

# CHINESE THEOLOGICAL REVIEW 2001, Vol. 15

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## From the Editor

A great deal continues to be written on the need for and importance of theological reconstruction or renewal in the Chinese Protestant Church. Many of the essays included in this issue relate this to various aspects of the church's life. Wang Aiming, commenting on the nature and purpose of the movement, notes that its significance is theological and ecclesiological, as well as social and political. Other articles explore the nature of theology and how theology changes in response to social change. Kan Baoping considers what theological renewal can mean for theological education and church development.

The discussion of theological reconstruction leads to its important corollary: adaptation of Christianity to socialist society. The term "socialist society" is generally used in preference to "socialism." In calling for theological reconstruction the authors included in this issue stress that faith does not change (it does not become socialist). The emphasis is on theology changing in response to the fact of a socialist society and to changes in society under socialism. These changes include the policy of reform and openness with its greater exposure to the world and its economic reforms, as well as the attendant challenges people face in a rapidly changing society.

These essays, along with four essays grouped here as Feminist Perspectives, suggest that theologians, church leaders, pastors, and teachers of theology have responded to the call for theological renewal with an emphasis on a theological consideration of problems facing the Chinese church. In February 2000, a Discussion on Women's Work and Theological Reconstruction was held in Shanghai. The focus was on a consideration of feminist theology and hermeneutics, seeking the meaning of biblical teachings on women for Chinese women today, through a consideration of feminist theological issues grounded in the Bible. Essays from this Discussion can be found in *Nanjing Theological Review*, nos. 2 and 3 (2000) and *Yanjing Journal of Theology*, no. 1 (2000).

The necessity for greater attention to theology and a greater diversity of viewpoints continues to be contrasted to the conservative theological attitudes that presently hold sway among large numbers of Chinese Christians, especially in rural areas. The 21st century requires the Christian church to express itself in a language people today can understand and identify with. Theological renewal is also linked to the work of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement in running the church well. As the TSPM celebrated its 50th anniversary in September 2000, theological reconstruction was described as the development and deepening of Three-Self.

Academic research and publications in the study of Christianity continue to flourish. Zhuo Xinping, director of the Institute for Christian Studies and of the Institute of World Religions in Beijing, and editor of a new journal, *Study of Christianity*, provides an overview of the state of Christian studies in China, noting developments both in the academy and in the Protestant and Catholic churches. He does not limit his focus to mainland China, but to efforts in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Macau as well. He hopes for greater sharing and communication with scholars and institutes all across China, as well as "new fruits" from multi- and cross-disciplinary research in the mainland.

Prof. Luo Zhenfang, long-time professor of New Testament at Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, a gentle soul loved and respected by his students and well known in church circles

overseas, died September 22, 2000, at the age of 81. He is remembered here in two tributes by colleagues.

Contents of the *Yanjing Journal of Theology* and the *Nanjing Theological Review* for the year 2000 have been included for those who do not have ready access to the originals. Unfortunately, it was

not possible to include updated church statistics in this issue. These should be available following the 7th National Chinese Christian Conference scheduled for November 2001 and will be included in volume 16 of the *Chinese Theological Review*.

I am grateful to the authors of the essays that appear here for allowing their work to be shared through translation, and apologize if the resultant translation does not do justice to their ideas. I would like to thank Elisabeth Wickeri for her assistance with translation in this issue. Throughout the journal, the Chinese term *lianghui* refers to the "two bodies" - the China Christian Council (CCC) and the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of Protestant Churches in China (TSPM). The English title of Bishop Ting's book, *Love Never Ends*, is used when referring to either the Chinese or English edition. Quotations from this work are taken from the English edition, and page references in translations have been changed to reflect this. In some cases, direct quotations have been changed to indirect quotations where the English source was either unavailable or unidentifiable, and some notes have been deleted.

The editor and publishers would like to thank the Council for World Mission for a three-year ecumenical project grant made to the China Christian Council for the partial support of this journal. As editor, I would like to thank the Foundation for Theological Education in South East Asia, Dr. Marvin Hoff and Mrs. Joanne Hoff for their continuing support.

Janice Wickeri San Anselmo

## The Study of Christianity in China Today - ZHUO XINPING

Research in Christianity by Chinese scholars began in the late Ming and early Qing dynasties. The debates between missionaries and the Chinese literati of the time over the relationship between Christianity and Chinese thought and culture—Christ vs. Confucius, orthodoxy vs. heresy, Chinese vs. barbarian, along with the Rites Controversy and the Term Question—both stimulated and influenced the study and assessment of Christianity, on many levels and from many perspectives. But its status as an independent discipline in the humanities and social sciences and as the interdisciplinary field of modern religious studies is a 20th-century development. In the first half of the 20th century, the Christian denominations in China and their seminaries initiated some basic research and theoretical inquiries. Historians at some research organizations and institutions of higher learning undertook important textual research. In the 1950s and 1960s, scholarly circles in China engaged in related research in history, of philosophy, intercultural exchange, and investigation of social conditions. Since the late 1970s, contemporary studies in Christianity in China have entered the stage of systematic enquiry and substantive achievements have been realized.

### *1 Organization of Chinese Studies of Christianity*

Organizationally, the study of Christianity in China can be roughly divided into four systems: specialized research institutes engaged in the study of Christianity; the Christian studies bodies of government departments; related departments at tertiary educational institutions and the religious studies institutes and centers for the study of Christianity that they founded; and important schools and research bodies of the Chinese Christian churches.

The main components of the system of specialized institutes for religious research are the research institutes under the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and their counterparts at the provincial and municipal level. They have more personnel and their research is more systematic and comprehensive. Of these, the most important is the Institute of World Religions of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, founded in 1964 (in 1977 the name was changed to the Institute of World Religions of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences). Research in Christianity is led by its Office of Research in Christianity and the Institute for Christian Studies. In addition, the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences set up its Religious Studies Institute in 1980, the Religious Studies Institute of the Yunnan Provincial Academy of Social Sciences was established in 1984, and the Institute for the Study of Historical Religion of the Shaanxi Provincial Academy of Social Sciences in 1995. All of these have initiated research in Christianity.

The religious studies bodies of government departments rely mainly on the religious studies center of the Religious Affairs Bureau of the State Council, whose emphasis is on the current state and development of Christianity. It publishes the monthly *Religion and World*, providing a great deal of news and information for the study of contemporary Christianity.

Related departments in tertiary educational institutions and their religious research institutes whose research involves Christianity include the religious studies departments of Beijing

University and Wuhan University, the Religious Studies Institute of Nanjing University, the Religious Studies Institute of Fujian Normal University, the Christian Culture Research Institute of People's University (Beijing), the Institute for the Study of Christianity at Fudan University (Shanghai), the Institute for the Study of Christianity at Zhejiang University, the Central China Normal University's Institute on the History of Church-Run Universities in China, Zhengzhou University's Institute of Religious Studies, the Beijing Foreign Languages University's Institute for the Study of Foreign Sinology, Shandong University's Institute for the Study of Modern Chinese Christianity (which became the Shandong University Institute of Religious Studies in 1998), Zhongshan University's Institute for the Study of Religious Culture, the Institute for the Study of Christian Culture at Shaanxi Normal University, and related research bodies at other institutions, such as the Yanjing Research Institute, the Matteo Ricci group of the Ming History Association, etc. The hallmark of these institutes is that they can do relatively concentrated concentrate research in a field or specialized topic that is fairly profound and concrete. But most of them de not deal comprehensively with Christianity.

Christian schools and research bodies were more numerous in the first half of the twentieth century; many Christian studies institutes at church universities were quite outstanding. Most Christian research bodies in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau since the 1950s are of this type. Before 1949, there were about twenty Christian universities in China. On the Protestant side, these included:

Yenching University (1916)	Zhejiang University (1910)
Tung Wu University (1901)	Lingnan University (1916)
St. John's University (1905)	Hwa Nan Women's Academy. (1914)
Jinling University (1911)	
Hujiang University (1915)	Huaxi United Univ. (1910)
Cheeloo University (1917)	Xiangya Medical Academy (1914)
Jinling Women's Univ. (1915)	
Huazhong University (1910)	Beijing United Medical College (1906)
Fujian United Univ. (1918)	
San Yu University (1927)	Wuhan Wenhua School of Librarianship (1929)

Catholic-run universities included Zhendan University (Aurora) (1903), Jingu University (1922), which became the Tianjin Academy of Industry and Commerce in 1933, Fujen University (1925), and Aurora Women's Academy (1937). These universities, to a greater or lesser degree, did undertake some study of Christianity, but in a very unsystematic and unspecialized way. Additionally, the Christian churches ran various levels of theological schools to train pastors and clergy and to engage in theology, with more focus on materials for theological education, publishing commentaries on the Bible, and issues of church development and theological construction.

In the early 1950s, Catholics had about twenty seminaries for training clergy and engaging in theological research. Since the early 1980s, the Chinese Catholic Church has reopened seven general seminaries and four novitiates, including the Chinese Catholic Seminary (1983), the Shanghai Sheshan Seminary (1982), the Beijing Catholic Seminary (1982), the Shenyang Catholic Seminary (1983), the Sichuan Seminary (1983), the Wuhan Zhongnan Seminary

(1983), Hebei Catholic Seminary (1984), the Shanxi Catholic Seminary (1985), the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region Catholic Seminary (1985), the Shandong Sacred Seminary and the Xi'an Catholic Seminary (1991), among others.

On the Protestant side, in 1917, there were 48 male seminaries and 16 female seminaries nationwide. In 1949, there were still 48; of these, the China Baptist Seminary, Jinling (Nanking) Seminary, and Yanjing (Beijing) Seminary had the highest cultural and academic level. In 1952, Jinling (Nanjing) Union Theological Seminary was established, a union of twelve existing seminaries:

Nanking Seminary, Jinling Women's Seminary, Shanghai Central Anglican Seminary, Shanghai Baptist Seminary, Hangzhou China Seminary, Wuxi North China Seminary, Jinan Jilu (Cheeloo) Seminary, Zhangzhou China Seminary, Fuzhou Union Seminary, Ningpo Trinity Bible College, Zhenjiang Baptist Bible College, and Jinan Mingdao Bible College.

In 1953, Yanjing Union Theological Seminary was established, uniting eleven former seminaries: the original School of Religion of Yenching(Yanjing) University, Beijing Seminary, United Women's Holy Word Academy, Beijing Holiness Church Seminary, Shenyang Northeast Seminary, Henan Kaifeng Inland China Baptist Theological Seminary, Shekou Lutheran Seminary, Hunan Bible College, Beijing Assemblies of God Truth Academy, Huazhong United Theological Seminary, and Beijing Xiangshan Monastery. In 1961, Yanjing Union Theological Seminary joined with Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, forming China's only remaining Protestant seminary at the time, based in Nanjing.

Beginning in the early 1980s, the Chinese Protestant churches now run seventeen seminaries:

- Jinling (Nanjing) Union Theological Seminary (reopened in 1982)
- Northeast Christian Seminary (1982)
- Zhejiang Seminary (1984)
- Sichuan Seminary (1984)
- East China Seminary (1984)
- Zhongnan Seminary (1985)
- Yanjing Seminary (1986)
- Anhui Seminary (1986)
- Guangzhou Union Seminary (1986)
- Shandong Seminary (1987)
- Shaanxi Bible School (1988)
- Yunnan Seminary (1989)

Additionally, Catholic seminaries and research institutions in Taiwan include Fu Jen (Furen) University, which in 1992 set up an Institute of Religious Studies, the first department of religion in a university in Taiwan, the Ricci Center (1966), Luwen University Verbiest Cultural Association, Piyue Seminary, Taiwan General Seminary, Sacred Heart Seminary, North Regional Catholic Union Novitiate. Protestants have corresponding bodies at Central (Zhongyuan) University, Tunghai (Donghai) University, CCK University, Taiwan University, National Qinghua (Tsinghua) University and Politics University. Taiwan Seminary, Taizhong Taiwan Seminary, Taiwan Baptist Seminary, Zhongfu Institute of Religious Studies, Christianity

and China Research Center (formerly "Chinese Church Research Center") are also important for the study of Christianity.

In Hong Kong, Catholic research bodies include, the Holy Spirit Study Center, the Diocesan Center for Teaching and Research, Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, Catholic Progressive Society, the Catholic Bible Seminary, the Hong Kong Catholic Bible Society, the Hong Kong Chinese Theology Society, etc. On the Protestant side there are denominational educational and research institutions that include Hong Kong Baptist University, the Hong Kong China Theology Society, the Chinese University of Hong Kong Department of Religion and Philosophy, the Theology Division and Chung Chi (Chongji) College, the Tao Fong Shan Christian Center, the Christian Study Center on Chinese Religion & Culture, the China Graduate School of Theology, the China Evangelical Seminary, China Seminary, the Christian Culture Study Society, Evangel Seminary, Hong Kong Seminary, Hong Kong Baptist Theological Seminary, the Lutheran Theological Seminary, Southeast Asia Graduate School of Theology, Bethel Bible Seminary, the Alliance Bible Seminary, China Bible Seminary, St. John's Seminary, China Baptist Seminary, Graduate School of Christian Education, Lingnan Academy, etc. And in Macau, the Macau Catholic Bible Society, the Macau Education Society, the Diocesan Society for the Propagation of the Faith, the Macau Christian Union, Macau Bible School, also undertake more systematic studies in Protestantism.

In addition to universities and seminaries, there are Chinese church bodies that specialize in research work, such as Beijing's Catholic Center for the Study of Theology, the Shanghai Diocesan Guangqi Society, the Taiwan Ricci Society, the Tao Fong Shan Christian Study Center on Chinese Religion & Culture in Hong Kong, the Christian Center for the Study of Chinese Religion and Culture, etc.

In addition to academic bodies specializing in the study of Protestant Christianity, there are some scholars in research bodies in the social and natural sciences who devote most of their energy to the study of various aspects of Christianity; for example, in the Institute of Philosophy, Institute of History, Institute of World History, Institute of Modern History, Institute of Sociology, Institute of Nationality Studies, of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences; the Institute of the history of Natural Sciences at the Chinese Academy of Science; the Institute of History, the Institute of Philosophy of the Shanghai CASS, the Departments of History and Philosophy at Fudan University in Shanghai, the Department of History at Huadong Normal University, the Department of History at Nankai University, the Henan Academy of Literature, and the Institute of Philosophy at Hubei University.

## ***2 The Contemporary State of Religious Studies in China***

Chinese scholars' study of religion for the most part includes the history of world Christianity, Christian theology, philosophy, aesthetics, ethical thought, the study of the Bible, the history of Christianity in China, the study of the major denominations and their mission boards and missionary religious orders, the current state and trends in the development of Christianity, the study of Christian organizations and famous personages, the study of Christian art and culture, and so on. In these studies, the emphasis is on the history of Christianity in China and its current status, the point of departure being a comprehensive history of Christianity in

China: Nestorianism in the Tang dynasty, the Yelikewen in the Yuan, Catholicism during the Ming and Qing dynasties, the development of Protestantism in China, Christianity since the Republican era, Chinese attitudes toward Christianity and the attack on and defense of religion (including "missionary cases," the anti-Christian Movement, and so on), the relationship between Christianity and Chinese culture, the history of Christian colleges in China, the indigenization of Christianity and the "Three-Self" Patriotic Movement, along with catalogues of historical documents relating to Christianity in China. But overall, the study of Christianity in China is still at the stage of collecting materials, individual case studies, and introductory historical studies. At present, some monographs and booklets have appeared, such as Lin Jinshui's *Ricci and China* (1996); Li Lanqin's *Biography of Johann Adam Schall Von Bell* (1995); Sun Shangyang's *Matteo Ricci and Xu Guangqi* (1993), with mention of Ricci, Johann Adam Schall Von Bell, Ferdinand Verbiest, Xu Guangqi, Yang Tingjun, Wang Wei, Ai Rulue, Wei Kuangguo, J. Leighton Stuart, Y.T. Wu, T.C. Chao and others; the "Rites Controversy," the "Term Question," "independence," "indigenization," etc. There are a number of outlines of the historical development of Christianity in China, such as Xu Zongze's *Introduction to the History of Catholic Missions in China* (1938); Wang Zhixin's *Outline History of Christianity in China* (1940); Yang Senfu's *History of Chinese Christianity* (1968); and Gu Weimin's *Christianity and Society in Modern China* (1996). What is lacking is a general work of the history of Christianity in China: comprehensive in scope, well-substantiated, and setting forth a fresh point of view.

In addition, in the discussion of issues around the developmental trend of Chinese Christianity, the terminology for the "sinicization of Christianity" or "indigenization" is not uniform, and bias on both sides is marked. One group believes that the integrity of the Chinese church and its theology demands that it rid itself of the influence in the modern era of western missionaries and their theological thinking, methods and language, and engage with Chinese culture in order to realize their goal of an "indigenous church" or "indigenous theology."

The other side feels that the very terms "sinicization" or "indigenization" in themselves are misunderstandings of the true nature of Christianity. In their view, Christianity in China is not a question of "sinicization" or "indigenization": the idea of some sort of '-ization' is inimical to the meaning of the ecumenical and transcendent nature of Christianity. And thus, they suggest that an understanding of communicating the Christian message should have a holistic basis. They propose to substitute "contextualization" and "mother-tongue theology" for the term indigenization, and in the "context" of China, put their efforts into the construction and development of "theology in Chinese." Of course, many scholars have reminded them, as they embark on this idealistic course, not to forget that Christianity, in its east-west dissemination and north-south development, is replete with instances of "cloaking itself in culture" and "syncretism." Christianity was introduced into China from the West, and its attendant Western cultural coloration is quite obvious. So-called "sinicization" is precisely the opposite of its western-ness, and in itself it suggests holding both sides at once, a very open attitude.

Compared to the study of Christianity overseas, especially in the West, that in 20th century China is on the level of a second-year course in religious studies. Usually, the history of Christianity, Christian scriptures, the history of Christian thought and the study of Chinese Christianity contain what overseas would be the various branches of the discipline: study of church history, dogmatics, religious philosophy, biblical theology, practical theology,



evangelical theology, canon law and church governance, study of ancient texts, and Christian art and literature. Thus, there is nothing particularly theological about the main stream in mainland Chinese studies of Christianity in the latter half of the 20th century; rather these are inquiries into the many aspects of the humanities and the social sciences. The special features of Chinese studies of Christianity include the historical development of Christianity, Christian theological thinking, the history of Chinese Christianity and church education, the study of missionary cases, Christian culture, the current situation of Christianity, etc. The study of the history of Christianity includes general history and period histories, the history of global evangelism and regional developments, monasticism, and religious orders, along with the history of Vatican City and the corresponding opening up of study of the papacy. Several short histories and relevant works have been published, but there is an absence of comprehensive histories. The church histories that have been published are roughly put together outlines. We lack a multi-volume history of the history of global Christianity that is clearly argued and well researched.

The study of medieval Christianity, as well as the modern and contemporary periods is very weak. Period studies focus on the history of the 16th century religious reformation, and the fruits of these are fairly numerous. The history of world evangelism and the history of regional developments have coalesced into the study of evangelism and historical development of Chinese Christianity. It takes shape around Ricci and the history of the Jesuit missionaries in the Ming and Qing dynasties. This has opened up the study of east-west intellectual and cultural exchange, for example, Xu Minglong's *Pioneers of East- West Cultural Exchange* (1993); Xiong Yuezhi' s *Western Learning in China and Late Qing Society* (1994); Sun Shangyang's *Christianity and Late-Ming Confucianism* (1994); Lin Jinshui's *Ricci and China Zhang Kai Zhe's Pantoja and China A Study of the Jesuit Policy of "Assimilation"* (1997). The study of east-west social and political clashes has formed around the study of modern missionary cases, for example: *Research into Missionary Cases in Modern China* (1987); Zhang Li and Liu Jiantang's *History of Missionary Cases in China* (1987); and, in particular, Chen Zenghui et al of the History Department at Fujian Normal University who edited a collection of missionary case materials, published as *Series of Modern Chinese Historical Materials*. The first three volumes of six of *Late Ming Missionary Cases*, were collated and edited in collaboration with the Palace Museum, with Zhu Jinpu as chief editor, and published 1996-1998 by Zhonghua Press. There are also efforts underway to systematically write annals of (Chinese) Christianity on the national and local levels, for example, Zhuo Xinping's *Annals of Christianity and Judaism* (1998), which is part of the *General Annals of Chinese Culture Series*.

