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Chinese Theological Review [Vol. 18, 2003]

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Item Type	Journal volume
Publisher	Foundation for Theological Education in South East Asia (FTESEA)
Rights	With permission of the license/copyright holder
Download date	2026-06-30 21:56:47
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/165407

Remembering the Past as a Lesson for the Future

Foreword

LUO GUANZONG

History is the summation of this or that period; reality is the continuation of objective existence. History is what has been; reality is development and change. History is a record of the past; reality a manifestation of today. But history and present social development cannot be separated. History is an eternal textbook, a record of the successes and failures, experience and lessons, of our forebears, offering inspiration and admonition to those who come after. We must deal squarely with history in order to correctly face the future.

This volume takes as its title the Chinese saying, the past not forgotten is a guide for the future. The hope is that it will aid Christians, (secular) scholars of Christianity, and all those who care about Christianity in understanding Christianity in modern Chinese history, a historical period which must not be forgotten. Keeping the lessons of that experience firmly in mind is helpful in doing theoretical and practical work related to Christianity well, and in strengthening patriotic thinking and national cohesion.

1

Modern Christianity came to China in the nineteenth century and made a considerable contribution to Chinese

society. Unfortunately, the entrance of Christianity to China cannot be separated from imperialist aggression against China; Christianity was used by colonialism and imperialism.

The most important event in Chinese Christianity in the twentieth century was the initiation of the Chinese Christian Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSM/TSPM) following the establishment of new China. The greatest achievement of the Three-Self Movement was the severing of the relationship between Christianity and imperialism, throwing off the control of the foreign mission boards, and enabling a *foreign religion* used by imperialist aggressors to be transformed into an independent Christianity run by Chinese Christians themselves, self-governed, self-supported and self-propagated. On this basis TSPM enabled Christianity to adapt to socialist society, to be a church in a socialist nation that is run on three-self principles and to advance the path of theological reconstruction.

The fundamental reason the Three-Self Movement was launched was to counter the manipulation of Christianity by the forces of imperialism in their aggression against China. The inception of the TSPM in 1951 took place at the height of the accusations and attacks on imperialist aggression in China by the people of China. Chinese Christians, too, personally experienced, uncovered, and made accusations concerning the serious crimes of colonial and imperialist manipulation of Christianity. Through the common efforts of Christians, on the basis of statements and missionary and foreign consular documents, much persuasive documentation was uncovered. These words and actions, evincing complacency toward the trend of events as aggression moved forward, became incontrovertible evidence of guilt, enabling us to gain a deeper knowledge of this issue.

The TSPM is a half-century old. The materials we uncovered consist mainly of excerpts and individual essays. Recently, a number of people have hoped it would be possible to organize this material. Today, this foundation of materials uncovered by our forebears has been compiled according to historical period and important events. Our

approach has been based on the following principles: 1) We are not writing a history of Chinese Christianity, but a history of the manipulation of Christianity by imperialism in its aggression in China; 2) We write according to historical developments in China, for apart from the facts of our national history, we have no way of understanding the substance of the words and actions of foreign missionaries and their nations' officials at the time; 3) In terms of documents, insofar as possible, we will use the original words of foreign missionaries and officials and, relating these to the contemporary historical background, add whatever explanations and commentary are necessary; 4) Our authors all have their own writing styles and we have not tried to impose unity; 5) Documents previously published in *Tian Feng* have been included in an appendix.

2

From the very beginning, colonial and imperialist aggression against China used Christianity to serve its ends. To be sure, when this issue was discussed in the early days of the TSPM, religious sentiment made it difficult for some to accept these facts and objections were raised. Later, with the emergence of a large quantity of historical evidence, awareness grew more widespread; though understandably some people still do not have a thorough or complete understanding of the situation. Strangely enough, however, some people still call it a fabrication. And so we must provide an explanation:

1 The exposure and criticism of the crime of manipulating Christianity for colonial and imperial ends in China did not begin with the establishment of new China or with the TSPM. As early as 1922, during the anti-Christian movement, non-Christian students and intellectuals were the first to oppose imperialist aggression against China; in so doing they were also in the vanguard in sharply attacking the use of Christianity for imperialist ends in China. During the foreign mission board and missionary controlled "National" Christian Conference held in May of that year, Chinese Christian delegates also raised the criticism that the

history of the entry of Christianity into China was linked to her humiliation.

The West called itself Christendom, but offended Christian doctrine by invading and humiliating China, such that Christian evangelism in China was greatly impeded. They went on to say that the church, under the control of mission boards and missionaries, was in fact still a foreign church, and thus subject to outside condemnation.¹ In the May Thirtieth Incident of 1925, while all Chinese people joined to condemn the imperialist murder of our compatriots, many patriotic Christians attacked those so-called Christian nations who were selling opium, starting wars of aggression, forcing signature to unequal treaties, ceding of territory and payment of indemnities, and much more. Some missionaries went against Christian doctrine, saying one thing and meaning another, to cover up crimes of aggression by their governments.

All these are historical fact; historically patriots in and outside the church have attacked these crimes of aggression in which imperialist forces made use of Christianity. The exposure of these crimes undertaken by Christian leaders and believers after the founding of the TSPM is in fact a continuation and development of the anti-imperialist patriotic movement of our patriotic Christian forebears. Though now we are able to criticize more profoundly and more concretely, and substantiate more fully, the facts of this history are proven and undeniable.

2 There are many statements by western officials and Christians recognizing the close political and economic relationship between Christianity and the big powers.

The American China missionary and historian K.S. Latourette, writing of the Treaty of Tientsin (Tianjin), said "The treaties placed not only missionaries but Chinese Christians under the aegis of foreign powers. It tended to remove Chinese Christians from the jurisdiction of their government and to make of Christian communities *imperia in imperio*, widely scattered enclaves under the defense of aliens." The results of the toleration clauses, then, were far from being always creditable to the name of Christ. And he strongly asserts that the Church had become a partner

in western imperialism.²

There are also many examples of the recognition by American consular officials of the important contributions to their own diplomatic activities made by Christian missionaries. J.W. Foster, an early US Secretary of State, in his *American Diplomacy in the Orient*, described signal contributions of missionaries on behalf of US diplomacy, saying that the contributions of missionaries to the diplomatic relations between western nations and those of the Orient were particularly outstanding, and absolutely essential.³

Charles Denby, American Minister to China for thirteen years, said that for nearly one hundred years, men and women missionaries had striven on behalf of (U.S.) prestige, language and business in China. Without them, the national reputation would dim. Undoubtedly, without them, U.S. commerce would have suffered huge losses and its diplomacy have been deprived of one of its major supports.⁴

In its annual report for 1932, the North American Board for Foreign Missions openly admitted that all telegrams and important documents, including important first-hand intelligence reports, were immediately passed on to the State Department in Washington.⁵

On 18 September 1955, the editorial in the *Christian Century*, titled "The Church in the Cold War," stated, on the possibility of missionaries taking part in spying activities, that missionaries and mission boards had experienced a great deal of pressure to report on conditions in their areas to U.S. intelligence departments, and that many mission sending agencies had discussed the issue internally behind closed doors.

In the 1980s, the U.S. National Council of Churches and other important church organizations, in their statements on relations with China, acknowledged that the missionary movement was a component of western efforts to control China and bring influence to bear. Western missionaries and their churches in China were all under the protection of the unequal treaties with which the big powers oppressed the Chinese people. The close ties between the missionary movement and the economic and political forces of imperialism hurt their witness to Christ and caused

Jesus Christ and the Gospel to be linked, in the eyes of many Chinese, to the power and might of the big western powers.⁶

Many western scholars of religion criticize the close ties between Christianity and imperialism, and many church persons of conscience admit that these ties harmed the missionary movement. All this illustrates that the manipulation of Christianity in the cause of imperialist aggression is objective historical fact.

3 The present volume aims to use historical fact to illustrate that the thesis that imperialist forces manipulated Christianity in carrying out aggression is a historical judgment witnessed by their own words and actions.

3

Given that the thesis referred to above is a foregone conclusion, concrete implementation and execution of the policy of aggression cannot be separated from the activities of missionaries and foreign mission boards either. And thus, the proper assessment of missionaries' contributions and errors is of concern to all. Many people think of missionaries as ambassadors of the Gospel, and cannot speak of them in the same breath as imperialist aggression. This is a very complex issue.

There are the individual contributions of missionaries and their deeply moving achievements; but missionaries cannot escape their links to the foreign mission boards and to governments either. Many missionaries carried on other activities while spreading the Gospel, and these included, to varying degrees, whether consciously or not, participation in (foreign) government activities.

Following TSPM criticism of the use of religion as an agent of imperialism, many Christian writers prefaced mention of missionaries with the phrase "agents of imperialism." This had changed by the 1980s, with the feeling that missionaries could not be lumped together, but should be discussed on an individual basis, especially with the "Love Country, Love Church, Together Enter the Twenty-first Century—A Summation of Fifty Years of the Chinese TSPM" reso-

lution passed in 2000 by the Joint Standing Committees of the CCC and TSPM, which clearly stated: In the 1950s, the TSPM labeled all missionaries agents of imperialism. This is wrong. We should differentiate among missionaries on the basis of their actions during historical events. Any actions of theirs which benefited the Chinese people will not be forgotten.

The key to the assessment of the missionaries is that it must be done on the basis of individual actions and individual ties to the (foreign) government policy of aggression.

Foreign mission boards have actively denied that links existed between mission boards and missionaries and foreign government policies. The clearest example is a letter dated 8 May 1950 from the China Committee of the North American United Mission Board to Chinese Christian leaders which said that the mission work of this Board in China had never had any direct link to (American) government policy.⁷ This is succinctly put, but the facts suggest otherwise.

It may be recalled that in 1943, when the British and American governments repealed their unequal treaties with China and signed new treaties, the *Christian Century* editorial said that while Americans often have forgotten and do not speak of the links that formed between governments and those persons the Christian mission boards sent to non-Christian countries to work, the people in the countries to which they went never forget.⁸ The editorial was very clear, admitting that the activities of the mission boards and missionaries were related to their governments' policies. Since all the facts are there, it said, the people of those countries where the mission boards worked will never forget. But it is not easy for Americans to admit; thus to say *forgotten* actually means *avoided*.

In fact, since the advent of the western big powers' aggression in China, they exploited the services of missionaries, and many missionaries, directly or indirectly, sold opium, gathered intelligence, urged war on China. Some took direct part in the armies of aggression or took part in the planning and coercion of the Qing government in the

matter of signing the unequal treaties. Nearly all mission boards and missionaries welcomed the victory of the war of aggression and the selection of a new government and economic benefits. Many missionaries, under protection of the unequal treaties moved deep into the interior of China like colonial conquerors, rampaging through towns and villages, bullying and humiliating the people, arousing their resistance. This is what led to what are known as the missionary cases. The establishment and expansion of missionary regions was closely allied to spheres of influence carved out by imperial powers. These are commonly known historical facts.

After the Boxer Movement, the U.S. and British governments and mission boards increased their cultural aggression. Their aim was to foster a group of leaders obedient to them in political thinking who would control all aspects of Chinese government, economy, culture and society. Influenced by such leaders, the Chinese people would no longer resist the imperial powers. This was seen as a much more effective means of reaching their goal of total domination of China than wars of aggression. This can be seen in their evangelical activities, in their schools, hospitals and relief activities: all ways in which they trained the talent they needed and bought support. This is especially true of the dissemination of their theological thinking along with their evangelism: a theology which was an apologetic for imperialist aggression, an effective way to hoodwink believers.

With the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, September 18, 1931, and the Japanese invasion of China, the Chinese people embarked on the high tide of the National Salvation Movement, but until the outbreak of the War in the Pacific in 1941, the American policy of appeasement toward Japan induced the Chinese government to submit to Japan. In every evangelistic meeting in China, at every international Christian gathering, American missionaries acted in conjunction with U.S. government policy on the issue of Japanese aggression in China.

In 1946, following World War II, in order to strengthen its pro-Chiang Kai-shek, anti-Communist policy, the U.S.

government went so far as to make the famous missionary John Leighton Stuart its ambassador. He openly both administered U.S. policy toward China and directed mission board and missionary activity in China.

To sum up, the activities of foreign mission boards and missionaries in China have always been inseparable from their governments' policies toward China. Some well-known missionaries were important figures in masterminding schemes and implementing their governments' China policies. How can anyone say the evangelical work of the mission boards in China never had any direct link to their governments' policies!

Were all missionaries involved in political activities of aggression then? No.

Many missionaries came to China with a mission of spreading the Gospel and many gave their lives for it. They translated the Bible and did much for cultural exchange, medicine and health, worked to transform social traditions, and social service work. Some sympathized with and supported the 1911 Revolution. In 1937, during the Nanjing Massacre, there were American missionaries and foreign nationals who risked suffering and danger to form a safety zone to protect Chinese citizens. These we will always remember. However, because missionaries came from various social backgrounds in countries like Britain and America, their levels of education meant that they could never completely escape the political views of their own country toward oppressing other peoples. Even more importantly, because of the close connection of the entire missionary enterprise with (foreign) governments, missionaries who were sent out could not shake off the fetters of their governments' China policies.

Following the imperialist invasion of China, the aggressors were the militarily mighty big powers; China was a weak and humiliated nation. The big powers were rich, scientifically and technically advanced, while semi-colonial China was poor and backward. Its people lived in misery. Foreign mission boards and missionaries had money and influence. Chinese churches had to depend upon the

assistance of foreign mission boards: mother churches to the Chinese daughter churches; a mother-and-child relationship subject to the missionary. Authority in the administration, personnel and finances of the churches were in the hands of the mission boards and missionaries. Many missionaries harbored feelings of superiority; they had come to distribute charity, to save the Chinese. During the National Christian Conference of 1922, because the church was entirely under the sway of foreign missionaries, Chinese church leaders and delegates could only indirectly criticize the missionaries' arrogation of power in the Church, could speak only obliquely of missionary despotism, their hope that missionaries would rid themselves of national and ethnic biases, and so on.

Many missionaries regarded the poverty and suffering of the Chinese people as due to their lack of belief in God and their sinfulness, while they saw their own nations' wealth and power as due to blessings from God because they were Christian countries. Perhaps they did not understand that these different fates were mainly created by imperialist aggression against China. The so-called truth that imperialism, through its exploitation of evangelism, wanted to preach was that the poverty, backwardness and suffering of the Chinese people was the will of God, and they must submit and not resist. This explains why many missionaries, rather than doubting the policies of aggression of their governments, praised them and, consciously or not, served their governments' policies of aggression toward China.

Because the mission boards took their orders from the U.S. Department of State, and missionaries were under the control of the mission boards, the freedom of missionaries was limited. That is why they did nothing when the Japanese attacked and heavily bombed Shanghai in 1932. One hundred five missionaries who witnessed the invasion joined to issue a statement, accusing the Japanese army of barbaric cruelty. These missionaries spoke out of humanitarian conscience, to uphold human rights and justice. But several days later, the North American Board of Foreign Missions issued its Statement to American and

Canadian Churches, saying that the situation in the Far East was enormously complex, that they should be very careful in making judgments and not be overly hasty; that they should not be influenced by reports and articles that reflected misunderstandings and error. Clearly, the statement by the 105 missionaries went against the policy of appeasement toward Japan of the American and British governments and the mission board issued its statement to stop their mouths.⁹

In Chengdu around the time of victory over the Japanese, too, the Canadian missionary James Endicott (Wen Youzhang), because of his sympathy with and support for the progressive student movement, took part, along with Y.T. Wu and others, in student meetings and demonstrations against the civil war, and even spoke at these meetings, saying it was his profound belief that their actions were in accord with Christian doctrine. But because his activities went against the Canadian and American government policies of supporting Chiang and opposing the Communists that the mission boards upheld, Endicott ran into opposition from within the mission board and eventually had to withdraw from the mission.¹⁰

After World War II, the Chinese people opposed the dictatorial and corrupt government of Chiang Kai-shek, and the nation was politically polarized. But the American government continued a policy of propping up Chiang and opposing the Communists, through strong political, economic and military assistance to the Chiang government. Among missionaries in China at that time, the absolute majority followed in being pro-Chiang and anti-Communist, in complete accord with the American policy.

In early 1949, when the war of liberation had met with decisive victory, Moore of the China Bible Society had the idea that the dissemination of a great quantity of Bibles would be a deterrent to the Communists, and he wanted the American Ambassador Leighton Stuart to wire the State Department for instructions. The missionaries in China at the time had at first withdrawn, but then changed their minds, wanting to remain in their posts and protect American interests: these were the instructions they received from

the American State Department.

As for the issue of espionage activities (by missionaries), we can see from the September 1955 *Christian Century* editorial referred to above that it was the enormous pressure on missionaries from the CIA which made them do this. Thus we see that some missionaries who did engage in espionage activities had no other choice.

To sum up, in a system in which missionaries took orders from mission boards and mission boards took orders from their government, many missionaries were carrying out government policy without realizing it. They were simply acting out of a zealous desire to spread the Gospel and did not know or did not understand this situation. Some did know, but could not say, could only forget to mention it, or only speak of it behind closed doors. This was their tragedy.

4

The Chinese Church was being controlled by foreign mission boards that sought to make Chinese Christians comply with imperialist aggression in China through the theology spread by the missionaries. But there were some patriotic Chinese Christian leaders, patriotic Christian intellectuals in particular, who were determined to do something about it.

In the early twentieth century, Rev. Yu Guozhen and some intellectuals in the Church opposed the unequal treaties and the articles of church protection. They founded in Shanghai the Chinese Independent Church, which rejected mission board control and financial assistance and was non-denominational. This church promoted love country, love church, independence, self-support and self-propagation and drew a response from churches all over the country. An independence movement gradually took shape in the churches, developing sporadically in relation to the highs and lows of the Chinese anti-imperialist, patriotic movement itself.

Following the May Fourth Movement, along with the awakening of nationalism, and due to the effects of educa-

tion and the stimulus of the 1922 anti-Christian Movement, some Christian leaders and intellectuals under the control of the foreign mission boards, advocated an *indigenous* church. Indigenization differed from the independence movement in that it did not seek to withdraw from the mission board, but rather hoped that the mission board would give the administration, finances and other authority over to a Chinese leadership, and on this basis, gradually eliminate denominational differences and undertake a reform of structure, liturgy and theology to adapt the Gospel to Chinese culture and people.

But the mission boards did not agree to these proposals and the indigenous church could not be realized. To deal with the situation, the mission boards changed their names from *American* or *English* thus-and-so to Chinese thus-and-so, and invited one or two Chinese whom they trusted to serve as nominal leaders. But all real power, such as administration and finance, remained in the hands of the missionaries. The names were new, but the substance of missionary control over the church had not changed. This was not the indigenous church demanded by Chinese church leaders, and we cannot call what the missionaries did indigenization.

Patriotic Christians, those in the pews and those more prominent, were active in the 1911 Revolution, the May Thirtieth Incident, the Northern Expedition, the National Salvation Movement, the War of Resistance against Japan, the War of Liberation and in every patriotic struggle against imperialism. Examples will be found in the essays in this volume. Since the anti-Japanese war, especially, we find many and increasing traces of patriotic and progressive Christians as the corps of patriotic believers grows stronger.

Since this is a volume about the historical facts of imperialist uses of religion in their aggression against China, we introduce here only the high points of (Chinese) Christian patriotic activities. The glories of Christian patriotic resistance in the War against Japan, for example, were treated in a small book titled *For Justice and Peace: Christians in the National Salvation and anti-Japanese Movements*

published in 1995 as part of commemorative activities on victory in the War against Japan.

5

History must not be forgotten. Forgetting history leads to error.

We must not forget the history of imperialist uses of religion in its aggression in China; even less can we deny it, warp or alter it: such behavior would lead to error. Since the one hundred or more years of humiliation by imperialist forces such as the Opium War in old China, and our experiences in the half century since the founding of new China, we have had the following profound perceptions:

1 Imperialist forces have never ceased in manipulating religion in service to their aggression. In 1950, Chinese Christians published *The Path of Chinese Christianity in the Construction of New China* (the *Christian Manifesto*) which stated: “With the victory of the Chinese revolution, the imperialists cannot countenance this unprecedented fact of Chinese history. They will certainly use all means available to them to destroy it. They will make use of Christianity to sow discord in their attempt to foment a rebellion in China.” In fact, following the establishment of new China, hostile forces overseas still used religion in their infiltration and destructive activities. Even today there are those who wave various flags, and use various methods to continue such activities. Some even say that religion should be used to change the social systems of other countries. Fifty years have taught us that the wisdom and foresight of this *Christian Manifesto*, drafted by Y.T. Wu and other church leaders and signed by a majority of Christians in China, was entirely correct and must always be remembered.

2 Religion is not politics, but religion cannot escape certain political, economic, cultural and social relationships and influences. Historical experience tells us that only when a nation is rich and its people have well-being can the church be independent and flourish; when a nation is poor and weak and humiliated, the church will be controlled and used by aggressors, and thus transgress the benefit of its own country and people. The church itself will be damaged in such a situation.

Remembering the lessons and experiences of this period of history makes us aware that we must guard the independence and authority of the Chinese Church as we would protect our own eyes, for this is a component part of protecting the independence and authority of our nation.

We are glad that there are Christians of conscience and with a sense of justice beyond our borders who, though they felt some hesitations or were disturbed by the TSPM exposing the history of the manipulation of Christianity by imperialist forces in their aggression in China, yet when they understood the truth of that history, and saw the witness of damage done to the Gospel by the close alignment of the missionary movement with big power politics and economics, when they saw that Chinese Christianity grew strong on the path of three-self patriotism, expressed their respect for the independence and integrity of Chinese Christianity, affirmed the self-government, self-support and self-propagation of the Chinese Church and its spirit of church unity, and wanted to halt all activities that violate the independence of the Chinese Church.¹¹ This is an expression by our foreign friends of the Chinese proverb that says remembrance of the past is a guide to the future. We have profound admiration and gratitude for this, and it is upon this foundation that we will establish and develop friendly relations with such persons.

