

**Chinese Theological Review: Volume 11:1**  
**CONTENTS**

From the Editor ..... 2

**ESSAYS**

1. Remolding Three-Self to Run the Church Well – He Changping..... 3  
2. Social Service and the Building Up of the Church – Li Yaping ..... 10  
3. Preaching in the Church in China – Ji Tai ..... 18  
4. Indigenization in China in the First Half of the Twentieth Century – Yao Minquan..... 25  
5. Theological Education in China – Su Deci ..... 33  
6. Jesus' Attitude and Manner of Work (John 4:1-42) – Han Bide..... 39  
7. The Indigenization of Chinese Christianity – Zhang Yan ..... 46  
8. The Cosmic Christ and Theological Thinking – Qiu Wei..... 49  
9. Theological Thinking from Experience – on reading Theological Writings from Nanjing  
Seminary – Zhang Jie..... 51  
10. The Feminist Awakening Among Chinese Christian Women – Peng Yaqian..... 54  
11. Christianity and the Modern Chinese Women's Movement – Zhang Yan ..... 58  
12. On Building Up the Local Church in China – Zhao Zhi'en ..... 65  
13. Theological Reflections on "Hong Kong, 1997" – Geng Fu ..... 68  
14. Contextual Theology: The Hong Kong 1997 Question as a Case Study (*excerpt*) – Peter  
K.H. Lee..... 71  
15. In Memoriam: Bishop Shen Yifan (1928-1994) – Li Yading ..... 74

**SERMONS**

16. Your Young Men Shall See Visions – Shen Yifan ..... 77  
17. On Being A Good Pastor – K.H. Ting ..... 79  
18. Trees Must Have Roots – Wang Weifan ..... 82  
19. Praising God and Having the Good Will of All the People – Wu Enyang ..... 85  
20. The Story of David and Jonathan – Zhao Qiusheng ..... 88  
21. Faith Cannot Match the Promise – Deng Youde ..... 93

## From the Editor

Volume 11 of *The Chinese Theological Review* will have two parts. The current issue, vol. 11: 1 contains a selection of recent essays and sermons from the Protestant Church in China. As part one of two, it is a somewhat slimmer volume than usual. Volume 11: 2 will present papers on Christianity and Culture and will include essays by both Chinese and American scholars. We are especially pleased to be able to broaden the scope of the *Review* in this way and to offer readers this valuable resource on Christian thinking about the relationship of religion and culture in the Chinese context.

The writings collected in volume II: I reflect ongoing concerns in the Chinese Protestant Church, particularly running the church well and the obstacles to achieving this goal: a shortage of ordained clergy, the need to improve management practices in the local church, the difficulty of enforcing decisions taken at the national level by the China Christian Council and the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Churches of China, as well as the attendant problems of responding to the needs and concerns of a community of believers which is in large part rural and often poorly-educated, a problem which is referred to as the need to raise the quality of believers. There are also explorations of current responses to society, culture and the return of Hong Kong to China, reflections on indigenization, theology, feminism and theological education, discussions of the role of both indigenization efforts and feminism in the history of Christianity in China, and a tribute to the late Bishop Shen Yifan.

Selections of sermons and essays, translation and editing all take place, or are coordinated through, Hong Kong. I would like to thank the authors of the pieces included here for sharing their work through translation, and colleagues in the Publications Department of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, especially Mr. Chen Yongtao, for their assistance in providing pre-publication manuscripts and liaising with authors. I would also like to thank Mr. Alan Miller, Dr. Gotthard Oblau, Ms. Francesca Rhys, Rev. Henry Rowold, and Dr. Don Snow for their fine translation work and Mrs. Cecilia Ip for her help in layout and production. Unattributed translations are my own work. Dr. Marvin Hoff, Mrs. Joanne Hoff and the Foundation for Theological Education in Southeast Asia have been generous with encouragement and support.

Janice Wickeri Hong Kong

## ESSAYS

### 1. Remolding Three-Self to Run the Church Well – He Changping

Three-Self, as a principle by which to run the Church well, has already been widely adopted by Chinese Christians, and accepted by the government and by our fellow citizens. This has changed the "foreign religion" image of Chinese Christianity, and has allowed the church to become a uniquely Chinese Christian Church. In this way, it has made a contribution to the unity of the Church ecumenical. In the early 1950s, the elder generation of church leaders issued the "Christian Manifesto." Not only was this a turning point for the Chinese Church, but a milestone in its ongoing development. It talked specifically of "sharpening our vigilance concerning imperialism, expressing the political standpoint of the Christian Church in new China, bringing about a Chinese Church managed by Chinese people themselves, and demonstrating the responsibility that all Christians should have toward developing new China." Its purpose was to help us recognize how imperialism had historically used Christianity to invade China, to express our political standpoint, to find our own space and place in things, to use the teachings of the Bible to re-evaluate the Chinese Church, and to recover its original self or identity. During this period the critical concerns were to oppose imperialism and encourage patriotism, to proclaim the independence of the Church, and to resolve the question of the sovereignty of the Church.

The denunciation movement that followed was to serve this end. The objects of the denunciation movement were imperialism and some missionaries related to it, though not all missionaries and certainly not Chinese clergy. Yet it cannot be denied that in actuality some colleagues and co-workers of pious faith and spirituality who had some misgivings about Three-Self were branded as unpatriotic and subjected to attack.

This led to two results. First, it gave people the wrong impression that Three-Self was out to eradicate religious faith. Staff of the Three-Self organization were government officials and cadres, which meant that from the beginning, a centrifugal tendency appeared in Three-Self, so that its base of unity was decreased rather than increased. Second, foreign anti-China groups took advantage of this situation to attack the religious policy of our government focusing on certain events to increase their propagandistic reporting.

During the time of the Anti-Rightist Movement and the Cultural Revolution, efforts were made - under the influence of leftist ideology - to change the religious policy, and to attack religion as feudalistic superstition, and class it with what were then termed monsters and demons. Individual staff in the Three-Self organization, responding to circumstances, joined together with the leftist forces to attack clergy, set Christians at odds with each other, and close churches. This also led people to feel that the ultimate aim of Three-Self was to destroy the Church. In reality, Anti-Rightism and the Cultural Revolution were political struggles in which

---

He Changping is an evangelist in Huzhou, Sichuan and also head of the Huzhou Municipal Christian Council.

the whole nation was caught up. Even national leaders could not escape it, how much less the Church?

It is worth noting that following the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee (1978), the policy of freedom of religious belief was reinstated, and sanctuaries everywhere were restored, church services held, and news of newly constructed churches began to be heard regularly. Three-Self was then no longer a matter of finding space for the Church, or who would govern, support, or propagate it, but how to govern, support, and propagate the Church well. It was no longer merely a slogan or a movement, but a genuine way to proceed. But even now, a minority of those in charge in the Three-Self organization, though they are neither pastors nor evangelists and have no theological training, not Only manage church affairs and oversee pastors, they want to manage Church members as well. They seek to consolidate management of personnel, finances, and property in their hands. It is not surprising that Christians call these people "non-pastors who manage pastors."

Although the situation described above is isolated and local, the impact it has had among Christians is considerable. Not only has it resulted in some Christians drifting away from Three-Self or from the Church, but some of these people have been used by anti-China groups that have infiltrated from abroad. This, further exacerbated by divisions and rivalry arising from old denominational loyalties, have caused some to claim that "the Three-Self Church is without life, unspiritual, and unsaved." These claims, spread through itinerant preaching and home worship gatherings, have resulted in real divisions within the Chinese Church, and have made it difficult to run the Church well.

Therefore, we need to grasp clearly the essence of "Three-Self, follow the pattern by which the Three-Self Patriotic Movement developed, renew the roles played by Three-Self and the China Christian Council, and establish the image of Three-Self as a unifier of Christians and a servant of the Church, so that the principle and spirit of Three-Self permeates our task of running the Church well from start to finish.

### **Clarify Concepts and Definitions, Transform Roles**

Running the Church in China, preaching the Gospel and building up the Body of Christ involves concepts like "three-self," "church," "love country and love Church." It also involves dealing with the organization and personnel of Three-Self. In such a situation, clarification of concepts and definitions, and a change in function are all extremely important, in fact, imperative.

Three-Self is the patriotic movement of Chinese Christians and their independence movement, as well as that which brings Chinese Christians to walk in unity in Christ. This determines the duty of Three-Self; namely to unify believers, to love country and Church, to serve as the bridge and link between government and Church. Three-Self is not the Church, but rather is the principle by which the Church is administered. The Three-Self organization should establish itself in the image of a servant, never should it place itself above the Church, or become the "head" of the Church. The colleagues in

charge of the Three-Self organization, together with the broad masses of Christians, are united in the Head, Jesus Christ, equally as members of the Body. They should never presume special authority over brothers and sisters or over Christ, because they are not officials of special rank. If they are also clergy, they should all the more be humble, gentle, and peaceful. The leaders of Three-Self should be Christ-like, Church-like, and believer-like.

The Church is the fellowship of people called out by Jesus Christ. That is to say, the Head of the Church is Jesus Christ, and the Body is the brothers and sisters. Those who are clergy are merely spokespersons of Christ, and certainly cannot replace Christ as Lord, becoming veritable "tyrants of the Church," who make the Church their individual sphere of authority or power. Not only would this represent the secularization of the Church that some people fear, but more importantly, will people continue to call us a Church, if this is the case? Therefore, we must change the current state of affairs, recognize our Head (Jesus Christ), rely on the body (brothers and sisters), bear with one another in love and keep the bond of peace, so that the Church can become Gospel-like and Christ-like.

The governmental departments for religious work are organizations for the implementation and oversight of religious policy, who carry out their work of management in accord with policy, the law, and regulations, and uphold the legal rights and interests of religious bodies and individuals. They are not, however, a higher authority for religious bodies or places of religious activity. Particularly with reference to places of religious activity and the personnel, finances, and property of religious groups, they have only the authority to suggest and to oversee - not the authority to make or implement decisions. Yet in some places where the level of religious work organizations is uneven, they have, to varying degrees, exceeded their authority and become meddlesome. For instance, in some places inquirers who desire baptism must get their permission to do so. This is why there are those who say we are a "government-run church." We can see from this that if we are to administer the Church well, (government) organizations for religious work cannot exceed their authority or mistake their place, much less break the law. In accord with the principle articulated by Comrade Jiang Zemin ("religion of the peoples is not an insignificant matter"), they should change their role, and set themselves to stabilize, unify, oversee, and serve.

Looking at loving country and loving Church from a Biblical standpoint, neither the prophets of the Old Testament nor the apostles of the New Testament, nor even Jesus Christ Himself would consider that a problem. Why then is it still a problem for Chinese Christians in the 90s? It is because in the past there have been those who deliberately separated love of country and love of Church, taking these words out of context. Add to this the fact that leaders of the Three-self Patriotic Movement in the early 1950s were excessive in both words and actions, and the biased view that one who loves Church cannot love country was born. In addition, cadres in religious work, influenced by "leftist" ideology, felt that loving country precluded loving Church - anything else would have been seen as an expression of backwardness. I feel that love of country and love of

Church are too closely related to separate, and I hope that believers and religious cadres can put this error behind them.

### **Re-ordering Relationships and Establishing a System**

Since the 1950s, China's system of government has followed the centralized leadership of the Party. This has meant that there is no separation between Party and government, or between government and enterprise, with non-professionals leading professionals. This kind of system undoubtedly shapes the relationship between religious work departments and Three-Self (or the China Christian Council), as well as the relationship between Three-Self and the Church. How to order these relationships, establish relationships in line with political policies and regulations, and with church regulations and doctrine, as well as contemporary needs, is a matter of top priority for the Chinese Church.

Three-Self and the China Christian Council were originally to be the scaffolding for running the Church well, related cooperatively in their separate tasks. Since Three-Self was established first and the China Christian Council only later, and since there were some mistaken views on the part of some religion cadres, in actual practice either the Three-Self has been directing the China Christian Council or the China Christian Council has had an equal role in name only. The way to resolve these relationships harmoniously - aside from operating on the basis of their constitutions and the duties of each - is to establish a relationship between the two as between members of the same Body and focus all effort on making the work church-like.

The Church and its members are fundamentally a spiritual body in a living relationship as limbs and body. The Church is the spiritual family of the faithful, the pillar and mainstay of truth. This is the Church's most characteristic point of contrast with other social organizations. However, in reality, there are presently some churches which do not see proclaiming the gospel as their fundamental task and do not preach the living way of salvation. Lacking an inner spirit of piety, they have only a facade. In some places, churches have become arenas in which to scramble for position and power, and take advantage of the piety of the members, or, borrowing pressure from religious work departments, use piety as the door to personal advantage. The faithful are left completely helpless. Even the two governing bodies, because they are only advisory, are at wit's end. This kind of situation causes the faithful much sorrow.

Of course, there are many reasons for the poor co-ordination mentioned above. However, to me it seems that the crux of the matter lies in the absence of reliable laws and regulations, enforceable constitutions and a supervisory restraining mechanism. On the one hand, though our country is ruled by law, and regulations are increasingly well established, there is as yet no law that concerns religion. As far as religion is concerned, at the very least we can say that we are still in the era of rule by people (rather than by law). Even the "Regulations Governing Sites for Religious Activities" promulgated by the State Council have been supplemented by various accretions in the process of local implementation. Although the "Church Order for Trial Use in Chinese Churches" was

passed by the national Church, yet, because the two governing bodies (CCC and TSPM) at the national and local levels have only an advisory role and lack the power to enforce their decisions, this order carries no authority, and can be implemented, or not.

Therefore, I feel that in accord with the spirit of what Premier Li Peng said to the national conference on religious work in 1990 ("doing religious work well has become an important part of constructing socialism with Chinese characteristics"), a law on religion which guarantees freedom of religious belief, based on a firm and unwavering policy and with the constitutional articles on religion as a yardstick, should be produced as soon as possible. This would regulate people's behavior, counteract foreign anti-China groups who use religion for purposes of illegal infiltration, and at the same time effectively prevent a stripping away of freedom of religious belief and the rights and interests of the Church. This will benefit the stability of both the Church and society. To handle internal matters, the two national bodies need to formulate an authoritative, workable organizational system, or what might be called a guiding principle, for church-state relations, one based on Scripture and the regulations and doctrines of the Church, integrated with our national situation, and drawing on the organizational experience of overseas churches and former denominations, one which would be acceptable to Christians of whatever denominational background. This is urgent in the extreme. Otherwise, divisions will appear in the Chinese Church and the existing foundation of unity, and the two national bodies (along with their local incarnations) will lose their function and break down. This is no exaggeration.

For another thing, for the two bodies at all levels—national, provincial (municipality and region), municipal and county levels—maintaining the present advisory role has disadvantages that clearly outweigh the advantages; it appears weak and feeble. How should the relationship be determined for the future? How should the work develop? Should it be leading or guiding? Or partial leading and partial guiding? Or should a pattern of central headquarters with various branches be established? I think further consideration is needed on the basis of the Church, the state structure and normal international practice.

### **Higher Standards and the Opening-up of Self'-Propagation**

Raising the overall standard of the Church is an urgent need facing the Chinese Church. There are approximately ten million believers, but some 70-80% are in rural areas, where the majority gather in meeting points, without regular full-time clergy. Most of the members are women and the educational level is a bit low, and some are illiterate or partially illiterate. In urban areas, though there are some better-educated members, yet there, too, the standard of faith should be raised. In order to elevate the quality of the faithful, we must operate many kinds and levels of lay volunteer training and nurture classes. We must train them to observe the law, to be better informed and act accordingly, and to use the power of the laws and regulations to protect themselves and the rights and benefits of the Church. When we find young people of pious faith who are determined to offer themselves, we should recommend them to test for the seminary.

For historical reasons, whether in terms of quantity or quality, clergy is wanting in our Church today. With the development of the Church, we urgently need to train a large number of suitable clergy. At the same time, present clergy should have a plan to utilize training, advanced studies, or correspondence courses to raise their standards, and to strengthen their awareness of the use of laws and regulations to protect ourselves, to run the church democratically, to feed the faithful in season in accord with truth, and to serve the faithful as spiritual elders and servants.

Some cadres in religious work today take one of two biased approaches toward management of the Church. On the one extreme, there is complete involvement, down to the smallest detail; on the other extreme, there is complete uninvolvedness, even to taking no notice of activities in obvious violation of the law. If we probe the reasons for this, we find they are various: religious work is very difficult and religious work departments are not lucrative official posts. This has led to lack of stability among the ranks of religion cadres and the turnover is rather high. It is not surprising to find a lack of understanding of religious policy, unfamiliarity with normal religious life, a lack of appreciation for religious feelings, and a failure to respect the character of clergy. Therefore, I appeal for stability in the ranks of government religion workers, implementation of relevant laws, policies, and regulations, and training in religious knowledge, to make their work more effective and improve the quality of lawful management. Then, cadres in religious work and church leaders can become friends, can co-exist over the long term, practice mutual oversight, and learn to value each other as friends, sharing honor and dishonor. My sense is that this is an essential condition for administering the Church well.

As far as self-propagation is concerned, this seems to be the center of our Church's work today. Everyone talks about it and discusses it, and it is constantly worked at. But where is it heading? Over the past forty-five years, it seems that no one has understood or explained it, and we have wandered uncertainly without making progress. As a result, people have had trouble distinguishing what is primary from what is secondary in the ministry of the Church, adversely affecting the Church's ministry of proclaiming the word of salvation. It is true that it takes money to administer the Church, but should that money come from a faith-reliance on the offerings of its members, or from profit-making enterprises? All this needs study and evaluation.

Of course, to administer the Chinese Church well requires the coordinated efforts of all. Beyond that, it means that we seek the guiding light that God gives us in this time. This is not something that will happen overnight, nor do we reap the minute we sow. The problems discussed above, like a block of ice three feet thick, will not melt in a day. In a word, we are talking about remolding "Three-Self."

My consideration of this issue has its faults and biases, but my desire that the Chinese Church be well run is sincere. It is not my intention either to oppose Three-Self or to deny its achievements. As a clergy person myself, and a staff of Three-Self, I work vigorously on its behalf, that Three-Self may show forth God's glory, that the Church may be the Bride of Christ, and pleasing to Him.



*Nanjing Theological Review. Nos. 24-25 (3-4/1995), p.5 I.*  
Translated by Henry Rowold.

## **2. Social Service and the Building Up of the Church – Li Yaping**

The focus of my discussion is the importance of participation in and development of social service on the part of the Church. Indeed, this is one of the most important areas for building up the Church in China today. I have approached this subject in two ways: 1) the development of social service as a part of the Church's mission, and 2) the development of social service as an essential factor in mutual accommodation of religion and a socialist society.

### **1. Development of Social Service is Part of the Church's Mission**

The Church is a stage in the whole process of creation through which God and creation become reconciled and perfected. The Church's most important mission is evangelization. The ultimate aim of this lengthy task is the Kingdom of God - a realm full of love and freedom which we will possess together, in which all of creation is renewed and changed. As the Church as it exists in worldly society has its own particular needs and goals, I call it a "community." This is, however, an open community, one that must constantly seek to reach out beyond its own boundaries. The last commandment that Jesus gave to his disciples is recorded in the Gospel of Mark as follows: "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation."

We also recognize that God certainly does not confine his revelation to only one means of communication - his revelation to us and tempering of us takes place in the actual social environment that surrounds us. For this reason the Church has, since the very beginning, had to face up to a particular relationship - that between evangelization and our responsibilities towards society.

The British theologian John Stott has explained this relationship in the following three ways:

1. Social responsibility (action in society) is a result of evangelization. Evangelization draws people to faith, faith is expressed through love, and love is expressed in a concrete way through service. For this reason, he argues that social service is also one of the goals of evangelism.

2. Social responsibility (and action in society) can serve as a bridge for evangelism. Apart from the risk of creating rice Christians, the action of love can break through prejudice and suspicion and is able to open wide hearts and minds that have been closed, so that people are able to listen attentively to the gospel and draw near to it.

3. Social responsibility (and action) is the partner of evangelism. When Jesus was preaching the gospel to the crowds, service and evangelism worked together just like the

two wings of a bird or the two blades of a pair of scissors. John Stott described this as "the relationship between two married partners."

This partnership is the same for the relationship between the individual Christian and the Church. Every Christian has received different gifts and callings from God, and they each play a different role. Acts 6:1-7 tells how twelve disciples were sent out to do pastoral work and evangelism, and how a further seven were chosen to serve and manage the affairs of the Church. Everyone who follows Christ has a duty, and that is to use the gifts and opportunities that they have been given to bear witness and to serve.

As regards the Church, the community in which it dwells has many different needs, yet no one person is going to be able to fulfill them all. Therefore the Church should encourage its members to form themselves into organizations for "study and action," so that the work of evangelization, pastoring and social service among its neighbors can be allocated according to each person's talents and interests, and thus enable the Church to take root in society. Only if the Church takes root in society will it be able to make an appropriate response to every kind of challenge. It is important that the Church ought to support and develop this type of work through affirmation, encouragement, advice, prayer, and financial support. Through these kinds of service, the Church will be able to enter into society through love.

Christians live according to the teachings of the Bible. In the Bible it is made quite clear that evangelism and social service are united in being based upon a common foundation.

I. The nature of God. The God who is revealed in the Bible is Creator and Redeemer, who cares for the spiritual well-being and material prosperity of those whom he has created. "God loves humankind," and created them in his own image. God hopes that people will have a right understanding of the relationship that ought to exist between God and humanity and the relationship that ought to exist between people. In the relationship between God and humanity, when they rebel against him, God saves people, requires that they listen to his word, that they return to him, and receive his forgiveness. Between people, God cares for all humankind, and especially for the poor, the hungry, the despised and the lonely... He wants justice to come into the world so people will help and care for each other. The two greatest commandments that God has given us are "love the Lord Your God with all your heart and all your mind and all your strength, and the second likewise, love your neighbor as yourself." 'therefore, the two great duties of every Christian are to worship and obey God, and to have charity for our fellow human beings.

Dr. David Howard, the former General Secretary of the World Evangelical Fellowship (1982-1992), in describing the evangelistic work of one of his friends, wrote: When he was travelling in Columbia evangelizing, his heart grew heavier and heavier, as the people to whom he intended to preach the gospel there felt that their souls were in torment because they lacked nourishment. How could he preach the gospel of redemption to these starving tormented people'.? The evangelist was very worried over this, and he began to search for an even more effective means of preaching the gospel. Several years

later, he developed a panoply of services to meet the needs of the local inhabitants. This work continues today and comprises two factors - on the one hand is the preaching of the gospel, and on the other, he and his fellow-workers help the local people to improve agricultural techniques, educate them about how to improve household hygiene, and have developed programs to eliminate illiteracy and protect the environment. In this way they have improved the lives of both the families and of the community. Dr. Howard has called this friend of his "one of the most gifted evangelists I have ever known."

2. The teaching and preaching of Jesus. Without any doubt, Jesus' teaching of the crowds combined the spoken word with action. The Bible tells how "he went about among the villages teaching" (Mark 6:6) and "He went about doing good..." (Acts 10:38). In Jesus' work of evangelism, his principles informed his actions, and his actions gave witness to his principles, so that the two supported and complemented each other.

If there is no concrete expression of love through action, the principle behind it remains merely an empty abstraction; the action of love is only unambiguous when it is explained by the proclamation of the gospel. If principle is separated from action it lacks believability, if action is separated from principle, it lacks a goal. Jesus' actions make clear his principles and his principles render his actions more easily understood.

Among the great number of Jesus' teachings, there are two parables which are very widely known and loved. One of these is the parable of the prodigal son, the other, the story of the good Samaritan. The parable of the prodigal son is a striking expression of the change brought about by faith, that about the good Samaritan is a remarkable expression of social action. I think that there are several points in these stories that deserve consideration.

1. Both parables have a victim. The prodigal son is the victim of his own sin, but the Jewish man in the other story is the victim of another's sin. The sin in the first is the sin of the individual, that in the second is the sin caused by disorder in society. Jesus' parables tell us that both of these sins should arouse an emotional response from us, and we must deal with both these kinds of sin.

2. Salvation takes place in both parables. When the prodigal son repents and is forgiven, this is spiritual salvation; for the wounded Jewish man in the other story, who is unable to save himself and has to rely upon the benevolence of the good Samaritan for help, there is salvation brought by good deeds.

3. Both parables contain expressions of love. In the parable of the prodigal son, the love is the love of God, who, like a father, welcomes the lost child when he or she returns. In the parable of the good Samaritan, the love is that between neighbor and neighbor. Of even greater importance is the fact that in both parables love triumphs over the prejudices of faith and of the world.

The two parables in their different ways highlight key issues for Christians. Firstly, we have to face up to our own sin, then we must face the suffering of society; we must

first of all repent and receive God's compassion and love, then we must take this pity and love to society. Love and compassion have no means of concrete physical expression unless they are accepted, and once we have accepted love and compassion, we ought then to bring them to others. We must not separate the faith and action of love that have already been united in Jesus Christ. We are all "prodigal sons," and God want us 1111 to be good Samaritans.

The Manila Manifesto (1989) states:

"Today, we are commanded to go and make the unity of word and action a reality. In a spirit of humility, we are developing our evangelistic work, nursing the sick, feeding the starving, caring for those in prison, helping the disabled and rescuing the oppressed. While we recognize the many and varied spiritual gifts, spiritual calls and spiritual intentions, we also firmly believe that the good news and good actions cannot be separated."

I believe that God became incarnate in the humble man Jesus from Nazareth, and that the Holy Spirit is incarnate in all people. Therefore, God works through the loving hearts and actions of all people to effect his redeeming plan, and we must actively establish God's kingdom on Earth in order to promote ecumenical unity and united action, wholeheartedly to serve those in need, and by mean of God's love to resolve people's spiritual and physical problems.

