And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.

Jn. 1:14
Dear Reader,


This small breast, gently rising and falling, is yet boundless beyond compare. How else could Christ embrace his innumerable prodigal children who are scattered far and wide? These tiny shoulders, delicate as jade, are yet strong as metal or stone. How else could they bear the burden of our human suffering and concern?

Earlier, in another Christmas meditation, he quotes John 1:11, “He came to what was his own.” These two quotations encompass our hopes for Christmas and the New Year of 2011. Though our world often seems broken, our people scattered, Christ has come to claim the world and bring us renewed hope and strength to work toward the peace we find present in him.

In this December 2010 issue of ANS, we report on the 80-millionth Bible to be published by the Amity Printing Company (APC). As one who has been privileged to follow the progress of The Amity Foundation and the Amity Printing Company since their inception, it is both humbling and thrilling to realize that Amity is today one of the largest NGOs in China and the APC is the largest producer of Bibles in the world. The article also contains the sermon Rev. Dr. Cao Shengjie’s preached at the worship service to mark this milestone in printing of the Bible in China and a brief review of the history leading up to it.

According to the findings of a survey published in the *Blue Book of Religions: Annual Report on China’s Religions (2010)* there are now over 23 million Protestant Christians in China. In addition to this official statistic, our article summarizes survey findings that will be of interest to our readers: who Protestant Christians are in terms of age, gender, and level of education; their geographic distribution; and their reasons for becoming Christians.

Our former editor, Dr. Theresa Carino, profiles the English service at St. Paul’s Church in Nanjing. She finds that the service is not provided to meet the needs of foreign residents of the city—though a number do attend—but rather to attract educated young people. Six years ago, fewer than 10% of worshippers at St. Paul’s were university educated. Today, half the 3000 worshippers who attend the various Sunday services are young people.

Zhuo Xinping, Director of the Institute of World Religions at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, explores the idea of a theology of love and why such a theology may be able to bring Christians and non-Christians together in China today.

Rounding out this issue, Zhou Xinfang identifies self-support as the crucial issue for churches in the countryside and offers suggestions to meet the challenge, while Xu Qing writes of his experiences as a seminary graduate and young pastor.

The lovely paper cuts throughout this issue are the work of Christian artist Fan Pu (Paula Fan), now retired. Many readers will be familiar with her paper cuts, which have been exhibited overseas and sold through the Amity Christian Art Center in Nanjing. Photographs are courtesy of St. Paul’s Church and The Amity Foundation.

Many thanks to Suzanne Rowe, Emily Dunn, and Katie Spillane for translation, and to Theresa Carino for contributing her article on St. Paul’s English service.

Janice Wickeri
Bibles from the Amity Printing Company:
Eighty million and counting ...

The 80-millionth Bible to roll off the presses of the Amity Printing Company (APC) in Nanjing since it began operations in 1987 was published in November 2010. The occasion was marked on November 8, 2010 with a worship service and ceremony culminating three days of events celebrating the 25th anniversary of the Amity Foundation. Since publication of the first “Amity” Bible in 1987, APC has grown to be the largest producer of Bibles in the world.

The Rev. Bao Jiayuan presided at the worship service and Rev. Dr. Cao Shengjie, former President of the China Christian Council and currently a co-chairperson of the CCC/TSPM Advisory Committee, preached a short sermon, “God’s grace exceeds our expectations,” based on the biblical story of Jesus feeding the “five thousand” with five loaves and two fish. This is particularly apt, since the five loaves and two fish appear in the Amity logo as well as on the cover of ANS. With her excellent command of English, Rev. Cao served as her own interpreter, moving quite naturally from one language to the other as she preached.

Rev. Cao prefaced her sermon by recalling the first meeting of the TSPM Standing Committee following the Cultural Revolution. Rev. Cao attended this meeting, which took place in Shanghai in 1980. After the hard years of political chaos, one might have expected that committee members would share their stories of suffering during those years; it would have been only human. But no one dwelt on the past; no one spoke of personal bitterness over the lost years. Instead they focused on the joy of the return to normal church life and above all, the priority to print the Bible, most copies of which had been destroyed during the Cultural Revolution.

To print Bibles in those days just after the Cultural Revolution, however, many challenges had to be overcome. Paper was in short supply; each press was allocated a limited amount. The 3 million Bibles produced between 1980 and 1985 were printed at presses in Shanghai, Fuzhou, and Nanjing, but the number still fell far short of need at the time. Still, by the third National Christian Conference, every participant received a New Testament and Psalms. Rev. Cao also paid special tribute to Bishop K.H. Ting and Dr. Wenzao Han, as well as others in the elder generation of CCC/TSPM leaders, who had the vision to join with the United Bible Societies in establishing the Amity Printing Company.

Rev. Dr. Cao’s sermon

As Matthew tells us, Jesus had been trying to go away with his disciples to a deserted place after hearing of the beheading of John the Baptist. But the crowds followed. After a day of preaching and healing, as evening drew in, “the disciples came to him and said, ’This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves.’ Jesus said to them, ’They need not go away; you give them something to eat’”(Mt. 14: 15-17). This last phrase is common to all three synoptic gospels: You give them something to eat.

Today we celebrate the 80-millionth Bible. Today APC not only prints Chinese Bibles but Bibles for other countries. A real miracle. God has done new, great, wondrous things for Chinese Christianity. Remember the example of those church leaders who responded to Jesus’ command when the disciples asked where they would find food to feed the five thousand: You give them something to eat.
partners and the United Bible Societies, as well as government officials, also spoke, congratulating Amity, APC, and the United Bible Societies on the outstanding achievement represented by the publication of the 80-millionth Bible. Mr. Jiang Jianyong, Deputy Director of the State Administration of Religious Affairs, spoke of the appearance of the 80-millionth Bible as Christians’ “beautiful witness to Jesus Christ,” an unprecedented accolade from a government official.

The service was enhanced by the contributions of the Miao choir from Yunnan, in particular their impressive performance of Handel’s Hallelujah chorus.

Beautiful numbered presentation copies of the 80-millionth Bible were given to participants as they left.

Along the way to 80 million

In 1986, The Amity Foundation and the United Bible Societies signed a memorandum of understanding. The two organizations broke ground in the environs of Nanjing for a printing press that was to give priority to the printing of Bibles for the use of Christians in China, as well as other materials of use to society, such as educational books. Prior to this, only 3 million Bibles had been produced, printed in several locations between 1980 and 1986 (see above). Among the few presses available during those years, one that did service printing Bibles was in fact owned by the People’s Liberation Army. Once the Amity press began functioning in 1987, 6.5 million Bibles quickly followed, with an annual average of 2 million volumes.

