainted with numerous celebrities in academic cultural circles, among whom were people who guarded every aspect of traditional China the way Gu Hongming did, and were even regarded as "monsters" at the time.³¹ Their words and deeds deeply influenced this emotionally bereft wanderer of the ideological doldrums. This child of the mountains had maintained a constant, insatiable curiosity for the world around him and began to cast aside what he had learned both at school and at university and embarked once more on a spiritual exploration. He immersed himself in the study of ancient Chinese literature and philosophy, and personally experienced the glory and fulfillment of pagan Chinese society with regard to both intellectual and aesthetic appreciation. (Though this was similarly ridden with evil, corruption and poverty. Lin found happiness and peace of mind.) Having set foot in that luxuriant jungle of Chinese thought, he could but ask: what, then, does it mean to be a Christian in China? Thus the aversion Lin had developed to the education and all else afforded him by the Church, was accompanied by his forsaking the Christian faith.

III. Meditation in the Great Light

Having spent approximately thirty previous years wandering through pagan territory (i.e. those ideological expanses which Lin Yutang swept through wholeheartedly - the ancient eastern ones (Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism) together with western rationalism, materialism and the many trends in modern thought coming within his sphere of enquiry), in later life Lin unexpectedly, and to the astonishment of many, returned to Christianity. By this time, the majority of people had assimilated the realism of modern times, and once more, Lin's metaphysical Christian faith seemed somewhat questionable and to ordinary people. To the last, he saw Christianity as a satisfactory solution to the problems of human spirituality, and believed that those who boasted a modern education and who rejected religion would do well to ponder the many reasons for this.

It is difficult to appreciate the many details concerning the renewal of Lin Yutang's faith. As he himself said, "I have returned to the Christian Church rather by an intuitive perception of my moral being, by one of those 'signals out of the deep' at which the Chinese excel."³² At this point I wish to mention Madame Liao Cuifeng, Lin's wife. This devout Christian woman certainly played no small part in Lin's final return to faith.³³ Lin himself said, "My wife always read the Bible in bed and attended church services wherever

³¹ In 1941 Lin wrote an article on Gu Hongming, "Gu Hongming - the last Confucian".

³² See *From Pagan to Christian*, p. 64

³³ Dr Zhou (see 26) mentioned an interesting episode: in the 1960s when he was working on translations into modern Chinese with church colleagues, he very much wished to ask the celebrated and literary Lin to glance through their translation of part of Luke's gospel. Dr Zhou was in church when he cautiously approached this old man in his seventies with this request. Madame Liao was at his side and readily assented, and took the manuscripts for her husband. This shows her enthusiasm for the Church.

she could. I admired and secretly envied the true spirit of piety in her, the essence of which I believe is humility." ³⁴Occasionally, Lin would accompany his wife to church. But he could not tolerate second-rate sermons; in his view, church speakers who, "in the typical voice of a crier at a village fair", preached sin and eternal damnation only seldom spoke of all that was of the divine in the human heart, and it was therefore especially difficult to encourage people to draw near to God. He longed for a church in which to sit at ease and, in joyful spirit, listen closely throughout. It was in just such an environment, in the Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York that, a "thousand anxieties dispelled", Lin was spiritually set free. His every audience of Dr. David Read's sermons was abundant in its fruitfulness, enabling him to come freely before the Heavenly Father, to worship him in the way he had so often wished to worship him. This continued for six months. Lin felt a strong sense of inner contentment, and his faith in Christ was recovered naturally. ³⁵

Regarding our scrutiny of Lin Yutang's reconversion, there are external details which seem to carry little weight. But what people are more interested in understanding is how this celebrated cultural figure of recent times came, through the intuitive knowledge of the depths of his soul, to make this extraordinary choice. Here is the way Lin himself put it:

"I must make it clear that the process is not facile or easy, ... I have roamed in the pastures of sweet, silent thought and beheld some beautiful valleys. I have dwelt in the mansion of Confucian humanism, and climbed the peaks of Mount Tao and beheld its glories, and have had glimpses of the dissolving mist of Buddhism hanging over a terrifying void, and only after doing so have I ascended the Jungfrau of Christian belief and reached the world of sunlight above the Clouds." ³⁶

Lin Yutang sought answers to questions concerning the ideal he cared most about—that concerning life and questions of human moral character in the spiritual heritage of humanity. Lost in an ideological wilderness, he first ventured into the inner realms of Confucianism, the positive accomplishments of its humanist philosophy and its rigorous and earnest lifestyle, both of which led Lin to believe that the efforts of the human will can change the self and the world for the better. But as he experienced the stormy meanderings of human life, thought and experience, he saw that the increased self-belief of man was incapable of making him good. Human wit may have been enriched but, at the same time, modesty and warmth had gradually diminished. Moreover, one of the lessons of modern history is that the brutal danger brought about by this self-belief is so great; that despite the pace of development in material life and technological knowledge, conditions for human survival remain precarious. The gradual decline of his humanist beliefs prompted Lin to turn to the Orient and its many outstanding moral doctrines and religions, the main ones being Buddhism and Taoism. He was amazed to find that Buddhism consisted of a set of exquisite metaphysical systems as well as placing direct emphasis on human wisdom: life is like a yoke - full of suffering, and restricted by sadness, fear and death; many things in life cause us to sink into "evil", and the truth to be obstructed. Yet ultimately, Buddhism perceives the world as an illusion, and life as endurable sorrow and, in looking to the next life and escaping the present one, even advocates the ascetic. How, then, could the firmest and most indestructible of Buddhist concepts satisfy Lin and his lust for life? Taoism, however, advocates patient and unresisting contemplation in deep, speechless silence; a reverence for the illusory, the anonymous, the unfathomable and omnipresent "way": the supreme Way controlling Heaven and Earth, the mystery which

³⁴ See *From Pagan to Christian*, pp. 233-4. 35

³⁵ See "Return from humanism to the Christian faith" and Ch. R off r om *Pagan to Christian*

³⁶ *From Pagan to Christian*, p. 64.

governs it inevitably adjudicating over the universe. These and other Taoist principles, such as that of humility, had a profound influence on Lin Yutang's thinking. But the essence of Taoism - responding to nature and shunning progress - would never contribute fundamentally to answering the questions of modern man. Lin Yutang also discussed the modern western habit of resorting to Cartesian logic in approaching God. But most astonishing to those in the East was the fact that almost all Christian theology carried out scholastic research into religion. Furthermore, religion is adoration, bewilderment, heartfelt reverence; individual, fully conscious intuitive knowledge, intuitive praise; an understanding far subtler and nobler than mathematical reasoning - a higher level of understanding. In fact, Lin was disparaging of the little natural and scientific evidence supporting faith. To Lin, the current prevailing materialism in the West was indeed contrary to human nature, and it was the ethical chaos and loss of belief, etc., guiding it which gradually drew him once more to the crossroads of belief.

" 'Blow out the candles, the sun is up!' ...Such is the natural imagery when mankind sees an incomparable light. The world of Jesus is the world of sunlight by comparison with that of all the sages and philosophers and schoolmen of any country."³⁷ I having engaged in such extensive discussion of other philosophies and religions, and having searched the treasured words and teachings of the sages, Lin Yutang finally discovered that Jesus' example alone possesses an extraordinary beauty. As Lin was often to expound, this truth which humanity had universally yearned for since ancient times could not be found in other religions. The venerable and profoundly thought-provoking teachings of Jesus and their clarity and simplicity shame other efforts to know or to seek God. In Lin's view, the enchanting radiance which draws people to Jesus, is only loosely related to the actual content of his teachings. Rather, it is intimately related to the manner and the voice of his teaching and from his personal example. "Jesus never expounded his faith, never reasoned it out." The words of Jesus have no mystical definitions; there are no threatening inferences to be drawn from them, nor do they rely on the so-called 'five essentials of dialectics' for justification. "The world of Jesus contains both power ... and the absolute clarity of light, without the self-limitation of Confucius, the intellectual analysis of Buddha, or the mysticism of Zhuangzi. Where others reasoned, Jesus taught; where others taught, Jesus commanded. He spoke of the fullness of the love of God. ... and this truth contains the germ of the principle for all human development.

Time and again, Lin pointed out that man frequently attempts to superimpose his thought onto simple truth, and believes that today's accumulated knowledge of religion can compete on an equal footing with both the laws of Jesus' time and the visions of the prophets. It was precisely the chaos resulting from the relentless bandying about of a confusion of creeds which was the most important factor in Lin's thirty-year absence from the Church. Along the road back to his original faith, Lin advocated the peeling off of the outer layers of Christianity's many metaphysical theologies; that the ways peculiar to people of the east such as intuition, pure realization and contact with the emotions be used to enable the bare simplicity of the Bible, the inspiring figure of Jesus be set before the people. The thought-provoking and natural, simple religious experience of Lin himself will prove to have profound implications for enlightened teaching in the church in present-day China. Lin also noted:

"In actual fact, Christianity in China never made converts by doctrines, but it did make converts whenever a Chinese came into personal contact with a Christian personality who followed the Christian teachings; namely, those few words 'Love ye one another'".³⁸

³⁷ See *From Pagan to Christian*, p. 53.

³⁸ See *From Pagan to Christian*, p. 223

He had great admiration for Christians such as Albert Schweitzer whose lives exuded Christian love and whose ethics and Christianity merged. This was what the mind of this civilized and traditional Christian was able to accept in all sincerity.

What remains to be addressed is the fact that when Lin Yutang revealed the course of his personal faith, he did not believe one could make compare Christianity to light and other religions and philosophies to darkness merely for the sake of convenience. In his view:

"it would not do to ... say that, Christianity being true, Confucianism is therefore false; to dismiss the Buddhist religion with the simple phrase 'heathen idolatry'; to say that Jesus' teachings on love and humility are right, therefore Laozi's teachings on the power of love are wrong..... it must be pointed out that systems of thought are rarely mutually exclusive at all points.... Especially in the case of Confucianism, it is not possible to say that a Christian cannot be a Confucianist. For Confucianism is the religion of the 'gentleman', of 'good breeding' and 'good manners', and to say that would almost amount to saying that a good Christian does not believe in being a gentleman, in good manners. Taoism reinforces the Christian teachings on love and gentleness more than many people dare to admit. And if the Buddhist formula for salvation is different from the Christian one, its basic starting point, the recognition of sin and deep concern with the fact of human suffering, is akin to Christianity."³⁹

Is this not precisely the breadth of vision today's Christians should possess in a world of global pluralism?

As Lin Yutang recounted when he was nearing the end of his journey of faith:

"The reader may have felt that I never stopped believing in God and that my quest for a satisfactory form of worship never ceased. But I was deterred by the theology of the churches. I was repelled by things which are coldly intellectual, haughtily deductive, and even uncharitable toward God. My position was that of many modern men who are born Christians but who, for various reasons, feel there is something in churches that instinctively keeps them away ... There was, in fact, no cataclysmic 'conversion', no mystic vision, no feeling of someone heaping red coals on my head. The return to the church of my father was merely finding a church which was adequate for me and did not repel the by dogmatists. It was a natural thing when it happened."⁴⁰

Indeed there are still people who believe that "he was a Christian, and although he once did turn his back on Christianity, his spirit still identified with it, and he therefore finally returned to the faith, which couldn't be a more natural thing..... when he abandoned himself to reading the writings of Lao Zi, Zhuang Zi, Confucius and Mencius, these ways of thought were probably no more than novel and amiable allies. Throughout, he never altered his Christian attitude to life. During this scholar's self-cultivation in Chinese and western literature, he also read the Bible to familiarity not once did he violate the morality of his Christian education."⁴¹ However, even if Lin's Christian faith was thoroughly shattered what harm was done? Was his newly-established faith not even

³⁹ See *From Pagan to Christian*, p. 65

⁴⁰ See *From Pagan to Christian*, p.236

⁴¹ From the journal *Taiwan Biographical Literature*, vol. 31, no. 6 and vol. 32, no. I, quoted in Ji Shiyun, ed., "Lin Yutang in the Eyes of the Literati," in *Cultural anti Educational Materials*, March/April, 1990.

better able to be tested? Moreover, Lin Yutang's journey of faith has left us with food for thought which only experiences of real hardship and searching can provide.

Nanjing Theological Review . No. 18 (June 1993), p. 116.

Translated by Oliver Stunt.

12. The Passageway to Enlightenment: On Xie Fuya's 'Mystical Union' – Chen Yongtao

Xie Fuya, also known as N.Z. Zia, was born in 1892 in Shaoxing, Zhejiang. As a youth he studied briefly in Japan during the last years of the Qing dynasty. While in Japan, he became a Christian and participated in Christian student activities there. He returned to Shanghai in the mid-1920s where he worked with the YMCA in literature and student work. In 1925 he went to the U.S. on a YMCA scholarship and studied philosophy of religion in Chicago Theological Seminary and at Harvard. On his return he taught at Lingnan University and Zhongshan University in Guangzhou. In 1949, he went to Hong Kong where he taught at Chung Chi College and Baptist College before leaving for the U.S. in 1958. During his long life, Mr. Xie was a man of letters, writing not only volumes on philosophy and religion but poetry, essays and several books of memoirs. He also translated a number of western religious and philosophical works into Chinese, including works by Aquinas, Kant, Schleiermacher and Kierkegaard. Mr. Xie returned to China to retire in Guangdong in 1986. He died in 1991. This essay deals with his Christian philosophical mysticism, which he based on personal conversion and a commitment to service.

The Russian writer Anna Akhmatova once said, with conviction: "A soul need only have a tiny tender spot, but that spot determines the person's sense of self and relationships with others." Indeed, people all pursue life on the basis of their own soul's "tender spot", which gives their hearts an "anchor" and their spirits a home. Xie Fuya's aspirations are those of a Chinese Christian. All his life he maintained a pure innocence as he sought his own life and the Way, at the same time never ceasing to improve himself. The tender spot, or ache, in his soul was the desire to better the human plight and promote the early establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth through the nurture of "cultivated Christian exemplars."¹ During his exceptionally long life, his soul's ache, like Diotima,² held him with its magical powers, guiding his pilgrimage and thoughts, gradually elevating him into the perfect realm of heavenly beings. However, he did not enter this perfect realm by way of rational argument or philosophical profundities; rather, through the mystical union of religion, for only through the enlightenment that comes of mystical union can one gradually enter there.