The movement for theological reconstruction in Chinese Christianity has attracted the attention of scholars in China and abroad. Its latest explorations and studies include Wang Weifan's *Chinese Theology and Its Cultural Sources* (1997); and *Selected Writings of K.H Ting* [English translation, *Love Never Ends*] (1998) published by Jiangsu Translation Press. The study of the history of monasticism and religious orders in China lays particular emphasis on the Jesuits, especially Jesuits in China. The work of a French scholar, *Biographies and Bibliographies of the Jesuits in China* has been translated several times in 20th century China; in a single volume by Feng Chengjun published in 1939 by the Commercial Press in Changsha, in a complete translation edited by Hao Zhenhua and Lu Junling, published by Zhonghua Books in 1995; a translation by Mei Chengqi and Mei Chengjun entitled *Biographies of Jesuits in China in the Ming and Qing (1551-1773)*, was published in 1997 by the Shanghai Diocese Guangqi

Press. Studies of the other religious orders, however, are scarce; nothing systematic has appeared. Translations of historical studies of the papacy appeared in the 1960s, for example, Shi Ziyu's selection and translation of *A History of the Papacy* (1962). Since the 1980s, discussion of the topic has gradually increased, but these inquiries have been extremely simplistic and unsystematic and therefore need further strengthening. Studies of the Vatican have concentrated on contemporary Sino-Vatican relations. Relevant studies by Hong Kong scholars include Lin Ruiqi's *Reflections on the Modern History of Chinese Catholicism* (1995); Liang Jiefen's *Chinese Communist-Vatican Relations, 1976-1994* (1995), etc. Mainland scholars like Ren Yanli have also begun to open up the study of Sino-Vatican relations.

Inquiries into Christian theology and philosophy overseas are generally subsumed into theological-philosophical studies in Christian circles. Topics include dogmatic theology, systematic theology, foundational theology, history of dogmatics, history of theology, Christian philosophy, history of Christian thought, etc. Theological studies overseas place comparatively more stress on the construction of theological systems, the distinctions among theological schools and the history of theology. Most of those that are more influential are works by systematic theologians works on the history of Christian thought. Inquiries by Chinese scholars in this area began with the translation and introduction of foreign theological works. Original work in the strict sense in this area actually began in the 1980s. Though Chinese scholars have published some monographs and essays on certain topics or thinkers, there is no systematic work of the history of Christian thought to recommend. The latest development in this area are works which emphasize contemporary theological trends: Zhuo Xinping's *Contemporary Western Protestant Theology* and his *Contemporary Western Catholic Theology* (both 1998) engage in a profound and objective discussion, their systematic, inclusive research, based on both a subjective and objective understanding, has caused a breakthrough in this area. Several works have appeared to fill the void in the study of theological philosophy of the Middle Ages. Among these, Zhao Dunhua's *1500 Years of Christian Philosophy* has attracted scholarly attention. Along with the new scholarly examination and reassessment of society and thought in the Middle Ages that took place in the latter half of the 20th century, studies of Christian philosophy in the Middle Ages by Chinese scholars will be more profound and detailed, with new attainments in sources, understanding, and viewpoints. In the study of Christian theology and philosophy, in the areas of theory of God, Christology, ethical views, social viewpoint, political theology, homeland theology or contextualized theology, animated and intense discussion and writing have taken place among Chinese scholars. Their traditional interest in medieval Scholasticism and neo-Thomism has broadened to include new areas and inquiries into hermeneutics, theological anthropology, and postmodern theology.

The main accomplishment in biblical studies in the 20th century in China has been the work of church scholars in the translation of the Bible: T.C. Chao, Cheng Zhiyi, Li Rongfang, Xu Dingxin, Luo Zhenfang, and Wang Shengyin have all produced studies and translations. For example, T.C. Chao's *Life of Jesus* (1935); Li Rongfang's *Guide to Study of the Old Testament* (1948); Cheng Zhiyi's *Word Studies in the Text of the New Testament* (1956); Luo Zhenfang's *Manual of the New Testament* (1990); Xu Dingxin's *Guide to the Old Testament* (1991); and Wang Shengyin's translation of *The Dead Sea Scrolls* (1995) have been original contributions to the study of the Bible. Zhu Weizhi has made a name for himself in the field of the Bible as literature. Catholic scholars in Hong Kong and Taiwan, through the *Studium Biblicum*

Franciscanum, have edited *Dictionary of the Bible* (1974) and are widely influential in the area of bible research. Since the 1980s, in the humanities and social sciences, new talents in biblical studies such as Liang Gong and others have appeared. Because of the difficulty of using the ancient biblical languages and the inconvenience of using original materials, in the branch areas of New Testament, Old Testament, pseudopigrapha, Dead Sea scrolls and so on, Chinese scholars are mainly active in translation and introductory research. Where Chinese scholarly activities differ from those of scholars overseas, is that, rather than doing textual criticism, archaeological excavations, and terminological commentary, they concentrate more on the social and cultural influence of the Bible. Discussion focuses on Bible history, evolution, literature, translation, and research from the standpoint of the greater cultural milieu in which religion exists.

In late 20th century, Chinese scholars have paid special attention to the study of the sociology of Christianity, which they view as an important component of the study of the sociology of religion. Originally, the sociology and psychology of Christianity, pastoral theology, Christian liturgy, and phenomenological studies were part of western Christian practical theology, and were related to the study of evangelism, comparative religion, and dialogical theology. Here Chinese scholars have broken the bonds of theology while extending the scope of sociology. Canon law is composed of Catholic legal codes and legal history. Since the 1980s, Chinese legal scholars and religious scholars have taken a few steps in this field and Chinese Catholic circles have also fostered their own church scholars who will specialize in the field. Besides the systematic translation and objective assessment of works of theological theory, the work of Chinese scholars in ancient and historical texts includes the collection and compilation of historical materials of Chinese churches, and especially the compiling and study of resources relating to missionaries to China and missionary cases, and the biographies and papers of famous church personages. In addition, the study of Christian culture, art, and literature has become a hot topic among Chinese scholars. This includes the Christian cultural tradition, literary works, legends and myths, Christian painting, sculpture, architecture, and specialized studies in the fields of music and art. But there is an absence of links and contacts in terms of course planning and comprehensive inquiry among these cross- and multidisciplinary studies. They give a single angle, and thus have not yet entered the ideal realm of "inclusivity."

Viewing the situation of Chinese studies of Christianity in the 20th century as a whole, we have a new force coming to the fore. The particularity and the uniqueness of the existence and development of Chinese Christianity lends to Chinese studies of Christianity their own unique meaning, such that it is able to take its own seat of importance in contemporary research in Christianity. Furthermore, in terms of the relationship between Christianity and Chinese culture, the dialogue with traditional Chinese thought, and the meaning and influence of Christianity on the modernization process in China, Chinese scholars have the possibility of being in prime position, on the cutting edge.

Under the prerequisite of systematization and regularization, the various fields and branches of studies of Christianity in China are developing along a path of comparative studies that reveal its special characteristics. Systematization and regularization require that Chinese scholars in related research bodies to fill the void in all fields of research in Christian studies, and to make a breakthrough in major research. Its special Chinese character is apparent in its grasp of what is

suitable for China, in the urgent need for practical leading edge topics and hot issues, especially for strengthening research in cross-disciplinary areas. For this, the original, leading edge topics that Chinese academics are developing at the turn of the century include the development of contemporary Christian theology; comparative religions and inter-religious dialogue; Christianity and world peace and environmental protection; historical change and development in social and political relations of western Christianity; Christianity and the formation of national cultures and economic development; Christianity and modernization and the postmodern issue; the history and current situation of Chinese Christianity; the compilation of historical resources of Chinese churches; compilation and research into documents related to Matteo Ricci; selection and editing of important Christian documents; research in the Dead Sea scrolls; a new assessment of medieval Christian thought and culture; theological commentaries, etc. The important theoretical questions and practical hot issues these touch on include the modernization and contextualization of Christianity; ecumenism and the movement for unity; the relationship between Christianity and postmodernism; contemporary Catholic social theory and practical concerns; the Christian approach toward socio-politics, the ecology, human rights, feminism, race, etc.; the church and the secularization of society, the pluralistic development of contemporary fundamentalism, evangelicalism; liberalism; Christian conservatism and the Protestant right; the meaning of western theology and its philosophical metaphysical system, its application, and a new assessment; Christian ultimate concerns and real life; Christianity and regional development; and the analysis, prospects, and forecast for 21st century Christianity.

Chinese scholarship in the late 20th century has also strengthened its study of the major foundations of Christianity. Its emphasis and field of vision is on materials related to the general history of Christianity; introductions to Christianity; history of Christian thought; history of Christian ethics; Christian cultural history; history of Christian spirituality; historical Christian documents; history of biblical research; the Vatican and the history of the papacy. In the process of opening up important research with Chinese characteristics, the history of the development of Chinese Christianity; the evolution of Christian theology; research in theology in Chinese; the indigenization movement in Chinese Christianity; the history of Chinese Bible translation; research on church-run schools in China; the compilation of historical materials of Chinese Christianity; Christian dialogue with Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism; and the local annals of Chinese Christianity were also opened up. In addition, contemporary ecclesiology (church structure, organization, and fundamentalist denominations); Christianity and international politics; investigations of Christianity and Chinese essence; the coordination and adaptation of Christianity and Chinese society; the meaning and function of Christianity in the clash and melding of civilizations; development and change in eastern European orthodox churches following the dissolution of the Soviet Union; the history and current situation of Christianity in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau; contemporary Chinese Christian theology; trends in humanitarian thought and folk beliefs; trends in modern Catholic thought and the Chinese Catholic Church; the "culture Christian" phenomenon; the prospects for the influence of Christianity on the future development of China. All of these have drawn the attention and study of Chinese scholars. And in the modern academic atmosphere that stresses interdisciplinary courses, and all sorts of cross-fertilization, the study of Christianity has formed relationships with the fields of philosophy, sociology, psychology, and within many fields of Christian studies.

Since the 1980s, 20th century Chinese studies of Christianity within the humanities and social sciences are beginning to take shape. Many scholars originally in the fields of literature, philosophy and history have turned to research in many aspects of Christianity, and have brought new vision, new methods, and new views to the systematic study of Christianity. There are many new topics in these areas and these scholars are very active, which adds to the prospects for future building of the discipline. Furthermore, scholars within the Chinese Christian church have in the last twenty years undertaken devoted inquiries and conscientious study and have begun to make Chinese Christianity pay attention to its own social and religious functions, reviving and developing activity in theological study, in thought, culture, and academic realms. In this way, the Chinese church, too, offers to the new liveliness and the many new questions and challenges modern Chinese society faces in its transitional process a variety of topics from its interaction with a broad range of Christian studies overseas. This has attracted wide interest and attention. Chinese scholars combine the contemporary open world of information with Chinese essence to develop their studies of Christianity, and open up a way forward that is both intensive and extensive, which enables it to make new breakthroughs in many areas of research and to gain a pioneering academic position in some fields.

Of course, because 20th century Chinese study of Christianity got off to a rather late start, it met with rather a lot of difficulties, and there is a gap between it and foreign, especially western, research in Christianity in terms of overall strength and achievements. To decrease this gap, and to have an important seat in world Christian studies, Chinese scholars should actively develop bilateral and multilateral cooperation, to ensure that contemporary Chinese studies in Christianity no longer drift outside international level research, but become genuinely a component part of it. Chinese studies of Christianity should also deal appropriately with the relationship between "globalization" and "indigenization," for openness, complementarity, and commonality, in new directions for academic study. But domestically, Chinese scholars need to strengthen horizontal contacts and information exchange among personnel engaged in systematic research, societies and research centers should organize, harmonize, and promote scientific research activities in this field, They should promote complementarity, as well as intellectual innovation, and strengthen the foundation for contacts among scholars in the study of Christianity in Institute of Religions, in the Institute of History, the Institute of World History, the Institute of Philosophy, the Institute of the History of Sino-Foreign Relations, and the Institute for the Study of Chinese Judaism. Those engaged in research in disciplines related to Christianity should establish closer academic ties and cooperation outside their fields. In this way, the corps of those who study Christianity in China will grow and the fruits of their research multiply.

*Study of Christianity*, 1 (1999): 1-14.

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## The Nature and Purpose of Theological Reconstruction in the Chinese Church - WANG AI-MING

At the turn of the new century, the Chinese church has clearly made theological reconstruction a priority. This illustrates a historical fact that demands immediate attention: the thinking that guides the management of our church and the pastoral care of our believers lags far behind the social reality in which the gospel is preached and witnessed. To put it even more bluntly, what is preached and how the church is run in many local churches actually inhibits the progress of God's creation and favor. Since the Jinan Conference of autumn, 1998, the historic subject of theological reconstruction, a subject related to the future and fate of the Chinese church, has not been substantially understood or emphasized in church administration. Faced with the simple and fervent faith needs of Christians at the grassroots, pastoral workers, especially those in charge of church affairs, easily intoxicated by simplistic ways of thinking, may try to avoid the hard work of theological reconstruction, and sentimentalize the issue, calling for "identification with the believers," saying "religion long ago adapted to socialist society," and "adaptation cuts both ways," or "theological reconstruction in fact sets one faction against another; the modernists against the fundamentalists, or the liberals against the evangelicals."

What, then, is the aim of theological reconstruction? Why is it not a factional debate? Why do we define the central task of theological reconstruction as "actively leading religion to adapt to socialist society?" To answer this we must consider why we feel that to say "religion long ago adapted to socialist society" is incorrect.

### *The aim of theological reconstruction*

In his 1995 speech at the 45th anniversary celebrations for the Three-Self Movement, Bishop Ting clarified the aim of the theological reconstruction we are engaged in today, that is, "construct a theology which is both of the spirit and of the world (and) harmonize the church with socialism."<sup>1</sup> In 1998, the Joint Standing Committees of the Chinese church formally adopted the "Resolution on Strengthening Theological Construction." This resolution was based on the historical scene to which the publication of *Love Never Ends* was a response. In this we can see the urgent reality the church is facing, what Chen Zemin's heartfelt words at the Jinan Conference described: "There are many concepts and thinking in the church which are not compatible with socialism and cannot adapt to it. When theology lags behind social reality, we can say that compared with the consciousness of the Chinese people today, we are indeed backward."<sup>2</sup> "Whether or not we recognize our church's backwardness in theology, it is an important issue for strengthening theological reconstruction in the church. In August of this year, Bishop Ting spoke on the backwardness of Chinese Christian theological thinking today at a meeting of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference in Xi'an, and called for a revisioning and striving for adaptation to and compatibility with socialism."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> K.H. Ting, *Love Never Ends* (Nanjing: Jiangsu Translation Press, 2000), 470.

<sup>2</sup> Chen Zemin, "Intensify Theological Reconstruction in the Chinese Church," *Chinese Theological Review* 14 (2000): 45.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid: 46.

In early December 1999, the CCC and TSPM held a joint conference in Shanghai on the "Three-Self Principle." The consensus of the conference was "uphold the three-self principle, run the church well, promote theological reconstruction." This is to say that as it faces the 21st century, theological reconstruction is a strategic measure the church takes while upholding the three-self principle. In other words, whether the Chinese church can follow the path of upholding three-self and running the church well in the century just begun hinges on the success or failure of theological reconstruction. Thus, we should say clearly and without misunderstanding that the aim of theological reconstruction just begun by the Chinese church concerns the future and fate of the Chinese church.

### ***The nature of theological reconstruction***

We must realize that theological reconstruction does not consist in the views of one religious faction suppressing those of another. In the early 1950s, when the TSPM was initiated, the idea of uniting all patriotic believers was a principle upheld by the Chinese church. The substance of the issue lies in the fact that the principle of uniting is not the same as maintaining harmony all round; establishing theological reconstruction as the leading direction is not the same as being factionalist or separatist. If the argument is formulated that way, we must develop the necessary exposition. In the summer of 1998, when the worst floods in a century devastated the fields and the people who till them along the lower reaches of the Yangtse River, the state mobilized its power in rescue and relief measures, while in the church were heard voices saying, "The floods are God's punishment of unbelievers in China," or God's justice is manifest in punishment," etc. This was even echoed and elaborated upon in some seminaries among faculty and students. Can we really say that such negative and pessimistic ideas clothed as Christian gospel should occupy a spot under the canopy of "let a hundred schools contend" or hold a leading place in theological reconstruction in the Chinese church? Can it really be that, for the sake of safeguarding the doctrinal purity and righteousness of the Chinese church preaching, "God is love" is "one faction suppressing another"?

Why has the Chinese church stressed "patriotism" from the start? The history of the development of Chinese Christianity shows that in the history of the Chinese people Chinese Christians have never truly taken the lead in taking up the deep suffering of their compatriots in the great national salvation enterprise. To put it another way, the Chinese church, at the crucial junctures of history, times of devastation for the nation and the people, have never of their own initiative played the just and moral role they should have taken. Therefore, in the glorious liberation history of the Chinese people, there is no monument to Chinese Christian efforts to save the nation. Besides this, as it says in the Cambridge History of the late Qing, western missionary evangelism in China was marked by exhorting Chinese people to abandon the Chinese cultural tradition, and thus, the Chinese church, which has been deeply influenced by western missionary preaching and devotional writing (though it has cut its political links to western missionaries) has never truly reflected theologically on its own ideas of evangelism.

Therefore, Bishop Ting points out, to understand what it means to bring about the adaptation of religion to socialist society, means for Christianity first of all a theological understanding and acceptance. The thinking of the Christian church is in essence theological thinking. Thus,

theological reconstruction must understand and expound the responsibility of Christian faith toward the Chinese people in terms of theological thinking, so that Chinese people will be willing to "hear the message religion has for them." If the role Christianity plays in China is a disastrous and negative one of "harming the people's unity, and giving rise to endless divisions," the Chinese people will have no way to understand, tolerate, or accept it. Furthermore, the ecumenical church, beginning from a desire to safeguard the purity and orthodoxy of Christian faith and doctrine, would see such a Chinese church as heretical and heterodox. Even more seriously, it would ignore or oppose a theologically reconstructed church like this, one that would certainly prove a natural hotbed and haven for heresy. Most seriously of all, such a church would be sure to disintegrate. Therefore Bishop Ting has for years maintained his call for theological reconstruction. He has a truly historic vision of the serious questions facing the Chinese church and their possible disastrous consequences.

### ***Steps in theological reconstruction***

We have shown that theological reconstruction is the study of how to better uphold the three-self principle in the new century. Let us now consider "self-government, self-propagation, self-support" to see what concrete steps are needed in the area of theological reconstruction.

Firstly, the importance of self-government lies in independently dealing with matters of church affairs, especially in rejecting the authority of hostile forces from outside. The demand for theological reconstruction illustrates the principle of the independence and decision-making power of the Chinese church. In its international contacts the Chinese church benefits from the government's policy of reform and openness, by normalized international relationships, which have expanded sympathy and understanding for the impact of the Chinese church's three-self principle. At the same time, we understand the new fruits of the ecumenical heritage of the western churches, especially churches' participation in and contributions to social development. However, the flip side or negative factor in this comes from an indifference to our church's independence. Such interference takes place through normal international relationships. Seen from the principle of theological reconstruction, the international contacts of the Chinese church directly impact the three-self principle of self-government.

Secondly, self-support emphasizes that as it faces the 21st century the Chinese church should study all the successful administrative experience of the ecumenical church. This is to say administratively reforming existing unreasonable or still unhealthy organizational structures. For example, the retirement plan for pastoral workers; pensioners' insurance; abnormal wastage and expense in church finances; supervisory structures for church property; financial support for seminaries from churches in various regions; the legality of having non-Christians in church administration and educational organizations and their financial share based on regulations concerning similar state personnel; and the power of financial safeguards.

Thirdly, the principle of self-propagation in promoting theological reconstruction is expressed in our church's guiding principles for running our 18 seminaries and bible schools, in their theological guidelines, in principles for classroom teaching, and in the standards for the literature and publication work of the CCC. We can say that this is an extremely crucial part of theological reconstruction. The publication of *Love Never Ends* initiated the historical task of



theological reconstruction, and provided a guiding call to the concrete task of upholding the principle of self-propagation in the Chinese church. At present the reality of pastoring believers in grassroots churches is far from meeting the demands of the truth of the gospel. The basic problem is that its theology is not broad enough, to the point that many evangelists simply have no idea of theology.

In his 1995 speech, "A Look Back at the Way We Have Come," Bishop Ting said, "In general terms, sadly, there seems to be only one genuinely important doctrine in Chinese Christianity: If you believe in Christ, then you are justified in God's eyes; if you do not believe in Christ, then you are not justified in God's eyes. From a shallow insistence on this point have evolved many views contrary to common sense: So and so believes, so though he is counter-revolutionary and a traitor, he will go to heaven. Imperialist aggression is bad, but the aggressors were Christians, justified in God's eyes, while the objects of their aggression were non-Christians, not justified in God's eyes, so the objects of aggression got what they deserved-it was God's punishment. Notice to what extent emphasis on only one point of faith and no others can turn right and wrong upside down. According to this point of view, God is well aware that the majority of humankind is bound for the eternal flames of hell because they are unbelievers. Yet day and night without ceasing he keeps creating human beings. What kind of view of God is that? Where do we begin to talk about God's mercy?"<sup>4</sup> Here Bishop Ting has pointed out for us the fundamental responsibility of teaching and research in our seminaries and bible schools for training pastoral workers, that is, the question of the direction of theological education.