By the end of 2005, the Amity Printing Press had printed 40 million full-volume Bibles. On September 11, 2007, the cumulative total reached 50 million. This included 43 million copies of the complete Bible produced for mainland China, including Bibles in traditional and simplified Chinese characters, in eight ethnic minority languages, and in Braille, while the remaining 7 million were exported to over 60 countries around the world. Study versions

Christianity is a faith in action and practice. Love for God and for people cannot be separated. This unity of words and action is also a traditional Chinese idea. Christians believe we must study God’s word and live it out. We must help people to study the Bible; we must show them what the Bible teaches us to do. Xie Fuya (N.Z. Zia), the well-known Chinese theologian and philosopher, said that the Jewish and Indian nations were nations of faith. The West emphasized knowledge and reason. We Chinese focus on action.

A recent issue of Tian Feng (October 2010) carried an article on the “Theology of Love in Chinese Christianity and Social Concern.” Amity promotes friendly relationships between people and countries; this Amity has done domestically and internationally. God is love to people through Amity projects. In Amity projects, love has been manifested. People in China today thirst for love and justice. We are optimistic about China’s future, but the question is, have we done our part to manifest God’s love and grace? We look forward, for God can do even greater things, but we must do more ourselves to be a living witness.

Remember Jesus’ command: You give them something to eat. And respond.

During the ceremony following the service, Mr. Qiu Zhonghui, General Secretary of the Amity Foundation, put away his prepared remarks to speak “from my heart” about Amity, its relationship to the APC and the important work of making the Bible readily available in China. Representatives from churches and church organizations in China, Hong Kong, and Macau, and from Amity’s ecumenical office, also spoke, congratulating Amity, APC, and the United Bible Societies on the outstanding achievement represented by the publication of the 80-millionth Bible. Mr. Jiang Jianyong, Deputy Director of the State Administration of Religious Affairs, spoke of the appearance of the 80-millionth Bible as Christians’ “beautiful witness to Jesus Christ,” an unprecedented accolade from a government official.

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and bilingual Chinese-English editions, as well as a variety of hymnals were also produced. In December 2007, an official agreement extended until 2018 the joint venture between the (now) Amity Development Company and UBS, Amity Printing Company, which makes possible the printing of Bibles.

The Amity Printing Company has always enjoyed the strong support of the National Committee of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Churches in China and the China Christian Council (TSPM/CCC), the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA), and the Jiangsu provincial and Nanjing municipal governments. The Central government has given the Amity Bibles tax-free status multiple times to support its work and maintain the pricing at an affordable level that is one-third to one-fifth the price of books of comparable quality. Jiangning district government has also praised the APC, one of its representatives pointing out that the Press had not only contributed to the cause of religion in China, but was also one of the leading enterprises in the local printing industry, producing high-quality books under an advanced form of management.

At the 25th anniversary celebrations for the Amity Foundation, several speakers, including the Rev. Dr. Cao Shengjie in her sermon at the worship service marking production of the 80-millionth Bible, referred to the special mission of Amity to achieve “love in action,” manifesting God’s love for people through their projects. The Amity Foundation and the Amity Printing Company sprang from this same vision: manifesting God’s love by promoting amicable relationships between people and countries, domestically and internationally. With the APC, this has happened in surprising ways and at a variety of levels as it has developed into the largest producer of Bibles in the world. Its effect on the paper producing and print industries in and around its Jiangsu base is a case in point. In the early days the special Bible paper—thin enough to keep the Bible a convenient thickness, yet strong enough to be printed on both sides—had to be entirely imported from abroad. Cooperation between the APC and local businesses resulted in steady improvements in the quality of Bible-type paper produced in China, until today all the APC’s paper needs are sourced domestically. Local printing companies have also benefited from the sharing of technical expertise.

Between 2007 and 2010, APC produced 30 million Bibles, moving from 50 million in 2007 to the milestone of 80 million in 2010. Of course, as production continues at a pace of one or two Bibles per minute, that milestone has already been surpassed. The Amity Foundation, too, reached a milestone and paused to reflect on and celebrate 25 years of growth and achievement, but it, too, is already hard at work to continue and develop its programs and move in new directions—that is love in action. The production of Bibles is one demonstrable, active way that this love extends to the Body of Christ in China and around the world.

— JW

For more on the 25th anniversary of the Amity Foundation, visit their website: <http://www.amityfoundation.org/>.
See also The Amity Printing Company site: <http://www.amityprinting.com/english/home.asp>.
A brief snapshot of Protestant Christians in China

There are over 23 million Protestant Christians in China.

- As a percentage of the total population of China, Protestant Christians account for 1.8%, or over 23 million people (23,050,000).
- Of these, 67.5% or 15.56 million are baptized Christians, while 32.5% (7,490,000) are not yet baptized.
- Female Protestants outnumber men, at 69.9% of the total Protestant population, compared to 30.1% for men.
- In terms of educational level, over half had a primary school education or less (54.6%), with 2.6% at junior college level or above.
- The majority of Protestant Christians, over 60%, fall in the 35-64 year-old age bracket.
- Protestant Christians are concentrated in the eastern part of China and in the Yangtze River basin.

These figures are from a survey conducted by the Institute of World Religions Research Group of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in the year 2008-09. The survey was limited to the Chinese Protestant Christian community of mainland China and does not include Catholics or Orthodox Christians, or Christians in Hong Kong, Macau or Taiwan.

The survey sample consisted of 54,360 households for a total of 211,750 people living in the jurisdiction of 2,718 village committees in 321 units at district level. Households without Christian family members filled out a single questionnaire. Households with Christians received a questionnaire for each Christian member. 63,680 questionnaires were issued, with a 100% return rate.

The questionnaire comprised the following 19 questions:

1. Number of members in the family.
2. Gender.
3. Age.
4. Ethnic identity.
5. Marriage status.
7. Profession.
8. Religious affiliation.
9. Age on becoming a religious believer.
10. Year this took place.
11. Reason the individual became a religious believer.
12. How the individual came into contact with religious faith.
13. Whether the individual attends religious activities frequently.
14. Where the individual attends such activities.
15. The individual's attitude to other religions.
16. The individual's attitude to "grave-sweeping" and the Qingming festival.
17. Are non-believers willing to make friends with the religious believer?
18. Reasons for their non-belief.
19. Are there other religious believers in the home?