## **II. Development of Social Service is Essential in the Mutual Adaptation of Religion and Socialist Society**

Religion is a very complicated thing, and especially so in the environment of the particular political and social systems in China. Religion is a kind of faith, consciousness, or universal outlook, and religious believers naturally form, or have the potential to form, a political force. Religion is a type of culture and ethics, and religious believers also naturally form a particular group in society and a special social force. People's faith, and the cultural or ethical standards that derive from it, are demonstrated in their actions in society, which gives rise to differences and contradictions between groups of people of different faiths on the level of thought and social action. Since Liberation, under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, in times of hardship, through the hard striving of all Chinese, especially those in religious circles, we have all "sought common ground while reserving our differences," and we have created a social environment where in principle "all people, whether religious believers or non-believers, have the same basic political interests, and in which there are no acute contradictions, and certainly no antagonistic contradictions." However, despite this basic situation, these differences and contradictions are nevertheless natural and deep-rooted, and cannot be entirely resolved. This is the same situation as exists in all other countries, and China is no exception.

Chinese society is dominated by an atheistic ideology, and for several decades religious work was influenced by a "leftist" line of thinking; consequently the Chinese

Communist Party's (CCP) Marxist view of religion needs to be improved and developed. Therefore religion in Chinese society is still regarded as an expression of ignorant and backward beliefs and behavior, and is even looked upon by some people, at least subconsciously, as a threat. Under the present circumstances in Chinese society this has formed into an amorphous, yet nevertheless real, fear of and limiting of religion. However, religion - regardless of what religious life-force or nature, depends on the certainty that it will grow. For this reason the differences and contradictions in society described above can become aggravated. The aggravation of these differences and contradictions is not conducive to social stability, nor to the development of China, and is harmful to all, whether religious believers or not.

In order to slow down the development of these inevitable differences and contradictions, and to allow religious believers and non-believers to work closely together in the great task of developing China, the CCP and government constantly emphasize the implementation of the policy of freedom of religious belief, repeatedly restating the need to concentrate on religious work. Premier Li Peng, addressing the National Conference on Religious Work in 1990, said: "Throughout society we must create the following atmosphere; that is, we must encourage unity, so that religious believers, non-believers, people from different religious backgrounds and from different groups within religions will respect one another, join together in unity, and live in harmony." He also said: "The unity between religious believers and non-believers of every ethnic group, is an important element of unity between all ethnic groups throughout the country. Moreover, the greater unity of all ethnic groups in the country is one of the basic guarantees that China's socialist endeavor will be victorious." Comrade Jiang Zemin stated even more clearly: "We must aim towards a mutual adaptation of socialist society and religion."

This is a great goal, a great endeavor, a great project, which should be discussed from many different directions and standpoints. I would like to say a little on a superficial level about several different opinions, from the viewpoint of us religious believers.

At the beginning of this year Mr. Luo Guanzong gave a speech to the conference of religious leaders in China who were gathered to discuss "the mutual accommodation of socialist society and religion," in which he showed that there are two approaches to the work of adaptation between socialist society and religion:

1) A prerequisite for mutual accommodation is the resolute decision to implement the policy of freedom of religious belief on the part of the CCP and the government.

2) The things required of the religious world were the continued encouragement of religious believers to be strongly patriotic, to love socialism, to uphold the leadership of the Communist Party, to work for the construction of two socialist civilizations, to preserve social stability, and to contribute their strength to "reform and openness." Regarding Christianity, we are to protect and build on the achievements of more than forty years of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, and to continue to adhere to the policies of independent self-government, loving the country, loving the Church and of

greater unity. I think that these are two very important aspects of the work of mutual accommodation between Christianity and socialist society. These will be implemented in our "working together to promote national stability and making a contribution to developing prosperity." These two approaches are mutually complementary, and by doing a little better in one aspect it is possible to improve the work of the other. Concerning the first, the CCP and government have done much, and we ourselves are continually working hard in this area, and can often be seen and heard offering constructive criticism in relation to this matter. We must be objective and recognize that the CCP and government have passed a number of relevant and effective laws that are appropriate to the national situation and that protect the right to freedom of religious belief. Of course when it comes to the implementation or application of these laws, there are times or places at which this is done better than others, and that at other places or times not enough has been done, and sometimes the situation is in fact very poor. However, I consider that this type of situation is not to do with the policy itself, but is rather a problem related to the quality of the people responsible for its implementation - whether related to their cultural level, their level of understanding of the policy, the quality of their working methods, or indeed related to the level of their understanding of and attitudes towards religion. Because of this, we must continue to work hard in this first area, to continue to improve it, yet we must pay even more attention to the second area of work, as it is here that we see direct expression of whether or not religion and socialist society are mutually adapting. If in this area we do a little better, directly in society - in an environment in which the great majority of people have no religious faith, we give expression to our image and help people to improve their understanding of and attitudes towards religion. Perhaps we have not put enough effort into or focused enough on this aspect of running the Church in China well, and this is another area in which we can use our own subjective initiative.

History does not repeat itself, yet at times this seems to be the case. In (lie year in which Chinese Christians chose the Three-Self patriotic path, we did so because we were in the middle of fundamental and radical changes in Chinese society, and wished to adapt to the social environment and to preserve political unity with the great mass of non-believers in China. We actively participated, and immersed ourselves, we suffered attacks that were founded in irrationality and prejudice. The result was that we changed the image of Christianity in people's eyes and minds as a "foreign religion" and the way to acceptance of the gospel was opened wide. Y.T. Wu's original intention was that we throw ourselves into the changes and participate in them. If we had not done this, but had relied on governmental laws and policies alone, then perhaps Chinese Christianity would not now be as deeply rooted in Chinese society as it is. Similarly, today we are again facing a time of radical changes in the Chinese social environment, and this is once again related to whether the socialist system can succeed in the current national situation; that is also related to the question of whether or not China can develop. or guarantee its membership of the global community at this crucial stage.

What, then, should the Church do"? There is no doubt that we should participate in, get involved in things, so that we may continue to keep up with the development of society. In the same way, at this crucial moment in history, it is not enough for us simply to rely on the appeals to the CCP and Chinese government to require fuller implementation of the policy of religious

freedom of belief by all sectors in society; this might even give rise to social factors which are harmful to the image of Christianity. How can we say that we are in harmony with society, if, when all the people of China are striving for reform and openness, for economic development and to improve the social fabric, we stress only the implementation of policies and our own self-preservation? If this is the case, how can we hope for genuine sympathy and understanding from society? We cannot behave as if we were living in an ivory tower, and we neither can nor should seek to escape from this present world.

Adapting to our socialist society is one of the key factors in loving country and loving Church, and is also central to the task of building up the Church in China. This must be realized through action, through hard work to answer society's needs. There are some who think that this is very simple, and that it is enough simply for every individual Christian actively to make their own contribution by working hard at their own jobs. Yes, when we individual Christians blend into society, we are always outstanding, and this is an important element of mutual adaptation, nevertheless, the influence that it is possible to exert in this way is extremely limited.

It seems as if we do not do nearly enough as a special group, organization or body in society. The sublimation of our collective consciousness and our organized collective action is an even more important concrete expression of our mutual accommodation or lack of it, and in this way our influence on and effectiveness in society are also much greater. If the image of Chinese Christianity is improved, then it will be possible to transform the social prejudice against Chinese Christianity caused by the harmful actions of some individual Christians.

The central task facing Chinese society today is this: economic development and the building of a socialist market economy. To achieve this requires all people in China, of whatever ethnic group or from whichever walk of life, to struggle alongside each other. To establish a perfect socialist market economy, it is necessary to have a perfect legal system and a social security system. I think that one of the obvious characteristics of the socialist market economy is that it should have an even better and stronger social security system - a social safety net. In the ten or so years of "reform and openness" we have made many notable and very visible achievements in the field of economic reform and construction. Yet this has given rise to another problem which grows more obvious day by day, and that is that our present systems of social welfare and social security are lagging far behind our advances in economic reform and growth. The facts have shown that it is no longer possible to rely solely on the government to shoulder this social responsibility. For this reason it is now a very important and urgent matter for all groups in society, and especially for non-governmental organizations, to take part in sharing the burden of this responsibility. The Church and other Christian organizations should face up to this challenge and opportunity to shoulder our responsibilities in society, be actively involved and offer our services, and in this way demonstrate our love through our actions and make our contribution to our nation's prosperity and to improving the living standards of her people.



For the Church to provide social services and to engage in good works is an historical tradition. If we today continue to call on, encourage, and organize Christians to make new efforts in this direction, we will be like salt and light, giving strength and convenience to people. We will be able to make society better and more beautiful, will allow society to have a fuller and deeper understanding of us, thus winning wider support and achieving a true mutual adaptation with socialist society, "working together to promote the stability, development, and prosperity of our nation."

In summary, then, the development of social welfare is the responsibility and mission of the Church, the essential foundation on which Christianity reveals itself, an important channel by which we are able to win support. For these reasons it is an important part of building up the Church in China.

As is written in Matthew's Gospel, Chapter 25, verses 37-40:

"Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you? And the King will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.' "

Colleagues, fellow Christians, should we not do likewise?

*Nanjing Theological Review, No. 22-23 (1-2/1995), p. 21.*  
Translated by Alan Miller.

### **3. Preaching in the Church in China – Ji Tai**

As is well known, the two great signs of the Christian Church are the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments, and since the Reformation the Protestant Church has placed particularly great emphasis on preaching. The (Protestant) Church in China has always maintained this tradition and continues to do so, such that the preaching of the sermon is at the center of our worship services.

People like to call preaching "bearing witness" because preaching is not simply the explication of God's word, but is also a form of witness. As an evangelist who had served God for many years once said, "When God's servants are in the pulpit they are not only "preaching," but also "testifying," so that the word which they have received from God and experienced through Him may be proven ... the Word is brought to life in the body of the servant of God, its living force is made manifest and becomes the personal experience of God's servant. In this way the Word is able to work effectively in the hearts of the congregation and to serve its purpose in their daily lives." In the particular context of China, the preaching of the Church has developed certain distinguishing features, by drawing on the traditions of the evangelical wing of the Church since the Reformation and through combining with certain elements of Chinese culture. In what follows, I will discuss preaching in the Church in China today by considering style and content.

#### **Style**

Regarding the form and style of preaching, the preaching of the Church in China basically reflects the educational level of the great majority of Church members and the particular emphases of the theological training of pastoral workers. Four characteristics stand out and I will consider them in turn.

##### **I. Longer length of sermons.**

When compared to the "standard" twenty-minute sermon preached in America, Europe, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, sermons in the Chinese Church are very long. The usual length of the sermon in cities is forty-five minutes, and more than an hour in rural churches.

On one occasion I was invited to preach in a rural church in Hunan. Having preached for fully one hour, I thought that I had gone on long enough, and drew to a close. To my surprise, my presiding colleague asked me to resume preaching once I had had a short rest! Thus I preached for two hours in total and only then did the congregation feel that they had heard enough. Chinese Christians are extremely hungry, thirsty, and eager indeed. Many Christian brothers and sisters in the countryside have to walk for one or two hours, or even travel by cart for up to half a day, in order to worship God and hear the pastor preach. How can a twenty or thirty minute sermon satisfy their needs'?

One of the reasons for the length of our sermons is that the pace of life for many people is much slower than it is in America, Europe, Hong Kong, or Taiwan. This is especially true in rural areas where a comparatively large number of Christians live. There they follow the natural lifestyle and customs of agricultural society, "working when the sun rises, resting when it sets." Time for them is not divided into hours and minutes, and most people speak of time in terms of morning, afternoon, or evening. Since the sermon is the central element of worship, it is inevitable that plenty of time will be allotted for it. Of course there are a minority of highly industrialized cities, such as Guangzhou, where the pace of life is much faster and the length of the sermons has been correspondingly shortened, to about half an hour.

Another reason for the long length of sermons is that in China preaching also serves as a means of religious education. Due to the fact that in China religion and the state education system are kept strictly separate, it is impossible in most schools to hold classes in religious education in the same way as in Europe or America, so that people can neither learn about religion while attending primary or secondary school, nor become familiar with the Bible. Coming to Church and listening to the sermons is therefore an important way for people to receive a religious education. In many churches it is almost always the case that there will be people in the congregation who previously knew nothing about the Christian faith, and therefore in our preaching we must be careful to explain both the basic doctrines of the faith and the background to the scripture passage from which we are preaching. This means that the sermon will be that much longer. It is possible that as the pace of life for many people speeds up, so our sermons will become a little shorter. However, we feel that the sermons at the center of our worship should not become too short, as an abundance of preaching is the key to ensuring the vitality of the Church. One of the principal reasons for the decline of some churches in America and Europe is that they do not have enough preaching.

## **2. Greater use of quotations from the Bible.**

Christians in some areas call the sermon "Bible preaching," which is perfectly reasonable. Preachers in the Chinese Church place particular emphasis on the Bible.

Firstly, pastors have a habit of choosing a number of texts for their sermon. Two or three passages is quite normal, and four or five is fairly common. There was even one sermon which used no less than nine passages from the Bible as the basis of the sermon.

Secondly, many sermons use scripture references in everything from the title and outline down to the details, theory and exposition - a style of sermon known as a "string-of-pearls" sermon. For example, there was one three-part sermon in the second part of which fourteen scripture references were used.

The increased use of the Bible primarily reflects the fact that for the preachers and Christians in China scriptural revelation is the principal authority for faith, and that the Bible is the highest standard in their lives. In this they are heirs to the principle upheld by Luther and other reformers, that is "Scripture Alone" (*Sola Scriptura*) and the exegetical

method of "using the Bible to expound the Bible." Of course, this tendency is also related to the historical Chinese emphasis upon the written word, for example, our reverence for the Classics

Yet another aspect is that it appears to be the case that this situation also reflects the fact that preachers in the Church in China either have not received adequate education in the humanities, or else ignore what they do know. At the present time, the great majority of preachers in churches or meeting points have received no regular theological training, only short-term training in Biblical knowledge and the basics of the faith. Further, there are many among the students in the seminaries who regard most studies in the humanities as "secular study" and who therefore turn their backs on them.

In our opinion, this emphasis on the Bible is the most direct means by which to ensure that we preach well and that we pass on the message which comes from God; if we do not have this emphasis, then our sermons may become just run of the mill. Of course, a Biblical emphasis does not necessarily mean piling up quotes from scripture. Generally speaking, if one can preach thoroughly and in depth on a passage of scripture then it is possible to produce a very good sermon. And the congregation should also be able to remember it well - too many scripture quotations in a sermon can often obscure its main point.

We preachers ought not to despise the learning of the humanities and natural sciences which lies outside the Bible. As the number of relatively well-educated young and middle-aged inquirers rises, we increasingly need to use language which is easier for them to accept and understand in witnessing and explaining the Gospel to them.

### **3. Greater use of testimonies.**

Christians in China like most to listen to testimonies, and preachers like to use them in sermons. Testimonies make up a large proportion of the sermons, especially rural churches. These testimonies consist either of the preacher recounting his or her own experience of rebirth and salvation, some instance when brothers or sisters in the congregation received the grace of God, or else some other moving example from another church. In a sermon, it is often possible to hear three or four such testimonies, and sometimes even more.

Preaching seldom uses dry logic and prefers vital, detailed testimonies, primarily in response to the fairly low cultural level of the congregation. Although it is obvious that in recent years the proportion of young and middle-aged people in the churches in big cities has increased, overall the majority of Christians are still middle-aged and older people of low cultural level. Even in certain rural districts where comparatively more young people attend worship, their cultural level is still not very high.

A second reason for the frequent use of testimonies is that this also reflects the generally realistic and practical-minded attitude of Chinese people. One time when I was taking part in a Gospel Summer Camp run by a Chinese church in Germany, some

Chinese students who were studying abroad and who had never before heard the Gospel were also invited to participate. In our discussions they raised the question: What are the advantages of believing the gospel? If even highly-educated people react this way, it goes without saying that other people will do likewise.

We think that testimony is an important factor in bringing our preaching to life. Testimony, and in particular testimony concerning our own personal experiences, is one of the most convincing and effective ways of bearing witness to the Word of God. At the same time this method is very flexible and adaptable, and is especially suited to congregations of low cultural level.

In addition, in order to raise the quality of Christians' faith, when we use testimonies in our preaching we must be careful to elucidate them with reference to the truth of the Bible, and even more to recognize the significance of these events for our faith. If we only use these occasions to put across simplistic messages such as, for example, "the hens of those who believe in God lay more eggs" or, "Faith in God can eliminate disease and avert disaster," and do not speak words of guidance from the point of view of faith and theology, then this can lead to a kind of Christian utilitarianism.

#### **4. Frequent use of allegorical interpretation.**

"Allegorical" should be taken to indicate the "spiritual meaning." When we preach we should of course explain the Bible passage in terms of the significance of the news of salvation and of the spiritual life of the Christian. However, in the Church "allegorical" Biblical exposition in fact often refers to a method of Biblical interpretation which tries hard to read a meaning into every text.

Chinese preachers have always been fond of this method. For example, when John Sung (ca. 1920s) preached, he even elaborated on the Chinese transliteration of the name of the Roman governor Pilate, which consists of the three characters *bi-la-duo* and which can be interpreted as "he draws many [people to him]." Jia Yuming makes even more frequent use of this method. For example, when preaching about the four rivers in the garden of Eden, he said that the one called "Pishon" when interpreted allegorically is to be taken to signify that grace is given freely by God, etc. On one occasion I heard a young colleague preaching, explaining the story of the five loaves and two fishes (in the feeding of the five thousand, John, Chapter 6), saying that this represented our bodies, as people have "five internal and five external" organs, and have two eyes and two ears, so that the numbers match up exactly...

In fact, we know that Protestant Christianity does not hold this allegorical method of interpretation in too high regard, because it allows too much leeway for individual interpretations. Why, therefore, is it that this method is so well liked in the Chinese Church? One reason is that perhaps this technique has a special affinity for Chinese Culture. Due to the fact that Chinese writing is largely made up of ideographic elements, characters each have a certain symbolic character - it is possible for instance to analyze the character for sin/crime (*zui*) as consisting of "four wrongs" (*si* + *fei*). In the past there were people who told fortunes by analyzing Chinese characters. A second reason is the fact that preachers in the Church in China

have not studied enough of Biblical history and language. While a few preachers may have the qualifications and opportunity to research different translations or commentaries, the great majority of preachers in churches at the grassroots level have neither the time nor the opportunity to do this.

In our opinion, the allegorical interpretation of the Bible should become the dominant method which we use. We do need genuine allegorical interpretation to elucidate the meaning of the Bible for our spiritual lives. Yet this must first of all be based upon a foundation of thorough understanding of the history, language and literature of the Bible, and should not simply be a free interpretation of the implicit meaning of the text.

## **Content**

Regarding the content of sermons, the preaching of the Church in China basically reflects the special characteristics of the faith and theological orientation of the great majority of Chinese Christians and pastors. The three features outlined below are particularly marked.

### **1. An emphasis on basic faith.**

The content of the preaching in the Chinese Church most often relates to basic beliefs, particularly the doctrine of salvation. It seems that there are certain churches in America and Europe which no longer concentrate too much on these fundamental truths, where it seems that the preachers do not dare to mention the word "sin." Although the sermon text varies from service to service and the topic differs, many preachers nevertheless automatically touch on the subject of original sin, move on to Christ's redemption of humanity on the cross, and go from there directly to the new Heaven and the new Earth.

Christianity is certainly not only about "encouraging people to be good." It is useless to stand on the riverbank and call out advice when someone falls into the water. Humanity needs a Savior, not an Advisor. The Lord Jesus said, "The Son of Man has come to save the lost ..." Still such content is very common in sermons.

The main reason why the great majority of Christians and pastors in the Church in China emphasize basic faith, especially the doctrine of salvation, is primarily due to the fact that they are heirs to the evangelical and fundamentalist traditions. It is possible to say that there does not exist in the Chinese Church a "liberal wing" as there does in Western Christianity. Secondly, this is also connected to the composition of the body of Christians. Prior to the Cultural Revolution, it was the case that there were mostly elderly believers left in the Church. Today the majority of Christians in the Church have become Christians only in the past ten or so years, and at every service there is a large number of inquirers. We need to enable them to understand the basic teachings of the Christian faith through their hearing of the Word.

We consider that preaching on the basics of faith and especially concentrating on the doctrine of salvation, is an important way to preserve "the faith which was once for all

delivered to the saints" (Jude v.3). The Church should not avoid preaching a message or embrace secularism, just because people and society feel that a certain argument is too harsh. On the other hand, emphasizing basic faith certainly does not mean having to go from Genesis to Revelation every time we preach. Each sermon should be preached according to the needs of the particular congregation and according to the inspiration which the individual preacher has received from God, combined with the various seasons of the Church year and incorporating the various items of news and concerns of the congregation, while avoiding repetitiveness. Then the congregation will be able to hear the truth of the Gospel in all its fullness and abundance.

## **2. An emphasis on the individual and the gospel.**

In comparison with the active concern shown for and participation in society by the churches in Europe and America, there is a clear emphasis in the preaching of the Chinese Church on the personal gospel. A very typical example of this can be found in a sermon on the Exodus from Egypt. We can say that the Exodus was the most important historical event to affect the Israelites in the Old Testament. "through this event they freed themselves from slavery and transformed an independent tribal people into the basis for a new state. It was a great event of tremendous political significance. Nevertheless, the majority of preachers interpret this story only in terms of its significance for the faith of the individual, such as: "when the Israelites came out of Egypt, crossing the Red Sea, the Egyptian soldiers who were pursuing them were all drowned in the Red Sea. and the Israelites were no longer enslaved as they had been before. In the same way, when we are baptized, we become children of God and are freed from the control of demons, and we also are no longer slaves to sin."

The way in which preachers and believers in the Chinese Church emphasize the personal gospel is the effect of their embracing a particular attitude that characterized both the evangelical movement at a comparatively early period and the traditions of pietism. Secondly, this is also related to a deficiency in the social consciousness of Christians in China. For these people, it appears that individual salvation is the entirety of Christian faith, and therefore there is no need to think about Christians' responsibility to society.

It is our opinion that that the nurturing and training up of the individual's spiritual nature by the preacher is of great importance, but that they ought also to have regard for the fact that each Christian lives in society, and of course ought to have responsibility towards that society. The Good News of Christ is not only for individuals, but also for the whole of society.

## **3. An emphasis on morality.**

In recent years there have been several Biblical texts which preachers in China have particularly liked to preach on, for example, "The Great Commission" (Mt. 22:34-40), "The Sermon on the Mount" (Mt. 5,7), "The Good Samaritan" (Lk. 10:25-37), and "Peter's Three Protestations of Love" (Jn. 21:15-19). The main point of all these passages

relates to Christian love. The conduct of Christians should conform to the moral principles expounded in the Bible, and this is something that is very often stressed by preachers. There are also many sermons which take as models Biblical characters, such as Abraham, Moses, and Ruth, describing in detail their faith and all kinds of good deeds that they did, holding them up as moral exemplars to the congregation.

This emphasis on morality reflects a combination of Christianity with Chinese cultural tradition. Historically we Chinese have placed great importance on ethics and morality, yet Confucianism, the traditional mainstream of our values and ethical system, appears ill-equipped to adapt to the demands of modernization. In this time of rapid change, people need to know good from bad, what has value and what does not.

We believe that the emphasis on morality is one of the most important ways in which Christians can bear witness in society, and especially in Chinese society. However, we should be careful: if we only preach morality, we may water down Christianity until it becomes simply another moral theory.

In the above I have offered an evaluation of preaching in the Church in China from two different angles - style and content. Preaching in the Church in China continues to be based upon the traditions established at the Reformation, while combining certain elements from Chinese culture to give it its own particular distinguishing features. These features include the relative lengthiness of the sermon, the greater use of scripture quotations and testimonies, a preference for allegorical exegesis, an emphasis on basic faith and the personal gospel, and an emphasis on morality.

Over the past few years, new trends have begun to emerge, such as a search for the historical and social significance of the Bible, a concentration on the overall truth of the Bible and the use of contemporary language. An assessment of the impact of these new departures must await a future article on preaching in the Chinese Church.

On this topic, see also "Protestant Sermons in China - Harbingers of an Evolving Contextual Theology," by Gotthard Oblau, *China Study Journal* (U.K.), vol. 11, No. 1 (April, 1996), pp. 16-28.

*Nanjing Theological Review*, No. 26 (1/1996), p. 8.  
Translated by Alan Miller.



## 4. Indigenization in China in the First Half of the Twentieth Century – Yao Minquan

In contrast to the West, Chinese Christianity is truly a small and immature Church with a brief history and narrow area of impact. But one has only to probe a bit deeper in looking back and it is not difficult to discover that Christianity in China has its own momentum and flavor. God has given the Chinese Church too unique historical riches; for example, its independence movement, its indigenization movement, and the appearance of three branches of the Church - the Little Flock, or Christian Assembly Hall, the True Jesus Church and the Jesus Family. These are historical facts of great significance. In recent years, I have had occasion to look at the historical materials associated with these movements and sects frequently and I have formed various preliminary views which I would like to share with you here. I believe that the movements and sects mentioned above are in fact a way for Chinese Christians to protect the Church in China and transform its image as <t "foreign religion" - a way to transform this religion from the West into one which grows in Chinese soil.