This also touches on the question of a correct view of the Bible, because only in establishing a correct view of the Bible can we interpret doctrine and faith principles in accord with God's word. These are the theology of God, Christology, creation theory, redemption theory, theory of grace, eschatology, and so on of systematic theology. When we look at Bishop Ting's call for establishing a well-run church based on three-self principle in terms of theological reconstruction, we see that the direction for the task of theological reflection for the whole church must be in accord with the ecumenical grace contained in the word of God.

At present the task of publication in the Chinese church directly relates to another important aspect of the principle of self-propagation. This is the tendency to hang on to what is outmoded, to think inside the box, to be lost in nostalgia, and simply reproduce either those sermons and works that are semi-colonial and semi-feudal, or to broaden our vision and look to the great heritage of the ecumenical church and our Chinese traditional culture to establish a theological tradition in the Chinese church that leads to the adaptation of the church and socialist society. This is an issue that must be considered in considering how literature and publication work in our church can uphold and advance self-propagation in the realm of theological construction.

### ***The significance of theological reconstruction***

The significance of theological reconstruction is first of all to guarantee that in the 21st century Chinese Christian faith will be understood by the Chinese people, to guarantee that the Chinese church continue to advance and prosper in taking up its given responsibility and duty, and to guarantee that what the church preaches is orthodox and pure faith and doctrine.

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<sup>4</sup> Ting, 492.

Secondly, the realization of theological reconstruction means that the Chinese church's reputation and prestige in the church ecumenical will finally be established. Third, it means that no heresy or heterodox preaching will find any way to mislead the millions of Chinese Christians.

Thus, the significance of theological reconstruction is theological and ecclesiological, as well as sociological and political. We have every reason to believe that actively leading religion to adapt to socialist society, as the guiding thought of efforts to promote theological reconstruction in the Chinese church, will decisively enable Chinese Christians to walk the advanced path of identification with the Chinese people, and on this great path, Chinese people will affirm the patriotic will and humble contributions of Christians to the common enterprise of reconstruction.

*Nanjing Theological Review* 1 (2000): 3-5.

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## **Adapting Christianity to Socialist Society: Theological Changes - XIAO ANPING**

Changing times are a challenge to Christian theological thinking and bring about profound examination and reflection, calling forth effective responses and adjustments. This is a universal phenomenon, a law of the history of the Christian church and Christian theology. It is natural and inevitable that changing times and social development also bring about changes and development in theology; this is progress. In this paper, I shall consider how the current adaptation of Christianity to Chinese socialist society should be viewed from the perspective of changes in theological thinking.

A history of theology is a history of the development of Christians' knowledge of God. It is also the history of the contextualization of theology in different societies and cultures, and its development within that context. In its latter period, as the ancient church became more Roman Catholic and developed step by step into the Catholic Church of the feudal society of the Middle Ages. The theology of the church fathers gave way to Scholasticism, the dominant philosophy of the Middle Ages. But with the east-west schism, the eastern churches, developing eastern orthodoxy, becoming contextualized and subsumed into Slavic culture, national characteristics and society, and shaping a unique orthodox theology. In the late medieval period, the Catholic Church became increasingly corrupt, selling indulgences on a grand scale. This exposed it to great danger and kept it from adapting to the developing times. Influenced by the humanism of the renaissance and classical studies, Martin Luther said that he would rather be consumed on a bed of burning coals than "rot here." After being sorely tested, he proposed, with God's guidance, the idea of returning to the Bible and "justification by faith." Pasting his 95 Theses on the doors of the church in Wittenberg, he raised the curtain on the reformation of the church, causing a great transformation in theological thinking. His idea of the "priesthood of all believers" allowed people to be in direct communion with God, set free and liberated in thinking by the truth. He brought new life to the church and revitalized believers' spiritual lives. "Martin Luther brought thinking that fought for people's right to independence and self-initiative into religious doctrine and thereby weakened the church's strict control over believers."<sup>1</sup>

Calvin brought religious and secular life together by changing an other-worldly religion into a this-worldly one. This helped people develop their capacity for action, making a realized faith of the religious life, a life in the world that was virtuous, improving, healthy, and promising: a life developing in a direction beneficial to society. This conformed to the tides of history and the forward march of time, spurring transformation and renewal in theology. It is important to note that the religious reformation became the third thought movement of the renaissance, directly involved in the great transformation in thinking that took place. Thus the religious reformation can be seen as the expression of humanism within the church, not only causing changes in theology, but also promoting the advancement of the whole of European history and society. It was the first of three decisive engagements of the bourgeoisie against feudalism,<sup>2</sup> and played a

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<sup>1</sup> Zhang Chuanyou, *Sources of Western Wisdom* (Wuhan: Wuhan University Press, 1999), 134.

<sup>2</sup> Engels saw the 16th century religious reformation in Germany, the 17th century English reformation, and the 18th century French Revolution as three decisive battles of the protracted struggle of the bourgeoisie against feudalism; the religious reformation was the first, showing its

significant role in preparing for modern society. The justice and progressiveness of changes taking place in theology shone into the rest of society. Beginning with the reformation, Protestantism separated itself from Catholicism, and its establishment and development may be said to be an example of adapting to the developments of the times and to society.

In addition to social change and development, theology also changes because of differences in denominations and theological systems. But the three largest Christian churches-Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant-as well as all the smaller denominations and theological systems, are shaped by their encounters with the combined politics, economics, culture, society, mores, etc. of their contexts. It is these differences and riches that bring depth to people's knowledge of God, and it is these, which propel church development and shape theology into systems. At the same time, its particularity and diversity enriches the church universal and unites the particular and the universal. How do we bring about change and development in traditional concepts and values that are unsuitable for today? These must be tested in the present time and reality, changes compared to and considered together with actual conditions, so that a new interpretation and elucidation can be made that is more rational, more penetrating, and more comprehensive.

Moreover, through the revelation of truth that God gives people in different times and contexts, they gain more sight and more light: This means that different regions during the same era may, because of similarities and differences in their contexts, give expression to certain changes and special features in theological thinking. In addition, the sharing, exchanges, learning, and exploration among believers can also raise understanding and artistic conception, and thereby spur adjustment and transformation in theological thinking.

Will changes in theology change faith? No. The prerequisite for changes in theological thinking is that faith remains unchanged. Changes in theological thinking do not act to change faith, but rather to witness to and strengthen faith. "Changes are always taking place in theological thinking, but the fundamental faith of the church is firm and unchanging. Just as the Trinity, the Incarnation, Christ's death on the cross for all, his resurrection on the third day, do not change. And just because these fundamentals of faith do not change, theology must follow the changing times and must make adjustments."<sup>3</sup> Theological explanations of faith are the church in the act of thinking; different ages spread different messages, and have different theological elucidations. In order to meet the needs of the times, theology has to explain faith in terms of the age, so that people of this time can better understand and accept it. Thus, faith is unchanging, but times change and the theological theory that follows the changing times in interpreting faith also changes.

Furthermore, changes in theology are not in contradiction to the Bible. Changes in the image of God, from disciplinarian in the Old Testament to the image of a loving God in the New Testament, to God is Love (John 4: 8), shows that in the Bible there are people whose understanding of God or whose theologies, change. Acts 15 records the meeting in Jerusalem

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importance historically. And the religious reformation brought about the German peasant revolt. See Chen Xiux and Yang Zutao, *Draft History of European Philosophy* (Wuhan: Hubei People's Publishing House, 1987), 227.

<sup>3</sup> K.H. Ting, "Adjustments in Theology are Unavoidable and Inevitable," *Nanjing Theological Review* 2 (2000): 10.

that decided to abandon observance of the Jewish law and its rituals (like circumcision) and permit the gospel to be spread to the gentiles, causing Christianity to break out of the bonds of Judaism and become a world religion. This is also an example of a great change in theological thinking that caused people to realize anew that Jesus is not Savior of the Jews alone, but also Savior of the gentiles. This was a significant meeting in the history of the church, because it broke through closed and rigid traditional thinking, enabling the church to flourish and develop even more. Thus, rather than opposing changes in theological thinking, the church actively promotes and supports them, just like the decisions of that meeting in Jerusalem.

"Because God reveals things to us in the Bible gradually, revelations are not single events over and done with. In the same way, human understanding of God's revelation does not come all at once either, but unfolds and increases gradually."<sup>4</sup> It is extremely important to see God's revelation in the Bible and in history as development. Humanity is miniscule and our capacity for knowledge limited. We cannot understand the perfect and ultimate truth all at once, but need to travel a long road of exploration with every means at our disposal, coming gradually to knowledge. Many times and in many ways, God gave explicit instructions to the tribes of Israel through the prophets, and Jesus said "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth" (John 16: 12-13). People come gradually to knowledge. Then that knowledge is gradually changed and increased. We see this in two thousand years of changes in theology: human knowledge of God moves through a process of development from low to high, shallow to deep, simple to complex, abstract to concrete.

Under the influence of the Reformation, not only Protestantism, but also the inner circles of Catholicism, underwent a reformation. Changes took place in theology and there were new trends. Later, with Vatican II, self-reflection and renewal in the face of a changed modern society took place. This meeting emphasized that the church's mission was to serve humanity. In this way the Catholic Church raised the status and role of lay people in the church, and took a more tolerant approach to acceptance of human society, showed a greater concern for real-life societies and gave increasing prominence to the local character of churches. It can be seen that the Catholic Church changed in response to changes in the times.

In the modern period, following the development of modern industry and technology and the awakening of peoples, there has been increasing diversity in Christian theology, such as neo-orthodoxy, liberation theology, process theology, theology of hope, African-American theology, feminist theology, ecumenical theology, dialogue theology, eco-theology, Minjung theology, contextual theology, water buffalo theology, theology of culture, and so on. The appearance of this vast system of theologies once again witnesses to the fact that theology is ever changing and developing. This is a historical inevitability, a demand of changing times, the advance of society. It is also the result of the inner demand and inevitability of the self-development of the church.

Looking at the Chinese church today through the lens of theological change, we cannot be complacent and conservative, abandoning the universal laws of the development of Christian theology, running counter to the church's truth. Rather, we should face the context and

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<sup>4</sup> "God's Self-Revelation in the Bible and Our Slowness in Grasping It," *Nanjing Theological Review*, I (1999),3. Translated in *Chinese Theological Review*: 14 (2000): 32.

environment in which the church finds itself today—a China with a socialist society—and adjust and develop the church's theological thinking in line with the changing times and social development. The reason Protestantism is alive and well today is that it is extremely adaptable. Not only can it adapt to the development of the times, it goes ahead of its times. This is the prophetic voice, its far-sightedness and its vision, the moral character and special nature Christianity should possess.

But we should reflect on the fact that the church in China, as the independent church it is today, is fifty years old, while China, a new type of society, is fifty-one years old. How will Christianity adapt to this new time and society? We certainly do not deny that the church has developed tremendously and that there have been explorations and a beginning in theology, but in another aspect, we must also look at the fact that Chinese Christian theology is still a poor and backward thing. We should use a historical approach to see things squarely. We have yet to establish a systematic theory of theology and its attendant systems. There is still the issue of existing differences in believers' thinking and quality of faith, to the point that some preaching is still speaking in the categories of fifty years ago, and has hardly adapted to the times and society.

If there is no change in theological thinking in the Chinese church, it will have a very difficult time adapting to the daily developing Chinese socialist society. But it must adapt, and it cannot be satisfied with lip service, adaptation must take place theologically. Only theological adaptation is genuine adaptation. In actuality, change and adaptation in theology is necessary for the survival and development of the church. Thus in order to undertake theological adaptation, it is necessary to break through the unsuitable old and backward traditional concepts and theological thinking, to revise, transform, and renew it. From this it can be seen that there is much to be done in order to adapt. We must work hard to promote theological reconstruction. The goal of theological reconstruction is adaptation to socialist society. "Whether or not theological reconstruction can adapt theology to socialist society is the standard by which to judge it."<sup>5</sup>

Chairman Jiang Zemin has asked that we actively bring about adaptation between religion and socialist society. From a faith point of view, there is no reason to oppose religion's adaptation to socialism. After all, the basic faith of the Bible is not in contradiction to it, nor is it harmful to biblical truth. There is even less reason from the viewpoint of the history and praxis of theological change. Further, the question of adaptation to socialist society also exists for education, social sciences, literature, art, and morality. Adaptation of Christianity to socialist society is in line with the teachings of the Bible, accords with church history and with the direction and laws of the historical development of theology, as well as with the direction and advance of the times, and the will and truth of God. "Socialist society is the newest form of society to have developed up to today. It is a just and progressive society. All culture, art, philosophy, morality and all truth, goodness and beauty in the world that have derived from it all come from the "Father of all light," and all this is contained in the pre-existence, perfection, and transcendence of Christ that contains the entire universe."<sup>6</sup> Thus, adaptation is only natural. As

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<sup>5</sup> Ye Xiaowen, "Take History as the Standard, Strengthen Accomplishments, Open Up the Future", *Religions in China* 6 (2000): 6.

<sup>6</sup> Hua Yaozeng, "Theological Reconstruction is the Main Task at Present to Delve into and Open up the Three-Self

Bishop Ting has stated: "For the benefit of the nation, and for the existence and witness of the church, adaptation to socialist society is a natural thing, the natural choice of any responsible citizen, any responsible faith."<sup>7</sup>

Strengthening theological reconstruction at present is related to the future and fate of the church and all the tremendous tasks that go with it, an important guarantee and strategic policy for the continued observance of the three-self principle in running the church well, and an important path to fundamentally resolving the church's adaptation with socialist society. Can the church adapt to socialist society? - to a large extent, this will be decided by the theology of the church. Only by first doing a good job of theological reconstruction can we adjust, transform, and renew our theology, enabling it, in a new time, to be rich in new content and special features. Then religion can genuinely adapt to socialist society. Thinking this through, changing, and adapting in thinking and understanding will inevitably bring us to identify with our country, our people, and our socialist society, adapting in action and practice. Only in this way will the Chinese Church be contextualized and indigenized in the true meaning of those terms.

Finally, let me conclude with two extremely important points. First, looked at from the vertical of history to the horizontal of place, as well as from the praxis of actual churches and the real needs of church development as well as biblically, changes in theology are a universal law and an important principle of the history of Christian thought and the development of the world church. Thus, this law and principle of the adaptation of Christianity to socialist society is reasonable, correct, and inevitable. Second, for genuine adaptation of Christianity and socialist society, there must first be changes in theology. This means we must undertake adjustment, transformation, and renewal in theology, even by leaps and bounds. The late Bishop Zheng Jianye, speaking of the work of three-self, once made the earnest statement: "How will this benefit the nation? How will it benefit the church?"<sup>8</sup> Everything has to be weighed in the scales of love country, love church in order to see how it should be handled. Obviously, theological reconstruction is beneficial to the survival and development of the church. Faced with a changed context, time, and society, change is an urgent matter. Adapting will establish an image in accordance with that of the nation and socialist society today: a Chinese church filled with witness to the glory of Christ.

*Nanjing Theological Review*, 1 (2001): 10-12.

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Movement" *Nanjing Theological Review* 3 (2000): 11.

<sup>7</sup> Ting, "Adjustments", 10.

<sup>8</sup> Shen Derong, *Fifty Years of Three-Self Work* (Shanghai: CCC & TSPM, 2000), 52

## What Is Theology? - -with a Reflection on the Theology of K.H. Ting - YAN XIYU

Since the Jinan conference in 1998, the majority of pastoral workers in the Chinese church have reached the consensus that theological reconstruction in Chinese Christianity must be strengthened. The reasons are twofold. On the one hand, theological reconstruction is necessary to run the church well. This year is the 50th anniversary of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of Protestant Churches in China (TSPM). This means the independent Chinese church is fifty years old. It has been twenty years since the resurgence of the church following the Cultural Revolution. But up to now, our church has still achieved all that it should.<sup>1</sup> Our church is a long way from being well-run. And all this is due to the poverty of our theological thinking. Bishop Ting states: "There is a great deal involved in running the church well, and building up theological thinking in the Chinese church is the most fundamental, the most decisive step."<sup>2</sup> This is a must if we are genuinely to adapt Christianity to socialist society. Adaptation to socialist society is not just a matter of formal identification. The aim is to enable Chinese Christianity to become a constituent part of the big socialist family. "Adaptation to socialist society is not simply a means of dealing with society as it is, but to have the ability to actively contribute to that society."<sup>3</sup> Therefore, theological reconstruction is crucial to enabling the Chinese church, in its specific context, to express its own worth. Bishop Ting has analyzed this clearly: "Genuine adaptation is adaptation of thinking; in religion, this means adaptation in theological thinking. Theological reconstruction is nothing more than the promotion of adaptation in theological thinking to socialist society. It also eliminates obstacles to a patriotic and socialist theology, enabling an intellectual basis for people's endorsement of patriotism and socialism."<sup>4</sup>

We can also understand the need for theological reconstruction in terms of the need to safeguard basic Christian faith and the church's witness to the times.

First, theological reflection helps purify our Christian faith. Our faith is always guided by theological thinking; faith without theological guidance does not exist. Because of a long absence of conscious theological reflection in the Chinese church, the purity of Christian faith today is subject to attack from all sides. Country villages are awash with superstition, which has seriously overflowed into the churches. In the cities, there are secular influences, such as the pursuit of money. How Christianity is to maintain the purity of its faith in the midst of this complex society is one of the tasks of theological reconstruction. Bishop Ting again:

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<sup>1</sup> We can assess the development and progress of the church in terms of quantity and quality. Quantity has changed tremendously, but except for satisfying our pride a bit in statistical terms, what real issue does quantity illustrate? The Bible asks us to "present everyone mature in Christ" (Col. 1: 28). Can we really say that we have done this for the majority of our current believers? Looked at in this way, except for adding names to the church register, we haven't achieved qualitative development.

<sup>2</sup> K.H. Ting, "The Development and Enrichment of the Three-Self Movement," *Tian Feng* 1 (2000):5.

<sup>3</sup> Kan Baoping, "On Theological Education," *Yanjing Journal of Theology* 1 (2000): 2

<sup>4</sup> Ting, "Development and Enrichment," 5.



"Theological reconstruction is a safeguard to basic Christian faith, it in no way attacks or changes it. Through theological reconstruction, our faith will gain a fairer and more reasonable exposition, thereby enabling believers to have a better and more confident understanding of their own basic faith, and enabling friends outside the church to be more receptive to the gospel message the church has for people."<sup>5</sup>

Secondly, theological reflection helps make the church more in tune with the times, which will make society more receptive to the church's voice. Christianity has a tradition of social service, a way of glorifying God and helping people, of being salt and light. Society develops and so does the church. At the very least, we cannot allow the church to become a group that has nothing in common with society. When Chinese Christians speak of love country, love church, it is not to separate church from society, for to love country is also to love church and to bring nation and church together, joining the two. For us, running the church well is a concrete expression of patriotism. If our church lags so far behind the times that it cannot influence them, we can hardly call this running the church well.

The consensus to strengthen theological reconstruction has been reached. Then we come to the second question-what is theology? Only when this question has been answered can our efforts at theological reconstruction be carried out effectively and in an orderly manner. Only then can there be a clear direction and goal. The present essay considers the question of theology on the basis of study of K.H. Ting's writings on theological reconstruction. It does not dare to define theology; it is no more than what I have learned.

### ***Theology is the church in the act of thinking***

There have historically been many responses to the question of what theology is. It will be helpful to our understanding of Bishop Ting's theological viewpoint to make a simple comparison of some definitions of theology.

In spite of the number and diversity of these definitions, to the knowledge of this writer, no single definition has yet been found acceptable to the majority of people. This writer has found five main types.

The etymological definition emphasizes that theology is learning about the *theos*. Macquarrie says that the English word theology is made by joining the Greek words *theos* (God) and *logos* (rational thought). Thus, theology is a kind of rational thought about God.<sup>6</sup> This type of definition makes God the object of theological reflection. This writer feels it is rather inappropriate from an epistemological viewpoint, because the field of human knowledge is far smaller than God. In terms of our faith, God is hardly a specimen in the laboratory, but rather the One who gives us life, the Lord who is continually renewing our life.

The hermeneutical definition proposes that theology is a question of how to understand the

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<sup>5</sup> K.H. Ting , "Adjustment of Theological Thinking is Unavoidable and Inevitable," *Tian Feng* 4 (2000): 4.

<sup>6</sup> John Macquarrie, *God Talk-an examination of the language and logic of theology*, trans. An Guoqing (Sichuan People's Press, 1997), 1.

biblical text. The nature of a complete theology is hermeneutical. In practice theology is hermeneutics. ... Theology is the question of how to understand the text of the Bible, the question of how to understand the theme expressed in these passages.<sup>7</sup> The Bible is the point to which all theology returns, the starting point of theology, as well as its ending point. Therefore, a correct view of the Bible is a prerequisite for gaining correct theological thinking.

The contextual definition says that theology is the expression and understanding of Christian faith in a specific context. "Theology, as a function of the Christian church, must serve the needs of the church. A theological system is supposed to satisfy two basic needs: the statement of the truth of the Christian message and the interpretation of this truth for every new generation. Theology moves back and forth between two poles, the eternal truth of its foundation and the temporal situation in which the eternal truth must be received."<sup>8</sup> Theology is the circulation between the real context and Christian truth.