In editing this volume, our aspiration has been to use history as a reference and face toward the future, in the hope that Christian leaders, ordinary believers and those friends who care about and study Chinese Christianity, will gain a greater understanding of this period of Chinese Christian history, and that this will aid in further understanding of the Three-Self Movement of the Chinese Church, the necessity for running the church well according to three-self principles and the need for theological reconstruction and will strengthen our ability to withstand activities from abroad aimed at infiltrating and damaging the church. Most of all we hope to win the understanding and friendship of more Christian friends overseas.

Foreword to *Remembering the Past as a Lesson for the Future* edited by Luo Guanzong. Beijing: Religious Culture Publishers, 2003, 1-18.

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1 In his Opening Address, Conference president Cheng Jingyi said, “ We must acknowledge that the church at present is still under the control of foreigners, and that Chinese today still think of Christianity as a foreign religion.” (*Proceedings of the National Christian Conference.*)

2 Kenneth S. Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China*, 1929.

3 In *Missionaries and their Critics.*

4 Ibid.

5 from *Documents of the Three-Self Movement.*

6 See p. 409 in this volume.

7 Church of Christ in China Conference, 1950.

8 *Christian Century*, June 2, 1943.

9 See pp. 301-302 in this volume.

10 In *Remembering Y.T. Wu.*

11 See pp.409 in this volume.

My View of Three-Self Education

K.H. TING

For decades now, when we in the Three-Self Movement preach three-self, we begin with missionaries sent under the rubric of religion by the imperialists to serve the imperialist aggressors against China, and then bring out the necessity for Chinese Christianity to be independent, carrying out self-government, self-support and self-propagation. We can say this is the Denunciation Movement view of three-self. It has been the traditional evangelical line of TSPM since the 1950s. But recently, we have increasingly found this way of speaking to be rather unpopular: many young people are indifferent to it, many find it annoying and the speaker finds it wasted effort. One important reason for this may be that a stress on so-called spiritual offerings is widespread in our Church, and persuading believers through reason is neglected.

When speaking about three-self we must give full weight to the standing of missionaries in the eyes of most Christians in the Church, including seminarians. We should not think that quoting a few lines from some westerners' self-confessions to Christians today will persuade them that Christianity was used as a tool by imperialist forces in their aggression against China, or that having done so, they would then accept the necessity of three-self. The political climate today is very different from that of the 1950s, and it is not easy for people to accept the ideas that some of us formed at that time. Evangelism, missionaries, mission organizations and mission boards have a great deal of pres-

tige among Christians, both in China and abroad. We should adopt a spirit of seeking truth from facts in realizing this.

Might we consider that in explaining the necessity of three-self today, we no longer begin by citing as evidence the example of China missionaries from imperialist nations using religion as tools of aggression? This is liable to arouse disgust. Please note my phrasing, *begin by*; I am not suggesting that we deny the facts. When Jesus commissioned us to go into the world and spread the Gospel, imperialism did not use religion and mission was nothing other than spreading the Gospel. When evangelism and politics (imperialism) are linked, believers seldom see the connection immediately. They believe that evangelism is Jesus' commission and cannot be denied.

We should collect facts on churches from around the world, those that are well run, and those that are not, as illustrations. Those churches that are well run are self-governed, self-supported and self-propagated. We can find evidence in the New Testament as well. Acts 15 tells us that in order that the non-Jewish Gentiles might accept the Gospel, the Church in Jerusalem decided not to take on the customs of Judaism (observing the Sabbath, circumcision, etc.), but to allow Gentiles to develop their own Christianity. This is Three-Self. Paul respected the independence of the newly established local churches. He was not willing to re-evangelize where a church had been established (Rom. 15: 20; 2 Cor. 10:16). There were those in the churches of Britain and America who early on advocated that Asian and African churches should implement three-self as soon as possible. The earliest form of three-self was their proposal. They had many arguments for the concept and filled a number of books with their theses, which would be useful references for us. We must first of all link three-self with love for the church and use this to replace the bad impression that three-self means politics and lack of love for the Church.

We cannot base an understanding of the significance of three-self on the fact that in our early days we came to it through an awareness of the way in which imperialist aggression in China made use of missionaries and religion, and insist that the youth of today and Christians in general

follow this same line of reasoning.

My suggestion is to first marshal a great quantity of material from China and overseas, historical and current, theological and biblical, to demonstrate that in order to run the church well, implementing self-government, self-support and self-propagation are essential. Three-Self is a precondition, or one of the preconditions, for running the church well. This shows that reliance on foreign countries -being governed, supported and propagated by others-is of no benefit to running the church well. It means that the church cannot *be* the church. If we present things in this way, many in Third World churches, judging on their own experience, will find that what we say has merit.

As for missionaries' contributions to China, Frederick Brown of the Allied Forces (an American missionary who led imperialist forces from Tagukou (Tianjin) into Beijing), and other missionaries who imposed the unequal treaties on us in service to their governments, tried many ways to destroy our feelings for our own country. This is something that should be exposed and opposed. We need only proceed by seeking truth from facts, setting out those facts, speaking reason, not exaggerating, and our Christians will respond sympathetically when we speak. But it is best to put these things at the end of what we wish to say. In our seminaries especially, classes in three-self studies should first study church and theological issues and move from this to politics, without rushing into the missionary question. Imperialist is a fuzzy concept, difficult to define, and should be used with caution.

This path of promoting three-self in the churches and implementing three-self education, that is, adjusting the starting point of our discussions, will be more suitable to our listeners in the church. Is such an adjustment important? Must we be particular about results? Does it make a difference, whether we make this adjustment or not? The question touches upon the future of three-self and our international reputation. We must not treat this lightly, nor reject what is new. I hope my colleagues in Three-Self and those in government who work with religions will consider this carefully. I welcome your reactions.

Nanjing Theological Review 3(2003): 4-6. Closing speech at a Conference on *Love Never Ends*, Shanghai, July, 1999.

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The Popularization of Theological Reconstruction

ZHANG XIAOFA

The Chinese Church needs to have its own theological thinking, but there is a lack of interest in contemplating the construction of theological thinking. Theological reconstruction is not simply a matter for church leadership, clergy and professors at seminaries. Much more, it is a matter for Christians in the churches of China. The clergy are a special group, which at different times has varying responsibility for guarding the faith. The solid construction of theology in the Chinese Church is the responsibility of modern clergy, something which, to a certain degree, also functions to safeguard the faith. Theological reconstruction no doubt requires a group of specialists for research and study, but it requires an even greater number of lay people to be involved, to create a special kind of atmosphere. It may be that those who do the work of theology will arise from among them. Theological contemplation only truly begins when these lay people have awakened to it.

Those who call believers to take part in theological reconstruction play a prophetic role and Bishop K.H. Ting is one of these elders of the Church with a burden for both country and people. If we are to call people to truly take part in theological reconstruction, we need, on the one hand, those who can raise the cry, and on the other, those who can stir things up. Of course, when they are ready, and willing, the theological giants of the Chinese Church will arise.

Five years have passed since the Jinan Conference in 1998, and theological reconstruction has entered deep into the hearts of Christians. Increasing numbers of colleagues and church workers and believers with some knowledge of theological reconstruction praise the development of this ministry, and pray to God the Father, saying: Prosper the work of our hands (Ps. 90:17).

1 Popularization of theological reconstruction means better preaching of the Gospel

The souls of the older generation of believers have been profoundly marked by past experiences. But the younger generation of believers ought to be challenging the issues raised by their times and be brave enough to answer; they must face things head on and not avoid them. We are Chinese born and bred, and it is on this good earth that we want to spread the Gospel, using the language of our faith to respond to the unceasing issues of the times we live in. We must have the armor of Chinese theology in order to have answers for others.

Rev. Cao Shengjie, President of the CCC says: “The Church exists in a specific context, nation and society and churches in every nation develop their theological theories in step with the times and use them to guide the Church in how it should build itself up on this foundation. The theological reconstruction our Church is currently carrying out must integrate with our national essence and culture, setting forth how the basic faith and ethical principles and canons of Christianity can enable us to better spread the Gospel and aid believers in living healthy and uplifted spiritual lives. ... Preaching the Gospel is the unchanging mission of the church. But how, in these times, to correctly and effectively spread the Gospel is something that cannot be determined apart from theology.”¹ From the spiritual principles of the Bible we see that all believers have the mission to spread the Gospel (Mt. 28: 19-20).

But on the question of preaching the Gospel correctly, of striking a balance between the Christ of faith and the historical Jesus—theology all believers should grasp—we cannot, as in the past, say simply that Jesus is the Great

Healer, some God of Wealth for the poor, the savior of the suffering. This may attract people to the church, but in the end, because a foundation has not been laid, because a genuine understanding of the truth is not present, this good result cannot be sustained. “The rain fell, and the floods came. And the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell and great was its fall!” (see Mt. 7: 27). In our culture, we do not go about the streets and byways talking about heaven and hell whenever we wish, or saying that if you believe in Jesus you will go to heaven and if you do not believe in Jesus you will go to hell. Modern people do not like to hear such things and they are not afraid of such scare tactics. We must prepare in a serious manner, study well, make use of the related truths in the Bible in a systematic way and preach Jesus Christ to them in a way that is easily understood and acceptable to people today.

The goal of the shift from three-self to three-well is the effective running of the Church. One of these three-wells is well-propagated, which means Chinese ourselves preaching Christ: this is the very crux of the matter; this requires the guidance of theology. The author believes that preaching Christ requires establishing oneself on the Bible and preaching the Gospel found therein. Christ is the heart of the Gospel. Through an understanding of the Gospel, we can deal with political authority, ourselves, society and the Church in a correct manner. To achieve this, theological reconstruction must be brought to every believer. We must put on the pure Gospel of Christ, the truth of the Bible and a systematic theology as our guides. In order to propagate the Gospel well, theological reconstruction must be popularized.

2 Popularization of theological reconstruction means better adaptation to socialist society

We can see from two thousand years of church history that world Christianity has always adapted to its times. Development and changes in theology have been especially striking. Failure to adapt is self-destructive. How shall we

adapt to socialist society? According to Bishop Ting, “effective adaptation must take place on the level of thinking.” This is very true. Adaptation in thinking is very important, and includes the political views and moral values of Christians. For every Christian to adapt to socialist society, it is especially important that theological reconstruction be popularized, clarifying for believers that adaptation to socialist society does not mean abandoning or changing the faith, but rather means better safeguarding and interpreting faith. Adaptation is for the existence and development of the Church, that it may move forward with the times. In the Bible, Nehemiah, Moses and Jesus are all good models of those who both love the church and love their country. As Bishop Ting put it: “We know that Christ, the Word incarnate, was a citizen of a particular country, not a man without a country. He did not adopt a nihilistic attitude towards his own people. He studied his national culture and religious traditions. He announced that he came not to abolish these traditions, but to fulfill them. His people were under the political domination of Rome, and because of this, when he looked upon the capital city, he wept. This was patriotism in that situation.”²

The author believes that in popularizing theological reconstruction among believers there must be both direction and principle. Without these, confusion can reign.

1 Founded on biblical truth. The Bible is the Self-revelation of God and so it is eminently suitable that this revelation should be one of the sources of theological knowledge. “The Bible is the quintessence (of the faith) and the foundation of theology. Thus, the explication of Christian theology should be founded on and rely upon the Bible.”³ Theological discussion apart from the Bible is a tree without roots, a stream without water.

2 It must sustain the faith tradition. Any faith with a long history has its tradition, which can neither be avoided nor easily denied. Of course, some things are kept as part of the heritage and others are cast off. We chose the essentials of the “two creeds” (the Apostles Creed and the Nicene Creed). Whatever is suitable to doing theology in the Chinese Church can be absorbed, can become a requirement of reconstruction.

3 Uphold the three-self path. Theology is the Church thinking. The Chinese Church has its special experience within its particular context, which differs from those of other countries. The three-self path is the starting point of Chinese theological reconstruction. Theology is a dynamic developmental system. It does not leave behind its historical heritage, but keeps the good and discards the bad, reforming and renewing. In addition, the study of theology has a strong concern with reality. Theological exploration must be in touch with current intellectual culture. A living theology is what the Church is thinking in the midst of modern social life, that is, theological reconstruction must clash with, dialogue with and mingle with modern intellectual trends, reflecting the pulse and breath of the times. Additionally, theological topics can clash tremendously with modern society or have far-reaching influence on it, forming a counteraction of *thought to existence*.

4 Integrate with progressive culture. Traditional Chinese culture cherished unity of heaven and humankind, harmony with nature and unity of thought and action. It thus differed from a dualist separation of body and soul, and hatred for the material. Modern progressive culture can serve as an entry point for theology. Confucianism speaks of the Golden Mean, Taoism of *yin* and *yang*; both of these have attracted a great deal of attention in the West and can become important ways of thinking for Chinese theological inquiries, enabling theology to put down genuine roots in the soil of Chinese culture, becoming a theological system initiated by Chinese ourselves, one that is easily accepted and can have an excellent result.⁴ Dr. Zhuo Xiping states: “For the Chinese Church, there are two facets of Christian theological study. One is combing through and becoming acquainted with theological systems that have matured in western cultures. The other is seeking or creating suitable theological concepts and language within a Chinese cultural atmosphere. These two facets are complementary. Both should be allowed to form as they will, neither being emphasized at the expense of the other. Furthermore, their mutual care and working in concert with each other can serve not only as a starting point for mutual en-

lightenment for both east and west intellectual culture in exchanges and integration; it has the even greater possibility to serve a positive function for Chinese theological reconstruction of bringing forth the new from the old, a link between past and future.”⁵

Adaptation does not mean saying whatever everybody else says or following feelings without a goal. Nor is it about mechanically applying the experience of others, trimming the toes to fit the shoes, or limiting the whole truth of the Church. Adaptation is responding to the development of the times, grasping the advanced tide of the times, unearthing the truth and light of the times, being light and salt to the times, and attracting more people to turn to Christ. Thus adaptation is needed for the healthy development of the body of the Church.

The author is promoting the popularization of theological reconstruction because he has discovered that there remain in the Church areas that do not adapt, adjust or harmonize with socialist society:

1 Faith vs. medicine. Some believers think that the sick should avail themselves only of prayer and not seek medical help. Those who seek medical help are not true Christians and do not have a genuine faith. To people outside the Church, this is close to insanity. This believe and be healed mentality has evolved in the wake of *religion fever*. The Church today cannot resort to casting out devils, or healing as a way to expand its influence or attract “believers.” This is out of step with the times, not a way of keeping up with them. There was a believer who fell ill and was persuaded by responsible persons in the Church to rely on faith and not seek medical help. They prayed for him, but only when he was in grave danger and under the strongest urging from family, did he agree to enter hospital. There he fell into a coma and died. The medical staff said sadly that if he had come earlier he could have been saved. Although this is an individual case, its features are familiar, for those who stress faith healing the patterns and sources of thought it exhibits belong to all and its negative effects cannot be underestimated.

2 Belief vs. unbelief. This is a striking and malignant

tumor affecting self-propagation. I call it a tumor because it goes against the principles of biblical truth, goes against political unity and works against what draws us together. The Bible clearly teaches that Christians should respect non-Christians (1Pet. 12: 17); should love them (2 Pet. 1: 7); and get along with them (Rom. 12: 18). Therefore, if Christians are unable to correctly handle relations with non-Christians theologically, it will be very difficult for us to walk the path of constructing a socialist society with our fellow Chinese. This is an area of non-adaptation and must be changed. Therefore, theological reconstruction must be popularized.

3 This world vs. the next. There is a fairly large group of Christians, in both urban and rural areas, who mistakenly understand the text that says “Do not love the world” (1 Jn. 2: 15-16) as saying that materialism is evil, or “Do not serve Mammon,” and speak of those who grow rich from their labors as loving money. Unwillingness to work, denigrating the creation of wealth; this creates inroads for idlers. Actually the world the Bible is referring to here consists of three things: the desire of the eyes, desires of the flesh, pride in the things of this world.

Paul says: “Do (their) work quietly and (to) earn their own living; ... Anyone unwilling to work should not eat” (2 Thess. 3:12, 10). Busy as he was preaching the Gospel and building churches, Paul was still a tent-maker, one who worked with his own hands. Jesus too, during his “hidden period” also worked as a carpenter—are we going to say that Jesus the Lord was corrupted by love for the world? Lydia had a great love for the Lord and was also good at business (Acts 16: 14). So where money is concerned, we must preach a theology of make more, save more, give more, sacrifice or serve more. This will create more wealth for society and increase the potential of the Church for development. “As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good

foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life" (1Tim. 6:17-19).

3 Popularization of theological reconstruction will serve to better build-up Christian ethics

Strengthening the formation of ethics is an extremely important task within theological reconstruction.

Many Christians mistakenly think that since there is justification by faith, and that once one has faith, everything else goes without saying. They do not stress the Christian search for morality and holiness, so they do not speak of good deeds. Christian doctrine requires every Christian who believes in the Lord to walk in the ways of righteousness and to do what is right, just, good and beautiful in the eyes of God. This is the behavior all Christians should exhibit after repenting and believing in the Lord. As the Bible says: "Bear fruit worthy of repentance" (Mt. 3:8). At the same time, this is an important path and means to raise the moral quality of the church, to glorify God and help people.

Christians should strive for three things: 1) religious knowledge; that is one should constantly strive for knowledge of the Bible, knowledge of faith and doctrine and theological knowledge; 2) religious moral sentiments; one must obey the biblical commandments, keep the Lord's teachings, being especially careful in matters of ethics, never offending against doctrine or canon. This serves to restrict the individual in thought, word and deed, to purify and sublimate; 3) religious experience; that is, like other religions, Christianity has its own mystery: "Go into your room and shut the door and pray" (Mt. 6: 6), and "Aspire to live quietly" before God (1 Tim. 4: 11). And this is precisely the Christian way (Is. 30:15). The unity of faith and life, harmony in life and ethics, balance in faith and action. These lie only in taking individual spiritual deeds—that which is before God, that which is secret—and expressing them publicly in service to others. When the three things mentioned above move in concert, the religious experience of the Christian will be deeper and solidier, for "the spiritual life is tempered in the realities of everyday life."⁶

The strengthening of ethical formation in the Church also aims at making the knowledge and action of believers more perfect, so that we “lead a life worthy of the calling to which (you) have been called” (Eph. 4:1). In these times, especially, the actions of Christians should be better. The author believes that the word *good* in the phrase “a good Christian should be a good citizen,” includes the fact that a Christian should have good morals. After all, preaching the Gospel is not just a matter of words; more often it is the case that actions speak louder than words. To be honest, when the Bible speaks of someone as good or evil, it does not speak of faith but rather whether that person has done what is just, good and righteous before God. Before Cornelius believed in the Lord, his righteous actions were pleasing to and remembered by God (Acts 10: 4, 31, 35). Therefore a true Christian must act in accordance with the teachings of the Lord (Mt. 21: 25-32).

Strengthening ethical formation in the Church can enable individuals to have a witness of good deeds, and attract more people to Christ. Strengthening ethical formation is a constant teaching in the Bible. This being the case, theological reconstruction is a necessity, for everyone needs this kind of formation. Hegel once said that if the agency of morality were to be removed from religion, then religion would become superstition. Bishop K.H. Ting, speaking at the Sixth National Chinese Christian Conference, said, “I hope that this meeting will see new developments in the area of Chinese Christian theological reconstruction, and that it can recover what the Bible teaches us, that is, that Christianity should be a religion that stresses ethics and morality ... I hope that in future our Christianity will become a religion which increasingly has a high moral level.” The years since have shown these words to be of profound significance.

Faith is the foundation of morality and the Bible is its source. Theological reconstruction is its direction. “The deterrent power of church ethics and morals comes from Christians’ faith in the God who is everywhere. Their sense of moral responsibility comes from the strivings of their inner spiritual life. Thus virtue is the fruit of faith.”⁷ The

Bible greatly emphasizes morality; six of the Ten Commandments are concerned with morality. If we look at the letters of Paul to the Ephesians, Colossians and Romans, we find that half of what he says is about doctrine and the other half about life. This latter half is mainly concerned with moral issues. Therefore an emphasis on building up morality and ethics in the church is a return to true biblical teachings and reflects a rise in the quality of the church as a whole. The morality of encouraging goodness is not the equivalent of the Gospel, but the Gospel cannot exclude morality. This is especially true for those who already believe: they must not take justification by faith to mean that there is no need for morality, thus losing sight of the need to work to achieve salvation. If the place of morality is excised from within Christianity, we are left with a secular gospel.

“A Christianity which turns a blind eye to all this [the world], 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.”⁸ Therefore, “I hope that through greater spiritual formation, more Bible reading and more theological reflection, more fellowship and, especially, through greater practice, we will receive greater revelation, and in this way, have a richer perception of the broad and deep love of God.”⁹ The Church must walk on two feet, before God and before humanity. Life and everyday life, faith and action, the spiritual life and witness must be in balance. A witness from church history: Consider the reformation in England and Europe and the witness in those times of the great reformer Calvin and the evangelist John Wesley. A theological reconstruction with an emphasis on morality and social responsibility is not unrelated to such examples. If we want Chinese Christianity to walk in health on the broad highway ahead, then we must construct a theology with “a balance between a personal Gospel and social concern.”

Theological reconstruction that stresses ethics and morality is the point of convergence between the Church and Chinese culture in social life. As Bishop Ting has written: “It is in lifting high morality that the excellence of Christianity and other religions lies. China is an ancient

civilization, a nation or morality and ritual. For Chinese intellectuals especially, a discussion of ethics will be more appreciated than a discussion of paradise and will be more likely to make the religious message heard.”¹⁰

4 Popularization of theological reconstruction counteracts heresy

In recent years, there has been a rash of heresies flying the banner of Christianity. Statistics tell us that in the last two decades, more than a thousand self-proclaimed Christs have arisen worldwide. Other kinds of heresies are countless. In China, many heresies have also arisen in these decades. They are like a pestilence, seriously disrupting the Church of God: the Ling Ling Church, whose leader Hua Xuehe proclaims himself the Jehovah for today; the Yellers, whose leader Li Changshou has been called Lord Changshou by adherents; there is Wu Changming, self-appointed Christ, the Anointed King; the self-proclaimed Savior Heir of Christ of the Disciples Sect Xu Sanshu; and Zuo Ken of the Apostles sect, etc.

