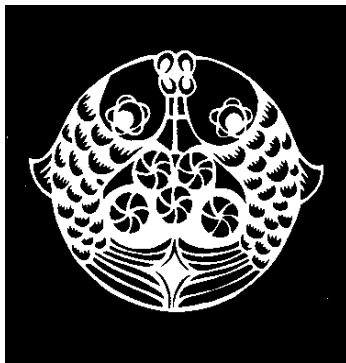


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## From the Editor

Nanjing Union Theological Seminary celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary 31 October- 1 November, 2002. The opening ceremony was held in the auditorium of the imposing Nanjing headquarters of the Jiangsu People's Political Consultative Conference. Bishop K.H. Ting, principal of the Seminary, honorary President of the CCC and honorary Chair of the TSPM, welcomed the more than 400 alumni and 35 guests from Hong Kong and overseas. Rev. Cao Shengjie, President of the China Christian Council, Presbyterian Ji Jianhong, Chair of the TSPM and Executive Vice-President of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary and Dr. Wenzao Han, General Secretary of the Amity Foundation, also spoke. It is perhaps a measure of the progress the Church, and by extension, the Seminary, has made in developing its public role in socialist society that church and seminary leaders were joined on the podium by government officials, including Ye Xiaowen, head of the State Administration for Religious Affairs, Zhu Weiqun of the National United Front Department, Associate Party Secretary of Jiangsu Province Wang Shouting and Party Secretary of Nanjing University Han Shingchen. Both church and government leaders and many overseas guests struck the theme of theological reconstruction, which Bishop Ting described as adapting theological thinking to social changes. Dr. Marvin D. Hoff, the executive director of the Foundation for Theological Education in South East Asia, brought greetings to the celebration from the FTE and its ten member denominations.

At an afternoon symposium, papers were read on heretical sects, theological education, pastoral care and psychological counseling, and factors affecting theological reconstruction. Two of these, Xu Xiaohong's assessment of factors hindering the progress of theological reconstruc-

tion, and Chen Yilu's appraisal of the state of theological education and areas for improvement, are included in this issue.

Ting also spoke at the symposium, presenting an appreciation of two friends who had played positive roles in the life of the Seminary, one from within the church, Y.T. Wu, a founder of the TSPM and one from outside, Luo Zhufeng, a Religious Affairs Bureau official from Shanghai. In the early 1950s, Y.T. Wu not only encouraged the church, fiscally weakened by the loss of western support, to move boldly toward the establishment of its own, self-supported, institution of theological education; he was even more "concerned with how we should manage to keep up with the times and what sort of theology we should have to equip the students and staff of our seminaries, what we would impart to our clergy and through them, to the church and our Christian believers." In remembering Mr. Luo, Bishop Ting underscored another theme of the events: the timely and encouraging role of sympathetic and far-sighted government officials in the ongoing implementation of the policy of religious freedom in China and in the development of the seminary.

"'Fullness' and 'Emptiness'," the sermon preached by Presbyterian Ji Jianhong, Chairperson of the TSPM, at the chapel service during the celebrations, is also included here.

In these articles and in the four selections from *Bible, Faith, Church* (Shanghai: CCC/TSPM, 2001), a collection of recent writings by K.H. Ting, we find what might be called an apologetic for theological reconstruction. The case is made for the naturalness and indeed the inevitability of changes and adjustments in theological viewpoints in response to changes in culture, society, economics and politics throughout the history of the Christian Church. Theological views arise and gain support in a particular context or historical period, and lose ground or are downplayed for the same reason. These changes, Ting emphasizes in these essays, do not threaten or affect basic faith. Less emphasis on the distinction between believers and unbelievers and on justification by faith alone are seen as key to enlivening theology and opening up a broader role for the

church in the rapidly modernizing context of Chinese society. The need for better-informed overtures to intellectuals is also a concern.