The church construction definition may be illustrated by K.H. Ting's statement that "theology is the church in the act of thinking" is representative of this type. Bishop Ting says, "... Theology is the church in the act of thinking. Our theological work is naturally conditioned by the historical and ecumenical church, but it is not imitation work. It is rather based on reflection by Chinese Christians ourselves as we face up to the problems of the Chinese Church."<sup>9</sup> I will have more to say about this below.

The faith in practice definition says that theology is reflection on Christian faith. "Theology may be defined as the study which, through participation in and reflection upon a religious faith, seeks to express the content of this faith in the clearest and most coherent language available."<sup>10</sup> In one sentence, theology is the principles related to faith.<sup>11</sup> Faith includes the subject and the object of faith, as well as the relationship between the two.

All these definitions have their own emphases. This writer feels that in light of the current situation of the Chinese church, attention should be focused on the fourth definition, Bishop Ting's "theology is the church in the act of thinking." Because it is our task to run the Chinese church well, and make it better run, we must reflect. Philosophy says that existence determines consciousness, and consciousness directs action. According to modern psychology, there are two types of consciousness: one is the conscious consciousness (I call it active consciousness), the other the unconscious consciousness (I call it passive consciousness), what we generally call the

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<sup>7</sup> H. Ott, "What is Theology?" trans. Yang Rensheng and Huang Yanping, *Christian Culture Review*, no. 4 (1994): 20.

<sup>8</sup> Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, trans. Hong Shusen and You Longwen, vol. I. (Tainan: Taiwan section of the Association of Southeast Asian Graduate Schools of Theology, 1993), 4. See also, Chen Zemin, "Theological Construction in the Chinese Church," *Nanjing Theological Review*, 14/15 (1992): 50-51.

<sup>9</sup> K.H. Ting, "Foreword to *Theological Writings from Nanjing Seminary*," in *Love Never Ends: Papers by K.H. Ting* (Nanjing: Jiangsu Translation Press, 2000), 421. See also Chen Zemin, "Theological Construction in the Chinese Church," (note 8); and John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966), 2.

<sup>10</sup> Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology*, 1. See also Ott, 32.

<sup>11</sup> See Lu Jiaying, "What Is Philosophy?" *Dushu I* (2000): 92-97.

subconscious. The goodness or evil of a person's life is determined to a certain extent by his active consciousness. His perception of his present life and his hopes for and grasp of the future—all this is his active consciousness. One cannot always live in the subconscious. The Chinese church is the same; we cannot live in the subconscious, we must make a profound analysis of the current situation. We must have a vision for the church. Many coworkers in the church today tire themselves out with busyness; they are like a fire brigade, running off to the next blaze. They have no vision. Of course, there are many reasons why this situation arose, but the poverty of theology is a crucial element.

To say "theology is the church in the act of thinking" is not to say that the metaphor is complete. In comparison with traditional conceptions of theology, two points stand out. One is that theology is clearly a task for the church. Traditional Christian definitions of theology make it primarily the work of individual theologians. Thus, most Christians set theology far to one side. But theology is reflection by the whole church, which shows that theology is not simply a matter for theologians, but for the whole church, and for each believer. Chen Zemin wrote in the 1950s: "Theology is created by the church, not by individuals."<sup>12</sup> The second point is that in this metaphorical explanation, theology touches on the witness of the church to the times and on the quality of believers' faith. That is to say that theology should concern itself not with what seems strange or obscure, but rather with what relates to our church construction and our genuine Christian faith. I say "genuine Christian faith," because there exists in our church, to a greater or lesser extent, faith which is Christian in name but not in substance. We know that a person who does not reflect is one who is poor in thought. In the same way, a church that does not reflect is of course a church that is poor in theology. Poverty of thinking can make a person appear shallow, impetuous, lost. In the same way, poverty of theology will make a church appear foundationless, easily shaken by the winds of heresy.

Two questions have been dealt with so far. One is Why do we need theological reconstruction? and What is theology? The next question is How do we go about theological reconstruction? We have no answer for this yet, but we know where to begin, with reflection on theology in its actual context, as Bishop Ting has pointed out.

### ***Theological reflection cannot be divorced from its actual context***

In the history of modern Chinese thought, many enlightened thinkers and reformist thinkers have been enamored of Buddhism. However, their understanding of Buddhism proceeded not from an individual point of view, but from that of society, of the group. For example, Gong Zizhen a type of creative spiritual power hidden within people's hearts, a factor in the transformation of society. Kang Youwei used the Buddhist concept of saving the world to demonstrate his "Great Harmony." Tan Sitong, in his *A Study of Humanity* also used a Buddhist concept, that of the interconnection and equality of all life, to emphasize the democratic improvement of society. We might sum this up in Liang Qichao's praise of benefit for all, rather than benefit for the few.

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<sup>12</sup> Chen Zemin, "Theological Construction in the Chinese Church," *Nanjing Theological Review* 14/15 (1992): 7. Reproduction, with added material, of an essay originally published in *Nanjing Theological Review* 5/6 (1957). Translated in *Chinese Theological Review* (1991): 53-76.

The hallmark of Bishop Ting's theological reflection also lies in "benefit for the whole world (*jianshan tianxia*)," and not for oneself alone. Of course, he sees this question, not only from the vantage of social improvement, but also from that of the apex of Christian theology: for God so loved the world. Bishop Ting holds this view because his theological reflection is deeply rooted in the real context. As Chen Zemin said of Ting, "I knew him as a man who did theology not by feeling reality for some theological ivory tower, ignoring the world while pursuing his own academic and moral cultivation, but rather by seeking ways in which Christian faith and teaching could be combined with the cause of national salvation and social transformation."<sup>13</sup> It is not difficult to see from the pages of *Love Never Ends* that the impetus for Bishop Ting's theological reflection lies in the conflicts of the real context. In "The Cosmic Christ," for example, it is the stark contrast between bad things within the church and true goodness outside it that impels him to reflect on the parameters of Christ's love: Is Christ's love only for the small circle of the church? Or is it for the whole of God's creation, the whole cosmos? Bishop Ting comes naturally to his theory of the Cosmic Christ.<sup>14</sup>

In the tradition of the church, we may divide theological thought into two main classifications. One centers on personal salvation, emphasizing the opposition between the sacred and the secular, the church and the world, theology and politics, the spiritual and the worldly. This type of theology is generally called redemption-centered theology. The other kind is centered on love for all that God has created. Where Bishop Ting differs from other theologians of this sort is that he does not negate salvation, rather he simply joins God's creation to redemption, seeing these as two expressions of the same thing.

Guided by such thinking, Bishop Ting's emphasizes context in his theology, reflecting on God's care for human beings and for the world in the actual context of the Chinese church.

Of course, K.H. Ting did not discover contextualized theology. Contextualization became the hallmark of theological reflection in the Third World in the 1970s. Contextualization means the actual society we live in, made up of a diversity of ethnic and cultural traditions, its political and economic development, its synthesis of all that makes a people, the influence of world culture, etc. No person, no theologian, can avoid this real context. Therefore, consciously or unconsciously, theological thinking is always strongly colored by its times and context. Bishop Ting is not averse to contextual issues, but actively moves to adjust his own theology, in order to adapt it to our present society.

In essence, contextualization is the identification of the church with its nation, people, and culture. Prof. Wang Weifan, in his "The Word was Here Made Flesh," concludes thusly, "The word was *here* made flesh.' *Here* in China we are a people with thousands of years of cultural tradition, a people who have also experienced all the difficulties and vicissitudes of life. And the body of Christ made flesh here is the tiny church of China, which has identified with its people in suffering and in suffering has built itself up."<sup>15</sup> This is a markedly specific context. Bishop Ting also said, "The Incarnation needed Mary to be the mother. Chinese theology needs Chinese

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<sup>13</sup> Chen Zemin, "Foreword: Faith's Journey," in *Love Never Ends*, I.

<sup>14</sup> K.H. Ting, "The Cosmic Christ," in *Love Never Ends*, 90-99.

<sup>15</sup> Wang Weifan, "The Word Was Here Made Flesh," *Nanjing Theological Review* (1992): 146. Translated in *Chinese Theological Review* 8 (1993): 92-99.

culture as its mother."<sup>16</sup> At times, we who are in Chinese traditional culture, make this culture abstract, not historical. We abstract it from our actual society, creating a pseudo Christian theology that identifies with some distant ancient culture. In fact, culture does not exist in a vacuum, culture is a whole. It includes the whole history and the whole present reality of a people. If we speak of Chinese culture separate from the history of the Chinese people in this century, or from the context of our present reality of socialist society, we clearly cannot completely express what makes the Chinese culture what it is. This type of theological reflection is obviously not contextual reflection.

When I read the works of western theologians, I am aware of a kind of linguistic (or we could say conceptual) obstacle, which is not present when I read the *Selected Writings of K.H. Ting* (translated as *Love Never Ends*). Reading the latter, I have a strong feeling of intimacy, as if I was chatting with K.H. Ting. The reason for this, besides the spareness and fluidity of Bishop Ting's language, is, I think, primarily the result of his theological reflection being intimately tied to the context of our society, culture, economics and politics—a context in which we are situated and with which we are very familiar.

Now we must turn to another question, what is the central material of theology, its subject? For Bishop Ting, it is the reconciliation between God and human beings.

### ***The subject of theology is reconciliation between God and human beings***

The theme of theology is its core, its essence, and this is also the goal of theology. In whatever we do, we have a goal, and so it is with doing theology. As to what the goal of theology may be, responses have varied through the ages. The great medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas may be representative. For him the goal of theology was to understand the origins and destiny of God and humanity. "According to Aquinas, in whom Scholasticism attained its noblest development, the aim of all theological investigation is to give knowledge of God and of man's origin and destiny."<sup>17</sup> Paul Tillich divided Christian theology into two types (mainly in terms of systematic theology): kerygmatic theology and apologetic theology. Kerygmatic theology emphasizes the eternal nature of the Christian message, thus overlooking the specific context of that message. Apologetic theology considers both the eternal nature and the concrete context of the Christian message. Therefore, Tillich places more emphasis on apologetic theology.<sup>18</sup>

My preference is to divide theology into three basic types: apologetic, pastoral, and speculative. Different types of theology have different goals, and there is some difference in subject as well. When the church is the object of accusations, criticism, and misunderstandings from all sides within its specific context, theologians employ methods those outside the church can understand and accept to explain Christian faith and doctrine: This is apologetic theology. The goal is to harmonize relations between the two and resolve the issue of the existence of the church. To do this, one must have a clear knowledge of Christian theology. This type of theology was more in evidence during the early years of the church. These early theologians are now

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<sup>16</sup> K.H. Ting, "Preface to *Chinese Theology and its Cultural Sources*," in *Love Never Ends*, 511.

<sup>17</sup> Williston Walker, *A History of the Christian Church*, trans. Sun Shanling et al. (Beijing: CASS Press, 1991), 311.

<sup>18</sup> Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 4-9.

known as apologists because their goal was to explain and introduce Christianity to those outside the church. To sum up, apologetic theology is a cross-disciplinary, theology of the margins.<sup>19</sup>

Pastoral theology was primarily formed to better minister to the church. Its goal is to strengthen the church, that is, to lead believers and the church to have a correct and perfect faith, to help us to have a correct understanding of the God we believe in, and to better understand our present human life. This type of theology arose because of the attacks of heterodoxy and heresy within the church. To prevent these, it is necessary to raise the resistance levels of believers, and indeed, of the whole church. Pastoral theology, on the foundation of biblical teachings, seeks to cleanse our faith, and to make our doctrines more rational and more systematic.

The development of speculative theology is closely tied to philosophy. It is concerned with the more abstract ontological questions, more at odds with the phenomenological world. It absorbs the essence of world culture and considers theological questions from a metaphysical standpoint. Of course, one needs to have undergone a certain level of philosophical training to understand this theology, and to be familiar with some basic philosophical concepts. Although this type of theology is not of immediate benefit to the church, because it is in contact and dialogue with the latest and most advanced thinking, it guarantees that theology will be up-to-date. In addition, speculative theology ensures that our theology has a profound grounding; it is the intellectual storehouse of the church's theology. Of course, speculative theology has also had an apologetic goal at times, especially in the early church.

Each of the three types of theology discussed above has its different goal, and thus, different subject matter. But looked at overall, they seem a bit vague. Bishop Ting's response to the lack of clarity in terms of subject in traditional theology is to state the purpose from the very beginning: the subject of theology is reconciliation between God and humans. "The theme of the Christian gospel and of Christian theology must of necessity be the reconciliation of God and humanity in Jesus Christ."<sup>20</sup> This theme has its source in the Bible: "The Bible has 'reconciliation' and 'covenant' as its central message."<sup>21</sup> Led by this kind of thinking, Bishop Ting concentrates his own theological thinking on the theory of God and Christology, emphasizing God's guidance and care for humankind, and the forgiveness of Christ.

Finally, it must be specially pointed out that although Bishop Ting's theology differs in places from traditional Christian theology, as a theologian in the Third World, he does not strain after originality like some other Third World theologians, doing some so-called indigenous theology to please westerners. Rather, within the context of the Chinese church, with a heart set on resolving the real questions facing Chinese Christians, Ting reflects on God's revelation in China today. Therefore, Bishop Ting's theology is not narcissist, but is a theology for the masses, a theology summed up on the foundation of theological mass movements in China.

"By this time you will probably have got the impression that Chinese theologians have not

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<sup>19</sup> In the 1980s, at the beginning of the period of reform and openness in China, a great number of new disciplines flooded into Chinese academia. These differed *from* traditional single-subject disciplines, with each of the new ones crossing several traditional disciplines.

<sup>20</sup> Ting, "Theological Mass Movement in China," in *Love*, 146.

<sup>21</sup> Ting, "Chinese Christians' Approach to the Bible," in *Love*, 390.

ventured to take heroic, not to say sensational, steps to make headlines in their theological pursuits. It is our conviction that we should stay where our constituencies are and wrestle with their problems in ways helpful and acceptable to them."<sup>22</sup>

Nor is Bishop Ting's theology anti-traditional. He has not abandoned tradition, but rather, with tradition as a basis, returned anew to the Bible to seek God's revelation. We know that the core of the "covenant" of the Bible is the reconciliation between God and humankind.

"The days are surely coming says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them out of the land of Egypt-a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more" (Jer. 31:31-34).

The emphasis of the covenant spoken of here is the reconciliation between God and humanity. In Romans, Paul points out an important doctrine-justification by faith. Many New Testament scholars have pointed out that justification here emphasizes a kind of relationship. Justification by faith means that a person depends on her own faith in God to attain a right relationship between God and human beings.

It is not only in theory that Bishop Ting proposes that the theme of theology is the reconciliation between God and humankind. In the practice of his theology, faith, and life, he very much emphasizes the message of reconciliation: the unity of the Chinese church is the fruit of the practice of this message. "What I need to say is that it is exactly the orientation to the historic heritage of the church that enables the church I come from, a minority of less than one per cent of the population, to keep its unity and survive, and to have something unique and at the same time appealing to present before our fellow Chinese."<sup>23</sup>

Today, we have just taken the first steps in theological reconstruction in the Chinese church and we cannot presume to foresee the future image of theology in China. I think that at present the work we can do is to firmly seek the correct direction for theological reflection, and follow this with long-term labor by the mass of our pastoral workers. This is the way to set a firm foundation for theological thinking in the church in China.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

# **Theological Education and Church Development in China - KAN BAOPING**

## **Theological Education in China: An Introductory Sketch**

Before 1949 in China, there were independent seminaries and Bible schools, and also Christian study institutes in universities such as the Yanjing Institute of Religious Studies of Yanjing University in Beijing. In 1950s, with the policy of separation between school education and religion, those university-affiliated Christian institutes became independent seminaries. During the Cultural Revolution, all seminaries and bible schools were closed. Since 1980, theological education in China has entered a new phase.

At the end of 20th century, as the Protestant church in so-called Christian countries is in a general decline, in China it is faced with rapid growth. Church buildings are mushrooming, and people are flocking to join churches. The phenomenon has puzzled many people. There are many wrong assumptions about the causes of the growth. Some, including some scholars, claim that the reason for the growth religion in general and of the Christian church in particular in China is that Chinese society is now in a moral vacuum, and Christianity is needed for the reestablishment of a moral system. This is a very simplistic judgement. As a matter of fact, the traditional value system in China has not collapsed, and people still abide by their traditional moral concepts. The traditional culture that has maintained Chinese society for thousand of years is still alive and functioning. That is ultimately why, as China undergoes great changes in all aspects, its culture is not fading, but energizing the society. In contrast, American society is in a moral vacuum in a more proper sense. Campus violence is one instance. But, given the moral vacuum, Protestant churches in the United States are not that fast growing. Thus the claim that moral vacuum causes church growth does not hold up.

The second wrong assumption is that the church is growing because of people's disappointment with the communist ideal. In China, the communist ideal is still rather influential, and the party is also growing. If one checks the free forums on Chinese websites, one can easily find out that many Chinese people still use the slogan "Long live the Chinese Communist Party" to express their political and social ideal.

The third misunderstanding assumes that people go to church because they feel hopeless about the future of China. It is widely known that China's reforms have been rather successful in recent years. As the result of these reforms, our society is much freer and the people's standard of living has improved tremendously. It sounds rather awkward to assume that people feel hopeless at this point. At least, it is unlikely to be a reflection of Chinese people's opinion. The revival of classical studies in the past decade proves the above argument. It is a fact that there are many corruption cases and more crimes now in China. If we compare, however, the freedom and economic improvement people enjoy now with what people had before the reforms, most people will say there is no contest. When people have the opportunity to choose, they may choose according to their personal interest, and when so many possibilities are open to them, there are many ways they may achieve their goals.

The Chinese church is growing; the reasons for the growth, however, are various. Any simple judgement that generalizes the complex situation in China will necessarily lead to fallacies.



Chinese society as a whole is changing in every aspect, and the changes have a variety of impacts on the church, including the growth. The growth of the church is a result of the changes. Let us consider some possible reasons.

No democratic country with multiple ethnic groups has only one religion, since it is not possible to satisfy the religious needs of all its people with only one kind of religious faith. China has been transformed from a closed society into an open and more democratic society. Consequently, it is possible for people to have free choice according to their personal will. That is one of the reasons that all religions, as well as the Christian church, are growing in China.

Secondly, the encounter of Chinese culture with other cultures encourages Chinese people to explore other cultural concepts, including religions, as a part of cultural expression. Many Chinese young people take Christianity as a part of Western culture because westerners keep telling them that their countries are Christian countries. In this era of globalization, it is popularly said, Follow the money and you'll find the culture. Economically speaking, western countries are better off, therefore Christianity appeals to those who think learning Christianity means learning western culture. Eventually some of them may become church members.

Thirdly, it is well known in the west that many people enter the church only three times in their lives: birth, wedding, funeral. Church buildings have been there for hundred of years and they have become a part of the natural landscape. Televangelism and religious broadcasting are always available. The church has become a part of the culture (I would not say that the culture is a Christian culture). The church is very familiar to people as a cultural icon, but not necessarily as a faith community. Many people are church members, but do not believe Jesus. The focus on church expansion has replaced the proclamation of the Gospel. All of the above robs Christianity of its uniqueness. The situation in China makes a sharp contrast to that in western countries. It is the uniqueness of the Christian church in China that makes it attractive to Chinese people.

The last, but most significant, reason for growth is that the Chinese church carries on its mission in China with an indigenized missiology. I have been asked many times by Christians from western countries whether Chinese Christians can preach on street comers (actually this method is not widely applied by churches in western counties either). The Chinese church does not believe in that kind of evangelism. Chinese society is bound by the traditional culture that emphasizes personal relationships and the Chinese church develops its missiology on the basis of this cultural character. We carry on our mission in accordance with Martin Luther's belief that every Christian is a priest, and elevate this to an emphasis on every Christian as a missionary. This kind of personal evangelism has been proved to be the most effective way in China.

In order to meet the needs created by the rapid growth of the church, seminaries, bible schools, and training centers have either been reopened or established. Presently there are 18 seminaries and bible schools with a relatively formal setup. Of these, one is operated by the CCC; the rest either by a provincial Christian council or by the cooperation of several Christian councils. There are innumerable training centers managed by municipal Christian councils and local congregations. This is not the end yet, and more schools are still in the works.

In the 18 better set-up schools, around 2,000 students are presently enrolled. About 4,000

students have completed their programs in the 18 schools in past years, with more than 90 percent of graduates serving either in local congregations or at different seminaries and Bible schools. The major component of a new generation of leadership in theological education are those who have done their graduate studies overseas. The first round of new campus construction has almost finished. All the 18 schools have either moved into new campuses or new buildings, or are in the process of construction. Just in the year 2000, 4 schools dedicated new campuses. The Commission on Theological Education (CTE)<sup>1</sup> has been helping the schools to set up libraries and enlarge their book collections. Nanjing Union Theological Seminary in Nanjing, the only national seminary with degree programs, has the largest library, with about fifty thousand volumes, including about twenty thousand in English. The library at East China Theological Seminary in Shanghai has over fifty thousand volumes, but about eighty per cent of them are straight historical studies. Some of the schools have only few hundred books.