These heresies and sects have not had a great effect, but recently one called Eastern Lightning has appeared, a sect with a more superstitious, more deeply poisonous message. It began among several women who claimed to have an almighty woman, a so-called Female Christ. This group has established a mysterious and vast organization, their so-called Apostles roam the whole country, beginning from Henan, Anhui, Shandong, Shaanxi, and with unprecedented speed, spread everywhere. These apostles specialize in swallowing up local churches which have a pure faith, targeting responsible persons of influence in the church. Wherever they go, they put on an outward show of loving hearts and good deeds that most Christians would have difficulty in achieving. They are extremely hard-working and long suffering. Their heretical teachings lie in their efforts at theorizing, systematization and evangelization. Their organizational structure, joined with these efforts, is unprecedented and thus their activities are widespread and develop rapidly. They are like a cloud of locusts, group

after group eating through the countryside. Their work methods are planned out and standardized, aiming first for rural areas and then urban ones. When they enter a district, they first pull in the responsible persons in the church; then, relying on these persons' influence, capture all the churches in the district.

The course of Eastern Lightning can be divided into several stages: 1) It began in Henan, tempting people with gifts; distributing books, often with bills tucked into them. 2) This was followed by intimidation. If people did not follow along they would be threatened, and force-fed doctrine. 3) Sex was often used to tempt people to sin, then forcing them to submit, threatening them with the ruin of their reputation. Many have fallen into this trap.

We know from local churches that this Eastern Lightning is mad. To fall in with them is like being beaten to death. The consequences of trying to leave are unthinkable. Their methods are cruel, even family members are implicated. They teach that Satan is wisdom, that the murder of others is helping God (meaning the Female Christ) in revenge. From their so-called Scriptures, we see that their language is coarse, full of contradictions and poor logic. Basically nothing they say is to be trusted. However, many people have been hoodwinked by just such a strange heresy.

If believers know their Bible and have an understanding of the correct view of God, Christology, the Church, the Christian life, values, money, marriage and worldview, they will not be easily led astray. Thus, the popularization of theological reconstruction is an urgent need for the Church today. To hesitate is tantamount to providing an opportunity for sects and heresies to grow strong and develop. Resisting heresy and sects is an important task facing the Chinese Church in this new century. The Latin church father Lactantius (ca. 250-325) analyzed the origins of heresies and superstitions. He felt that clarifying what is false is the first step toward truth. The next is to define what truth is. He summed up his thinking in four points. First, forgetting reason results in ignorance of the true God; it is only in adversity that people worship the true God, while

in good fortune they despise the true God. Second, there is a kind of persistent power which is always opposed to the truth, that spreads darkness, obscures people's souls and causes humans to fall into repeated error; third, philosophers and doctors have not enabled humanity to cast off error; and fourth, humanity has not discovered true religion.

Why are heresies found in numerous villages and small towns? Because the educational level and faith quality of most believers there is low and they lack a comprehensive and correct understanding of the truth. There is a serious lack in rural areas of clergy who have received standard theological training. These sober facts tell us we must pay attention to church work in the countryside and stress the promotion of theological reconstruction. If we do not work to raise the quality of believers, it will affect the whole future of the Chinese Church.

5 Popularization of theological reconstruction will better ward off the tendency toward superstition

Some people believe that religion without mystery is not religion. But Christianity is the least mysterious of religions. Seen from the viewpoint of sociology of religion and comparative religion, the simplicity of its faith, the conciseness of its liturgy and the openness of its organization are unmatched.

Superstition is a fairly widespread psycho-sociological phenomenon. The usual understanding of the word superstition is a psychosis founded in ignorance based on self-interest in which cause and effect are mistakenly linked to some mysterious and terrible force. It is a belief, a concept, an act, or a practice. Objectively, superstition brings together mistaken inferences, weak ideas and confused feelings; subjectively, it is a psychological state: a blind belief in cause and effect relationships that whether experientially or logically have not and cannot be substantiated. The superstitious psychology is easily led to mistaken life practices and superstition is one factor in shaping an ignorant character.¹¹

In the past, religion was never mentioned without be-

ing linked to ignorance, backwardness, superstition and opium. Nowadays such simple assumptions no longer hold, especially in the consideration of religion among academics and intellectuals. Awareness of the importance of religion is greater than at any other period in our history. We have already rid ourselves of two labels: *foreign religion* and *superstition*. But recently what has been happening in rural churches is disquieting and arouses fears that the superstition label is on its way back. This is my fear.

The ratio of rural Christians among the increasing number of people joining the Church is very large. It is an undeniable fact that a great number of rural Christians are illiterate or semi-literate. Moreover, most come to the faith with very strong goals: to be healed; out of curiosity; or because of family contradictions. Of course large numbers of people joining the Church is not the issue; the problem lies in the quality of these believers; in the depth of their faith and whether their faith is genuine, based on right understanding. Moreover there is a shortage in the Church of clergy with regular theological training, which creates an imbalance in pastoral care. Along with the danger of damage from heresies, there are many people with a surfeit of enthusiasm and a deficit of wisdom who one-sidedly stress spreading the gospel. This makes for a great deal of the blind leading the blind. Added to this are divisions, trouble-making, heresy, etc., all of which result in disturbances in the church. The most pressing demand at present is, on the one hand, training clergy of better quality and thereby raising the level of believers while, on the other hand, making a comprehensive effort to promote theological reconstruction. This will aid in raising the quality of faith in the Church.

The true God is the foundation of truth and truth is the foundation of true religion. In this case there can be no doubt that Christianity is true religion. But the issues discussed above sow doubt in some hearts, and some mistakenly equate Christianity with superstition and false religion. Theological reconstruction can correct these inappropriate tendencies in the Church.

We need to assert that:

1 Christianity is universal love, not selfishness. When believers' faith turns to superstition, it will certainly be selfish, lacking the expansiveness of Christ's universal love which unselfishly serves others. "Take thought for what is noble in the sight of all" (Rom. 12: 17). "But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Mt. 5: 44). "If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all" (Rom. 12: 18). These verses express this truth.

2 Christianity is positive, not negative. When believers' faith turns toward superstition, they will take a negative view of this world. They will think all is vanity, which clashes with the construction of socialist spiritual and material civilization. We should see the world as good: heaven and earth are creations of God, filled with meaning. Christians must enter into the world and bear witness, spread the Gospel and enter into the affairs of the world. The Bible teaches: "Not to be served, but to serve" (see Mk. 10: 45); "You are the salt of the earth...You are the light of the world" (Mt. 5: 13-16).

3 Christianity is based on reason, not on superstition. If the Christian message is out of step with science and advanced information, it will be unable to offer a reasoned explanation to society, unable to promote historical development. Then it would truly be a superstitious and backward religion. But Christianity has an ultimate explanation of the source of creation and history. God is the source of order and ability; God is the one who gave order and regularity to the world and because of this human history has continued to evolve. Furthermore, our faith and doctrine place importance on developing the moral potential of humanity and training people in the life of the spirit. It stresses harmony between human beings and God, between individuals and between humans and nature. And so humans can, through striving after the love of God, be constantly sanctified and sublimated, and finally, in their moral practice, constantly bring forth spiritual and moral fruit (see Gal. 5: 22-23).

The Church has a special responsibility entrusted to it by God to safeguard the purity of the truth of God. Oppos-

ing superstition serves not only to promote and popularize theological reconstruction in the Church, but serves to purify the church itself and thus advances the development of the Church in society. Actively popularizing theological reconstruction means leaving no place for superstition. Only in this way can the Church maintain the purity of its faith, adapt to the needs of the age, and mold believers' souls.

Conclusion

We must understand our great mission and take up the great responsibility to reflect and ponder, for the twenty-first century is an age in which science flourishes. It is also an age which will truly realize the potential of the church in society to take up an important social function and play a positive role. To better preach the pure Gospel of Christ, to better serve society, to firmly oppose superstition, to put an end to sects and heresies, we must popularize theological reconstruction.

Nanjing Theological Review 3(2003): 85-98.

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2 K.H. Ting, *Love Never Ends* (Nanjing: Yilin Press, 2000), 94.

3 Xu Zhiwei, Introduction to *Guide to Christian Theology* (Beijing: Academica Sinica, 2001), 3.

4 *Bulletin of the Liaoning CCC/TSPM* 3(2001): 54.

5 Quoted in Xu Zhiwei, 1.

6 *Writings from Nanjing Union Theological Seminary* (Nanjing: Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, 1992), 202.

7 *Newsletter of the Zhejiang CC/TSM*, no. 31 (April 2002): 7.

8 *Love Never Ends*, 481.

9 *Ibid.*, 265.

10 *Ibid.*, 510.

11 Luo Bingxiang. *Christian Through and the 21st Century*. (Beijing: Academica Sinica Press, 2001), 439-440.

The Church in the Modernization of China:

A Theological Interpretation

XIAO ANPING

The Chinese Church has become involved in the modernization process in China, just as Christians in every country contribute to the independence and development of their own nations. Many Chinese Christians have put faith into practice through their deeds in this endeavor, some have made great sacrifices and some have given their lives. Their actions, values and contributions are a witness to Christ in China, manifesting the love of God and glorifying the name of Christ. This is the abundant grace of God, showing forth the vitality of Christianity, while at the same time adding substance and reality to theological thinking in the Chinese Church.

In order to understand and interpret theologically the involvement of the Church in the vast enterprise of Chinese modernization, and to comprehensively and profoundly strengthen theological reconstruction, this essay will attempt, by basing itself on theological evidence from the Bible, from dogmatics, from church history and tradition, from Christian ethics and from the history of Christian thought, to discuss the rightness, reasonableness and importance of Church involvement in modernization, to explore a theological interpretation and expound the inherent relationship between practice and basic doctrine for Chinese Christians, with related theological principles.

1 The Theological Basis for Church Participation in the Modernization of China

Christianity is a religion that stresses adaptability and social involvement; it advocates a theology of both this world and the next. According to the Bible, this life and the next are mutually linked realms; neither is stressed at the expense of the other. If believers wish to gain the blessings of the afterlife, they must treat this life according to the will of God; thus, Christianity values mortal life. Jesus says, “I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one” (Jn. 17: 15). This is not world-rejection. We are asked to avoid the evil of the world, not the world itself. In the Incarnation, Jesus came into the world, made manifest the great love of God and lived among us, in history. Justo Gonzales puts it well when he says that it is unimaginable that Christianity would be separate from the world.¹ Obviously escaping or rejecting the world is unrealistic. If we distance ourselves from the world, from social reality and our true context, Christian faith has nothing to say; it becomes pie in the sky. In Jesus’ deeds and teachings while on earth we can see his full humanity: he understood people’s sufferings, felt for the poor, helped the weak.

Christianity asks us to observe the rules of morality. Six of the Ten Commandments regulate human ethical behavior. In the New Testament the Law is summed up as “Love your neighbor as yourself.” And Jesus says: “...You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘ You shall love your neighbor as yourself (Mt. 22: 37-39). Love is the center of Christianity, the basis of Christian ethics. The Bible says “Hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good” (Rom. 12: 9), to “overcome evil with good” (Rom. 12: 21), to have a sense of right and wrong, and of justice, “take thought for what is noble in the sight of all” (Rom. 12: 17). Those who do good will have their reward in heaven and the unrighteous will have their retribution. “For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without

works is also dead” (James 2: 26). The fruit of the Holy Spirit is nine-fold, including love, joy, peace, generosity and faithfulness (Gal. 5: 22). Paul says, be all things to all people, as long as you do not go against the truth. “ If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all” (Rom. 12: 18). “ Let us live honorably as in the day...” (Rom. 13: 13). Jesus loved his people and the nation of Israel and once wept over Jerusalem.

On the subject of Church and State, Paul says: “ Let every person be subject to governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God” (Rom. 13: 1). “ For the Lord’ s sake, accept the authority of every human institution” (1 Pet. 2: 13). “ Do not seek your own advantage, but that of others” (1 Cor. 10: 24). “ ...it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth” (1 Cor. 13: 6). And the Bible gives us the Sermon on the Mount and the Eight Blesseds: “ Blessed are the pure in heart, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven” (Mt. 5: 3-10). We must be light and salt (Mt. 5: 13-14); “ For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve” (Mk. 10: 45). “ For this very reason, you must make every effort to support your faith with goodness, and goodness with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with endurance, and endurance with godliness, and godliness with mutual affection, and mutual affection with love” (2 Pet. 1: 5-7). We should seek personal excellence such as altruism (Phil. 2: 4), contentment (Heb. 13: 5), generosity (Ps. 112: 5, 9); we should do our duty towards others, such as caring for the young and old (1 Tim. 5: 4); we also have worldly duties, such as paying taxes (Rom. 13: 6-7). “ All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3: 16-17). Thus, loving our country, upholding our just socialist system, taking part in the construction of Chinese modernization and serving society are all actions in accord with biblical teaching and with Christian faith.

Proofs from dogmatics

The main attribute of God is love; the Bible says “God is love” (1 Jn. 4: 8). The love of God is broad and deep and without end. “In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 Jn. 4: 10). K.H. Ting also says that love is the highest attribute of God. The doctrine of the human nature of Christ and that of his divinity are equally important. If he is not truly human, his death upon the cross would be just an illusion, and so he must be human, in order to die on behalf of humankind. The view that stresses his divinity at the expense of his humanity or denies his humanity altogether is one-sided and wrong. He had a real physical body, but he did not inherit human sinfulness. Like any human being, he grew normally, and matured intellectually, physically, spiritually and socially. The fact that his social relationships also matured must not be overlooked.

The Church today is located in society and must deal with its relationship with that society. Maturing in this society is like Jesus maturing in relationship to his own society, we cannot distance ourselves from this environment or from our social relationships. Jesus brought love to the people, that they might receive grace. In ecclesiological terms, Christ is head of the Church and the Church is his body. The body symbolizes that “all members of the body, though many, are one body” (1 Cor. 12: 12). At the same time, the local church is involved in service, as in serving one another (Rom. 12: 7), providing for others (Rom. 12: 8), helping others (1 Cor. 12: 28). Today, as part of the worldwide Church, the Chinese Church takes part in modernization in China, takes up its social responsibility, serves the people and “work[s] for the good of all” (Gal. 6: 10). All this is in accord with dogmatics.

Church history

Many churches work for the unity of their own countries, serving society with all their might. This caring for society may take the form of running charities, hospitals, schools and so on. African American ministers used to open

a school along with a church. In the 1950s, the social gospelers took part in the Civil Rights Movement; in the 1960s and 1970s, they struggled against poverty. In both cases, they made great contributions to society. The Church is part of society, connected to the material environment and the social context. It must deal with relationships among people, and therefore the Church is closely linked to society and nation. No church can cast off its social or national environments. The English Church is very English; the German Church, very German. The early Church had to adapt to its Greco-Roman cultural surroundings. Roman society required an emphasis on theory, so church fathers like Justin made use of Greek philosophy to explain and prove the faith, to enable Christianity to better exist and develop in that context. This was the first *indigenization* or contextualization of Christianity.

Today the Chinese Church is taking part in construction in its own country, it is in dialogue with Chinese culture, adapting to Chinese society; this is also a contextualization issue. These things have a long history and are not at odds with historical church traditions or development. In addition, social service is an inherent part of church activities.² Paul views social ethics as in line with the spirit of the Gospel. He does not limit the Gospel to the narrow world of Judaism, but expands it to the larger society, to the Gentiles and to the whole world. His ecumenism is very important. Paul exhorted the Thessalonians: “admonish the idlers” (1 Thess. 5: 14). In the Today’s Chinese version, this is translated as an admonition to do nothing that is not in obedience to God. Martin Luther also stressed the necessity of the nation; he held it in high esteem, and proposed that obedience to the state was the obligation of the Christian, as it was of all the people. In his view the church and state were not at odds, but were complementary. They were two entities established by God, and the state had its specific functions. He exhorted Christians to uphold the government and the government to uphold justice.

The modernization of China is a just endeavor. That Chinese Christians should support and participate in it

goes without saying. Paul said to Titus, “Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work” (Titus 3:1). The Church and the State should cooperate in doing their separate work. In the course of modernization, the Chinese Church has become aware that it should undertake theological renewal and adapt to Chinese society. It must play a prophetic role in Chinese society, have a servant role in Chinese construction, reflect on its context, know its faith and theology anew and strive to keep up with modernization, enabling Christian tradition to meet the needs of modern people and to develop with the times.

Christian values and social values, Christian morality and social morality are not at all in conflict. The two have commonalities and Christianity has a very large social function: in harmony and stability; in history and culture; in international exchanges; in morality. The Chinese Church has made its witness in Chinese society, but it has to be said that there is still a need to be confident and firm of purpose. The greater the contribution of the Church, the more successful will be its efforts to make itself known and the greater the glory to God. In addition to guidance from God, what has brought the church this far is the important role of its ethics and morality, which gives the faith its abundant vitality. This is an important reason for its endurance over two thousand years and more.

In *The Protestant Ethic and the Rise of Capitalism*, Weber stresses that whatever people do, it is for the greater glory of God. To glorify God, live for God: this is a significant Christian view. Luther put forward the idea of vocation or calling, which he believed came from the Bible. God gave human beings a mission, instructing them to work. Deuteronomy says: “Six days you shall labor and do all your work” (Deut. 5: 13). This means that anyone, no matter who, must work hard in his or her own job or profession, be devoted to his or her duty and in this way glorify God and aid neighbors. This has real significance for loving and doing a good job in one’s work. It teaches people not to take too lightly or look down upon their own work and role in life, to see work as a calling from God. Calvin-

ism absorbed this concept, and stressed hard work even more, no matter what work God had given you, must do it with all your might and energy.³ Calvinism proposes that the *end* or goal of life is to work hard in production, to profit through business, to save and draw interest, to accumulate capital, to invest widely, to be careful of time and money and to be abstemious. It forbids all pleasures of the flesh such as prostitutes, liquor and gambling. It both supports economic development and promotes ethics and morality. Here we find that it is entirely possible for people to seek the treasures and benefits of this world and not offend against doctrine.

The *Institutes of the Christian Religion* by Calvin develop very well the reform aspect of Protestant thinking and proceed to bring together Protestant thinking and actual society, enabling its theology to be better able to adapt to new social needs. Calvin promotes keeping to one's post and being devoted to duty, enacting planned charitable work among the poor; he bans begging, promotes actively developing industry, commerce and trade; he opposes high interest loans, for goods should be sold at fair prices. He also established fines for selling at short weights, exaggerated measurements, and so on.⁴ His doctrine of predestination was a denunciation of the corrupt lives of the lords of the Church and feudal society; for the people it stressed active participation in social activities and encouraged getting rich. But he opposed the luxurious life of the Pope and many of his ideas were in opposition to those of the Pope. The Pope said that wealth leads people into sin and away from salvation; Calvin said: Wealth is a sign of success for those who have been blessed by God.⁵ Therefore Protestantism promotes an active, involved Christian life. We cannot make an arbitrary decision that wealth is evil. We must be objective.

The Jesus Family, founded in north China in 1921, called on its followers to abandon family, property and profession and enter into the group to live an ascetic life of "poor food and tattered clothes." In the villages of Shandong and Yunnan, their followers preached the end of the world, giving the specific date for Jesus' return and

the destruction of the world. Church members quit working, and in isolated instances played out a tragedy of barricading themselves in and waiting, causing serious damage to human life and property. This is diametrically counter to true faith. Calvinists believe that the standard of true faith is “Christian behavior that adds to the glory of God.”⁶ Calvin praised music, art and true science, believing that these could aid humans in knowing God and could guide human life. For Chinese Christians to be involved in modernization, work hard at their jobs and professions, develop all truth, goodness and beauty, and support the construction of socialist spiritual civilization, is in accord with Protestant tradition, ethical thinking and doctrine. “During the ten-year reform of the economic system, a great quantity of facts has shown that religious believers and non-believers alike have worked hard for individual and social well being.”⁷ Through their hard work, their lives are materially fulfilled and they glorify God. Is there any reason to oppose this?

Modern theology takes a positive view of life in the world and of society. For example, Liberation theology, feminist theology, Black theology, contextual theology and so on all reflect the quest of Third World peoples for equality, freedom, liberation, national autonomy, ethnic identity and contextualization. Moved by liberation theology, many Latin American priests and nuns supported and even took direct part in democratic revolutions and some died in these wars.

Modernists advocate developing along with society and improving society. At one time they had a definite impact on Chinese Christian intellectuals. Influenced by progressive thinking, Y.T. Wu expressed his support for the people’s democratic revolution: “The Christian mission for this age is to change the present society which treats persons as slaves and tools into a society which fully honors the value of persons.”⁸ In this way, the value and integrity of a person as a social subject, a person possessing soul and moral consciousness, gains recognition.

In 1950, Y.T. Wu initiated the Three-Self Movement, setting Chinese Christianity on the three-self path of love

country, love church. Believers, like others, loved their country and helped build new China. In 1956, the Second Plenary of the TSPM Committee issued a resolution saying that the liberation and construction of China clearly demonstrated God's holy, good and loving will for the Chinese people, and made believers' participation in socialist construction, one of three Witnesses for the Age of the Chinese Church. Bishop Ting said that the Church must "become one with the Chinese people who were undertaking the socialist experiment," ... "encouraging the people in the continuation of their valuable work ..to link them to God's love as this is expressed in God's work of creation, salvation and sanctification. In this way, Christians will have a new and fuller understanding of work and the roots of this enterprise will go deeper and will be connected to the nature of the love of God. In such a situation, Christians will gain a kind of peace, a steadiness and confidence, and a calmness and undauntedness, for we sense that through Christ we can be united to the ultimate being that loves the cosmos." ⁹

This kind of spiritual Life or transcendence, in no way denies the good of this world, but supports human beings to enter into history, to raise the quality of secular endeavors. Christ came not to destroy, but to fulfill. These theological views affirm this life and clearly affirm the hard work of our people in the construction of socialism. Under the guidance of correct theological thinking, the masses of believers will cast off old consciousness, love life, care for reality and social progress. They will take part in all patriotic activities that actively contribute to construction of the nation and are beneficial to it. The whole of the history of Christian thought including modern theology and modernism are evidence of this.