The indigenous consciousness of the two movements is rather more obvious. As for the three sects, though they (lid not make explicit use of terms like "sinicize," for many years (especially in the early years of national construction after 1949), they repeatedly referred to themselves as indigenous - born and bred in China. Though this is their stated motive, their indigenous character may not necessarily be what sets them apart. For the sake of ease of discussion, however, I will treat them all under the rubric of the historical move from "foreign" to "native."

### **The Historical Course of Indigenization**

According to the materials available, the earliest mention of the idea that Chinese Christianity should adapt to the Chinese environment and put self-support into effect, came from the founder of the magazine *Church Affairs* (*jiaowu zazhi*), the Rev. S.L. Baldwin, a missionary in Fuzhou. He first raised the subject in the magazine in 1868 and missionaries in Fuzhou gathered to discuss the issue of making the Church in Fuzhou self-supporting. In 1877, at the first Missionary Conference, Baldwin presented a long paper "Self-Support of the Native Church" in which he urged self-support of the Chinese Church, critiquing the phenomenon of "rice Christians" and mentioning the psychological dependency of Chinese evangelists and the fact that the Chinese Church should not distance itself from the living standard of Chinese Christians. The paper aroused wide discussion, and it should be said that it was a proposal which should be affirmed.

Thirty years later, at the China Missionaries Centenary Conference (Yu Guozhen had already founded an independent church in Shanghai at the time), a Swatow missionary found that the actual results of one hundred years of mission work in China was the

---

Rev. Yao Minquan is a research fellow in the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences and Vice-Chairperson of the Shanghai Municipal Three-Sell Association.

cultivation of a Western Christianity; not only were Christians held in low esteem by non-Christians, but this had led to many missionary cases. The first item on the agenda of the Conference was "The Chinese Church." He felt that the Chinese Church must achieve independence and union, with independence being the first priority. In his report he used the slogan "self-administration, self-support and self-propagation." History has shown the reasonableness of this three-self path. Obviously the Chinese Church should be sinicized, should be indigenized. This was the right direction to go.

There is historical evidence of Chinese Christians running their own churches in the latter half of the nineteenth century: Chen Menguan in Guangdong, Huang Yishan in Shanghai and the Daoji Church somewhere in Guangdong, for example. But in order to establish a church one first had to have financial support and the social conditions in China at the time were such that not many church founders could be produced.

In 1903, thirteen people, including Me Honglai and Song Yaoru joined together to establish the Christian Union, stating that "Chinese Christians should band together and Chinese Christians call easily evangelize China," proposing that through independence they would "eliminate the contradiction between the people and the Church." Rev. Yu Guozhen, pastor of the Zhabei Church in Shanghai announced that his church would no longer rely on mission boards for financial support. He also contacted small and medium-sized churches in his native Zhejiang and established the Chinese Christian Independent Church, which developed into a denomination with a national assembly and organization, produced publications and built churches, making a distinctive mark in Chinese Church history.

Following on from Me Honglai and Yu Guozhen, the forces of independence present a splendid sight. In Shanghai alone, in 1906, Rev. Zhu Baoyuan of the Church of the Savior (Anglican) announced that his church would no longer accept financial assistance from mission boards and constructed a church building in the style of Chinese architecture, with a church flag upon which was embroidered "self-administration, self-support and self-propagation." In 1933, Rev. Zhu penned the hymn "The Independent Church of China" which is still frequently sung today. Christians from Fujian and Guangdong living in Shanghai joined to establish the Shanghai Sojourners' Baptist Church and the Cantonese-speaking Fuji Church. Some big mainline churches, such as the Pure Heart Church, St. Peter's, St. Paul's, the Mu'er Church and the First Baptist Church, announced self-support, relying on support from Chinese Christians rather than mission boards. Some well-known pastors like Jia Yuming and Jiang Changelluan published articles on the independent church and propaganda for independence was common in church publications. As the 1918 *China Christian Yearbook* put it: "in recent years calls for independence have resounded throughout the Chinese churches" and some magazines called independence "the term of the hour." This reflects the widespread nature of Chinese Christians' support for independence. Calls for indigenization centered mostly on localization of church leadership and indigenization of worship. This was confined to higher circles and did not have the broad appeal of the call for independence. Yet at the three missionary conferences the issue of indigenization had been raised and it permeated the issue of running the church. Matteo Ricci's Chinese garb and knowledge of the

Chinese classics in the seventeenth century and the nineteenth-century interest in and researches into traditional ethics and wedding and funeral customs by some missionaries, were all alike efforts at indigenization.

With the latter part of the nineteenth century, efforts at world evangelization rose to new heights, while at the same time colonized people everywhere stepped up their demands for independence and the work of indigenization became even more urgent. International Christian organizations and their leaders (like Mott) were clearly active promoters of indigenization. Mott said that the door to the gospel worldwide stood open as never before and that Christians should work actively to take advantage of it, so the opportunity would not slip away. In spreading the gospel widely one had to follow the tugboats familiar with the harbor .... Such words are the finest commentary on indigenization. The Edinburgh World Missionary Conference set up the Continuation Committee for China to carry out the nine-year survey "The Christian Occupation of China." The Chinese National Continuation Committee that was later set up had Chinese as chairperson and general secretary. Some general meetings held during this period completed the transfer of leadership, and quite a number of denominations added the word "China" or "Chinese" to their names. All these measures were concrete signs of indigenization.

When the National Christian Council was established in 1922, its assembly announced that an "indigenous Church" was the crux of Christian development: "the time has already come when we Chinese Christians should, with careful research and bold experiment, draw up our own church organization and order, order of worship and methods of evangelism." Its goal was to "ensure that all would assist in making the present church more of a Chinese Church." In 1924 at the second annual meeting of the National Christian Council, a Standing Committee on the Indigenous Church was established with the sole aim of promoting indigenization. Some church leaders of the day such as Cheng Jingyi, Timothy Liu Tinglang and T.C. Chao, were all in favor of indigenizing the Church. In the two decades prior to Liberation, the Council did carry out some programs related to the indigenization process, such as joining hands with other social organizations to promote rural experiments, investigate labor conditions, develop mass education, and organize anti-drug campaigns, etc. All these brought the Chinese Church closer to Chinese reality.

We know that "judging the achievements of history does not mean deciding whether historical activists have or have not given us what we need today, but whether they have superseded their own forebears." On this basis, I believe that whether in terms of personnel and organization or transformation of ministry, indigenization efforts were a giant step toward enabling Christianity to identify with the Chinese people. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Chinese history came to its most critical juncture. During this period, from the Allied Army's invasion in response to the Boxers to (Japan's) Twenty-One Demands, this ancient nation with its five thousand year old civilization, was nearly wiped out. The urgency of the question of national survival caused some Chinese to struggle for self-strengthening. This crisis was the stimulus which caused Xie Honglai, Yu Guozhen and others, "feeling that the Church in China was weak and subject

to many obstacles coming from outside," to conceive of breaking through the old forms and starting something new in the independent Church.

The May Fourth Movement was even more a movement for the liberation of ideas. Not only did it raise anti-imperialist and anti-feudal banners in the area of political models and social revolution, but challenged people's thinking with concepts of equality, freedom, anti-Confucianism (feudal ethical code), and humanism. Why did the Little Flock, the True Jesus Church and the Jesus Family, with their critique of the existing church structure and theology and their anti-hierarchical nature, all develop in the 1920s? We cannot say that this was unrelated to the upsurge in new thinking on independence, equality and anti-traditionalism. In fact the three sects mentioned above were not the first by a long shot to advocate independence and style themselves church bodies. There were for example, Shi Meiyu and others in Shanghai who left the Jiangxi Presbyterian Mission and set up the Bethel Church. The Chinese Presbyterian Church in Jiangsu and Shandong was started by Jia Yuming on leaving the North American Presbyterian Church. In Shandong, Ding Limei cast off the YMCA Student Movement and began the Chinese Students Volunteer Movement for Mission. These all had a fairly long existence and were substantial in scope. So we can see that history brought forth a whole range of born and bred expressions of Christian faith. The three sects mentioned above simply had a longer existence and covered a wider area, and are thus more familiar, especially because they tested their strength against the Chinese forces of revolution. '

Watchman Nee (1903-1972), founder of the Little Flock, turned to the English Brethren in 1920. In 1922 he began to cast off traditional forms of worship, no longer relying on pastors and elders, and set up his own fellowship. In 1926 he formally established the Christian Assembly Hall (Little Flock) which grew rapidly over the next twenty years. The Little Flock and Nee had their own views on every point of theology, utility of which sounded quite reasonable. The probable reason they were able to attract such a large following was because they counted among their number quite a few "Christians of long standing" who wanted to break free of the "formal" church. In addition, the Little Flock (at least in theory) was egalitarian: all believers were called brother or sister, responsible brothers, whom we would call clergy, were termed church workers, their assemblies were all equally "branch fellowships," and even a communion service could be led by the ordinary Christians. They stressed the local nature of the church, believing that fundamentally the church was born and bred of a particular place. They did not believe that any church was subordinate to another and were opposed to mother-daughter church relationships. The only authority for organizing a church was the power of the Spirit. Though to say this is necessarily abstract, it can be done in practice. When Nee's licentiousness came to light, just as the church was about to split, Nee, the founder, "bowing to authority," withdrew from the church.

This sect's egalitarian outlook was highly suited to the mindset of Christians in intellectual circles who had been imbued with the new thinking. They felt their church was an entity that could be established in their own homes, where God would be nearer to them personally, more in communion. Naturally, the extent to which the Little Flock's theology was completely in line with their practice, and how Nee made use of this

theology for anti-revolutionary activities, is another topic, which should be discussed separately.

The True Jesus Church was established in 1917 by Paul Wei. Wei was originally a follower of the London Missionary Society who later, within the space of two or three years, moved around from the Mormons to the Christian Faith Church to the Pentecostals. To found his church he relied on seeking revelation while being "titled with the Spirit" and having visions. Thus the church's doctrine was very confused (or we can say it had no systematized doctrine), only the revelation of the Holy Spirit received by the leader was the source of the gospel message and the basis for running the church. China had a traditional folk belief in using dreams and signs to tell fortunes: these beliefs were deeply rooted in the society. An ancient Chinese book on the explanation of dreams was a bestseller last year, which shows that a lot of people are still attracted by such cultural mysteries. From the point of view of folk religion, it is much easier to approach Christianity by such routes than by Augustine's theory of original sin or Martin Luther's theories of justification. So as soon as the True Jesus Church was founded, "churches" sprang up everywhere and there was "baptism almost every Sabbath." It had its followers. Prior to Liberation there were numerous splits and duplications within the True Jesus Church. These were very similar to the frequent power shifts within the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom. This is a well-known reflection of a peasant consciousness. Wei stressed that his "mission was not to waste too much effort on the gentiles, but rather to purge the "established" (churches)." In fact, they believed that theirs was the only true church, and that the foreign Christian churches were false. So it was no accident that their greatest development took place among those whose educational level was as not very high and who had little opportunity of contact with Western culture.

Jing Dianying's (1890-?) education level was somewhere between that of Watchman Nee and Paul Wei. He was born into a landlord family in Mazhuang (Shandong) and was naturally familiar with village society and the expectations of the peasants. He knew that after thousands of years of oppression, Chinese peasants had no very high hopes. For them, the primitive communist model characterized by common labor, common consumption, lack of private property and equality in wealth or poverty was the realization of paradise. Jing's talent and his middle-school education put him head and shoulders above them. People respectfully called him fifth uncle and so he was able to use the primitive communist idea of holding "all things in common and ... distributing them to all, as any had treed" from Acts to form the Jesus Family. He said, "The Jesus Family was termed in poverty. We eat rough food and wear plain rough clothing, ... the family is formed of love, stressing the spirit over material goods, cherishing spiritual bonds over blood ties." The area of China lying at the foot of Mount Tai (Taishan) was a place of drought and natural disasters. Moreover, in the 1930s and 40s Shandong was the scene of frequent military skirmishes, and the greater the turmoil of chaos and war and the poverty of the peasants, the more the Jesus Family grew, benefiting from the times. According to the church archives in Shanghai, there was no Jesus Family in Shanghai until 1948 and that had only four members. This shows that in places where there is economic and cultural development, it is much more difficult for that sort of low-level, poverty-based communalism to develop.

## Evaluation

In making an evaluation, one must first clarify one's angle of vision. I believe that the first thing to consider in evaluating a Christian entity today must be whether it has been of benefit to the development of Christianity in China and to the faith of Chinese Christians. The reasons for this are: 1) this is the angle from which Chinese Christians today would consider the matter, and our evaluation of the good or evil, falsehood or truth of things should be acceptable to the ordinary Christian masses. Chinese Christians are our basic group and they are also part of the whole Chinese people. In considering questions and issues we should begin from their way of thinking and feeling, and their basic interests, to serve them .... If our standards of evaluation are unacceptable to them, then our "good standard" is an arrow that misses its mark. Every group has its own criteria for what is most important: for architects, this is safety, artists appreciate works of art from an aesthetic point of view, students proceed on the basis of a solid grasp of knowledge, for a political party or a class organization, politics is primary and they begin with class analysis. If we do not scrutinize these distinctions, but see the whole nation only in terms of the primacy of class struggle and drawing lines on the basis of some political criteria, there will inevitably be greater struggle leading to greater chaos and the more lines we draw, the more confused things will be.

A book I read recently dealt with the dangers of a solely political outlook. I think its views may be helpful in the matter of evaluation. Its main points may be summarized as follows: During the period of national construction following Liberation, in order to determine truth and falsehood on a large scale and distinguish friends from enemies, political standpoint and political direction were stressed. At the time this performed a great educational function; this much is indisputable. Later this idea of "seeing things politically" was inflated and absolutized, becoming a value judgement - "politics first", politics was everything. This vogue for politics only shaped a way of thinking. History shows that when this way of thinking inundates everything, a phony politics prevails. One of its marked characteristics is that it appears that the more prominence is given to politics, the less one has to know about anything else in a given (professional) field. As long as one is sufficiently "red," one can be utterly ignorant. In the course of Chinese cultural construction, this kind of thinking resulted in a social atmosphere where proper duties were not attended to, and the pursuit of fame and wealth led to a corruption of social values. In particular, scholarly issues were, with great frequency, "transformed" into political issues to be solved by means of storms of fierce political struggle. This meant that cultural critique and cultural reconfiguration lacked objectivity, a scientific attitude and democracy, and led to stagnation in cultural construction. In every field there were lies, exaggeration and empty talk, and a slighting, even a destruction of the professional.... This is the main point the author makes. If we substitute faith, religious and theology for the terms profession, scholarly and cultural in the passage, I believe we can adapt it to our needs.

I believe every field and department has its own special characteristics and rules; politics is not the master key. If we insist upon putting politics in command of

everything, the result will be that we get hold of the wrong "keylink" and warp our "goal." In such cases, we will have to rely on vague preaching and coercion to control people's hearts.

The two movements and three sects I have been describing here have all been upheld and followed by a group of fine Christians. The theological views of the three sects differ greatly from my own, yet, many other Christians have indeed found in them faith and rest and spiritual comfort. I believe I must respect their faith. Society is multi-layered. Within the same Christianity, the expression of people's Christian faith is also multi-layered and many-hued. It is as Bishop K.H. Ting has understood it: these are the riches of the Gospel of Christ. We cannot get to the truth of the matter if we approach it on the basis of differences in faith or suspicions about "sheep stealing": most especially we should not analyze non-political issues into political ones. Such things have happened in the past - - because of Watchman Nee's reactionary political attitudes and his offenses against the law, the special characteristics of the faith of the little Flock have been disparaged, distribution of their publications has been blocked, and *Streams in the Desert* has even been criticized. This is a result of exaggeration due to "seeing things through politics." The result is less than ideal. Through my teaching I get the sense that there are still traces left behind from the "politics only mindset" among us today. We see this when everything has to be vetted against a political standard. On the other hand, if out of sympathy for someone's special beliefs we whitewash their political faults, this too is a consequence of the politics only mindset. I feel that only through playing down such habits of thought can we aid unity and linkages among Chinese Christians.

My thinking on this is not fully developed. I found that Watchman Nee's so-called theology in fact is not all his own. Other Christians were involved in and contributed to the source of these beliefs, their development and maturation. In my opinion, the beliefs of the Little Flock should be separated from those of Watchman Nee (especially his reactionary political views and actions). The first should come under the rubric of "mutual respect," how to deal with the second is the responsibility of the nation's laws. Will recognition of Nee's theological thinking lead to a clash of two criteria, that is "religion is good, politics is bad" and create a contradiction wherein love country, love Church cannot be one? I believe that the unity of love country, love Church is a macro determination and one which need not be applied to all individuals. Throughout history, whether in China or abroad, there have been numerous politically reactionary scientists, writers, and artists. In the auction houses of Shanghai today, samples of handwriting by Chen Duxiu and Wang Jingwei sell for tens of thousands of yuan. I doubt whether the purchasers are putting down their money out of traitorous intent, but rather because Chen and Wang are both experts in calligraphy.

The unity of love country, love Church is a proposition in line with Christian faith. We needn't be too anxious that (lie two criteria will conflict. I believe that whatever is just and good must also be in line with Christian faith. Facts show that an upright and pious Christian will cast off all evil automatically and become a law-abiding citizen. Some think that before you can come into contact with the "negative side" of things, you must first establish a highly dependable political viewpoint, and so we get the "is it love

country love Church or love Church love country" controversy. Actually since the "two loves" must be unified, how much difference can there be between first and second position? The essence of the type of thinking that says one has definitely to love country (politics) first and religion (profession/expert) second, is still a metaphysical conceit that holds that the two cannot be a unity.

As for further historical evaluation of the two movements and three sects - whether or not the two movements were anti-imperialist in nature, their historical periodization, whether indigenization should be considered three-self, whether there are conflicts in their characteristics of belief and the path to unity - I cannot go into these here due to limits of space. My purpose is to invite further discussion among scholars of religion, whether Christian or not, and among my readers. I sincerely hope more people will be concerned with the historical evaluation of Christianity in China and devote themselves to its study in order to develop the field of the history of Christianity in China.

*East China Theological Review, No. 1, 1994, p. 12.*



## 5. Theological Education in China – Su Deci

A brief retrospective of theological education in China will lead us back to the 1850s. This nearly 150 year history can be divided into three stages: 1) inception: the latter half of the nineteenth century; 2) growth: the first half of the twentieth century; and 3) testing and innovation: the second half of the twentieth Century.

During the first stage, a dozen or so theological colleges and Bible schools were set up with the aim of training local preachers. Their first concern was for practical training. Though the proposal was made at the 1877 missionary conference in Shanghai that some higher-level, more academic, theological seminaries be set up in (China, in the earlier half of the twentieth century only about one quarter of the sixty or so theological seminaries and Bible colleges (not including the doctrinal schools which specialized in training women preachers) in China were of university standard, offering degree programs. However, the goal of these seminaries did not differ from that of less academic institutions: training ministers for the Church. Students interested in pursuing scholarly work were very few. The only solution for such students to pursue their goal was western-style education which required study abroad. This reflects the colonialist education policy characteristic of the time.

The 1950s saw radical and fundamental changes in the situation of the Christian Church in China: the withdrawal of Western missionaries and the rise of the Three-Self Movement. After a painful but exciting struggle, the Christian Church in China began to possess her own "selfhood." But for obvious reasons, it was only later, during the 1970s, that our nation, society and church returned to the path of stability and progress. This signaled the coming of a new era for theological education in China. Having come through severe testing, it entered upon a new stage of revival and renewal. The most urgent task for theological education in the 1980s was the speedy training of ministerial personnel. But at the same time, we also began to train faculty as well as scholars in theology, though just a few.

Comparing the current reality of theological education in China with its past, we perceive that though the task remains the same, there are some distinct differences:

1. During the seven years from 1981 to 1988, thirteen theological seminaries and colleges (not including the three Bible schools begun in the past two years) were established by the national and by the provincial (which includes the municipal and autonomous region level) Christian Councils concerned. God has been working through Christians in China. Following God's guidance, relying on God's strength, we know that God is working wonders through us. Though difficulties persist - shortages of housing for faculty and students, poor facilities, lack of teachers and texts - nevertheless year after year, we are training young ministers in these less than ideal circumstances. By 1994,

---

Rev. Su Deci is General Secretary of the China Christian Council. Chairperson of the "Theological Education Commission, and Principal of East China Theological Seminary in Shanghai.

these theological colleges had graduated 2,274 students who will form our younger generation of pastors.

2. Few of those trained in the 1950s remain. Where is the faculty for our seminaries to come from? Faced with this situation, many older ministers who had never taught theology, courageously came forward in the early 1980s, in spite of their age and in spite of the fact that they were also occupied in re-establishing their churches and ministering to their congregations. Teaching responsibilities meant a lot of extra work for them, yet they did not shrink from it. One could hardly imagine they could succeed, if not for their sincere love for Christ and whole-hearted devotion. They lacked teaching experience, true, but for their students, who would be Christian ministers in China themselves, their experience in serving the Church and their passionate commitment made their classroom teaching much more concrete and practical. They were living examples of what they taught. This was an advantage for our theological education since its aim is to train church-builders for China. To our joy, since the 1980s, more and more young seminary graduates are joining our faculty teams. 1994 statistics show that these young teachers represent 54% of all theological faculty members in China.

3. These thirteen theological seminaries and colleges were re-opened or established during the post-denominational stage of the Christian Church in China. Students learn about the historical reasons for the emergence of Christian denominations, their influence and impact through the study of Church history. In studying this history they also learn that it was inevitable for missionaries to preach the doctrines of their respective denominations and to develop their denominations in China. But their own reality attests that we can preach a pure gospel without endorsing a single denomination. Living in theological seminaries which reflect a post-denominational church life, our young future pastors have this common experience: How lovely it is to live in harmony with brothers and sisters. This younger generation will be a solid foundation for the unity of the Christian Church in China.

4. The traps-denominational character of our theological education made it possible for our colleges to discuss and agree upon educational policy geared to the needs of the Christian Church in China. This policy was proposed by Bishop K.H. Ting in 1984 (or earlier): the aim of theological education in China is to build students up spiritually, morally, intellectually, physically and in community, so that they will be persons of good all-around character who will benefit the Church. From 1985-1987 this policy was scrutinized and discussed at national meetings on theological education and a common understanding of the policy was attained through this process. Since then all theological seminaries and colleges have embraced it as their educational guideline, carrying it out through constant exploration and practice, suiting it to their immediate situations.

All this may hardly seem out of the ordinary, yet if we compare the experience of Christianity in China in the past with that of the last fifty years, we cannot fail to see that the Church is growing, and that our sense of mission through theological education has been undergoing revival and renewal. This has been achieved, not through personal power, nor through talent, but through the Spirit of God. It is the Holy Spirit who opens

our eyes to our time and situation. It is the Holy Spirit, also, who shows us how to adapt ourselves to our particular time and thus be able to preach the gospel effectively in it.

In the 1950s, the Three-Self Movement had a more political thrust, gaining social space in which our Church realized its new Selfhood. Today, we find more theological significance in the three-self principle. Compared with the historical situation, we most clearly see now the new Selfhood of the Christian Church in China. It is a Selfhood with its own task and commitment. We are just beginners on this hopeful path of revival and renewal. With the vision revealed by our God in view, we will not be hesitant to go forward, no matter how many difficulties lie ahead.

I do not wish to imply that we should be content with our current situation. On the contrary, we should always remember that God's will surpasses our own. God's way is much higher than ours; God wants us always to go higher, to take a broader view. We should not be short-sighted, but always open to vision, striving hard to realize it. Only in this way can we fulfill the commission God has entrusted to us, rather than pass it by.

Thirty years of self-imposed seclusion and external sanctions caused China to be partly closed-off from the world. But in the last two decades we have seen this vast country reconnected with the world through the policy of openness and reform. China has stepped onto the road of development and modernization. This makes it possible for the Christian Church in China to share with churches overseas on a broader and more profound basis.

The prophets of our day join voices to predict that the twenty-first century will be the Asian Century. Some even speculate that in 2010 or 2020 China will be the world's number one economic power. But as Chinese, we recognize our weakness: China has one-fifth of the world's population and too large a population means a nation will be held at a low level of production and living standard for a considerable period of time. Yet we mustn't ignore the strikingly rapid progress our nation is currently making, nor should we be blind to the ensuing changes and their impact on life in society. We who are carrying out the mission of theological education must face this changing situation seriously, because economic development is bound to bring about cultural change. Neither religion nor theology is immune to its impact. Here I would like to share with you my vision of Chinese theological education in a Chinese society experiencing rapid and ongoing change.

As we approach the turn of the century, Christian theology and theological education in China is immediately confronted with four issues which require serious thought and practical action.

I. How can we enhance our own sense of self-worth and be recognized and respected by our society?

Schools exist to serve a variety of educational levels: primary, secondary, junior college, university. We are free to decide which level our schools shall serve, but our

decision, whatever claims we may make for our schools, must be recognized by society. We now have many theological seminaries, theological colleges and bible schools. There is a lot of space in society for theological education and we receive support and recognition from society as well. We like to claim that we offer education equivalent to that of a four-year undergraduate college, or to a school offering two-year professional education, and so on. But we must match our claims with fact.

We can term the last fifteen years of theological education the period of reconstruction. Its goal was the expeditious training of pastors for a Church in urgent need of them. This period was characterized by efficient use of our poor resources and constructing something out of nothing. In the second period, the next fifteen years, emphasis will be upon normalization, improvement and standardization of theological education. Otherwise we will fail to match our claim by our quality and will lose our value and status. Realization of this task will be a hard process, calling for struggle and dedication. Over the past one to two years we have held discussions and consultations on this issue. At the Sixth National Assembly of the Commission on Theological Education, several resolutions were passed: Regulation on Degree Conferring Programs, Regulation on Title Assessment for Teachers in Seminaries, and an Outline for the Standardization of Theological Education in China.