Why are we born? How should we live? What is the meaning of human life? These are issues for philosophy and religion, and they are the very core of Mr. Xie Fuya's thought. What *human life should be* like is the focal point of all of his ideas, whether on religious philosophy or Christian theology. He once said, "Religion is the religion of human life; religion ought to be expressed in the whole of human life." In other words, religion is religion for the sake of human life, and human life ought to be life lived for the sake of religion. In the finite we return to the infinite and therein come to know the finite. Through-

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¹ [Trans, note:] In the phrase, "cultivated Christian exemplars," Mr. Xie employs an important Confucian term, *junzi*, which denotes a ruler, but also has additional nuances involving cultivated virtuosity and humane achievement. His Christian imagery seeks to emphasize the aspects of the term *which* suggest spiritual cultivation *its* well as personal maturation through unselfish spiritual and moral activities bound up in the representation of the truths of Christ.

² Diotemes is the female priest in Plato's dialogue, *The Symposium*. The German poet and philosopher, Holderin, once referred to her in his poem, "Diotemes," as a "heavenly person" who was sweet as honey while also having the power of law.

out his life, Xie Fuya pursued his dream of the "cultivated Christian exemplar." How then can human beings nourish "cultivated Christian exemplars"? From Mr. Xie's viewpoint, "mystical union" is the direct path to success; it may even be said that there is no other way. In an occasional piece entitled "On the Humanism of N.Z. Zia's (Xie Fuya's) 'Jesus-Oriented' Christology", this author has already touched on this point.³ The present article is a further discussion of Xie's ideas on "mystical union."

"Following Heaven and Responding to Humankind"

In the Zhou dynasty *Book Of Changes*, the hexagram "Revolution" appears after the two hexagrams, "Oppression" and "The Well," and is followed by the hexagram, "Caldron." The commentary tells us that "nothing transforms things so much as the *ting (ding)* [caldron]" and that "The Caldron means taking up the new."⁴ Mr. Xie realized that the creation of any new moral character or new society stems from the operation of such change. Only when this happens is it possible to follow Heaven and respond to humankind.⁵ "Following Heaven" and "responding to humankind" are in fact the two emphases of Mr. Xie's thought on mystical union, and mystical union is the source of power which allows the discarding of the old ways in favor of the new. Grounded in his dream of nurturing "cultivated Christian exemplars," as well as on the aspiration to bring about the Kingdom of God on earth, Mr. Xie inevitably begins from the two foci of traditional Chinese culture and Christian faith to underscore the idea of discarding the old for the new, putting new wine into old wine skins. This vision differs from the social and political reforms of the sage heroes, Wu and Tang. For Mr. Xie, a reformation of consciousness or spiritual reformation is needed first, then one can turn to social reform. On this point, he is considerably like the distinctive modern Chinese writer and scholar, Xu Dishan (1893-1941), who wrote

Jesus, who thoroughly understood the cosmos as well as human life, was deeply aware of the fact that in order to have national and social revolution, there must first be spiritual revolution. Filled with sorrow for the cosmos and for humankind, he was willing to sacrifice himself in order to realize the love ... [word missing in the originals that can move the ignorant to change their stubborn ways ... By virtue of his moral courage, he offered himself to be bound and willingly ascended the cross, offering his individual life to the great life of the cosmos. In other words, he testified to the highest truth by abandoning the ephemeral life in order to win life eternal .⁶

That is to say, the inner revolution of the consciousness or spiritual dimension is a matter of great urgency. In other words, if one wishes to create "cultivated Christian exemplars" who will bring about the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth, the inner revolution of the consciousness or spiritual dimension is indeed the first task, and cannot be treated lightly. In

³ *Nanjing Theological Review*, Nos. 14 & 15 (1 & 2 1991).

⁴ *The I Ching or Book of Changes*, The Richard Wilhelm Translation Rendered into English by Cary F. Baynes. vol. II. Pantheon, 1950, p. 290.

⁵ The commentary on the hexagram, Revolution, says "Tang and Wu [two early sage kings of the 16th century before Christ under whose leadership the Xia dynasty was destroyed and the Shang dynasty was established - trans. I brought about political revolutions because they were submissive toward heaven and in accord with men." *Book of Changes* (see note 4), p. 285.

⁶ Xie Fuya, "The Hexagram, 'Revolution,' and 'Rebirth' in Christianity," in *Collected Essays on the Book of Changes* (Taiwan: Tunghai University Press, 1984), pp. 114-115.

that case, how is it possible to achieve such an inner revolution? For Mr. Xie, "mystical union" is in fact the only way. In his estimation what is urgently needed by the Chinese nation and culture is the production of a "new theory of the unity of Heaven and humankind," to facilitate the creation of a new world order. In this sense, the "new theory of the unity of Heaven and humankind" and "mystical union" are simply different phrases with the same meaning.

"Mystical union,"⁷ otherwise called "divine union," indicates the intimate communion between an individual believer and God, or the integration of the individual ego with the universal spirit. Mystical union is an important concept in Xie Fuya's world of ideas; human beings must follow the path of mystical union in order to become one with God. Following this, they turn back to re-enter the world and serve society. In mystical union, the tangible secular completely yields to the intangible light of the spirit. Mystical union is the bridge which links the individual ego with the universal spirit, the unobstructed thoroughfare between two worlds. Its purpose is not purely to escape the world but to serve society better. Mystical union and service are not two separate things, but two sides of the same thing. They are mutually supportive, mutually fulfilling, and mutually reliant upon each other. Solitary mystical union necessarily leads on to broad universal salvation, while universal salvation is completely reliant on solitary mystical union. This is an especially prominent feature of the Church of Jesus Christ. Mr. Xie goes on to state that:

... in general, a higher caliber and normal religion will certainly possess these two important elements: one is inner mystical union; the other, outward salvation. The former is individual; the latter, universal - but the two are intricately linked together, meaning that as mystical union deepens, salvation broadens; and as salvation broadens, skill in mystical union grows more profound.⁸

The content or intellectual implications of mystical union include both individual mystical union (communion with God) and universal salvation (social service).

Mystical union or individual mystical union, "refers to the individual believer's inner heart being joined with the great spirit of the whole cosmos - that is, having intimate communion with God, even to becoming one with God. All profound mystical union is necessarily a state of being 'alone' before God, originally God is the 'only' true God; therefore, mystical union must be solitary."⁹

In addition, only when a person is in the midst of 'solitary' mystical union - sharing a mutual encounter with God, and so 'solitary' before God - then and only then can humans truly know themselves, know their mission as persons and discover the foundation of individual peace and conviction. If we say that religion is "the establishment of spiritual peace,"¹⁰ then religious mystical union is the foundation for the establishment of an individual's peace at heart, and is the never-setting sun of human life. Not only this, mystical union is also very similar to what theorists on creative evolution call "the power of abrupt creativity" (Nisus), which can break

⁷ [Trans. note [: The writer adds in parenthesis at this point "(Mysticism)," but I have chosen not to render the key term by 'mysticism' because of his later differentiation of this term from the normal translation phrase, *shenmi zhuyi*. The description of this key concept in the rest of the paper should provide justification for this choice.

⁸ Xie Fuya. "Solitude and Expansiveness in Christianity," in *Later Essays On Christian Thought* (Hong Kong: Chinese Christian Literature Council, 1986), p. 3.

⁹ *Ibid.*, loc. cit.

¹⁰ Xie Fuya, "Poetry and Religion," in *Collected Poems and Essays for Professor Xie Fuya's Centenary* (Hong Kong: Christian Study Centre On Chinese Religion and Culture, 1991), p. 340.

through from the level of mind to the spiritual level, and then, break through again to the divine level." It is able to restore the dying to life, transform human 'nature' and change selfish worldly human beings into "great persons" (which is identical with what Confucians call "sages" and Christians call "saints"), noble and unsullied as the heavens, who willingly offer themselves for their sisters and brothers. These "great persons" are able to become one with God, to live their lives as God ordains and to participate in God's great work of creation and redemption.

During mystical union, the little ego is both subject and object; it is completely submissive to the Great Spirit of God, and also initiates the encounter with the Great Spirit of God, becoming one with this Spirit, finally transcending space and time, reaching the point where subject and object are no longer distinguishable and the guest and the host are one. This is the highest realm where the little ego is completely forgotten and from whence one is released from this "sea of bitterness," that is the human world, to deliver one's "brothers and sisters." This is probably one level of meaning of what Mr. Xie calls "merging time and space, the union of the guest and the host."

...religious believers offer themselves to the Great Spirit of the cosmos, forgetting the little ego; naturally no trace of selfish ideas remains. Since this stage is like the state of 'absence of thought' so often emphasized in Buddhism, at this time the soul is breathing as one with the cosmos; all that is of the vulgar world is completely forgotten - fame, fortune, power, even the physical body - no longer belong to me. This is what is called "leaving the world" in religious philosophy. Leaving the world is neither passive nor nihilistic, but an active and positive step which must be taken, a leap into the sea of suffering in order to rescue all sentient beings.¹²

¹Theorists in creative evolution consider that the power of abrupt creativity (Nisus) is able to transcend the dimensions of time and space to advance [first] to the atomic level, then to the level of mind, then higher once more to the spiritual level, and finally to the highest, which is the divine level. The author thinks that Mr. Xie's mystical bonding in several of its meanings involves something considerably like this power of abrupt creativity, Nisus, and so it is able to take sinful [human life] and transform it into divine life.

The great contemporary Confucian scholar, Liang Shuming (1893-1988), once claimed that the heart of religion is an irresistible and compelling human desire to establish spiritual peace within themselves, which cannot be replaced by aesthetic education. Indeed, although art and religion both lead to transcendent realms, aesthetics can, at the very most, cause a person's little ego to be immersed in the grand self of the cosmos, so attaining the feeling that both self and object are forgotten. Religious mystical union goes one step further, because after the little ego becomes one with the spirit of God, one is able to know one's mission more clearly, and then, suddenly and completely, return to "the sea of suffering in order to rescue one's sisters and brothers." Mr. Xie's exposition of this point is as follows:

Aesthetic mystical union stops where the absence of self begins, where one attains the supernatural realm and assimilates into it. Religious mystical union offers the self to what lies behind the supernatural, gains support from it, and turns to reenter the sea of human suffering, helping sentient beings to cross [to safety] ... Jesus once secretly prepared himself in the wilderness for three days and nights [he must mean forty days and forty nights, see Mt. 4:1-11]. Gradually he became aware that "I am in the Father, and the

¹² Xie Fuya, "Conversing with Bishop K.H. Ting about The Nature and Spirit of Atheism" in *Solitude and Expansiveness in Christianity*, op. cit., p. 38.

Father is in me," I and the Father are one" (see Jn. 13:37) [Mr Xie is mistaken, the citation should be Jn. 10:30; 38]. Jesus gained the strength to empty the cup of bitterness and walk up to the cross, entirely from the support of this great moral character behind the supernatural. On the other hand, aesthetic mystical union is merely poetic, like Tao Yuanming's (c. 370-427) 'picking chrysanthemums beneath the eastern hedge, gazing leisurely at the distant Southern Mountains,' or Wang Wei's (701-761) 'turning away, the bright light enters the deep forest, bringing brightness once more to the green moss'; for they do not turn back to the world and contend with the host of devils.¹³

What then, is the impetus, what are the implications of individual mystical union? And how can an ego enter into a mystical bond with God? Mr. Xie thinks that without the Deity there would be only suffering and sin (for the individual). If we put it into current parlance, we could say that the memory of suffering and the consciousness of pain trigger the process of mystical union, marking out its path. For the consciousness of hardship (suffering) and the consciousness of pain (sin), burn like fire, leaving us nowhere to turn. One cannot but face God alone, praying that God will become the strength supporting one's whole life, allowing God to dry all tears, and moreover, partaking of the suffering of God. One cannot but come before God and thoroughly repent; for oneself, but more, for all humanity, begging for forgiveness from the Spirit of God and thus attaining the peace of deliverance from sin, healing for the sinful, wounded soul.

For this reason, where guilt exists, it not only enables people to enter into the highest stage of human life-the religious stage-but can also enable a person to enter into the highest stage of religion - "mystical union." As people say, it is exceedingly necessary and beneficial for people to turn to God behind closed doors and repent. For although religion and medicine belong to different disciplines - religion heals the soul, while medicine heals the body - there is no doubt that they are similar in a number of ways. Though sun and moon sail across skies of different hues, their light is not divided; the light of religious mystical union is even more of a continuum, for it not only allows humans to know themselves, but compels them to change, guiding them onto a completely new path. The burning pain of sin makes it impossible for a person not to come into the presence of God, to "give an account of themselves." [Mr. Xie believes that when humans come before God, they are their own accusers and God their just judge.] When one stands alone to confess before God, sin vanishes without a trace in the light of God's countenance. This is also part of the process of the mystical union between the individual and God. Mystical union enables persons to know themselves more fully as they are, to come to know that they are "the chief of sinners," so that they can enter even more deeply into "mystical union" with God. Truly, only when there is consciousness of sin can there be consciousness of God, and consciousness of mystical union. As a result of sin, humanity becomes more and more presumptuous, pride in its own abilities grows, and hearts shrink, leaving no room for God or other people. Yet consciousness of sin causes us to be able to empty ourselves [of pride], prostrating ourselves in the presence of God, receiving Divine judgment and "accusing ourselves" in God's presence.

Consequently, mystical union does not change God and cannot change God. It changes *the individual person* who enters into "mystical union." As Soren Kierkegaard said: only after a human being is *genuinely repentant, experiences the agony of heart and its*

¹³ Xie Fuya, "A response to Mr. Shen Yunlong's [Recounting of] the Mourning Woman Incident," in *Collected Poems and Essays for Professor Xie Fuya's Centenary op. cit.*, p. 155.