2 Modes of Christian Participation in Modernization, Links to Doctrine and to Theological Interpretations and Principles

The Eleventh Plenum of the Third Party Congress in 1978 proposed as a general task for the new era the construction of China as a modern socialist nation. Today Chi-

nese achievements in modernization are notable and have brought a vast transformation to Chinese society. As Party Chairman Jiang Zemin said, “Through the common efforts of the whole Party and of all ethnic groups in the whole country, we have succeeded in bringing about the first two steps in our three-step strategy for modernization; our people are now better-off. This is a great victory for the socialist system, and a new milestone in the historical development of the Chinese people.”¹⁰ Our country will basically have achieved modernization by mid-century, making it a prosperous and strong, democratic socialist nation with a high-level of civilization. In the first two decades of this century, China focused on achieving a more comfortable standard of living, making the economy flourish, society harmonious and the lives of people stable and prosperous. The Chinese Church, located in this socialist country in the process of strengthening modernization, takes an active part, along with all other groups, and witnesses in its own context, not only contributing to modernization, but transforming the image of the Chinese Church and raising its position in society.

Besides taking part in productive work, Chinese believers contribute to the construction of socialist modernization by running factories, hospitals, kindergartens, homes for senior citizens, shops, bookstores, and hotels; in tree planting, agricultural pursuits such as raising mushrooms, tree fungus and the like; animal husbandry such as raising pigs, shrimp, fish and ducks; making donations to run schools, undertake technical training, aid the poor and respond to disasters, road and bridge repairs, bringing free tea to travelers, taking part in volunteer efforts to clean up and keep their environs healthy, providing social services, uncover and study religious culture, protect religious relics, etc. The Church has also established the social service organization The Amity Foundation and the Amity Printing Company. Now the national CCC/TSPM has set up social service departments to enable the Church to better express the social value of church groups in this time of social transition, to take up its social responsibilities to care for society and to serve the people, to extend love and live out Christ in social life.

A retired doctor in Beijing has made outstanding achievements in health care for several hundred residents and was lauded in the media. She says that there are two sources of strength in her heart: one arises from the care, trust, encouragement and training she received from the Party and the people; the second is that she always puts her work into my prayers. She has only one desire, that God gives her a heart on fire with love for others.¹¹ In this doctor, we can truly see that many Christians become involved in service and modernization efforts because of education by Party and government, and because of religious faith. This is a function of their dual identities as citizens and as believers. Religious consciousness and patriotic consciousness have an organic connection: the two impulses form a single energy uniting love for country and love for church. This has become a marked characteristic of patriotic consciousness among believers.

In Caohejing economic development zone in Shanghai, engineer Brother Du Zuyin of the Loving Heart and Health Engineering and Technology Company recently developed a twenty-first century health elixir that is anti-aging, anti-Alzheimer's disease, and has a purifying, detoxifying and strengthening effect. He has researched altering the structure of water for use in improving the health of the people, an answer to the needs of people with hereditary cardiovascular disease and something that will enrich all society. The Bible tells us to work for the good of others and to serve others. This is exactly what Brother Du does. He has given society the fruits of his scientific research, using them to serve the people and society, expressing a moral and social meaning and making a beautiful witness to Christ.

From this we can also see that Christianity functions to accelerate, not decelerate, the economy. Though the development of Christianity requires an economic base, it also strongly promotes the forces of production and technological development and has practical significance for economics and economic ethics. The Protestant ethic encourages industry, enterprise, commerce and trade, praises diligence that leads to wealth, and, at the same time, advo-

cates morality and opposes waste and corruption. Today, in the course of perfecting the socialist economic system, the restraint of ethics and morality is needed in order to avoid certain negative impacts. The Protestant ethic which once played a positive role in capitalist economic development can be quite illuminating in terms of the Chinese market economy. “Christian ethics should become a beneficial complement to socialist ethics and morality,”¹² acting as a referent. As Weber said, you can work for God and get rich, but you cannot get rich on the sins of the flesh. Christians with means must do good works, storing up wealth in heaven (Mt. 6:20).

It is glorious to take part in production. God blesses eager work: “In all toil there is profit” (Prov. 14: 23). God wants humans to work hard and admonishes laziness (Prov. 6: 6-11). In order to live, we must earn our keep each day. The Bible says it well: “For even when we were with you, we gave you this command: Anyone unwilling to work should not eat. For we hear that some of you are living in idleness, mere busybodies, not doing any work. Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living” (2 Thess. 3: 10-12). Christians should both work and pray. May God “strengthen the work of our hands” (Ps. 90:17). Believer and non-believer alike must rely on their labor to eat. It is dishonorable to get without working. Taking part in modernization is a wonderful work, a diligent work, exactly what the Bible is talking about and God will bless it the same. In taking part in modernization, the Church expresses its social value and function, and this is another contribution to the construction of socialist material and spiritual civilization, as well as a contribution to world civilization and the creation of wealth for humanity. Such efforts will certainly be precious in the sight of God; the hard work is not in vain. This also illustrates the extension of Christian love, which will reach many places and fill the earth. At the same time, it illustrates that God’s creation is ongoing and that he wants human beings to be co-workers, making this world better.

Christianity does not advocate placing believers and

non-believers at odds, separating this life and the life to come; distancing faith from life; setting faith at odds with the world; the Church at odds with society and state; setting Christianity at odds with economic development. Christianity foregrounds the value and position of persons, believing that human success and work in this world glorify God, and are significant for gaining salvation in the world to come. In speaking of the theology of Teilhard de Chardin, K.H. Ting said: "Though we are semi-finished products, God wants to use us to further history, to further evolution and creation. This is the process by which semi-finished products become finished ones." This Christian spirit of not disparaging humanity is compatible with modern social development, and is an expression of progressive civilization, an act of abundance; it is joining together with all the people of the nation to transform lives and build a rich and strong nation.

Believers and non-believers are all working in a common struggle to build in China a modern socialist country. There is no reason for us to oppose this valuable and beneficial endeavor. Love of God is expressed in concrete actions that show love for others. If in this world we do not express our faith in actions, behavior and fruits, then our faith is empty, doctrine becomes empty and our love for God cannot find expression. Jesus is our model. He made the healing of illness the concrete action by which he made manifest the love of God. Believers have blended their faith and spiritual lives with their everyday lives and work. Their attitude to life is serious, conscientious and positive, and they are willing to contribute to modernization. This is the concrete expression of moral action in faith. This is the true value of humanity.

Those who despise reality, who do not take active part in production, who are essentially idlers, want only to use so-called faith as a cover for opposing work. The Bible tells us that the lazy will be poor and the diligent rich. Perhaps understanding of these verses has been corrupted by negative, corrupt and out-of-date theology. The relationship between faith and reality and work has not been comprehensively and correctly faced. Without correct theological guid-

ance, interpretation may fall into error; this does not glorify God, and can actually do quite a lot of damage. Nothing that is true, good, or beautiful is outside the love of God. Origen said that God is the fount of all wisdom. There is much truth, goodness and beauty outside the Church, such as art, science, wealth, well-being, social virtue and so on, none of which we can deny. God is Lord of all creation, the source of all wealth: “The earth and its fullness are the Lord’s” (1 Cor. 10: 26). Everything belongs to God, who gives riches to human beings (Deut. 8: 16-18). The grace of God is extremely abundant, we cannot place limits upon it.

Just as K.H. Ting advocates in his theology of the Cosmic Christ, God is the Lover of the Cosmos: “All God’s creative and saving action is for all of humankind.” Christ is a Cosmic Christ, the Christ of all humanity. He is transcendent and all things come from him (Col. 1: 16), “He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (v. 17), he is the beginning (v. 18), the source of all truth, goodness and beauty, “For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell” (v. 19). As Wang Aiming has said in his article, “Understanding the Task of Theological Reconciliation in the Chinese Church,” “there yet exists outside the church the truth, goodness and beauty of God’s creation.”

Thus we must not make a duality of belief and non-belief, and in particular we must not say that no matter what good non-believers do they are destined for hell. In addition to the effect of such talk on harmony and stability, this view does not correctly deal with belief and unbelief, with relationships within and outside the Church, nor with the relationship between faith and persons, society and the world.

The Church is one cell within society and cannot develop without society; it cannot leave the soil and atmosphere of a society. Nor can the Church leave its nation; its fate is tied to the fate of the nation. Luther stressed that the Church and the state have different functions, but they are not opposed, nor in contradiction. They are very close and it is entirely possible for them to cooperate. This coopera-

tion is not a situation where one wants and the other does not, nor where one party swallows up the other, but two parties coexisting, without prejudice. Thus the Church is not something that must be eradicated in the course of modernization. In countries that have been modernized to a moderate degree, such as in England and the U.S., Christianity and other religions continue to exist and are able to deal well with relations between church and state. But for the church to exist and develop, it cannot turn its back on its own country, but must adapt to its nation's context and environment. The Bible tells us to honor those in authority (1 Pet. 2: 17), and to pray for them (1 Tim. 2: 1-3). Two thousand years of church history tell us that we must deal rightly with relations between Church and State.

Today the Chinese Church needs to reflect deeply on this question, understand and interpret it theologically and take very seriously the Sinification and contextualization of the construction of the Church. We have clearly seen that the Church we build in China cannot be western. It must be a Chinese Church, with Chinese characteristics, for it is in this nation of China that the Chinese Church is building itself. Were the Chinese Church to remove itself from China, it could not be the Chinese Church. Looking at Chinese Church history, it is only when the nation became independent that the church became truly independent. The construction and development of the Church is linked to the nation. To reject society, the state and modernization is an error.

As we comprehensively promote theological reconstruction, the Chinese Church should not, in seeking to bring Christianity together with Chinese culture and society in the course of strengthening theological contextualization, overlook the fact that besides uniting with what is best in traditional Chinese culture, it should particularly bring Christianity together with modern China's new culture and society. We should not underestimate the social context of Chinese modernization. Proceeding in this practical and concrete way to do theological reflection and exploration can accelerate the transformation of certain incompatibilities with modernization

which still exist in the Church, reforming theology and bringing it in step with the times. As Bishop Ting writes: “The masses of the Chinese Christians love their country, support the people’s government, actively engage themselves in working for modernization and do not support divisiveness. However, this does not imply that their first allegiance is not to Christ but rather to the state, or that they relinquish the principle of independence from the state in faith, life, work and administration.”¹³

In China, Church and State are separate and Church affairs are handled by the Church itself; the government does not interfere. It is incorrect and a distortion of the facts to call the Chinese Church an “official church.” Chinese Christians uphold socialist new China, they participate in modernization and support the just endeavors of the people’s government. Does that make it logical to call them an official church? Rather these things are an expression of faith. Again, we cannot use separation of Church and State to oppose Church-State cooperation or the contribution of the Church to the nation. We cannot make the government into an object of hostility, something unrelated to faith and the spiritual life, or even at odds with these. This goes against the theological and faith principles of love country, love church and glorify God and benefit the people.

Christian ethics, like other ethical systems, consist of mainly two large areas: providing an ultimate ideal of character and moral standards, establishing a universally recognized system of absolute values; and, concrete rules and regulations based on this system. From its beginnings, Christian morality showed itself to be progressive in thinking and principles about values, such as a sense of justice, the quest for equality, freedom, goodness and love, especially love which became its highest moral principle. But its morality did not depart from the Bible, or replace faith. Quite the opposite, faith is the basis of morality and morality or virtue is the fruit of faith: faith impels action; action shows forth faith. Faith requires that people seek holiness, goodness, peace and good works, and keep a distance from sin, being thus sanctified, in the pursuit of holiness and

perfection. This beautiful virtue is closely linked to faith.

But the Gospel cannot reject morality. It cannot set saving grace and spirituality at odds with morality and service; even less can it deny the value and function of morality. Hegel said if morality is taken out of religion, religion becomes superstition. Christian ethics is an ethics of love. K.H. Ting emphasizes a God is love theology, developing and expanding love, a love that loves to the end. These are of great significance for the building of ethical thinking in the Chinese Church, to service to society, and for participation in modernization. Christian ethics and Chinese ethics both show forth love. And through love, these two have renewed contact fused and merged in a relationship, that is renewing the modern mission of Christian ethics along with a renewal and rebuilding of Chinese ethics and world ethics.

To paraphrase Einstein, all human value is the basis of morality. This observation means that we must never forget that reliance on knowledge and technology alone cannot bring good fortune and honor to human life. Humankind has every reason to place preachers with lofty moral standards and values above discoverers of objective truths.¹⁴ In the great process of Chinese modernization, to value and lift up the concept of Christian ethics and morality enables the Chinese Church, seeking its own development within a socialist society, to have its own place. The special characteristic of the social function of the Chinese Church is as a model of morality and a model of service. This is historical inevitability operating in the development of the Chinese Church; it is the light of the truth of Christ in China. Bishop Ting states: “It is my hope that after a fairly long period of time, a new form of Chinese Christianity will rise on the eastern horizon—one that speaks of ethics and makes clear the difference between truth and falsity and is mentally sharp, one that lifts high Christ and that lifts high morality. A Chinese Christianity with an important message for the world.”

Many Christians imitate Christ, in willing and enthusiastic service, and many of them have received various commendations as advanced workers. They are well thought of

by Chinese society and by government departments because they serve joyfully and without thought of repayment. One retired pastor, over eighty years old, has gone each morning for over ten years to volunteer at a shop selling soy milk. Such persons do not think of awards or of receiving any kind of benefit for themselves, but like blades of grass which cover the earth with green, do their small bit for society, expending some of their energy. For this elderly pastor, this is faith in action on the soil of China. At home, at work, in the area of social morals, the great amount of witness by Christian believers shows how active they are in society and that their Christian faith is inseparable from ethical and moral action. It also shows that faith is not in contradiction to the patriotism, collectivism and humanism promoted in China and furthermore that believers who serve Christian ideals of morality can also accept the moral principles of patriotism and socialism.

Socialist spiritual civilization is a broad concept. When the government attacks smuggling, punishes corruption and promotes good behavior, Christians are greatly encouraged. Genuinely faithful and moral Christians have high moral standards and yearn for a highly civilized society. They can entirely move with the moral standard of the Four Haves: “to have ideals; to have morals; to have culture; to have regulations.” They respond positively to slogans such as *Wujiang simei* (The Five Stresses [stress on decorum, manners, hygiene, discipline and morals] and Four Beauties [beauty of mind, language, behavior and environment]) and contribute their energies and strengths to the construction of socialist spiritual civilization.”¹⁵ Chinese Christians have a high sense of social responsibility. They are filled with love for the people, are enthusiastic about life and filled with confidence and hope for the future. Their faith gives them tremendous strength and from this come good deeds that are a living out of faith and life, a witness to faith and to the Chinese Church. In our present consumer economy and in society, stress on behavior, morality and honesty is extremely important. If Christians do not stress morality and honesty, they are not good Christians.

The Chinese Church has been involved in construct-

ing modernization for many years already and should do some summing up and analysis in terms of its work experience and theology, thereby refining and generalizing to draw out useful guidelines. It is not difficult to see that the church's involvement in modernization is proper, reasonable, important and necessary. The Christian duty, faith, witness and moral action, is an integral part of contextualization for the Chinese Church. Let me repeat that the quest for well being in life is proper, reasonable and in accord with the Bible and Protestant ethics. We should not think that the poorer one is the better. God is not biased. God helps the poor; God also watches over the wealthy. When the people's lives improve, when the nation is strong and flourishing: none of this is beyond the vast love of God. God wants to fill the world with love, to make people better and more perfect. God requires us to aid the poor and the weak, that they may be strengthened and their lives improve.

Process theology also emphasizes the love of God and this message is very important for the Chinese Church. Church involvement in modernization is an illustration of the love and care God has for people; it is involvement in creation and construction, in making the nation prosper and the people flourish. Though making love a reality is a vast undertaking, the superior Chinese socialist system can, as a social system, guarantee this. In the course of modernization, the lives of Chinese people are improving, so that today we want to construct a moderately well-off society. To do this is to strive to provide good soil and environment for the love of God.

Thus, speaking theologically, I feel that the following guiding theological principles are worth stressing: equal emphasis on this life and the next; faith cannot be separate from action; theology cannot be separate from reality; Protestant ethics are closely related to economics; spirituality and morality cannot be separate; the sacred and the secular are not at odds; saving grace and service are not at odds; church and society and state are not at odds; theology cannot be separate from its time and its context; love is the highest attribute of God and the heart of Christian ethics;

theological theory should be joined to practice; Christianity should adapt to socialist society; love country, love church; glorify God and benefit people; honor Jesus' moral teachings; promote virtue and the spirit of service; encourage diligence leading to wealth and make good deeds widely done; uphold justice and peace; oppose avarice and correctly treat truth, goodness and beauty outside the church, affirm nature, humanity and culture; stress both salvation and creation; uphold the three-self principle, treat correctly the relationship between the individual and the collective; theology changes and develops, and pessimistic and negative thinking and thinking that is behind the times or cannot adapt should be adapted and reformed; promote theological reflection and a spirit of creativity in theology.

It is obvious here that in our real lives and work, the church' s involvement in modernization is not at all in contradiction to or conflict with the Bible, faith, doctrine or theology, but rather entirely in accord with them. The problem is that we have not often looked at or tried to understand this theologically or rationally. There are so many points of commonality between what Christianity promotes and the strengthening of spiritual civilization promoted in the course of socialist modernization: carrying forward traditional Chinese culture, absorbing all that is good in the human spirit; upholding truth, goodness and beauty; aiding the poor and rescuing those in difficulties; strengthening social service; stressing love; public morals; morality in the workplace; dedication to work; a sense of responsibility, confidence, standing up for what is right; healthy trends, honesty, stability, unity, civilization, work, working to become moderately well off, pursuing well being, protecting the environment, seeking truth from facts, keeping up with the times, etc. The words may differ, but their spirit is the same or similar.

The Bible says truth is truth and falsehood is falsehood. Doesn' t this mean that we should seek truth from facts, stress honesty and concreteness; that we should make it our joy to help others, love country, love the people, and serve society? Involvement in modernization is precisely

the faith in practice of the Christian ideal to love others as ourselves, the extension of the belief that the highest attribute of the Christian God is love, the continuation of God's creation. From this we can give expression to the Christian doctrine of unity of faith and action, unity of love country, love church, unity of this world and the next, unity of the spiritual and the secular, unity of love for God and love for others, unity of salvation and service. We can demonstrate that all this is extremely sound theologically. It is a concrete expression of faith in practice for China, greatly enriching the spiritual experience and selfhood of the Chinese Church. There is much here for the renewal and improvement of the contextualized theology of the Chinese Church. Moreover, the theological understanding and interpretation it brings will be a strong impetus for theological reconstruction in the Chinese Church, setting it on a more comprehensive and profound path of development, ultimately establishing a solid foundation for the theological system of the Chinese Church.

3 The Significance of Church Involvement in the Modernization of China

The participation of the Chinese Church in modernization is important both historically and currently:

1 To fully express engagement by the Church with the world and its significant accomplishments in this regard.

The history of Christian thought demonstrates that Christianity continued to develop and show undiminished vitality because it is uniquely and strongly adaptable. No matter what dangers, difficulties, issues and challenges it may meet, it is able to face them, reflect on them and respond; it has a self-regulatory capacity. It does not avoid reality, but engages with the world, frequently speaks in a prophetic voice, is involved in everyday realities, can transform a bad situation, face the future and develop better. Church involvement in modernization has shown Christians their own worth and fully expressed Christian engagement with the world and Christian accomplishments in China. It has opened up a broader space for the Chinese Church, provided a stage for faith practice and witness,

and moved Christianity closer to reality, closer to society and into real life. In China, the language of deeds—body language—is much more effective in communicating faith, morality and service than the language of preaching or mere lip service to these ideas. Actions are more persuasive and much more attractive. This is because the Chinese, who come from an intensely humanist culture, stress the practical and value action.

2 To promote production and moral construction, and, by adapting to socialist society, run the church well.

In China, the issue of Church participation in socialist modernization is unavoidable. Bishop Ting has said, “The socialist system is suitable for China. It helped our people out of extreme poverty and enabled more and more people to live more human lives. So in China we support this system as a matter of course. But socialism is concerned with raising the level of production and with reconstruction of the material and the moral.”¹⁶ Though Christianity and socialism have their differences, Bishop Ting explores the similarities in spirit between them, seeks the common ground and advocates their reaching the same goal by different routes. The involvement of the Church in economic construction is a promotion of the productive strength of the nation, enabling it to better develop. A great number of Christian experts, engineers, technological innovators, entrepreneurs, scholars, advanced workers, diligent workers and farmers, etc., have come on the scene. This is a tremendous contribution to the society and the nation. Some have received commendations and awards, some of their innovations have garnered international recognition. The work of Christians in these fields can play a very positive role in improving the lives of the people.

In Wenzhou, Zhejiang province, the TSPM gave over ten thousand *yuan* to set up Wenzhou University. A number of wealthy Christians also contributed generously to this institution which will greatly benefit society. There are many other examples to show enthusiastic good deeds, social service and aid for others on the part of Christians; these are all seen as giving glory to God. Such actions are both the starting point and the firm grounding for their promo-

tion of work, pursuit of a good life and support of Christian morality. In this process of modernization, the church has done much by good actions to show moral behavior and this is an advancement of Chinese ethical construction, the social expression of church service, an expression of the strength of their faith, and a beautiful witness to faith. This also shows that Christianity can adapt to socialist society, move with the times, love country and love church and run the church well in the area of ethics and morality.

3 To promote modernization and indigenization in the Church and strengthen reflection and exploration in contextual theology.