But while striving to improve the quality of our theological education, we cannot forget the reality of the Christian Church in China. Most Christians live in the countryside, and it is the rural grassroots churches which are most in need of pastors. In the past fifteen years we have trained thousands of lay church workers through short-term training programs. These people are now active in twenty to thirty thousand meeting points throughout China. We shall remember their dedication and hard work and are grateful for their fruitful labors. However, they had never received any formal theological education and so their work is not always successful in combating heresy. Sometimes their ministry is not efficiently carried out. To deal with this situation we are planning to gradually improve the quality of the short-term training programs. Such training will also be incorporated into the overall system of standard theological education. I believe this is why the China Christian Council proposed that those provinces which met the criteria should establish provincial Bible schools.

It is my belief that in order to carry out the mission of theological education in China, we should aid in the building up of grassroots churches while striving to standardize theological education, enhance our sense of self worth and secure our status in society.

## 2. We must develop a multi-subject, multi-specialty educational system.

I have mentioned that traditionally the training of ministerial personnel has been the sole goal of theological education in China. But this is not the only type of personnel we need. Though Christians represent a small minority of China's population and the history of the Christian Church in China is not a long one, it is still an independent and integrated Church. Thus we need every kind of personnel appropriate to churches today: managers, Christian musicians and artists, theologians, experts in Christian and

theological education, persons to deal with international relationships, Christian authors, editors skilled in various types of media... the list goes on. Quite a few of the older generation of specialists are no longer with us. If we do not make haste to train new specialists, some of these areas of expertise will fall by the wayside and have no one to hand them on to the next generation. Since theological education today is no longer run by separate denominations, concentration of personnel is possible. During the coming period we must make the training of specialized personnel a special concern. Compared with those studying for the ministry, these specialized personnel are fewer in number; thus large-scale planning based on the conditions and resources of different theological colleges is advisable. This means, for example, that a college which is able to offer courses in a particular specialty can recruit students for churches all over China. In this way, the various colleges can cooperate in training specialized personnel for the whole Church, attaining our goal with half the effort. Once such a training network is established, I believe it will be sufficient to our needs.

### 3. We should highlight study of the relationship between religion and culture.

China's participation in the world economy has initiated and accelerated cultural exchange between China and the West. The extent of the latter is in direct proportion to the former. Openness and reform is an irresistible trend in Chinese society. We can confidently predict that this ongoing trend of cultural exchange and dialogue will broaden and deepen in the coming century. Many institutes of social science and non-Christian universities in China have set up research centers on religion and culture, and it is quite evident that "religion" here means Christianity. The 1980s saw the publication of numerous books on Christianity, a measure of interest in the subject.

This phenomenon can almost be termed the second entry of Christianity into China, but it is entirely different from the first entry in nature. The first entry was implemented by missionaries. We could say it took place under a "religious mask" because a large number of foreign missionaries launched their crusade to bring Western religion into China backed up by the political, military and economic power of Western nations. The missionaries seemed to celebrate their triumph over the East, while the Chinese people appeared quite passive.

The second entry, however, took place in the cultural strata, and this time, in general, it is the Christians who take the active role. The government policy of openness opens a channel for both Western capital and Western Culture. We are learning to utilize Western wisdom for the Chinese reality, to select what is good in the Western economy and culture to make up our shortages. Since today we have a Christian Church in China, it should carry out the mission of evangelization here. This is quite natural. ('an it then remain silent in the cultural exchange taking place in China'? I seem to hear the voice of Chinese society calling to our Chinese Church, asking for scholars.

This is a challenge to our theological education. Our seminaries should consider the training of Christian scholars as their special mission. To be a Christian scholar demands not only devotion to Christ and theological knowledge, but also a solid academic

foundation of liberal arts and social science. The Christian scholar should be capable of carrying on a dialogue in all situations which are related to Christianity. If we do not make haste to train our own scholars, it is possible that in future those who speak for Christianity in Chinese society will be non-Christian scholars. This is a serious challenge and not one to be taken lightly. Taking up this challenge is one of the tasks for research in self-propagation.

#### 4. We must ponder contextualization of Christian theology in China.

The task of theology is to build bridges between God's eternal truth and constantly changing human society. Any Church, in whatever nation, develops its own theological thinking. The maturity of a Church is shown in the extent of the contextualization of that thinking. Through the distinctiveness of its theological thinking, a Church makes its special contribution to the Church ecumenical. A Chinese Church which upholds the three-self principle should all the more have its own theological thinking. Let me illustrate this below by means of the example of ecclesiology.

An ecclesiology should be highly contextualized: the Church exists in society. But social order, tradition and culture differ substantially throughout the world. How can a Church fit itself into these external conditions? This concern is not only sociological and political, but ecclesiological and theological as well. Chinese society today is socialist with Chinese characteristics. In its nearly two thousand year history, the Church of Christ has never encountered this type of society, has never sought to deal with such a society. Thus there is no existing ecclesiological paradigm for the Church in China, either in Christian history or in the ecclesiology of churches in other nations. Since we believe that as the Body of Christ the Church ecumenical is one, we cannot disregard this tradition and develop our ecclesiology in seclusion, either. However, a Church which is part of a particular nation, people and territory must have an ecclesiology which is contextualized on the basis of these particularities.

Again, the Church in China today is a post-denominational church and this post-denominationalism is unique to the Church in China. Any new enterprise, such as post-denominationalism, is like a boat trying to sail upstream - without concerted effort, it will be pushed backwards by the current. Our situation is the same - either explore further and go forward, or hesitate and lose ground. If we wish to make further progress, then we should sum up our experiences and develop our own ecclesiology on that basis, which will give practical guidance to the Church.

We thank God for God's abundant grace and pray that God will give us an ever clearer vision for the new century. I believe that the "double orientation" of developing upward while serving the grassroots should be the guiding principle for our mission of theological education in this second period.

*English original.*

## 6. Jesus' Attitude and Manner of Work (John 4:1-42) – Han Bide

### A Good Attitude

Our attitudes are often influenced by the people and things around us, this influence may even extend to the effectiveness of our work. Before his talk with the Samaritan woman, Jesus dealt with a number of problems that might have affected his attitude. I will consider these below.

He was under attack from the Pharisees. Being talked about by other people can spoil a person's attitude. Jesus' departure from Judea was caused by verbal attacks from the Pharisees. Jesus' success in attracting and baptizing more followers than John the Baptist had become the focus of the Pharisees' attention, and the tone of their discussion had a clear flavor of judgment and challenge. On the surface the Pharisees were indignant on behalf of John the Baptist because his baptismal activity had preceded that of Jesus, but when the Pharisees said that Jesus was baptizing more people and attracting more followers than John, this was actually intended to demean Jesus and suggest that what he was doing was wrong.

How do we feel when we become the object of others' criticism? Can we maintain a calm and unperturbed frame of mind? Upon becoming the focus of public gossip, most people easily become upset or depressed, and unfounded accusations have special power to make people angry and ruin their mood.

Jesus was not like this. The Pharisees' accusations were groundless and Jesus did not pay them any heed. Scripture says: "He left Judea and went to Galilee."

Baptism is a good thing. No matter whether those being baptized were disciples of John or of Jesus, baptism indicated a willingness to repent. Was it worth becoming upset over a dispute about who was baptizing more and who less? The best strategy was for Jesus to temporarily leave the site of controversy in order to maintain his sense of inner balance.

The second reason Jesus left Judea was to relieve his disciples of an emotional burden. If his colleague (John) heard the gossip of the Pharisees and became emotionally upset, this would also have upset Jesus. Shortly before this, John had heard similar questions from his own disciples, but at that time he responded very well on three points: 1) he acknowledged that the work of Jesus was given from Heaven; 2) he acknowledged that he was not the Christ, but rather had been sent as the forerunner of the Christ; the friend of the bridegroom; 3) he joyfully blessed the ascendancy of Jesus' work and the decline of his own (Jn. 3: 22-30). But human understanding is not eternal and immutable, and in order to lessen the pressure on John, Jesus left Judea for Galilee. Jesus did not want challenges from the Pharisees to spoil the friendship between himself and John.

Before us stand two co-workers devoted to the advancement of God's kingdom - John the Baptist and Jesus. One was willing that "He must grow greater, I must become less." The other was not willing to let this issue of who baptized more increase the pressures on his co-worker, so "he left Judea and set out once more for Galilee" in order that both could preserve peace of mind. Surely there is something here for us to mediate over and learn from?

(He)"set out once more for Galilee." Even though Galilee was Jesus' home region, the people there felt little goodwill toward Jesus - "a prophet is without honor in his own country" (Jn. 4:44). To go and work in a place where one receives no respect is something over which most people would have misgivings. When people choose a place to work, they generally choose a place where they will be welcomed and respected; when people are fully aware that they will not be respected, their hearts resist, their steps falter, and they retreat. But Scripture tells us that Jesus "set out once more for Galilee." Although in Galilee Jesus had been ridiculed and rejected, even plotted against (cf. Lk. 4: 16-30), he still chose to go.

"He had to pass through Samaria." For historical reasons, Samaritans did not interact with Jews; upon meeting they did not even greet each other. Although both were descendants of Jacob, they treated each other as strangers. Such were the places to which Jesus was going and through which he was passing; such were the people he faced.

What allowed Jesus to keep his peace of mind and go to such a place? I think the only answer is the love Jesus had for all people. Jesus loved all, no matter whether Galileans or Samaritans. With love in one's heart it is possible to withstand prejudice and attack without taking offense or attempting to escape. In the Old Testament, the basic reason why the prophet Jonah was unwilling to go to Ninevah, but fled to Tarsus, was that the love of God was not in his heart. With love in one's heart, all doubts and excuses can be quieted. We can only work effectively if we have a good frame of mind.

"Jesus, tired after his journey, was sitting by the well." This was a famous old well, a relic of the days of Jacob. Sitting by this well, there were two reactions Jesus might have had. First was a feeling of rest after exertion. When weary, people always long for rest. Like us, Jesus had a physical body, became weary, and needed rest. When resting, most people relax, think about nothing, and do nothing. This is a normal frame of mind. Second, because this was a famous old well, it brought to mind ancient history and the lives of famous people. Sitting by the side of this well one could easily become lost in a multitude of thoughts and musings over the past, and in the enjoyment of weighing past people and deeds one could easily forget exhaustion and cares.

Jesus may have been influenced by these two kinds of feelings, but weariness did not cause him to forget the reason he came into this world, nor did relics of the past distract him from his mission of salvation.

"It was about noon..." "His disciples had gone into town to buy food." Here we consider the issue of time. These two verses show that Jesus was sitting by the well as



most people were having lunch. The saying "For the people, food is paradise" illustrates the importance of food to the human body. Jesus and his disciples had just made a long journey and were undoubtedly famished. Hunger and thirst are normal human needs. Within the borders of Samaria, nobody was willing to host Jesus and his disciples so the disciples had to go into town to try to buy food. One can readily be affected by lack of daily necessities or by a cold reception; this can easily leave one in a negative frame of mind. But Jesus was not dejected as a result of these things, and afterwards said to his disciples: "I have food to eat of which you know nothing... For me it is meat and drink to do the will of him who sent me until I have finished his work" (31-34).

The factors mentioned above can easily affect a person's frame of mind, and we have seen how Jesus maintained a positive outlook through all of them. Below we will look at a second condition needed for effective work.

### **A Good Style of Work**

Jesus paid much attention to his approach to work. Throughout his conversation with the Samaritan woman, we can see the excellence of his approach.

He knew the importance of politeness. The politeness referred to here is not just "being polite," but rather a kind of respect for people. When Jesus saw the Samaritan woman who had come to draw water at the well, he said to her "Please give me something to drink." This short sentence contains a wealth of treasures. First, Jesus took the initiative in speaking to the Samaritan woman. That is to say, Jesus actively broke down barriers, prejudices, and grievances which separated Jews and Samaritans. Second, Jesus treated the Samaritan woman with courtesy as an equal before God. Finally, he broke through a barrier between the sacred and secular; rather than disdain this woman for her lowly character he politely said to her "Please give me something to drink."

It is our responsibility to bring people to Christ, but how do we do this? This is an art, and requires that we do things well. Some people pose as "Saviors" and view all people as sinners waiting to be saved. Jesus chose instead to identify with the Samaritan woman and treat her as an equal. It is only with this attitude that the defensive fences people erect can be torn down, and that people's dreams can be realized. The word "please" used here by Jesus is very important and precious.

He knew how to ask something of others. "Please give me..." We often have a wrong-headed sense of superiority, a sense that "I have come to give you something," as if we are only givers and not receivers. If we have this attitude as we evangelize, the door will often be slammed in our faces. When good evangelists discuss the gospel with someone, they should think of themselves as asking of others. What does it mean to ask of others? It means to ask others to give you an opportunity, to give you trust, to give you time, to give you patience.... Always remember that when sharing the gospel with others you must first make them feel you are asking something of them; when you gain their understanding and interest you have gained an opportunity to share the gospel.

He began with concrete needs. "Please give me something to drink." This request of Jesus is both very Mundane and very concrete. Jesus had already walked the better part of a day, and it was natural for him to need water to satisfy his thirst. The Samaritan woman had also come for water, so water was the concrete need that Jesus and the Samaritan woman had in common. By beginning his conversation with this request for water, Jesus demonstrated his wisdom: Start with the shared needs of daily life. Sharing the saving grace of God does not begin with the distant, the abstract, the lofty, or with incomprehensible ideas and philosophies, but rather from the practical, from the things of daily life; it proceeds from the shallow to the deep, from the surface to the core, from the near to the distant, from the daily to the eternal. This was one of the approaches Jesus used, and this is an approach we should study today.

He did not give up easily. When Jesus asked the woman for something to drink, her reply was unexpectedly rude - she bluntly refused. If it had been us, we might well have lacked the courage to speak again, but Jesus was not like that. For Jesus, a rebuff was a daily occurrence rather than something new. As the author of the Gospel of John notes at the beginning of the book: The world was made through him but did not recognize him: he came to his own people but his own people did not accept him (Jn. 1:10-11). Jesus expected to be refused by the Samaritan woman. However, from the words of the Samaritan woman we can see that she bore Jesus no ill will, and that the reason for her refusal lay in traditional (ethnic) prejudices; these prejudices were forced on the Samaritans by the Jews. Jesus and the Samaritan woman were victims of the sins of others. The greatest headache for evangelists is people who are called "Christians" but by improper behavior soil the Christian name and become an obstacle to those who would accept the gospel of Christ.

If we run into a wall when we share the gospel, we must not give up and retreat. Jesus not only had a heart of understanding for the Samaritan woman, but also great faith in her. He believed that if they kept talking, her attitude would change, and that she would accept and acknowledge him.

With a little more understanding for others and a little more faith in them, your work stands a little better chance of success.

He gave her the benefit of the doubt. On the surface, the answer given by the Samaritan women seemed crude, impolite, and unreasonable. If this had ended the conversation, an opportunity to share the gospel would have been lost. From Jesus' answer we can see that Jesus felt the main reason she answered in such a manner was that she didn't know of God's grace and didn't know who had made the request of her. As the saying goes, "Where there is ignorance there is no crime." Jesus believed that if the Samaritan woman knew of God's grace, that if she knew that the person she encountered that day and who was making a request of her was the long-awaited Messiah (Christ), "You would have asked him and he would have given you living water." This was the reason Jesus did not take offense at the woman's refusal. Giving the benefit of the doubt shows a person's wisdom.

He established mutual trust. We must have confidence in people because people can change. Perhaps because of her experiences, the Samaritan woman had lost faith in people, so she had

only disdain for the Jewish man in front of her. Her experience had taught her that she did not trust others and they did not trust her. The reason that she had come alone to the well at noon was that she didn't want to encounter or interact with other people; she had lost all hope in others. Jesus wanted to establish mutual trust between himself and the Samaritan woman. First Jesus trusted her, so the next step was to help her recover her trust in others and to help her believe that Jesus trusted her. He also wanted her to feel that he could be trusted. If you don't make listeners trust you, your efforts will be in vain. In this present-day world, establishing mutual trust between people is vitally important but ever so hard. For an ambassador of the gospel, establishing mutual trust between yourself and your listeners is very important, and the first step is enabling them to trust you.

He let others express their doubts and criticisms. After listening to Jesus' answer, the Samaritan woman's attitude took a turn for the better. She abandoned her hostility and began addressing Jesus as "Sir," but still had doubts about his answer. "Sir, you have no bucket and the well is deep, so where can you get 'living water'?" Clearly, the Samaritan woman looked down on Jesus and felt she was superior to him, after all, she had a bucket and he did not, so what was the point of talking about living water with someone who couldn't even draw water from the well in front of him'?

Not only this, she compared her ancestors with his. In the eyes of the Samaritans, her ancestor Jacob was the greatest of all. It was Jacob who had dug the well, and the water from this well sustained him, his sons, and his livestock; it was Jacob who had passed this well on to his descendants, and over more than a thousand years it had never run dry. Could this be other than a well of living water'? Could there be better living water than this'? "Are you greater than he'?"

In the process of sharing the gospel, situations like the one above are often encountered: People's sense of superiority and the idols they carry in their hearts cause them to compare themselves favorably to others and predispose them toward criticism.

To start this kind of debate would have been pointless. Jesus avoided this useless argument and seized instead on the key point - the weaknesses of humankind.

He suited the medicine to the illness. The Samaritan woman had a bucket and she had the well left by her ancestors. We can take this bucket and well as representing human wisdom and labor, human wealth and civilization, things of which people are often proud. Over thousands of years, human knowledge has grown, life has improved, and wealth has increased; however, human desires have also increased and there is no way to fully satisfy them. Just as Jesus said: "Whoever drinks this water will be thirsty again..." Tools are good, and treasures left by our ancestors are also good; the problem is that all these things cannot really satisfy human thirsts. Spiritually, people have for thousands of years repeated the same process over and over: becoming thirsty, drinking, becoming thirsty again and drinking again, with never a possibility of being satisfied. This is not a material problem but a problem of the spirit; it is a reflection of humanity's fatal weakness.

Jesus came to break this vicious cycle of Thirst, to satisfy it eternally. The water of which Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman, living water which would forever end her thirst, was actually Jesus himself. Jesus is the source of the living water of life. If someone has Jesus, he or she has the source of this living water and will never be thirsty again, because Jesus Christ satisfies our thirst.

There is nothing eternal on this earth. Honor, position, possessions, power, wealth, fleshly desires - none of these are everlasting and none can fully satisfy. Only Jesus Christ can satisfy. He is the way, the truth, and the life, and only he can fully satisfy our hearts.

He taught with skill and patience. Jesus' words moved the heart of the Samaritan woman; she began to feel a need, and her attitude and tone toward Jesus began to change. She said to Jesus: "Sir, please give me this water..." However, she didn't really understand what Jesus meant, and mistakenly thought that the water he offered would only satisfy her physical needs, saving her only from thirst and the need to walk a long way.

Jesus did not find it unreasonable that she did not understand what he meant. On the contrary, he continued speaking with her until this Samaritan woman really recognized him.

He hit the mark. As the Samaritan woman was asking Jesus to give her the living water of which he spoke, he took the opportunity to say something that struck to her to the core: "Go call your husband." This very commonplace sentence broke into the bitter history of the woman's life, this sentence bored its way into the secret pain of her heart. As it is said: "One stone arouses a thousand waves," and she could not calm her heart. She had had men before, and had one even then, but not one of them was her husband. She longed to have her own husband, but no one was willing to have her. She was a woman who had been abused and abandoned, and fate had been unfair to her. Today, before this strange and unique Jesus, she spoke frankly: "I have no husband." Her trembling heart was opened wide to Jesus. For the first time she spoke to Jesus of what was really in her heart: she recognized herself.

He did not shy away from repetition. When the woman said: "I have no husband," she was affirmed by Jesus. At this time, her understanding of Jesus had progressed and she addressed him as a prophet because he was able to see her secrets. The progression of her understanding of Jesus from "You are a Jew" to "Sir," and now to "prophet" is quite substantial, but from what she said next we can see that she was not entirely willing to bow before Jesus. She next changed to a new topic, different places of worship: "Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews say that the place where God must be worshipped is in Jerusalem." She still saw Jesus as a Jew, at best a Jewish prophet.

It is very difficult for people to completely put aside preconceived notions, prejudices, traditions, and customs. It is even harder for people to deny themselves. So often just as people begin to make a change, they suddenly go back to their original starting point. This is nothing strange and it should not be a cause for disappointment or discouragement.

He took advantage of the flow of events. Jesus was not discouraged by the Samaritan woman, and he took advantage of the topic she raised to point out that place of worship was not the crux of the issue, that the key issues were rather worship "in spirit and in truth" and the question of who worships.

By this time the defenses of the Samaritan woman had crumbled completely, and with a tamed mouth and heart all she could think of was a prophecy about a Messiah, and that perhaps the Jesus sitting before her was that Messiah. It was at this point that Jesus dispelled her doubts and revealed himself to her: "I who am speaking to you am he."

From the beautiful story above we can see how Jesus worked as he led people to recognize that he was Christ, the Savior of the World. Jesus successfully overcame those negative factors which can so easily complicate our thoughts, and patiently, carefully, and wisely he led the Samaritan woman step by step in the process of recognizing himself, recognizing that he is the Christ, finally recognizing God the Father. May we follow in Jesus' steps, learn from his approach and experience, and today lead even more people to Christ our Lord.

*Nanjing Theological Review, No.21 (2/1994), p. 56.*  
Translated by Don Snow.

## 7. The Indigenization of Chinese Christianity – Zhang Yan

Although there is considerable history behind the dissemination of Christianity in China, Christianity still hasn't really put down any deep roots into Chinese culture. Why is this? This writer believes that the indigenization of Chinese Christianity is a key issue.

### 1. The Significance of Indigenization.

Indigenization means being rooted locally. When a religion leaves its place of origin and starts to spread to other areas, indigenization inevitably occurs due to differences in spoken and written language and culture, in order to facilitate development in the new environment. The indigenization of a religion indicates the process by which a foreign religion blends with the native culture in order to find appropriate forms and means by which to evangelize that land. Religious indigenization can be divided into two parts: one aspect of indigenization relates to church personnel, forms of worship and methods of evangelization. The other is the indigenization which takes place between religious doctrine and the native culture. More often than not the former precedes the latter.

Christianity was introduced to China by Western missionaries who could not but simultaneously introduce the distinctive characteristics of Western culture. The meeting of Western culture with Chinese customs inevitably led to some clashes. The significance of the indigenization of Christianity in China is to make Christian thought take root, blossom, and bear fruit in Chinese culture and society.

### 2. Indigenization of Christianity in China.

When Nestorianism came to China in the Tang dynasty, it strove to indigenize, but was only able to cobble together a motley of Confucian, Buddhist and Daoist terminology. Moreover, Nestorian Christian traditions (scripture, doctrine, and history) were simply transliterated into Chinese with very little consideration given to the Chinese context. Our impression of the Nestorian heritage is of a hybrid, which lasted just two hundred or so years and then withered away. Neither did the Christianity of the Yuan dynasty have any lasting impact; moreover its influence was limited to the Mongolians. Concurrently, Catholic missionaries such as John of Montecorvino brought Catholicism to China, but the influence of both Nestorianism and Catholicism was so short-lived it could not hope to take root in China; when the Mongolians retreated, Christianity's influence was suddenly cut off.

In the seventeenth century, when Jesuits like Matteo Ricci came to China, Catholicism was at last to succeed in entering China. Matteo Ricci firstly made great efforts to learn about Chinese cultural traditions, and secondly familiarized himself with some of the Classics. He was quite capable of spreading the gospel to China's elite government officials and gentry, such as Xu Guangxi, and Li Zhizao, etc. Matteo Ricci proposed the

---

Zhang Yan is a first-year student in the graduate program at Nanjing Union Theological Seminary.

three monumental strategies of respect, enhance, and transcend Confucianism. His efforts at harmonizing Christianity and Chinese culture earned him the support of the Confucian scholar elite of the day. Christian books published at that time are very important documents of indigenization process. The protracted Rites Controversy between the Vatican and the Qing Court, however, brought Ricci's efforts to nought.

The next effort to bring Christianity to China was that of the first Protestant missionary Robert Morrison in the early nineteenth century. The majority of missionaries over-emphasized personal salvation along with a Christian culture of superiority over heathenism and spiritual arrogance, which meant that they could not adequately value the splendid magnificence of traditional Chinese culture, and instead were biased against and misunderstood much about Chinese culture. Chinese people therefore came to believe that Christianity was just a foreign religion with nothing to offer China.

There were repeated collisions between Christianity and Chinese culture and frequent occurrences of so-called "missionary cases." When these collisions continued to end in tragedy, some within the church began to wonder: why do Chinese people go out of their way to reject even that Christianity propagated by themselves'? Some people reached the painful realization that Christianity had to be indigenized in China and they started out in that direction. The 1920s and 30s saw an upsurge of democratic sentiment. In the years between the May Fourth Movement (1919) and 1922, an anti-Christian Movement, propelled by intellectuals, broke out. This forced people within the Chinese Church to radically rethink the meaning and importance of indigenization. The call for Christianity to be indigenized in China rang out continuously, and there was a profusion of efforts to this end. During this critical period, some well known Christian scholars and theologians, such as Wang Zhixin, Y.T. Wu, T.C. Chao and Xie Fuya, who were at the same time thoroughly conversant with Confucian thought and the Chinese Classics, started to inquire into these questions. An indigenization movement was underway in China.