*struggles, then and only then is it possible for that one to become a Christian.*¹⁴ For it is only within deep mystical union that the individual can repent, face their agony of heart and its struggles, and wage a desperate battle against sin, relying on God's backing to achieve victory over sin and evil. Like Kierkegaard, Mr. Xie believes that it is through a consciousness of sin that one truly comes to a consciousness of God's existence. It is only in this way that true mystical union becomes a possibility. If a person wants to be saved, he or she, alone and in person, in mystical union, must present to God an account of their sins. Mr. Xie believes that emphasizing the sinner's accounting to God is indeed to be regarded as a profound effort at religious reflection.¹⁵ In mystical union, when the person finishes his or her confession and account of sufferings endured, and receives a completely new human life, what the Apostle Paul calls the "new man [sic]," that new life must "share in the eternal life of the cosmos. That corrupt and sinful body must die and the true human and the true God share together life everlasting."¹⁶

Guilt or the consciousness of pain is the key to the door of mystical union. God stands behind the door, gazing at 'you' with mercifully kind eyes, patiently waiting for 'you' to return. Yet the memory of suffering or the consciousness of pain guides the whole progress of mystical union, so that one can never forget the inner cries and pleading of the suffering human soul. It causes one to see clearly that God and humankind do in fact suffer together and draws one on to participate in suffering with God, to suffer with God in history. This is where the strength of one's inner drive toward social service, saving the world, and benefiting the common people is found, and where the traditional theory of unity between Heaven and humanity differs from Mr. Xie's new theory. For when a person enters into mystical union and truly feels the sufferings and difficulties of this world, he cannot help but fully feel at the same time the sufferings and difficulties of God. This also occurs when one truly feels the sufferings of Job, and cannot help but sense God's sufferings. For when Job suffers, God suffers with him; when humanity sinks deep into the sea of sin, God struggles together with human beings. Put in another way, during mystical union, as the tear-filled eyes of this world of suffering look upon you, God looks on, too, eyes brimming with tears. When that happens, you have no means of escape, no means of finding freedom in self-forgetfulness. You can only suffer with God, imploring help from the strength of God's Spirit, and then turn back and re-enter the world, to rescue others. This is what is meant by "following Heaven".

Because of this, genuine mystical experience does not stop at "following Heaven"; inner mysticism must meet and be fulfilled by outward salvation.

Another aspect, so-called 'saving grace', points to the fact that the founder of a high level religion is bound to act on God's will, loving the multitude and through them all humankind, so that not even 'one will be lost'. Not only the founder of a religion, but also great religious figures, who perceive the will of God and have a high degree of faith are bound to care for the multitude who are tossed in the sea of suffering, and will stand for nothing less than rushing to save them. He hopes that the whole of humanity will be able

14 See Kierkegaard's *Philosophy Of Human Life*, "Great Authors of Christian History" series, Part 11, vol. 22. Foundation for Theological Education in Southeast Asia and Chinese Christian Literature Council, Hong Kong, 2nd ed., 1972.

15 See *Drops in the Stream* (Hong Kong: Chinese Christian Literature Council, 1974), pp. 11-12.

16 Xie Fuya, "Human Life," in *My Life and Books* (Hong Kong: Taosheng Press, 1978), p. 20. *Solitude and Expansiveness in Christianity*, op. cit., p. 3.

to climb from the waters and flames to a safe place. He cannot bear to see a single person lost.¹⁷

Furthermore, mystical union and salvation are not two separate stages of the same process, but two mutually dependent steps of one and the same stage. In mystical union there is salvation and in salvation there is mystical union. The deeper the mystical union, the broader the salvation; the broader the salvation, the deeper the mystical union. Because

looking at it from another point of view, as they (religious figures) share the experience of being buffeted by the waves of the sea of human suffering, they cannot conquer feelings of commiseration and compassion, yet an individual's strength is limited, thus they are impelled to seek help from the power of the supernatural. In this manner, spiritual communion with God and the redeemed heart are like the two wings of a bird, or the two wheels of a cart. They work to support each other, so attaining a lofty and perfect moral character.¹⁸

There is an inevitability and cold indifference about life in this world that is very like Medusa: a single glance can turn you to stone. It is similar to what happened to Lot's wife in the Bible: because she turned for a look at Sodom, she was unceremoniously turned into a pillar of salt. Yet, mystical union is more like Midas' touch which can turn stone to gold; mystical union can change a human with a heart of stone into a warm-blooded, warm-hearted "new human". This "new human" is profoundly represented by the "cultivated Christian exemplar," a product of Chinese-style education, nurture and moral training. But as has already been described, the goal of mystical union is not simply to cultivate new humans. This new human must continue to follow Christ, obey the voice of God and follow the way to salvation for the soul and for the world. Furthermore, individual mystical union and social service are not two purely distinct entities. but one body mutually dependent and cooperative. In the early 1920s, Mr. Xie explained this point from the perspective of the philosophy of religion in his book entitled *Philosophy Of Religion*.

Religion's preparation for the supernatural is its preparation for the life of a transcending human life; its spirit of leaving the world is a way of reentering the world, its oneness with creation is its experience of empathy with humanity. The former is the union of creation with ourselves; the latter our oneness with all humankind. The former is Zhuang Zi's "the world hidden within the world - "; the latter is Mencius' "When they saw anyone hungry it was as though they themselves hungered; when they saw a drowning, it was as though they themselves had drowned."¹⁹

For the final goal of religion is human life, to help people through this life and to bring about the coming of the Kingdom.... The Divine union of religion, is but a stage in the process of cultivation (some might say, the highest stage), yet if we simply dally in its realms and do not turn back to human affairs, it is not suited to religion. Thus 'spiritual drunkenness' is sharply condemned by religion.

¹⁷ *Solitude and Expansiveness in Christianity, op. cit., p. 3.*

¹⁸ Xie Fuya, "Cultivation of the Christianized Moral Character," in *ibid.*, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

¹⁹ [Trans. note] Mr. Xie does refer to these passages by their chapter titles. The first is correctly located in the sixth chapter of the *Zhuang Zi*, "The Great and Most Honored Master," but the location of the latter mentioned in the text is not quite correct.

It can be seen that mystical union is not a matter of seeking 'spiritual drunkenness,' but is oriented toward service and salvation. The "following Heaven" which takes place during individual mystical union is precisely the "responding to humankind" of social service. Mr. Xie never failed to advocate the link between individual mystical union and social service, though at times he may have emphasized one or the other, and in this he never wavered through all his decades of scholarly activity, for he was constantly explicating the mutually supportive and mutually fulfilling qualities of mystical union and service. And, in fact, all of Mr. Xie's life was a very good example of this theory. He never presumed to forget either one. His whole life was a place apart for meditation as well as dedicated to service to society and a sacrificial altar worshipping God.

In general, a genuine religion, or a highly developed one, must be a cone. Moving from the point downward represents its individual dimension; moving from the base upward represents its social dimension. The general principles of Christianity are equally direct and simple. These are the words which Jesus himself spoke: You must love your God with your whole soul and with your whole might, and the second [commandment] is that you must love others as yourself. In these few words are captured the whole and entire truth of the Way of Jesus, without unnecessary additions. The first sentence deals with our communion with God - this is the personal dimension of Christianity; the second deals with universal love and sacrifice - this is the social dimension of Christianity."²⁰

The individual moves from mystical union to service, from the personal dimension of religion to the social, that is, from "following Heaven" to "responding to humankind." Through mystical union, a person responds to humankind, turns again to this world, to rescue it and save humankind. Thus is the mission to achieve reformation of society by reformation of the spirit fulfilled. At this point, individual ego has completed the whole process of mystical union and can be said to be fully situated within it; or, to put it in more appropriate language, in this way the person is truly able to achieve "following heaven" and "responding to humankind". I might mention that in My *Two-S Philosophy of Life*, Mr. Xie declares that his philosophy of life is summed up by terms 'solitude' and 'sociality.' Quiet solitude and sociability are comparable to mystical union and service; the words are different, but the meaning is the same.

"In Deep Solitude is Deep Enlightenment"

Contemporary Chinese theologians can be separated into two major camps: Modernists and Fundamentalists. The Modernists are represented by T.C. Chao (1888-1979), Xie Fuya, Y.T. Wu (1893-1979) and others; the Fundamentalists, by Jia Yuming (1880-1964), Yang Shaotang, Watchman Nee [Ni Tuosheng] (1903-1972), and others. Unlike western Modernists, the orientation of their Chinese counterparts is generally from rationality to mysticism, from society toward the individual, followed by a turning back to society. This is the point where Chinese Modernists and Fundamentalists merge and join forces. They are the two morning stars occupying different positions in contemporary theology, each shining with its own light, yet sharing the same sky.

²⁰ Xie Fuya, "Foreword," Y.T. Wu, *The Social Gospel*, reprinted in *Solitude and Expansiveness in Christianity*, op. cit., p. 264.

Why did Chinese Modernists move, as it were involuntarily, from rationality to mystical union? Why, in stressing the construction of an indigenous theology and the nurture of "cultivated Christian exemplars," did Xie Fuya proceed by way of mystical union? And what are the mental processes by which Mr. Xie moves from rationality to mystical union? Or we might ask, what are the sources of his thinking on mystical union'?

In general terms, at least, the orientation of Chinese Modernists is one; yet in specific instances individuals differ. The light each sheds is not always the same. They may be said to be taking divergent paths to the same goal, as having common ground, yet reserving minor differences. Although their specific individual environments differ, the intellectual influences on each differ, and even their work is not entirely the same, yet in some ways they are very much alike. In the old China, sunk in suffering, the country which was no nation, a people who could not be human, the profound solitude they experienced was the same, and so their experience of "deep enlightenment in deep solitude," was also the same. The same profound solitude necessarily impelled them toward fundamentally the same mental processes: from rationality to mystical union, from mystical union to salvation. However, differences still existed. Some turned toward clarity, while others chose obscurity; the orbits of some were so definite as to be nearly unchangeable, while others were so vague as to be hardly distinguishable. It is worth pointing out that although the main trend of Chinese Modernists is from rationality toward mystical union, yet they cannot be said to forsake rationality in the process. To the contrary, the light of rationality encircles their lives like an aureole that will not disperse. This means both that they have not become obscurantists in faith terms, and also that their thinking contains, to a certain degree, strong humanist overtones.

Unlike T.C. Chao, Xie Fuya strongly emphasizes the "philosophy of the Mean",²¹ philosophy of traditional Confucian culture (which is also called the "Doctrine of the Middle Way"). Because of this, he has neither Mr. Chao's decisiveness nor his urgency; there is little difference between his earlier and later thought, and his orientation is not as obvious and clear as Mr. Chao's. T.C. Chao's earlier and later thought can be divided into two distinct kinds; Mr. Xie never makes a drastic turn from absolute rationalism to the mysticism of mystical union, rather his path embraces "both discontinuity and continuity."²² In decisive change there is continuity, and in continuity there are breaks - a 'critical' inheritance and an inherited 'criticism.' We could say that his mother, "muttering the name of the Buddha" during his childhood at times when no other help was near, not only planted the seed of religious faith very early in his young heart, but sowed the seeds mystical union there as well.

In his autobiographical *Drops in the Stream*, Mr. Xie divided his life into four periods: the traditional Chinese period, the social tendency period, the period of philosophical pondering, and the historical synthesis period. Mr. Xie was certainly very concerned about social service in his earlier years, especially in the ten years he spent at the YMCA in Shanghai before he left for graduate work in the United States. After being influenced by Alfred North Whitehead's process philosophy and the creative change theory of Lloyd Morgan and Samuel Alexander, he became increasingly concerned with mystical union. While studying in the United States, Mr. Xie heard

²¹ Mr. Xie feels that the distinctive feature of Chinese culture is located in the character *zhong*, "the center", a feature which should never be underestimated. This is reflected in his own "Middle Way thesis" and in his reflections on a theology based on the Doctrine of the Mean [*zhongyong*].

²² Mr. Xie used several Buddhist phrases to refer to his cosmology, employing the "theory of recognizing the phenomena." "Both discontinuity and continuity" is one of these which is found in his *Drops in the Stream*, op. cit., p. 203.

H. N. Wieman's lectures on Mysticism and read several texts on the subject, including books by James H. Leuba and Evelyn Underhill. These undoubtedly influenced his ideas on mystical union. Yet in his earlier years, there was no more influential figure than Whitehead. Mr. Xie once said that while reading Whitehead's book, *Religion in the Making*, he was profoundly struck by the phrase, "Religion deals with solitude," and with this in mind, he gradually made a 180-degree turn in his own ideas, from an emphasis on social issues to an emphasis on solitude. Truly, this phrase of Whitehead awakened the seed of "mystical union" buried so early in the young Mr. Xie's heart. The later influences he received from the ideas of Kierkegaard and Friedrich F. von Hugel caused him to become more enamored with individual mystical union, so that both individual mystical union and social service became a complete system of intimately related and mutually dependant ideas. However, this is not to say that in his early years he never said a word about individual mystical union or the solitude of religion. Early in his social tendency period in the early 1930s, he wrote a book entitled *The Personal Gospel*, which was commended along with Y.T. Wu's *The Social Gospel*. At that time Mr. Xie felt that a genuine personal gospel would necessarily be a genuine social gospel, and vice-versa. He praised Mr. Wu's quotation from Harry Emerson Fosdick:

The social gospel and the personal gospel are like the two ends of the tunnel beneath the Hudson River. If you enter at one end, you have to exit at the other and vice-versa, but there is only one tunnel.²³

This is right on the mark. Generally speaking, all Chinese Modernists enter at the social gospel end and exit by the personal gospel end. Mr. Xie is no different, but there are points at which he does not fit the mould. In his early work, *Philosophy of Religion*, he proclaimed:

The place where my little self and my superior self meet is religion's highest consciousness. Artists don't have it, because aesthetics cannot replace (religious) belief, intoxication of the senses cannot replace spiritual communion, and the fine arts cannot replace religion.