Three essays, those by Chen Yongtao, Li Xinnong and Yang Donglong, follow the spirit of theological reconstruction in their exploration of possible directions for Chinese theology. Chen draws on three culture-based metaphors to explore the contours of an ethical christology which would be more accessible in Chinese culture than the traditional christologies inherited from the West: a bowl, the sun and the image of the suffering mother. All three resonate against the large background of the concept of *tao*. Li examines what faith in practice means in the Chinese context and its implications for a Chinese ecclesiology. He looks at efforts to contextualize the Christian message in other Asian societies and what this has to say to Chinese theologians. "We must believe that the Holy Spirit is leading us to understand in context what God wants us to do, and what the text is saying to us Chinese theologians today as we do our own theology (p. 58). Yang Donglong considers some of the contradictions in the relationship between Christianity and culture and society in China: belief/unbelief; the challenge of folk religion; ecumenism/patriotism; and this world vs. an other-worldly faith. He sees possibilities in the dialogue around these issues and calls for a broader and more positive interpretation by Christians and greater understanding by non-Christians. The secularism of modern society and the threat of superstition posed by folk religion, especially in rural areas, are seen as two of the greatest challenges to the church at present.

The issue concludes with Chen Kuanrong's consideration of the presentation of women disciples in Mark, a paper by Lin Manhong presented at a meeting on peace, justice and people's security, and three talks given during the CCC/TSPM visit to the World Council of Churches in April, 2003.

I am grateful to the authors of essays included here who have allowed their work to be shared, either in English original or in translation. Any errors in representing their work are entirely my own. Quotations from books in languages

other than Chinese which could not be consulted in standard English translation have been made indirect to minimize the pitfalls of back translation.

The various levels of church bodies and offices are referred to as CCC or TSPM with appropriate regional modifiers (local/ regional, etc.) or (at the national level) CCC/TSPM.

Biblical quotations are taken from the NRSV, unless another version has been used in an original English piece.

Thanks are, as always, due to the FTE for its continuing support of this journal and in particular to Dr. Marvin Hoff and Mrs. Joanne Hoff.

Janice Wickeri  
San Anselmo



# “Fullness” and “Emptiness”

JI JIANHONG

## **Eph. 3:19; 2Kings 4: 1-6**

Ephesians 3 tells us that in God is all fullness. God fills all in all and in God is no deficiency, but rather the fullness of grace and blessing. Moreover, God has promised us that God will fill us with all God’s fullness.

2Kings 4 records the story of selling oil to pay debts. It tells us that the amount of oil available to the widow depended on how many empty vessels she had. The flow of oil halted when there were no more empty vessels. In these two texts, God shows us how “fullness” and “emptiness” are related.

Nanjing Union Theological Seminary has come fifty years on its journey, and today we gather to celebrate that half-century. It is a day worth celebrating, for during these fifty years we have not only seen, but experienced, God’s abundant grace for us. These fifty years have brought suffering and hardship, but that God who is all fullness has been present with the faculty and students of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary through it all. These fifty years have been years of the fullness of grace and of blessing, years of great achievements in theological education and of identifying ourselves with the people of our nation and progressing together with them. More than simply celebrating these fifty years, we should raise our thanks and praise to God for them.

These years have brought their ups and downs. Yet our

God has realized in us the promise to fill us with God's fullness that is all in all. Why should this be, and how shall we live to remain in God's fullness?

These are questions all of us at this seminary must ponder and find answers to, for they bear on whether the seminary can continue to flourish and grow into a vessel useful to God, a partner in doing God's will.

As we consider our past and look to the future, there are several points I would like to share with you this morning:

### *Hold yourself "empty"*

Luke 1:53 says, "he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty." The fullness of God has been prepared for the hungry. Those who feel that they are satisfied will not taste the "fullness" of God, but will be sent away empty-handed. Matthew 5:6 tells us "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled." Only those who are in a constant state of hunger and thirst will feel the motivation and have the strength to pursue their goals. Only they thirst for God's righteousness, and they will be filled.

We at Nanjing Seminary have, over the last fifty years, always felt that we have fallen far short of what God requires of us, that we have done little, far too little, of what God has entrusted to us, of our mission. Whether it be in our teaching—experience and achievement—or in guidance for our students' spiritual lives, morals and intellectual attainments, there is always a great gap; that is to say, over the last fifty years, we have always reminded ourselves that we are hungry and thirsty, and this has kept us constantly aware that we must strive to do God's work. This compels us to continually seek to improve our teaching standards and methods, to seek where God is leading us day to day, to follow in the footsteps of the Holy Spirit, and thus be able to move ahead with the times. And so we taste the eternal fullness of God and this keeps us ever ready to receive God's fullness.

There are a few ill-intentioned people who attack Nanjing Seminary for this or that fault. We oppose these

attacks and intend to ignore them. Yet at the same time, we have never denied that our work still falls short of what God requires, what the church needs and where the Holy Spirit leads. Only by knowing our shortcomings, emptiness and poverty can we gain the abundant grace and blessing of God, only then can we improve, progress and carry on the work of God.