Some of the selected findings are as follows:

**Growth**

The fastest growth in the Protestant churches has taken place since 1993. Those who were Christians prior to 1965 account for 3.0%. Those who became Christians between 1966 and 1981 account for 5.7%; from 1982-1992, 17.9%; from 1992-2002, 42.2%; and between 2003-2009, 31%. This means that 73.4% of the Protestant Christian community has become believers since 1993.
According to geographic region, the Protestant Christian population is distributed as follows: East China: 42.5%; Central China: 29.2%; Northeast 11.4%; Southwest 6.6%; North China: 4.9%; Northwest: 3.8%; and South China: 1.6%.

**Reasons for conversion**
Conversions due to illness of the individual concerned or a family member account for 68.8% of all conversions. Family traditions and influence have been decisive in 15% of conversions. 44% of new Christians have been introduced to the faith by family members or relatives; in 46.5% of cases, by other believers or by friends.

**Attendance and registration**
The report finds that Protestant Christians in China are “quite active in religious activities.” 57.8% of Protestant respondents answered “often participate in” religious activities, 38.2% “sometimes participate,” adding up to 96%. Only 3.9% said they “do not participate.”

67.9% attend registered sites (churches and meeting points-ed.), with 20.2% participating in the activities of unregistered establishments (or churches and meeting points-ed.), 26.7% worship in friends’ homes, while 22.4% worship in their own homes.

Data also shows that the probability of attendance at activities in a registered site increases with the level of education.

**Age and education** (total Protestant Christian population)

**Age**
- 35-64: over 60%
- 14 and below: 0.6%
- 15-24: 3.7%
- 25-34: 5.9%
- 35-44: 16.1%
- 45-54: 23.4%
- 54-64: 24.6%
- 65 and above: 25.7%

**Education**
- Primary school or less: 54.6%
- Middle school: 32.7%
- High school or technical school: 10.1%
- Junior college and above: 2.6%

**Age at conversion**
According to the report, many people have the impression that conversion to Christianity happens only in old age. However, the survey shows that nearly half the Protestant population (44.4%) became Christians between the ages of 35 and 54.

The statistics do vary based on geographic area. For example, in the northeast, 54% of believers became Christians between the ages of 35 and 54, while in the South China region, about one quarter (22.7%) were younger than 14 years old, and another 24.4% were between the ages of 25 and 34. The survey attributes these numbers to family influences.

Among the total Protestant Christian population, age on becoming Christian stands at 5.9% for those younger than 14; 9.5% for those between 15 and 24; 16.5% for those in the 25-34 age bracket; 22.5% in the 35-44 bracket; 21.9% among those 45-54 years of age; 17.0% were between 55-64; and 6.8% were 65 years of age and older.

**Attitudes toward other religions**
With regard to other religions, 17.8% of Protestant respondents felt other religions were “as good as my own,” but 47.5% answered that other religions were not as good as [Christianity].

**Attitudes toward the custom of “grave-sweeping” and the Qingming Festival**
The survey sought to discover the level of acceptance of traditional Chinese customs on the part of Chinese Christians. 52.9% of respondents described the sweeping of ancestral graves as a “traditional custom” and 57.0% felt it was a form of “remembrance of the departed.” The report concludes that this shows a high level of identification and acceptance of a traditional custom. Those who felt the custom would “protect the family” accounted for 18.1%, while 15.1% termed it a “superstition.”
According to the *Blue Book of Religions: Annual Report on China's Religions (2010)*, the “Questionnaire Survey of Chinese Protestant Christian Households” is the first such large-scale household survey by an academic institution, a research group from the Institute of World Religions of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) in Beijing. It was published by the Social Sciences Academic Press, and is part of a series of Blue Book reports on various subjects published annually. The information presented here has been summarized and arranged with an eye to presenting those findings our readers would be most interested in. Readers should remember that the Blue Book report goes into much greater depth with detailed graphs and tables, as well as an explanation of the methodology used to gather statistics and a detailed breakdown of findings. For the full text of the report, as well as information on the status of other religions, see 宗教蓝皮书，中国宗教报告 (2010). Information on this and other titles in the Blue Book series can be found online at <www.pishu.cn>.

Some overseas groups have given much higher figures for the number of Chinese Christians. One of the authors of the Blue Book report has said that the figures in the CASS survey may be somewhat conservative for three reasons: (1) It is a sensitive subject for local officials and they do not want to facilitate the poll or have large numbers reported. (2) It is a sensitive subject for some Christians and churches who do not want to admit their true numbers; (3) Some ‘Christians’ who have not yet been baptized do not want to say they are Christians because according to the churches they are not.

Nonetheless, as an in-depth survey based on questionnaires received from Protestant Christians, including those unaffiliated with the CCC/TSPM, this is a highly significant report, the first of its kind. However conservative, the number of Protestant Christians reported here is based on concrete statistics, while many overseas reports, however well intentioned, are for the most part based on conjecture and guesstimates.

— JW
English Services at St. Paul’s Attract Chinese Youth

Theresa Carino

Built in 1913 by an American Episcopalian missionary, St. Paul’s is the oldest church in Nanjing, capital of East China’s Jiangsu Province. On Sundays, the 600-meter square building, which has been described as rural Gothic, is packed to capacity. Worshippers arriving late have to sit on small stools in the courtyard despite the fact that the upper floor of the annex is now used for worship as well.

The church now has 5,000 members and 3,000 worshippers every Sunday. Six years ago, university graduates comprised fewer than 10% of a mainly elderly congregation but today, youth constitute more than 50% of worshippers. One of the attractions of St. Paul’s for educated youth has been the English-language service on Sundays that starts at 11.00 a.m.

St. Paul’s pastor, the Rev. Kan Renping recalled that having an English-language service was the idea of Ms. Pan Hui (a teacher of English in Nanjing at that time). She had initially proposed starting an English-language Bible Study group in 2003. Unsure of how to respond, Pastor Kan said he prayed about it. Six months later, the request was repeated and Kan realized that some needs were being expressed here.

For one, there were returned students, baptized abroad, who were in search of smaller congregations where they could meet people of the same age and educational level. Many college students came to church wanting to have a deeper understanding of the Bible. These young people were eager to know more about the Bible in another way, and the English version was the best option. For others, there was simply a desire to improve their language skills through attending English Bible Study classes.