Here one can see that even in his social tendency period there are already traces of his mystical union (e.g. "spiritual communion"), even though not always explicit or elaborated.

Generally speaking, although the phrase "in deep solitude there is deep enlightenment" can be applied, Mr. Xie's inner direction in moving from rationality to mystical union, and the inevitability of that course, the fact that he did not have an absolute intellectual about-face, but rather "both discontinuity and continuity," suggests that even though we have the key within our grasp, it is no easy matter to open the lock to plumb the depths to find the source of his ideas. I will proceed by investigating traditional Chinese culture and Christian belief.

First of all, Mr. Xie is a Christian scholar possessed of a highly Confucian disposition and distinctive traditional Chinese characteristics. Thus, all his thinking must be both Christian and Chinese. Traditional culture and Christianity are the two springs feeding the single river of his thought. On the one hand, he has been deeply marked by traditional culture; on the other hand, this traditional culture has in turn continually stimulated his own contemplations. In his shift from rationality to mystical union, Confucian (especially the Song-Ming dynasty Neo-

²³ See Mr. Xie's Foreword to Mr. Wu's *The Social Gospel* in the former's *Solitude and Expansiveness in Christianity*, *op. cit.*, p. 263.

Confucian "heart and mind" school), Buddhist (especially the thought of the Chan sects) and Taoist (especially Lao-Zhuang philosophy) have influenced him very deeply.

Mr. Xie was born at the end of the nineteenth century in 1892. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Chinese people were subjected to bullying and humiliation. This was a dark period in the history of the Chinese nation. Where was the way out for China? At this time any intellectual with a conscience pondered in solitude, hoping to discover the way forward for the Chinese nation. In the 1920s, at a time when the cries of "National Salvation through Science" and "National Salvation through Moral Character" reached their height, when those in the church joined their voices to those of the people and called for China to turn to God, Mr. Xie did not jump on the bandwagon but pondered in solitude. That seed of mystical union which had been sowed in his young and impressionable heart had already germinated, waiting to slowly break through the earth covering it, burst forth and grow. By the time "solitude was deep and enlightenment thorough,"²⁴ the tree of mystical union inevitably put forth strong branches and flourishing leaves. Moreover, only because Xie Fuya was a Christian scholar fully steeped in the Chinese tradition, did he not, in the depths of solitude produced by the times, quietly slip away, or blindly cry out, but finding deep enlightenment in deep solitude, enter into mystical union with God, following and imitating Christ, out of a desire to fulfil the great mission of saving the world and its people.

The contemporary English historian Arnold Toynbee felt that the fundamental feature of Chinese culture is *yin-yang* culture or a culture of dualities, an opinion with which Mr. Xie expressed strong approval. He felt that

the major difference between Chinese culture and western culture lies in the fact that the former is based on harmony of dualities, while the latter specializes in the confrontation between the two extremes of the individual and the collective.... In fact, both the hard *yang* and the soft *vin* are like wings: because within the *yang* there is *vin*, and within the *vin* there is *yang*: within you there is me, and within me there is you.²⁵

This kind of *yin-yang* culture sees all things in the universe as made up of the mutually dependent qualities of *yin* and *yang*. Yang cannot be born alone; yin cannot grow alone. In Chinese traditional culture, *vin and yang*, Heaven and human beings, male and female, creativity and nurturance ... are all both opposite and complementary, rather than opposed and competing. Thus in China, the idea that "Heaven and Man (sic) are one" is an ancient one, a distinctive element in Chinese culture. This concept, a religious concept of mutual dependence, understands 'Heaven' to be "one big" character [the Chinese character for heaven being a combination of those for "one" and "big"] and a human being to be a miniature Heaven. Heaven and human beings have the same moral nature, and cooperate together, just like the cooperation between male and female, husband and wife, gradually mature, and reproduce each other.²⁶ From his youth Mr. Xie loved to read classical texts, and so was very much imbued with this kind of culture of dualities. Thus, traditional culture inevitably helped to form his thinking on mystical union and the concept that

²⁴ This comes from a poem by Rev. Wang Weifan: "In Memory of T.C. Chao".

²⁵ Xie Fuya, "Culture, History, **Philosophy** and The **Book Of** Poetry, The **Book Of** Historical Documents, and The **Book Of** Changes," in *Collected Poems and Essays for Professor Xie Fuya's Centenary op. cit.*, p. 282.

²⁶ Xie Fuya, "Using foreign fertilizers to irrigate China's old roots," in *ibid.*, op. cit., p. 235.

Heaven and Man (sic) are one. Besides this, the influence of the traditional Confucian idea of "sagely within; kingly without" the Chan Buddhist concept of "not establishing theories, but probing the true heart," and Neo-Confucian philosophy, particularly the "mind and nature" school and their idea that "Heaven and Man(sic) are of one heart,"²⁷ are constantly and everywhere apparent in his thinking. It was such influences which made him able to hear another kind of call and so turn from rationality and social service to mystical union and service to God.

Secondly, as a Christian, Mr. Xie constantly discusses mystical union and service to God, and the solitude and sociality of Christianity from the perspectives of the Bible, faith and theology. This is to say that Christian faith is another source for his thinking on mystical union, a major one. It can be said that without Christian faith he could not have formulated his "new theory of the unity of Heaven and humankind", nor his thinking on mystical union, because Jesus Christ's words and life are the true foundation of his thinking. Mr. Xie once stated that

beginning from the seven resounding 'I's of the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5:18, 22, 28, 32, 24, 29, 44), the command to pray behind closed doors in 'solitude,' joined to the "we . . . we . . ." (Mt. 6: 9-14) of the great fellowship; and the consequent breaking open of the mutual opposition between the solitary and the collective, led to the recognition that this is the very theological life blood of Christianity. Truly, this road on which one strides forward to eternal life is so narrow that believers must walk it in single file, and the gate it leads to is so narrow that they must enter one by one to make their accounts before God.²⁸

In the difference between 'I' and 'we' Mr. Xie cleverly reveals the solitude and the broadness of Christianity, an insight which undoubtedly was a great stimulus to his thinking on mystical union. Simultaneously, Mr. Xie also paid great attention to the way Jesus Christ lived his life, that is, bearing witness to mystical communion with God and saving society. He felt that

the Jesus Christ revealed in the Gospel of John, is on the one hand so mysteriously in mystical communion with the cosmos, . . . and on the other, so personally lives out the new commandment of mutual service that 'you must love one another' (Jn. 13:34).²⁹

Throughout all his work Mr. Xie advocated taking Jesus' moral character as a model; that is, imitating Jesus. Jesus' mystical union and his acts of service were inevitably a profound influence on him, causing him to look at mystical union as imitating Jesus, a necessary means of creating the new moral character. We can say that the influence of Jesus' words and actions is the foundation of Mr. Xie's thinking on mystical union. Besides this, as was already described above, the influences of Whitehead's "process philosophy," the philosophy of *The Book Of Changes*, and the "theory of creative change" should not be overlooked.

²⁷ Mr. Xie calls this "the mind in which Heaven and human beings are one body." See his discussion in *Collected Poems and Essays for Professor Xie Fuya's Centenary op. cit.*, p. 290.

²⁸ See *Drops in the Stream, op. cit.*, p. 156.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, op. cit., pp. 111- 112.

"Set an Example for All Sentient Beings and Save the Multitude"

Shakespeare once said that a man's goal lies not in his fate but in his soul; not in his external environment, but in the deep anxious places of inmost being. The goal of Mr. Xie's inmost soul is nothing other than wanting to "set an example for all sentient beings and save the multitude." Mr. Xie's thought, revolves around human life and society, as do his ideas on mystical union. All his life he kept before him his "cultivated Christian exemplars," who were to transform moral character through the imitation of Christ and create the "great persons" who "join their virtues to those of Heaven and Earth, join their brilliance with that of the sun and the moon, order themselves by the four seasons, and join their destiny with the spirits." With them he seeks to save the world, rescue its people, and hasten the reform of society. This is also to say that his thinking on mystical union, lies only in the attempt, from a philosophical and faith perspective, to "establish the heart for Heaven and Earth, establish the people and continue the excellent studies of the ancients."

He felt that "religion is religion for human life, and so religion ought to be expressed in every dimension of a person's life." The ache in the soul caused him to be even more concerned about the quandary of human existence, and moved him to a profound conviction in Jesus' example for all sentient beings and the saving of the multitude, and so he arose and followed him. In his thinking, human beings hold an extremely important place, so that his thinking is everywhere imbued with humanist qualities,³⁰ and even his thinking on mystical union is no exception.

Mr. Xie once said that his own thought was "a Christian humanism" or a "Christianized humanism." In my "On the Humanism of N.Z. Zia's (Xie Fuya's) 'Jesus-Oriented Christology'" I discussed, as the title suggests, the humanist features of his Christology. Here I would like once more to discuss briefly the humanist facets of his thinking on mystical union and its differences with western mysticism. In fact, these two points can be discussed together. Its humanist qualities cause his thinking on mystical union to differ from western mysticism, and these differences can be used to explain these humanist features.

Mysticism is generally translated into Chinese as *shenmi zhuyi*. Mr. Xie renders it in two other ways: "mystical union" *miqi* and "divine bonding" [*shenqi*]. Although the Chinese terms for mystical union and mysticism are homonyms, they have different meanings. Though all mysticism does not pursue "spiritual drunkenness,"³¹ in comparison with Mr. Xie's mystical union, traditional Christian mysticism places greater stress on sweet communion with God and neglects partaking of the sufferings of God and humankind. Thus, it also places more stress on the presence and initiative of God and is more enamored of the state of being in communion with God, neglecting the even greater commandment to pursue communion with God. The result is that in God's presence, human beings did not seek self-knowledge and understanding, but enjoyment of the grace of God. Because God is everything, in dwelling in God, one shares in all that is and belongs to God, experiencing incomparable sweetness and beauty. The result of this is that in communion, humans become completely

³⁰ Humanism here indicates Mr. Xie's special concern for human beings and human life, the mutual responsiveness between human beings and God, and the mutual responsiveness between "humanism" and "astronomy" I [trans. note: as in the ancient cosmological conception of harmony], so that it could be described as "supporting the Heavenly appointment by completely fulfilling human duty."

³¹ ³¹ Mysticism is generally described as focusing on the communion between the individual and God, seeking "spiritual drunkenness" in several different senses, but there are exceptions. For example, Meister Eckhart, once said: when I have entered into the sweet honey of communion with God, if I hear a brother has any need, then I temporarily leave communion with God and help my brother.

one with God and no distinction between the human and the divine remains. As Meister Eckhart the great medieval mystic said:

If there is no God, then there is no me; If there is no me, then there is no God.³²

Therefore, mysticism has very strong overtones of mystery and the sacred. However, though Mr. Xie's mystical union does stress that God and humankind are one, during mystical union, this union simply means that humans are naturally endowed with God's commission, their moral character transformed, and they receive from God the way of strength. Mystical union is not the end of the road, but the beginning of a new one. In his thinking, "mystical union" is Heaven; or more appropriately, purgatory. Thus, in mystical union human beings have the initiative, they can "judge themselves" and "give an account of themselves" in the presence of God, and can "make their solitary confessions" to God. Besides this, having embarked upon the path of mystical union, they stress 'enlightenment,' an emphasis different from that of western mysticism. In his essay "The Future for Christianity in China," Mr. Xie stated

I fear that indigenous Chinese theology will in future go the same route as indigenous Chinese Buddhism ... it would be better for it to enter enlightenment by way of mystical union

This word, 'enlightenment,' speaks even more of the humanist overtones of his mystical union. Brother Lawrence thinks that "to reach the road to God, love is everything, and thinking least of all."³³ This can be called the "common guiding principle" of western mysticism. It is not hard to see that what Mr. Xie says diverges considerably from this.

In his thinking on mystical union, Mr. Xie frequently uses the phrases "the thesis of communicative dependence" and "the thesis of the Middle Way" to describe and explain his thought. The "thesis of communicative dependence" makes humans and God mutually dependent and the "thesis of the Middle Way" makes Mr. Xie's thinking distinct from the usual mysticism - not going to extremes, but fervently pursuing the Middle Way. Thomas A'Kempis once said: "The more distant one leaves the confusion of the degraded world, the more one is able to draw nearer to the Creator."³⁴ Mr. Xie believes that the nearer human beings are to God (the Great Spirit of the cosmos), the more able they are to return to this world, save it and save others. One whose attitude to humanity is pessimistic will necessarily seek escape in God; one whose attitude to humanity is optimistic will necessarily re-enter this world after mystical union. Some people believe: the major difference between western and Chinese aesthetics is expressed in the phrase "God and humanity are one" and "Heaven and Man (sic) are one". The former moves from aesthetics to religion; the latter from aesthetics to human concerns. The former is conversion to God; the latter a return to [everyday] life. The former reverences the spiritual and despises the flesh; the latter admires both spirit and body, blending feelings and

³² Quoted in *Cries in the Wilderness*, tms. Fang Shan and Li Qin (n.p.: Huasha Publishing Society, 1991), p. 9. Actually, God is the I am Who I am, and Mr. Eckhart in this saying is referring to the relationship between the individual and God but the knowledge which an individual has of God is [very limited], with "ten people having ten understandings." On the basis of this understanding we certainly ought not to say, if I do not exist, then the God does not exist; rather, we should say, if I do not exist, then that which I know about God does not exist either.

³³ Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God* [translated into Chinese as *Dwelling With God* (Nanjing: Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, 1989), p. 58.