### 3. Chinese Ethnic Characteristics and Theological Convictions.

Chinese culture originated in the vast Yellow River valley. The Yellow River has endowed the Chinese people with their typical characteristics: industriousness, patience, frugality, peacefulness and cooperativeness. In contrast to Westerners, Chinese people are generally practical and grounded in specifics, prize intuitive knowledge of reality and avoid unreliable fantasy. Abstract or philosophically inclined theological reflection will not be readily understood by Chinese people attuned to the everyday world.

The Chinese people tend to express their religious faith in gentle, peaceful ways. One of the virtues of Confucianism is maintaining the golden mean, also termed "keeping to the middle way," ensuring that everything is carried out according to the proper order, relationship and position, avoiding extremes. The spiritual disciplines of both Buddhism and Daoism emphasize mildness and tranquility. Christianity should also learn from tranquility. Christ carried out salvation through transformation. The efficacy of the Christian gospel of salvation depends on its active ability to bring about individual and social transformation in and through culture. The prospects for Christianity in China

depend on whether I Christianity can demonstrate this active ability to transform all things in the present pluralistic, secular and changing cultural environment

#### 4. Contemporary Challenges.

A big challenge facing Christianity in China today is the urgent need for first class thinkers, theologians, and scholars to address all kinds of issues, and to bring pure Christian faith into contact with the lifeblood of Chinese culture. At the same time, there is a need for practitioners in the field to go out into Chinese society and culture to be light and salt, make Christianity's influence felt, and stimulate the indigenization of Christianity in China. What's more, young scholars, artists and others in contemporary China are coming into contact with Christianity through literature, philosophy, ethics, music and fine art. Such persons are often called "culture Christians," "unbaptized or unnamed Christians," who are outside the Church.

There are, therefore, at least two kinds of challenges facing the Church in China: the first is, how can our pastoral workers, and the staff and students of the theological seminaries deepen their own cultural understanding to seek bases for dialogue? The second is, how to lead these "Chinese Nicodemuses," currently outside the Church, into the fold and back to a shepherd? These are the challenges facing the Church in China at the present time. They are also crucial for the indigenization of Christianity in China.

*Nanjing Theological Review, Nos. 22-23 (1-2/1995), p.76.*  
Translated by Francesca Rhys.



## 8. The Cosmic Christ and Theological Thinking – Qiu Wei

Theological reflection is the Church's response to the challenges and choices it faces. Thus, theology is not simply the product of a small coterie of scholars, even more importantly, it represents the summation of the spiritual experience of believers in the Church during a particular period. Theological thinking by Chinese is in fact their reflection on God within the Chinese language environment. It aims to reveal God's truth and light to us. It ought to be independent, belonging first and foremost to the Chinese. Then it should join with theology from the West to enrich the treasure house of Christian theology.

Bishop K.H. Ting's thinking on the Cosmic Christ represents the highest achievement of Chinese Christian theological reflection at present. As Bishop Ting has himself said, this reflection "has resulted from the clash of historical transformation with traditional beliefs."

The comparatively long historical encounter between the Chinese people and Christian thought began with Nestorianism in the Tang dynasty and extends over a thousand years. However, Christology has not occupied a place of importance in Chinese scholarship. Yet the influence of Christian thought on the Chinese people cannot be denied. Signs of God's salvific activity and traces of Christ's presence can be felt in all cultures. Rev. Wang Weifan illustrates this with a moving testimony.

A Chinese woman with some knowledge of the Chinese classics, herself a devout Buddhist, suffered numerous hardships for the sake of the son she bore. With no regard for her own safety, she died for the sake of another, who was not her own son. This ordinary, yet great, Chinese woman was Rev. Wang's mother. Rev. Wang concludes the story with deep emotion: "Christ is present in the love of a mother nurtured by traditional Chinese culture."

After the founding of new China in 1949, Christians here faced an entirely new context. The Church in China faced an imperative to do theology from within this new framework. Gradually, constraints from the West were cast off. Chinese theological workers undertook independent exploration of their relationship with God - that is, they did theology. Cosmic Christ theology is the fruit of theological reflection by the Chinese Church in its new context.

Some Christians, influenced by Western church traditions, divided people into believers and non-believers. Believers would be blessed by (now and go to heaven when they died. Non-believers, on the other hand, would all burn in hell, regardless of what kind of life they had led. The Bible points out that God's salvation is not so narrow:

"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or

dominions or rulers or powers - all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things and in him all things hold together." Col. 1: 15-17

"But in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the worlds. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word." Heb. 1: 2-3a

Here we see the magnificent process of creation, where the driving force is love, that is, God. Christ's salvation proceeds together with creation, and neither is separated from or negates, the latter. The Cosmic Christ transcends the narrow belief/unbelief antithesis and enters into the grand cosmic scale. The God of Christianity is also Master of all humankind. All of humanity's acts of kindness and its pursuit of truth and beauty are not in vain, but are all remembered by God.

"The Cosmic Christ" reflects Chinese Christians' thinking about the cosmos, humanity's place in the cosmos, and human beings' relationship with God. The Chinese people see the cosmos in poetic terms: changes on a cosmic scale are seen as harmonious developments, humanity and nature are not mutually antagonistic but interdependent. The natural world was not created to be willfully abused but rather treated as a friend of humankind. Whether viewing a Chinese nature painting or reading a poem by Tao Yuanming or Wang Wei - each one subsumes this harmonious relationship. A pair of fish in a close embrace - the taiji image of *yinyang* - likewise embodies a similar interdependence.

In dealing with conflict, Chinese people avoid extreme responses. Instead they choose to adapt and seek resolution. Such behavior is consistent with the spirit of Christ's salvation and it is played out against the background of the entire cosmos. This is the very same way God acts. If God cared only for those who believe, then God's omnipotence and omnipresence would be open to doubt. At the same time in Christ we see a transcendent love, and this love is the sole governing principle of the cosmos. God alone is worthy to govern the cosmos. God created it, fashioned it, saved it, governs it, not posturing as a Pharisee, but as a servant. As Lao Zi said:

"It gives them life yet claims no possession;  
It benefits them yet exacts no gratitude;  
It accomplishes its task yet lays claim to no merit."<sup>1</sup>

Or, in the words of Confucius, "The benevolent one loves others."

The Chinese people know and believe in this Lord - the Cosmic Christ - with us from the beginning.

*Nanjing Theological Review*, Nos. 22-23 ( 1-2/1995), p. 78.  
Translated by Francesca Rhys.

---

<sup>1</sup> D.C. Lau tr., *Tao Te Ching* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), p . 58.

## 9. Theological Thinking from Experience – on reading Theological Writings from Nanjing Seminary – Zhang Jie

Theological reflection and the spiritual experience and life of the Church are closely related. We know that theology is derived from rich spiritual experience and a lively spiritual life, so it stands to reason that theology is the Church in the act of thinking. Whatever does not come from faith is not theology. Likewise, whatever theological thinking does not come from the faith experience of the Chinese Church is not theology with Chinese characteristics. In his essay "Theological Construction in the Chinese Church," Rev. Chen Zemin says: "Theology is the spiritual experience of the Church; it is a summation of the religious experience of the Church in a given historical period."<sup>1</sup> "It is a commentary on the faith and truth of the gospel; an expression of the life of the Church; it is the Church at reflection. The content of that reflection constitutes the faith and experience of the Church."<sup>2</sup> The contents of the volume under discussion, taken as a whole, do not provide a systematic Chinese theology nor a compendium of forty or so years of theology from the Church in China. The majority of the essays included, however, reflect the fact that the Church in China is engaged in the process of reflection.

Over the course of forty years, the Church in China has consistently engaged in its own theological reflection based on its own spiritual and faith experience. In what follows, I will consider three impressions I gained from my reading of *Theological Writings from Nanjing Seminary*.

*One.* Modern Chinese history has been fraught with adversity; the Chinese people have been deeply humiliated by foreigners and have known the sufferings of war. Consequently, Chinese people have a profound knowledge of adversity. The Cultural Revolution, in particular, was a time when the Chinese Church and the Chinese people met in suffering and walked hand in hand through the valley of death. In navigating the hardships of the Cultural Revolution, the Church in China amassed riches of spiritual experience. Born of suffering, this spiritual experience has been a continuous source of vitality for theological reflection within the Chinese Church.

Bishop K.H. Ting has encapsulated this very well: "As we look back, we are thankful for having suffered in our powerlessness with the rest of the Chinese people during the Cultural Revolution because that has become a token of our identity and credibility as part of the people. It increases our rapport with them. To suffer with the people is to relinquish any protection by foreign or domestic powers, and thus to present Christianity as something Chinese with a right to be heard."<sup>3</sup> This is a pivotal point for theological reflection in the Chinese Church, as well as its driving force. Precisely because the Church has undergone adversity and experienced the same calamities as the people, the

---

A 1995 graduate of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, Zhang Jie now works with the Correspondence Course at the Seminary.

<sup>1</sup> In *Theological Writings from Nanjing Seminary* (Nanjing Union Theological Seminary publications Department, 1992), p. 50, translated in *The Chinese Theological Review*, 1991, p. 53.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *The Chinese Christian's Approach to the Bible*, in *Theological Writings*, p. 5.

experience of suffering has therefore become a central issue in the theological reflection of the Chinese Church, providing a rich source of material and a solid foundation.

*Two.* Having undergone adversity, how can the Church in China use "theological language, a language easily understood by Christians and theologians, and through faith, link with Christian tradition and recount its spiritual experience in order to witness that the path it has chosen is the right path," and that a God of love can not but be accepted and contemplated by Chinese Christianity'?

It is even more important for Christians in China, having gone through so many trials, to accept that God is love. God is love and is present with the people and the Church of China throughout times of adversity. God is love and this love extends to all creation. Bishop Ting interprets God's love by referring to its motherliness, a theological reflection typical of the Church in China. "We are increasingly coming to the conclusion that to compare God's love exclusively to that of a human father is far from adequate."<sup>4</sup> "To be more precise, an awareness of motherly qualities brings to light parts of God's nature which have been overlooked by people for so many years, and can greatly enrich our knowledge of God."<sup>5</sup> In his essay, "The Word Was Here Made Flesh," Rev. Wang Weifan compares God's love to a mother's love for her son, loyal unto death. He believes moreover, that God's image is "painted ... with nothing other than the most beautiful colors of human nature, of which mother love is a part."<sup>6</sup> God is love and God requires people to love each other, "to bear one another's burdens, and together become co-workers in all the works of God's creation."<sup>7</sup> It was from precisely this starting point that Bishop Ting harmonized love and socialism, believing that socialism provided a channel by which love is fully realized in society. This is a bold view and a heartening line of exploration, quite consistent with the inquiry into "the Cosmic Christ."

*Three.* How should we understand God's love and the extent of its saving grace'? How should we understand truth, goodness and beauty outside of the Church" This issue is one assiduously explored by the authors of *Theological Writings*. It has led to the theology of "the Cosmic Christ," as propounded by Bishop Ting, being acknowledged and accepted by even greater numbers of people. From the volume under discussion it is evident that "the Cosmic Christ" school of thought has already become the heart of Christology in the Church in China.

As Bishop Ting says in his preface: "A central concept in Chinese Christian theological reflection is in the process of taking shape. A central feature for growing numbers of Christian intellectuals, especially the younger and middle-aged among them, is the Cosmic Christ."<sup>8</sup> This Cosmic Christ holds the whole of creation in his arms, he doesn't disparage the truth, goodness and beauty which exist outside of the Church. He is lord of the Church and also Lord of the world. So too, Christ's magnificent saving grace

---

<sup>4</sup> "Femininity, Motherhood, Divinity," *Theological Writings*, P. 29.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>6</sup> *Theological Writings*, p. 143, translated in *The Chinese Theological Review*: 8 (1993), p. 92.

<sup>7</sup> *Theological Writings*, p. 74.

<sup>8</sup> p. 4, translated in *The Chinese Theological Review*: H (1993), p. 1.

accomplished on the cross isn't restricted to a small flock of believers, but instead extends to the whole of creation which has until this time been groaning in labor pains. Precisely because Christ is the Cosmic Christ, he is not only Christ of the Church but also is involved with the people of China. It is precisely because Christ is the Cosmic Christ that the Word (*dao* or *lao*) could be made flesh in China and dwell among a people with cultural traditions several thousands of years old, a people who have experienced all the suffering and vicissitudes of life. Moreover, Christ's "embodiment" is precisely about identifying with our people in the midst of hardship, about nurturing a church in China with Chinese characteristics. And precisely because this is the case, the Church in China also came to identify with the people of China, and the experience of suffering - suffering with the Chinese people - takes on meaning. Understood in this way, theological reflection about "the Cosmic Christ" has not only opened avenues for evangelization in China, but this theology, being born directly out of the experience of believers in China, is undeniably Chinese.

*Nanjing Theological Review*, Nos. 22-23 (I-2/1995), p. 78.  
Translated by Francesca Rhys.

## 10. The Feminist Awakening Among Chinese Christian Women – Peng Yaqian

Traditional Chinese culture, deeply influenced by Confucian thinking, emphasized human relationships; for example, that between subject and ruler, between father and son, between (older and younger) brothers. Such relationships were unequal ones, based on status and rank. That between husband and wife, for example, like that between male and female, was not only a relationship of inequality, but of servitude. In this type of culture, the relations between the sexes were compassed within the precincts of philosophy and the concept of sexual difference embraced within the system of the Confucian worldview. The male was defined as *qian*, or heaven, and the female as *kun*, or earth. The relationship between *qian*/male and *kun*/female, heaven and earth, was used to illustrate the relationship between father and mother and that between man and woman. The relationship between men and women was defined as one of *yin* and *yang*, with corresponding relationships of male domination and female Submission, and of honoring the male and disparaging the female. Therefore, a woman's status has always been determined with reference to men. In the classic *Shuowen* Dictionary, the same principle is explained etymologically: "Woman (*fu*) is Submission (*fu*)." "Women bow to men." During Han times, Liu Xiang's *Lives of Virtuous Women* and Ban Zhao's *Precepts for Women* set forth the limits of women's lives even more concretely; these were what is called the "three obediences and four virtues" of women: in youth, obedience to father and brothers; in marriage, obedience to husband; as a widow, obedience to sons; and the virtue, speech, deportment and merit expected of women. This meant that the husband was heaven and the wife should submit to him, safeguard his interests and fulfill his needs. This unequal relationship between men and women lasted several thousand years in China and even today still influences our thinking and behavior.

### (1) The Christian Women's Movement

The arrival of Protestant Christianity in China in 1807 precipitated a crisis in the ancient nation with its thousands of years of feudal culture and influenced the advancing course of modern Chinese history. When missionaries brought the Christian gospel to China, they brought Western culture at the same time, for example, respect for women, equal education rights for women, the proposal that all are equal in freedom and so on, especially that all persons are equal before God. Such thinking brought hope to women who had been fettered by traditional culture and who found themselves on the bottom rung of society. Moreover, a number of outstanding women appeared in early twentieth-century Christianity and a feminist consciousness began to awaken among them. Women such as Bing Xin, Wu Yifang and Shi Meiyu, Christian women intellectuals, directly or indirectly participated in the women's movement of the time, opposing traditional ethics and morality, running schools and founding hospitals, braving social opprobrium to set up the "anti-footbinding league," and proposing slogans such as "oppose opium smoking,

---

Peng Yaqian is a Lecturer at Nanjing Union Theological Seminary and a 1991 graduate of the graduate program there.

taking concubines and selling sex." They made a contribution to the women's liberation movement of the times.

We have seen that a feminist consciousness was already awakening among Christian women in the early twentieth century and that they took the initiative to join the ranks of the women's liberation movement. However, in the 50s and 60s, due to social changes, the emphasis of concern for Christian women had reverted to individual spirituality and service to the church. At this time, Church and society were gradually separating and the Church was falling behind the society.

There were many reasons for this "separation" and "falling behind" and for the fact that Christian women were missing from the women's movement. I will consider these below.

### *Social Factors*

A Christian women's movement as an independent entity had never appeared. From the beginning, women's liberation had been an important part of social reform. During the Constitutional Reform and Modernization Movement, for example, Kang Youwei, in his *The Great Commonwealth*, discussed the women's issue at some length, and called vigorously for women's liberation. In the 1911 Revolution, Sun Yatsen too strove to promote male-female equality and full political rights for Chinese women. During the New Culture Movement, Lu Xun called for women to come out and struggle side by side with men, gain their economic rights and change the irrational social system. Li Dazhao, an early proponent of Marxism in China, said that the women's issue was basically a social question, and believed that a thorough solution required "women to come out in force to break the monopoly of the social order." The socialist revolution posited that "women hold up half the sky" and women then became one of the forces essential to socialist revolutionary construction.

In each of these historical periods, the initiators and organizers of the Chinese women's movement were primarily men. In this kind of women's movement, women's consciousness of themselves as subjects had been expropriated. This also shows us that Chinese women had to seek their own liberation through social reform.

### *Religious Factors*

Christianity promotes freedom and equality for all, but such equality and freedom is not total and it can be said that traditional Christian theology has provided the theoretical basis for inequality. When Protestantism came to China in 1807, the various denominations followed and set up their own churches. Evangelical churches predominated and these have a very strong mass base in China. They are marked by the stress they lay on the Bible, emphasizing that not one jot or tittle may be changed. They particularly stress the epistles of Paul and his explication of morality and ethics. But they do not much emphasize theological study. Due to having been influenced by "literalism," they are prone to relying solely on text-based exegesis of Biblical texts. For instance in 1

Corinthians, chapter 11, they stress only that "the head of a woman is her husband (man)," "for man was not made of woman, but woman of man, Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man." Chapter 14 stresses "the women should keep silence in the churches, For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church." And in 1 Timothy 2:12, it says "I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men." Some missionaries used these verses as their authority for not permitting women to preach or to be ordained and from this inferred that women's position was inferior to that of men - women came from men, men are the head of women and therefore it only natural that men should have authority over women. For these missionaries, every chapter and verse of the Bible had absolute authority.

Such superficial exegesis offered as the basis for women's lower status reinforced and rigidified concepts of male superiority in some Christians who had been deeply influenced by traditional Chinese culture to begin with. And Chinese women, originally very submissive, became more so.

We can say that Chinese Christian women carried a double burden: one originating with traditional culture, the other emanating from the unreasoning and superficial Biblical exegesis of traditional Christian theology.

#### *Factors Originating with Women Themselves*

Ideas about the superiority of men, formed through a long period of feudal society, were deeply ingrained. The majority of women, as well as the majority of men, had been deeply influenced by such traditional thinking and believed that the main duty of women was "Look to the husband and honor the son; manage the affairs of the family," i.e., be a good wife and mother. There were a few women intellectuals who, taking up Western progressive thinking, were awakened first and threw themselves into the women's liberation movement. But these women intellectuals came, for the most part, from the middle and upper rungs of society and were a minority among women. Though they poured their enthusiasm into the women's liberation movement, they did not have an impact upon the masses of women at the lower levels of society or prompt their participation in the movement.

#### (2) The Awakening of a Feminist Consciousness in Christian Women in the 1980s

Feminist consciousness has been increasing among Chinese Christian women along with the widening and deepening of economic reform and cultural exchange in China. This awakening, and the reflection on their role by women in society, is not unrelated to the separation of women's issues from the bounds of traditional philosophy and their identification as a specialist subject for research. Concrete expressions of this include:

1) Attention to the role of women in the Bible; for example, women prophets, women teachers, women disciples, women stewards, as well as popularizing Biblical models for Christian women. Some preachers are beginning to use the stories of women in the Bible



as sermon topics; for example, Mary who anointed Jesus' feet, maintaining that she loved Jesus even more than the other disciples and could understand his heart. Or. Mary the Mother of God who poured out her love for Jesus all his life, maintaining that her influence can be seen in the person of Jesus.

2) Reasonable exegesis of certain passages in Paul's epistles. When speaking of the order of creation, some people feel that Paul, influenced as he was by Judaism and Jewish culture could not transcend his own era. In discussing the covering of women's heads, there is an attempt to do reasonable exegesis against the cultural background, that the submission Paul speaks of should be mutual.

3) Reflection on the traditional concept of God. Some feel that God possesses not only a father's righteousness, but also a mother's mercifulness. If we speak of God only as the stern father, as the Lord on high, this is an incomplete picture. This incomplete picture ignores the love that is an attribute of God, and affects the fullness of the gospel. The feeling is that in addition to speaking of Paul's teachings, the Church should speak more of Jesus' teachings, for example, his treatment of women.

On another aspect, women leaders are being raised up in the Chinese Church. In the rural and border areas, especially, where men have left home to seek work, women are naturally taking on the responsibilities of home and society. And in the Church they have resolutely taken up the responsibility of the work of the Church. In many rural meeting points, women participate in the leadership. For example, in Yinchuan county in Henan, a group of elderly Sisters built the church with their own hands. According to statistics for 1994, there are currently 387 women pastors in the Chinese Church and some of these are senior pastors.

The examples above fully illustrate the awakening of a feminist consciousness in the Chinese Church. Women have become conscious of their own worth and have begun to look at the Bible through women's eyes and re-evaluate traditional theology. In May 1995, a questionnaire sent out by the Commission on Women's Work found that 90% of the respondents felt that there was still a failure to give women their due in the Church, while 94% felt that "male and female pastors should be treated equally and without discrimination." Only 3.4% felt that "a female pastor can take over only in the event that no male pastor is available." while 93.5% felt that Paul's statement "I permit no woman to teach" was simply a response to the situation prevailing in the Corinthian church of his day; only .03% felt the passage should be taken literally.

It must be said, however, that the Chinese Church has not yet produced a systematic feminist theology; for example, "Sin" and "Christology" have not been addressed from its standpoint. But we can say that a feminist consciousness has awakened among Chinese Christian women and that it is actively seeking space to develop in church service and administration. There were Chinese Christian women representatives at the September 1995 Fourth NGO Forum in Beijing. And we can say with full confidence that in the near future the Chinese Church Commission on Women's Work will be even more active. The prospects for Chinese Christian women in the Church are bright.

*Nanjing Theological Review, No. 26 (1/1996), p. 36.*

## 11. Christianity and the Modern Chinese Women's Movement – Zhang Yan

The situation of Chinese women under centuries of feudal rule was extremely miserable. One of the "three cardinal guides" from the *Analects* of Confucius was "husband guides wife." These, along with the "three obediences" set down in the *Rites*, clearly placed women under the control of men. Women did not have the right to education - "Ignorance in a woman is a virtue" became the standard of female morality. Women did not have the right to choose their mate, for marriage was "decreed by parents, arranged by a matchmaker." After the Southern Tang, women's feet were bound from childhood and this was an even more devastating blow for women. Historically, the majority of Chinese women lived under heavy oppression, and rebellious consciousness was rare. Most silently endured a life of suffering.

Christianity was preached in China in the nineteenth century, and the gospel was brought to Chinese women and preached among them.<sup>1</sup> The loving care of the incarnate Jesus for women at the lowest rung of society was different from the Jewish notion of male superiority; among Jesus' followers were many women. The Christian concept of male-female equality could not but be perceived as an attack upon the Chinese society of the day.

### (1) The Spread of Christianity and the Rise of Feminist Consciousness in China

It is generally thought that the Chinese women's movement was a post-May Fourth Movement phenomenon. From then on, traditional concepts of marriage, virtue, the home, etc., all came under renewed scrutiny. However, the Chinese women's movement did not begin with the May Fourth Movement. As early as the latter half of the nineteenth century, Christian missionaries from overseas had begun working to improve the lives of Chinese women and raise their status. For the sake of women's physical health, they opposed the disgusting practice of foot-binding: for the sake of women's mental health, they spread education for women. These efforts can be said to mark the beginnings of the modern Chinese women's movement.<sup>2</sup> As a result of the propagation of Christianity in China, some women became Christians. In 1821, Liang Fa baptized his wife, nee Li, with a rice bowl of water in their humble home. Thus Ms. Li was the first Chinese woman to become a Christian.<sup>3</sup> Of course, Christianity could not fundamentally change the lives of Chinese women, but its advocacy of male-female equality undoubtedly played a revelatory role for Chinese women. Most missionaries to China advocated liberation for Chinese women to some extent in the following areas:

1. Opposition to foot-binding. Foot-binding had a long history in China, some say it began in the southern 'fang dynasty. Hu Shi sadly pointed out that "the idealism of the Song and Ming was truly pitiful, they talked about idealism for seven or eight hundred

---

<sup>1</sup> *Current Research in Religion*, No. 2 (1995), p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> *The Missionary Enterprise and Modern China*, p. 19-21). Yuzhou Guang Press.