Pastor Kan was surprised at the interest generated when the English-language Bible Study class began in the spring of 2004. More than 30 people joined the class. Soon after, in September, the church held its very first English-language worship service, which was attended by close to 80 people.

Convincing the local church committee that it was a good idea took time, confided Rev. Kan. Those initially opposed to the idea questioned the rationale for having an English-language service. They felt services should only be in Chinese.

For Kan, however, “What’s most important is to bring people to God.” He was convinced that the church should draw more people and should be more dynamic. “I feel it was God’s guidance. Now we have the largest number of youth in our congregation and many have a high educational level. Every year, 200 are baptized.”

Some came initially just to learn English but many have eventually become Christians. “English worship service has changed the face of St. Paul’s,” according to Rev. Kan. “It has given our church dynamism, infused young blood and drawn the...”
more educated into the congregation. Interested youth spend 2 to 3 hours together on Saturdays, studying the Bible in English and on Sundays, they gather after the service for discussions on discipleship. Choir practice and tea after the service all provide opportunities for them to meet and serve the church.

Many of the youth are encouraged to attend both Chinese and English services. The youth fellowship meets on Saturday evenings and conducts its service in Chinese, drawing 400 young worshippers. “Every year, four to five couples from the Chinese youth congregation tie the knot and now they are having children.” Rev. Kan believes that the church has a primary responsibility in nurturing young people.

Helena Liang, a young English teacher at the Southeast University in Nanjing, exemplifies some of the youthful worshippers at St. Paul’s. It takes her an hour and a half to reach St. Paul’s every Sunday but she does not mind the travel time and finds much satisfaction in joining the English-language service. “This congregation is a blessing from God,” she declares enthusiastically. She attends the English Bible Study class on Saturday afternoons, is a member of the choir and also attends the discussion group on “discipleship.” Just listening to sermons is not enough for this energetic young woman. “There are more young people here at St. Paul’s from universities around Nanjing,” she observed. “The interaction here is enriching and helps us deepen our faith and understand more about the Bible. I meet people here who are spiritually more mature. This kind of service attracts many young people because it is unique.”

On a recent Sunday service at St. Paul’s, Rev. Wen Ge, a young teacher at the Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, delivered the sermon in fluent English. Chinese youth provide the leadership for the English Service at St. Paul’s. Job Zhou, an English teacher at Zhongshan College, is one of the pillars. As a lay leader, he helps to lead worship on Sundays and was one of the founding members of the Bible Study group in 2004. Cathy Zhang, former teacher at the Nanjing seminary, was also an active member and leader of the English congregation until her departure for post-graduate studies in Beijing. Quite often, professors and students at the Nanjing Theological seminary are invited to give sermons but getting enough people to preach in English is not always easy.

Every Sunday, there is always a generous sprinkling of foreigners worshipping at the English service. They include Amity teachers, experts teaching at universities, visitors to Nanjing, foreign students and other expatriates working in Nanjing. Rev. Kan welcomes the participation of foreign members in programs led by Chinese believers, such as English Bible Study and Disciple Training Group. “Worshipping in a flourishing Chinese congregation helps them better understand the church in China,” he feels. ♦

Nanjing may have been the first to hold English-language services but it is no longer the only place. One example is the English-language service at the Beijing Haidian Christian Church. Begun in 2007, the service now attracts 800 worshippers, many of them students and academics from the university district of Haidian.
The Theology of Love in Chinese Christianity

Zhuo Xinping

When we look back and reflect on the spread of Christianity to China in modern times, we experience a range of complex emotions. Initially, in ancient times, Christianity entered China peacefully, engaged in equal dialogue and positive exchange with its people, and earned praise for its good deeds. However in religious exchange between China and Europe during the Qing dynasty, differences in cultural traditions and divergent understandings of faith gave rise to the “Chinese rites controversy.” This ended up sparking or turning into a political conflict and confrontation, and equal exchange and peaceful dialogue were consequently impeded. Chinese feudal society subsequently became “cut off from the rest of the world” and ceased to support and encourage such openness and exchange, and Western powers used opium and gunpowder to open China’s gates. It is a pity that the dissemination of Christianity in China in modern times took place against this historical backdrop, and was drawn directly into these political and cultural conflicts. This meant that the gospel (福音) which modern Chinese society heard had already been distorted (變音), making accurate reflection of the Christian spirit of universal love difficult.

Drawn into the realities of the society, Christianity primarily met with the same resistance and condemnation that Chinese society and the Chinese people maintained towards imperialism and colonialism. It was seen as lending spiritual support to the Western forces, as a “political religion” and a “foreign religion,” rather than one that transcended history. On the church’s side, as these political choices and historical entanglements consumed most of its energy, it was difficult to enter fully into social service and charity and the politics of the time also cast a shadow over these undertakings. Consequently, Christianity’s love was indeed lost or obscured. Unable to win the confidence and trust of the Chinese people, it did not gain wide acceptance or the approval of Chinese society.

Caught up in the cultural and political conflicts between China and the West, Christians became a minority group in China, somewhat separated from mainstream social developments. Christian values and ethics were peripheral to Chinese society, visible only sporadically, their impact on most people negligible. During this estrangement, the Western church was mostly complaining and critical of Chinese society, and failed to examine and reflect on its own missionary history in modern China. Accordingly, Chinese society viewed the growth of Christianity with suspicion and alarm, and neither the political or social spheres saw much value in the church. Such an atmosphere of suspicion and misunderstanding made it difficult for Christianity to express its kindness and show its true nature as a religion of love, and to a large degree, Chinese society did not understand Christianity as such. In the era of “class struggle as a guiding principle,” the response of Chinese society to Christianity was essentially one of “struggle,” and the church and its members were primarily concerned with isolating themselves for self-protection.

The rediscovery of love during the reform era and the development of a harmonious society

In the late 1970s, China embarked on a period of reform and opening up. The concept of class struggle gradually faded and harmony was increasingly placed at the centre of Chinese social development. Amidst this unprecedented renewal and opening up to the world, people slowly rediscovered the idea of love. The pop lyrics “If everyone gave a little bit of love, the world would be a great place” struck a chord all over China. In this new pursuit of social harmony, people also began to care about Chinese historical traditions and religious values; the phrases “traditional culture craze” and “religion fever” aptly described this trend.