*How shall we view "yesterday's" experience, yesterday's grace, yesterday's achievements; in short, how shall we view the past?*

No matter how good our experience, how abundant the grace we have received, or how great our achievements, we must admit that they all belong to yesterday: they are the past. And the past cannot take the place of today or of tomorrow. The past can be a reference; it cannot be a substitute; otherwise we will find ourselves unable to move forward. God wants us always to live in the present, to keep our vision fresh—whether in the midst of our ministries, or in the midst of every kind of grace—we must maintain a sense of newness; for to become mired in the past can only lead to failure. Victory in Jericho cannot win Ai. Old experiences cannot help us with new challenges; old visions and outdated views are not appropriate for new circumstances and new work. Never forget that “yesterday” is now history, and new challenges must be met with new abilities; new situations and new opportunities require new light. God is always leading us into the new—new realms, new circumstances, new challenges. God’s goal is to create within us a new desire, a new hunger and a new thirst, a new sense of call, to draw us into a new light, new revelation, new inspiration and a new world, that we may keep pace with the ever-unfolding inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

If we remain mired in our past successes, if we have no idea how to meet the challenges of the present, we can never move forward. God does not want us to feed on yesterday’s manna; God wants us to eat today’s manna, new manna. Past victories cannot become present strength. We need to see that if the cross is not continually at work in us, we can never be filled. If the Holy Spirit is not continu-

ally leading and working within us, we cannot succeed. The “constant” action of God and the “continuing” response of humanity: the key lies in these two working in concert. And only this brings about a state in which we are filled with the abundant grace of God.

*What shall we imitate?*

The concept of “imitation” is found in Hebrews 6:12, where we are told how to view the achievements of our forebears, famous persons and elders. It is a question of what to imitate: their deeds or their faith? The two are quite different matters. A living faith never need imitate the deeds of others. There are people in the seminary who, whether in their own spiritual lives or as part of the community, imitate the deeds, rather than the faith, of others. Some people, reading that the disciples preached and prayed in tongues, want to imitate this; others read (Acts 5:19; 9:12) that the sick were healed by the disciple’s shadow, handkerchief or apron and this moved them to pursue the power to heal and cast out demons; and they went further, using this power as a standard for judging whether others were spiritual or filled by the Spirit. In so doing, they were not imitating others’ faith, but merely their deeds. This is a completely mistaken path, a wrong leading and teaching. Our God does not want us to imitate others’ actions, even when these are undertaken in faith, for this would be a dead end. If we are able to discern whether we are imitating the faith or the actions of others, we are on the road to healthy spiritual growth. We will live in the fullness of God and we will make steady progress in our ministries.

*“Be transformed by the renewing of your minds”*

Romans 12 tells us “be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.” In order to be filled with the fullness of God, we must first walk in his will. Thus, whether we are continuously being transformed by the renewing of our minds is the foundation and key to receiving the fullness of God. Why is it that some people, some work units, though they are dedicated and

hardworking, find themselves living outside the fullness of God and do not enjoy God's grace? The fundamental reason is that their wills, their views, are stale and unyielding. We must transform our thinking and wills by the renewing of our minds, in step with the Holy Spirit and changing with the times.

These four points demonstrate the most important ways in which we keep ourselves "empty" before God and continue to live in God's fullness. I believe that if we uphold the light and inspiration we have received in these four areas here at Nanjing Seminary, we will be filled even more with the fullness of God, our understanding of the truth will grow deeper and we will make steady upward progress in running our seminary. This is the inspiration and light God has given me. Through our sharing here today, may God bless God's living word and may God's will be done.

Ji Jianhong is Chairperson of the TSPM. He preached this sermon in a chapel service for the 50th anniversary celebrations at Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, October 31- November 1, 2002.

Text available in *Nanjing Theological Review*, 4(2002):35-36.

# Obstacles in the Path of Theological Reconstruction

XU XIAOHONG

At the Seventh National Chinese Christian Conference called at the beginning of the new century, it was noted that “theological reconstruction is the most important of important requirements for running the church well,” pointing out that strengthening theological reconstruction is the focal point of the church’s work at this time.<sup>1</sup> A renewal in thinking and views and raising the quality of faith of both clergy and believers is crucial to this work and to achieving a well-run church.