Material modernization is first of all human modernization; and human modernization is mainly the modernization of ideas. In the course of modernization—in fields such as politics, economics, culture and technology—China has undergone an unprecedented transformation, especially marked in ideas and thinking. This is a challenge to the church, as well as an encouragement, and the church should not turn away, but rather reflect and respond. Its reflection and response should deal with how to reform theological thinking, keep up with the times, adapt to society and link up with modernization. Happily, theological reconstruction is already taking place in the Chinese Church and this has opened a new page of progress in the Church's history. It has been recognized in international theological circles: our theology is in the process of construction and growth. At the same time, we see that in taking part in modernization, the Church is also raising itself by striving to keep step with the modernization process. The modernization process also spurs the Church to be modernized and Sinified, to provide material and experience for theological reconstruction and better propel contextual theological reflection and exploration.

We can see the Chinese Church as an ellipse with two focal points, two C's: Christ and China. The two are not mutually exclusive. Rather they are complementary. We must protect the selfhood and particularity of the Chinese Church, both of which are in the process of formation. The

selfhood of our Church cannot be sought apart from the Church universal, for Christ fills the universe with light, shining on its hills and valleys and across its plains. The ecumenical Church exists in the whole world and throughout the ages and bears witness in every social system.

4 To raise the status, quality and level of the Church; discover its position, role and selfhood, and realize its contribution to the ecumenical Church.

K.H. Ting reminds us: “Patriotism in China today affirms the achievements made through the self-sacrifice on the part of millions of our fellow Chinese, and pledges that we will continue to struggle against the evils that still linger in our society, for material and cultural elevation, and for greater justice and human dignity. This is a responsible love for nation. Christians need to care for the welfare of the people of the whole world in all their historical concreteness. It means for us caring for China, not exclusively but as our point of departure, the first stage in our love of mankind. This caring is not in opposition but extends itself naturally to internationalism.”¹⁷

Caring for the well being of the Chinese people and involvement in modernization will raise the position of the Church in Chinese society and will also enable the Church to broaden its own vision, opening up to society and the world beyond, identifying with the people so that faith is better applied and its value better expressed, enabling pastoral care and administration to take place at a higher level, enabling people to see the abundance and variety of the grace of God and the universality of love and thus raising the whole level of quality, theology and so forth, in the Church. At the same time, this enables the Church to define its own place in our socialist society, to discover the special social function of Christian morality, our special form of service and the place where Christianity can exist and develop in China, as well as its role in China—a role with a modern mission, rich in individuality. It is extremely important to establish the selfhood of the Chinese Church, for it has an indispensable role in the world Church, one which will be definitive for the understanding of the contextualization of theology in China, and will also

be a contribution to the ecumenical Church.

Making the Chinese Church into China's own Church is an important condition for Christians in China in their relationships and exchanges with others. The preaching of the Gospel requires a suitable environment. The Church must identify with the people, must deeply love the people. To a very great extent, the Chinese Church has cast off its foreign image. In order to self-propagate, it cannot distance itself from its own environment and context. It must love the Church; it must love its nation. It must see this nation's difficult accomplishment in totally transforming itself into the nation it is today in the midst of constructing socialist modernization with a heart of love and it must become involved in this process.

As a Christian, one should have a heart filled with universal love, one should care for society, love and safeguard the nation and build the country up well. Theologically one should have a correct view of Church, society, morality, values, history and this present life. What we do not say is that if socialism fails, or modernization does not go smoothly or cannot be realized, the Gospel can be successfully preached, or the church run well. Quite the opposite, to give effective witness to Christ in China, to run the church well in China, we must identify to a very great extent with the Chinese people, adapt to socialist society, love the country and love the church. In fact, the context of the Church, the state and one's own people are intimately linked. In his "Witnessing to Christ in China," K.H. Ting writes "We are seriously undertaking the development of selfhood for the Chinese Church. The linkage between the local Church and the ecumenical Church are of course indispensable to the realization of the selfhood of a Church. But the idea of the local character of a Church is part of the New Testament ecclesiology; ecumenicity is realized through nationality. Ecumenicity can only exist as the collective total of countless concrete, particular Christians. Locality, nationality and particularity are the marks of the nature of the ecumenical Church; they are not dispensable."

If the Chinese Church does not first run itself well in its own context, does not build itself up, does not have

plentiful fruits and selfhood, then it will have no way to make a contribution to the ecumenical Church. In fact, the richer the individuality or localness, the richer the commonality and ecumenicity. The Church's witness through its involvement in Chinese modernization, besides being under the care and leading of God, also reflects our Church in its own locality, in the midst of seeking a new path with Chinese characteristics suitable for the Chinese Church as it adapts to socialist society, a path that is in line with models of development and internal regulation in the Bible, doctrine and orthodox church theology. We can see that a Chinese Church, worthy of its nation, with a modern image, in step with the times and glorifying the name of Christ, which is in the process of developing and growing. This church will establish itself in the East and become a model in the eyes of the ecumenical Church.

Nanjing Theological Review 2(2003): 31-51.

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From Incarnation to Divine Reconciliation

WANG AIMING

The Background of Theological Reconstruction

Since its all-round revival in 1980, the Chinese Church has seen great development, churches being reclaimed or built on all sides, with a great many churches appearing within a short time, and great numbers of Christians appearing in urban and rural areas. A senior pastor told me that over half the Christians in the Chinese Church now are first generation Christians who have come to Christ since the Cultural Revolution. This has created a worrying state of affairs; though the numbers of Christians have risen dramatically, the number of pastors is very small and the situation has yet to show much improvement. According to statistics in two recent issues of the church monthly *Tian Feng*, there are about 1800 regularly ordained pastors in the Chinese Church, most of whom are elderly. By comparison, as China becomes more and more modernized, the level of advancement and education in society rises. However, the educational level within the Church has not risen as fast as that of society in general.

Church leaders, especially Bishop K.H. Ting, were aware of this problem a decade ago. In looking through past issues of the *Nanjing Theological Review*, I discovered that Bishop Ting had raised theological reconstruction as the most important of the many important tasks facing the Chinese Church eighteen years ago. Despite the fact that strengthening theological reconstruction was only formally

raised at the Jinan Meeting in 1998, Bishop Ting had already referred to it eighteen years earlier. We cannot content ourselves with the restoration of religious life in the Church, nor with the building of new churches. Rather we must turn our attention to the vast challenges facing theological education.

Theological reconstruction is not only the work of theological education, but theological education holds an important place in theological reconstruction. Adjustment of certain backward and conservative views is a necessity and the burden of such adjustment falls first on pedagogy and research within our seminaries. Thus, the background to the task of theological reconstruction is: a surge in churches and an increase in Christians is offset by a dearth of clergy and a tendency to backward-looking preaching.

During 50th anniversary celebrations for Three-Self, the Chinese Church passed a formal resolution dividing the fifty years of Three-Self Movement history into three periods based on an analysis and summation of that history by Bishop Ting:

1 The Chinese Church adapting to the establishment of new China, resolving a political issue by accepting and recognizing the new Chinese government; that is, the leadership of the Communist Party. This was the first step in the process of adapting to socialism, the first beginning step in merging Christianity into the political life of the Chinese people. This extremely important period Bishop Ting identified as the first phase of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement.

2 In the 1980s, having been through the Cultural Revolution, Chinese Christianity was gained widespread recognition among the people of China. Chinese Christianity revived, benefiting from national reforms and the policy of openness. After nearly twenty years of development, we have built many churches, and many cadres from government departments related to religious bodies, like Chinese society overall, have been helping us to bring Church-State relations into better balance. Through its own actions, the Chinese Church has made it possible for the Chinese people to identify with the justice, progressiveness and rationality of Christianity.

The achievements of these twenty years, from 1980 to 2000, were tremendous. Many problems remain. Many pastors and evangelists in our pulpits still preach with relish on faith healing and casting out demons. There are students in our seminaries who speak in so-called tongues, language they do not understand and others cannot translate. These students avoid difficult studies but make themselves appear extremely spiritual, accusing their classmates who do not speak in tongues of being unspiritual. Yet in actuality their own academic records are poor. With healings falsely done in the name of God, and so-called speaking in tongues, how can we be so complacent as to claim, as some do, that the Chinese Church has greatly matured; that numbers are up; so many Bibles have been printed, so many distributed; that great things have been achieved? Those who espouse such an attitude have not looked clearly at the difficulties and challenges the Chinese Church faces. The question we should be posing in such circumstances is: What should our Chinese Church be doing?

3 At the Jinan Meeting in the fall of 1998, the CCC/TSPM proposed the strengthening of theological reconstruction at a time when the Chinese Church faced a time of great adjustment. The proposal did not come as a result of complacency or due to a sense of vast achievement.

There are many definitions of theology. There must be over twenty that are very vivid, that go to its very essence. Bishop Ting has given a very vivid definition in saying that “theology is the Church thinking.” This emphasizes the role of the Church. What is the role of the Chinese Church in Chinese society? What sort of role should it play? What questions should it be answering? So to say that theology is the Church thinking is quite different from other classic definitions of theology. Classic definitions basically refer to study of the words of God, exploration of God language in the Bible, etc. But to emphasize the Church thinking as the nature of theology, is quite in line with his referential world. This is an extremely important point, because it responds to a pessimistic, unrealistic view, in China and overseas which says that China has no theology.

China has a Church, a Church established with Christ

as its head and the thinking of the Chinese Church is Chinese theology. Thus, in reiterating the definition of theology in the early days of promoting the task of theological reconstruction, Bishop Ting was giving the younger generation a timely reminder: that in developing our own theology, whatever issues the Chinese Church is thinking about, are all part of its theological reflection. If the Chinese Church is able to resolve some actual issues it meets with in the process of the communication of God's word, including issues around ecclesiology, this will be the contribution of the Chinese Church to the theology of the Church ecumenical. Chen Zemin, vice-principal of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, has said that with our proposal of theological reconstruction, others cannot say that the Chinese Church has no theology. And at the forum on *Love Never Ends: Papers by K.H. Ting* held in the Qingpu district of Shanghai in 1999, Chen Zemin pointed to the publication of this volume as another proof that it could no longer be claimed that the Chinese Church had no theology.

Since 1998, many articles on aspects of theological reconstruction have been published and many issues have been discussed, all of which, in practical terms, are all linked to the three facets of background discussed here. Many churches have been built, but the Church remains weak, because the Church has not truly formed its own responses to the difficulties and challenges it faces; that is, thus far it has not done enough thinking. We must begin with each church, each co-worker, all the way up to the persons in charge in the Chinese Church. All must think theologically together: only then can our theology be put in motion.

The senior generation of clergy has pointed out that theological reconstruction is a long and difficult process which will require twenty to fifty years. Some issues will not be clarified in our lifetimes, perhaps not for generations. As the primary task of all the tasks facing the Chinese Church, theological reconstruction will need a lot of hard work and it may be that a high price must be paid.

Intellectual Origins of Theological Reconstruction

1 The Three-Self Movement resolves a political issue (early 1950s)

In the early 1950s we formulated a political standpoint, stating that “A Christian is a Chinese citizen too.” What the TSPM actually accomplished by doing this was to form a political standpoint for Chinese Christians: as Chinese Christians, did we dare to be citizens of new China, or was it true, as used to be said, that one more Christian meant one less Chinese? The facts prove that this negative claim has no force in new China. From the 1950s on, the idea that a Christian should be a good citizen has been an unchanging principle of Three-Self. This issue was dealt with in the early 1950s, but the theological issue and some religious views, were not.

In the early 1950s, *Tian Feng* carried many theological debates. These progressed to the point where some backward and conservative theological views were already being addressed and revised. Later the Cultural Revolution brought this very significant task to a temporary halt. The true beginning of this work has only come about in the present, in the theological reconstruction of the last few years, in the third period mentioned above. Only now has the Chinese Church dared to address these theological issues and boldly declared that these backward and conservative views must be revised. And if, for the time being, explanations are unclear or revision is not possible, at least such views can be de-emphasized.

De-emphasis is not the same as elimination. Bishop Ting has given us a very vivid example of the connotations of de-emphasis here: It is as if we have a cup of tea, and when we have drunk half, we add water. The tea leaves are still in the cup; they have not been thrown out. De-emphasis is like adding a little water when we find the flavor of the leaves is too strong; the taste becomes milder, but it is still tea. When theological reconstruction calls for de-emphasizing some basic doctrines, no one should think that basic faith is affected. We are not getting rid of basic faith.

Rather, in special historical conditions, we are asking: What should receive more emphasis and what less? What doctrines should be put to the fore, which de-emphasized? Take justification by faith, for example. Why did Martin Luther emphasize this doctrine, rather than any other, during the Reformation? Christian systematic theology comprises so many doctrines—creation, resurrection and so on—why did Luther give particular emphasis to justification by faith? Was he getting rid of the others? No. He was putting less emphasis on them. Then what was his goal in emphasizing justification by faith?

We know that the issue of authority was the central issue of the Reformation. Did the Pope have greater authority? Or was the authority of the Bible greater? Luther discovered that the authority of the Bible could be used to control that of the Pope. The Pope was not God, and even though he called himself the heir of St. Peter, Peter was not God either. The Pope might be the successor of Peter, but he was still human. So for Luther, the goal in emphasizing justification by faith was to solve the political issue of the Reformation, the issue of authority. This was not the same as emphasizing justification by faith in order to do away with other doctrines. Luther did not get rid of any doctrines, such as those of the love of God or the grace of God, and we can find evidence of this throughout his theological writings.

In sum, this consideration of the intellectual origins of theological reconstruction shows that in the early 1950s, the intent was to solve the issue of the political standpoint of Christians. Only the first steps were taken during this period; genuine revision of theological views has been undertaken only in recent years with theological reconstruction.

2 The reality of heresies in China since reform and openness

In recent years, the government has banned heresies like Anointed Kings, Eastern Lightning and the Ling Ling Church that claim to be Christian. Sociologists have found that in a Christian environment, especially in rural areas,

many self-proclaimed evangelists wave the Bible as they preach heresy. Why is the rural church so weak in these areas in its ability to resist heresies? One important reason is the uncertain theological level of clergy there. Christianity has developed quickly in many provinces; many areas have thousands of Christians, but not one pastor. I did a quick survey at Nanjing Union Theological Seminary and found that in certain areas of Anhui, there were tens of thousands of believers, but no pastor. Without a pastor where do believers go for pastoral care? There are many lay volunteers who have had several months to a year of training, some only by correspondence course, who serve as preachers. Some of them, because they have a certificate from the training course or the correspondence course, feel they have some authority vis à vis other Christians and think that their interpretation of the Bible is the correct one. Yet it is in these places that resistance to heresy is weak.

This reality is one that shapes the reflection on theological reconstruction. What can be done when resistance to heresy is weak? I teach systematic theology at Nanjing Seminary, so it is natural for me to begin the discussion with systematic theology.

Systematic theology comprises the precious experience of the church over two thousand years, especially knowledge formed in the process of resisting heresy and heterodoxy. It tells us which interpretations of our basic faith are correct and which are heresy. For example, following our proposal that in the present context of the Chinese Church justification by faith should be de-emphasized, a lot of debate arose among our co-workers and in different places there remain those who cannot, for various reasons, accept certain aspects of it. They take it too literally. Is it that people are justified, or is it God who makes them so? I have put this to many people and many Christians say that since they have confessed their faith publicly, then of course they are without sin. Many people have this understanding. But according to dogmatics, it is God who judges whether or not a person is without sin.

The Chinese formulation of justification by faith is a classical formulation without an expressed subject, mean-

ing because x , then y . Many people in the Chinese Church have assumed the subject of this formulation to be human beings rather than God. In fact, the subject is God. It is God who enables us human beings to establish right relations with God. Humans are judged righteous or not by God. The subject of the equation is God, not humans. If we had this interpretation of justification by faith, then our Christians would not think that once they are baptized, they will go to heaven even if they do something bad, while good people who have not been baptized are going to hell no matter how much good they do. That our Christians come to a conclusion like this illustrates that there is something wrong with our understanding of justification by faith. For authority rests with God, not with human beings; we know that the final judgment comes from God. Humans must not judge each other. I am a teacher, but I cannot pronounce that if a person has not been baptized, they will go to hell despite all their good works, because the final judgment comes from God, not humans.

The de-emphasis on justification by faith proposed by Bishop Ting has allowed us to reconsider justification from the viewpoint of systematic theology, reminding us that the subject here is God and not humans. This is very important.

This is the second point of reflection on the sources of theological reconstruction: How shall we deal with the exhaustion and weakness in the church that resistance to heresy entails? The fundamental issue is that the theological quality of our clergy must be raised. This is the theological direction that theological reconstruction stresses. I believe that to sum up reflection on the sources of theological reconstruction as theological orientation is a crucial step in moving forward theological reconstruction.

A few colleagues feel that stress on an orientation is a modernist or liberal approach, while a lack of such stress is fundamentalist. In fact, this is an emotionalized language. Actually every church emphasizes a certain orientation; western churches even more so, otherwise there would not be so many denominations. Each denomination has its own orientation. Our Chinese Church is post-denominational, a

post-denominational union, so of course it should have its own clearly-defined orientation. This grasp of theological orientation is concretely arrived at through course requirements in correct views of the Bible and church history. Theological reconstruction has brought the issue of orientation to the fore once again, so that we may find a correct resolution. What is pure faith? How do we preach pure faith?

3 Theological Reconstruction and Basic Faith

When theological reconstruction was first mooted, some more senior colleagues influenced seminarians by the tenor of some of their language. They wondered whether theological reconstruction was aimed at changing our basic faith, feared that it would affect basic faith somehow. Bishop Ting made it very clear that an appropriate distance would be kept between theological reconstruction and matters of basic faith.

What, then, do we mean by basic faith? This is spelled out very clearly in the Constitution of the Chinese Church. On a visit to the U.S., some church colleagues in California asked me whether we had basic faith in the Chinese Church. I replied that we had and brought out my copy of the devotional diary published by the CCC/TSPM and opened to the first page following the Table of Contents, on which The Lord's Prayer is found. On the very next page were the Apostles Creed and the Nicene Creed. They were amazed. It was the first they had heard of these two creeds being included in the devotional diary published by the Chinese Church. They asked me for a few copies so they could be reminded that the Chinese Church placed these two creeds first. Later I thought how strange it was that they looked at the Chinese Church through colored glasses. Quite a few of them had visited Nanjing Union Theological Seminary where The Lord's Prayer and the Apostles Creed are said in every chapel service and where the Apostles Creed and the Nicene Creed are included in explaining our basic faith.

These American friends later said this was the first they had heard of this and admitted that perhaps they had listened too much to attacks on the Chinese Church and too little to positive introductions of theological thinking in

the Chinese Church. Having spoken with me, they were more interested in theological reconstruction. I presented them with copies of the English edition of the writings of Bishop Ting, *Love Never Ends*. I asked them not to open the books until I read several paragraphs to them, to see if these accorded to the impressions they had been given of the Chinese Church.

For the benefit of friends overseas, I had summarized some of the themes from *Love Never Ends* as “Fifteen Basic Propositions Related to the Work of Theological Reconstruction.” In these fifteen propositions, I expounded on the writings and thinking of Bishop Ting, making frequent use of his own words. For example, he stresses that human beings are semi-finished products of the ongoing process of creation. When theologians at Fuller Seminary heard this, they found it very profound. It was the first time they had heard it. I also mentioned that Bishop Ting, in speaking of original blessing and original sin, said that original blessing was greater than original sin. Moreover, he felt that love is the highest attribute of God. These ideas and others are included in my Fifteen Propositions and were all topics for discussion at the forum in Qingpu to discuss the writings of Bishop Ting.

In our reflections, we believe that basic faith does not change, but that theological thinking *can* be revised, and this revision of theological thinking is linked to our great commission to preach the word of God. Think for a moment of what it would be like if we, today, had to adapt to Jesus’ time, if we were only able to preach the Gospel within the Jewish social environment: our Church would have died out long ago. The Church is always developing and the environment in which the Church has been preaching the Gospel for two thousand years has always been changing; the social environment, the everyday life has changed continually throughout two thousand years.

Today, when we say that the Church should adapt to socialist society, we mean that it should keep abreast of the times. If society is developing, the responsibility of the great commission is increasing. And this responsibility demands that we adapt to our changing environment, our

changing age. Our proposal that the Chinese Church adapt to socialist society means we need to adapt to our nation as it changes in the midst of the modernization process.

Four years ago when I returned to China from Switzerland, I spent a whole spring reading and studying *Tian Feng*, *Nanjing Theological Review* and *Love Never Ends*. A piece by Bishop Ting that has stayed with me appeared in the first number of the reissue of *Nanjing Theological Review* (1984). In this essay, he wrote of three basic issues in theological education, primary and important issues facing the Chinese Church in this area: 1) How to be faithful to the Bible; 2) How to be faithful to the teachings of the historical Church; and 3) How to match the new face of China. The first and second are extremely important theological questions and issues for our view of the Bible; the third is the question of keeping up with the times, for our nation changes daily. In that essay of eighteen years ago, Bishop Ting raised the question of how we might match the new face of China. Seen from my vantage point today, this is the issue theological reconstruction must solve. Religious concepts must be adjusted; they must keep up with the times.

Questions for Discussion

1) How can we match and adapt to the face of our nation? How do we understand God's continuing act of creation?

Some co-workers explain this using Genesis 2: 1-3. They think God has rested from the act of creation, that creation is finished, and only salvation remains. This is a mistaken understanding. To think that God's work of creation came to an end in seven days is a literal interpretation of Scripture. In fact, throughout the Bible we can see that the work of creation continues. In the 1980s, Bishop Ting lectured every Wednesday afternoon at the Seminary, introducing many streams of theological thought. One of these lectures was on creation theology and dealt with the fact that God's work of creation is ongoing.

2) *How shall we treat the higher unity of creation and salvation?*

As long as the great mission of the Church continues, we must take up the responsibility we have received from God. This implies that we have a responsibility to be good helpers to God in the work of creation, to continue the work of creation. This is the view put forth in *Love Never Ends* and I hope my listeners will think of writing on this topic for the *Nanjing Theological Review*.