Computer technology is not widely used in seminaries and bible schools. Yanjing Theological Seminary is the only one to have a networked multimedia computer lab. The Seminary is now approaching its goal to computerize its library in the near future.

Bible schools and training centers, as well as church buildings, are mushrooming. The situation sounds very exciting, but it also raises concerns. The fast growth of training programs causes resource decentralization. First of all, all the schools currently face a shortage of teaching staff. Shall we have fewer schools with adequate teaching staff or simply more schools? This issue does not seem to have gained popular attention. Another issue caused by random growth is the overlapping of similar programs. Because of the lack of staff and the absence of school management skills, one may not find much difference between a seminary and a bible school, or between a bible school and a training center. If they all serve the same purpose, why must there be so many schools, when the older institutions do not have enough qualified applicants? The third difficulty is that the schools with better facilities do not have enough applicants, since local churches prefer to send their young people to their own local training programs. At this point, the question is whether we shall have more local training centers, rather than better equipped and higher quality schools. In other words, shall we put our attention on more schools or on better quality?

Fundraising is another hard issue. Theoretically speaking, regional and provincial schools are financed by local churches. If money goes to local training programs, who is responsible for the support of regional schools or even provincial schools? This is a common issue in most regional schools. All the above issues are the result of the urgent need for church personnel. The needs of the churches create a vicious circle in theological education: if every church runs its own training program, and none of the programs has sufficient or qualified training staff, we may have to evaluate what our church really needs. But the issue is who makes that judgement.

Our seminaries and bible schools benefit from close relationships with local churches, for they know what the local churches expect from their students. On the other hand, they also suffer from this close relationship. Church institutions as educational organizations have their own disciplines. A seminary or a bible school trains future pastors for churches, but it is not a church

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<sup>1</sup> CTE is a functioning committee under the CCC, which oversees and serves all 18 schools. It can make suggestion, but has no decision-making power over them.

by nature. The church mindset always tries to corrupt school spirit and convert the school into another church, and the church interference very often cripples the school discipline. It may not be a good idea to have a clear distinction between a seminary and a church, but there must be a difference. The Chinese church is already in a quandary due to the absence of a well-formulated ecclesiology. If our churches try to impose the church concept without the support of an ecclesiology on our schools, and to interfere their pedagogical disciplines, our theological education will remain in an awkward position. The issue will continue to disturb until the Chinese church formulates its own indigenous ecclesiology and has a right understanding toward the relationship between churches and church institutions.

## **A Pedagogical Examination of Theological Education in a Chinese Context**

Theological education must be carried on according to its context in order to make it effective. Therefore, the ability to be aware of our Chinese context is one of the foci of our theological education. Our purpose in theological education is to enhance our church's ability to express itself and to enforce effective and constructive carrying out of the church's mission.

Because of its complex historical background, the Chinese Church must be able to identify its historical self with its present self. The historical self refers to its historical identity that relates mostly to its semi-colonial past dominated by western powers. The present self reveals its true nature: a Chinese church that is witnessing to the Good News of Jesus in China. Only when the Chinese Church is able to gain historical awareness of its true self, can it play its prophetic role in China.

When we speak of our context, we have to consider the following characteristics and development of today's China seriously. By this, I mean not only developments in Chinese society that have nothing to do with the church, but the society as the context in which the identity of Chinese church is shaped.

Ours is a developing country that possesses one quarter of the world's entire population. The economic achievements of recent years have enabled the whole nation to strive for a more successful future while struggling with economic problems and controversial issues that relate to development: environmental issues, ecological issues, issues of economic justice, and even family problems, etc.

All of China is developing. However, the economic gap between the rich and the poor is widening. The central government has recently launched a campaign for purposes of a geographically balanced development and called upon the whole nation to develop the China's west, its least developed area. A strange phenomenon is that while many people with special skills and ambition are thronging westward, many young people from the west are coming east as migrant workers.

Chinese culture is six thousand years old, and it is self-sustaining. With economic development, traditional Chinese culture has been invigorating and enriching itself by absorbing new insights from other cultures, especially western cultures. On a superficial level, for example, more and more new words transliterated from other languages are being borrowed into Chinese. Changes in thinking are also obvious. The reforms and changes have not undermined young people's obligation to their traditional culture, nor their obligation to their national identity,<sup>2</sup> but inspired them to reflect their own tradition and culture more profoundly.

China now is a socialist country with its own particularities. It is trying to benefit all Chinese people through a balanced development that does not only connote economic achievement but

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<sup>2</sup> A scholar from Nanjing said: "I had a student tell me the other day that in 1989 he was in Tiananmen Square as a young boy and in 1999 he was outside the U.S. Embassy throwing stones after the Americans bombed the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade." ("International Herald Tribune, October 28-29,2000)

the full-scale development of the entire society. Serious controversial issues have also arisen in the course of the reform. Is a market economy the only way in which China can develop? What is the ultimate goal of a market economy? What does development imply when it relates to a market economy? To what extent should a market economy be introduced? Will a market economy lead China into balanced development? Is there still a room for a planned economy that will balance the market economy?

Because of the policy of separation between education and religion, there is no religious education in primary schools or high schools. There are some universities that offer basic introductory courses on religion. Many Chinese people have traditional beliefs or folk beliefs, which have almost become a part of our folk culture. It is easy for Chinese Christians to confuse their Christian faith with folk beliefs. Chinese churches are constantly disturbed by pseudo-Christian heresies.

The Chinese church is in a post-denominational stage, but it may be in a pre-denominational stage.<sup>3</sup> We understand the post-denominational situation as in accordance with the biblical teachings concerning the unity of the church, and it is also in accordance with Chinese cultural tradition. In this pluralistic world, however, this situation of unity seems to go against the grain. How can we express the significance of church unity in a society that is inclining more and more toward individual rights? How shall the oneness of the faith in Jesus Christ become the basis on which difference will no longer play a destructive role?

It is in such a context that we set our goals for our theological education, and try to make our faith meaningful to our people. Below are some of the major foci in our theological education.

We emphasize the importance of being familiar with our own context, but not to be preoccupied by the established norms brought from other contexts. Martin Luther broke down the barriers between God and individual pilgrimage. If we accept Luther's position on the possibility of lay people communicating with God, we must admit that the Chinese Church can have its own understanding of the Word of God, since God Himself speaks to our Chinese context.

Our viability lies in our awareness of our selfhood (indigenization and contextualization). We believe that particular religious experience presupposes particular faith. In that sense, a profound faith must be the result of one's personal cognitive experience and conviction in his or her particular existence. In religious faith, individual experience is authentic, and it can not be

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<sup>3</sup> The possibility of being a pre-denominational church is caused by the fact that some narrow-minded overseas churches are trying whole-heartedly to restore their denominational influence in China, since they can not tolerate the Chinese Church without their denominational emphasis. They do not regard the post-denominational situation of the Chinese Church as God's guidance in a Chinese context, but strive to break the harmony that brings strength and life to the Chinese Church.

replaced by any other experience.<sup>4</sup> That is why Job sternly rebuked his friends who felt his experience in his dreadful suffering was not relevant to their faith experience, nor to Job's own prior faith experience.

Given the focus on our own reflection, we shall not overlook the tradition that consists of the Scripture, doctrines and the Church. We shall be conscious of our selfhood in accordance with the oneness of the church universal. We are a church at a post-denominational stage that is particularly Chinese since it is the reflection of traditional Chinese culture that emphasizes harmony rather than difference. At the same time, however, we are an integral part of the church universal. The spiritual life of the Chinese church is inseparable from the spiritual life of the church universal.

Our concentration in our theological education is to make our theological breakthrough. In our context, to make a theological breakthrough is to confess "Jesus is Christ" in our existence. This is especially important in today's world when so-called globalization is corrupting human spirituality, as can be seen in any developed or developing country. The separation between Jesus and Christ leads the Christian church either into becoming simply a social establishment relying on its own sufficiency, or a self-interested and independent cell unable to engage in social intercourse. Such a church can be influential to some extent, but unable to go beyond itself.

Both of the above mentioned extremes are self-sufficient. The former does not imply a transcendent goal to fulfill its obligation, and the latter fulfills its obligation to transcendence but isolates its goal from its commitment.

To reclaim "Jesus is Christ", as Chinese Christians understand it, is the way to regenerate the viability of our church again and again in our modern society. It is also the way that will enable us to combat the threat of secularization that is being intensified by the clamor of globalization. To confess "Jesus is Christ" is not only a faithful proclamation of one's Christian commitment, but also a faithful recognition of the truth that God is at work in this world and we are his instruments. In such an understanding, the uniqueness of Christianity, if there is any, is not in the aggressiveness of our Church toward people with different experience, nor in its indifference in a world where the notorious blasphemy that "Might is Right" still prevails, but in its confession of the ultimate truth, and in its action to manifest "Jesus is Christ." The claim "Jesus is Christ" is the proclamation of a church to the necessity of becoming holy. The holiness of a church can only be achieved to the extent that the faith proclamation of "Jesus is Christ" becomes a faith praxis, and to the extent that our Church constantly becomes the new vessel of Jesus Christ. The emphasis of the Chinese Church on being the light and the salt is the result of its understanding of the proclamation that "Jesus is Christ" in its experience.

It is with such an emphasis and understanding that our education is carried on. It is significant to recognize that theological education must be able to integrate church praxis. In the course of doing so, a tension may arise. Local congregations may not be aware of the

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<sup>4</sup> The term "individual" here refers to both an individual person and an individual church. An individual's experience is unique, and an individual church's experience is also unique. The experience of Chinese Church has shaped a faith pattern that is also unique.

significance of our emphasis in our theological education, and they may discourage the attempt to challenge their set-faith. Therefore, education should be carried on both from above and from below. It is true that Church has always been growing in tensions and tensions may be unavoidable in a growing church.

Theological education in China has just started. There will be more challenges and tasks. While we use the experience of other churches from their theological education as our references, we must concentrate on developing our own pattern of theological education that is capable of being expressed by the Chinese culture. This pattern of theological education with Chinese particularities can only be based on the confession of "Jesus is Christ" in a Chinese context.

English original.

## ***FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES***

### **Feminist Theology and the Chinese Church - CAO SHENGJIE**

Feminist theology has been advocated by western female theologians since the mid-twentieth century, functioning to raise female consciousness concerning biblical commentary and traditional theology. Except for Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, Chinese seminaries rarely offer courses in feminist theology, but through contacts with overseas Christians, feminist theology has had a definite influence on Chinese Christianity.

#### **Feminist Theology Furthers the Development of Women's Work in the Church**

Following resumption of church activities in China in the 1980s, development in all areas of church work began to prosper. Before the Fifth National Chinese Christian Conference in 1991, the CCC and TSPM had established a system of regulations, committees on theological education, church music, Christian literature and Bible publication; but none for women's work. Many people's thinking at the time was that since men and women both participated in the work of the church, there was no need for a special category of women's work. In fact, the Chinese church had a tradition of women's work during the last century. Now, with women accounting for upwards of seventy per cent of Chinese Christians, it would be difficult to run the church well if we do not do a good job in this work.

In the process of developing relationships with overseas Christians, the Chinese church has had many contacts with overseas church women. These have included American Presbyterian Jean Woo, formerly with the China Program of the U.S. NCCC, who has organized many groups of American church women to visit China; American feminist theologian, Prof. Letty Russell, together with Prof. Kwok Pui-Lan of Hong Kong, led a delegation of American and Asian feminist theologians in 1990; prominent officers of the Women's Council of Asian Christian Churches visited twice under the leadership of their former head, Eunice Kim. Women from churches all over China participated in conversations with these visitors, shared experiences with them, and learned about women's work in churches overseas. The visitors also brought their views on feminist theology. I remember an occasion when Asian Christian women used Jesus' healing of the woman who had been bent over for 18 years (Luke 13: 16) to illustrate Jesus' special love and care for women. This was very inspiring and encouraging for us.

1988-1998 was the WCC Decade of Women. Among the materials sent out was the theological basis for the importance of women's issues: Christ's body should be a fellowship of mutual love. Men and women were God's creation, the limbs of the church, and they should be closely bound together, to enable women to make many contributions to the church.

The Chinese church also sent women to study overseas, where they very naturally tended toward feminist theology. To my knowledge, after studying overseas, Gao Ying, Peng Cui'an, Sun Meici, and I myself, all felt that there were in the Chinese church, too, issues that women needed to address. For example, women's work: the thinking behind this term does not stress anything special about women, it does not see women's role within the church. Feminist theology helps us to move from theory to raising our level of knowledge, and to become conscious of the



importance of promoting women's work.

The UN Fourth World Conference on Women was held in Beijing in 1995. As a member group of the Chinese Federation of Women, the YWCA was permitted to organize a discussion in the NGO Forum. When it was learned that Christian women from many countries would participate in the activities, Chinese church women could not wait to get involved. At the initiative of 19 young colleagues, the *lianghui* set up the Commission on Women's Work at the end of 1993. It was the first national women's organization of the church in new China, signifying that a new page had been opened in women's work. With the establishment of the Commission on Women's Work, its active participation in the NGO Forum, and the joint discussion with the YWCA at the Beijing forum, "Women-Church-Society," many foreign women heard the voices of Chinese Christian women.

These events illustrate that feminist theology functioned to encourage, in terms of theory, the opening up of the work of organizing Chinese Christian women.

### **Feminist Theology and the Awakening of Chinese Church Women**

Feminist theology touches on a broad range of issues, three of which are directly related to women in the Chinese church:

1. Raising feminist consciousness and understanding that, in the eyes of God, men and women should be completely equal.

China has been influenced by thousands of years of feudal thinking, and its effect on the consciousness of young women is very profound. After Liberation, the equality of men and women was enshrined in the law, but in reality, women faced many difficulties: in educational, employment, and other opportunities. In the church, those who looked down on women always quoted certain Bible passages to support their views, adding another layer to the fetters that bound women in the church.

Whether in society or in the church, people, content with received ways of life, see the actual inequalities between men and women as the norm. Not only men, but women, long accustomed to the thinking that says men are better than women, put themselves down, shrank from meeting things head on, felt that they should come second. If we want to strive for male-female equality, we women must first have a feminist consciousness, we must realize our own value as women, one that men cannot substitute for.

There are two Bible passages frequently referred to in feminist theology that have great significance for understanding the value that God has given to women: 1) Genesis 1:27, where God makes humankind in God's own image, "male and female he created them." This shows that women and men are the same in God's creation, each has God's image. God created men and God created women; neither is set higher than the other. 2) Galatians 3: 28: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Jesus Christ." This shows that in the redemption of Jesus Christ, women and men alike have been blessed, with no difference made between them. Thus there is absolutely no reason for

women to think that they are a lower rung of humanity. They should value their status in Christ.

2. In the matter of women clergy, the emphasis should be on women also being vessels for God's use.

The Chinese church began to ordain women in the 1980s and there are now more than 300 women pastors in China, quite a few in absolute numbers. But this does not mean that men pastors and women pastors are equally accepted in the Chinese church. In some places some churches still have not ordained women, or if they have, they are still placed in subordinate positions. It is said that in some places, a female pastor will only be allowed to lead services if there is no male pastor available. Individual female pastors, too, have a sense of inferiority. If someone asks a female pastor to marry them, that female pastor may, on the excuse that believers are not used to it, recommend a male pastor for the job.

Feminist theology helps women study the Bible. In Old Testament society where women had no social position, God still used women such as Miriam, Deborah, and Esther to achieve God's will. In New Testament times, the female disciples who followed Jesus were loyal to the end. It was a woman who first saw Christ after his resurrection, and who was sent to spread the message of the resurrection. The Church was built on the foundation of Jesus' resurrection, and in this sense, we can say that women were the earliest disciples. These Bible teachings help women in the church today to be brave in taking up what God has entrusted to them, and accept work in the church.

3. Women should not only serve generally in the church, but should take up important responsibilities.

In many churches, whether in China or overseas, women are in a majority, and enthusiastically join in the work of the church. But the proportion of women among decision-makers and leaders in the church is always very small. On the one hand, this has to do with the quality and ability of women, but on the other hand, it is often because women have not been given the attention they deserve. The *lianghui* values women comparatively more. There are four women among the nineteen office holders at the chairperson, deputy chair, president, and vice-president levels of the current TSPM and CCC. But at the local level, the imbalance is quite pronounced. Before the Fifth National Chinese Christian Conference, women were hopeful that 30 per cent of the delegates would be women, but in the event it only reached 21.3 per cent. Before the Sixth National Conference, women worked harder, with the result that women accounted for 26.1 per cent of delegates, but though this represented an increase over five years earlier, it still did not reach the goal of 30 per cent. This is because in the grassroots churches, and in the county-and-city-level *lianghui*, there are very few women in positions of responsibility, so it is difficult to choose women as delegates. These small numbers reflect the status of women in the grassroots churches—they do a lot of work, but have little right to speak.

Feminist theology stresses that when God created women, God gave them special grace, and so the church should recognize the role of women and encourage them to play to their strengths in serving the church. Like Phoebe, the deacon praised by Paul (Rom. 16:1), Priscilla's name is mentioned before that of her husband Aquilla (Acts 18:26), which shows that Phoebe and

Priscilla made great contributions to the church. If the church takes a good look at women's role, it should create the conditions to help them grow, rather than disparage them. Training women to take professional positions within the church is not only helpful in reflecting the needs of women Christians, but will be a great help to the development of the church.

### **Unite the Chinese Church for Practical Study of Feminist Theology**

In my contact with conditions in the church, and in the process of studying feminist theology, I personally have perceived two things:

1. We do not take up feminist theology indiscriminately, but encourage women to look squarely at and realize the potential of the grace God has blessed them with, encourage them to make higher demands on themselves, and work to together with male colleagues in building the Chinese church well.

There are radical feminist theologians in the West who concentrate on the struggle for women's rights. Some, if the opportunity arises, can be quite fierce in accusing their male colleagues of oppressing women. Feminist theology calls for inclusive language, and opposes the use of gender exclusive language to describe God, or the use of the male third person pronoun to represent all Christians. This has positive significance. For example, in the NRSY, what had been translated in the past as "brothers" is now "brothers and sisters," which is closer to the original. But the proposal to use "Creator" in place of "Father" for God, easily leads to conflict in the church.

One idea implied in the call to run the Chinese church well according to the three-self principle is that of "strengthening unity." The Chinese church is short of qualified people today. The phenomenon of keeping women out on the premise that women are lacking in physical strength and good at housework is totally wrong and must be changed. But within the church, men and women must work together, must complement each other and work with one heart to build up the church. The issue of male-female equality should not dominate, giving rise to the erroneous idea that women must "seize power." At our present stage, it would not be productive for us to bring in disputes over inclusive language and so on, for these would affect the unity of the church.

If women are to be respected within the church, they must not depend on others, but work realistically themselves, proving by real action that they will not fall behind. The Chinese Federation of Women promotes "Four Selves" for women (self-respect, self-confidence, self-determination, and self-strengthening) and these are also useful for women in the church. Women pastors and women coworkers face many real difficulties-lack of education, narrow - mindedness, heavy burdens at home-and so should rely even more on the power of God to overcome their own weaknesses. They should take the matters of God's house as their own, and continually improve themselves and be loyal handmaidens of God.

2. Feminist theology is closely related to hermeneutics. We must study advanced methods of biblical interpretation, not only to resolve women's issues, but more, out of concern for theological reconstruction in the whole Chinese church that will enable Christianity to adapt to

socialist society.

If we proceed from a literal interpretation, then there are things in the Bible that are not helpful to women's position; for example, Paul denying women the right to speak, requiring them to be obedient, etc. In fact, God is not biased, and does not denigrate females: this is not the whole message of the Bible. Feminist theology has always stressed hermeneutics, not only for passages that value women, but have called for close study of those passages that have been seen as belittling to women, including study of the words, grammar and tone of the original language, the historical background, etc. Feminist theology has been very helpful in gaining a correct understanding of the spirit of the original. Reading the Bible from a woman's perspective frequently brings women new light.

China is currently engaged in theological reconstruction. Theological thinking must be anchored in the Bible; how to understand the spirit of the Bible is crucial. Many theologically related issues that concern our Chinese Christians are all directly related to biblical interpretation. For example, "do not be yoked together with unbelievers"-does this imply that believers and unbelievers are set in opposition? Does the call for Christians to "be sanctified" mean that Christians must separate themselves from all that is of the world, etc? Christian women must concern themselves with the theological direction of all Christianity, not simply with feminist theology. If the dominant theological thinking of Chinese Christianity is stagnant, conservative, and does not develop healthily, feminist theology will receive little attention and it will be difficult to raise the position of women in the church. Precisely because women have tasted sweetness through biblical interpretation, they want to know more about God's truth. We must actively involve ourselves in the present theological reconstruction in our church and take the lead in biblical interpretation.