Christianity, too, made positive social contributions during this period of reform and opening up; in fact the guiding concept of the reforms was a core Christian value: Love your neighbor as yourself. In order to reshape its image as a religion of love, Chinese Christianity introduced the idea of a “love-centered theology” or theology of love. Of course, in the Chinese context the concept of love has emerged from Christian thought but also ties in

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with the traditional virtues of Chinese culture; the Christian command to “love thy neighbor” (愛人) and the Confucian tradition of benevolence (仁愛) echo one other and blend seamlessly. As China became reacquainted with foreign culture and delved back into ancient Chinese culture, these two elements came together in a spirit of love and this spirit characterized the religious revival in Chinese society in the new era.

Chinese society seemed at this time to be in greater need of practical rationality and applied ethics than of the Western analytical tradition. A Chinese Christian theology of love is not a systematic or analytical theology in the Western vein, but rather constitutes a practical theology or a social theology which caters for Chinese Christians and helps them to survive and flourish in the contemporary Chinese social and cultural context. Such a theology will help the church break out of its closed, conservative nature and express universal care for all Chinese; it will also demonstrate the value and meaning of Christian love to Chinese society beyond the church.

A real and useful contribution to the current formation of a harmonious society in China

A Chinese Christian theology of love attempts to break down the barriers which have existed between Christianity and Chinese society since modern times—to alleviate tensions and facilitate positive two-way interaction, mutual respect and trust between the religion and secular society. The key principle of the theology of love is to rebuild confidence and trust between the Christian Church and Chinese society through a faith characterized by love. It does not seek a “narrow love” or “self-love,” but a “great love” which is broad-minded, selfless, and “loves without borders.” It calls upon the Chinese Church to move beyond its own limitations, and upon Chinese society to seek understanding and tolerance.

The earliest thinking of Chinese church leader Bishop K.H. Ting (Ding Guangxun) on the theology of love originated in the Yangtze River basin floods in the 1990s and the reactions that they elicited within the church. At the time, some conservative Christians proclaimed that the floods were a form of punishment upon the non-Christian majority; a calamity and omen for a society that had “lost faith.” Bishop Ting was shocked by this interpretation and firmly opposed it. He put forward the theology of love with the aim of reforming and correcting these views.

In Ting’s view, the true and central revelation of God is universal love for all humankind. This great love will naturally illuminate every corner of China, and is already being shown in the good deeds of non-Christians in China. With regard to this point, Bishop Ting drew a close and concrete connection between the actions of the People’s Liberation Army in combating the floods and providing disaster relief, and God’s love. He said: “During television coverage of the floods, we saw a five or six year old child clinging to a branch, about to be swept away. Without a thought for his own safety, a PLA soldier guided his small boat over, grabbed the child and took her to safety. This act, braving death to save another, is love. I cannot believe such love to be very small, hardly worth mentioning. I believe this is a great and holy love, and that the creator of this love is God. Seeing love like this, God is most certainly pleased … Can it be that we as Christians should criticize and demean even the good actions of others? Is this normal? Can our Christianity have no common language with the rest of our people? John 3:16 tells us ‘For God so loved the world …’ May we know the will of God and see the world with loving hearts.”

At the beginning of the reform period, the lack of confidence and trust between Christianity and Chinese society remained. The best ways to address this were to use love to communicate mutual respect and warm the chill, and also to work hard at rebuilding confidence and gaining trust. Thus Bishop Ting felt that the ideal path for Christianity in China lay in developing and promoting a kind of theology of love; in using love to unite those inside and outside the church, and serve society. Love and trust may then be able to overcome the longstanding resentment and lack of understanding between Christianity and Chinese society.

The practical significance of the theology of love and its expression in social service

The theology of love addresses the social reality of contemporary China, and the fact that the Chinese Church operates within it. Hence, as a practical

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theology, it is primarily a kind of moral theology, marked by its ethical example and an infectious spirit. Where differences exist in values and faith, the ethic of love is in fact the best path for religion in seeking adaptation and harmony with the broader society. On this point, Philip Wickeri has pointed out “Bishop Ting maintains that Chinese theology needs to place more emphasis on morality and ethics in order to rediscover biblical teaching and communicate it effectively to others. Emphasizing ethics will not detract from the unique nature of Christianity, because the Christian understanding of love does not conflict with the human concept of love. This view is related to his contribution to the debate on the Yangtze floods. Bishop Ting praised the PLA’s efforts towards flood relief, and considered it as an example of God’s love for the world: this love is the cause of all of God’s acts in the world, whether they occur inside or outside the church.”

Since this theology of love concerns acts rather than just talk, it must show its practical relevance and be expressed in social service and care for others. At the heart of the theology of love is that it broadens the church’s horizons and encourages it to enter into society. Through its actions in society, it also spurs people on to form harmonious relationships and creates an atmosphere of togetherness. At present, society in general does not have a very clear picture of Christianity, let alone a very favorable one, so Christianity must value humility and demonstrate its sincerity in a down-to-earth fashion. All of this requires a spirit of love and a truly practical contribution to society.

The Chinese Christian theology of love is rooted in a combination of the Christian faith and Chinese social reality. In order to win the understanding of Chinese society and the trust of the Chinese people, Christianity must put its “spirit of love” to work in a “spirit of servanthood,” and move China by using social service to establish confidence and trust with Chinese society. The theology of love seeks to move beyond the complex politics and burdensome history. For this to be possible, Christianity must tone down any politics, let go of grievances over past history, and enter into current Chinese society free from baggage. It should use social service to contribute to the construction of a harmonious society, thus living out the faith that “God will bless China” and the belief that “God loves the world.”

Today’s Chinese society no longer rejects faith, and is open towards and accepting of religion. Clearly, changes in this society and its new stance towards religion will bring numerous opportunities and challenges for the re-positioning of the Christian Church in Chinese society. People should be aware of the significance of this historical moment and seize the opportunity to write a new history.

Translated from Tian Feng No. 370, October 2010 by Emily Dunn. Dr. Zhuo Xinping is Director of the Institute of World Religions at CASS. The article has been slightly condensed; a full version will appear on our website: <www.amitynewsservice.org>.

Fan Pu’s Paper Cut Art

The Chinese paper cut artist Fan Pu (Paula Fan) is one of the most famous representatives of Christian art in China. Her paper cuts, first put in circulation in the early 1980s, have been widely printed and reproduced in China and abroad. She was born in 1948 in Nanjing, the daughter of a Protestant pastor. She has been associated with the Amity Christian Art Center since its founding in 1993, and helped in organizing two nationwide Christian art exhibitions in 1996 and 1999.