3) *On the question of “ semi-finished products.”*

At present, the essays submitted to the *Nanjing Theological Review* on this topic have not dealt with it on the deeper level of understanding the implications of seeing human beings as semi-finished products in the process of creation. But this emphasis on human beings as semi-finished products is one of the contributions China has made to ecumenical theology. The theory of semi-finished products is extremely important, for we either see humans as comparable to angels, perfect and without flaws—this is the error of Chinese culture—or we see them as the lowest of the low, worms, completely sunk in sin, thus denying the creation of God and the grace of Christ.

Semi-finished products is a seek-truth-from-facts way of explaining humans' relationship to God. Relying on God' s grace, we humans can attain salvation, we can be reborn, and in the final judgment we can stand before God and be among the chosen. Only at the final judgment can we affirm that creation has come to a full stop. Only then can it be said that one is a finished product, chosen by God or set on a new path. The theory of semi-finished products is a contribution, a theological topic, that the Chinese Church, through theological reconstruction, has given to churches in the West, in Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan.

4) *Original Sin and Original Blessing*

Since the time of Augustine, many ideas and theories of the Church have been established on the doctrine of original sin. Indeed, ecclesiology, our theory of the Church it-

self, has been affected by this doctrine. But from another perspective, Bishop Ting has drawn from the relevant verses of Romans 5, a confident conclusion: Because of Jesus Christ, original blessing has won out over original sin. We have to date not found in the submissions to the *Nanjing Theological Review*, any with a very good understanding of this idea of original blessing. American theologians I have spoken with stressed that they felt original blessing was a profound expression of God as love. It lifts the grace of God to a very high level; in fact, it is raising up Christ. It is an important principle of the Reformation: only Christ. If the sin of Adam falls on all humanity, if all are thrown into the abyss of evil, where is Christ? Is the cross needed? The Chinese Church, especially preachers at the grass roots, always speak of sin, always paint humankind as pathetic. Where is the glory of God? The honor of the cross? What is the meaning of the cross that hangs in our churches?

A Swiss visitor was very moved by his visit to the churches of China—so many churches, so many Christians. But as a good friend, he told me that he had felt depressed to see the congregation crying while the pastor preached. If they had not been praying at the time, he would have thought something terrible had happened. He inferred that the sermon message was a painful one. This made me wonder why pastors do not preach on the love of God. On the glory of God? Why aren't people filled with joy? Our brothers and sisters do not rest on Sundays, rather they come to church, where they should feel uplifted by their worship of God, filled with confidence in life—but not sad and unhappy.

On a visit to the U.S. I said that Chinese theologians' stress on original blessing was a way to de-emphasize original sin in the Chinese Church, but that to de-emphasize is not the same as to discard. Seminary classes in systematic theology still teach original sin, but if they teach only original sin without original blessing, we will know only Adam, and not Christ. This is what Paul tells us in Romans 5.

5 Incarnation and Reconciliation

Since the reopening of churches in China in the 1980s,

when Chinese church leaders go abroad, the doctrine they speak of most often is the Incarnation. The Incarnation is also an important theme of theological reconstruction. Bishop Ting and other pastors in their preaching and witness in the U.K., U.S. and Europe, as they introduce Chinese theological thinking, have raised two issues most often. The first is that the Incarnation shows that Chinese theology must be done in the mother tongue of Chinese culture and must be in relationship to Chinese culture and Chinese present reality; it must develop and grow within the context of Chinese socialist society. This is in fact an enrichment and development of the doctrine of Incarnation. The second is that the Incarnation speaks of reconciliation, reconciliation of people. In the beginning they spoke rather more about the reconciliation with the Chinese revolution, reconciliation with the Chinese people and reconciliation with social modernization in China.

These three reconciliations express three great steps for the Chinese Church. To reconcile with the Chinese revolution is a recognition of the rightness and legality of the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party. To reconcile with the Chinese people is to cast off the label of foreign religion so that three-self may be well done. To reconcile with Chinese modernization is theological reconstruction—to respond to the challenges of modernization. The Chinese Church is in many of its views too backward, too negative and too conservative. Chinese modernization makes one demand of the church: that it be in step with the times.

Nanjing Theological Review 2(2003): 19-30.

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The Contextualized Theology of Bishop Shen Yifan

OUYANG WENFENG

In the academic world, contextual theology, in the true sense of the term, began in the 1970s. In terms of the mission history of Christianity, however, this was just the tip of the iceberg.

From the first, the work of Christian mission has faced the issue of integrating with and adapting to the social reality and culture of the area in which the Gospel was being preached. Contextual theology in the modern sense has taken the exploration of contextual theology in the historical work of mission from being a necessity to being a conscious and free choice. In this sense, then, there have been at least three periods in the contextualization of Protestant mission work in China: 1) the indigenization movement of the 1920s; 2) the movement for theological reorientation at the grass roots in the 1950s; and 3) the new trend toward contextual theology since the 1980s. For historical reasons, a genuine contextual theology with Chinese characteristics was not produced out of the efforts of the first two periods. Happily, in the third period we welcomed the opportunity to create a new heaven and new earth of contextual theology: circumstances favored us. We found new companions in Chinese academic and intellectual circles involved in the new cultural movement, and the process of modernization was embodied politically in policies of reform and opening.¹ Thus, since the 1980s, explorations in

contextual theology in the Chinese Church have flourished and continue to do so. A number of Chinese theologians have also made outstanding contributions and become prominent at home and abroad. One of these is Bishop Shen Yifan.

The untimely and early death of a leader in the church like Bishop Shen was a great loss to the church in China.² But the rich contextual theological thinking he did during his life is a heritage of strong faith for those who come after. In this essay, I will attempt to demonstrate for his successors his pure heart of love for the Lord through a consideration of his thinking on contextual theology.

1 Reflections on the history of Christianity in China show the importance of contextual theology

Reflecting on the historical failures of Christian mission in China, Bishop Shen felt that because the work of mission did not overcome its foreignness, the Gospel could not put down roots in Chinese soil.³ Prior to Liberation Chinese theology was a duplicate of the various denominational theologies of the West.⁴ Even more alarming, not only did traditional western theology produce in Chinese Christians a kind of ethnic humiliation, but brought a pernicious sense of loss of national identity.⁵ When Bishop Shen pondered the future of the Chinese Church, he sighed with distress over these things.

However, though this was the case, the dynamics of his thinking in contextual theology carried the developments of the two earlier periods of contextual theology to a deeper dimension. During the indigenization movement of the 1920s, our forebears considered theological questions from a Chinese standpoint; that is, they paid great attention to the ancient philosophers and to traditional culture, but not to their own society or to developments in intellectual circles. They rather distanced themselves from the anti-imperialist and anti-feudal struggles of the people in their times.⁶ Because of this their efforts were extremely limited and were not even as successful as those of Matteo Ricci.⁷ Shen Yifan's attitude toward the movement for theo-

logical reorientation at the grass roots of the 1950s was one of admiration and a desire for continuing the work. The old traditional theological attitude that whatever in this world is true, good or beautiful is really Satan dressed up as an angel of light, was an impediment to a correct appreciation for new China on the part of Chinese believers.⁸ The premillenarianism of the fundamentalists even more erroneously led Chinese Christians to be hostile towards new China.⁹ From the topics considered in his *The Chinese Church in the Act of Thinking Theologically*, Bishop Shen also saw himself as carrying on the work of this period of the 1950s.¹⁰ In sum, Bishop Shen both critiqued and learned from the two earlier periods of contextual theological thinking in the Chinese Church.

2 The challenge and opportunity for theological contextualization posed by the reality of Chinese socialist society

First of all, Shen Yifan was filled with confidence about the future prospects for contextual theology in China. He elucidated three aspects of the opportunity provided for theological contextualization by the reality of Chinese socialist society. First, the tide of the times and the tide of reform in socialist China provided a foothold for contextual theology.¹¹ Second, the new period in Chinese socialist society facilitated the raising of the self-propagation question in a new way in the Chinese Church. It constructed a self-definition for a Chinese Church running church well according to three-self principles. This both provided the greatest guarantee that Chinese Christianity could put down roots and resolved for the Church the issue of the meaning of *self* in self-propagation.¹² Only then, on this foundation, could the Chinese Church redefine *what* should be propagated in the course of self-propagation.¹³ Third, the modernization of Chinese society also engendered a turn toward theological contextualization in the Chinese Church.¹⁴ The victory of the revolution thirty-five years ago brought about a fundamental transformation of the fate of ordinary people and this had a tremendous effect on our theologi-

cal thinking.¹⁵ At the same time, the new environment of socialist China brought new spiritual experience to the Chinese Church and this new experience is bound to produce new theology.¹⁶

Secondly, Shen Yifan did not shrink from the challenges facing theological contextualization. Exploring contextual theology in China implies accepting the double challenges of culture and politics. In culture, though the positive aspects of traditional Chinese culture can link with Christianity, the Gospel also poses a challenge to the culture.¹⁷ The Gospel is a challenge to the overly-optimistic view of human nature found in traditional Chinese thinking; a challenge to the lack of seeking the transcendent realm and its values; and a challenge to the idea that one can achieve transcendence through moral cultivation or unity of humankind and heaven through meditation.

In politics, though the explorations of the Chinese Church in contextual theology can be considered as a demonstration of the adaptation of religion to socialist society, still, people do not want to create a Christian socialism or a socialist Christianity.¹⁸

3 Themes in the contextual theology of Shen Yifan

1 Sacramental theology

Bishop Shen felt not only that the Incarnation was an important Christian doctrine, but also that it was of real significance for the affirmation of the real world in the context of socialist China, for entering into reality, for non-separation between the sacred and the secular. Through his investigation of the Confucian emphasis on practicality, on reason and on real human relationships, as well as its positive assessment of the world and absence of escapist thinking, he found points of contact and confluence between Christianity and Confucianism.¹⁹ And he went further, citing the Bible to demonstrate (Eph. 4: 6; 1 Jn. 1: 14) that the view of God, both transcendent and immanent, demands that believers judge reality rightly and enter into it. In the doctrine of the Incarnation he saw that God was mani-

festing the glory of God and sanctifying the life of this world. Thus everything of this world, if done to the glory of God, is all holy.²⁰ In this sense, the Incarnation breaks open traditional views of the separation of the sacred and the secular and of God, humanity and the world as being in opposition to one another. Even better, the Incarnation affirms all actions in human life that are righteous, honest and done in a spirit of self-sacrifice, and makes all this pleasing in the sight of God.²¹

2 Theological reflection on human nature

In Confucian humanism with the concept of *ren (jen)* or human-heartedness at its center, Bishop Shen found a mutual point of contact between Confucianism and Christianity. Confucianism affirms human nature and affections, adopting an attitude of positive affirmation to human life. It has no concept of human life as vanity, as base, useless, or worse, despicable.²²

At the same time, considering the Christian view of human nature, Bishop Shen saw that Christian knowledge of human nature is more profound than that of Confucianism. The overly-optimistic Confucian cannot see the dark side of human nature. Human sinfulness is not, as Confucianism has it, a matter to be eliminated through education.²³ On the one hand, Bishop Shen identified the point of contact between the Christian affirmation of human nature and the optimistic affirmation found in Confucianism. On the other hand, from within the profundity of the Christian understanding of human nature, he revealed to Chinese Christians the blindness of the Confucian optimism.

3 Theological reflection on the relationship between God and humans

Starting from the importance of the God-human relationship, Bishop Shen first explored points of contact in this area between Christianity and Confucianism. The Confucian relationship between heaven and humankind is harmonious; the two form a unity. In Christianity, though human sinfulness obstructs the unity of heaven and human beings, salvation that comes from God reconciles human-

kind with God.²⁴ Thus in Christianity it is through salvation that humans seek harmony and communion with God. Then Bishop Shen proceeded to point out that although humans are sinful, they can still be in communion with God, they can pray and communicate spiritually with God. All that a person does, if it is in line with the will of God, is of great value, a reflection of the glory of God.²⁵ Bishop Shen quotes the Bible (Mt. 5: 48) to show the hope God has for humankind. Humans have great potential in the eyes of God.²⁶ Theology which believes there is an insurmountable abyss between God and humanity, that there is no point of contact or common ground between the two, that everything human is resistance against God, rejected by God, that humanity is helpless before God, or that all efforts are unavailing: all such views are, for Bishop Shen, in conflict with the will of God, which created humanity and redeemed it. These views are also completely out of step with the Confucian optimism toward human life and with traditional Chinese cultural thinking.²⁷

Investigation into these three points gives us a rough sketch of the thinking of Bishop Shen on contextual theology. It is not difficult to see that, beginning from the reality of socialist China, Shen Yifan grasped the idea that any theological thinking is contextualized thinking,²⁸ in undertaking his own reflections on contextual theology. I believe that in the new period of theological reconstruction, the contextual theological wisdom of Shen Yifan will be of inestimable significance for the Chinese Church, now and far into the future.

Nanjing Theological Review, 2(2003): 116-122.

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3 Shen Yifan, "The Ministry of Evangelization in the Chinese Church," *East*

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6 *Ibid.*, 30.

7 “Confucian Thought and Chinese Theological Thinking Today,” *Nanjing Theological Review* (New Series) 9(1988): 77.

8 “Theological Reflections in Chinese Christianity,” *Nanjing Theological Review* (New Series): 31.

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10 Ye Qinghua, *On Chinese Theology and the State-Church Context*. 1997, 96.

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13 “Thoroughly implement the Three-Self spirit in the grassroots churches,” *Tian Feng* (New Series) 14 (February 1983): 26.

14 “The Task of the Church in the Chinese Modernization Process,” *Tian Feng* 7 (2001): 41.

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17 Shen Yifan, “The Ministry of Evangelization in the Chinese Church,” 4.

18 “Theological Reflections on doing pastoral work at the grassroots in new China,” *Nanjing Theological Review* (New Series) 6-7(September 1987): 89.

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20 “The Chinese Church in the act of thinking theologically,” *Nanjing Theological Review* (new Series) 9 (November 1988): 20.

21 “Theological Reflections in Chinese Christianity,” 33.

22 “Confucian Thought and Chinese Theological Thinking Today,” 80.

23 *Ibid.*

24 *Ibid.*, 81.

25 *Ibid.*

26 *Ibid.*

27 *Ibid.*

28 “The Chinese Church in the act of thinking theologically,” 18.

Women, Faith, Marriage

A Feminist Look at the Challenges for Women

MENG YANLING

In the opinion of Wang Meixiu, associate professor of history at Beijing University, in the socio-cultural value system, marriage and family are the social institutions most sensitive and responsive to changes in social life. Social change and development will inevitably be reflected in ethical relations within the family and in the moral standards of marriage. We can say that changes in the concepts of marriage and family reflect changes, developments and progress in the entire system of social and cultural mores. This point is expressed not only in society, but is particularly evident in the Church, because there is a concentration of women believers in the church. As a woman pastor, I naturally connect very easily with women in the Church, who frequently come to tell me privately of the conflicts and difficulties they face, and to find support and help in their faith. The greatest number of problems facing women are marriage problems, because even today, women see marriage as the most important aspect of their lives.

Once, following a sermon, a Sister poured out to me the humiliations and sufferings of her twenty-year marriage. I was greatly shaken, and this gave me greater recognition of the importance of feminist theology and feminist biblical interpretation. Reading the Bible from a feminist perspective, uncovering the experience and spiritual language of women that has been ignored by men, interpreting the

Bible from within the context women face, giving women support and guidance in faith is clearly of extreme importance.

1 For modern Christian women marriage is a compromise between attitudes in Chinese culture and Christian faith

Contemporary Chinese society can only be an extension of Chinese history. This period of culture, besides new modern concepts and consciousness; it is also the critical inheritance and rational extension of the Chinese traditional culture. Traditional Chinese culture has an undoubted and profound impact on the lives of Chinese women, their values, role choices and future development.

Traditional Chinese society was one in which men were honored and women despised. This is no doubt that for two thousand years of civilization, women were kept at the margins of society. The nature and status of women were never valued or affirmed. A traditional Chinese saying goes: Three things are unfilial and the most serious is to be without progeny. Here progeny refers, not to daughters, but to sons who could carry on the family name, authority and property. Another traditional saying has it that The most beautiful daughter cannot match a splayfooted son. In the extreme poverty of the old society, female infanticide was a common way of reducing the number of mouths to feed.

Throughout her life, a woman was confined by family regulations. The scope of her everyday activities was restricted to the home. The Book of Rites set down the role of women as one of inner spaces: confined to the inner quarters where men might not enter. While men went out and about, women were confined within. Men spoke of things beyond the home, women did not. In sum, traditional social rules for women were nearly all about establishing, maintaining and strengthening the family order. The restrictions of feudal propriety placed upon women contained many unique and unequal demands.

There are a number of famous passages in the Book of Rites whose subtext is to discourage an independent character or social position for women. With regard to the fe-

male intellect: A virtuous woman is without talent. Economically, women had no right to property and the names of women were not recorded in the family record book. Women were forced to observe so-called female virtue, to be Confucian paragons. A Song-dynasty Confucian saying had it that starvation is a small matter, while loss of virtue is serious. The truly virtuous, women who died rather than compromise their virtue, were rewarded with memorial arches constructed in their honor. Economically women were dependent on others. And the Book of Rites says that “women are subservient. As children they obey their fathers and brothers. When married, they obey their husbands. As widows, they obey their sons.”

These special rules built a human wall around women, excluding them from acting as social subjects outside the home. The female gender made women into political, economic and cultural outsiders. The traditional Chinese woman, whether in reality or in literature, had only two paths open to her, the same paths open to Hua Mulan: taking on a male role, fighting the enemy and acting as part of the feudal system, or becoming a wife. This was the context for a woman. We could say that marriage and family were, for all intents and purposes, the sum total of the space allotted to the traditional woman for her existence. The man always held authority and thus placed on woman a consciousness more in line with his own tastes. Thus the image of the traditional woman was created in accord with male imagination and desires. The role of women, their nature and position, were all controlled, defined and explained by men. The signifying process women underwent in patriarchal society was the process by which women were gradually depreciated and oppressed.

The concept of marriage for modern women has its source in tradition, but is sited in the modern. Traditional Chinese marriage has been attacked and influenced by modern thought. Threats to modern marriage come mainly from the impact of social material consumerism and indulgence; sentiment and sex have become commodities. Since the twentieth century, there has been in developed countries a whole host of vast changes in the realm of sex, what has

been called the sexual revolution, which has in effect been a comprehensive challenge to traditional sexual relationships and ethics, causing people to rethink, reevaluate and readjust sexual tradition. This sexual revolution reached its height in the 1960s. Under attack in this revolution, the traditional system of morality and values (in the West) collapsed.

As it happened, in the 1970s and 80s, China was implementing a policy of reform and opening; the gates of China were open to the world. Things from the developed countries, good and bad, came in, and the soul of the Chinese people, too long held down, rushed to absorb these things from outside. There was no time to consider, the mind simply took it all in, including some moral and ethical ideas that were too radical and open and thus assailed traditional Chinese marriage and family. As one American historian has pointed out, the assault brought about by the sexual revolution is nearly global, and its greatest assault on the human soul is moral confusion. Traditional, Confucian-, Buddhist- and Taoist-influenced ethics and morality have experienced an unprecedented challenge. Trial marriage, living together before marriage and extra-marital affairs are no longer to be wondered at. The divorce rate has risen sharply and as a result there are now many single-parent households.

It is especially among young people that the concept of family has diminished: individualism and hedonism have surged. With a concept of marriage and family in which pleasure is the goal and no one takes responsibility, people seek only to satisfy their own desires and ignore the needs of the family. Many people see marital affections as a private matter unrelated to others, separate from morality, chastity and responsibility. The traditional conception of marriage and family has been shaken. People are no longer willing to shoulder a lifetime of responsibility. Popular sayings along the lines of *Who cares whether the mountains crumble as long as I get mine*, or *Live it up*, reflect the current attitude. Margaret Thatcher reflected a typical critique of the situation when she said in March 1983 that we are now being paid back for what was sown in the 1960s. The

families of many Christian women in China are experiencing such attacks, and, not only their families, but they themselves are experiencing the effects of this so-called modern thinking.

The effects of traditional Chinese culture on women Christians are profound and far-reaching; some are more affected by traditional culture, while others are more affected by modern trends.

As a Christian woman, one lives, on the one hand, within Chinese culture, while at the same time one is influenced by biblical culture. A Christian woman stresses understanding marriage and family from a biblical standpoint and her views on this are frequently taken from those of her preachers and pastors. Though sixty to seventy percent of believers in the church are women, it is mostly men who stand in the pulpits and do the work of teaching and leading. Male pastors can only speak from their own standpoint, while most ordinary women Christians do not have the capacity to correctly interpret the Bible on their own. Thus, their understanding of the Bible must come from pastors. Because these women have a pious faith, one that upholds the authority of the Bible, they do not dare question the teaching of the preacher in any way. The message the majority of women believers get from preachers is that women in the family should be long-suffering and obedient. In fact, sometimes it is not that a male preacher is deliberately biased against women, rather their own gender means they have no way to understand the inner struggles of women and so it is easy for them to overlook the female context. It is also extremely difficult for women in a congregation to pour out to male pastors private sufferings to do with their marriages and families. And it is difficult for male pastors to identify with these Sisters in the way a woman pastor can.

A high government official, a man, following a conference on women at which he heard real stories of bias and harm done to the rights of women, spoke with great feeling. In his opinion it is really not that men deliberately discriminate against women; all men have mothers, and what son would discriminate against his mother? But men

do indeed fail to think about or often forget the rights of women or ignore the needs of women. And in the Church, too, it is often for the same reason that male pastors, deliberately or not, ignore the context and experience of women.

Even in the course of giving a sermon, a preacher is frequently unable to transcend culture in (his) interpretation of the Bible. The Bible was revealed by God; it transcends all culture, but penetrates through all culture. The revelation of God had to be expressed in human language and in the course of being expressed, was inevitably influenced by Hebrew culture. The Bible was born out of a culture that honored men and despised women and so it too reflects this phenomenon. If we pay no attention to historical culture and background in our biblical interpretation, but simply apply things mechanically, we make the revelation of God into a petrified Word.

The teachings the Church most often directs to women are those of Paul: “Wives be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Saviour. Just as the Church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (Eph. 5: 22-25). “But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the husband is the head of his wife, and God is the head of Christ” (1Cor. 11:3). “Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord” (Col. 3:18).