<sup>3</sup> Yang Keqin. *Between Man and Woman*. p. 153. Alliance Seminary (HK) publication.

years, but no saint arose to denounce foot-binding as an inhumane and barbaric practice."<sup>4</sup> "Yet though the question was ignored for centuries, the practice was wiped out to the short space of forty years once the missionaries finally strove to convince people. Now women with small feet want to pretend that they have big feet."<sup>5</sup>

The Church first promoted the abolition of foot-binding within its church-run schools: girls whose feet were not bound received free room and board. As early as 1867, for example, a church-run school in Hangzhou ruled that girls who lived at the school could not bind their feet. In 1872, another church-run school in Beijing adopted the same regulation. From then on, as church-run schools increased, so did the use of similar regulations. Western missionaries published numerous articles which touched upon women's issues in *The Globe* magazine. These articles popularized the dangers of foot-binding for women: damage to health, constant cold feet which could lead to chronic illness, and the great harm done to the family and society by the practice. Because female foot-binding precludes physical exercise, men must do work women could do, leading to waste and the impoverishment of the nation. An English missionary wrote: "When God created humans, he did not distinguish between man and woman but gave each two feet so that they could walk in health. The male scurries hither and- yon for the sake of family and country, the female's job is to teach the children and share the labor. In order to fulfill their duties each must have the use of hands and feet. The present practice of binding women's feet will have the eventual effect of making them useless, rejecting heaven's grace, going against nature and fate and gives rise to all sorts of sin."<sup>6</sup> To encourage people not to bind women's feet, the missionaries also established anti-foot-binding groups. In 1874, the first anti-foot-binding league, the Amoy [Xiamen] Anti-Foot-Binding League, was set up. In 1895, a dozen or so Western women set up the Natural Foot Society in Shanghai, combining the anti-foot-binding forces of Church and society, pushing the anti-foot-binding movement to a new level of activism and scope. The Natural Foot Society's activities centered around publication and lecture meetings aimed at Chinese officialdom and the gentry, attempting to first influence the upper strata of society and through them the broader society. In the seventh annual report of this society, twenty-two publications are listed.<sup>7</sup> These publications were widely distributed; 100,000 copies went out from Shanghai alone. Distribution centers were also set up in Tianjin and Chengdu and distributed all over. In 1878, when the American Southern Presbyterian Church met in Hangzhou, opposition to foot-binding was written into the minutes of the meeting. In some areas, churches took strong measures, such as only baptizing women with natural feet or those willing to unbind. With the passage of time, natural feet became the norm among Christian women.

2. Opposition to female infanticide. Chinese people always hope for sons to carry on the family line: the traditional view that "there are three unfilial things and the greatest is to lack progeny," makes having daughters an unfilial act - to have a daughter is to lack

---

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Lin Zhiping. *Christianity and China*, pp. 66-67. Yuzhon Guang Press.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Yang Keqin, pp. 153-154.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

progeny. Missionaries were fiercely opposed to the practice of female infanticide. At the same time as attacking the practice and making appeals, the Church proposed measures such as giving financial assistance to people who raised daughters, and teaching girls skills so that they could make a living the same as boys. They even went so far as to point out that since the Chinese government had laws against murder, they should apply these same standards to the drowning of baby girls and abortion. These efforts all had an effect on Chinese society and caused the various social circles to stress women's right to life.

3. Opposition to the slave-girl (*mei zai*) system. A decadent custom of old Chinese society, this refers to the practice of buying a female child and raising her in one's home, basically as a slave and/or concubine. Because these girls could be bought and sold, the practice led to social problems, including kidnapping-. In the late nineteenth century a number of Western missionaries in Hong Kong had written books exposing the miserable lives of these girls and brought the matter to the attention of the English government and public.<sup>8</sup> To express their active opposition to the system, Hong Kong church people held the inaugural conference of the Anti-*Mei Zai* League on August 8, 1921. Its manifesto pointed to the reasons for reforming the practice: it was 1) inhumane; 2) immoral; and 3) harmful to Chinese culture.<sup>9</sup> The setting up of this league can be called a free association of Christians and others in society, but the true planners and directors were mainly pastors and Christians.<sup>10</sup> In 1930, a Slave-Girl Rescue Team was established. At the time it was common in Xiamen for such girls to be scolded and beaten, bought and sold. They might be driven to suicide or even beaten to death. Because of numerous such tragedies, some Christians, basing their actions on Jesus' love, started the team, published exposes of atrocities in the newspapers and brought cases to the courts to assist the cause of justice. In this way, they garnered the attention and support of thoughtful people in society. The Rescue Team set up refuges for slave-girls which attracted a maximum of 105 "patients," as they were called, who studied, wove cloth and did needlework in the refuge. Food and clothing were provided, and when they were of age, if they so requested, they were assisted in finding marriage partners. The reputation of the Xiamen Rescue Team grew and it was upgraded to the China Rescue Team. Its influence reached province-wide, nation-wide, even worldwide and its activities were mentioned in the league of Nations report "On the Oriental Women's Liberation Movement." After a decade, the Team ceased operations with the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War, but its influence was broad and deep.<sup>11</sup>

4) Opposition to social practices harmful to women. Chinese Christianity opposed evil social practices such as opium smoking, prostitution, gambling, concubinage and prenatal betrothal of infants. The Christian Yangzhen Society was anti-smoking, gambling and prostitution, and supported the abolition of all practices harmful to health. It promoted monogamy and the abolition of concubinage.<sup>12</sup> Missionaries in Shanghai, Kaifeng and Xi'an started "Door of Hope and Child Refuges" or "Associations for the Reform of Social Practice," taking in prostitutes

---

<sup>8</sup> Li Zhigang. *Anecdotes on Hong Kong Church History.*, p. 148. Joint Publications (HK).

<sup>9</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ *Research in Christianity in Hong Kong.*, p. 136. Taosheng Press (HK).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> *Religion.* No. 3, 1992, pp. 83-84.

<sup>12</sup> Yang Keqin.

whom they fostered in finding normal ways to make a living.<sup>13</sup> In the regulations drafted by the Gangwa Market Church of Christ in China in Beijing, article 20 stated: "Among current social practices, this congregation feels that the following offend sacred principle: polygamy or taking a concubine utter joining the church, possessing both wives and concubines, Opium, heroin and cocaine addiction, drunkenness and gambling."<sup>14</sup> Shanghai's Moral Advancement Society strove to wipe out the "flesh trade," and opposed morally offensive movies, the sale of pornographic books and pictures and fake medicines. The Chinese Women's Christian Temperance Union, headed by Shi Yumei, was established in 1907, with dints of abolishing opium addiction, drinking and prostitution and working for women's rights. 'File many I departments of the Union advocated the same moral standards for both men and women, the protection of the home and of women workers and the strict observance of the 8 hour working day for women, etc.<sup>15</sup>

The propagation of Christianity in China and the all-encompassing care for Chinese womanhood of people in the Church, spurred on the Chinese feminist awakening. Still Wenxue feels that Christianity and women's liberation are closely related. She says: "Christianity was one of the moving forces spurring the rise of feminist self-consciousness and in China there are even more obvious traces to be found; when Christianity came to China, ... it caused Chinese women, sunk in the inequalities of the *Rites*, to begin to discover their position, and to re-evaluate their worth as people; their opportunity for liberation from the home and entrance into society, their demand for economic independence, this was truly the overflowing cup of the Chinese women's movement."<sup>16</sup>

## 2) The Spread of Christianity and Women's Education

### (1) Advocacy of Education for Women

Traditional thinking in China said that "ignorance in a woman is a virtue," and its goal was the hope that women would comply with the demands of the feudal system. Since women had no right to an education, it was difficult for them to produce a sense of self-consciousness, and thus women simply silently accepted their humble place in society and their miserable lives. Raising women's standards cannot happen apart from women's education, thus the desire to improve women's lives and raise their status must begin with the promotion of education for women.

Discussion of the women's issue as an issue began in the magazine *New Youth* during the May Fourth era. As much as fifteen years before this, *The Globe* magazine, which represented the Christian point of view, had already published a series of articles concerned with women's rights. Fan Wei's "On China's System of Suppression of Women," Ren Tingjiu's "Women are the Foundation of the Home," and "Revitalize Women's Education," Lin Yuezhi's "A Report on the Revitalization of China and

---

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> *Current Research in Religion*.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Sun Wenxue. "Christianity's Contribution to the Women's Movement," in YWCA. No. 4.1928.

Women's Education," all promoted the idea that women's rights proceeded from women's education.<sup>17</sup> Li Yuezhi's work *Women's Customs in Five Continents Worldwide* in 21 volumes, began appearing in 1930. In the Preface, Lin Lin summed up the main points of his theory: 1) Women's status can be seen as an indicator of the health of a culture; and 2) Nations which do not stress women's education cannot flourish.<sup>18</sup>

## 2) The Spread of Women's Schools

The first object of modern church-run schools was to open up educational opportunities for women. The first women's school within China's borders was opened in 1844 in Ningbo by the Association for Women's Education in the Far East of the English Presbyterian Church. From then until 1860, eleven more women's schools opened on the shores of the five treaty ports. In 1850, for example, the wife of the American Episcopal missionary Elijah Bridgman opened the Bridgman School for Girls in Shanghai.<sup>19</sup>

Church education for women was from the beginning an arduous undertaking. It had to overcome the deep-rooted and rigidly held concept of female inferiority and male superiority and the long-standing habit of ignoring the education of women. Due to the fact that church-run schools advocated natural feet and free-choice marriage, most Chinese looked askance at the students in church-run schools for women, and their parents were the objects of social pressure, fearing their children would not make good matches. Church education for women also had to overcome the fetters of old-fashioned ideas which bound women themselves. For example, in 1850, missionaries in Guangzhou opened an academy of Western learning with only three students. Not long afterwards, two of the three withdrew, citing the bad environment and social pressure. Thus, church schools resorted to free tuition to lure students and missionaries attracted them with material inducements. For example Presbyterian missionaries provided students attending lectures with free lunches and filled them with snacks before they left in the afternoon. One, recalling her arrival in Shanghai to run it school in 1854, noted that she gathered twelve girls in her home who recited the day's lesson while swaying rhythmically before the young teacher. Afterwards, each student would receive ten copper cash as compensation to their families for neglecting their duties at home.<sup>20</sup> Obviously, such methods had the effect of breaking through misunderstandings and establishing better relations.

In the late nineteenth century, Christianity and church schools had a definite influence upon society. Famous girls schools included the Bridgman Academy in Beijing set up by Mrs. Bridgman, the Roman Catholic Chongde Girls' School in Shanghai and the Anglo-Chinese Girls' Middle School in Shanghai established by Americans from the Methodist-Episcopal mission, and called one of the four great women's schools in the Orient. According to statistics, in 1869, of 4,389 students in church-run schools, only 576 were women. By 1876, there were 2,084 women students out of the 5,686 students in church-

---

<sup>17</sup> *The Propagation of Religion and Modern China*, p. 24, Yuzhou Guang Press.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *History of China*, vol. 18, p. 820. Shanghai People's Publishing House.

<sup>20</sup> *Religious History of Shanghai*, p. 820. Shanghai People's Publishing House.

run schools. In 1934, of 260 church-run middle schools, there were 155 boys' schools and 102 girls' schools, with 43 co-educational schools. It can be seen from this that women's education developed rapidly.<sup>21</sup> In the twentieth century women's education in church-run schools became a complete system from kindergarten to women's universities. The latter included the Northeast Women's Union Medical College, Jinling Women's College, Aurora Women's College, the Women's College of Furen [Fujen] University, and so on. Women's medical and nursing schools produced women doctors and the theological colleges women evangelists.

### 3) The Rise of the New Woman

In the early to mid-twentieth century, most female professionals were a product of church-run women's schools. The appearance of women teachers, students, doctors and nurses, changed traditional lifestyles of women and had a big impact on other women around them. Church-run schools produced China's first women university students and on this foundation, China had its earliest women studying overseas. Like the well-known women's educator Wu Yifang, a graduate of the humanities faculty of the Nanjing Jinling Women's College, who went on to Michigan University in the United States to continue her studies. After returning to China, she became President of her alma mater. In the 1914 edition of the *China Christian Yearbook*, she published an essay, "Progress in Chinese Christian Women's Education," in which she spoke of the outstanding contributions to education in China of Chinese women who had studied overseas.<sup>22</sup>

The achievements of Chinese women in medicine in the early years are impressive. You Meiqing was the first Chinese woman to study medicine in the United States. An orphan adopted by a missionary family in Ningbo, she accompanied them to the United States where she studied medicine in the Women's Medical College in New York. Upon graduation in 1885 she returned to Xiamen as a medical missionary. The second was Wu Jing'en, who graduated in Philadelphia in 1894 and became the head of a hospital in Xiamen. Two others, Shi Meiyu and Kang Cheng, graduated together in 1896 from the University of Michigan and returned to China to work in medical education.<sup>23</sup> Shi Meiyu started the Fude Hospital for Women and Children in Jiujiang and was praised for her medical prowess and moral and personal excellence. She later went to practice in Shanghai where with the support and aid of her sister Phoebe, her brother-in-law Cheng Zhihe and Wu Zheyang, later the first head of the Chinese Nursing Association, started the Bethel Hospital in Shanghai.<sup>24</sup> The women who began the Bethel Hospital can be said to be representative of the first generation of outstanding new women in China. These women intellectuals used their knowledge and talent in the task of building up the nation and contributing to the growth of women's liberation.

*And China had its own women's publications: Woman's Magazine, Women's Times, Chinese Women's World, Young Woman's Newspaper, Woman's Tocsin to name but a few.*

---

<sup>21</sup> Wei Waiyang. *They Wrote History* p. 9. Yuzhou Guang Press.

<sup>22</sup> *Current Research in Religion*

<sup>23</sup> *Missionaries and Modern China.*

<sup>24</sup> *Current Research in Religion.*

These were often managed by missionaries in the beginning, but Chinese women gradually took over the responsibility. These publications played a large role in enlightening Chinese women.

Christianity, in the spirit of Christ, loving others as oneself, care for society, and respect for women, gave impetus to the modern Chinese women's liberation movement. But it could not bring about far-reaching changes in the situation of Chinese women, because it affected only a small number of Chinese women. In comparison with the broader Chinese womanhood, this small part was a drop in the ocean. Yet, "the ripples from a single pebble flow outward." Chinese women, long mired in the throes of a miserable fate, saw the glimmer of hope through these movements.

*Nanjing Theological Review, No. 26 (1/1996), p. 39.*



## **12. On Building Up the Local Church in China – Zhao Zhi'en**

China is a developing country and the Chinese Church a developing church. The recent rapid growth in Christianity in China began in 1979, when reforms were introduced following the Cultural Revolution. In 1982 the number of Protestant Christians in China was just over three million. By 1995, the total had risen to approximately ten million. Protestant Christianity in China has been growing more rapidly than Buddhism, Islam or even Catholicism. Reopened and new churches and meeting points have mushroomed. Though most growth has taken place in rural areas, those joining the Church in the 1990s have included a growing number of younger and better educated persons. Such growth will have a far-reaching influence on Chinese society. The various ways in which we are striving to meet the needs of the growing number of churches in China, as well as to meet the spiritual needs of our believers is the subject of my discussion.

### **Lay Training Classes at All Levels**

Although we now have thirteen theological colleges, the number of graduates is still too small to meet the need for pastors in China because of the rapid growth in the number of new believers. In Jiangsu province, for example, the 1993 figures found 800,000 Christians. At present, this number may have risen to over 900,000, but there are just 104 ordained pastors in the province, or one for every 9,000 believers - an impossible task for even the best pastor. In the face of such statistics, the Jiangsu Christian Council has been running lay training classes. From 1982 to 1984, just three classes were held. Since then, classes of one, three or six months' duration have been held at city and county level throughout the province. Statistics are incomplete, but show that 235 classes have been held, training approximately 9,380 persons in Bible and basic theology. Lay leaders are engaged in all types of work in the church, including preaching, leading meetings, pastoral care, church administration and maintaining church property where needed. Lay training classes give them a better understanding of the Bible, improve their standard of preaching, enhance their spiritual life and encourage them to love the people more. This is the Chinese path to cultivating large numbers of qualified church workers to meet the needs of building up local churches today.

### **Christian Literature**

All sorts of books for new believers have been published, especially Bibles and hymnals. From 1980 to 1992, 7,430,000 copies of the Bible were printed in China. Today that figure has doubled with 2,500,000 printed in 1995. Thus, in the last ten years, 13,790,000 Bibles have been published in China. This figure includes 200,000 in seven minority languages. Besides this, the Bible is available on audio tapes specially designed for the illiterate in the countryside.

---

Rep. Zhao Zhi'en is Vice-Chairperson of the Committee on Work in Rural Areas of the China Christian Council and an Associate Professor at Nanjing Union Theological Seminary.

The Bible holds a very important place in our Chinese Church. The Word of God is essential for the building up of the Church. Anyone who wants to undertake this task must listen to and act according to the words of God. When members of our congregations encounter difficulties in their lives, they often recite Bible passages to help them overcome these difficulties, strengthening themselves with the Bible. They then bear witness to this to their brothers and sisters in Christ. Thus Christians constitute a living Bible.

In recent years we have published a great deal of devotional literature and material for spiritual edification, Bible study and teaching materials for the training of lay leaders. All these publications aid the development of grassroots churches, especially those for new believers such as *Sermons about the Trinity*. These materials are also made available on audio tape.

### **Glorify God and Serve the People**

If we want to build our Church among all kinds of people and aid the churches in bringing the good news to their neighbors, we must show our love and care for those who need our help - the elderly, children, all those who need us. We should do those things that are in our power to do: running homes for the aged, kindergartens, clinics, literacy classes, even setting up a "tea station" for the thirsty during the hot summer months. The purpose of such work is to serve the people, regardless of whether they are Christian or non-Christian. Some elderly people have accepted Christ because of the care they received from Christians in homes for the aged. Church-run clinics provide good service at low cost and are widely welcomed. In Hangzhou, a university professor became interested in studying the Bible and ended up joining the church because he once saw a "tea station" providing free tea to passersby.

Our Chinese Christians love their own churches deeply and many new church buildings have been built in a large number of cities and villages. In areas where people are not well off, church buildings are very simple. It is usually the case that when a congregation decide to build a new church, the members will donate money, even their old age pensions. They also donate all sorts of building materials, food for the workers, even volunteer labor to realize their objective. During the construction, pastors and preachers will join the laborers. There are many moving stories about the construction of new churches in China.

### **Problems**

*I. The need to raise the quality of believers.* In rural China, superstition has traditionally been rampant. People who have been used to worship idols to gain material benefits may take this same approach to the gospel and the Church. Though they are pious, they believe in God in order to gain in this world: harmony in family life, healing, even fatter livestock. There is indeed a material aspect in what the gospel brings us, but the final goal of faith is eternal life. So we are to nourish believers to have a firm foundation in the faith that they may be saved from sin, have a new birth and a new life

and grow in the living words of God. This is the fundamental aim of our building up of the local Church.

2. *False teachings and heresy.* Since the days of the primitive Church, the dissemination of the gospel has been accompanied by the infiltration of false teaching. Many people have not taken root in true faith and are likely to wander from one false doctrine to another. If they are not trained in the true faith, they are bound to be lured to heresy. We have seen the harm to the Church done by sects in the countryside, such as the Yellers sect (*Huhan pai*), the Established King sect (*Beili Wang*), and the Spirit sect (*Linging jiao*). We must publish more literature against heresy so believers will "avoid the profane chatter and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge" (1Tim. 6: 20) and return to the true faith.

December, 1994.

English original.

### 13. Theological Reflections on "Hong Kong, 1997" – Geng Fu

An article titled "Contextual Theology: The Hong Kong 1997 Question as a Case Study," appeared in the September, 1994, English edition of the Hong Kong journal *Ching Feng*<sup>1</sup> Reading it gave rise to a train of thought which I have ventured to jot down here.

#### What "Contextualization" Is

Contextualization is a popular buzz word in theological circles, but it is also a rather vague, even fairly hard to pin down term. Human contextualization, social and historical contextualization, differ from natural contextualization. The latter is a pure object available to all to be enjoyed, used, developed and protected. While the former shape a complex, tangled subjective entity constructed by persons of differing cultural, social, historical, etc., backgrounds. That is why different people, as the subjects of one and the same context often make different, even diametrically opposed, theological judgments and raise different, even wildly opposite, contextual conceptions. This is why in addition to context and theology we must add the revelation which comes from God. Without revelation, we have no way of judging whether a context is under God's dominion and will; without revelation, there is nothing we can say about context, no response that can be made. In sum, without the revelation that comes from God, it is difficult for so-called contextual theology to escape (its) relativity.

Moreover, any context has as its locus its particular time and space/place. One context and another are both like and unlike. The article in question equates the 1997 question faced by Hong Kong with the Third Reich faced by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and states:

"In the case of Bonhoeffer, his context was different from the Hong Kong context to be sure, yet the circumstances which called forth his theological wrestling had enough common elements with the Hong Kong situation so that someone who is doing theological reflection in Hong Kong could have access to some points of entry into Bonhoeffer's thought, and vice-versa." (p. 152-3)

Hitler's Germany was the arch-criminal of World War 11. China, after a hundred years of poverty and humiliation, has begun, with much difficulty, to explore the path of national resurgence. How can these two be spoken of in the same breath'?

The *Ching Feng* article affirms Christopher Patten, the Governor of Hong Kong, saying "...his spirit for a greater degree (actually, a very moderate degree) of democratization runs counter to the Chinese will." (p.151) This reveals a theological bias toward a single context. The crux lies between the hard places of the "Patten spirit" and the Chinese will. Which way does theology go'?

---

Geng Fu is a pseudonym.

<sup>1</sup> Peter K.H. Lee, in *Ching Fen*, vol. 37, no. 3 (September 1994), pp. 147-167. See P. 96.

## **To Choose or to Return**

The article states that "...Hong Kong is at a critical point in its history where a choice is being made whether Hong Kong will lean toward a centrally-controlled political structure or whether it will safeguard a moderate degree of democracy within the sovereignty of one country." (p. 158). Hong Kong 1997 is basically an historical debt. In 1898, Hong Kong island and part of the Kowloon peninsula were forcibly leased by England for a period of 99 years, set to return to China in 1997. Even if there were no concept of one country; two systems, Hong Kong would still have to return to the motherland; even if China today were still a feudal empire, Hong Kong would still have to return to the motherland.

Love for one's country is a sublime human emotion; this has always been so, both in China and elsewhere. The Chinese poet Qu Yuan (343?-278 B.C.) was unjustly treated by the King of Chu, and the nineteenth-century English poet Shelley was forced into exile in Italy, yet both penned lines that were cries of unswerving loyalty of the patriotic conscience.

In theological terms, in accusing a nation which has been stupid, corrupt, dissolute, tyrannical, God causes it to become a fallen nation. The lessons of the subjugation of northern Israel and southern Judah to Yashuhe Babylon were quite similar contextually to that of the Qing dynasty ninety years ago. But when God took heed of the enslaved people and they were returned to their land, their emotions turned towards thanksgiving and not towards apprehension, towards joy, not misgivings:

Restore our fortunes, O Lord,  
like the watercourses in the Negev!  
May those who sow in tears  
reap with shouts of joy!  
He that goes forth weeping,  
bearing the seed for sowing,  
shall come home with shouts of joy,  
bringing his sheaves with him. (Psalm 126: 4-6)

We can imagine how our compatriots in Hong Kong and Kowloon must have shed tears, sweat and blood on that land when they fell under foreign dominion ninety years ago. How can their descendents, as they return to the motherland, abandon their ancestors' longing for home?

## **The Mission of the Church**

The article under discussion proclaims: "I myself opt for the direction of safeguarding, and fighting for, more democracy for Hong Kong. (p. 159) It complains of many middle-class Hong Kong churches hiding behind closed doors. "Some, though they have not done this, have no idea what to say, let alone, speaking a prophetic word." (p. 165) Actually this proves that most Christians in Hong Kong churches are not terrified by 1997 and are

not so appreciative of the Patten spirit. Consequently, the article warns: "Bonhoeffer's martyrdom is a sober reminder to the Hong Kong Christians of what some of them should be prepared for." (p. 165) It even goes so far as to paint churches in the mainland as having "some spiritual vitality, though mainly of a behind closed-church-door-kind." (p. 167) In reality, God has given the mission to open wide the church doors and pour into the streets neither to Christians in the mainland nor to those in Hong Kong.

The mission which God has given to us is precisely that message of Bonhoeffer in *The Cost of Discipleship* which the article also mentions. Bonhoeffer's famous dictum "When Christ calls a man, he wants that man to follow him on the way of the Cross," implies that the Christian life is a life of sacrificing oneself for others with no expectation of recompense, a life in service to others without expecting service in return. This is precisely the way, a way of following Christ which Christians in China and in Hong Kong are both on, the way of taking up one's cross.

But it is not necessary to sanctify the Patten spirit and even less necessary to call upon the churches of Hong Kong, which have no sense of political oppression, to learn resistance from the German Confessional Church of Hitler's day. (see p. 161) For it is as Bonhoeffer said: Christ is Lord of the Church and Lord of the World. History is in God's hands, and if the Church should die, it can also rise. This is the experience of Chinese Christians, which can be offered as reference. What God requires of humans is faith in the future, hope and divine love.

Nanjing Theological Review, No. 21 (2/1994), p.17.

## 14. Contextual Theology: The Hong Kong 1997 Question as a Case Study (excerpt) – Peter K.H. Lee

*The following is a short excerpt from Dr. Lee's article which appeared in Ching Feng, vol. 37, no.3 (September, 1994), pp.147-167. The article has three major sections: "The 1997 Question," "Theological Perspective," and "Contextualized Theological Reflection-Action." This excerpt is taken from the final section, and sets out some of the views which Geng Fu's article is responding to.*

### We go on to speak of the church's mission.

By the church we do not mean just as institution. We refer to Bonhoeffer's understanding of the church as consisting of the followers of Christ who exemplify the costliness of discipleship.

Are there many such churches in Hong Kong? Catholics and Protestants, roughly half and half, number about 8% of a population of 6 million, i.e., less than 500,000. It is not for anyone to judge how many are committed Christians and how many are nominal Christians. But it can be said that a general impression may be gained that, rare are the cases (churches and Christian groups) who are known for exemplifying the "costly grace" of Christ. There are congregations who may have the close fellowship and the disciplined discipleship which Bonhoeffer characterized in *Sanctorum Communio*. But these groups tend to be by themselves behind closed doors. Many of the congregations and churches are more visible, but they are not noted for having a prophetic message to give. In fact, in value-orientation they are hardly distinguishable from the middle-class people who make up the greater part of the church membership. If we are thinking of a word to say about the life-style of the middle-class, the churches would not know what to say.