A collection of her work has just been published: The Way of My Heart: The paper cut art of Fan Pu (322 pages, Nanjing Press, 2010). The text, including the Introduction by the artist, is in both Chinese and English. Included with the book is a color insert, with text, of a series of paper cut panels depicting the life and teachings of Jesus. Further information may be had from: isabel.hess-frieman@gmx.de
Self-Support and the Rural Church

Zhou Xinfang

In the relatively brief span of 60 years, the good results the Chinese Church has made through steady progress are plain to see. However, the objectives of the Three-Self Movement (self-government, self-support and self-propagation) have not yet been achieved for we are still some distance from being “well-governed, well-supported, and well-propagated.” Coming from the countryside, I have seen firsthand the actual situation of the rural church, and believe it still faces great challenges. China’s current rural population is 9.4 million, accounting for approximately 70% of total national population. Whether we count churches or church members, it is a huge sector. Whether we adopt a fixed perspective or a developmental perspective, if the rural church is not well managed, we will never be able to say that the Chinese Church as a whole is well managed. In what follows, I discuss the necessity of “self-support” in the rural church.

How weak self-support affects the rural church

Effects on harmonious and effective service

During China’s current unavoidable shift towards urbanization,* the better life possible in urban areas and intense urban construction has led a great part of the rural labor force to rush to the cities, leaving behind primarily the old and young to hold down the fort in rural areas. The latter are also the mainstay of rural church congregations, yet 100% of the church’s funds in the countryside come from members’ donations. The majority of preachers and managers in the rural church emerge from among local believers. Because the foundation of the church is weak, many of these people have no choice but to serve as volunteers. They have not received formal theological training—few have received even short-term training—and their knowledge of the Bible is far from systematic, yet they are responsible for the vast majority of work in churches and meeting points. They have responsibilities to their land and families as well; their time and energy is limited. Without proper training, how can they lead others? It is hard to avoid the blind leading the blind. If things go on this way, how will we keep people in the church? How can the church develop? Why do outside evangelists, on the other hand, find a ready welcome in the rural church? This bears pondering.

Some churches do receive seminary graduates, but because the church lacks resources, it is very difficult to make appropriate living arrangements for them. They may serve the church, but they have no guarantees of a livelihood, and in the end many become “volunteers.” Because they are seminary graduates, they experience high demands from all sides—yet how fast can a horse run on an empty stomach?

Needless to say, contradictions appear often among grassroots church staff. Seminary graduates returning to the church—or lay persons who have received theological training—are given a position and a fixed salary. Meanwhile, other lay volunteers—who also preach, make visits and manage church affairs without remuneration—feel passed over. “Money” is an extremely sensitive topic in the church. The church strives to use money to train and retain personnel and to run the church well, but, because of money, “those who feel unfairly treated” take out their anger on their colleagues. In some cases, intentionally or unintentionally, church leaders who have served as lay volunteers for many years keep the salaries of the professional staff low. The pulpit becomes a fortress and the work environment a battlefield. This is common in the rural churches.

If self-support is not done well, personnel supply will be a problem.

The question of placement, which already weighs heavily on the minds of theological students, www

The Blue Book of Cities in China (2009) reported that urbanization had reached 45.7% by the end of 2008: 607 million Chinese citizens now live in the 655 established cities and towns throughout the country.

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makes it extremely difficult for seminary students wishing to return to churches in their hometowns. Because the rural church has no ability to support itself, it is hard to bear leaving a hometown. Yet it is also difficult to return to a hometown congregation to serve. On the one hand, God has entrusted this to them and they have no choice but to accept. On the other hand, these students carry heavy familial burdens that they are unable to fulfill. Given this situation, what parent would want their child to become an evangelist or pastor? And what young Christian would happily serve the church? The saying in the churches used to be that there were “many sheep and few shepherds”; today it remains a situation in which “the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.” This does not bode well for the rural church.

Realistically speaking, no small number of leaders in today’s rural churches are “institutionally heavy, but light in terms of talent or training.” They take the hard won savings of the church and invest in infrastructure and “hardware,” unaware of the importance of investing in personnel. Since the 1980s, magnificent churches have sprung up everywhere. Jealousy and competition are green-eyed monsters. Many churches invest blindly in building “cathedrals” and satisfying inflated vanities by borrowing large sums—landing the church in debt up to its ears. Money is carelessly spent on buildings while personnel remain an afterthought. We cannot single out seminary students and blame them for going to the big cities. The lack of awareness of the importance of fostering personnel and the general lack of resources make settling in a rural church difficult to consider. When the rural church has no one to pastor it, the countryside becomes increasingly desolate. Because it is desolate, offerings decrease and the vicious cycle begins. Clearly the church cannot hire people at high salaries, but all believers are duty-bound to provide relatively good living conditions for servants of the Lord. The Bible itself teaches us “the laborer is worthy of his reward.”

**Biblical teachings on self-support**

The priests and Levites’ portion in the Old Testament

When God chose Aaron’s sons to be priests, he spoke explicitly of how they were to be supported. “The Lord spoke to Aaron: I have given you charge of the offerings made to me, all the holy gifts of the Israelites; I have given them to you and your sons as a priestly portion due to you in perpetuity. … All the holy offerings that the Israelites present to the Lord I have given to you, together with your sons and daughters, as a perpetual due…. I am your share and your possession among the Israelites” (Numbers 18: 8-20)

When the Lord chose Aaron and the Levites to unite and minister the tent of meeting, replacing the first-born sons of Israel in serving the Lord, the Lord likewise said unto them: “To the Levites I have given every tithe in Israel for a possession in return for the service that they perform, the service in the tent of meeting” (Numbers 18:21).

In the Book of Judges, we see that when the Israelites did not respect the Lord’s decrees the needs of the Levites went unmet. They had no place to settle and, unable to turn their hearts to guiding the people, they became strangers to the priesthood. The longer they lived in impiety, the further the Israelites strayed from the sight of the Lord. They lost their...
way, leading the entire nation of Israel into a state of disorder (see Judges 18 – 19).

New Testament teachings on self-support

There are clear teachings on self-support in the New Testament as well; both our Lord Jesus and his disciples saw self-support as very important.

Lord Jesus was concerned his disciples’ needs be met.