There are many such passages, and when women hear them, they obey, they endure, and they are humble. Because we have not transcended the gulf of culture in our Bible interpretation, we find conflicting verses: “On the one hand the church teaches Brothers and Sisters to love one another, that we are all made in the precious image of God; but at the same time, on the other hand, it teaches that men are the main and women the subordinate gender and that Sisters ought to obey their husbands and moreover, ought to make the home their ultimate base of service if they wish to be in accord with biblical truth.”¹

Naturally, a woman has an irreplaceable function in

the construction of the family, in building harmonious family relations, in the education of children and in care for the elderly, they play a most important role. Research has shown that care for pre-school age children is borne by the wife in over sixty percent of households and that women themselves feel this is their responsibility. Today we have, on the one hand, a rising body of public opinion that would like to see women return to the home as housewives, and on the other, a society that still judges women according to male values. The efforts of women in marriage and the home are ignored. This being the case, if women want to gain recognition and respect, they must expend greater effort and gain success in the workplace and professions.

In their view of marriage, Chinese women Christians are influenced by society and culture on the one hand and church teachings on the other. Within the Church there are times when culture is equated with truth, to the extent that men and women are seen as unequal. The Church must first deal with such phenomena; otherwise it will be powerless to take up its mission of responding to the times. Women within the Church will more and more feel their isolation from their surrounding environment and feel unsure in facing real issues; they will sense a clash between faith and real life.

2 Considering biblical teachings on marriage from a feminist perspective on biblical interpretation

Let us consider first of all the position God gave to women at their creation. In the first creation story in Genesis, “the peak of creation came when humanity was created, because the result of the creation of other things and beings was “good” and that of the creation of humanity was “very good.”² “...in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Gen. 1: 27). In this P source account of creation, male and female are united, not separated; from this union, we can infer that neither is higher or lower than the other. Male chauvinists usually take the second creation story as evidence for male superiority, especially Genesis 2: 18: “Then the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him

a helper as his partner.” In fact, the word helper here has no sense of higher or lower either. Helper (*ezer*) occurs a dozen times in the Old Testament and in many instances it refers to the work of Yahweh and has no meaning of grade or level attached to it.³ In v. 20 of chapter 2, it is excellently translated as “but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner.” In fact, an overview of the term helper in the Bible indicates that it is the role and status of the helper which is at issue. Helper here is used to express the idea of fulfillment or complementarity, and not a conferral of status, so most scholars take this helper not as simply helping in the work of everyday life or child bearing, but as a mutual partner. Thus, we best understand helper as a role, a kind of post: a helper should be the role of one who knows when to extend a hand in aid, like God who gives human beings aid in time of need but does not spoil the people he loves.⁴ When the man, on seeing the woman, calls her “bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh,” this is a fuller expression of this mutual complementarity, of their union. Only when male and female are united, mutually helping, can perfection be achieved. Thus, the most important message Genesis 2 has for us is not the order of creation but the mystery of human connection, that “they become one flesh.” Between male and female there is not opposition, but mutual help.⁵

It is Paul who mentions the male-female relationship within marriage most frequently in the Bible and there are several instances in his discussion of marriage that are frequently quoted by Christians, especially that in Ephesians 5: 22-25 quoted above. But “be subject to” here is not a command, but a sincere exhortation, the best translation of the Greek verb is “willing obedience.”⁶ A wife is obedient to a husband just as the church is obedient to Christ. Christians do not obey Christ because of a command from God; their obedience stems from willing and joyful hearts. At the same time, Paul is at pains to point out that Christ is the head of the Church, something quite different from the husband being the head of the wife. Therefore, he particularly emphasizes “the body of which he (Christ) is the Saviour.” By saying this, Paul shows that he knows his com-

parison is not exact. Christ is the Saviour of the Church, but the husband is far from being the saviour of the wife.⁷ At the same time we must not forget that Paul has a teaching for a husband: to love his wife as Christ loves the Church. Paul tells us that the love of a husband for his wife is a high form of love and its mark is self-sacrifice, not self-satisfaction. The goal of such love is the well being of the loved one. And Paul says: “...husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies” (Eph. 5: 28). This is not to demonstrate the limits of a husband’s love—that as much as he loves himself he should love his wife, but rather it refers to the nature of the relationship between husband and wife, which is the foundation of his love. The husband should love the wife because she is part of his body.⁸

We do see in the Bible that the letters of Paul in some passages express a great equality: “As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3: 27-28). But there is also what looks like belittling of women: “...but with good works, as is proper for women who profess reverence for God. Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor” (1 Tim. 2: 10-14), and so on. In these passages, we see a Paul who is contradictory, conflicted. But we must not forget that Paul was situated in a male-dominated social environment. Paul was attempting to bring the fellowship of the Christian ideal of male-female equality and the culture of the time, into harmony. Cultural comparison must use horizontal time, not vertical time. In those times, discrimination against women was a global phenomenon. When Paul said the husband was head, it was to say that, like Christ, he should love his wife with a self-sacrificing love. And in those times, this was quite a breakthrough.

When we study the Bible, we unconsciously place particular cultural values in a sacred position, with the result

that, in order to uphold gender values that were in force in some culture, we maintain that the Bible has these unchangeable teachings on principle. Such a method only serves to continually diminish the abundance of the Bible and forcefully unify the varied voices of the Bible. This limits Christians' intellectual exploration of and interest in pursuing the world of the Bible.⁹

3 The Predicament of Modern Christian Women and the Way Out

Along with reform and opening and economic development in China, people are moving from being closed-in towards liberty, from poverty to abundance, and at the same time, values and ethics are also undergoing continual transformation. Marriage and family is the most fundamental social unit and its sensitivity to these changes means it is the first to be affected and dissolve. The divorce rate has not come down, but continues to rise and a substantial number of extra-marital affairs lead to the breakup of families. When marriage is under attack, it is women who are in the weakest position. The instability of modern marriage means that women cannot rely on their husbands forever. Women must be strong and independent and seek their own worth and status. There are many women in the Bible who can serve as models.

Hebrew society was a male-oriented society and for the most part women were not entered in the tribal or family records. But four women appear in Jesus' lineage, which means they are out of the norm. I think the reason these women won recognition was precisely because of their strength and independence, their unwavering characters and aspirations.

Tamar, for example, was much to be pitied. She was married to Er, the firstborn son of Judah, but because "he was wicked in the sight of the Lord, the Lord put him to death." According to Hebrew custom (Deut. 25: 5-10) she was then married to another of the sons of Judah, Onan, but her fate was the same, for the Lord was displeased at the sin of Onan and put him to death also. Tamar was again plunged into widowhood. What is more, Judah feared she

would be the death of his other son, so he was unwilling for him to marry her. We could say that her fate was at its nadir, because in Hebrew society if a woman wanted to change her status, she usually did it by giving birth. Though women were not valued, mothers were, and were respected. We see in the Bible that every woman paid great attention to the matter of bearing children, and moreover, they frequently felt pride or humiliation over how many children they bore or did not bear. And they could be ridiculed if they were barren. Biblical scholars believe that the reason Hebrew society placed such a high value on childbearing and gave high status to mothers was based on their misunderstanding of the promise of God: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your offspring and hers, he will strike your head...” (Gen. 3: 15). They believed that only once a woman had produced offspring did she have a part in the promise of God and have value. In her hopeless situation, Though we would look askance today at her methods, as a weak woman Tamar had no other way out. This was her only way of getting power and status. Therefore, in saying “She is more righteous than I,” Judah might be speaking of her way out. For her own worth and respect, she was willing to risk her life to get a son from Judah. I very much admire her courage and spirit of self-reliance. It was because of her unwavering determination that she saw light within her hopeless situation.

In the same way, each one of us Christians reverences Mary, Jesus’ mother. When we mention Mary, we think of her gentleness, her virtuousness and endurance, for these are male ideals of the image of the Holy Mother. Our definition of Mary has always been based on a male aesthetic. But when I do a close reading of the passages about Mary, I find that actually her most important virtues, courage and strength, are often overlooked. The angel appeared to Mary, telling her that she was to bear a child—to a young virgin, this must be seen as a tremendous challenge, especially in the Jewish society of the time. For a young woman betrothed but not yet married to become pregnant was not at all permitted, and Joseph thought of dismissing her quietly. In the face of great pressures, Mary courageously accepted

the divine plan: “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word” (Lk. 1: 38). In the days to come, Mary, with the strength and endurance of a mother, accompanied her son through every sort of situation and faced every kind of challenge. At the foot of the cross on Golgotha, we see a great mother, who with incomparable strength stood by her son to the end. Actually, what we notice first about Mary is her courage and strength, and not just in the male sense.

These women are excellent models for us. The courage, strength and self-reliance we see in them are qualities needed by women in every age. And it is by reason of these wonderful qualities that they are recognized and honored.

Wong Wai Ching, associate professor of modern languages and cultures at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, says that in its missionary efforts, early Christianity gave women a double-edged sword: faith both restricted them and gave them new stimulation and imagination. Thus, three “backhanded” phenomena quietly crept in: when missionaries intended to *save* oppressed Chinese women through Christianity, women missionaries were seeking their own independent roles outside their own country. As women missionaries blessed good wives and mothers with one heart and mind, women Christians in China discovered in the way these foreign women lived their lives an inspiration, that women might have choices outside the home.

Christian women, together with the church and its western network, struggled for gender equality. It can be said that once the missionaries, with their western colonial consciousness, met up with women who were seeking self-liberation and space for development, the result could not have been imagined at the outset.¹⁰ Today, Christian women also gain strength and help from faith, cast off their dependence on their husbands or others and thus raise the status of women in the home. Of course, self-reliance comes with much more difficulty for women than it does for men, whether in the past, or now.

The establishment of the market economy and economic development do not automatically bring freedom

and independence to women. One important aspect for women in ridding themselves of reliance on men is to go into society and earn salaries. This will enable women to have an independent voice in the home and control over income and finances. In such an environment, women will naturally have greater choice and opportunities. At the same time, however, there will be greater challenges and even potential for harm.

Because of the rapid development of the market economy and the weakening of traditional moral standards, for women to rely on men and there find protection becomes much more difficult. If women do not improve themselves, there will inevitably be more of the past repeating itself in modern dress. In such circumstances, women must strengthen their quest for freedom and independence and raise their educational level in order to strengthen their ability to meet challenges. But one characteristic of the economic revolution embodied in the market economy has been the marginalization of Chinese women in the labor force. Women go into business in large numbers, but their choice of work is very small and in some professions the gender gap is fairly serious. The force of public opinion compels them to be marginalized. Therefore, women must expend a great deal more effort in making themselves independent than men.

As China made the transition from traditional to modern, modern women underwent a profound and difficult transformation. In their everyday lives women frequently find themselves in a double bind. Their progress and development are always caught in this kind of contradiction. When social conditions are not yet perfect, women must give up one thing in order to get another. Faced with a changed aesthetics of the times, women have made the painful discovery that success in a profession does not mean success as a woman, but just the opposite. For a woman, success engenders in other people a sense that she has gotten off track; when people term her a strong woman, it is not a compliment. There needs to be a comprehensive integration of the modern women's liberation movement and the movement toward development. There needs to be

a kind of debugging undertaken between traditional culture and modern culture, social reality and Christian faith, to enable the formation of the character of modern women to develop in a healthy direction.

4 Theological Theory should be integrated with Christians' reality

The rise of the feminist movement was a response to and a resistance to culture which had made men the center of humankind. As Christianity grew and developed in human society, it was naturally profoundly influenced by patriarchal thinking. Feminist theology was born in response to this male-centered traditional theology. Western feminist theology was born out of the modern human rights movement. Later it completely broke free of this, and from the 1860s till today, it has been like a brilliant rising star, not easily ignored. Whether in terms of theological theory, or in practice, it has achieved quite a lot. Many seminaries have courses in feminist theology and many theologians and clergy have set up church organizations to protect and promote the rights of women. The focal point of feminist theology is to rediscover the experience of women that has been ignored, and, through new interpretations of the Bible, to reveal patriarchal influence on traditional theology, to develop a more inclusive theological language and connotations, and to emphasize male-female commonalities, interdependence, complementarity, and equality in friendship and love.

At the same time, taking the real context as material for reflection, exploring the signs of the times, questioning unequal phenomena, affirming the importance and inspiration of the feminist movement, will enrich theological reflection. Feminist theology also needs to recognize and give expression to gender inequality in social organizations and the context women face in the course of this opposing male domination, defined gender roles and language and actions that oppress women. Women should understand the significance, honor and value of being women and make ideas into concrete action, promoting the struggle for the dignity and power of women, abolishing male roles

and images forced on women. Their question should be not What do others want me to be? but rather: Who am I?

Zhou Bi-e studies the rights of women and believes that on the surface, women and gender studies and feminism seem to dominate, but in fact, whether in academia or in the cultural system, such ideas remain in a weak position. They are not the mainstream, but are almost without recognition. In such an unfriendly environment, to announce that one is a feminist or to identify with women's studies, takes quite a bit of courage.¹¹

It is difficult for people to accept Chinese feminist theology because of the influence of traditional culture on the one hand, and because of misunderstanding of many biblical passages on the other. So from the very beginning the term feminist theology raises a lot of doubts, even a lot of hackles. But I believe it is a very suitable term to express an important theological trend in the Church today. Perhaps in the course of its development, there has been this or that type of deviation, but no development leads smoothly from beginning to maturity and perfection. There must be a process of groping, an exploration, before it moves onto a healthy path.

Feminist theology is just beginning in the Chinese Church, and whether theoretically or practically, it is a bit scattered and superficial. Little practical use of the study or study and theory has been done. Christians with a consciousness of gender equality are mostly intellectuals; many ordinary women believers have no such consciousness and this may be due to the fact that all the promoters of feminism come from among intellectuals.

Women from middle and lower classes, because of their circumstances and limitations, have no resources for resisting men, so the idea of gender equality is, for them, nothing more than empty talk. Women who lack resources need help in all areas. There are women who have long lived in violent marriages, women whose husbands have many affairs. Because these women have no defined work themselves, they have no income and no ability or opportunity to struggle for themselves. They must accept their situations, endure abuse or live in what are marriages in

name only. Their most urgent need is the concrete help of the church and other institutions, enabling them to have the ability to live independently and, from a faith point of view, giving them practical guidance.

I am greatly concerned about women, not only because I am a woman, but also because God gives to men and women the same grace, because both when growing up and now I have encountered so many great, strong, fighting women. In their homes, workplace and society, they have used their weak arms to uphold a home, the sky, a whole era.

Nanjing Theological Review 2(2003): 123-136.

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4 Ai Jinsun *Christian Ethics*

5 Wang Peng, "On Paul's Prohibitions on Women in 1 Corinthians," *Chinese Theological Review*: 15: 88.

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8 Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, reprint. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1950), 332.

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On Justification by Faith

LI WEIZHEN

The closing talk at the Fifth Lay Training Class in Theological Reconstruction of the Nanjing Churches, given by Bishop K.H. Ting, was titled “De-Emphasizing Justification by Faith.” He said in this talk that if we oversimplify and directly link belief and unbelief, going to heaven and going to hell, we will run into a political issue. He exhorted us: “I think that it would be better for Chinese Christianity, like many churches around the world, to de-emphasize justification by faith somewhat and not link heaven and hell, belief and unbelief so closely together. This is my hope.” Bishop Ting also reminded everyone that “it is my feeling that if we still do not de-emphasize this in China, we will distance ourselves from the majority of Chinese, and this would be tragic.”

The issue which Bishop Ting raised is an old issue in new circumstances. Before Vatican II, it existed within the Catholic Church and though now it is much less serious, we cannot say it has been solved. And because of this, people inside and outside the church are frequently suspicious; they say, When the Allied Forces attacked China during the Boxer Rebellion, most of those aggressors were believing Christians. Were they, then, justified by faith? And those unfortunate Chinese—the common people and the heroic soldiers who sacrificed themselves protecting the sovereignty of China—most of them did not know or had never heard of Christianity. They certainly were not Christians. As non-believers, could they be justified? Did they

then go to hell? This is a realistic question, sharply put. It is a question Christianity cannot avoid, one which it must answer head-on.

In the Catholic Bible, the translation of justification by faith varies slightly from the Protestant, but it is still a famous biblical pronouncement of St. Paul and carries absolute authority. Through the ages, theologians have always felt the Bible is a saving book and that its Gospel of salvation cannot be in error. Thus, there is no question about justification by faith; it is not open to doubt.

One area of theological study is that we must clarify such questions using modern concepts of ethics and morality and modern scientific knowledge. We must make every effort to put things in a way that an impartial observer would find reasonable. This writer would like to adopt such an attitude in exploring this question, as a way of inviting broader discussion.

Why did Paul mention justification by faith? We see in Romans that many Romans who had come to believe in and follow Jesus Christ, abandoned their faith and turned to belief in other gospels when outside pressures were brought to bear. It was in response to this problem that St. Paul proposed justification by faith. With this as prerequisite, can we then, by extension, propose being unjustified by lack of faith? It seems as though we can. But without the mentioned prerequisite, does the converse theorem hold? This is much more complicated.

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven” (Mt. 7: 21). In general, all who can say Lord, Lord! have the sign and expression of believing in Jesus; yet this is not the only criterion. Jesus looks to see if faith has led them to do the will of God, as the most basic principle of whether they may enter the kingdom of heaven. Another passage, Matthew 25: 34-46, is even clearer; here the Lord tells us, “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.” These are those who will enter the kingdom. There are others to whom he says, “Truly I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me.”

Verse 46 sums up: “ And they [who did it not] will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” At the Last Judgment, God will see whether the actions of each one of us have been done in the grace given by God and choices made to carry out the will of God. “ For he will render to every man according to his works” (Rom. 2: 6).

From this we see that the idea of faith is not enough, the most important thing is to have the nature of faith, carried out in the virtue of action.

Then the question naturally arises: Can unbelievers also be justified? In order to explore this question, we must first discuss what sort of actions carry out the will of God. And can unbelievers, in their hearts, be said to believe in God? I would here like to recommend the concept of anonymous Christians of the theologian Karl Rahner. He felt that people could be classified as those who believed in God publicly and openly and those who believed in secret. The former are those of us who have been baptized and take part in religious activities as ordinary Christians; the latter know nothing of Christianity, but act according to their own conscience, desiring justice and peace, seeking and caring for human truth, goodness and beauty. They desire the infinite, though they are vague about it and do not acknowledge that they seek God in their hearts. But in fact they do sincerely and wholeheartedly seek the Lord and Rahner felt they belonged to those who believe anonymously. Their actions are mostly filled with the light of the Spirit and in essence they do the will of God. Though they are not called Christians, they are in fact very good ones and they should be able to gain eternal life.

Is there any biblical basis for Rahner’ s theory? A great deal can be found in Romans. “ When Gentiles who have not the law do by nature what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them” (Rom. 2: 14, 15). “ For he is not a real Jew who is one outwardly, nor is true circumcision external and physical. He is a Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of

the heart, spiritual and not literal. His praise is not from men but from God" (Rom. 2: 28, 29). And chapter 10, verse 14 says, "But how are men to call upon him in whom they have not believed?" Clearly Paul has taken account of those places where the Gospel has not been preached. How do we expect these to be justified by faith, especially since we must recognize the universality of the saving grace of God that redeems all humankind. Thus the most reasonable explanation is that the faith Paul points to contains anonymous faith. The Vatican II documents have this very concretely in saying that those who, through no fault of their own, do not know of the Gospel or Church of Christ, but wholeheartedly seek God and act according to the dictates of their consciences, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, carry out the will of God: these may also gain eternal life. This is the same view which Bishop Ting holds in all his theological thinking on truth, goodness and beauty outside the church.

Here we may sum up the foregoing as follows: Faith can be divided into public and hidden or anonymous faith. Thus there are some people who seem to believe in no religion and live only according to their consciences. Conscience was given by God when God created humans in the image of God, so that their thirst for justice, peace, truth, goodness and beauty, in sum for the infinite, means that objectively they do the will of God and in essence live lives of anonymous faith. There are also others who, though they have been baptized and are called Christians, who go to church and who seem to be leading religious lives, yet in truth live lives completely against the will of God. Can we say they have faith?

If what I have said here is reasonable, then the question sharply posed at the beginning of this essay has been answered. Then why did Martin Luther emphasize justification by faith?

Martin Luther posted his 95 Theses on the cathedral doors in 1517. We need not bother here with clarifying these or getting entangled in this history. For the Church of his day, there was no separation of Church and State. Therefore, to protect the political interests of the Church,

the corruptions of the secular world had been brought into the Church. Looking at all this impartially today, taking a calm look at Martin Luther and those like him, the 95 theses he presented hit the mark. His emphasis on justification by faith was an attempt to wake up the church leaders of the time and the believers who followed them and return to the correct path of the Gospel. But since the reformation and the reforms in the Catholic Church, justification by faith has become a bone of theological contention between Catholics and Protestants. The Catholic Church says that only once a person has received grace can they perform righteous acts, while Protestants emphasize preaching a gospel of justification by faith. This argument has gone on for four centuries, right up to the end of last century, when, through the efforts of theological committees on both sides, a consensus was reached, with both sides agreeing that we sinners are saved by grace and that through faith in Jesus Christ we become righteous and are justified.

Why do some people want to emphasize justification by faith today? If we analyze this only in terms of understanding of doctrine, it is quite possible that we will find many and widespread differences. In remote areas especially, clergy and congregants, in their preaching of the Gospel and salvation, frequently overdo claims such as: Unless you believe you will go to hell. I fear their aim is simply to scare people out of their wits so that they will make haste to convert. They do not realize how great a negative impact these words have.

But think of the fact that there are 1.3 billion Chinese who do not believe in Christianity—where is it these preachers want to consign all these people to? As Bishop Ting said, “it is my feeling that if we still do not de-emphasize this in China, we will distance ourselves from the majority of Chinese, and this would be tragic.” And to speak concretely of individuals, who goes to heaven and who to hell—this can only be known on the Day of Judgment. If someone wants to supplant Jesus in deciding who goes to hell, not only is this against doctrine, we have to guard against raising non-doctrinal questions, for these can be very serious.