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## On Paul's Prohibitions on Women in 1 Corinthians - WANG PENG

There are several passages in Paul's letters that make women readers today uncomfortable. Most prominent among them are 1 Corinthians 14: 34-36 ("women should be silent in the churches... for it is shameful for a woman to speak in church"); 1 Corinthians 11: 4-16 ("women should cover their heads"); and 1 Timothy 2:11-13 ("I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent").

Chinese Christian women were raising questions about these passages as early as the 1920s. These women included Dr. Zhang Zhujun, formerly of the Red Cross. She is said to be the first Chinese woman to preach from the pulpit. She had no praise for Paul's forbidding women to speak in the church, for she believed men and women were equal, both able to speak in church. Cheng Guanyi (sister of Cheng Jingyi), in debating the ordination of women, raised the hermeneutical issue of whether the Bible's teachings were appropriate in different environments. The first Chinese General Secretary of the YWCA, Ding Shujing, pointed out that Jesus' attitude toward women was quite different from the prevailing Jewish customs of the time.<sup>1</sup> In order to mobilize the potential of Chinese women in the church, these Chinese Christian women pioneers blazed a trail through the wilderness in many areas, including women's biblical interpretation, church structure, male and female equality in practice, and so on.

More than eighty years have passed since they began their efforts. Though female preaching and ordination are no longer problematic in most areas, hidden discrimination against women still exists in the Chinese church today. Paul's interpretation of the Old Testament and its influence still, consciously or not, dominates our views.<sup>2</sup> How should we, as female Christians today, treat Paul's prohibitions on women? Below, I would like to consider this question using modern methods of reading the Bible and taking a modern theological view of Paul's treatment of women.

### Limitations of a "Literal Bible Interpretation"

Though these several passages of the Bible are difficult to understand today, they have had a long-standing impact in the history of the church, in the history of the women's movement, and even in cultural and social life.

In the Middle Ages, a literal interpretation of these passages became the primary basis supporting the view that women were a lower order of humanity. People even felt that among God's creatures, women ranked between men and animals, and thus, though they were higher than animals, they could not be mentioned in the same breath as men. In this view, though

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<sup>1</sup> Kwok Pui Lan, "Hermeneutics from a Chinese Woman's Perspective," in *Asian Context and Hermeneutics*, edited by Li Huanchang (Hong Kong: CCLC, 1996), 252.

<sup>2</sup> Happily, since the 1980s, Chinese Christian women have been using feminist methods of interpreting the Bible in their study of the Bible and in their preaching. What they have found has been beneficial and has brought much new light. For example, both Prof. Gao Xiumei and Rev. Gao Ying have articles in *In God's Image-Feminist Hermeneutics* published in 1997 by the Hong Kong Women's Christian Association.

women had souls, they lacked the male's capacity for rational thinking, moral discernment, and theological understanding. This dangerous observation led to a denial of education to females, and to the tacit acquiescence in the low status of women in society.<sup>3</sup> In Victorian England, it was popular to interpret Genesis 3:16 ("I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children") literally. People liked to quote these passages to oppose using drugs in childbirth, and used them as an excuse to deny women the vote.<sup>4</sup>

There is no lack of examples of that all these depreciations of women's position and deprivation of female goodness created by literal interpretations go against the spirit of the Bible. The theologian Emil Brunner went straight to the heart of the matter in saying that an attempt to appeal to biblical passages in a literal way demonstrated that our attitude toward the authority of the Bible goes against the spirit of the gospel.<sup>5</sup> We cannot deny the value of a literal interpretation outright. In fact, if we are simply speaking of women's role in the church, there are still many passages in the Bible where, even in a literal interpretation, we can see women's positive role in the early church: in Mary the mother of John, whose other name was Mark (Acts 12:12); Lydia in the church in Philippi (Acts 16); Phoebe of the church at Cenchreae (Rom. 16), etc. We can make a long list of such names. But how do we prevent these precious witnesses from being abolished by an oversimplification in the tradition of Paul's prohibitions against women? Faced with perplexing Bible passages that because of the obstacles of time and space become difficult to grasp, it is necessary, while maintaining the authority of the Bible, for us to seek other methods of interpreting scripture. Paul said, "for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (2 Cor. 3:6). The goal of all our research methods is to find the "spirit," in hopes of understanding what God wants to say to us through these bible passages. Literal interpretation of some bible passages, especially the Union Version and other Chinese translations, can lead to dealing with them simplistically. This is not only a case of blind men trying to describe the elephant, but a departure from the spirit of the gospel. It is an objective loss of the Bible's authority.

### **Return to the *Sitz im Leben* of the Passage**

To a great extent, historical criticism can be very helpful in getting us out of our difficulty in understanding a passage. It can help us to return to the time of the biblical passage and understand the actual background that produced it.

Close readings of the Bible all over the world today are aimed at two goals. First is to bring forth the original significance of the passage within the historical web from whence it came; that is, the message the original author or editor wished to express. Because of time and distance, this task is not easy; still, it must be done. The modern tools mentioned above, that is, critical methods of all sorts, can help to achieve this task. The second goal is to ask what significance each passage has for our time and our place.<sup>6</sup> The historical critical method refers to the first goal. Although in the Chinese church today, and even in the seminaries, Bible scholars still feel doubtful when this method is mentioned, in fact everyone uses it, to a greater or lesser extent, in reading the Bible, whether consciously or unconsciously. Look, for example, at the texts related

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<sup>3</sup> William F. Orr and James Arthur Walther, *I Corinthians* The Anchor Bible, 262.

<sup>4</sup> Ji Bosun, *A Commentary on Genesis* (Hong Kong: CCLC), 159.

<sup>5</sup> Ye Jing de, "Brunner's Theology of Marriage," see *Christian Culture Critique*, 6:265.

<sup>6</sup> Fang Zhirong, "How Chinese Read the Bible," in *Asian Context and Hermeneutics*, 138.

to polygamy in the Old Testament and Paul's teaching in the New Testament on the relationship between masters and slaves—we cannot believe that there is any necessity for polygamy or slavery in today's world. And again, when we read Paul's demand to the church in Corinth that women cover their heads when praying or prophesying (I Cor. 11:4-16), the majority of churches in the world hold that this was Paul's demand to the church in Corinth of his day about their worship, not one directed toward worship in churches today. For Paul accepted the cultural environment of the times, and unconsciously saw it as eternal law.<sup>7</sup> That is to say, that Paul's strictures on women in the church at Corinth existed in the fixed conditions of the time, and are not an absolute and universal teaching for women regardless of time or place.

Corinth was then a morally lax and licentious city. Thus Paul felt it was better to be over-cautious, over-strict, in such circumstances, to avoid criticism from those outside the church of an excess of Christian tolerance, or to put Christians in the way of temptation.<sup>8</sup> In that increasingly decadent world Corinth women of position led lives of deep seclusion and rarely went out. At home, they could entertain no one but their husbands. They were not allowed to attend banquets, or go out alone on the streets, or go to public gathering places, let alone publish their views there. What sort of women went to public gathering places? - The thousands of priestesses of the shrines of Eros. They were temple prostitutes and entertained men every evening at dusk on the streets.<sup>9</sup> It was the good women who lived in seclusion, while the prostitutes showed themselves on the streets. This was the Corinthian social background of the time.

The female liberation brought by Christianity was an assault on and a challenge to traditional social mores, and caused some problems. It is quite possible that in the church at Corinth, there were some women in leadership positions and Paul did not seem to hesitate to work with them. It was the same in other churches, in Philippi, for example. But when Paul wrote this letter, there were some problems in the church at Corinth - divisions, disorder in worship, etc., and Paul perhaps felt that women bore responsibility for these problems.

The impact of the stricture that "women should cover their heads in church" was long lasting. Even today in Europe, men take off their hats in church, but not women. Visiting Rome's churches in the summer, women can come and go in their sun hats, but men must properly remove their hats. 1 Cor. 11:15: "but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory. For her hair is given to her for a covering." This is another custom that comes with a long tradition. It was only in the 20th century that women began to cut their hair short and when they did there was a lot of opposition from conservative circles.

If we look at 1 Corinthians 14:34-36, and its surrounding text, from the perspective of literary criticism, the "women" of v.34 might better be translated "wives". Together with v.35 and Ephesians 5:24, all are speaking of family relationships between husbands and wives. Generally in Judaism, a social relationship between a man and a woman is that of husband and

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<sup>7</sup> Malar Chinniah, *Women in the Early Church and a Commentary on Paul's Letters from the Perspective of Women Today*, see *Women Interpreting the Bible*. Hong Kong: Women Christian Feminist Association, 1997, 114.

<sup>8</sup> Barclay, *Commentary on the New Testament*, vol. 1 (Shanghai: CCC, 1999), 1571.

<sup>9</sup> See note 6.

wife. In these biblical passages, Paul is mainly looking at husbands and wives in their homes and not at the subordinate relationships of men and women in society or in the church. In 1 Corinthians 11:5, Paul suggests that women can pray and prophesy in church, so what he says here about women being silent in church, does not refer to praying or prophesying and is in contradiction with 11:5. Together with 14:26, from the text preceding and following v. 33 and 34, we know that what is emphasized here is "but all things should be done decently and in good order" (14:40), "for God is a God not of disorder but of peace" (14:33). With the following "let them ask their husbands at home," it is very possible that asking women to "be silent" is due to the fact that these wives interrupt the prayers or prophesy of the gathering at will. No matter what is referred to here, it is as Calvin said; whatever this refers to concretely is of no consequence. What Paul prohibits here can only be actions that disrupt worship and teaching.<sup>10</sup>

From our point of view today, these prohibitions are the result of the moral standards of patriarchal society. Of course no one can transcend his or her history or society. We cannot blame Paul from the perspective of women's liberation today.

Some people feel that Paul's prohibitions on women are part of a whole in which he stresses women's rights and positions. On the one hand he encourages and praises those women Christians who serve with zeal in the church: "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchreae, so that you may welcome her in the Lord as is fitting for the saints, and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a benefactor of many and of myself as well" (Rom. 16:1-2). In addition to Phoebe, in the long list of names that begins chapter 16, women are in prominent positions, which shows that in Paul's eyes, the sisters who "toiled for the Lord" in the church deserve special mention. On the other hand, faced with the many problems in the church at Corinth, he worried that the actions of women, especially wives, in that church departed from virtue, and harmed the image of their husbands and the church, and so he proposed some severe prohibitions. "All things are lawful, but not all things are beneficial. All things are lawful, but not all things build up" (1 Cor.10:23). The social results and impact of the actions of those in the church weighed heavily in Paul's eyes.

### **Reexamine the Biblical Basis in Genesis for Paul's View of Women**

Paul based his prohibitions against women on passages from the Old Testament, mainly passages from Genesis.

For example, 1 Corinthians 11:12 ("For just as woman came from man, so many comes through woman, but all things come from God"), has its origins in the J text of Genesis 2:21-23. The source of the latter half of 1 Corinthians 14:34 ("For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says.") is unclear, Biblical scholars, based on their assessment of the surrounding text, think that it may be from Genesis 3:16. 1 Timothy 2:13 ("For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor") comes from Genesis 2:21-23 and from Genesis chapter 3.

Following the historical critical method, contemporary scholars designate Genesis 1:1 - 2:3 by the letter P (the P tradition), which means that from the text and style of this document, the

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<sup>10</sup> See note 2, 312



author may be a scholarly priest. Genesis 2: 4 - 4: 26 diction and style is very different from chapter I and is believed to be from the J tradition. J stands for Yahweh, the sacred name, spelled Jahweh in Hebrew. In P, as in Genesis, chapter 1, God is Eloheim. Chapters 1 and 2 differ not only in diction, style and the appellation for God, but also in how they deal with gender. In chapter 1, humans are created last and humans are stressed as an entity, without gender distinction: "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (v.27). In the story of the Garden of Eden in chapter 2, gender distinctions become sharper, and the order of creation becomes "males, plants and animals, females," and it is only woman that is created last.

Paul's view on women and marriage are basically all founded on the theology of the J tradition in which the woman follows the man. From a female hermeneutical perspective today, this J tradition interpretation must be reexamined.

In Hebrew the word "Adam", in most cases, means "humankind" or "human" without gender distinction. Only in a few places in Genesis chapters 2 and 3 is Adam a specialized noun meaning "the male of the first human couple." In translating or commenting on this word in Genesis chapters 1-3, contemporary biblical scholars have been influenced by feminist interpretations, and are all very cautious. For example, Genesis 2:7 in the Chinese Union Version has "God Yahweh created man from the soil, blew life breath into his nostrils, and he became a living man with a soul, named Adam." The RSV has it: "God Yahweh formed man from clods in the soil and blew into his nostrils the breath of life. Thus man became a living being."

The French Bible (TOB) and the French Jerusalem Bible translate similarly. Comparing these three translations with the Chinese Union Version, we note in them the absence of "with a soul" and "named Adam." As for the "soul," Ji Bosun says, "this becomes 'being' in the RSV, the Hebrew *nephesh*, the King James Version has *ling* (soul) which the RSV astutely avoids, and because it may make present-day readers think of the "eternal soul." This is not a Hebrew concept, but a Greek one. For Hebrews, "soul" is not a part of a human being, but the whole living person, just as this passage so clearly says, the physical body plus that breath that gives it life.<sup>11</sup> "Named Adam" is not in the original text, but an addition in the Union Version. God's breath was blown not only into Adam, but into all created human beings.

Thus, this passage primarily emphasizes that the whole humanity received life directly from God. No matter what race or nation, male or female, his/her life began with God's breath "blown into."

### **Understanding Paul's Prohibitions from a Modern Women's Perspective**

The second aim of understanding the Bible is to get a detailed picture of the significance of this verse in the surrounding text. As Paul Ricoeur said, the final goal of hermeneutics is to make ours what has no relation to us. The historical critical method takes us into the social and historical world of the passage, a prerequisite for understanding the passage, and a first and necessary step in reading the Bible. But this is not the final goal. The final goal is to leap across distance and enable the passage to be the light for our times and our lives.

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<sup>11</sup> See note 3, 120.

## *Freedom and Order*

1 Corinthians 14: 34-36 poses for us a topic that is ancient and always with us: the tension and harmony between freedom and order. The women in the church at Corinth were faced with balancing these two. When it first began, Christian methods gave people a great sensation of gaining freedom, a life filled with the freedom of the spirit (see 1 Cor. 14). At a suitable time, the disciples settled down and led the ordered life of the catholic or universal church, with an ordained clergy, a worship life, carried out in good order and morally regulated, etc. For the church, a free, yet ordered, life is crucially important. First of all, the church is not a place where anything goes and no order prevails; it must have order, quiet, and solemnity. It must be removed from noise and quarrelling, it must create space within a solemn atmosphere and within believers' hearts, so that the spirit of God may move within. At the same time, whether church members are able to act in ways that live out their faith is related to Christianity's existence and development. The proportion of women in the church has always been high and so the exemplary role played by women has been very important.

"All things are lawful,' but not all things are beneficial. 'All things are lawful,' but not all things build up" (1 Cor. 10:23). Paul made this statement to all Christians, whether male, female, in ancient times or the present. Are' all things lawful'? Yes, Christ has already freed us from the slavery of sin. The truth has set us free (see John 8:31-36). But this costly freedom must be limited in three aspects: 1) it must be beneficial; 2) it must build up; and 3) it must glorify God. All freedom must meet these three standard tests.

## *Authority or Obedience to Authority*

With regard to the passage on covering the head, 1 Corinthians 11:7-12 bears further study and reflection.

- 1) In giving his reasons for having women cover their heads, Paul says, "For a man ought not to have his head veiled, since he is the image and reflection of God; but woman is the reflection of man" (11:7). But in passages dealing with the creation of the world, the only mention of "the image of God" occurs in Genesis 1: 26-27, which says, "in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." In Genesis 2, the expression "the image of God" does not recur. Thus, the creation story in P clearly tells us that it is not only men who have the image and reflection of God. The second part of 1 Corinthians 11:8: "but woman from man," is based on the creation story in J, but in 1 Corinthians 11:12, Paul returns to the P source in his conclusion "but all things come from God."
- 2) Corinthians 11:10: "For this reason a woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels." This verse must be carefully weighed. "Because of the angels," is relatively easy to understand; it is generally thought that angels are the guardians of order and the guardians of order in the church (see 1 Tim. 5:21). At the same time, they are the observers of the human spectacle (see 1 Cor. 4:9). The crux here is in the part of the verse that says [in Chinese] "a symbol of obedience to authority on her head." If we check this with the original text, we will discover that the term "obedience" in this

phrase is not found in the original [nor in the NRSV], but has been added by the translators on the basis of their understanding of the meaning of the surrounding text. Why add here a term not found in the original? In the New Testament, "authority" is never used together with the term "obedience." There is only authority, ability. The veil covering the head as a symbol of authority can be compared to Elijah's mantle. In 1 Kings 19:19, Elisha who was plowing in the fields, wanted to follow Elijah, because Elijah threw his mantle, a symbol of authority, over Elisha. In 2 Kings 2, "Then Elijah took his mantle and rolled it up, and struck the water; the water was parted to the one side and to the other, until the two of them crossed on dry ground. ... (After Elijah was taken up to heaven, Elisha) picked up the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and struck the water, saying, 'Where is the Lord, the God of Elijah?' When he had struck the water, the water was parted to the one side and to the other, and Elisha went over" (2 Kings 2:8, 13-14). As a symbolic sign, veiling the head and the mantle of Elijah are both signs of authority. This is to say that the women in the church at Corinth had the ability and the responsibility to strive to build up the church in good order.

In addition, it should be emphasized that in considering Paul's view of women in the New Testament, we cannot simply look at chapter and verse, but must view the whole. If we say that Paul's pronouncements on women in 1 Corinthians is but a blueprint or draft, then in Ephesians, the picture becomes much clearer, richer and complete. In Ephesians 5:31-33 especially, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church. Each of you, however, should love his wife as himself, and a wife should respect her husband." Genesis 2:24 is used here to illuminate the mystery of the relationship between Christ and the church, and also to illuminate the mystery of the husband and wife relationship within family relationships. "Love" and "respect" are the best expression and illustration of the relationship between husband and wife within the family.

This is also the primary message of the story of the Garden of Eden in the J source in Genesis 2, not the order of creation, but the mystery of the joining together of a person and his or her mate, "becoming one flesh (Gen. 2:24). Between the two sexes, male and female, there is not mutual opposition, but mutual "help" (Gen. 2:20), mutual love and respect (Eph. 5:33). Because the Bible tells us that the female, too, is made in God's image (Gen. 1:27), and in their breath is the same grace of God.

### **Conclusion: Stress the Biblical Message of Reconciliation, and Establish a Comparable View of Women**

In "Chinese Christians' Approach to the Bible," Bishop Ting writes, "We find the Bible with its central message of reconciliation and covenanting a source book for inspiring Christian people's unity."<sup>12</sup> And Professor Chen Zemin, in speaking of Liberation theology, said that our theological task is not liberation as such, but reconciliation.<sup>13</sup> These words are very inspiring for us today as we contemplate the role of women in the church. To develop feminist theology and

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<sup>12</sup> K.H. Ting, *Love Never Ends*, 390.

<sup>13</sup> Chen Zemin, "Reconciliation with the People," In *A New Beginning* (Canada China Programme, 1983), 20.

hermeneutics in the Chinese church, we must stress the biblical message of reconciliation, and establish a view of women that conforms to this message. We need not simply a flip-flop of traditional attitudes, which would continue to cause tension between the genders, creating an oppositional relationship, but rather to stress mutuality, unity, and a return to God's intention in creating them male and female. As we find in the P source creation story, men and women alike are made in God's image (Gen. 1:27), and the J source, shows the helping between the two, becoming "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh: (Gen. 2:20, 23).

The attitude of traditional Chinese culture toward women often tends toward two extremes. Confucius, representative of Confucian culture, relegates woman to a place outside the gate of the "gentleman," placing her fifth among "inferior people." In our lives today, this deeply rooted gender bias has not been entirely abolished. In some poor and isolated places, the practice of abandoning female babies or denying education to girls is worrying as ever. In the Taoist approach of Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi feminine beauty symbolizing mother and child is praised, and in some literary works influenced by this, such as *A Dream of Red Mansions*, the author, speaking through the male protagonist, says that women are made of water, while men are made of earth. The image of woman is near that of a celestial being. These two views of women do not consider the dignity and worth of women on an equal par with that of men. But it cannot be denied that there is in traditional Chinese culture much that is waiting to be uncovered. In the vast stores of our history there are images of women as farsighted and insightful, courageous, and upright. Thus, on the one hand, we must use the light of the Bible to examine traditional Chinese culture, while at the same time digging out from traditional culture those inspiring models to enrich our understanding of the Bible. The inter-dynamic relationship between these two aspects will aid us in establishing a view of women in accord with the biblical message of reconciliation.