It was not only in his last teachings that Jesus instructed his disciples to go into the homes of good people and accept offerings while spreading the Gospel; even during his own three years of preaching, though he could turn stones into food and feed 5,000 people with five loaves and two fish, he did not do this for himself. Instead, he accepted the heartfelt contributions of the people. The concern Jesus had for the livelihood of his disciples has served as an example for generations of saints.

"Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain."

In the years of his career as a preacher, Paul always emphasized the importance of giving offerings to the saints. He gave guidance to Timothy saying:

“Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching; for the scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain,’ and, ‘The laborer deserves to be paid’” (1Tim. 5:17-18).

And Paul worked to meet the needs of his companions when they were in need, deeply understanding God’s intention for a shepherd to lead his flock with a peaceful heart. To the children of Corinth he said:

This is my defence to those who would examine me. Do we not have the right to our food and drink? Do we not have the right to be accompanied by a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living? Who at any time pays the expenses for doing military service? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not get any of its milk?

Do I say this on human authority? Does not the law also say the same? For it is written in the law of Moses, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain.’ Is it for oxen that God is concerned? Or does he not speak entirely for our sake? It was indeed written for our sake, for whoever ploughs should plough in hope and whoever threshes should thresh in hope of a share in the crop. If we have sown spiritual good among you, is it too much if we reap your material benefits? 12 If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we still more? (1Cor. 9: 3-11).

The New and Old Testaments describe clearly the direct and intimate relationship between a thriving church and self-support. Only when those serving the Church are free from worry about their basic needs can they serve the church to their fullest and only when the resources of the Church are put to rational use can they be of one mind with their brothers and sisters and only then will the church thrive.

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Thank You!

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Proposals for achieving self-support in the rural church

Strengthen funds management

Building churches is admittedly important. Yet beautiful buildings without pious congregations and qualified personnel will not bring about growth or strength in the church. Thus, the balanced use of the church’s limited funds is extremely important. Priorities must be weighed; a timeline for personnel training and infrastructure building is needed. Self-propagation and self-government are only possible when there are qualified personnel serving the church. Training and building up a reserve of talented people is clearly the ideal way to build the church, and we should actively encourage promising young people to take the seminary entrance exams, look after their needs, and welcome them back after graduation. We should also establish a Theological Education Fund. Currently, seminary conditions are poor because there is no guarantee of regular and reliable funding. Many provincial Christian Councils and TSPM bodies designate one day each year as “Theological Education Day”; those funds should be set aside for a Theological Education Fund.

Urban-rural mechanisms for mutual aid

This essay already noted at its start that believers headed for the cities leave behind those whose material lives are relatively poor, notably older women and the more vulnerable members of society. As such, we expect that the numbers of the rural church will gradually diminish. How is the rural church to face this challenge? The urban churches should do more to help and support the rural churches— and not only in terms of human resources. Urban churches should also volunteer to take responsibility for the financial support of one or more rural preachers.

With urban churches at the center, we should establish pastoral care areas, and based on levels of giving in an area, set up a stable pastoral fund. The central church can then create a rational plan for training and hiring pastoral staff based on the region’s financial capacity and, further, for the rational deployment of such staff, based on the needs of different areas. This will lead to a balanced use of pastoral staff and guarantee financial support for staff so they can serve with peace of mind. City Christian Councils and TSPMs should evaluate the dangers facing the rural church and take measures to create a regional master plan. If we proceed this way, necessary improvements in the rural church are just around the corner.

With city help to rural areas, rural churches can strengthen themselves

For a long time, urban churches have mainly supported rural churches through visits by pastoral staff to preach or preside at worship and religious ceremonies. Although this is unquestionably good, the results are, by and large, short-lived. Some members of urban churches have their own businesses. If they could invest in the countryside, or open branch offices there, there would be work for many believers in rural areas and stable meeting points could be established where they live. This is a fine method of support. The church could also serve as a kind of clearinghouse for information on agricultural production, handicraft industries, etc. There are many channels by which believers’ work lives could be invigorated. Our church is a church that serves. Helping believers to develop the rural way of life will provide the church’s needs. In the course of their pastoral work, clergy should help believers establish an accurate concept of giving. CCC/TSPMs at all levels should play their part, calling on churches in more developed areas to give financial support to churches in more backward rural areas, promoting alliances between urban and rural churches in working for the common cause of self-support in the whole church.

Facing the current situation in the rural church, I believe that “well-propagated” and “well-governed” are the foundation of a church that is “well-supported.” We look for more people to care for and support the ministry of the rural church in the belief that this will certainly bring about a Chinese Church made up of strong urban and strong rural churches.

Translated from Tian Feng, no. 371, November 2010 by Katie Spillane
My wife and I graduated from different seminaries in 2007. Before our graduation, we'd prayed long and hard for direction. We had a priority list – our first preference was to pursue advanced studies at seminary, the next was to pastor in a church or to teach in the theological college in our hometown. What eventuated, however, was not what we had in mind … we were sent to the Cixi church,* where we remain today.

For several years now, the Cixi CCC/TSPM and church have taken care of our daily needs. They have lovingly supported our work in many ways, deeply encouraging us. When we experienced difficulties, the church gave generously. Apart from working in this church, I also teach classes at the city Christian Training Centre and help other churches too.

As you can see, the path on which God has led us is one of blessing but not without challenges or difficulties.

**The first challenge – homesickness**

Cixi is a very long way from our hometown. The two places are totally different in terms of food, language and customs. When we first arrived, our fellow workers in the church showed us tremendous hospitality but we didn’t appreciate the special delicacies they fed us. The local dialect was so unfamiliar to us that we needed a “translator” every time we spoke to a local person over the age of about 50. The believers had plenty to say, but because the translators weren’t terribly accurate, I felt like I was only getting half the story. We have an idiom for that … it was like swallowing dates whole without chewing them.

After we’d been at Cixi for three months, the Cixi CCC/TSPM sent me to undertake a training course in a city in the same province as my hometown. As the train pulled in to the station in the provincial capital, my mood changed. I suddenly felt very happy. For a long time, it felt like a tremendous weight had been pressing on my heart, but this weight was swept away in an instant. I had studied at seminary in this city for three years, and knew this place very well. Now I understood the ancient attachment to one’s native land. I also began to understand how Abraham felt when he received the call to leave Ur of the Chaldeans and head for the unknown land that God had promised him.