³⁴ Thomas A'Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ* (Nanjing: Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, 1989), p. 34.

rationality. . . . The former involves indulgence and abstinence; the latter promotes a balanced doctrine of the Mean.³⁵

Although employing these terms to compare mystical union with mysticism may not be absolutely correct, yet the attempt is not without value. Certainly western mysticism anchors itself on individual religious mystical union, while Mr. Xie's mystical union moves more from individual mystical union to human concerns - that is, first moving out from humanity to mystical union with God, and then returning to human concerns in order to serve society and human life. It can be seen that western mysticism places its emphasis on God, while for Mr. Xie the emphasis is on human beings. We detect here further evidence of the humanistic quality in his thought. And no wonder that his thinking on salvation, of "setting an example for all sentient beings and saving the multitude" meant that he could not but develop deep affection for the Chinese people, further enriching the humanist cast of his thinking. Thus, his humanism differs from the western variety.

* * * * *

How, then, shall we evaluate Mr. Xie's thinking on mystical union'? It is difficult, and to give an objective and justifiable evaluation even harder! The best thing to do, it seems, is say nothing in favor of those more brilliant than oneself. Nevertheless, this does not prevent me quoting a short poem by my teacher, Rev. Wang Weifan, written for Mr. Xie in the spring of 1989. Let it serve as a simple evaluation:

A mortal life of 100 years sees many changes,
Yet it is as fleeting as a cosmic rainbow.
Peace, in the end, issues from the storm,
And life is sustained in the mystical union
of Heaven and humankind.³⁶

Nanjing Theological Review, No.16 (1992),p.61.

Translated by Lauren Pfister.

This essay has been slightly shortened in translation.

³⁵ Wang Shengping, *"Heaven and Humanity are One" and "God and Humanity are One" - A Macroscopic Comparison of Chinese and Western Aesthetics* (Hebei People's Press, 1988).

³⁶ Wang Weifan, "Response to Mr. Xie Fuya," in *Sighs on the Road Home* (no publishing information), p. 29.

SERMONS

13. Come, Lord Jesus – Peng Cuian

Is. 64: 1-9; 1 Cor. 1:1-9; 1 Thess. 5:1-11

Today is the first Sunday in Advent, which refers to the coming of Jesus. The Advent season begins four Sundays before Christmas, and so, we will celebrate Christmas four weeks from today. Advent is not the same as Pentecost, which occurs seven Sundays after Easter. Pentecost commemorates the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, as well as the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Advent has two meanings. The first is to prepare to welcome the birth of our Savior. The Son of God, Jesus Christ, left the glory of heaven, and humbled himself by assuming human form and coming into our midst. The Word became flesh, and was revealed to us: "Immanuel" - God with us. During these four weeks, we should prepare our hearts to welcome the coming of our Savior. Not only do we remember the birth of our Lord in Bethlehem so many years ago, but we prepare to welcome him into each of our hearts. On the first Sunday of Advent, churches in western countries place a special stand with four candles before the altar. On the first Sunday of Advent, one candle is lit, on the second, two candles, and so on, until on the fourth Sunday of Advent, all four candles are lit. When the people who come to worship see the candles being lit one by one, they are aware that Christmas is approaching week by week. This reminds everyone to prepare room in their hearts for their Lord, just as the hymn we have just sung, "Come Into My Heart, Lord Jesus", tells us to do. The second meaning of advent is to prepare to welcome the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. We will hear much more about Christmas as it approaches, so today I will not say any more about it. Instead, on this First Sunday of Advent, I want to speak about Advent's second meaning, so that in the coming week we can think about Christ's return and how we should prepare to receive him.

The Lord's Promise

Jesus will come again. This is his promise. The Lord Jesus Christ we believe in is the eternal God's only begotten and beloved son. He left the glory of heaven and descended into this world to save all of us sinners. We believe that Jesus took our sins on himself when he was nailed to the cross, and that he defeated the power of death and was resurrected on the third day. We also believe that this Christ who was resurrected and ascended into heaven will return in the future to judge the living and the dead. John 13:33 tells us that when Jesus knew he was about to leave the world and return to his Father, he said to his disciples: "Yet a little while I am with you." The hearts of the disciples were troubled, so Jesus comforted them by saying, "Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you"? And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also." Jesus said clearly, "I will come again and will take you to myself." This is his promise.

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We also have the testimony of angels that Christ will return. The first chapter of Acts tells us that after his resurrection, Jesus appeared to the disciples on Mount Olive, and after addressing them, was lifted up and carried away by a cloud. Suddenly, as the disciples stood gazing after him, two angels stood by them and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven" (Acts I : 11). He "will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven" - this is the message of the angels. When John, the beloved disciple of Jesus, had a vision on the island of Patmos, he also received the clear revelation that "Christ will return". The last chapter of "The Revelation to John" records three places where Jesus says, "I will return soon"; (1) "And behold, I am coming soon" (22:7); (2) "Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense, to repay every one for what he has done" (22:12); (3) "he who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming soon'" (22:20).

Christ will return. This is his promise; this is also our hope. We hope that Christ will return to receive us into our heavenly home where we can be with him for all eternity. This is our vital, glorious expectation. If we accept this hope, we will never be lost, for Christ has said "Heaven and earth may fade away, but my words will never fade away."

How to Welcome the Lord

Be cautious, avoid delusion. We believe Jesus will return because of the promise he has made, the testimony of the angels at the time of his ascension and the revelation he made to John. But when will he come? We do not know. Because of the development of our churches, we have heard much news concerning church growth this year which makes us happy. However, we have also heard news which causes us to worry. The situation in some areas is chaotic. Some people have predicted the time of Christ's return on the basis of their own calculations. They announce the year, month and day of Christ's Second Coming, and call on their followers not to be concerned with worldly affairs. They leave their work, don white robes and go to a mountaintop to await Christ's coming. What is the result? Of course Christ does not come according to the predictions of these false prophets. Not only do they make these predictions without evidence, but they also dishonor the name of our Lord and cause others to ridicule him. When we hear of such things, how can we help but be angry with these false prophets who misunderstand the Bible, deceive their followers and bring shame to the Lord's name? How can we help but pity those believers who are confused and blindly *follow* their words?

When we consider this in more detail, we begin to realize how valuable the Bible is to us. The Bible very clearly records the words of our Lord Jesus Christ: "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority" (Acts 1:7). "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only" (Mt.24:36). We know that Jesus Christ had both a divine and human nature. As God's Son, he was originally one with the Father. But if he, as a human being with a human nature, said that "the Son does not know", then this is even more true for us. The time of his Second Coming cannot be known by humans, but is known by "the Father only", so it is important that we do not listen to what people say about it.

The Bible is the Word of God and the basis of our faith. When we hear the different teachings and beliefs that are being propagated, what should we do? Consult the Scriptures.

When we hear what seem to be different doctrines which raise doubts in our hearts, what should we do? Consult the Scriptures. From a very early date there have been people announcing Jesus' return. This has happened in the past, happens in the present and will continue to happen in the future. We should be cautious and not listen to humans; we should listen only to what Jesus says to us himself. The invaluable Scriptures record that Jesus warned us to be cautious and to avoid entering into doubt, for in the future there will come many false Messiahs and prophets who will contuse the people. Jesus said, "...then if any one says to you, 'Lo, here is the Christ!' or 'There he is!' do not believe it" (Mt. 23:23). Jesus clearly states his meaning. He did not say that when the time comes, he would send messengers to announce his return. Instead, he warns us not to become confused.

Jesus also said in a parable, "For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of man" (Mi. 24:27). No one can say whether lightning will come in the east or the west until it appears in the sky. We know that the return of Jesus will be like this -- it will come without warning. His Second Coming will not be manifest only to certain people, but will be witnessed by everyone. So we should remember Jesus' words, be cautious and not follow human calculations nor become confused.

Always be prepared. Jesus will return. We can concentrate on waiting for him. This is not passive waiting, in which we do nothing, but a waiting in which we remain dedicated and dutiful. When the Lord Jesus came into this world, he chose twelve disciples, and he said to them, "Come follow me." But when he left this world, he did not repeat this command, "Come...", but told them to go out and make disciples of all the world. This is the mission the Lord has entrusted to us, and which requires our dedicated sense of duty. For "...this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come" (Mt. 24:14).

When I started studying theology, I was narrow-minded. Before that, I had not dared to pray for Christ's quick return, but when I came to the seminary, I thought, "This is a good thing to do, my sacrifice must be pleasing to the Lord, I can now say, 'Come, Lord Jesus. It will be best if you come while I am studying theology'." I was only thinking of myself, and did not remember that God is merciful, that his love is unlimited and that he wants all people to be saved and no one lost. Even if you, as an individual, do not satisfy him completely, he still wants you to work with him to spread the Gospel to the whole world so that all humanity can be restored to him.

The Gospel of Matthew records the many teachings of Jesus which clearly show us how to wait for him, such as the story of the good and wicked servants. In this parable, the Lord praises the good servant, that is, the faithful and wise servant whom the master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time. This servant will be blessed when his master returns and finds him so doing. The wicked servant is not like this, but says to himself, "The master is delayed," and begins to beat his fellow servants, and eats and drinks with drunkards. His master will return when he is not expecting him, and will punish him and put him with the hypocrites.

Some people really wonder why, since Jesus said, "I will come again soon," 2000 years later, he has still not returned? Indeed, why hasn't he? Peter tells us, "The Lord is not slow about his promise as some count slowness, but is forbearing toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9). So we should take advantage

of the fact that we still have time to fulfill the mission the Lord entrusted to us. We should not be like the wicked servants, and think that the master will return late, because this is presumptuous and lazy. Both Peter and Paul tell us that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night; that is, when we least expect it. The Lord Jesus himself spoke of this in a parable: As were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, and they were not aware of anything until the day Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and swept them all away. The coming of the Son of man will be like this, when we least expect it. So we should be alert, and always be prepared. For we cannot know when the Lord will come.

Brothers and sisters, the Lord will return, but we cannot know if it will be during the day or night. If the Lord returned today, could we meet him confidently? Are we prepared? Are we still unreconciled with that brother who is our enemy? Are we still unwilling to forgive that sister who has wronged us, thereby keeping her imprisoned in our heart? Do we still owe debts that have not been settled? Have we shared the Gospel, that valuable gift which has been given to us, with those around us? The Lord values our human souls above all else; how many of these have we led back to him?

I hope that each of us will often recall in our hearts the Lord Jesus' teaching: "You should be prepared, for you do not know the time when the Son of man will come." We should wait alertly, like the five wise maidens who had readied the oil for their lamps, and who were always prepared to meet their master. In this way, we can pray confidently in our hearts, like John, the author of Revelation, "Come, Lord Jesus!"

Finally, let us pray together: Lord! you will come again, this is your promise. We pray that you give us wakeful hearts, and protect us from delusion. We also pray that you give us wise minds so that we can be loyal and knowledgeable servants, with whom, at your coming, you will be well pleased. Amen.

Nanjing Theological Review, No. 18 (1/1993), p. 130.
Translated by Craig Moran.

14. Creation and Redemption – K. H. Ting

Recently, a Christian whom I do not know has written me a number of letters, raising his contention that the phrase "All people are born of God", which appears in the Catechism, is wrong, and that it should say "All people have been created by God." I understand his meaning to be that: God has divided people into two categories and that most people have simply been created by God, while only those who are saved because of faith, were born of God.

I am not well-versed in the terminology of the Bible, my feeling is simply that, when we speak of humankind, whether we say created by, or born of, is not of great issue. In speaking of Christ the Bible explains that he is the only Son born of the Father, that he is the first-born, and was not created. In the Nicene Creed we also find the phrase "born, not created." But when it comes to people, naturally the more common phrase is "created", as "God created humankind," but "born of is also found, as in Acts 17:29: "Since we are God's offspring," (at the time, Paul was speaking to the Athenians, who worshipped the unknown god, in the Areopagus), and also in 1 Jn. 2:29: "everyone who does right has been born of him."

I am saying that as far as Christ is concerned, it is necessary to say that he is the only Son of God, born and not created; for humans, however, it seems unnecessary to say that Christians are the offspring of God while non-Christians may only be said to have been created by God. There is no clear evidence in the Bible, either, for distinguishing between "born of and "created". To emphasize the distinction creates theological problems. These days, people generally say that all people are God's children, and I do not feel that one has to take issue with this. It is not necessary to say, no, you are not God's children, only we are God's children. This is not helpful in bringing people to Christ, and it leads to a problem: if God has made only believers his children and given them eternal life, then, is the God who has created the great majority of humanity only to finally become children of Hell, a God to be believed in and loved?

If we consider the problem in theological terms, then I think the issue is how to bring creation and redemption together. My Christian correspondent has divided the world into two parts: one which has been created by God - the mineral, plant and animal worlds, such as the grasses and trees, birds and animals, natural man (sic) - all these were created by God and it seems that God has little feeling for them; created today, gone tomorrow, and the human beings among them will even suffer eternal punishment. The other part is born of God. It is a cut above the created part, it has been chosen. In addition to being created, it has been *redeemed*. In the eyes of this Christian, born of and created cannot be discussed in the same breath. Obviously, he makes a very clear distinction between creation and redemption. I suspect that he sees it this way: God is the Lord of all creation, Christ is the Lord of Salvation and each minds his own store.

This is classic theological thinking. Carried to its logical development, it evolves into the following attitude: true, the world has been created by God, but creation is finished, the world has been possessed by Satan and is his dominion. When Christ came into the world, it is as if he slipped behind enemy lines to save those who could be saved. It may be that quite a number of Christians hold such a world view.

Setting creation and redemption in opposition to one another separating the Lord of Creation from the Lord of Redemption, emphasizes redemption at the expense of creation, God

the Father and God the Son are split and each tends to his own. This view, which tears apart the Trinity, appeared early in the history of the Church. Some heresies make the Lord of Creation and the Lord of Redemption into two opposing gods - this is the extreme view. My Christian correspondent in his treatise on "created" and "born of", has not gone this far.