Since the Jinan Meeting in 1998 where the “Resolution on strengthening theological reconstruction” was passed, recognition of the necessity and importance of this reconstruction has grown, for it represents a deepening of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement and is the inevitable demand of Three-Self in this new historical period. Essential factors in theological reconstruction are: having a biblical basis, absorbing the essence of church tradition, joining Chinese culture to our church’s experience on the Three-Self path, and in a language contemporary Chinese Christians can understand, explaining basic Christian faith and its moral rules and principles. An emphasis on theological reconstruction does not mean a change in basic faith, Basic faith is unchanging. Since ancient times, theological thinking has been continuously adapted and developed; theological reconstruction is for the purpose of maintaining and protecting our basic unchanging faith. At present, this work

is being developed in churches all over China, but progress is uneven. In addition to those churches in which there is insufficient organization and publicity, knowledge of theological reconstruction can be hampered by conservative theological views. In this article, I will try to analyze some of the factors which impact the development of theological reconstruction.

*Educational limitations of Christians against a background of modernization*

Some scholars believe that, when it comes to modernization, Christianity represents a “pre-modern” culture, which was surpassed by modernization in the movement toward secularization of the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Now, with post-modernization on the horizon, modernization, as represented by modernity, is in its turn being supplanted by post-modernity, and the socio-cultural function of Christianity continues to decline. These scholars also believe that Christianity must adapt to modernity and post-modernity, that it can only survive and develop as a modern or post-modern cultural component, and the various schools of what is termed “post-modern theology” that have appeared within Christianity seem to confirm the reasonableness of the above views.<sup>2</sup>

Setting aside for the moment the question of whether or not these views are correct, the view which says that Christianity must adapt to the development of modern and post-modern society has very positive significance. Looking at the current developments in Chinese Christianity, not only has its socio-cultural function not declined, but can possibly grow stronger. This is due to the fact that Chinese society has not experienced a capitalist stage, and the influence of religion in China is much less strong than that of Christianity has been in the West, so that in some sense, all religions in China have first of all to come out of the “Middle Ages,” that is, the influence of feudal culture.

In the late 1970s and the 1980s, the policy of reform and openness spurred the process of modernization, established socialism with Chinese characteristics and the idea of a market economy, attacking people’s long-held tra-

ditional views. The Chinese church, at the same time as it was occupied with restoring religious activities and assisting the government in the thorough implementation of the policy of religious freedom, called for making the Chinese church well-governed, well-supported and well-propagated. It was not until the late 1990s that the need for theological reconstruction was recognized. At the time, eighty per cent of Chinese Christians were in rural areas, though following the universal spread of free education to primary nine, the level of education of youth in the countryside was rising. However, compared to the rate of development for the whole era, illiteracy or partial illiteracy was still concentrated in the countryside, especially in border areas and poor districts. Educational level was thus an important factor in limiting the quality of clergy and believers.

Frankly, Chinese Christianity's influence among intellectuals is still limited, even though this situation is slowly changing. But, among non-intellecutuals, it is finding rich soil for growth. Yet, in comparison with the mainstream of Christianity worldwide, it is still quite rudimentary and retains an admixture of superstition and backwardness.<sup>3</sup> Though many churches are enthusiastic in their evangelism, they overlook the fact that the educational level of the believers, pastoral care and nourishment are inadequate. Because of the way Christianity has functioned in the modernization process in Europe and America, we had "Christianity fever" in China, with some people (especially intellectuals) going to church, but not staying in the churches. The gap between their expectations and the reality of the church caused them to lose confidence in the clergy. It must be said that this is an important negative factor in influencing the church to initiate theological reconstruction.

#### *The corrosive effect of traditional feudal superstition*

Related to the factors discussed above is the way feudal superstition can act to corrode Christianity. Though traditional culture in China is represented by Confucianism, polytheism proliferates among the people and folk religions (including every sort of superstition) are much more influential among the ordinary Chinese people than Confucian-



ism. This faith includes ancestor and demon worship as its main content. Since reform and openness, there has been a resurgence of folk religions in many places and temples have been built on a grand scale. Folk religious superstitious activities have been held, not only in these fixed sites, but in streets and alleyways, and even under the guise of scholarly exchanges, and packaged as the essence of traditional culture, have attracted men and women who feel spiritually needy and experience a spiritual vacuum.