Thus, in dealing with this passage in the Bible, we must first understand individual passages from the standpoint of universal salvation found in the Bible as a whole, and then interpret the passage in the spirit of Vatican II. If we must preach on this passage on justification by faith, then we must make clear that there is public faith and there is the hidden faith that lies in the deepest recesses of each soul, so that those who do not have public faith will feel comfortable hearing it, willing to be in contact with us and share with us. Only in this way, can we truly be salt and light and yeast to the world. This is a very difficult passage to preach on. It is part of the Bible and we must preach it, but if we do not thoroughly lay out the meaning of faith in this passage, all the problems we do not wish to come up, will come up. What shall we do? In fact the content of the Gospel is abundant and overflowing and need not reduced to justification by faith. This is why Bishop Ting speaks of down-playing or de-emphasizing justification by faith. Down-playing is an excellent way to put it. I believe that our congregants will increasingly come to identify with this idea.

In writing this essay, my hope is that my readers will come to know the depths of the hearts of those outside the church and their thirst for the infinite. We Christians should see this as a kind of hidden faith. In fact, looking at church history, faith has through the ages been understood in terms of its content and principles. Recently the view of a pluralistic faith has appeared; currently, a point we cannot overlook is the necessity for a more rational or reasonable explanation of faith. We can see that our understanding of faith is developing, moving with the times.

Today, when we see the faith hidden deep in the inmost hearts of those outside the Church, it certainly does not mean that we should ignore or treat lightly those who profess their faith, but we must not put obstacles in the way of the Gospel; the mission of the Church is still extremely important. One part of that mission is to bring this hidden faith to a profession of faith in Jesus Christ and bring people into the Church, through the sacraments and other means of salvation, that we may more effectively and

holistically bring people to salvation, that they may better know God and accept the grace God offers.

May God be with us.

Nanjing Theological Review 1(2003):122-127.

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De-emphasizing Justification by Faith: Theological Reflections

OUYANG WENFENG

Ever since the closing talk by Bishop Ting at the Fifth Lay Training Class in Theological Reconstruction of the Nanjing Churches in July 2000, the proposal to de-emphasize justification by faith has had a great impact in the Church. Conservatives think that this is an extremist statement of Bishop Ting, while liberals see it as part of the new theological departures Bishop Ting advocates. But this writer thinks both sides' understandings are a misreading of the de-emphasis on justification by faith proposed by Bishop Ting. Actually a de-emphasis on justification by faith is no extremist view, nor is it a new departure in theology; rather, it is a logical development of theological views Bishop Ting has always held. I would like to explain my view on this under four points below.

1 A historical look at the doctrine of justification by faith

At the mention of justification by faith, two great Christians come immediately to mind: the apostle Paul and Martin Luther. In Romans and Galatians, the formulation of justification by faith given by Paul was based in part on considerations of his context. It was also, however, a theological breakthrough for the future path of Christianity. As Bishop Ting has said, for Paul, the doctrine of justification by faith was meant to “free people from the fetters (of Ju-

diasm), to liberate human nature,” enabling the Gospel to “break out of Jewish restrictions,” and move from being a small sect of Judaism to a world religion. A thousand years later during the Reformation, because of the practice of selling indulgences in the Catholic Church, Martin Luther raised the idea of justification by faith again. To resist the practice, which oppressed the people, Martin Luther stated in his 95 theses that salvation comes from faith, not from the sale of indulgences. Historically speaking then, the advocacy of justification by faith by these two great religious progressives, Paul and Luther, was for the purpose of upholding justice, resisting the dark forces of the religious authorities of the day, purifying and simplifying religion and gaining liberation for the people. We can see that justification by faith originally had a progressive meaning; it was a banner of liberation. Its goal was by no means to send people to hell.

At the height of the western missionary movement in the nineteenth century, foreign missionaries, eager to convert Chinese, linked justification by faith to heaven and hell, using the threat of hell as a means to scare the Chinese and compel them to convert to the faith. This, with the impact of fundamentalist theology on ordinary Chinese Christians, naturally led to justification by faith becoming orthodox belief in the Chinese Church.

2 A close analysis of the danger of emphasizing justification by faith

However, justification by faith, which once brought Christianity to the Chinese people, has, in the context of new China, become a stumbling block to the continued development of Christianity. An excessive emphasis on this doctrine has done quite a lot of damage. As evidence of this, Bishop Ting has pointed out four types of serious harm which excessive emphasis on justification by faith might bring about. The first is a distorted view of God. Some persons have used this doctrine to say that God defines unbelievers as sinners out of anger, as if God views the work of human hands, including the good work humans do, with

enmity. The claim is that the love of God is only for those who believe. God has abandoned this world, and all the beauty we enjoy comes from Satan, who only pretends to be an angel of light, and so on. The result of spreading this view of God and such a worldview is to make Christians view those outside the church in the same way Jonah looked at Nineveh.

The second harm is that it leads easily to inaction by faith and the idea that morality is useless. The message of justification by faith has undergone a change in this view: God no longer asks whether you have done humane and virtuous deeds, nor whether you have lived a selfish life or one of self-sacrifice and devotion to the welfare of others. God asks only whether you believe or not. This will certainly lead to inaction by faith. And even more seriously, “this denies the ethical and moral content of the gospel,” and leads down the slippery slope to the idea that morality is useless. Superficially, Christians who place excessive emphasis on justification by faith are interested only in personal salvation; their fervor is concentrated on the spiritual quest. Actually, their thinking is not essentially different from that of those on the ultra-left during the Cultural Revolution. They separate religious doctrine from its moral and ethical aspects. This is ludicrous.

The third harm is that it easily sets up a barrier between the morality of believers and unbelievers. Bishop Ting feels that against the current background in China, this doctrine creates an unnecessary distance between the moral actions of believers and those of nonbelievers. And it in fact runs counter to genuine Christian humanism. It is in this sense that Bishop Ting raises his reservations about justification by faith as definitive of Protestant Christianity.

The fourth harm is that in China, belief and unbelief take on a serious political ideological content. The question of belief and unbelief seems on the surface like a question of faith, but because it has been linked to heaven and threats of hell, it extends to becoming a political question.

Through this penetrating analysis, the harm excessive emphasis on justification by faith may do no longer seems

like scare tactics. Rather, we deeply believe that Bishop Ting is giving us a serious and well-intentioned philosophical warning.

3 An appropriate adjustment of justification by faith

Based on consideration of the factors discussed above, Bishop Ting has boldly undertaken an appropriate adjustment of this doctrine of justification by faith. First of all, he affirms, in an extremely objective way, this undeniable fact: There is a difference between belief and unbelief, and it is not a negligible one. Every person in this world was created by the Father in heaven, but not everyone is a friend of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ thirsts for friendship, but those he can call friends are in the minority. ...But we cannot say that those who do not believe in God are therefore not sons and daughters of God, even less can we claim that they are all enemies of God.

Bishop Ting then borrows from Teilhard de Chardin the concept of the Cosmic Christ to effect a change of theological angle of vision. How abundant is Christian faith; we need not close circles around belief and unbelief, or saved and unsaved. He calls on us to undertake theological thinking from a new angle of vision, looking to God and not looking to humans, and setting aside the issue of belief and unbelief.

Finally, Bishop Ting clearly brings up the proposal to de-emphasize the doctrine of justification by faith. "It would be better if Chinese Christianity could ..de-emphasize the doctrine of justification by faith a little, and not tie heaven and hell, belief and unbelief so tightly together." This reveals purity of heart in one who has dearly loved the Lord, and even more, a hope directed at fundamentalist Christians in the Chinese churches. Bishop Ting has given Chinese Christianity a theological vision of great openness, and a new definition of justification by faith.

4 A de-emphasis on justification by faith is an inevitable product of the theology of Bishop Ting

We know that God as Love and the Cosmic Christ are prominent in the theology of Bishop Ting. The proposal to de-emphasize justification by faith is a logical development of this thinking. It is not a new departure from his theological system. In explicating this point, Bishop Ting has, through refutation of excessive emphasis on justification by faith, opened up his own theological reflection.

First of all, he has opposed God as Love to justification by faith. If God has made only those who believe in him his sons and daughters, if God has given eternal life only to them, yet continues to create crowds of people, most of who will become residents of hell because they do not believe—is this a God in whose love we can believe? This does not make sense.

Secondly, he opposes the concept of the Cosmic Christ to justification by faith. There is nothing vague about this position. “It is not that God created the world but ceded its control to the successful rebellion of Satan, and Christ came to rescue certain individuals out of it to be returned to God. As creativity is inexhaustible and creation a long process, Christ has everything to do with Creation thus far and with Creation as it goes on now. His concern is to bring Creation to its fruition when love, justice and peace become the rule. Redemption, like education and sanctification, does not stand against Creation but is one process with Creation. Not only communities of Christians here and there, but humankind as a whole and, indeed the whole cosmos are within the realm of Christ’ s redemptive work.”

And so we see that the de-emphasis on justification by faith that Bishop Ting proposes is not something insincere or frivolous, but is rather of epochal significance in keeping the Church in step with changing times as theological reconstruction continues to develop.

Nanjing Theological Review 1(2003): 128-132.

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Exact references were not given in the text.

De-Emphasis on Justification by Faith: An Instance of Theological Adaptation

WANG GUANGHUI

It has been several years since the initiation of theological reconstruction, yet the most egregious reason why theology is not suited to socialist society remains the issue of belief vs. unbelief: how Christians look upon those who do not believe in Christ. This is an issue that touches on the relationship between believers and the rest of society, including the Communist Party. And it is a question of how Chinese believers should look at justification by faith today.¹ Justification by faith has been an unchanging truth and doctrine of Christianity through the ages.² How did it produce these issues in the Chinese Church? The answer lies in the “excessive emphasis on justification by faith in Chinese Christianity and the idea that it is the all in all of Christian faith.”³ Because of this, Bishop Ting proposed a de-emphasis on justification by faith. Such a de-emphasis is a kind of self-regulation on the part of the Church. This adjustment demonstrates the task of the current theological reconstruction in the Chinese Church, and opens an effective path for clergy and pastoral workers at the grassroots to join in theological reconstruction.

A necessity for the Chinese Church

A very pious sister, a convert, zealously evangelized her colleagues and friends. But no one was converted; quite the opposite, they would hide from her. If they heard her

voice on the phone, they would not take the call. Finally she went to ask her pastor the reason why. Only then did she realize her mistake. She saw belief in the Lord as a wonderful thing, and she thought unbelievers would go to hell. She wanted to tell her friends the good news so they could escape the sufferings of hell. To do this, she urged on them some very judgmental passages which showed them as sinners and said that horrible things would happen if they did not believe. And so she scared them off.

Superficially it seems that it was her method of evangelization that led to her failure. But looking further, she was compelled to act that way out of her own sense of superiority. In fact, she was influenced by an over-emphasis on justification by faith. Justification by faith is in itself a component of our basic faith, but an over-emphasis on it increases the distance between belief and unbelief and before we know it, we have separated from society and reality, and our witness for Christ has been directly affected.

Certainly, the majority of our preachers and believers are not always going on about lifting up justification by faith. But the bad results of justification by faith can be traced in our faith and affect us deeply. Time has not faded its impact and group after group of new Christians are new bottles filled with old wine. This does not harm society, but it does very little to contribute to it.

The bad effects of over-emphasis on justification by faith are rather clearly to be seen in the Chinese Church today in individual believers themselves, who are focused only on their own salvation and gaining inner peace, and not on moral behavior. They are unwilling to have any contact with unbelievers. They fear unbelievers will pollute their holiness and influence their faith. Some believers regularly say that when they are with other believers, they feel closer than with their own brothers and sisters. But when they are with unbelievers, they always feel as if there is nothing to say, because they do not follow the same path. Without their realizing it, this sets them apart and vilifies others. Mark 9: 38-40 tells us that the heart of Jesus is broad enough to accommodate a man who, though he does not follow him, casts out demons in his name. We should

take the heart of Jesus as our heart in accepting others and never forget that “he who is not against us is for us” (Mk. 9: 40). In this way we will gain the sympathy and understanding of many more people.

Over-emphasis on justification by faith shows in the ministry of the church in an emphasis on the believing individual that ignores the social witness of the church. When the Chinese government banned the heretical Falun Gong, some who have not yet been converted to Christianity formed some unfriendly views which directly increased the difficulty of evangelization. The usual opinion is that these people do not understand the church. If this is the case, what do we do, besides preaching the Word inside our churches, to help those outside understand our faith? The law protects preaching within the church and does not forbid glorifying God through good deeds in society. If we think that running the church well is simply a matter of building churches, good preaching, opening up meeting points and doing a good job of self-support, this is simply not enough.

The standard for running the church well is “satisfaction on the part of Christians and having the favor of the people around us.”⁴ Both are important. To ignore either would affect the development of the Church. The Christ we believe in is a Cosmic Christ.⁵ This Christ cares for religion, spirituality, the church, and believers. But his care is not limited to such a small area. He also cares for those who have not yet come to follow him.⁶ People often quote: “But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us (Rom. 5: 8). Christ did not die only for those who came to follow him during his three years on earth, but also for those who had not yet come to follow him. The death of Christ is so great, so meaningful, bringing hope to all humankind. In the same way, the Church does not exist only for believers, but also exists for those who have not yet believed. The Church must show its worth in these who have not yet believed. As a Church, we must manifest this love of Jesus in society.

The social expression of over-emphasis on justification by faith is that there is no way to recognize the truth,

goodness and beauty outside the Church; the attitude is that only what the Church itself does has value. No matter how good the deeds of those outside might be, they have no value. Every person has been created by God in the image of God. Believers and unbelievers alike show forth this image in their persons, whether to a greater or lesser extent. Speaking of morality, whether one is a believer or unbeliever, moral behavior is the same, only the impetus and goal differ. This being the case, we must not link every issue, one-sidedly, to faith.

If the Church wants to put down roots in China, it cannot reject traditional Chinese culture, but rather must absorb and digest it, develop and enlarge it. The Nestorianism of the Tang dynasty absorbed the culture of the Chinese people without the least hesitation. In some two thousand words of the text on the Nestorian monument, the author used a large quantity of quotations and allusions to ancient Chinese classics: thirty from the Book of Changes and the Classic of Poetry; twenty from the Spring and Autumn Annals. Matteo Ricci, too, was a forerunner in making connections among the truth, goodness and beauty inside and outside the Church.⁷ And Vatican II recognized that many elements of sanctification and truth are found outside the visible structure of the Church.⁸ The breadth and openness of the Church are not a surrender to the secular world, but a process of absorption, renewal and adaptation in context. It is not a loss of self, but an enlargement of self.

In sum, over-emphasis on justification by faith has negatively affected the Chinese Church across the board and placed obstacles in the path of its development. Thus, de-emphasis on justification by faith is a necessity for the Chinese Church. Only by overcoming a “Jonah attitude” or an “eldest son attitude,”⁹ can the Chinese Church gradually downplay justification by faith and fundamentally change the way it sees those who have not yet believed.

Why the Chinese Church places such emphasis on justification by faith

“The emphasis on justification by faith that we find

in China, and in the whole Third World, was initiated by missionaries from the western churches. They were the first to target the great mass of those outside the church who did not believe in Jesus by posing the issue of belief vs. unbelief. Unbelievers were all going to hell.” The spread of Christianity in China was protected by and aided imperialist guns and cannon and unequal treaties. At the time the Chinese Church was entirely under the control of foreign mission boards. Those engaged in evangelization were foreigners; the believers were Chinese. When Chinese converted, they stood beside the missionaries and this imperceptibly widened the gap between belief and unbelief. The close relationship between Christianity and imperialist aggression roused the ire of most Chinese people. The *foreign religion* label gave expression to the abyss between the church and the great mass of the people. And the western church demanded that “Chinese who join the Church should not think of their native land; those in the Church belong to heaven and not to China.”¹⁰ The spread of the phrase “one more Christian, one less Chinese” directly harmed the feelings of the Chinese Church, the nation and the Chinese people. One and a half centuries later, the western mission board-controlled Chinese Church, having existed in such a context, had, under this imperceptible influence, formed a definite ideology.

The establishment of new China enabled the Chinese Church to cast off western church control and step onto the three-self path of self-government, self-support and self-propagation. The fifty years that followed could not entirely eliminate the shadow that had formed in the hearts of Chinese Christians. This situation arose from both faith and political factors. After nearly twenty years of development, the religious policy was implemented and freedom of belief was fully guaranteed; the political factor in the emphasis on justification by faith was basically eliminated. The initiation of the Three-Self Movement changed the self image of Christianity and gained the approval of society.

In terms of faith, because the Church was busy with restoration and rebuilding of churches, it had no surplus energy for pondering and understanding these questions.

There was little change in its sense of superiority. Though it had no ill intentions toward those who did not yet believe, it was difficult to get along together. The Chinese Church has long been independent, but thinking has not entirely changed. “At present, those in Chinese pulpits are all Chinese, but there is a certain portion of what we preach that is still what western missionaries inculcated into us in the 1920s and 30s.”¹¹ This is an important impact that one-sided emphasis on justification by faith has had and continues to have in the church.

Second Corinthians 6: 14 says: “Do not be yoked together with unbelievers.” Misunderstanding of this verse has also had a direct impact on relations between believers and unbelievers. “Yoked together” suggests cooperation and unity of purpose.”¹² The true intention of Paul here is not to say that believers and unbelievers cannot cooperate and work together, but rather to say that Christians must live out Christ in society, and not fall in with bad habits and elements in society.¹³ As Bishop Ting points out, we can square the existence of many things in the world with the cosmic role of Christ.¹⁴

To sum up, over-emphasis on justification by faith has deep historical roots and has arisen from factors in the Church itself.

De-emphasis on justification by faith in relation to biblical truth

De-emphasis is a kind of adjustment. One of the goals of theological reconstruction is to adapt to socialist society in terms of theological thinking and this includes some necessary adjustments in theological thinking.¹⁵ The doctrine of justification by faith cannot be revised and abolished at will. Someone once proposed that the church should substitute justified by love for justified by faith. Bishop Ting said we could not accept this proposal. De-emphasis on justification by faith is the only choice for resolving the justification by faith issue. In this way, justification by faith is restored to the place it should have in the Bible and faith. Then we will pay more attention to the other truths and teachings of the Bible.

Some people may think that de-emphasis on justification by faith will affect faith. This is an excess of anxiety, because to de-emphasize justification by faith is first of all to de-emphasize the one-sidedness of the doctrine, the dogmatic understanding. It is not to do away with; de-emphasis is no more than not to make justification by faith into the be all and end all of Christian faith, but rather to manifest the abundance of Christ.¹⁶ By de-emphasizing justification by faith we can better understand God, and allow others to know God, because God is love.¹⁷ Paul proposed justification by faith in response to Jewish legalism; the doctrine broke through Jewish narrowness, laying the basis for Christianity to become a world religion.

In Romans chapters 1-11, Paul specially lays out the teaching on the principle and issue of justification by faith. From Romans 12 onwards, he turns to the issue of how to be righteous before God and how to maintain such a position. Paul expounds in detail that the importance of the life of faith lies in its living out, and at the same time he raises the tasks of the new life of the Christian. The acceptance by a believer of the justice of God is a kind of inner experience, but must be expressed outwardly. Paul speaks of Christian personal morality and social morality. “Take thought for what is noble in the sight of all” (Rom. 12: 17-18). “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities” (Rom. 13: 1). These beautiful teachings show us the whole exposition Paul made of the truth. Taking Romans as evidence, to emphasize justification by faith is a one-sided understanding of the Bible.

In James, a Christian just liberated from the law, set upon another extreme course, thinking that with faith one could enjoy the abundant grace of God and that good deeds would not be necessary. James explains that true faith must be accompanied by good deeds. Faith without works is not true faith. “Paul speaks of how one becomes justified before God, true faith with works; James speaks of how to be justified before humans—how to let people know you are already justified, this comes from the true works of faith. Clearly, James and Romans are not contradictory, but give a whole picture of justification by faith. If we still take the

Bible as the foundation of our faith, then we must return to the Bible for an all-round understanding of justification by faith.”¹⁸ Bishop Ting says, If people write off the perfection and balance of the whole of Christian doctrine and replace it with some other doctrine and teaching, emphasizing only justification by faith, blowing it all out of proportion, this can have bad consequences.¹⁹

Christianity is not only a religion which concentrates on faith, but even more, one that concentrates on works. There are many instances of moral works in the Bible and humans will be judged by their works. “And so, to understand and grasp the true meaning of the Bible, we must generally emphasize three factors, the Bible, tradition and reason. If one is overemphasized and the others ignored, it is far from enough and may even be dangerous.”²⁰

De-emphasis on justification by faith shows us the importance of the balance and completion of the biblical truth. Emphasizing one part and ignoring another part of basic faith easily leads to problems. If the air and matter that sustain life get out of balance, it can be dangerous to life. In the past, the church paid special attention to the growth of the spiritual life. Now it is time for it to pay attention to life in its external environment. So the Bible is not simply a place to seek the spiritual or offer resources for personal salvation, but for clarity of direction, for the Christian to fully realize his or her vocation and responsibility in society today.²¹ Perfecting and balancing the biblical truth, not only allows us a correct understanding of the true meaning of the Bible, but can help us rightly understand the will of God in our own context.

De-emphasis on justification by faith is a process. Adjustments to theological thinking, exploration of the relations between Christianity and Chinese culture, shifting to a Christianity for the Chinese socialist era, all require common effort and practice on the part of all. “After the Reformation, it was 300 years before Protestantism began its evangelistic activities toward the outside world. For us to establish a Christianity adapted to socialist society will not be a matter of a few years, or even a decade.”²² We should not lose heart because results are not immediately forth-

coming. We must begin with reality, with the present, with ourselves. For the development of the Church, we must plant our feet on solid ground, add to our achievements daily and strive together. In this way, we will surely reach our goal.

Nanjing Theological Review 1(2003): 133-140.

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