Christ is Lord of both creation and redemption as Colossians 1: 15-20 says quite clearly. On the one hand it says that Christ is head of the entire body of the church and that redemption was realized through the blood of his cross. On the other hand it says that all creation depends on him, that he was before all things and all things were created through him. Ephesians 1:22, 23 is similar: Christ is both head over all things, the fullness of creation, and all things in heaven and on earth find their fullness in him. It also says that he is the fullness of the church and that the church is his body. Christ's relationship to creation is described very clearly in the Gospel of John: all things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. Hebrews says that all things are sustained by Christ's powerful word. The creation undertaken by God through Christ is proceeding even now. Creation has not failed, it has not lost out to Satan. Though John said "All creation is sleeping beneath the hand of the Evil One," this is simply to point out the savagery of sin, to make the reader draw a clear line between him or herself and sin, it is not describing the Christian world view. In 1 Tim. 4:4, Paul says "For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, provided it is received with thanksgiving." The New Testament recognizes Christ's creation; it also recognizes his redemption. This is one and the same Christ. and creation and redemption are a unity, not an opposition. There are not two Gods, each tending to his own.

Today, we are sending off a group of seminary graduates who are leaving our alma mater to work in the church. Other classmates will be going out to work in the church after another year or two. When we go to another country, we need to know something about the situation there; the same is true when we go out into the church. Let me introduce one aspect of the situation in the church - I hope you can all agree, or at least, that you will not be too quick to disagree: Theological thinking in the Chinese church tends in one direction, that is one doctrine is lifted up and that doctrine is the issue of being saved by faith, the question of salvation. We tend to pass over or ignore completely the issue of creation. Literary and art circles once had their "one-book-ism" which meant that once an author had written one book and made a name, that author wrote nothing else. The Chinese Christian church sometimes seems to have one doctrine, that of personal salvation, personal grace. Out of all the riches of Christianity, only this is left.

Several centuries ago, Thomas Aquinas said that grace in no way negates or abolishes nature but is a fulfillment of it. This may be the most famous of Aquinas' sayings. The question of the relationship between nature and grace is that of the relationship between creation and redemption. This is a problem which the Chinese church has not done very well at solving; the most obvious sign of this is that many people who join the church believe that by simply believing in Jesus they will be saved, blessed and given grace.

The eighth chapter of Romans tells us that the whole creation has been groaning until now. This is to say that creation is not yet finished. The world and the people in it are all products at various stages of completion who have appeared in the process of God's creation. A few individuals are not the only objects of redemption. The whole creation, the whole world is the object of Christ's work of redemption. We are half-finished products, and our duty is to assist God in the project of creation and at the same time, transform ourselves from

half-finished, to finished, products. Creation contains redemption; the purpose of redemption is to fulfill God's creation.

Recently a letter was sent to our church magazine *Tian Feng* raising the following question: Are Christians allowed to smoke? The meaning was, if Christians smoke could this eventually have an effect on whether they were saved? Could they go to hell? But many questions which touch on how one should treat creation seldom suggest themselves to us: Why should so much farmland be used for growing tobacco? It's like growing opium. Is it really a good use of nature? Is it in line with God's original meaning for creation? To take this further, in the United States the number of smokers is decreasing, yet the cultivation of tobacco is not and cigarettes are exported to the Third World, to countries such as China where today many people smoke American cigarettes. Don't Christians care about this? Do they condone it? Oppose it? Such questions far surpass those of personal salvation and blessing, they are related to the well-being of millions of people, they are moral issues, ones Christians should be concerned with. To enlarge the scope of Christians' concerns, to guide them, with Christianity as their starting point, in considering moral issues which transcend the personal -- this to me is the principle by which to raise the quality of our Chinese Christian church.

The creation which God undertook through Christ is in the process of being spoiled and desecrated by humankind: wars plunge thousands, millions of people into misery, their homes are destroyed and families broken up, people are made destitute and homeless. The earth produces enough food for everyone, yet because of human selfishness and greed, many die of hunger each year. We have all seen pictures of adults and children in parts of Africa who are simply skin and bones, on the brink of death. People have done a poor job of watching over and safeguarding God's world; rather they fell forests, burn timber and oil, all destroy the ecological balance. The Third World has suffered the most. This damage to the globe for their own self-interest by a minority of people, this theft of the right of the majority to sustain existence and enjoy a good life, takes many forms. To take an example closer to home, in Chinese society today, corruption -- the use of public resources for personal profit - is rife. A Christianity which turns a blind eye to all this, one which thinks all this bears no relation to the gospel, which believes the gospel is concerned only with personal salvation, is not a two-legged Christianity, but a lame one.

Most Chinese Christianity speaks only of personal blessings and salvation, it has no moral message for the world, yet the Bible has a great number of passages concerned precisely with what relations between people should be. How the Old Testament prophets lifted up social righteousness and social justice. We seldom hear sermons preached today on the Old Testament prophets or on Christ's Sermon on the Mount. Christianity has become an immoral, amoral religion. There are so many events taking place in the world today which are counter to God's plan for the world he created in Christ, and to all of this Christianity says, it's nothing to do with me. Christianity even limits the scope of God's dominion, preaching a God who cares only about the individual believer's soul, who cares only about the church and not about the world and all that is in it. Is this not a world view and a view of God in which God, having created the world, has now stood aside for Satan?

I hope that graduates of Nanjing Seminary and those of the other seminaries in China will take with them when they go into the church to work a holistic Christian view of God, Christology and world view, and in appropriate situations, use language appropriate to the

situation, follow the teachings of the Bible and spread them, thus raising the quality of our churches.

This is looking at the significance of our work from a long term perspective. I certainly do not think that our graduates should go to a place and ignore everything except for preaching the salvation of Christ, styling themselves as local prophets and publishing their views on the problems they encounter there in and outside the church. We have all sorts of limits and this is not something I am asking of our graduates. We must first do well in the work of uniting all those around us and in setting ourselves on a firm footing. A few days ago we received a long-distance call from an alumnus who graduated from Nanjing Seminary a few years ago. He said that the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of Protestant Churches in China and the China Christian Council where he was were holding elections and that someone whom everyone knew was a disreputable person would be serving as deputy chair. He was livid and asked me what to do, whether to struggle against this. I told him that it was good that he was infuriated by these goings on, but that this person certainly must have support and it was unwise to beat his head against a stone, the losses would outweigh the gains. My purpose in saying this is to tell you that I'm not suggesting that you go out and enter randomly into the fray, striking out all around and laying yourselves open to trouble, that wouldn't help.

The important thing is that we be clear in our minds that the gospel of Christ is not merely one of personal blessing. In fact it is not that at all. Personal blessing is no more than the fulfillment of selfish personal desires. The gospel of Christ includes the renewal of this world, bringing it into line with the beautiful plan of the God who created it through Christ. This requires the church to announce a moral message, a message of service to people. The Lord Jesus himself said: The Son of Man has come not to be served, but to serve, and to lay down his life for the salvation of many. Please note the "and" here. This means that laying down one's life for redemption and serving people are not opposites, but are one. Laying down one's life for the salvation of many is joined to serving people, is included in that service. Let us go forth to serve the people with minds to help God realize his creation, and in our service make manifest the great event of the saving Lord laying down his life for humanity.

No matter where you go, may the Lord be with you, may he help you to manifest before people the truth, goodness, beauty and all riches found in Christ, that by your excellent witness you may bring people to know Christ.

-commencement sermon at Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, July 1993.
Translated by Janice Wickeri.

15. "Follow Me!" –Kan Baoping

Mark 1:16-18, John 21:18-22

Mark 1:16-18 records how Jesus and Peter met for the first time. Peter was still called Simon, a common name among fisher folk. When Jesus saw him, Simon and his brother Andrew were fishing on Lake Galilee. Jesus called to them: "Follow me," adding: "I will make you fish for people." When they heard these words, Simon and Andrew did not hesitate but left their nets behind and went with Jesus. The very first sentence Jesus ever spoke to Peter was "Follow me."

John 21:18-22 talks about two things. First, according to verses 18 and 19, Jesus disclosed to Peter his future and enjoined him: "Follow me." Verses 20-22 record something else. When Peter asked Jesus what would happen to the disciple he loved, Jesus replied that this was none of Peter's business, and repeated his call: "Follow me!" In the Gospel of John, "Follow me" are the last words Jesus speaks to Peter.

When Jesus called to Peter, "Follow me," at their first encounter, Peter had never seen him before, and had certainly never heard about him. Just imagine how you or I would feel if we met a complete stranger who asked us to follow him! Even if we had a good impression of him, we would definitely not follow him without further questions. We would at least inquire who he is, what he does, where he is from, why he wants us to follow him, and what we are to do in his company. We would probably even ask how much our pay would be. But Peter did not ask any of this. Upon Jesus' call, Peter dropped the net he was holding and followed Jesus without the least hesitation. Though a fisherman's profession was not the best in those times and did not pay very well, it at least provided some security. But to go with a stranger without having the slightest idea what this would lead to, simply meant surrendering oneself to a completely unknown future. I believe that Peter at this moment did not understand what Jesus actually meant when he said, "I will make you fish for people." Y Peter resolutely and determinedly followed the Lord. At this point, turned from a fisherman into a disciple of the Lord; he abandoned h quiet life and chose to follow the Lord's way. From now on, his life would be filled with hardship and exhaustion, with hunger and thirst and great danger until he eventually died as a martyr to glorify the Lord.

Peter's was a life of accomplishment. Did Jesus choose Pete because he was stronger than others'? Was Peter a perfect person According to John 1:42, Jesus replaced Simon's name with "Peter," which means "rock." Does this indicate that Peter was especially strong and never weak? The Bible tells us clearly that this was not the case. Peter also had his weak moments, and sometimes he plainly failed.

When Jesus was arrested in Jerusalem, Peter panicked, fearing, that he, too, would be arrested if people found out about his connection with Jesus. When the slave girl of the high priest and others asked him whether he was a disciple of Jesus, he denied it. This happened three times in a row. Because Peter panicked, he did not have the courage to acknowledge Jesus.

Another occurrence of Peter's weakness is recorded in Galatians, chapter two. The circumcised Jewish Christians had a conflict with the Gentile Christians, who were not circumcised. The Jewish Christians were of the conviction that all Christians needed to be circumcised and that circumcised Christians could not eat with the uncircumcised, whom they considered unclean. In this conflict, Paul made his point very clear; he advocated mutual respect. For him, circumcision was a mere question of tradition and custom; therefore, the Jews should have the right to adhere to their tradition of being circumcised, while the Gentiles should be free not to adopt the Jewish habit. Peter shared this view. At one point, he and some Jewish Christians traveled from Jerusalem to Antioch, where he sat down with uncircumcised Gentile Christians and ate with them. While they were eating, some of the people who had come with Peter from Jerusalem -probably followers of Jacob-came over to check what Peter was doing. As soon as Peter heard that they were approaching, he left the table and pretended not to have eaten with the Gentile Christians. Paul was very indignant at such hypocrisy and

criticized Peter then and there, accusing him of denying the truth of the gospel through his behavior.

These two examples prove that Peter also had his weak moments, that he could even fail miserably. Why is it then that Jesus chose Peter and not somebody stronger? - Because no one in the world, except Jesus, is perfect. People who are stronger than others in one respect, may be weaker in another. Even the wisest and most intelligent may at times lapse into folly and weakness. Jesus did not choose Peter not because he was a perfect man. Basically, Jesus does not call people to make them models for others. He chose Peter for no other purpose than to make him his disciple and empower him to become a witness of the kingdom of God. The Lord picked Peter because he had a heart that could be touched by the Lord's words and changed through his love. Jesus said to him, "Follow me," and Peter put down his fishing net and followed him. It was precisely and only because he did not miss this opportunity that Peter became Jesus' disciple.

Although Peter was weak and failed even long after he had become a disciple, Jesus was faithful to him. This shows how Jesus forbears human frailty. He knew that Peter would deny him three times. Yet he did not dismiss Peter, he did not speak one sharp word, did not make a single pointed remark. The Lord forbears human weakness because he knows our imperfection. He would never expect us to do what we simply could not accomplish. He would not expect us to carry a cross which we would never be able to lift. Because our Lord is a loving Lord, he is also a Lord of compassion.

Though Peter was as weak as others and failed several times, he followed the Lord from beginning to end. He accomplished a lot for the Lord and eventually died for him as a martyr. In all his weakness, Peter lived a magnificent life. Or let us think of Paul! What kind of a person was he before his surrender to Christ? He persecuted the Christians fiercely. They must have perceived him as a furious tormenter, the devil in person. But when the Lord called him, Paul turned and followed him; in the Lord's name, Paul accomplished great and splendid things until he died.

Anyone who has read the Japanese novel "Silence" will remember the character Kichihiko who dedicated his life to spreading the gospel in Japan. But he was also a very weak person. Whenever he was intimidated by a government official he denied his faith; in his readiness to comply with the authorities, he even betrayed a missionary. But each time he failed, he sought out God, his father, to confess his sin. Although in his time it was very dangerous to call oneself Christian, and although he often outwardly denied his faith, he kept his personal faith throughout. Deeply distressed, he did not understand why God would empower some people to stay firm and act like saint while he would allow others to be weak and suffer humiliation. I am not advising you to copy Kichihiko's frailty. My point is, rather, that all people have their weaknesses which manifest themselves in different ways.

What can we learn from Peter, despite all his failings? First of all God has not called us to the seminary because he has found us stronger than others. Therefore, we must not think too highly of ourselves. Other believers may be more intelligent or wiser than us, some more robust and some spiritually more experienced. We certainly all have our strong points, but we cannot in every respect be better than others. If this is so, what would we have ourselves that we could boast about? The only thing we can rightfully

boast about is the Lord's grace and love, for it is precisely because of his grace and love that he doesn't dismiss us for our mistakes but still commissions us. Therefore, the call we have received from the Lord gives us no excuse to consider ourselves in the right. If it is true that the Lord does not forsake us in our frailty, how could we forsake others'? God is love; and we are to witness to this love. Because the loving Lord forebears human frailty, we, too, should lovingly care for others and join together in a common and unceasing aspiration for perfection.