Superficially, since Christianity is opposed to idol worship, believers basically do not take part in these folk religious activities, but many concepts in Christian faith have been given a superstition-ized explanation (this is not the same as indigenization)—in some places God is no more than a powerful god with a different name. This has already attracted the notice of some scholars, and Sun Shanling in the essay *Chinese Folk Christianity*, points out that “because the growth of Christianity in China has been mostly at the rather low cultural level of the rural folk, and because the Han religious concept is limited to the rather primitive stage of belief in gods and demons, ancestor worship, etc., superstition and fortune-telling are widespread, and Chinese folk Christianity includes a large measure of feudal superstition.”<sup>4</sup> Relative to this, in areas that are more economically and socially developed, the quality of believers’ faith is also higher, while in those areas that are relatively less economically and socially developed, faith is proportionately more superstitious. In churches in large and medium-sized cities, religious activities are relatively regularized, while in villages and minority areas, religious activities are more diffuse.

As for believers generally, seeking God’s protection and healing because of events or sickness is quite widespread. Some believers even treat the Bible and cross as talismans to ward off evil, requiring a picture of Jesus while they pray. The Bible takes the place of fortune-telling sticks and dragons and snakes are taboo. Once while at a remote church, I found out that the responsible person at the church had in his former life been banned for being an office-holder in the Brotherhood of the Righteous Fist (*Yiguan dao*). It is

easy to see, then, why erosion through feudal superstition is such a vast hindrance to theological reconstruction. At the same time, it is the source for all those heretical sects that wave the banner of Christianity. Only by making a clear differentiation between feudal superstition and traditional culture can we better witness to Christ.

*“Orthodox” conservative theology*

Another hindrance to theological reconstruction is the conservative theology bequeathed to China by the missionaries.

Missionaries entered China in the nineteenth century under the protection of the unequal treaties. Many of them saw traditional Chinese culture as “heathen,” filled with superstition and inimical to the gospel. One missionary saw behind these non-Christian religions a terrible despair, backwardness, ignorance and fear. The missionaries came to China to “Save the souls of the Chinese people from the darkness of heathenism.”<sup>5</sup> Despite this, many among them came to China filled with enthusiasm to spread the gospel, and they did much good in the areas of education, health, and rescue work. Yet the “euro-centric” mindset of cultural superiority<sup>6</sup> caused many missionaries, “wittingly or unwittingly to make common cause with imperialism.”<sup>7</sup>

The consciousness of the Chinese people was raised under the influence of the New Culture Movement in the 1920s and campuses and intellectual circles initiated the “anti-Christian movement,” which expanded into an “anti-religion movement.” Knowledgeable people in some of the churches learned from this experience and initiated the movement for independent churches and reflection on indigenization. This played a very important role in laying the groundwork for the Three-Self Reform Movement which followed liberation. But in another respect, due to the fact that education rights reverted to the Chinese government in the 1920s, government higher and middle secondary schools began gradually to supplant church-run schools, and influential books and periodicals such as those published by the Christian Literature Society were supplanted by publications of the Commerical Press and other secular

publishers. The space for theological modernists began to shrink in the cities, and in the village and grassroots churches (where they had very little influence in any case), whereas the influence of fundamentalists continued to grow in these areas, taking shape as a unique tradition.

Some scholars overseas have pointed out that it is worth noting that these evangelical missionaries (originally fundamentalists) led hundreds of thousands of people to Christ ... in the Chinese countryside today, there are over a million Christians, and most of them are the fruits of the labors of those evangelical missionaries.<sup>8</sup> Of course, putting things this way may be somewhat of an exaggeration, but we must note that this “new growth” kind of missionary and believer have always been extremely conservative in their theological thinking. The important thing is that such ideas have gradually come to form part of the “faith tradition” of believers in some churches and sometimes these “traditional churches” are treated as the only orthodox ones. Dr. Richard Mouw of Fuller Theological Seminary, in a speech at Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, pointed out that “When we look anew today at the content of the faith preached by our forbears, we discover that we cannot agree with it in all respects; it may be that the thinking of these missionaries has not been popular in the United States for some time. Yet I was amazed to discover that these not very current ideas are entirely preserved in some of the churches of China.”

What Chinese believers accepted was that through faith in Jesus Christ, the believer could obtain spiritual riches. They cared more for the spiritual life than for the material life. Many Christians had contempt for this world and material life while waiting for the next, or adopted the utilitarian view that “prayers would be answered.” They set faith and reason, intellect and spirit, the material world and the spiritual world in opposition. For reasons of space I will not go into examples here.