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## **Women's Status and the Creation Stories in Genesis - CHEN KUANRONG**

Study of the Old Testament has shown that there are two creation stories recorded in Genesis; Genesis 1:1 through to 2:3, and Genesis 2:4-25, respectively. According to textual criticism by biblical scholars, the first creation story belongs to the Priestly tradition. It is part of Old Testament law, so it may be called a code; further, this part of the code was formulated and passed down by priests.

The second creation story belongs to the Yahweh tradition. Here God is called Yahweh, an earlier tradition than the priestly one, probably four hundred years earlier. The first creation story says that God created all things on earth in the first five days, and on the sixth day, God created human beings in God's own image, male and female God created them. God also bestowed upon them great blessings, saying: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have domination over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." (Gen. 1:28). This story tells us that male or female, we were both created in God's image. There is no first or last. Male and female were also equal in the work God entrusted to them; there was no difference in their work, nor any allocation of power. Instead God instructed them to work together.

The second creation story is described very vividly, and is often misinterpreted, thus becoming the basis for much discrimination against women. It says that God first made Adam, then made a garden, flora and fauna, and only in the very end created woman out of Adam's rib. Some people, then, in speaking about the relative position of man and woman, emphasize the sequence of creation events found here, thereby drawing the conclusion that woman is an appendage of man. They think women belong to a lower class, that must be led by men, and that women should always work for men. However, as one Old Testament scholar points out, the arrangement of the story shows us that with woman's appearance, gender difference comes into the human world, making man a whole person. The creation of woman makes the world perfect. Therefore, woman's creation was the peak of all God's creation, its quintessence. Although Eve came from Adam's rib, this does not mean that she was derived from or subordinated to Adam, just as Adam came from earth, but was not subordinate to it. The fact that woman was created from man's rib explains that they were both created from the same substance, and further, that they have an inseparable "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" relationship.

God's goal in creating woman was to make someone who would be a companion for man and also help him. The word "help" appears a total of 21 times in the Old Testament, and 16 of those times refer to God helping people. This demonstrates the fact that woman does not help from a subordinate position. But there are also those who take this "help" in context as a subordinate helping a superior, because God first brought the animals, which were lower than humans, before Adam, but found none suitable for the role. Thus, in this explanation, woman was finally created to fill the role of helper. We say it is precisely because the lower ranking animals were unsuitable that God finally created woman as an equal helper. In short, this story tells us that in the intention of God's creation, women are not second-class, but have the same value and position as men.

Now we will look at the way Jesus sees this issue. When the Pharisees tested Jesus, and

asked him about men divorcing their wives, Jesus' answer contained this phrase: "But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.'" (Mark 10:6-8). We note that Jesus' words are taken from the two creation stories, and are used here to make clear that husband and wife are one body, formed of equals. Jesus does not emphasize the order in which Adam and Eve were created, and is certainly not saying that woman came from man. Therefore, we should not over-emphasize order in creation, or seek biblical evidence for the idea that women are subject to men.

Not only does Jesus not discriminate against women, but teaches respect for them, and this is borne out in his life and teaching. Many feminist theologians emphasize Jesus' liberated attitude toward women. The gospels record that Jesus breaks through traditional ideas, making friends of tax collectors and prostitutes. He broke through ethnic discrimination and worldly prejudice to preach to a Samaritan woman. He didn't avoid taboo, but healed the woman with the flow of blood. And in his mercy, he released the woman taken in adultery. Jesus also believed that women's work was not restricted to the kitchen: he praised Mary for taking the better part. Jesus also broke through the tradition of rabbis accepting only men as followers, by calling many women to follow him, affording them very high honor.

His women followers did not disappoint Jesus. When everything was going well, they followed the Lord and served him. When Jesus was nailed to the cross, many male disciples ran in all directions for their lives, but the women boldly remained by Jesus' side in the face of the danger of persecution. Finally, when Jesus died on the cross, they tasted the bitterness and suffering of the cross with him. Reluctant to part with him to the very end they followed when he was taken to the tomb. Before dawn on the first day of the Sabbath, once again it was the women who were the first to go the tomb to see Jesus. For their following and service, Jesus blessed them: the resurrected body of Jesus first appeared to women, so that women were given the mission of spreading the good news that "the Lord is risen." Thus women were the first disciples to be sent out in God's mission, and women should take pride in this.

In the Old Testament, God is sometimes described using female imagery, for example, comparing God to a woman in labor (Is. 42: 13 14); or Proverbs (31:10-31) where God is compared to an ideal good wife. In the New Testament, Jesus also uses female imagery for himself, crying out to Jerusalem "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!"(Matt. 23:37). Only a mother's love could describe his love for the people. In the patriarchal Jewish society of the day, then, the way Jesus treated women can be called a feminist liberation movement, advocating a glorious model of equality between men and women.

Let us look again at how Paul sees this question. When he speaks of a "veiled head" in his letter to the Corinthian church, he says: "But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the husband is the head of his wife, and God is the head of Christ. ... Indeed, man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for the sake of woman, but woman for the sake of man." (1 Cor. 11: 3-9). Here, Paul is drawing on the second creation story. Some people think that Paul gleans from this second creation story that Adam leads Eve, who has been subordinated in the order of creation, and that, furthermore, this order

extends into the home and the church. Such a view holds that men are the head of the household, and should hold power in the church as well.

Although in some churches women can be ordained as deacons, elders, pastors, and even bishops, yet these ordained women must still fulfill their roles under the principle of male leadership.<sup>2</sup> Those who hold such views are actually protecting their own power, and seeking biblical evidence to do so. There are two possible reasons for what Paul says to the brothers and sisters of the Corinthian church: first, the position of women may have already surpassed that of men in the church at Corinth; second, perhaps the women of the Corinthian church had already declared their authority. This is to say; the Corinthian Church at that time may have been led by women. These women lived in a society in which women were considered inferior to men and were trying to gain their liberation and freedom, and break through the traditional custom of women being veiled in the public places, thereby igniting debate in the church. Writing to the Corinthian church under these circumstances, saying that women should have their heads veiled, Paul's goal was to tell these women what sort of society the newly born church existed in; therefore, the women of the church should not put themselves too far forward, but try, as much as possible, to conform to the social norms of the time, and in this way avoid non-Christian censure of the church which would hinder the spread of the gospel.

Paul then changed tack: "Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man or man independent of woman" (I Cor. 11:11). Men and women should be interdependent. As for who was whose source, Paul says, "For just as woman came from man," but after Adam all men "comes through woman"; and Paul goes a step further and points out "but all things come from God" (1 Cor. 11:12). In Galatians, Paul says that in Christianity there is no man or woman, we are all one (3:28). This is the most basic doctrine of and theological evidence for male-female equality. There may be many reflections of the male-centered society of the time in Paul's letters, but his general position is still to advocate for male-female equality.

To summarize, we can draw the conclusion that men and women's status is equal from the creation stories in the Bible. This conclusion is verified by the entire bible, as well as by Jesus' life and teachings, and the revelation given to Paul by God.

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## ***IN MEMORIAM: LUO ZHENFANG***

### **In Memory of Luo Zhenfang - XU DINGXIN AND MO RUXI**

Our beloved colleague Luo Zhenfang was a distinguished professor of New Testament at Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, well known in the field of biblical research at home and abroad. He was also the president of the Nanjing branch of the Yenching University Alumni Association. Because of a recurrence of heart disease, and the failure of extreme measures, he died in Nanjing at 2 a.m. on September 22, 2000, and now rests in the Lord. He was eighty-one years old.

Luo Zhenfang was born in April 1920 in the city of Tianjin in Hebei province. He studied in Huaiwen Primary and Middle Schools and in 1939 passed the entrance exam for the Foreign Languages Department of Yenching University in Beijing. Later due to the outbreak of war, he transferred to Beijing University, graduating from its Foreign Languages Department in 1941. With victory in the war against Japan in 1946, Luo devoted himself to work in the church in China, entering the School of Religion at the former Yenching University where he was a student of T.C. Chao. He studied theology and graduated in 1949, the year the People's Republic of China was founded, in the early years of the development of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Chinese church. In the same year, Luo began Christian youth fellowship work at the Chongwen Men Church in Beijing, working there seven years, from 1949 to 1956. Luo was conscientious and hard working as a leader of Chinese Youth for Christ. In 1956 he was invited by Yanjing Union Theological Seminary to teach New Testament and Greek. In 1961, Yanjing Union Theological Seminary joined with Nanjing Union Theological Seminary and Luo and his family moved to Nanjing where he became a professor of Bible. Following the Cultural Revolution, when Nanjing Seminary reopened, Luo was extremely excited and threw himself into teaching New Testament to each new class beginning with the class of '81, teaching many sections of New Testament, which were warmly welcomed by the students and had outstanding results. In 1988, when teacher rankings were reassessed in Chinese seminaries nationwide, Luo was named full professor of New Testament at Nanjing Seminary.

From 1956 when Luo began to teach at Yanjing Union Seminary in Beijing, and then came to Nanjing Seminary to teach New Testament and Greek, he has been a teacher for 44 years. Except when the Seminary was twice closed, in 1958 and again during the Cultural Revolution era from 1966, he never stopped working, but always stood on the frontlines of the Seminary, right up to the time of his death. In his more than forty years of service to the church in Nanjing and work at the Seminary, Luo Zhenfang set a fine example for us all of a noble pastor, a loyal servant of the Lord and of a teacher and friend who was loyal and kind, untiring in teaching and guidance, and caring for students with a loving heart.

In addition to his service to the church and work in the Seminary, Luo worked day and night in theology, biblical research, translation, and literature work. He published countless essays and sermons in Christian publications. There have been seventeen volumes published in the Theological Education Series and of these, Luo Zhenfang authored three major ones: *Manual for the New Testament* (1989); *Theories of the Bible* (1990); and a collection of his own shorter pieces, *Xuandao ji* (1999). In the 1980s he took part in the editorial work for the religion section



of the Chinese encyclopedia on Christian terminology.

Luo Zhenfang put a great deal of effort into self-propagation work for the church in new China and in exchanges and communication with churches overseas, including overseas Chinese churches. Every academic year he would be invited to give lectures in seminaries across the country, and to lecture in lay training courses in the grassroots churches, aiding in the training of lay leaders. He was a frequent member of delegations visiting overseas and a participant in all kinds of academic conferences overseas. He was often accompanied in these cases by Mrs. Luo.

On December 30, 1988, he suffered a myocardial infarction and was rushed to the Jiangsu People's Hospital where his condition was pronounced critical. But a miracle took place and his condition improved rapidly from critical to stable. Six months later he had recovered and resumed his teaching at the seminary, and in June of 1990 and again in 1994, he traveled to the US and UK on academic exchanges.

In March 1998, due to exhaustion from work as well as a serious heart condition, Luo again entered hospital for a five-month stay. In December of that year, he was again fit enough to resume teaching his classes at the seminary.

In July 1998, Prof. Luo, along with three other seventy-year-old professors at the seminary, formally retired. But he continued to accept invitations, and although he no longer taught in the B.D. program, he accepted graduate students in New Testament and supervised their dissertations.

In the summer of 2000, he and Mrs. Luo were again invited to travel to the Dalian church to lecture in lay training courses for over two weeks. When the heat of the summer passed toward the latter half of August, after Luo had returned from Dalian, he was visibly exhausted, and by special arrangement, he entered the convalescent hospital at Zhongshan in the eastern suburbs of Nanjing for rest and testing. On August 29, he made a special trip to the seminary to take part in the opening ceremonies for the current academic year. On September 1, he led morning chapel, and the day before he had gone to the library to check a source. That morning, as he stepped down from the lectern after delivering his sermon, he appeared short of breath and was taken back to hospital that morning. But he held on for three weeks, and then on the morning of September 22, he went into cardiac arrest, and his heart finally stopped.

In 1950, when new China was new, Luo Zhenfang began his service to the church, and personally experienced the development of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement over fifty years. Following the Jinan Conference of the Chinese church, he had a high opinion of and took an active part in the initiative for theological reconstruction. On the eve of celebrations in Beijing to mark the 50th anniversary of Three-Self, Luo Zhenfang laid down the burdens of fifty years and went to his heavenly home.

Luo had with his own eyes seen the fruits of fifty years of the TSPM; the fine students produced over twenty years since the reopening of the seminary, now spread throughout the country as the core group in the churches of every province and city and in the seminaries in every region; and he had seen the beginnings of a lively process of theological reconstruction.

The psalmist said, "The days of our life are seventy years, or perhaps eighty, if we are strong" (Psalm 90: 10). Luo Zhenfang had stepped over the threshold of eighty. We feel he was taken too soon, and we await the contributions of his students in New Testament research to continue his work.

Luo was the current president of the Nanjing branch of the Yenching Alumni Association, the elderly leader of those of us who had graduated from the School of Religion there, a student of that school's theologian T.C. Chao. We have been together with Luo for half a century-as classmate, colleague, and friend. Luo Zhenfang' s passing will leave a deep and unfading impression on us.

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The authors are colleagues of Prof. Luo at Nanjing Seminary.

## Living is Christ and Dying is Gain - CHEN ZEMIN

My text for this memorial service for our colleague, Luo Zhenfang, is taken from Philippians 1:21. Paul included in his letters many teachings on life and death, and the Christian understanding of the meaning and value of life. The attitude one should have in the face of death is summed up in the well-known verse which is my title for today. We can say this is Paul's guideline for the Christian life and death.

Paul wrote this letter while imprisoned in Rome, awaiting judgment. There were two possibilities before him: to be exonerated and released, able to continue to be present to the churches in every place and the brothers and sisters there, serving the church and spreading the gospel of Christ; or to be sentenced to death, which was his fate at the end of his life. As he faced life and death, he had the feeling of being between a rock and a hard place, with no control over the choice. 'It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be put to shame in any way, but that by my speaking with all boldness, Christ will be exalted now as always in my body, whether by life or by death.' (v. 20) He went on to say, 'For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain.' (v. 21) On the face of it, this sounds a bit arrogant, putting oneself on a par with Christ. 'Death is gain' is also very hard to understand. Most people see death as the completion of human life and work, as the end: how can there be gain?

In the original, these words are full of passion and the sentence is not very complete grammatically. The verb we use in Chinese is not in the original. A direct translation from the original would be 'for me, living ...' Christ, dying .., gain.' To make the meaning clearer in Chinese, we add verbs. (It is customary in Chinese at times to omit the verb as well, to give more force to the sentence.)

Since seeing Christ on the road to Damascus, being called, and gaining new life, we could say that for Paul, living was Christ. Barclay says that Christ was indeed the beginning, continuation and end of Paul's life; its encouragement and the source of its power. We can say that Paul's living was all for Christ, to show forth Christ and so we can say, 'living is Christ.' We are not Paul, and would not dare to say this, but we should take Paul as our model, learn from him, and strive to make our lives, our all, for Christ, learn from Christ, witness to Christ, and preach Christ. At the least, we should say, 'living is for Christ'

Human life is a gift from God, Psalm 90, which we just heard read, tells us that though life is short, like a dream or a breath in comparison to the eternity of God, those who believe in Christ should learn well to number their days. We are told to have a heart of wisdom, to be satisfied with God's steadfast love, to rejoice and be glad all our days. A person's life is usually seventy years; 'or perhaps eighty, if we are strong.' Rev. Luo Zhenfang was blessed by God with eighty years. He began to study theology in 1946, graduating from seminary in 1949. He served the church seven years, then joined the seminary, teaching, and doing research and pastoral work for forty-four years. Of his eighty years, fifty were given in the Lord's service. He worked conscientiously right up until the end. I won't forget his teaching and research (in linguistics), his translation of James D.G. Dunn's *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament*. He supported the TSPM through its fifty years, taking an active part in it, and bearing beautiful witness to Christ in

Chinese church and society. We can say that he 'lived for Christ, that all was for Christ.' He embodied the teaching 'living is Christ.'

'Death is gain.' If we apply common knowledge, these words are very hard to understand. Death is a sad thing. Why say it is gain?

- 1) Human life and death are in the hands of God: and are according to God's will. We cannot prolong our lives by a single moment. Medicine has advanced to reduce suffering and push back the moment of death, but in the end, people do die. How to treat death is an important part of how we treat life.
- 2) What happens when people die? There is no precise answer, but several hypotheses: It is the end of everything, everything is extinguished. If this is so, there is not much meaning in human life. This is not Christian faith or teaching.
  - We go immediately up to heaven, or down to hell. We gain reward or retribution for our lives. This is what many Christians and worldly people think, but there is no evidence for it.
  - We fall asleep, waiting for the final resurrection and judgment. Many Christians believe this, and there is some biblical evidence for it. Paul sometimes appears to believe this.
  - We go to some 'in-between' place and time, and continue to wait and train. This is the Catholic purgatory.
  - Paul says, 'my desire is to depart and be with, Christ, for that is far better.' (v. 23) 'To be with Christ, to be with other Christians who have died. This is a 'spiritual fellowship.'
  - Revelation 14: 13, '... blessed are the dead who from now on die in the Lord... they will rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them.'

'Blessed,' 'rest from their labors,'--cast off the weakness of the flesh, the suffering, all the cares of the world..., and be with Christ. After death we continue to serve the Lord in some fashion and to live in some way forever. 'Living is Christ (or, for Christ) and death is gain.' It is without fear or trembling, to continue in the spiritual realm that work, which went unfinished in life, with Christ and the other Christians, to enjoy the complete sweetness of spiritual fellowship. So it is called 'far better.' We believe that Rev. Luo Zhenfang is now in such a place. We, the living, if we attain 'living for Christ' will one day leave this world and be together with all the saints, continuing to serve the Lord. This is Paul's view of life and death, and the view of us Christians.

Finally, Rev. Luo left us just as we were about to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Three-Self Movement. He had been part of the Three-Self Movement for the whole 50 years. In the commemorative photo album published for the anniversary were many photos of those from the older generation who have gone before us, who contributed to the Chinese church and the Three-Self Movement. They did not make it to the celebrations either, but we remembered them. Now Rev. Luo is part of their glorious ranks, serving with them in heaven. We the living must urge ourselves on, so that in the new century, in the new phase of the Chinese church that we have already entered, we continue to progress and to engage in theological reconstruction. As

teachers, we should strive to complete Rev. Luo's unfinished work; as students, we should study hard, and realize his hopes, so that we the living live for Christ, fulfilling this glorious task. One day, we the living will follow them, but the Chinese church will, with God's blessing and under God's leading, continue to build itself up even better.

May God bless these God's words. Amen.

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Chen Zemin is Vice-Principal of Nanjing Seminary.

## **SERMONS**

### **The Choosing of the Seven - WANG AIMING**

'In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against those of the Aramaic-speaking community because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, 'It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word. This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.' (Acts 6:1-7)

'There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men.' (1 Cor. 12:4-6)

First, let us pray:

Almighty God, Dear Father, what a privilege it is to abide in Christ - to dwell in him, sharing his life as a branch shares the life of a vine! Thank you that he is our lives. Work in our hearts to keep us abiding in Christ and filled with his Spirit day by day and moment by moment, by simple faith. Show us any hindrances to this in our lives, and enable us to fling them aside. May God's Word live in us richly; may we keep God's commandments and abide in God's Word. May we keep God's commandments and abide in God's love. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, I'm very happy to share my understanding of these texts of the Bible and also my testimony with you in your Seminary.

Historically, the Church's work has always been divided into two basic categories. One is pastoral proclamation, and the second is pastoral service. The first concerns the essential nature of the Faith, and the second is the life of the church. Usually the clergy is in charge of the preaching and the laity of the work of administering the church. How can we make a strict division in an actual situation of evangelization? We must do this because we are called to organize activities for proclamation. That relates to the ideas of organizing actual matters in the Church. So we quickly face a serious question that is both ecclesiological and ecclesiastical. Put simply, the Church's works are the holy work for spreading the Gospel in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19-20), no matter whether it falls under pastoral proclamation or pastoral service. Thus we have come to the central message of our texts for today: the principles by which the Church is administered.

The fundamental message of Acts 6:1-7 is the principle of democracy in the ordinary life of the

Church. If everything in the Church were to be decided by the authority of the Apostles and the leaders of the Church without any controls in place, we can imagine that such a Church would be full of 'quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, gossip, arrogance, and disorder.' (2 Cor.12:20). This is because church leaders are human, too. They are not God. In actual pastoral work, we need to use the whole wisdom of the believers in practical matters. This wisdom is a gift from the Lord. The message of the texts shows that the full engagement of the believers was the basis of the principle of the democracy initiated by the Apostles in New Testament times.

The second important message of the texts is the principle of the mutual respect. We find that the Apostles, as disciples of the Lord, adopted kind and sincere attitudes when dealing with brothers and the sisters in ecclesiastical matters. Or we can say there is a relationship of equals between the Apostles and ordinary believers. We should recognize that them as brothers and sisters in Christ. The critical question for the leaders of the Church is how to apply this biblical principle in our pastoral work.