Peter's experience may also help us understand our Chinese church. On the one hand, the church in China today has reached a stage of unprecedented growth. New churches are being built all over the country, springing up like mushrooms; the number of believers is growing rapidly. But on the other hand, our believers are rather poorly educated, we are short of pastors and teachers, and church construction is far from perfect. We can't compare with most churches overseas, which are rich in financial resources and have a great number of well-trained ministers; we can even less compare with the high educational level of most of their members. But the Lord does not look down on our church for all its shortcomings. God did not look down on Mary's low status. Despite her poor family background, he chose her. In the same way, God would never abandon the Chinese church for all her imperfections. On the contrary, God is relying on the Chinese church, this imperfect vessel; he uses her to spread the gospel in the vast country of China; he needs her as a witness of his holy love. In his unlimited grace, God cares for the Chinese church, allowing it to grow and to become a wonderful witness before all the churches in the world. Therefore, we should not look down on our church because of her shortcomings. God delights in her and has use for her. On the other hand, we have no reason to be self-righteous either, since there is a lot to learn from other churches.

When Peter saw Jesus the first time, Jesus told him: "Follow me!" After his death and resurrection, Jesus again told him: "Follow me!" Following the Lord is not a one-time decision; it is a life-long, continuous process, involving every day and each moment. In coming here to study theology, we have decided to commit ourselves to the Lord. But we can't claim that by coming here we have made a commitment that leaves nothing further to be desired. Our commitment and self-dedication is a life-long task, a task for every moment of our lives. Only by striving unceasingly do we commit ourselves fully to follow in the footprints of our Lord. This requires constant spiritual discipline and witness bearing. The Lord has prepared for us a wonderful road, but this road is not necessarily easy. We may run into difficulties, we may become weak, even stumble and fall. But God will be with us; he can give us new strength whenever we need it. Relying on God's empowerment and following his road unswervingly, we surely will grow stronger and more perfect. And, just like Peter, we surely will accomplish whatever the Lord has in mind for us.

Nanjing Theological Review, No. 18 (1/1993), p. 139.
Translated by Gotthard Oblau.

16. Friend, Will You Work for the Lord? – Zhang Yongquan

The Book of Nehemiah

Throughout history God has made use of many people. Some have received a call from God, while others have been chosen from their mothers' wombs. Some have received their mission through an extraordinary sign, while to some the Lord has spoken face to face, saying: "Come follow me." Such people are really blessed. Let us consider Nehemiah for a moment. He was called by God to carry out the great engineering feat of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. This was a glorious chapter in the pages of history. But in the whole Book of Nehemiah you will not find a single text where God speaks directly to him. Nor will you find God sending Nehemiah on a mission or giving him any instructions. Nor will you find God revealing himself to Nehemiah through some extraordinary sign. How then did Nehemiah know that God was calling him for his work? Because he was a man who feared God and was concerned about God's affairs, the urgent desire to do God's work came from within his heart. He did not care about suffering or fatigue; these only made him happy. Thus he was able to accomplish great things for God. From this we see that when God calls people for his work, he does not adhere to any one form nor does he have a definite pattern.

I. How do we know that Nehemiah had a great reverence for God?

Nehemiah was the cupbearer for King Artaxerxes, and the king trusted him very much. It was Nehemiah's responsibility to guarantee that the king's wine was not poisoned. His was no mean office. He resided in flourishing Babylon, in the king's palace, accompanied by the nobles of the land. Everyday he witnessed scenes of debauchery, merry-making, singing and dancing. He ate sweet tasting delicacies and wore resplendent garments. He was exposed to unlimited splendor and glory. However, though his body was in the king's palace, his heart was in Jerusalem. He "came out from them and became separated from them, touching nothing unclean ... his holiness was made perfect in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 6:17-18, 7:1). All those luxurious things had not the least attraction for him.

Once when some people came from Judah, Nehemiah could not wait to ask them about the conditions there. After they told him that the Jews there were in great distress and suffering humiliation, that the walls of the city were destroyed and the gates burned down, Nehemiah could not contain himself, but sat down and broke into tears. He was in mourning for several days. He prayed and fasted before God, acknowledging his own sins and those of the Israelites. From the words of his prayer we learn that Nehemiah was a devout reader of the Books of Moses. Therefore night and day he continuously beseeched God on behalf of his servants the Israelites. His heart was as if on fire. He asked God to remember the words he had spoken to Moses, and to gather his scattered people once more in Jerusalem, to the place he had chosen as the dwelling place for his name.

During the building of the walls of Jerusalem, Nehemiah led by example, and shared the joys and sorrows of the work along with the common people. He, his brothers, the servants and the defense guard who accompanied him, did not get undressed but stood watch all night to protect the people while they were asleep. When the nobles and officials sought an advantage

from their brethren, he asked them with righteous indignation: "Should you also not walk in the fear of the Lord?" Nehemiah's predecessors as governor increased the burdens on the people, exacting food and wine and 40 silver shekels per day from them. Their servants also oppressed the people. But because Nehemiah feared God, he sympathized with the people and did not act like this. He did not claim the governor's allowance for the 12 years that he held the office. Moreover, using his own livestock, he fed 150 people at his table everyday. This was quite commendable!

He appointed Hananiah to take charge of Jerusalem because this man "was more trustworthy and God-fearing than most people." Nehemiah feared God himself and he was partial to those who also feared God. By appointing a God-fearing man to handle matters, his heart could be at ease. When God calls people for his work, he calls those who fear him.

II. Nehemiah was determined to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem

Most people would think that Nehemiah should have stayed in the king's palace. He had a comfortable life there and did not need to worry about anything. However he was determined to go to Jerusalem to repair the walls of the city, because every day that the walls remained in a state of disrepair was one day less of security for the people. Although he realized that many unforeseen difficulties could arise, that the task was arduous and risky, and that he, a non-engineer, was undertaking an engineering feat of no mean proportions, nevertheless these things did not lessen his determination. Concerning all these things he prayed to God for help. Here we get a glimpse of Nehemiah's fine character. No matter what task he undertook, he first prayed to God about it.

In Jerusalem, troubles followed one after the other. From within, false prophets arose to frighten the people, and from without, enemy forces launched attacks against them. Both adversaries colluded with one another, so that the people carried out their work in fear and trembling. When their energy was already spent, the nobles and officials took advantage of the brethren, forcing their children to become their slaves. Cries of discontent could be heard everywhere. Because some of the nobles were related by marriage to the enemy, they spoke on behalf of the enemy. The situation was very complicated and the problems kept piling up. Someone else would have become disillusioned and lost his resolve. Buffeted on all sides, another person would have thought only of running away. However, Nehemiah was full of confidence, firmly placing his trust in God. He believed that God was great and deserved to be revered. He believed that God would fight for the people and thwart the machinations of the enemy. Nehemiah carried out his duties to the best of his ability, and strengthened the guard. With a resolute heart he at last accomplished the task he had set out to do. Then it was the enemies' turn to be afraid and worried.

This tells us that when we do God's work, we will have difficulties, but that these difficulties, no matter what they are, do not stand in the way of accomplishing the Lord's work. This is the way it was in apostolic times too. The apostles were subject to great pressures, but the Gospel still spread everywhere.

III. God's grace was present from beginning to end

Upon hearing Nehemiah's prayer, God moved the heart of the king. Nehemiah did not speak to the king first, rather it was the king who took the initiative to ask Nehemiah what was on his mind. At this crucial moment Nehemiah quickly made a secret prayer. When the king heard that Nehemiah wanted to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls of the city, he readily agreed. Moreover the king commissioned Nehemiah to go, and even appointed him governor of Judea. The king also gave Nehemiah a letter to the keeper of the royal woods, telling him to give Nehemiah all the timber he needed. And out of all expectation, the king assigned army officers and cavalry to accompany him. In Jerusalem, the people all courageously rose up to undertake this holy work. They divided up tasks among themselves, and the work progressed quickly, because the people carried out the work with single-minded devotion. As Nehemiah said: "The favoring hand of God has rested upon me." Many times God's grace far surpasses what we ask for or conceive.

IV. What we should do

From Nehemiah's example we can learn a lesson. If a person fears God and is willing to do God's work, God will certainly use that person, and even put him or her into an important position.

This is especially the case in the countryside churches, where there is no one to preach the Gospel. There, brothers and sisters who love the Lord should learn from Nehemiah's example. When the church is desolate and the lambs have no one to feed them, one cannot remain aloof and unwilling to become involved in the work. You cannot push the responsibility onto others, thinking that there are many other people who can do the job. If everyone thinks like that, who will do the work then? For God wishes all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4). If this is God's desire, should we not have the same desire, and be concerned about the things of God? The church is desolate, like a wall which has holes in it. Once God complained to Ezekiel: "Thus I have searched among them for someone who could build me a wall or stand in the breach before me to keep me from destroying the land; but I found no one" (Ez. 22:30). Today, likewise, our Lord Jesus Christ is looking everywhere for people willing to do his work. Ask the Lord to move your hearts, to make your hearts burn like Nehemiah's. Pray with fasting, pray the whole night through, pray with tears, pray for the country, for the church and for lost souls. Pray that the Lord will raise up people within the church; pray even harder that he might raise you up.

Wholeheartedly take up some work for the Lord in accordance with the grace that the Lord has given you. The more work you are willing to do, the more grace he will give you. If a person who really loves the Lord has a share in the Lord's work, that person experiences untold happiness. He would most likely be willing to give up his time, and even sacrifice the chance of making a few extra yuan. He would also be like Nehemiah in the sense that he would not accept an official's "stipend," but rather tithe himself.

Perhaps some will say that they are willing to spread the Lord's Gospel, but that they are not very familiar with the Bible, and so they would have difficulty preaching. Who is there that finds this easy? If you believe that you are working for the Lord and you place your trust in his Holy Spirit, you can ask for the grace of prophetic preaching for the building up of the church (1 Cor. 14:12). At the same time you can increase your knowledge of the Bible by reading it regularly. When you come across texts that you do not understand, read them quickly; texts you do understand, read slowly; texts which move you, read carefully. Both read and meditate.

Ask the Lord to open your mind to understand the Scriptures (Lk. 24:45). If you have the chance, preach about the texts that moved you, because when you are moved, then you can move others. As for the texts which you do not understand, read them repeatedly, and understanding will come.

One brother noticed that his church had no preacher. The hunger of the flock was intolerable and their spiritual lives could not mature. A sense of responsibility pressed upon him, and he felt the desire to preach the Lord's Good News. But he had a stutter; how could he preach the Gospel? He earnestly prayed for the Lord's help, and miraculously, when the time came for him to preach, his speech flowed without interruption, not at all like a person with a stutter.

There was a sister in Shanghai who did not have much education, but who loved the Lord very much. Once she helped a very erudite engineer to accept Our Lord Jesus Christ. He had not believed in the Lord very long when he noticed that the church was being renovated. From the example of the sister, he knew what it meant to make an offering to the Lord, so he gave money to the church for repairs.

Once in a seekers' class I heard a sister who was preparing for Baptism tell the story of how she came to believe in the Lord. She said that she was sick in the hospital once, and every day an eighty-year-old sister climbed the stairs to her seventh-floor ward to visit her. This sister explained salvation in Jesus to her, read the Bible for her and prayed for her. She did this until the sick sister believed in the Lord, was cured of her illness and left the hospital. This old sister saw it like this: she did not have much time left in this world, and so she must quickly seize the opportunity to do a little work for the Lord.

So you see, the Lord is happy with anyone who is willing to do his work.

Let us think carefully for a moment. Nehemiah was quite a commendable person. Although he lived in the palace, Nehemiah was not given to indulging in pleasure to the neglect of his duty. His body may have been captive to luxury, but his spirit certainly was not. He clearly realized that those ephemeral things vanish in an instant and are not worthy of our esteem. He knew that this world and its enticements were passing away, but that whoever does the will of God remains forever (1 John 2:15-17). It really happened in that way. Not long afterwards, Babylon the Great was no more (Is. 13:19-20; Jer. 50:2-3).

In the countryside I see many brothers and sisters putting all their time and energy into secular affairs. They originally had a small house, but now they work assiduously to make money in order to put up a house of several stories. After the house is built, they are busy finding a bride for their son. They prepare a sumptuous banquet and the new house is decorated luxuriously. The house must have everything, the most modern furniture and the latest electrical appliances. Otherwise, the family will lose face and the neighbors will gossip. When the daughter gets married, the dowry is enormous. Some people ship it by boat, others by truck. The dowry must contain at least 12(1 pieces of clothing. Then people have it carried through town, so that everyone can see it. When I see a dowry like this, I can only shake my head and sigh. They are busy about such things the whole year through. Their bodies and souls are really held captive. Of course, I am not opposed to building houses and looking for daughters-in-law. I just want to ask if Our Lord Jesus Christ has the first place in their hearts. Do not compare yourselves to others and follow the ways of the world. Consider frugality

honorable. If you have food and clothing, you should be satisfied. Put aside some time for the Lord. God will never force anyone to do his work. If Nehemiah did not have a heart which desired to do God's work, God would not have used him. Even less would he have placed him in a position of authority. Nehemiah's short life was not in vain. He performed a work of everlasting value. Therefore, his deeds were recorded in the Bible.

*Collected Sermons, No. 25 (April, 1993), p. 50.
Translated by Peter Barry.*

17. When the Wine Ran Out – Chen Yiping

John 2:1-11

When Jesus was in Cana of Galilee attending a wedding feast the wine was exhausted and he turned water into wine of a superior quality. In life, too, there comes a time when food is exhausted, money spent, medicines of no avail and there seems to be no solution, no way to work things out, when we even come to breathing our last. Well over ten years ago church doors in China were closed and the Seminary ceased to function. Are not such experiences similar to the time in Cana when the wine had run out? Haven't we all had similar experiences'?

This miracle in Cana tells us that when the wine runs out, there is nothing to fear. What is fearful, is when the wine runs out and the foolish do not realize it. Cancer is fearful because when it first appears, we do not recognize it, not until it is incurable. But there in Cana when the wine was exhausted, no one, from the host to the servants to the guests, knew it. If Mary, the mother of Jesus, hadn't discovered the lack of wine in time, what a scene there would have been. How was it that Mary recognized the problem'? It really makes a person consider the situation more closely: the guests were all enjoying the feast, no one was concerned about whether or not the host had enough food and wine on hand. Only Mary was not like the others.