Theological reconstruction will be a difficult task for the Chinese church. In “A Look Back at the Way We Have Come,” Bishop K.H. Ting says: “Theology has to do with faith and convictions held deep in human hearts. Adjust-

ment is therefore slow...<sup>9</sup> Adjusting conservative ideas in faith may be quite painful for some, but if we do not do so, the long-term danger to the church may be even greater. The former vice-principal of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, Rev. Chen Zemin, hit the nail on the head in quoting the Bishop in his Foreword to *Love Never Ends*, “A religion that does not speak of theology is crude and primitive. A religion which does not apply reason to problems is unreasonable.”<sup>10</sup> As the new century progresses, may we develop a Chinese Christianity filled with the life of the Spirit, one that treats of ethics and reason, one that can adapt to all the changes of our great nation, one that can move forward in step with modern society and bear a wonderful witness to Christ in the worldwide church.

Xu Xiaohong is dean of the Shaanxi Bible School. This talk was delivered during the 50th anniversary celebrations at Nanjing Union Theological Seminary. *Nanjing Theological Review*, 4 (2002): 32-34.

1 *Documents of the 7<sup>th</sup> National Chinese Christian Conference*. (Shanghai: CCC/TSPM, 2002), 10.

2 Gao Shining and He Guanghu, *Christian Culture and Modern Culture*. (Beijing: CASS, 1996), 24.

3 *Ibid.*, 255.

4 *Ibid.*, 252.

5 Luo Guanzong, *Essays on the Chinese Christian Three-Self Patriotic Movement*. (Shanghai: TSPM Committee, 1993), 484.

6 *The World of the Colonialist*, translated by Tan Ronggen. (Beijing: CASS, 2002), 9.

7 “Efforts of Chinese Christianity in New China,” in Luo (see Note 5), 1.

8 Representative of these scholars is the American Paul Cohen.

9 K.H. Ting, *Love Never Ends*. (Nanjing: Yilin Press, 2000), 494.

10 *Ibid.*, 5.

# Some Concepts in Theological Education in China

CHEN YILU

Theological education today develops in the midst of contradictions. There is no agreement on the goal of theological education: seminaries hope to train theologians, the church hopes it will train preachers, and some seminarians hope to establish their careers and get married. In terms of tactics and methods, seminaries hope to have more financial resources at their disposal, to make improvements; churches see theological education as a kind of luxury expense which they hope can be reduced as much as possible. Seminarians hope they will get a decent salary upon graduation, while churches think a little hardship is good for seminarians—they should be dedicated. Seminarians hope that they can go abroad for further education after they graduate, while the church thinks higher degrees will lead to arrogance.... These differing views create greater difficulties for Chinese theological education on its already none-too-firm foundation.

The key question in theological education is: What sort of persons do we want to train up, and by what methods? I have some views on these issues which I will expand on in this essay.

## *Educate the whole person*

“Educate the whole person” (*zenjin*) was first proposed by the Japanese educator Kuniyoshi Obara (1887-1977) in 1921, emphasizing the harmonious and holistic develop-

ment of the student, to include knowledge, ethics, arts, religion, physical training and life. Obara believed that ideal knowledge was truth; ideal ethics was goodness; the ideal of art, beauty; the ideal of religion, the sacred; the ideal of physical training, health; and the ideal of life, wealth. To put it another way, the goal and content of education was to seek truth, goodness, beauty, holiness, health and wealth—life abilities.<sup>1</sup>

In the 1980s, K.H. Ting, principal of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, proposed that Chinese theological education implement a policy of “five-fold” holistic development of the student: in spirit, ethics, mind, body and community life, a policy in agreement with Obara’s, and which illustrates that the basic concept in Chinese theological education is to develop a mature personable to realize his or her potential.

Maturity in a person indicates mature development; the aim of education being to enable the person to become a person of dignity, accomplishment and virtue. Development of potential refers to the capabilities, skills and ability to make a living and a contribution that education confers: the capacity to survive and live. In terms of theological education, seminaries first of all want the students they train to become outstanding Christians, able to put into effect the spirit of Jesus’ teachings and the faith. They should possess excellent Christian virtues and cultivation. Secondly, they want this person to become a pastor and evangelist, one able to engage in theology or pastoral work. In other words, if one is not a good Christian, one cannot be a good pastor. Jesus said, “Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:20).