In terms of missiology, conceivably the churches have a mission in the middle-class environment. However, they have no mission to speak of if they have no message to give that is different from middle-class values.

Actually in the middle-class itself, there are plenty who are dehumanized and alienated by a consumer society or who are deprived of a decent quality of life (because of the high cost of housing, for instance) and who exploit others (for instance the migrant workers in their employ and due to gender discrimination). In a word, if the churches take the incarnation, the crucifixion and the resurrection of Christ to heart, they have a full message to offer to the rising middle-class people. In this connection, Bonhoeffer's martyrdom is a sober reminder to the Hong Kong Christians of what some of them should be prepared for.

And the churches have a mission to the wealthy and the affluent as well as to the poor and the deprived. This is done not just by evangelistic campaigns but by pungent statements and service in solidarity with the needy and the infirm. The Hong Kong

churches, however, are theologically not strong enough, and not united enough, to issue powerful pronouncements. The mission can also be performed by individuals who are in a position to shape public policy. It can also be done by the voters who know whom to elect to represent them to enact laws and execute policies for the good of the community. The Church in Hong Kong does not have as long a history as the Church in Germany of Bonhoeffer's time, nor is the Christian community in Hong Kong as large as that in Germany then. Yet there is enough of a nucleus so that the Incarnate Word has a semblance of a base. Bonhoeffer's emphasis on the church as a disciplined and faithful fellowship is particularly relevant here.

Bonhoeffer's Christo-centric ecclesiology is somewhat too optimistic for the Hong Kong-China situation. His christology is too "high-christology" (cf. Colossians 1). Such a high Christology is too much for a small Christian community to espouse. Bonhoeffer's Christo-centric ecclesiology, however, is realistically counter-balanced by his "worldly" theology.

#### One final word has to do with China in the future world civilization.

Hong Kong, a tiny place, is a cosmopolitan city which, after joining China, remains a special place. As we have seen, Hong Kong has a unique role to play within the whole of China politically and economically speaking. Now I would like to say a word in cultural terms.

As a British colony, Hong Kong has inherited certain Western cultural elements, including the rule of law. As an important entry port, it has been in touch with many cultures. On the other hand, the Hong Kong Chinese do not have deep Chinese cultural roots, though they still think of China as their cultural home.

In the meantime Chinese civilization under the impact of Western expansionism in the past two centuries and of Chinese communism in the last several decades has suffered blow after blow. Entering into the 21st century, China is ready to regain its place under the sun. Economically it will be a giant, with the advantages and problems to go with it. Politically it has yet to find a workable model, balancing central authority and local autonomy, a traditional hierarchical paternalism and a more democratic and liberal spirit. Culturally speaking, 21st century China will have to reckon with the forces of Westernization and modernization and will have to know how to shed what is burden from the past and to recover what is valuable in its heritage. All those matters will not be a rational process of sifting and selection. Yet not all the forces will merely act and interact blindly. Here and there, there will be some guiding lights, from religio-philosophical sources as well as from humanistic thinking and even folk wisdom.

The Judaeo-Christian tradition conceivably can furnish a guiding light but the question is how large a base the Christian community is. In Hong Kong the Christian Church is not insignificant and has some roots in the community. In mainland China the Christian community is even smaller in proportion to the population yet it has some spiritual vitality though mainly of a behind closed-church-door kind. Now the Hong Kong



Christians and their counterparts in the mainland can together search for the future of Christian mission. But first they should be concerned about the destiny of China as a civilization, not just an old civilization, but China in the third millennium of the Common Era, with the problems and promises of a global village. The Hong Kong Church, with greater openness to the world outside, can be more of a window, while it has lessons to learn from the Church in China, which has suffered much but is showing signs of life. The Church of Hong Kong-China will have to learn to be more "worldly" in Bonhoeffer's sense while being disciplined and spiritual.

English original. Reprinted with the permission of the Christian Study Center on Chinese Religion and Culture. *Ching Feng* is the quarterly journal of the Center.

## 15. In Memoriam: Bishop Shen Yifan (1928-1994) – Li Yading

This is the first time I have taken up my pen to write a eulogy for someone, and my heart is heavy within me, because the person I must eulogize is a pastor, my noble and universally respected elder in the Lord. How it saddens me to have to eulogize Bishop Shen Yi fan.

On the 9th of August, in Fuzhou, my wife and I received an unexpected telephone call from a friend saying that Bishop Shen had died suddenly due to illness. We were overwhelmed and the news was very hard for us to accept.

Three weeks previously, Bishop Shen had come to Nanjing to preside over the consultation on theological education. The evening it ended, in spite of his weariness, he invited me to his room for a heart-to-heart chat. As always, we spoke of many things - the problems facing the church, theological education, our concern for day to day problems in our work and life, etc. Sharing and talking with Bishop Shen was not only one of life's pleasures, I frequently gained a great deal from it. That evening, as often before, though we could have gone on and on, I was loathe to take up too much of the Bishop's precious time and stood to take my leave. Bishop Shen gripped my hand warmly in farewell. How could I have known that would be our last handshake?

I met Bishop Shen in the early 1980s, when the Church in China had just emerged from the valley of the shadow of death, a time of rebuilding. In winter of that year, I spent a month or so in Shanghai gathering historical materials. Every Sunday I attended churches there, Community Church, Mu'en Church, etc., and if I was lucky, I got to hear the then Rev. Shen preach. When the service ended, he would stand at the church door, a big smile on his face, shaking hands with each person in turn, and bending an ear from time to time to their confidences. His warm firm handshake, his unassuming and affable manner all left a deep impression on me.

Later as our opportunities to be in meetings together gradually increased, we slowly became better acquainted. Bishop Shen seemed to have a special soft spot for young people. He was happy to hear their views and had high hopes of the younger generation. In the hearts of many young Christians, he was not one of those leaders on high whom it is difficult to approach, but a warm, accessible elder. In the usual way of looking at it, his "position" was not low; in terms of scholarship, he was highly accomplished in many areas, but in his dealings with others, he was always so humble and gentle, so easy to approach. Anyone who worked with him or came into contact with him, not only had no sense of awkwardness, but rather was willing to approach and talk with him about whatever was on their minds. I was fortunate to attend the Fourth National Chinese Christian Conference in Beijing in 1986, as a theological student delegate, helping out during the meetings. Bishop Shen exhorted me in an earnest voice: "In 1954, at the First National Chinese Christian Conference, I too was a theological student delegate, and I

---

Bishop Shen Yifan was Vice-President and General Secretary of the China Christian Council.

Li Yading is Associate Dean of Studies of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary and Administrative Secretary of the Oversight Committee on Ministry of the China Christian Council.

too helped out with sundry tasks. Don't look down on these 'sundry tasks,' we can learn a lot from them. In the smallest task, one's loyalty to the Lord can be seen." These few words struck me deeply and I kept them in my heart as a spur to my work.

In April 1989, during Bishop Shen's visit to the United States, he found time in his busy schedule to visit me in Chicago. I had been studying in the States for over a year by then, and having recently passed my language requirements, had begun studies at Garrett Seminary. There, all day, every day, I sank my teeth into theological works in English - the difficulties I experienced can only be imagined. That day in the Seminary hall, I saw Bishop Shen coming towards me, walking with difficulty. He took my hand in his firm grip and a feeling of warmth swept through me. To see this dear Bishop from one's own country in a foreign land - perhaps only those who have experienced life as a student abroad can understand how moving it is. He inspected my dormitory and my study environment, all with concern, asking questions as he went. And I Couldn't wait to ask him about China and the situation in the Church there. At noon, we had lunch together in the Seminary dining hall by the shores of lake Michigan. As, we sat there, the Bishop's words, earnestly admonishing, filled with hope, were a tremendous encouragement to me, something I will never forget.

Back in China, I came to know Bishop Shen better in the course of working with him. I will never forget accompanying him on two visits to grassroots churches.

Once we went to Anhui, covering over two thousand kilometers in twenty days, visiting dozens of churches in nine Counties in five prefectures, as well as innumerable church leaders, lay people and cadres in related government departments. Bishop Shen was the oldest of our group, and the difficulties of travel and exhaustion were worst for him. From the moment we set foot in Anhui, Bishop Shen had barely a moment to himself. Sometimes a visitor would be knocking on his door before first light, and nearly every evening he talked to visitors until late at night. When he had a few moments to relax, he would be organizing his papers. He left his footprints on village threshing grounds, muddy roads, and field ridges. Working like this for seventeen or eighteen hours a day, was unbearable even for me, the young "companion," yet Bishop Shen's spirits were as chipper as ever, his mind sharp, and he spoke with vigor and strength. We saw many places where the government departments were conscientiously and thoroughly implementing religious policy. We saw the local churches flourishing and developing. Bishop Shen was extremely pleased and his happiness spilled over into his speech and manner. We saw places where religious policy had not been well implemented and the damage that this had done to the Church. We saw some churches with such bad internal problems that there was no unity, and Bishop Shen's heart ached, he even shed tears. In every place we came to, he kept in mind the benefit of the country and the Church, he looked at the big picture and strove to accommodate all aspects of the situation for the sake of peace within the Church and social stability. All he said and did revealed his strong love of country and love of Church. His colleagues and co-workers were all moved by his spirit of teaching with tireless zeal and working his heart out, they all admired his perspicacity and nobility of character.

In January of this year, my colleague Chen Meilin and I visited churches in Shenyang with Bishop Shen. Unfortunately we ran into foggy weather and our plane was delayed in Shanghai's Hongqiao Airport. The airport was overflowing with people; there wasn't even a place to sit down. We walked around for ages before we found an "island of peace" in a corner near one of the lavatories. Bishop Shen was over sixty, but he happily produced some newspapers from his bag, spread them on the floor and sat down on them along with us. Looking at his gray hair, I couldn't help feeling sad: Tile Bishop really had exhausted himself for the Church in China! On an evening like this, he could be relaxing at home reading, or simply enjoying life. But the affairs of the Church, and the needs of Christian brothers and sisters would not let him do so.

Finally it was our turn to board, and the Bishop, like the two of us younger people, had to push through the crowd. By the time we landed in Shenyang, it was past two a.m. The piercingly cold northeast China wind blew in our faces and made even me, who had grown up there, shiver, let alone Bishop Shen, who was from the south and elderly to boot. I was really afraid that the rigors of going from hot to cold would be too much for him.

All summer this year, his schedule was full, with hardly a chance to breathe. He first went to Nanjing to preside over a theology conference, then hurried back to Shanghai for the Board meeting of the East China Theological Seminary, then back to Nanjing again to teach a lay training course, and right after that he was off to Weihai in Shandong. And there was more to come after that ....

The news of Bishop Shen Yifan's unexpected passing shocked and saddened many both in China and abroad. His death is truly a great loss to the Church in China. We mourn the loss of a good Bishop and pastor. Though it will be hard to understand God's will for a time, yet we are confident that when we meet our Lord face to face in the future, all will resolve itself. For those who love the Lord and are faithful to Him, death is not the end of life, but the beginning of new life. Bishop Shen is a model for the millions of Chinese Christians, especially the young ones. We remember him today in order to learn from him, to move more and more people to continue Bishop Shen's work with ever greater sincerity and zeal. May he rest in peace.

## SERMONS

### 16. Your Young Men Shall See Visions – Shen Yifan

Text: Isaiah 6: 1-8

The second chapter of Acts tells how the Apostle Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, preached to thousands of people, and in his sermon quoted the words of the prophet Joel: "In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams..." (Acts 2:17-21).

When Paul is defending himself against King Agrippa, he says: "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision" (Acts 26: 19).

In our text from Isaiah we are told of a vision Isaiah had in the temple the year King Uzziah died, and the two passages I just mentioned speak of visions as well.

What is a "vision?"

The word vision does not indicate that a Bible passage is preposterous, nor is it some subjective human hallucination. In the original language, vision has the meaning of "distant view" or "prospect." "Vision" or "distant view" refer to a kind of spiritual sight, one which transcends the sight of ordinary people and enters upon a transcendent realm. The terms also refer to a special kind of experience, an encounter and dialogue between God and a human being, one so compelling that it leads to a fundamental turnabout in one's values and view of life.

The visions seen by the prophet Isaiah and by the apostle Paul were both of this nature. On the one hand they saw a spiritual prospect which others had not seen; on the other hand, having seen this prospect, there was a decisive transformation in each of their lives.

"And I said, 'Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the lord of hosts'"

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

"And I said, 'Here am I; send me!'"

" 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?'

'Who are you, Lord?'

'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.'"

---

This was the final sermon delivered by Bishop Shen, which he preached at the graduation ceremonies of the East China Theological Seminary in Shanghai. July 1, 1994.

"But get up and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you to serve and testify to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you."

Students of the graduating class, you have undergone four years of education and training at East China Theological Seminary; spiritually, intellectually, and in experience, you have made tremendous progress. And now that you are about to leave the Seminary and go to your places of work, what more do you need? In my opinion, you need, just as the disciples said at Pentecost that "Your young men shall see visions." Have you seen any visions?

To have seen a vision implies that you are able to surpass ordinary people in spiritual sight. What you see is not your future salary, terms of the work, or opportunities for personal development. What you see is the solemn prospect come down from Heaven and the sacred trust. Perhaps like Joseph, you will be seen as a "dreamer." Yet it is the dreamers who accomplish great things.

Seeing visions does not mean being intoxicated with the spiritual realm. Rather it suggests a genuine encounter between the individual and God, a dialogue carried on with God, even as when Jacob wrestled with the angel of God at the ford of the Jabbok, and through this coming to a knowledge of the true nature of God and one's mission.

Seeing visions further suggests surrendering everything of the self, and being completely obedient to God, accepting God's fundamental control over oneself and offering one's love and loyalty to God, to the Church, to society, to the nation and to all humanity.

As you graduate, the path which lies before you will not be all straight ahead and smooth going, or lined with bright flowers. You will meet with every kind of hardship and suffering, every test and temptation, every kind of cold innuendo and burning criticism, all kinds of twists and turns. And yet, one who has seen visions will be able to hold steadfast and remain undaunted by setbacks, serving (lie Lord and people, loyal to the end.

May the Spirit be poured out upon us, that we may see visions, and say with Isaiah: "Lord, here am I, send me." And when we have completed the course of our life, may we be able to say: "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision."

## 17. On Being A Good Pastor – K.H. Ting

Text: Luke 13: 18, 19

The Bible contains many analogies of the relationship between humankind and God; the most frequent is also that with which we are most familiar - the sheep and the Shepherd. Besides this, there is the relationship between servant and master, child and parent, the clay and the potter, the chick and the hen, trees and grasses and the farmer-analogies such as these abound in the Bible.

The Jews were a people accustomed to animal husbandry, so the relationship between the sheep and the shepherd is most often alluded to. "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want"; "We are His people, the sheep of His pasture." Jesus told of a man who had a hundred sheep; losing one, he searched until he found it and carried it home across his shoulders, rejoicing with his friends and neighbors.

What the Shepherd requires of the sheep is obedience, that they follow instructions and obey. As he herds the sheep, the Shepherd is constantly admonishing them, keeping them in line with the rod and the staff he carries, so that not even one will stray. Sheep do not have much sense of self, they will go wherever you want. Such obedience in a sheep is what makes a good sheep. But in people obedience does not necessarily lead to the heights of moral integrity. A person who can only obey orders, might perhaps be considered a good slave, but not a person of high moral integrity.

For thousands of years, China has been a nation whose culture is based upon agriculture. As a Chinese who has been raised in this culture, I am fond of the analogies in the Bible which compare the relationship between humankind and God to that between grasses and trees, wheat and other crops which flourish in the care of the farmer, are nourished by the sun and the rain, and grow. This process of growth is where plants differ from humans and sheep. In the four Gospels we read the analogies to Jesus sowing the seed, to the fruit tree, the lilies, the mustard seed, the grape arbor, the fig tree. The germination and growth of these plants is not due to admonitions from the farmer, nor to beatings from the farmer's rod and staff. The farmer must loosen the soil, plant the seed, fertilize, eliminate pests, pull up the weeds. After all this patient work, he does not pull up the young shoots to make them grow. After doing everything he can do, he must wait patiently, he must allow the sunshine and the rain to play their parts, allow Nature to complete its cycle of growth, and finally he will reap a good harvest, and the fruits of his labor will be "a hundred-fold, sixty-fold and thirty – fold." The old saying, "Ten years to grow a tree, a hundred years to raise a person," tells us that growth is a process, a process of renewal and change.

---

Bishop Ting preached this sermon at the 1995 commencement worship service of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary.

Bishop K.N. Ting is President of the China Christian Council, Chairperson of the 'three-Self Patriotic Movement. a Deputy Chairperson of the National People's Congress and a Vice-Principal of Nanjing University.

All this is simply to illustrate what sort of preachers pastoral workers in China, and especially you who graduate today and enter the Church, should be. We are pastors, giving pastoral care to people in the name of God. We are not caring for lambs, but for people. Jesus said "How much more valuable is a human being than a sheep." We must not go after people with our rod and staff. *People* must not be beaten.

The good shepherd should be like a good farmer, helping Christians grow with the same will which spends ten years growing a tree and one hundred years raising a person. In this sense the shepherd is an educator, an artist, a sculptor who works with great precision. This growth process is our work of co-creation with God, our Creator Lord, the process by which humans are raised from that primitive half-finished state to a state of wholeness and completion. An artist or sculptor does not refine what needs no more work, adds not one jot where it is not needed, but allows the natural beauty of the artwork to shine forth, and safeguards it. Every person God gives into our care is one of God's works-in-progress of creation or a work which has not yet been brought to perfection. They all partake of the sacred, and this does not brook disrespect or thoughtless treatment on our part.

China is a nation in which cultural education is not sufficiently widespread. As educated people, we do not have the right to do just as we please, we must respect our fellow Christians and co-workers. Our churches and meeting points must become schools for democracy, places where we all experience the democratic lifestyle. If whatever the pastor says goes, if the pastor becomes the "boss" of a church or meeting point, this is unhealthy. The pastor should encourage believers to be involved in decisions about church affairs, to become "masters" of the church. We need to learn how to be good leaders, that is, leading as well as practicing democracy, especially since in our context, the temptation to dictatorial action is great and we can easily find ourselves behaving in this way.

For a long time China was a feudal society. Feudal societies revere age and that is a good thing. But feudal societies also practice patriarchy -- everything goes according to the word of one person - economic authority, authority over personnel is all controlled by a single person: this is tyranny and tyranny is not a characteristic of Christianity.

A big problem for our Chinese Christianity today is the fact that in many places authority rests in the hands of a single individual. The national church organizations receive many letters every day reflecting this problem. In many grassroots churches the finances have not been made public for many years, no reports have been made, personnel has remained unchanged and all is decided by the pastor. Some pastors practice virtual tyranny. In places where this is the case, all wisdom seems to rest with the pastor, the pastor knows all and the congregation knows nothing. The Church of Christ cannot be run in this fashion. In the Church of Christ, as in the case of taking ten years to grow a tree and one hundred years to raise a person, everyone must be allowed to grow, Christians must grow and pastors too. All who enter into Christ, enjoy Christ's fullness.



We must pay special attention to the growth of women Christians, nurturing their confidence. There is much male female inequality in the Church today, there is bias against women believers. They are excluded, even though they may not feel so themselves. We must protect women believers and allow them to have a greater say in the Church and to take part in the leadership.

In places where there is tyranny. Christians feel oppressed. Though they may not speak out, this is only a surface calm. Many people feel the unfairness of it all and it will come to the surface eventually.

A healthy person does not need a doctor. I think the Church can be compared to a special kind of hospital. In this hospital that is the Church, pastor and lay people are all caught up in God's creative process, they are all works-in-progress in God's work of creation. Everyone is, to a greater or lesser degree, a patient, and in the same way, everyone is a doctor.

Democracy does not mean simply that the minority follows the majority during elections. Democracy is a way of interacting with others, a style of doing things.

Recently the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference passed "Regulations on Political Consultation, Democratic Oversight and Political Participation and Opinion." These three items have to do with socialist democracy: the first says that solving problems must be done through consultation; the second that administrative power must be supervised; and the third stipulates mass participation. I think the whole society, including us in the Church should do as follows: 1) everything must be done in consultation, one or two people must not have the power to decide things; 2) there must be oversight; where there is power there should be supervision; 3) people should have a voice in the discussion of important issues. Then the pastor will not be seen as a superman and the people as morons. This is the path towards growth for everyone.

It is my hope that as each class of seminarians from Nanjing Union Theological Seminary and the other seminaries in China enter into the Church, they will bring with them the democratic way of doing things, to make the Church a Church of equality, unity and love. Your alma mater cannot give you much in the way of material assistance, but I hope, that in thinking, in spirit you will not lose touch with us, but maintain a relationship in the Lord. Wherever your work takes you, unite the believers, love the country and love the Church, and go forward together.

We hope that as the Chinese Church receives into its band of co-workers each new generation, it will continue to grow and mature and become the Church beloved of the Lord.

## 18. Trees Must Have Roots – Wang Weifan

"Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose, they were scorched, and since they had no root, they withered away" (Mt. 13: 5-6).

"Remember that it is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you" (Rom. 11: 18).

There is a line in the theme song of the television series "The Deserted Road" that goes "It isn't a tree unless it has roots." Turning it around, we can say that if it doesn't have roots it isn't a tree, even if it looks like one. This makes one think of a line from the Tang poet Du Guji's *fu* (descriptive prose interspersed with verse), "Wandering in a Dream": "Still water has no waves and a drifting cloud no roots." It is the same for one who wishes to become a theologian in this land of China: (it) isn't a tree unless it has roots. Without roots it's just a drifting cloud, and will drift forever.

Of first importance are one's roots as a Christian; that is the seed of the gospel that takes root in the heart. Some strike deep and some are shallow, and the result differs too. Jesus himself, explaining a parable, said: "As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away" (Mt. 13: 20-21). The crux of the matter is whether it has taken root in the heart or not.

We were delighted to welcome the many "culture Christians" who appeared in China in the 1980s. They looked at Christianity sympathetically from the standpoint of philosophy, literature, art or ethics. They appreciated Christianity, they drew near to it, and even accepted it. But the basis of the problem was, as ever, that it "did not take root in the heart," or "the root did not go deep enough." Did it take hold in the intellect, in the realm of aesthetics or ethics, or did it take hold in the heart? Whether the tests of hardship and persecution, of money worship, or the desire for fame and possessions, produce one who is strong in faith or one who is committed to serve, depends on the depth of the root.

There are two places in the epistles of Paul where he deals with this question of roots. One is in Ephesians: "...that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love" (Eph. 3: 17). The second half of this sentence may also be translated as "being rooted in holy love, putting down a foundation." Christian roots are deeply rooted in holy love and in the source of Love and not simply in knowledge, scholarship or theory. Only if we are rooted in holy love and the source of Love can we comprehend "the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ" (Eph. 3: 18).

---

Rev. Wang Weifan is Associate Professor of New Testament and Head of Publications at Nanjing Union Theological Seminary.

The other is found in Colossians: "As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built tip in him and established in the faith" (Col. 2: 6-7). "Live your lives in him" implies that faith is not just empty talk, but must be seen in real action and in the whole of life. Moreover, the roots come first, the building up comes after. Taking root is a condition and a prerequisite. Without roots, there is no building up and no solidity. Building up without roots is like a tree without its essential part, water without a source, a castle in the air, a mirage.

Where are the roots of a Chinese theologian? One thing that must not be lacking is a grounding in what it means to be Chinese. This not only demands knowledge of some of the classics, but even more importantly fostering a certain ethos, nurturing the personality, becoming first of all what Mr. Xie Fuya called a "Christian *junzi*",<sup>1</sup> not a Christian who is a base person.

When the good things and bad things of (lie West pour in) together, when temptations for money and things come together, how a theologian regulates him or herself, how they preserve their integrity as Chinese, are decisive factors in whether that person can become a Chinese theologian.

There was not one Chinese theologian of the previous generation who was not a product of the time of national crisis. The purification and deepening of T.C. Chao's faith took place after his arrest by the Japanese. Most of Jia Yurning's famous *hynui* "Voices of the Saints" was written during the Japanese occupation and he therefore called it "the golden oil which flowed from the crushed olive." Suffering together with the whole Chinese people during the Cultural Revolution enabled some theological thinkers in the Chinese Church to enter into a more profound realm. We can say that the merely clever who lack a sense of identification with the people will never become Chinese theologians.

"Remember that it is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you." Support gives the sense of depending or relying on something. Many outstanding athletes give their gold medals to their early teachers and coaches. This is a lofty emotion - remembering your roots. In the past Chinese people often hung a scroll in the center of the middle wall of the main room, on which was the legend: "heaven, earth, sovereign, family, teacher." These are in fact the five fundamentals which Chinese never forget. To forget the creation and nurturing of heaven and earth, or the nurture from the nation and land represented by the "sovereign," or the toil and nurture of family and teachers are all unfilial acts. In the same way, without the Chinese Church, which died and rose again, which endured many hardships and where a thousand tasks are waiting to be done, where would the individual be'?

"Trees must have roots." One who does not have roots in Chinese traditional culture and in the spirit of the Chinese people, who does not have roots in the sufferings of the

---

<sup>1</sup> The term, which may be translated as "the cultivated one" or more loosely as "gentleman" refers to the Confucian ideal of moral and scholarly achievement. The opposite is the *xiao ren*, the "small" or base person.

Chinese Church and in its soul, may accomplish something in one or another aspect, but it will be very difficult for that person to make a contribution (literally, to grow trees - ed.) to the theology of the Chinese Church.