A Jewish wedding feast went on for seven days. Perhaps Mary and Jesus arrived on the seventh day of the feast, a time when there could easily have been a shortage of food and drink. This aroused Mary's sympathy; she didn't care about her own food and drink, but quietly checked around to see if things really were in short supply. She would have looked into the wine vats one by one and found them empty. Amazingly, when she discovered the crisis, she didn't panic, get angry or gloat over the host's misfortune. Even less did she give the situation away to the guests, thus spoiling the party. She didn't even suggest sending the servant to buy more. Instead, she turned immediately to Jesus and said, "They have no wine." This was a very simple prayer, but one from a humble, trusting, loving heart. She did not say, "I have no wine" or "we have no wine," but rather "they have no wine." Her prayer to Jesus was not selfish, but selfless. Jesus said to her, "Woman, what do I have to do with you? My hour has not yet come." Mary not only heard but knew what he meant, yet, without faltering, she went to the servants and told them, "whatever he says to you, do it." The servants did as Jesus told them, filled the vats with water and took them to the steward. The water had become wine.

Mary had said, "My heart does magnify the Lord." And at the wedding in Cana of Galilee, she put these words into action. She did not say to the servants, "listen to what I tell you," but told them to listen to what the Lord would say to them. This is one of the greatest principles for the church today - do the Lord's bidding. Many problems arise in the church when someone else says, "I tell you to do something and you do it." If the church has one hundred such people, all with their own opinions, there will be no end to the church's problems. Whenever church members have a problem they call on the pastor. In every case the pastor must be very careful not to use his own wisdom on the problem or to speak arbitrarily. The best method is to lead the believers to the feet of Jesus and pray together. If the pastor is able to lead all the believers to listen to what Jesus says, there will be miracles and not problems.

When the steward tasted the excellent wine which the water had become, he had no idea where it came from. He called the bridegroom over and rebuked him for saving the best wine until then. Why didn't Mary come forward then and explain: "I am the one who discovered the problem? I am the one who immediately told Jesus. I am the one that told the servants to do as he commanded." Why does she, completely at odds with what one would expect, keep silent? The amazing thing was that her silence was greater than words. In her silence, we hear thunder. What moves us most about Mary is her self, hidden behind the miracle, making a silent witness all the while. God looks on the heart. God wants people whose hearts are sincere. The power of Jesus was made evident through the humble, faithful, loving heart of Mary. The results of the miracle were three: it made those at the feast happier; it caused his disciples to believe in him; and it revealed his glory.

During the Cultural Revolution, when the wine had run out and churches in China were closed, when everything seemed to lead to a dead-end street, there were believers without number who, like Mary, turned to Jesus with humble and faithful hearts and prayed quietly for a miracle, so that today, there are miracles everywhere. This fortieth anniversary of our Seminary is the miracle of Cana. Each of us alumni has become new wine that Jesus has created.

I graduated from Yanjing Seminary in 1956. In 1958 I was wrongly accused of being a rightist and forced to leave my church work. During the following years I worked in a water reservoir, a factory, a salt works, a farm, on a sea wall, even on the railroads and highways. I raised pigs and did all kinds of manual work for over twenty years. Many a time I felt that my preaching days were over, used up, never to return. Even in my dreams I could never imagine that I would one day stand here as a pastor, stand in this pulpit and give my testimony to the Lord. As I watched myself become thirty years of age, then thirty-five, even forty, I thought my chances for marriage were over. But at forty-two from out of the blue came a lovely young thing on a bicycle. Now our children, a son and a daughter who helped so much with the choir and youth work of the church, are grown. My home is blessed with family and our church is blessed with good co-workers. God has done for me more than I could ever have dreamed or imagined. Again and again the Lord was with me during those twenty years of suffering, in order to turn me from useless water into useful new wine.

When we think back over these forty years of life's road there is one insight I think we all share: Humankind's "end" is God's beginning. The people of Israel faced the Red Sea with no hope of rescue while from their rear the armies of Pharaoh charged ever closer. It was God's opportunity to bring hope out of despair, to part the sea and save them with a great miracle. We have Jesus who dispels our fears. For when all seems finished and we are at the end of our

174

resources and there seems no way out, we still have Jesus. As in the ancient poem, "with hope almost gone, we sighted yet another village," - so for us just when all seemed lost and we faced a dead end, hope appeared - in the person of Jesus. When all seemed lost Jesus took us by the hand and led us on to a land of new days and new blessings.

Nanjing Theological Review, No. 18 (1/1993), p.3.
Translated by Britt E. Towery, Jr.

18. “May Your Kingdom Come” – Jiang Peifen

Heb. 2:5-10; Eph. 1:10; Mt. 6:10

"May your kingdom come" is the prayer our Lord taught us and God's eternal plan. It is also the age-old prayer of prophets, disciples and saints, and the wish and prayer of God's children all over the world today.

On the day God's kingdom comes, all in heaven, on earth, all creation, will be one in Christ. Thanks be to God, our little band, builders of the Kingdom, following in the footsteps of the prophets and saints of every generation who have gone before us, are leading and nurturing the believers to welcome the coming of the Lord's Kingdom through practical action. Heaven, earth and all that God created was originally harmoniously united in him. All between God and people, among people themselves and between heaven and earth was according to his plan and will. God will govern the earth's wisdom and power, giving it to those in communion with him in glory, making it subject to their governance. Human beings, having physical bodies and the soul of God within them, will oversee everything in this material world according to the will of God. Just as in the beautiful, happy Garden of Eden, everything is to be harmonious and united in Christ.

When people turn their backs, forfeiting their good relationship with God, they become separated from him, the essence of love, the source of creation, and the light of truth. Descending into darkness and made subject to the powers of evil, they become sinners. Not only does this cause them to sink into sin and suffering, but as sinners they also pollute and destroy all creation and all this comes back to them, inflicting adversity and suffering on their existence.

Although in forsaking God people damage the world's harmony and unity, the all-knowing and all-powerful God of Love, according to his eternal plan, will help them realize their goals. Thus in Ephesians 1:10 we find: "As a plan for the fullness of time, gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth." It is made clear that to accomplish this unity there is a process which takes place "in the fullness of time".

This process is God's redemption of humanity, because the paradise people lost by their own sin must be restored. God has not changed his eternal plan for creation. Hebrews 2:5 says, "For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come of which we are speaking." He will make it subject to humankind. But Adam failed and his offspring became sinners; they didn't govern the world well. They became slaves of sin and material things.

God therefore allowed his beloved Son to take on flesh, becoming the Son of Man and the representative of the last Adam, the new humanity.

God's beloved Son came into the world so that God might have the Son of Man he wanted among humankind who would fulfill what God wanted of him. This innocent Son of Man, the true Son of Man, in fulfillment of God's demands of humankind, reflecting the true face of God, became a Son of Man pleasing to God, united with him every minute, never apart. On the

cross he took upon himself the sins of all people and the curse of sin, so as to separate people from evil and reconcile them with God. "May we be moved to join the Kingdom of his loving Son," to be citizens of heaven.

We should of course live on this earth as God's Beloved Son did, reflecting the image of God's glory in concrete actions to welcome the coming of the Kingdom. At that time, not only will our bodies be redeemed, the whole creation, cursed and suffering on our account, will also share in the glorious freedom of the children of God, (Romans 8:19-23). "And through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross" (Colossians 1:20).

The descendants of Abraham and David did not realize God's mission, so Jesus came to earth for them. But they rejected their Saviour, even less did they revere him as the heavenly king. This great mission of this plan of redemption was to be carried out through the citizens of God's kingdom as co-workers with him. Some people have called Hebrews I 1 "a psalm of faith" or "great people of faith." At that time it had not yet been written down in the New Testament that from the just man Abel through the prophets of every generation, God's faithful servants were a powerful force in building God's Kingdom. The disciples whose names were not mentioned, the saints arrayed behind them, giving their all for the construction of the Heavenly Kingdom, fighting the good fight, running the race, keeping to the faith, they passed this great mission on to the next generation of God's citizens.

In the forty years of this new era in China, this elder generation whom we all respect because of their confident vision, understood what God's will and plan was in their time. Although the majority of church co-workers have not necessarily fully understood that to love country and to love church are identical, they followed God's will to spread the Gospel of the Kingdom far and wide that the church might grow here in this land, this new China, and prepare the way. With their faith, love, patience and wisdom, as well as their hard work, they overcame many difficulties. In the decade of the 1950s more than ten seminaries united and the students all joined in this ministry.

In 1956, Mr. Y. T. Wu pointed out that the Christian Church must make three important witnesses in China and overseas and carry out ten tasks of mission. However because of the damage of the left deviationist line there was a detour (the Cultural Revolution of 1966-76). But at the Spring 1980 meeting of the National Standing Committees, Bishop K.H. Ting proposed that we should build God's temple on the ruins. Nanjing Union Theological Seminary re-opened and church doors opened again one by one.

During these years seminary graduates spared no efforts serving God faithfully in churches all over the country. On the one hand they built up the church and on the other they built up their spiritual life and knowledge. For that we are very thankful to God.

The main task of pastoral work today is "running the church well by the three-self principle." All our churches have their hopes placed on us, this generation of theological students and pastoral workers. Yet we are not alone, neither are we fearful, for we have before us the example of God's many faithful servants united in Christ under the leadership of Jesus, the Great Shepherd, through the help of the power of the Holy Spirit and through prayers of the Christians and co-workers who, having fulfilled the mission God entrusted to them, now rest forever in God. Today we follow in their footsteps,

looking to our never-changing God and the power of the Holy Spirit, meeting all sorts of new challenges to fulfill the task God has given to us in these times.

"May thy Kingdom come" - we wish its early coming so that we may enter into that Kingdom where God and humanity dwell together forever. Not only is this our prayer and heart's desire, but more, because we have seen in faith, it has become our reason and goal for serving God. It is not because more people have joined the earthly church that we are joyful and content, but because there are many more brothers and sisters to give of themselves, to subject themselves to the Lord of Heaven and join our little band to work for the building up of the Kingdom of Heaven.

The church on earth is not heaven, but should be a miniature of it, filled with the pure unity of God's love, the temple of the Holy Spirit. God bless us all. Amen.

Nanjing Theological Review, No. 18 (1/1993), p. 1.
Translated by Gail V. Coulson.

19. The Solitude of God – Wang Weifan

I

I reared the children and brought them up,
but they have rebelled against me.
The ox knows its owner,
and the donkey its master's crib;
but Israel does not know,
my people do not understand.

-Is. 1: 2-3

The solitude of God, or a lonely God, is experienced when his sons and daughters rebel against him.

Let us say that God has one hundred children. The love and care he has for each of them is in no way limited to one-hundredth of the whole; to each he gives a full measure of love and deep affection. Or, imagine that one is lost. The magnitude of God's heartbreak by no means fills only a hundredth part of his heart. The solitude which assails him over a single lost sheep cannot be filled or supplanted by the other ninety-nine. This solitude, this sense of loss, fills God's whole heart.

Without a doubt, God called to the lost Adam in order to find him, to save this first human who was lost. At the same time, however, it was the aloneness God himself experienced over the loss of the human which led him to search to search through the garden of Eden for his own creation, with no thought for the dignity of his own position.

God possesses the whole earth, yet this cannot dispel the solitude he felt at the loss of Adam, the solitude he feels at the loss of you or I. The bird returns to her nest and the old horse knows the way home, yet human beings do not know how to repay God's blessing. They do not know the way back to God. We compare badly with beasts and birds!

II

What more was there to do for
my vineyard
that I have not done in it?

- Is. 5:4

God set all things in motion. But what most claims his heart's attention is his vineyard. This is his home-the nation of Israel in the Old Testament and the Church in the New.

When the vineyard is unworthy of his labors, when it does not come up to his hopes, then God is like a worker who has been dismissed, a solitary person with no work to occupy him.

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The Church is God's home, the place where he is present in the Holy Spirit. But when the Church does not seek his guidance in all it does, when it puts God to one side, then God is like someone with no home to return to.

"Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?"

- Is. 6:8

The solitude of God also arises from his inability to find a friend, one who knows his heart. He longs for home, but cannot find someone to bring him word from home.

He searches the universe in vain for someone to send. He searches our world, but finds no one willing to go for him. He is anxious about so many things at home, who is there willing to take word for him and bring him word in return? When will his family return? When will they call him holy? When will they allow him to order his own vineyard? The solitary God has already waited long.

III

Why was no one there when I came?
Why did no one answer when I called'?

- Is. 50:2

God wants to wrest back the warrior's pillaged wealth, he wants to rescue his children who have been bullied. His is the arm of salvation, the strength of salvation, but he feels alone because his children, contrary to all expectation, feel at home wherever they are. No one awaits his coming, there is no one waiting in expectation. He calls, and his voice disappears into the silent sky; it falls into the soundless sea. Yet, in the vast sky a wild wind whistles; in the soundless sea huge breakers crash. But his children, in their distress, are voiceless. There is no one to speak for them:

He saw that there was no one,
and was appalled that there was
no one to intervene

-Is. 59:16

Human history is full of struggles between righteousness and unrighteousness. But in the end, no unrighteousness or sin can escape from the Judge who "announces vindication, mighty to save". But the one who "marches in his great might", is a single "I", a solitary God waging a solitary battle. He has no warriors and no reinforcements:

"I have trodden the winepress alone,
and from the peoples no one was with me..."

- Is. 63:1-3

Seeing unrighteousness and failing to respond with courage; seeing inequality and passing by. Between truth and falsehood, we keep quiet out of fear; between black and white, we pander to the pleasure of others. All this is enough to plunge God into solitude.

The solitude of God, or the lonely God, appears even in his day of salvation, his day of judgement!

Nanjing Theological Review, No. 18 (1/1993), p.133.
Translated by Janice Wickeri.