Modern education has been quite influenced by the American educator John Dewey. Dewey believed that education was a means, a bridge to maturity. This concept of education emphasizes methods and efficacy and had a great effect on modern university education, and thus for theological education it is not only a bridge, but a path: the seminary is the beginning of the path to a life of service. Everything that is studied in seminary will have a tremen-

dous impact on the student's life. My own personal growth is inseparable from the education I received here at Nanjing Union Theological Seminary; the impact it has had on my life will never be wiped away.

Theological education in which spirit, ethics, mind, body and community life grow in a holistic way is a rich concept.

The aim of spiritual education is holiness. Because religion commands the intellect, emotions and intentions of a person's heart and soul, when one has the holiness of heart and spiritual beauty of religion, one can abandon the ego and dedicate oneself to the Lord and to serving others. Seminary students who do not pursue the spiritual life are often people who are unwilling to sacrifice the ego. For them, the seminary is only a stepping stone; seminary education has no other meaning than to help them become religious professionals.

Since Augustine (354-430), theological education has stressed spiritual formation and a spirit of service to the church. In his *Confessions*, Augustine wrote that all useful knowledge attained in his youth was to be used in service to God. The inner cultivation of spiritual education is for preservation of a sacred religious heart, including the search for and knowledge of God.

The aim of ethics is goodness. Obara believed that ethical education comprises five aspects: a) an understanding of the worth and dignity of the human personality and mutual respect between persons; b) a correct view of life, seeking to transcend all joy and sorrow; c) a profound understanding of the meaning of good, evil and suffering, understanding the elevation of repentance for sin; d) understanding the importance of a moral life, understanding the clash between desire and reason and the contradictions of human life; and e) fostering an excellent, upright, dependable, consistent person. Ethical education is not a set of theories. Its importance is in the training in ethical behavior and habits.

Since Augustine, theological education has always been joined to moral education. Indeed Augustine believed that moral education is the heart of theological education. As

Bishop Ting has often stressed, “Chinese Christianity must lift up ethics and morality.”<sup>2</sup> Religion and ethics have always been mixed together, like blood and water. Think for a moment: what kind of gospel could be preached by an evangelist who did not speak about ethics?

Education for knowledge is a search for truth. Truth is having real understanding of the cosmos and the things of this world; it is rational knowledge. Obara believed that seeking truth means seeking true scholarship, true skill, true wisdom, and this means inspiring wisdom, encouraging students to be active and participatory, raising their interest in learning, and corresponding abilities and spirit of exploration, linking education of the intellect with the realities of life. In terms of theological education, the object of the search for truth is the Bible, theology and doctrine. Acquiring a thorough, systematic and profound knowledge of theology through education enables students to become experts in matters of religion. Thomas Aquinas believed that theological education should guide humankind to overcome ignorance, search for truth, turn to God, and attain the goals of sustaining faith and service to the church. Aquinas put relatively more stress on education for knowledge and the intellect, which became the philosophical system of scholasticism.

Since the 1980s, Chinese Christian seminaries have basically been responding to the church’s need for trained persons in the ministry and so these persons have basically been pastors, with few able to undertake theological research and writing. Since the 1998 Jinan Meeting, Chinese Christianity has focused on theological reconstruction, and there has been a shift in the focus of theological education from the “pastoral model” to the “theological model,” to foster persons able to undertake theological reflection and research, and thus gradually develop a Chinese Christian theology. Here we should see that, whether in comparison with international Christian academic circles or (secular) academics of religious studies in China, there are too few academics in church circles, and the overall level is not high enough. There are many reasons for this, but what is important is that we need to reflect upon and



adjust our strategies and goals and then pursue them wholeheartedly. At the Symposium on Theology in Chinese Seminaries in mid-August this year, Bishop K.H. Ting asked: What is the function of a seminary? He believes that it is to train theologians. This is a timely voice and insight. There is an abundance of wisdom here, including the need for adjustment of the whole system of Chinese theological education. The distinction made among and the differing responsibilities of national, regional and provincial level seminaries is generally based on satisfying the need for ordained ministry and not aimed at the growth of theological thinking. Furthermore it is neither rational nor very practical: and it is inappropriate to have seminaries and Bible schools lumped together, for their tasks and needs are different. The function of a seminary is primarily to train theologians and Bible schools are primarily for the training of pastoral workers. To address these conditions we need to adopt a spirit of "moving with the times," with new thinking and orientation. This would include a new orientation toward the educational system and a new curriculum. Theology is the goal and the educational system is the scaffolding. Courses are the means. If the goal changes, the rest should change in response. Aquinas said that theology is a time-consuming enterprise. If we do not know its complexity and profundity, we shall not reach the goal.