After we’d been in Cixi for ten months, I wrote in my diary, “Time has both flown and crawled. I feel this acutely. It seems like the future is right in front of our eyes – that’s why time seems to have flown. And yet my heart has been heavy most of the time we’ve been here – that’s why time has crawled. My heart and body are worlds apart. I live in a place far from familiar faces, from our local accent and even from the vegetation of home. Sometimes I feel like a traveller aimlessly drifting.”

Our first year in Cixi was one of gradual adjustment. Apart from regular preaching, our fellow workers also helped us to visit the believers so that we could get to know each family in the church. By the beginning of the second year, we pretty much knew where each family lived and who had particular needs, and could visit them ourselves without needing a local guide. In the process, we experienced the joy of serving together as husband and wife, of sharing the load, and in times of difficulty we prayed together, helped and supported one another.

**The second challenge – believers’ expectations**

Rick Warren explains in his book, *The

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* Cixi City is in Zhejiang province, in the coastal region of the East China Sea.
justice, and carrying it, he suffered silently (See Isaiah 53:4-6). “For you, O God, tested us… You brought us into the net; you laid burdens on our backs…. We went through fire and through water; yet you have brought us out to a spacious place” (Psalm 66:10-12).

The third challenge – family life

A pastor’s living allowance comes from the church, and church finances mostly come from the offerings of believers. Most Chinese believers live frugally; there are very few Christians earning high salaries. What’s more, the example of purity of heart and servanthood set by the early generation of church leaders in war-stricken China, men and women who earned the respect and admiration of the people, mean that we really can’t ask for salaries on par with other positions in society. But the church has a duty to its workers (See Luke 10:7 and 1 Timothy 5:18). As a church worker, I feel our Lord’s words are worth remembering: “When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is set before you” (Luke 10:8).

I watched a television program called “Humble Abode.”* In a small way I identified with the sense of helpless and poverty felt by the main characters, Haiping and Haizao, who had moved to a big city. Many people in Cixi have high salaries and live very comfortably. Cixi is a “third-tier city,”** and

Purpose Driven Church, that world over, the church excessively and almost exclusively focuses on the gift of pastoral care, to the neglect of other areas. My church is no exception.

The church that I pastor was established by a devout servant of God, “Mr N,” who led it for six years and did very well, leaving behind a real legacy, all glory to God. “Mr N” died over 20 years ago and there has not been a pastor like him since. A significant portion of the church lived through that revival of over 20 years ago. When I talk with them, I always sense that they miss “the good old days.” Of course, those expectations get projected onto anyone who tries to pastor the church now.

To tell you the truth, I am just a young pastor. I am neither mature nor experienced. Yes, I know – any church would happily accept a mature pastor. That would be far better than to have a pastor who is still studying and still growing up even as he pastors. For a long time, I felt helpless in the face of such expectations. I wanted to run away. As well as that, I couldn’t meet the needs of believers who were at such a variety of places spiritually. How could the yearning for “the past” expressed by some church members be my standard for teaching and preaching today?

I’ve come to realize that though my issues weren’t entirely baseless, they really masked a serious problem: an excess of self-confidence. Thank God! He opened my heart and released me from the trap of thinking myself infallible. In the Old Testament, we see certain prophets who only cared for themselves and neglected the people. I slowly understood: the life of a godly shepherd means taking on ourselves the burdens and problems of others. This turned me to God, pleading for grace and for a way forward. God has worked through me but also in me, growing and maturing me. I see in Jesus what it really means to be a good “shepherd” – without a word of complaint; this is Jesus’ way of the cross. Jesus took on himself a burden that was not his, and carrying it, he suffered silently (See Isaiah 53:4-6). “For you, O God, tested us… You brought us into the net; you laid burdens on our backs…. We went through fire and through water; yet you have brought us out to a spacious place” (Psalm 66:10-12).

* “Dwelling Narrowness” is the official English name for this series broadcast in 2009. It followed the lives of two sisters who struggle to buy a home in a big city.

** Many cities in China are classified into tiers depending on their economic situations and population. First tier cities, such as Shanghai, are the biggest and most prosperous.
apart from rent, the cost of daily living is similar to that of “first-tier cities.” Church workers in Cixi are considered to be low-income earners according to statistics published by the local government. This also means that we have a low standard of living. We just have to live simply.

As we learned about life, frugality, peace of mind and thankfulness, and we have also been able to teach our daughter to be content with what she has, to be thankful and to trust God. She used to admire her friends’ beautiful clothes or the cars their families drove and would come home and ask “Dad, do we have much money?” Both my wife and I would explain to her, “Not a lot but not too little. We have enough to live on because of God’s grace.”

The fourth challenge – the call of the times

Paul said, “But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money … not lovers of the good … conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God - having a form of godliness but denying its power.” (2 Timothy 3:1-5) I have seen this scenario over the last few years. Society is becoming increasingly wealthy in terms of material things, but people are becoming increasingly selfish and less godly. This must be what sociologists call “secularization.”

New Testament scholars speak of the tension of “now and not yet.” It is easy to see this in our society. Certain values related to secularization are in direct conflict with us; we are called to the mission of Heaven. As pastors, we need to not only save ourselves, to be triumphant, but, relying on God’s great strength, we must lead believers to be salt and light, focused on God’s kingdom, carrying out the task God has entrusted to us. How can we keep from violating the God-given vision? This is a concern that pastors must take seriously.

This is also an information era; materials for sermons can be drawn from a wide range of sources. But I feel that the individual preacher’s preparation is far more important than his or her prepared sermon text. This sort of preparation involves our own spiritual journey and our spiritual practices at home and in the life of the church. Bible truth and church history both attest that the lure of secularization can be fatal to the spirituality of church workers.

A few final words

As the hymn says: “Could we with ink the oceans fill and were the skies of parchment made; Were every stalk on earth a quill and every man a scribe by trade; To write the love of God above would drain the ocean dry; Nor could the scroll contain the whole, though stretched from sky to sky.” God’s love is immeasurable. In comparison, I am insignificant, and as I write this article, I am well aware of how very small and worthless I am. Nevertheless, though I am nothing, I will do my best to tell of our Lord’s grace. Reader, please note that any shortcomings in this article are my own.

“To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen!” (Ephesians 3:21).

Translated from Tian Feng No. 371, November 2010 by Suzanne Rowe

If you are interested in Chinese theology, read the Chinese Theological Review (CTR). CTR provides an excellent follow-up of theological discussion in China.

Find details on the Amity News Service website: www.amitynewsservice.org

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