*N.B. Some of Rev. Wang's classical language examples or quotations from the Chinese classics have been omitted from this translation*

*Nanjing Theological Review, No. 20 (2/1994), p. R9.*

## **19. Praising God and Having the Good Will of All the People – Wu Enyang**

"Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the good will of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved." (Acts 2: 46-47)

In the text we see a faith community, the primitive Church after the Pentecost event, gaining momentum. The Scripture says those early Christians "... ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God ..."

It is almost common sense that Christians down through the centuries see praise as their foremost task. Yet heartfelt praise might often come from bittersweet experience. It was true of that faith community in Jerusalem and the same is true of Christians here in China.

If you go to a church and visit with people of different age groups, then, in all likelihood you'll come back with stories not so very different from those of the early Christians. The Church is young, but has no shortage of experiences in dealing with rock-hard reality. As a matter of fact, every lesson is learned the hard way. So the praise offered virtually originated in the shadowy valley.

However, praise does not come from past experience only. Its more meaningful and nobler form has to do with expectations of the future. This is a forward-looking kind of praise. The early Christians longed for the immediate coming down of divine rule, and even though the eschatological fervor might have been tempered in the course of time, the spiritual heritage of that community lived on - fraternity, equality and peace. Their idealism has inspired all Christians ever since. When good words are converted into good deeds, the world becomes a better place to live.

A forward-looking praise is all the more fitting and proper in an era of development. Both in the Church and outside the Church, we are faced with growth by leaps and bounds.

When Christians overcrowd churches and new buildings have to be raised to accommodate more newcomers - we know this is development.

When our cities are more colorful, and we see healthy youngsters walking among new buildings - we know this is development.

---

Wu Enyang completed her work in the graduate program of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary in July, 1996. She delivered this sermon at the orientation for a WCC China visit held in Nanjing in May, 1996.

When in our countryside, farmers turned factory workers proudly tell of their sense of fulfillment due to their involvement in township industry - we know this is development.

When the true, the good, the beautiful strike a chord with the nation, and Christianity is spoken of favorably by those who formerly saw it merely as foreign religion - we know this is development too.

For all these types of development, we render our praise and thanks.

In fact, development is a phenomenon found in every era. As the apostle Paul said, "We know that in everything God works good with those who love Him." There have been times when the progress of history was not so clear, but people of faith saw the way ahead, and their glimpse of the bright future was followed by praise, as Mary did in the Magnificat and the early Christians did collectively in their agape community. In these cases, forward-looking praise is like a song that breaks out with the morn; the first flower of spring, then blooms each thing.

Fortunate as we are, for the present, development is not a vague image or a covert phenomenon. In an era when signs of progress are everywhere to be seen and folks would just love to take the free train to a destiny flowing with milk and honey - praise could be an easy task. So for the faithful, walking with God requires something more than praise, for we need to *work with* God. Christian conscience prompts us to relinquish cheap praise, but to relish that costly praise which only comes after toil and trial. For it is simple truth, whether for Christians or non-Christians, that for life to be fulfilled, talent and energy must be drained.

Again, we need to praise God for having the opportunity to walk with the people. Integration with the people is the key to Christian mission. The early Christians in Jerusalem had "the good will of all the people," so "day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved." There were times when Christians walked in the clouds, reluctant to climb down the ladder. Some twelve-hundred years ago, Christianity in its Nestorian form was as influential as Buddhism here in China. The Nestorians did very well in converting members of the elite, yet failed to go to the masses. So they were not to survive the persecutions which followed. A Nestorian clergyman (the Church of the East) visited us recently and commented on his Church's failure, giving many a sigh before the ancient tablet describing the Nestorian mission enterprise in China.

Then we should throw open our own horizons even wider. A faith community is not meant to be alone. To have the good will of all the people means we need to be aware of the fact that we are part and parcel of the world community of faith. The spirit of truth that unites us all is beyond boundaries - racial, cultural, economic, or political. Human beings - co-dwellers on this earth - need to think big, and the world will get smaller.

The idea of unity is not alien to our culture. In the *Book o' Rites*, one of the ancient classics supposed to have been compiled by Confucius, the idea of the Great Unity was

set down and a blueprint for a future kingdom drawn. All rhetoric boils down to those words which have become a household phrase in China ---- "tinder heaven, one family."

Here and now, we gather together in the prime of spring. We in China wish the spring to last long, for we have a great number of seeds to sow. So come and share our spring joy, and together, we will sing even more beautifully the praise of God - an endless melody to usher in a thousand springs to come.

May glory be to God! Amen.

English original.

## 20. The Story of David and Jonathan – Zhao Qiusheng

Human history has handed down to us many touching stories of pure and true friendship. For the human heart, there is nothing more precious, nothing more desirable than friendship. Our Bible has recorded a great number of wonderful and moving stories. Among these we find the story about the friendship between David and Jonathan, whose relationship can be likened to a brightly-colored, beautiful flower. Whoever sees it will be deeply touched.

David and Jonathan were both important men in Israel. They were heroes who saved their people from untold miseries and delivered their country in times of distress. They shared a pure and heart-rending friendship such as is hard to find in this mortal life. Even the angels in heaven must have rejoiced in it.

David's and Jonathan's friendship is not portrayed in great detail. In the first book of Samuel, we find it mentioned only briefly: "Jonathan's and David's hearts joined together in deep and mutual fellowship. Jonathan loved David as his own life" (I Sam 18:1).<sup>1</sup> What a great friendship this was! To love one's friend as one's own life! Here, friendship was not a matter of convenience or mutual advantage, nor was it staged for personal gain. Instead, two friends met with self-denying, pure hearts, embracing with open arms and open minds. Only such a relationship of genuine, pure and undivided love deserves the word friendship. Today's inflationary use of this word is just a sign of our philistinism.

The friendship between David and Jonathan has inspired poets of all ages. But this does not mean that those two were born to become an ideal pair. Far from it! If we carefully examine the Bible, we will discover that, from a human point of view, David and Jonathan were not quite made for each other. It would have been much less surprising, if they had become foes instead of friends, because there was a lot between them which should have made them clash.

*They were of unequal status.* Saul was Israel's first king, and Jonathan, therefore, a prince. To be sure, in Saul's time Israel's kingdom was still in its embryonic state and a far cry from a developed monarchy with all the splendor of its palaces, the extravagance of royalty and the pride of courtiers. Nevertheless, Saul's personal position was that of a king, and in this capacity he stood high above the ordinary people. The same was true for Jonathan. As a prince, he could feel superior to all. David, on the other hand, began as the son of a shepherd, a very humble and common occupation in Israel. How could a prince and a shepherd boy "join their hearts together in deep and mutual fellowship?"

---

Zhao Qiusheng is a 1993 graduate of the graduate program of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary and now works with the Correspondence Course there.

<sup>1</sup> Translator's note: This quote follows the Chinese translation of the 1919 Union Version, which is quoted in the sermon. Much closer to the Hebrew original is NRSV: "The soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul."



*Fame threatened to divide them.* When David was still an insignificant young man, Jonathan was already being hailed as a hero of meritorious service. In 1 Sam. 14, we read about the blustering and truculent attack the Philistines launched against the Israelites and how all the people were routed and shattered by the enemy. But Jonathan with his young armor bearer was bold and vigorous enough to attack the garrison of the Philistines. Many of them were killed, and Jonathan gained a great victory. When Jonathan later broke military discipline and Saul threatened to kill him, the people pleaded with Saul, "Shall Jonathan die, who has accomplished this great victory in Israel? Far from it!" (1 Sam 14:45) So we see that already at an early stage Jonathan was a great hero among the Israelites and held in high esteem.

But once young David had killed the Philistine giant Goliath with a stone, all the praise and honor for Jonathan seemed to have vanished. David became the new rising star. Not only did he steal the people's veneration from Saul but he also put Jonathan in the shade.

Chinese people often say, one mountain cannot house two tigers. A celebrity tends to regard fame as more precious than his life. When Jonathan's fame was suddenly overshadowed by David's new prestige, how could he "love David as his own life?"

*Power threatened to divide them.* When Saul began to recruit the first regular army in Israel, Saul and Jonathan shared the command. According to 1 Sam. 13:1-2, two thousand men were under Saul's command, and one thousand under Jonathan's. In other words, Jonathan already held the position of Israel's vice-commander.

When David found favor before Saul, Jonathan gradually disappeared from the power center. In 1 Sam. 18:5 we read, "Saul gave him (David) command of the fighting forces, and his promotion pleased all ranks, even the officials round Saul." Here, David had already ousted Jonathan from the command of Israel's army. How then could Jonathan, who increasingly lost his power and influence to David, "strip off the cloak and tunic he was wearing, and give them to David, together with his sword, his bow, and his belt" (1 Sam. 18:4)?

*The throne could have come between them.* If it is true that David's rise caused Jonathan's demise, the two should have clashed even more violently since Jonathan was heir to the throne. Saul plotted to kill David because he saw in him a threat not only to himself but also to his descendants. Therefore, Saul urged Jonathan to kill David: "For as long as the son of Jesse lives upon the earth, neither you nor your kingdom shall be established" (1 Sam. 20:31). Actually, Jonathan himself saw this clearly enough. When he and David parted, he said: "If I am still alive, show me the faithful love of the Lord; but if I die, never cut off your faithful love from my house, even if the Lord were to cut off every one of (his) enemies of David from the face of the earth" (1 Sam. 20:14-15). According to these words, Jonathan anticipated David's becoming king of Israel, though this position was originally meant for himself.

China's history is full of dynastic fights, brother against brother. Why was Jonathan so different? How could he love his rival for the throne?

Indeed, by human understanding Jonathan and David should have been adversaries as incompatible as fire and water. How could they ever develop a friendship to the death? And yet, this is exactly what they did. In David's own words, their friendship was more intense than the love between man and woman (2 Sam. 1:26).

Let us ask for a moment how the impossible became possible. The Biblical narrative reveals that David and Jonathan, despite all differences, had a lot in-common. It was this common ground their friendship was built upon.

*Both had a pure and firm faith.* Though God was the God of all Israel, not everyone in Israel was fully devoted to God. David and Jonathan, however, shared a deep, firm faith and a fine spiritual life. When Jonathan and his young armor bearer attacked the garrison of the philistines (as recorded in 1 Sam. 14), Jonathan did not act as a courageous hero, relying on his human strength, but stormed ahead in faithful surrender to God. He said: "The Lord is the one to grant victory, whether the fighters are many or few" (I Sam. 14:6).<sup>2</sup> This sentence reveals the depth of Jonathan's faith. Without this trust in the Lord, he would have never dared to attack. Judging purely from the great disparity of strength, it would have been sheer

David, too, had a rich spiritual life. As a shepherd, he experienced God's care and protection (1 Sam. 17:37), and in response he loved God and relied on His strength. It was this attitude that helped David overcome Goliath. Confronting him, David said: "I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied" (I Sam. 17:45). This is a confession of trust. Though different in content, David's and Jonathan's confessions in the face of the enemy reveal the same fine and deep-rooted personal faith.

*Both gave praise to God.* Though both Jonathan and David won brilliant victories, we cannot find a single word of pride or arrogance from them, no matter how thoroughly we examine the Bible. On the contrary, giving all credit to God, they were led by their successes into humble adoration.

When Jonathan attacked the Philistines, he said to his young armor bearer: "Come up after me; for the Lord has given them into the hand of Israel" (I Sam. 14:12). We can see how humbly Jonathan disregarded his own role in the fight. Though spoilt with praise and success, he never tried to style himself as a great leader.

In the same manner, David confessed: "The battle is the Lord's" (1 Sam. 17:47). David, too, elevated the Lord and denied himself, showing not a trace of arrogance or boasting.

---

<sup>2</sup> Translation follows the Chinese Bible, not NRSV.

Both men knew that all credit and praise belonged to God and that they had nothing to boast about. Seeing themselves only as tools in the hands of God, they could accept each other with openness and magnanimity. Free from jealousy, they could rejoice in that which God did through the other one. Think about it! If David and Jonathan each had thought "I am the best," how would they have ever been able to "join their hearts together'?"

*Both had a deep concern for the fate of their nation.* Neither Jonathan nor David cared about their personal prestige or the establishment of a power base for themselves. Their only concern was the weal and woe of Israel.

While Saul incessantly plotted to kill David, Jonathan said to Saul: "The king should not sin against his servant David, because he has not sinned against you, and because his deeds have been of good service to you" (I Sam. 19:4). It was Jonathan's deep concern for the best of Israel, not his personal advantage that shone through these words.

As a fugitive on the run, David had several opportunities to kill Saul, and this would have ended his persecution. But he did not lift his hand against him. He refrained from assassination not only out of reverence for "the Lord's anointed" (I Sam. 24:6), but mainly because he did not want to seek his personal advantage at the expense of the country. Though his enemy, Saul was still the country's monarch.

Only because David and Jonathan put the people's benefit first and their own interests last, they were able to unite for the same goal and enter their friendship. This reminds me of the ancient Chinese story in which Lian Po and Lin Xiang were so eager to act in the best interest of their country that they cast aside their enmity and came to terms with each other.

*God was in their midst* The most important reason for the love between Jonathan and David, however, was God himself. God united them. Their friendship did not spring from the consonance of human sympathy but was based on faith and lofty ideals. Their friendship held together by the power of the Lord God alone.

Jonathan said once to David: "The Lord shall be between me and you, and between my descendants and your descendants, forever" (I Sam. 20:42). This sentence reveals that their mutual affection did not rest on material advantages, worldly power or purely on human sympathy. Their obedience to God enabled them to "join their hearts together." It was this common ground on which David and Jonathan could build up such close and true friendship.

As we read the story of Jonathan and David today, and as we carefully examine the contradictions and the common ground between them, we cannot simply rejoice in their friendship. Like a mirror, the story forces us to think about the relationships between our church workers today.

Let us not beat around the bush. Let us rather admit that conflicts between church workers are spreading and tensions within the Church have become increasingly common. In many churches, we do not find the harmony of David and Jonathan but rather the enmity of Saul and David. Christians attack and accuse each other. In this way, the work of the Church is obstructed, the name of the Lord dishonored and the reputation of the Church damaged. A brother once said to me: "What I really dread in the Church is not the hard and tiring work but the trouble of lingering conflicts."

The root of these conflicts can be summed up in a single word - selfishness. If church workers are not united in the Lord, if they do not cultivate peace, tolerance and love but only have their "self" in mind, distrust and suspicion will inevitably emerge.

It would have surprised no one, had Jonathan and David become enemies. Instead, they became intimate friends. Christians are designed to be brothers and sisters. Instead, they become enemies. No wonder that times are getting worse.

*Nanjing Theological Review, Nos. 22-23 (I-2/1995), p. 93.*  
Translated by Gotthard Oblau.

## 21. Faith Cannot Match the Promise – Deng Youde

Text: Jn. 3:16; 2 Cor. 12: 7-10; I Pet. 1: 7; Rev. 13: 1-10

Biblical scholars tell us that many promises of God are recorded in the Bible. We know that every promise of God must be drawn upon in faith. Sometimes it seems that a promise of God cannot be exchanged for anything. This does not mean that God's promise comes to nothing, but rather that our faith cannot match it. What does this mean, that our faith cannot overtake the promise? Let me explain with an illustration: once a servant of the Lord, while proclaiming the message of "promise and faith," wanting to help his listeners understand, took off his watch, saying, "I will give you this watch. Whoever comes up for it first, gets it." People thought he was joking and no one came forward for it. In the end a little child took it away. So we see that though the preacher made a promise, his listeners lacked faith and so they got nothing from the promise. This is what it means to say faith cannot overtake the promise.

I. God's promise of eternal life can only be gained by true faith.

John's Gospel, chapter three, verse 16, makes this very clear: everyone who believes in him may not be lost, but may have eternal life (God's promise). But the faith of many seekers cannot catch up to this promise. Some believe because of healing, some believe because Jesus has brought peace to their hearts - but when they hear that belief in the Lord can lead to blameless eternal life, they cannot believe it. In John, chapter six, we see a sad picture: when Jesus says to those following him, "Do not work for the food that cannot last," he who "eats my flesh and drinks my blood" (meaning to accept the Lord's grace) shall have eternal life, their response is that this is too difficult, who can listen?

And many of them left.

Once two Sisters were having a discussion. One asked the other: "Do you firmly believe that you have (already) been saved?" And she replied, "How can I say that I have been saved? Wouldn't that be too arrogant? What if God doesn't want me?" The other said, "You do not dare to believe that you have been saved, but I do not dare not to believe in God's promise (or word)."

Faith has at least two levels of meaning: acceptance and commitment. Acceptance means recognition of the facts that Jesus died on the cross for me, was buried for me, rose, ascended and will come again; my sin has been washed clean in his blood, my transgressions have been redeemed and I have been freely justified. Commitment means giving everything of oneself to the Lord, uniting with him. Without true faith there is no true acceptance and dedication. I saw this story in a magazine: a highly skilled acrobat was walking the high wire without a safety net and the high wire was strung between two cliffs across a valley. He performed three feats. For the first, he walked across himself; for the second, he turned somersaults; and for the third, he carried another person across

on his back. For the first two feats, there was thunderous applause from the spectators. And he asked them whether they believed he could perform the third successfully. They all shouted "Yes!" And he said, "All right then! Since you all believe I can do it, please give me your cooperation. One of you come forward to be carried on my back." When he said this, there wasn't a peep out of the spectators, they all hung their heads and wouldn't look at him. In the end no one dared to respond to his call. He had to carry one of the other members of his troupe across and they made it steadily and safely to the other side. Afterwards, he said sadly to the spectators: "When you said I could do it a moment ago, you were lying." Sisters and Brothers, is your faith before God like this'?

## 2. The grace the Lord promises can only be gained through faith.

In chapter twelve of 2 Corinthians we see how God gave Paul a thorn in the flesh to guard against pride because of the great revelation that he had received. He prayed three times for this thorn to be removed. However, the answer to his prayers was not the removal of the thorn, but rather "my grace is sufficient for you." And through this he saw: weakness was his opportunity to gain God's promise. This promise was given not only to Paul, but to all Brothers and Sister who walk in the way.

This sufficient grace has borne witness to the fact that God's promises do not come to nothing -whether for the people of Israel, for Elijah, or for the many of God's sons and daughters here and abroad, yesterday and today. He is a trustworthy Lord. But we of little faith always feel that this promise is not quite enough, as if our own troubles were exceptionally great and the Lord had no way to solve them. Or we think that the Lord's grace is sufficient for others, but not for me, because my cross is particularly heavy. But it is not that your troubles are so great, or your cross so very heavy, or that the Lord's grace is insufficient. It is that your faith cannot catch up to the promise. God's grace is so abundant, yet you cannot use it, do not dare to use it. You are as pitiful as the bird and fish of the fable: the one, fearing that the air will be used up, does not dare to breathe, while the other, fearing the water in the sea will be used up, does not dare to drink.

Only through grace can we be saved, walk in the way, live the life victorious, serve the Lord. We must not misinterpret God's grace and waste it. We firmly believe that God's grace, though it does not help us to escape the storm, yet helps us to overcome it. It does not keep danger from us, but brings us safely to the other side. Therefore God's loyal servant proclaims: "That is why I am quite content with my weaknesses, and with insults, hardships, persecutions and the agonies I go through for Christ's sake. For it is when I am weak that I am strong" (2 Cor. 12: 10).

I know a brother in the Lord who, when he graduated from seminary and was on his way to his place of work, prayed earnestly to the Lord to know God's will and all the road before him. But the answer to his prayer was not what the road ahead would be like, but these precious words, "My grace is sufficient for you" (God's promise). After nearly ten years of service, though he has experienced many times of suffering and hardship, twists and turns, this promise has not gone unfulfilled and he has enjoyed its blessings all along.

### 3. The glory of God's promise requires faith that can stand the test.

As an apostle, Peter was tested. From his experience, he tells us: "when Jesus Christ is revealed, your faith will have been tested (the essential condition for the human side) ... and then you will have praise and glory and honor" (the promise on God's side). This is to say, that in order to gain praise and glory and honor, you must have faith that can stand the test.

Unfortunately, some members of the body say: I just want to be saved. That's enough. I don't want glory or rewards. People who say this have probably forgotten God's purpose in calling them and saving them. God's mind, God's love, far surpasses our ability to measure them. "He called those he intended for this; those he called he justified, and with those he justified he shared his glory" (Rom. 8:30). Do you see? This is why God has called us. In the end it is because he wants us to gain glory. Only this can satisfy the heart of the Heavenly Father. Otherwise he will not be satisfied, cannot be satisfied. But God's glory cannot be given in vain or unconditionally; thus he has given a model and that model is Jesus. He wants us to model ourselves on his Son, before we can share in his glory. The Father does not want to see us copy worldly models (the original meaning of world is mold, everyone is formed the same in this mold). God wants us to be molded on Christ's model

Who will gain praise and glory and honor when Christ is revealed? Those who stand the test today - those who stand the tests of environment and the times, of poverty and wealth, honor and humility, money, desire and power. All these are tests of your faith, virtue and life, if you pass them you will be worthy of honor in the kingdom. On the day they receive their reward, one cannot but praise God's righteousness, to agree that they are deserving of honor Abraham was called the father of the faith and Job the model of endurance of suffering because they were worthy, they each had a faith which could stand the test. One whose faith cannot stand the test will lose that glory.

A Shanghai magazine carried the story of a young woman being trained as a swimmer by the famous coach Ma Junren. His strictness is well known. This swimmer had a lot of potential. Once when she hadn't swum well, Coach Ma gave her a dressing down in front of everyone. She was thin-skinned and went to complain to someone who had won an Olympic gold medal. He listened and laughed, saying: "So you got a lesson, so what? I've been beaten! If Ma decides to scold you it's because he thinks well of you, it proves that you're a diamond in the rough, that you have the potential for a gold medal." When the young woman heard this she suddenly understood and was able to smile. This little story struck me deeply; all my tears and complaints were due to ignorance. In fact, all the tests you endure today are your training to be a king in the kingdom. When we understand all this we can only worship and praise God.

The value of gold is a result of its tempering by fire. Our impurities are so many they must be tempered. Every tempering is a great test, after every test we have a faith more precious than gold, and this faith can gain you glory and honor, because this is a faith which cannot be shaken.

4. When the world is in darkness and the promise delayed, then is the greatest faith revealed.

Revelation 13: 10 shows us the following scene: the beast was doing as it liked and nothing prevailed against it; it blasphemed the Lord and no actions of the Lord were seen, it did battle with the saints and prevailed. It was given authority over every tribe and people and nation, every king and warrior. The rich acknowledged its power. This was truly a time when the forces of darkness were at the height of their power. If you and I found ourselves in such a place and little, we would be at our wit's end, unable to find a way out and disheartened, perhaps we would cry and curse heaven: Why? But the Spirit says: "Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints" (Rev. 13:10). [emphasis added] Please pay attention to the meaning and power of that word - here - for this is where your endurance and faith come to the fore.

God's servant Paul was in prison while the Church was being persecuted. In such a situation of oppression, when darkness covered the land, the young Timothy could only see the situation surrounding him and was cowardly and afraid, completely without hope. But God's servant, in the midst of his hardship and suffering saw - suffering is not the final word, the final word is the revelation of Christ and the coining of his kingdom. And thus he could write the following words in a letter to his true child in the Spirit: "In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I solemnly urge you: proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable ..." (2 Tim. 4: 1-2). And: "(the gospel) for which I suffer hardship, even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But the word of God is not chained" (2 Tim. 2: 9). See! What great faith this is! What stirring words. How they move our hearts.

Church history tells us that in the three hundred years after Christ the Church faced a dozen major persecutions and numerous Christians before us shed blood, even lost their heads, but still held resolutely to their faith and would not recant. In Church history the Middle Ages are generally called the Dark Ages. But we are amazed that while on the one hand the Church was at its darkest and most corrupt, on the other hand we find the saints with the greatest endurance and faith. Truly this great witness has never been surpassed. During the times of suffering in our own Church, though justice was turned on its head, truth and falsehood mixed up, Bibles were burned and the sheep had no shepherds, still there were seven thousand special souls who believed the tire of the gospel would yet temper China.

It has been some two thousand years since the Lord promised to come again. How many burning souls wait eagerly for that day to come. They have been waiting since the first century and have waited through all the centuries right up to the late twentieth century: they have worn out their eyes and their vitals, waited in suffering and exhaustion, but they have not yet seen the day. Lord, have you forgotten your promise, or are you delaying it deliberately, or are we not sufficiently prepared? Why do you not yet come to take us home? Today the lambs of your flock are weak and in retreat, they toil



bitterly in the fields, they watch the workers' jealous squabbles, they see the indifference of the Church. Heresy and sin are on the rise and it is difficult to find the splendor of a true Church. You say to wait for the Church to mature, but I reply that I do not know how much it will mature even if we wait another two thousand years. You say wait for the harvest to ripen and I ask when we may gather it in.

The darker the night, the nearer it is to dawn. While the virgins were napping, the cry came at midnight. The Lord will certainly come again one day and the kingdom of this world will certainly be transformed into the kingdom of Christ, here is the great faith!

Let me use the great saints of a dark time, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, as representatives of the great faith of ordinary people. When the nation was fallen and they were taken away into exile and were faced with the king who ruled the world, they dared to reply: "I will never serve your gods, nor worship the golden idol you have set up." They dared to reply this way because they believed in God's great power to save them and submitted to God's authority not to save them. Saved or not, they did not bow to the powers of darkness, but would rather be cast into the fiery furnace and be heroically justified than to worship an idol and live. This is great faith, perfect faith, which calls forth our veneration.

Collected Sermons, No. 33, p. 44.