The third point of the texts is that the apostles faced squarely the possibility of errors in their evangelical work. They never tried to deny their mistakes, especially those pointed out by ordinary believers. On the contrary, they responded by initiating an ecclesiastical institute to avoid future errors.

We have gleaned from the text from Acts three important points of the ecclesiology. These are: democracy in church government, mutual respect, and an attitude of the authenticity.

Let us turn to our second text for today: 1 Corinthians 12:4-6.

We need to contribute the whole of our life to evangelization; or, we can say that we must respond to the Divine calling with all of life. As a human being, each of us should try our best to work for the Lord using our proper gift that comes from him. We cannot ask all believers to do the same evangelical work. So first we should understand that each of us has received a different gift from the Lord.

But we must confirm from this text one important point: The Lord is the same Lord for all even though we do different services in actual evangelical work. God is the same and the Holy Spirit is the same. As a servant of the Lord, no matter what our position in the Church, we must obey the Lord and be loyal to our Savior. So in this sense, ordinary believers must be of the same mind as the leaders on faith and on responsibility for the Church.

In a word, the ordinary believers have an equal position of the spirituality for the Church because we have the same Lord and the same Holy Spirit, although we work in different positions of the Church because we have different gifts from the Lord.

Now let me share my personal experience about the essential message of the texts.

As you know, Chinese Christianity exists in a particular sociopolitical context. Culturally, China is characterized by authoritarianism. We find this in nearly all aspects relative to administration

both in the government and in the Church. It is a cultural factor of traditional Chinese civilization. So one of the serious challenges for our Church is how to realize the principle of democracy in the practical work of leadership. How can we realize mutual respect between the leadership and ordinary believers, so that leaders treat believers with authenticity in Christ.

Actually, through the working of the Holy Spirit, we can find surprising and pleasing examples in the local church. They have shown the exact way to work according to the teachings of the Bible. Last year I visited Chen Dai church, a church in a small village in Jinjing County, Fujian Province, in southern China. There are three thousand families in this village, of which only thirty families are Protestant Christians. They have established a church council composed of deacons and elders, for making important decisions in the church. The social gatherings and church services are led by the deacons and the elders. The pastor's work is only preaching the word of God. If there are difficult faith questions, they must listen to the pastor's opinions. For instance, should non-Christians be allowed to participate in the Christmas worship? Should unbelievers who request help from the church be treated the same as brothers and sisters in Christ? If so, is baptism still necessary? How can we understand the relationship between the civil authorities and the authorities of the Church? In this situation, the parish council will invite the pastor to give the final decision. Day by day, the Gospel has been spread by their excellent living out of the faith. Believers, and their rich relatives who live abroad, have been happy to support the church financially. Everything in the church, especially financial affairs, has been clear and aboveboard, and the use of money very reasonably decided by the church council for social service. They have offered various services for the children and the elderly of the village, whether they are Christians or not. So the relationship between the older leadership and the younger pastors and deacons is very harmonious. There is not the sad phenomenon Paul describes in 2Corinthians 12:20, of 'quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, gossip, arrogance, and disorder' in this church.

You know, in Third World churches most corruption is due to the fact that the lines of authority and power are unclear. If the principles of democracy, mutual respect and the authenticity could be strictly practiced in the church government or administration, with the understanding that we are brothers and sisters in Christ, I believe that the Church will move successfully onward, spreading the Good News of the Lord.

We should recognize that in China our church faces many serious problems now. One of the biggest is that we have not really established a healthy mechanism like church councils where believers can come together to administer the church. This disappointing situation keeps many potential believers away, especially Christian intellectuals.

And now by sharing the texts about the 'Choosing of the Seven' in the Bible, we have gotten a very important message about the Church's government. We also have this excellent example in one small village. So we are full of confidence that we may realize this good way for all of the administrative levels of our Church one day. Please pray for this.

Finally, let us pray together:



Lord, you hear our prayers before we speak, yet welcome our praying: therefore we come with confidence to lay our requests and thanksgivings before you.

We pray for the authorities of the United States, who can bring the world to peace, we pray for the authorities of China, who should do everything for the people according to the justice of God.

Thank you, Lord. We pray also for Christians everywhere, for those who are persecuted for their faith, for those who struggle to be faithful, we pray for your grace to grow in knowledge and love of you. Especially we pray for the professors, staff and the students both in this Seminary and in Nanjing Seminary. We pray for both the old and young generation of the pastors in the Chinese Church that you would give them the spiritual power to face the different challenges, including the challenges from inside themselves.

Lord, we give you thanks during this Easter season. Especially, we thank you for the gift of Jesus, his life, death and resurrection. We thank you for the surprising ways you continue to bring new life where there has been only death and for the gift of hope for newness in our lives. In Jesus' name. Amen.

English original

Preached at chapel, San Francisco Theological Seminary, April 23, 2001.

## **Imitate What is in Jesus - MANHONG LIN**

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?' And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets. ' He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.'

From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, 'God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you. ' But he turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things. 'Matthew 16: 13-16, 21-23

In order to imitate Christ, we must first know who Jesus is. In the first passage just read to us, this is the question Jesus poses to his listeners: Who is Jesus, after all? Though this question was posed two thousand years ago, and many answers were given in the course of the century that just ended, I believe that there are many people in the world today still asking, still exploring this question; and, with different people using different methods, they come up with an endless variety of answers. The question of who Jesus ultimately is may not appear to Christians, and especially to those of us in seminary, to be much in question. After all there are plenty of ready-made, orthodox answers set out for us to choose from. I think, though, that each one of us, because of differences in our individual faith journeys, and in our study of the Bible, would give different answers to the question.

While I was studying in Austin Presbyterian Seminary, I took a course in the theology of God. The first thing the instructor required of us in the first course session was an answer to the question: Who do you think God is? She wanted us to write down the first answer that came into our heads, and she didn't want anything too long, or too complete. There were twelve students in the class, and when the instructor wrote everyone's answer on the board, we discovered that there wasn't much duplication. The differences resulted from each one's different experience and feelings about God.

So I think that if someone asked those of us here today 'Who do you think Jesus is?' our answers would be very eager, rich, and colorful, and would naturally include Peter's response, with which you are all familiar. Actually, though every believer can answer the question of who Jesus is, at the same time, it really is a very big question, because almost no one can offer a perfect answer. In fact, even if we gathered up all the answers, we could not completely describe Jesus, Son of God, because as we know, we have to recognize our human limitations. All these various answers, however, will help in making our knowledge of Jesus, our Savior, relatively complete. Today, I would like to share with you my own recent thoughts on who Jesus is, in hopes that it will help us to better study Jesus together, to imitate Christ.

First, let us return to the Bible passage we just heard. To Jesus' question, 'Who do you say that I am?' Peter gave an answer that satisfied Jesus and gained his approval. Jesus is Christ, the son of

the Living God. This is the central message of Christianity, preached by the church and believers through the ages. At that time, the Holy Spirit spoke through Peter to reveal Jesus' divinity to the world.

Peter himself was not aware of this, but Jesus knew it clearly, therefore he said to Peter, 'For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven.'

A Korean-American theologian who studies theology of the margins has pointed out that when Peter said this, he had something quite different in mind. Peter, like most people, was one who liked to be at the center of things. Thus, in understanding Jesus, he did so from a central position. In Peter's eyes, only the Son of God could have the most central place, he was King of kings, the preeminent authority. Peter undoubtedly thought of sharing in Jesus' authority and in the dominion of the twelve tribes of Israel.

However, we can say that Peter completely misunderstood Jesus because Jesus' aim was not to begin from the center. On the one hand, Jesus affirmed Peter's answer, because it revealed Jesus' divinity. But on the other hand, Jesus immediately followed this by telling the disciples that he must go to Jerusalem to suffer and to die on the cross. Peter immediately grew nervous and upset, and took him aside to say, 'God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.' Some say that Peter spoke this way because he so loved the Lord that he couldn't bear to see him suffer. But Jesus rebuked him for setting his mind not on divine things, but on human ones; this was because Peter's love was too narrow. This narrow love became an obstacle to God's will. A good case can be made for this view, but I think there is another, compelling explanation, that also brings us light.

Jesus rebuked Peter because Jesus knew what was in Peter's heart. Peter did not really understand what was in Jesus' heart. He thought of Jesus only in human terms, and human nature is to tend toward the center, to crave power. In the beginning Peter certainly did not want Jesus to lose the central position, because if he did, Peter himself would have no tie to it.

In fact, if we go back and examine the Bible, it is not hard to discover that 'the Son of the living God' is nothing like what Peter understood him to be, certainly not at the center of the central position. Rather, he is a marginal person, located on the margin, a servant among servants. We can find many events in Jesus' life to prove this. Let me point out a few.

Jesus was a marginal person while still in his mother's womb. Though Luke's Gospel makes the record of Mary's becoming with child by the Holy Spirit into an extremely holy, incomparably glorious event, Mary is very frightened because this phenomenon is entirely out of sync with Jewish ethics and morality. In the society of the time it would be cause for denigration and scolding. Although the saying 'with child by the Holy Spirit' gradually released Mary from the constraints of the morality and social ethics of the time, she was still looked down upon by the people of her day who, of course, also dismissed the child she bore.

After Jesus' birth, he was cradled in the manger. It was old, hard, and none too clean. Think of it: for a newborn babe, its tender body wrapped in layers of clothes, sleeping in a manger could not be half as comfortable as our cribs today. And the first to come to see Jesus were shepherds, and

some scholars following a star, not important types of the day. Sometimes I feel the carol we sing 'We Three Kings' is rather misleading. Once in church, I heard a believer say, 'See how respected Jesus was as soon as he was born, even scholars with great learning, status, and position rushed to see him. Praise the Lord.' In fact, though the wise men had a little influence in society, their position was not high, it was far from that of the nobility. And the English carol exaggerates even more, saying that they are kings of the Orient. These are all human understandings, placing Jesus at the center.

Turning to Jesus' childhood, it, too, was passed on the margins, on borders, and a double one at that. Politically, he was under Roman domination; from a cultural and ethnic standpoint, he was also an outsider. Nazareth was a border area. Nazarenes were looked down upon. As Nathaniel said to Philip, 'Can any good can come out of Nazareth?' This was how other people saw Nazarenes. We can imagine Jesus' context as a Nazarene.

Jesus began his ministry at the age of thirty-three. The Bible records Jesus' miracles of healing and casting out devils and his preaching on the kingdom of Heaven. Many people think that Jesus was most welcome in his day, that he was loved, like a moon surrounded by stars. In fact, this is also a type of misunderstanding. If we read the Bible carefully, we'll find that in fact Jesus was frequently without a home. He said, 'Foxes have their lairs and the birds of the air their nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.' We should realize that Jesus is giving a true picture of his life at the time in these words. Some believers like to seek the spiritual meaning of their Bible readings, digging out the import of the passages. Of course the allegorical approach is one of many ways to interpret the Bible, but to overstress the allegorical and ignore the most direct message the text has for us will easily lead to extremes. If we think carefully about what Jesus says here, we will sense the bitterness it contains.

Overseas, especially in large American cities, there are many street performers. Many of them are very talented but perhaps because they have not been in America long, or for other reasons, they have not been able to get into the professional and commercial venues and must sell their art on the street. There are performances in the city square in Austin, Texas every day, always in the same place if never at the same time. They, too, mill about the streets; they, too, are homeless.

We can imagine a similar situation. When Jesus performed his miracles, healing and casting out demons, feeding the people with five loaves and two fishes, people flocked to him. But when the people had departed, Jesus had only the disciples, a group of homeless, a group of poor, solitary people. The reason people followed Jesus was not that they were interested in him, but that they were interested in the miracles. And just for this reason, quite a few who had once followed him later joined the crowd propelling him toward the cross.

I think these examples suffice to show that while Jesus was on earth, he was not a person at the center, but was with the people at the bottom of society, those who toiled day and night, those on the fringes. We should never forget that Jesus was one of these. If we overlook this, we will easily make the same mistake as Peter did. And in fact, this type of mistake is common in the history of the church.

Because people understand Jesus as someone at the center of things, his followers seek to follow him to the center. These Christians are fiercely attached to Christ's omnipotence and their attention to 'Jesus is Lord' surpasses their attention to 'Jesus is servant.' The Jesus sought by Christians like these, is not Jesus himself, but power and possessions with the self at the center. In Jesus' name, the Vatican enjoyed hundreds of years in control of Europe. Many western countries thought themselves Christian countries, better than others, their culture surpassing the culture of others. One American social ethicist once made this critique of America: Americans put God to one side and then do what they want. In modern history, many western nations made the same mistake—they were ambitious to control other nations, and brought calamity upon many nations and regions, including our own.

As a proportion of China's population, believers in the Chinese church today are a tiny minority. The number of believers and our national conditions mean that the church is not in a central position here. But there are still many in the church who seek the central position, to the point where they even compete with each other, and through their machinations, do damage to the Christian witness of the church. There are also many Christians who feel that their view of human life, their values, ethics, and morality are a cut above those of the rest. This leads to spiritual pride, and sets up an invisible wall between believers and non-believers. None of this is beneficial to the development of the church and it goes against the spirit of Christ. Christians should not forget that Christ's strength came through weakness. He was exalted through his humility, becoming King of kings, Lord of lords. There's something here we should all pay attention to: this sort of weakness and humility is qualitatively different in motive from our ancient virtue of enduring humiliation.' The latter, in order to be exalted, is willing to endure humiliation for a limited time. The humility Christians promote should avoid such errors.

In the incarnation Christ becomes the Son of Man, Jesus. Jesus, the Son of Man, was not born of a noble family, did not live with lords and princes, but was a very ordinary person, one who lived on the fringes among the toiling masses, and who, in the end, gave up his life for humankind. In this is God's mystery. We can say that the story of the incarnation is the story of Christ's humbling himself. Through humbling himself, Christ manifested the incarnation.

The process of humbling oneself is the process of the divinity of God transformed into human nature. Self-humbling is not part of the original nature of God, but is in essence a cause and effect relationship: that is, it was because Christ was willing to abandon his divine attributes that he descended to become human. Philippians 2 describes this in detail for us.

Ultimately, Christ was willing to humble himself because of love. For love, Christ was willing to die on the cross for our sins. Suffering is a negative experience, but Christ's suffering on the cross was positive because there was love in his suffering. It is said that if not for love, suffering would have enough power to topple the world. And the reason Christ was able, through suffering, to complete the great work of redemption, is because he used love to embrace and heal the whole world the Father had made.

Brothers and sisters, in order to show forth God's love, Christ was willing to humble himself. The Word became flesh and identified the lowliest among us. As those who follow Christ because of the gospel, we should also identify with the people around us. In China, Christianity

was once called a 'foreign religion,' not because it was foreign, but because it had not identified with the masses of the Chinese people. Fifty years of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement has enabled Chinese Christianity to transform its 'foreign' image, and this is the work of the Holy Spirit in the Chinese church. In the current new period, the church should continue to explore how to adapt to the new context. Adaptation means seeking a broader identification, to allow many more people to understand the truth of the gospel. Naturally adaptation does not mean changing or giving up our basic faith - identifying does not mean to seeking to become the same. It is Christ's love and Christ's self-humbling we should imitate. Humility does not ask us to keep our heads down and mouth what others say, to be without self-respect or individuality, but requires that we be open, willing to accept new things, new points of view, new thinking, genuinely able to 'see others as better than ourselves.'

These 'others' should not be limited to Christians, for every type of good gift comes from God. If we say that Christ is the circle of perfection, then the many truths and holy things that exist outside the visible church are all arcs along the circle. All things are fulfilled and perfected in Christ.

Finally, I'd like to conclude today' s sharing with an experience of my own. I recently accompanied a 34-person group from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) on a 22-day trip to 8 Chinese cities.

We saw churches in each place, including rural and minority churches, and visited seminaries. At the final sharing session, the group leader said that this trip to China was an experience of pilgrimage, because the witness of the church in China inspired their faith. She posed the following question for each member of the group: Where did you see Jesus along the path of this pilgrimage? The responses were eager and very moving. One left a deep impression on me: 'I saw Jesus in the visitors to the Gong He Yuan.' It turned out that while the group was in the park, this woman was dragging her feet and could hardly walk. A young couple saw her plight and came up to help her along, walking along with her and the rest of the group to the sightseeing boats on the lake. When we disembarked, another visitor saw that she couldn't walk and came up to help. This new helper was an orthopedic doctor and said she could relieve the woman's pain. The woman and the group leader wanted to give these people some money as a mark of gratitude, but they refused it, and hurried away.

These people who came up to help the ailing tourist may or may not have been Christians, but this was hardly important in the circumstances. The important thing was that their loving actions enabled this American Christian to see Jesus. May everyone see Jesus in us, and may many more such 'Jesuses' be seen by others. Let us imitate the self-humbling of Jesus - a Jesus happy to identify with the people in order to make the Father's world even more beautiful.

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## **"The Shepherd and the Sheep" - SHEN YIFAN**

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly' (John 10: 10-11)

Here Jesus compares his relationship to believers to that between a shepherd and his sheep. Shepherds spend their lives in the wilderness, leading the sheep in high places, watching over them, caring for them. The herd of sheep needs a shepherd, they need leadership; they need guarding.

Psalms 23 describes God and God's people as a shepherd and the sheep. This psalm is a favorite among Christians. It brings us strength and comfort in whatever circumstances we face. Through his life of shepherding and leading the sheep, the shepherd builds up an intimate relationship with them. The sheep know his voice, so they draw near and obey him. And the shepherd knows his sheep, he calls them, he can nearly call them all by name.

In the parable of the lost sheep in Luke 15: 3-7, Jesus movingly describes how worried the shepherd is over the sheep that is lost; and how great his joy is when that sheep is found. We are the sons and daughters of God. Because the Lord is our good shepherd, we receive the Lord's own care in our lives, and we should thank the Lord always.

But though the Lord is indeed a good shepherd, he is not like other shepherds. The Lord says: 'I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.'

The shepherd wants the sheep to have life. All his shepherding, guiding, and guarding are done with this goal in mind. But Jesus goes further: he wants us to have more abundant life. This is to say that more than hoping for peace, joy, and blessings in our lives, we should understand the spiritual meaning and goal of life.

And then Jesus says: 'I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.' There are instances where the shepherd gives up his life for the sheep, such as in a storm, or when thieves come, etc. The Little Heroine of the Grasslands didn't give up her life, yet she lost her feet protecting the sheep. The Lord sacrificed his life for the sheep; even more, he shed his blood for us on the cross, fulfilling God's plan of redemption, enabling us to escape sin through faith and become sons and daughters of God. The good shepherd gives up his life for the sheep. We who follow the good shepherd must also follow the path of self-sacrifice for others. Do we follow the Lord only for personal peace and happiness, individual material and spiritual enjoyment? Then our lives are too narrow, too poor, because we have not yet cast off our self-centeredness.

But when we discover that the Lord leads and blesses us because he wants us to live for him and for others, including others' concerns and a responsibility for serving others in our love, then we do not live in a narrow circle. Our lives greatly expand, and become extremely abundant, showing forth the full and rich meaning of human life.

A visitor came into a church, and seeing the cross, could not understand. What did that big plus sign mean? But that question inadvertently pointed to a truth - the cross is not a minus, but a huge plus.

In following the Lord, we must leave sin behind, this is certain and basic. But following the Lord really does not mean we must lead lives of suffering and denial.

Some people think that belief in the Lord means not eating this or that; not wearing certain things; avoiding this or that entertainment. Not, not, not. In the past some people didn't dare even to look at the things in shop windows, afraid they would commit a 'sin of sight.' This is wrong. We are against excess and waste, but we should have beauty, health, peace, and joy in our lives in this world. This is God's will and blessing. The cross asks us to increase, and to understand the spiritual meaning of human life.

But the Lord not only wants us to have life, he wants us to have it abundantly, to free our lives from narrowness, to enter into the realms of abundance.

This is also what 2 Peter 1: 4-11 teaches us.

Under the guidance of the good shepherd, we will make great progress in our lives, and we will be able to enter abundantly into the eternal kingdom of our savior Lord.

Collected Sermons of Bishop Shen Yifan (Shanghai: CCC, 1995).

A sermon preached on Sunday, September 13, 1981 at the Community Church, Shanghai.



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Each issue of the *Yanjing Journal of Theology* consists of two volumes, one of theological essays and one of sermons and devotions, writings on the life of the church, and student writings, titled "A Cup of Blessing Overflowing." Only the contents of the first volume are included here of each issue are included here.

### No.1 (June)

Volume 1 for this issue not available.

### No.2 (December)

This issue of the *Yanjing Journal of Theology* is devoted to a Forum on The Christian Three-Self Principle and Theological Reconstruction, held at Yanjing Seminary, April 26-28 2000. The forum was attended by participants from churches in ten provinces and municipalities in north and northwest China. Listed here are the main speeches. In addition, the volume contains 40 other papers and speeches presented at the forum by participants from Yanjing Seminary, Beijing, Tianjin, Inner Mongolia, Shanxi, Hebei, Shaanxi, Gansu, Ningxia, Qinghai, and Xinjiang.

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