The goal of physical training is health. Physical education's primary goal is a healthy physique, optimum weight and agility, for a stronger body and longer life. Physical education is a weaker aspect of theological education, and it should be recognized that the pressures of theological and pastoral work continue to increase. With the effects of pollution and possible illness, health has become an issue of universal concern and attention, and the pursuit of health is very important. For the healthy growth of students, the seminary needs corresponding facilities for physical education. Examples of this would be tennis and badminton, aerobics, and for the stronger students, more challenging physical training equipment.

The aim of community-building is abundance, in the sense of rich life experience and life skills; that is, excel-

lent personal relationships. Personal relationships in the church are special. There are some seminary graduates who, faced with such relationships in the church, are intimidated and retreat. Such a person has no self-confidence and thus has no way to carry on the work of pastoral counseling, and cannot function as a pastor. The seminary should offer pastoral care and counseling courses. It would be best to have as seminary chaplain and student counselor one who has been trained in this field.

Personal relationships in the Chinese cultural tradition are extremely complex. Therefore, in the absence of an excellent community life, such work is difficult to undertake. Courses in interpersonal relationships and psychology should be offered for those who will engage in pastoral work, working with people. For them, community life has special significance.

Spirit, ethics, knowledge, body, community: this is the concept of “education of the whole person” in Chinese Christian theological education. It is being implemented, but there are some problems in the process. Nevertheless, it does point the way for Chinese theological education. The pedagogical direction for Nanjing Union Theological Seminary on its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary is constant practice of this concept.

### *Strengthening faculty*

One of the obvious weaknesses of theological education in China at present is lack of faculty. Strengthening of faculty is a matter of immediate urgency.

To expand our teaching staff, we need a long-term plan, for such training cannot be done overnight. We need to plan for meeting a certain size and level of theological faculty twenty or thirty years hence. Without a long-term goal, we are simply firemen, able to implement only emergency measures.

The search for excellent teaching staff is the common quest of many seminary presidents. Where is such talent to be found? I think we can use the “send out; invite in” principle. Send out means sending people for directed further study, not simply as a matter of who wants to go, but of

what we need in terms of trained personnel, who is suitable, has potential and is willing to take up the burden. We send them out to study and they come back when they have received their degrees. Going overseas to study is not “gilding the lily,” but to enable the person to take on a larger burden and role. China is today a nation of reform and openness, and thus in searching for excellence, we can look in other universities and organizations. The key to applying the system of “inviting in,” is to first determine the standard; those who meet the standard can be re-invited. In recent years, we have examples of the successful use of this strategy. Bishop Ting himself did not study theology at a Chinese seminary at first, but overseas. Then he made up his mind to return to China and get involved in the Three-Self Movement and in theological education. The vice-principle of our seminary, Wang Aiming was “invited in.” We can see that in the burgeoning personnel marketplace the principle of sending out and inviting in is a workable one.

Hong Kong could be said to be the liveliest locale for overseas Chinese theological education. Twenty years ago, there were few Ph.D.s in theology there, but today there are no less than thirty who have gained their doctorates in well-known European and American seminaries. Their successful experience is also a result of the send out/ invite in principle. A person’s knowledge of Three-Self patriotism is not based on how long he or she has spent in the Chinese church, but rather on whether he or she has clearly understood it from the angle of theological reconstruction and is willing to take up the burden and be involved. Thus, the standard for personnel is quality. In the past few years, Nanjing Union Theological Seminary has invited several foreign professors to assist in teaching, and in many cases this has been a successful experience. These examples all tell us that we adopt an approach in step with the times in strengthening our faculty pool.

Using human resources to the greatest extent of their potential is the key to running the seminary well. To strengthen the faculty pool we must encourage an active and creative faculty. In some seminaries, due to issues of structure and administration, the faculty is not encouraged

to be very active and their potential is not brought out. The effects of an inactive faculty cannot be remedied with greater numbers of faculty; thus, the potential of even a superior faculty must be actively tapped.

The main actors in the school are the faculty and students. An active nature is usually expressed in participation and creativity. In other words, faculty should be part of more policies of the school. The Guangdong Union Theological Seminary has a staff meeting every Wednesday, with discussion of issues both spiritual and ministerial. This is a place where the faculty can offer their views and use their basic decision-making power. The facts have shown that if a school can allow staff to have opportunities to “make their views known,” even without much further active participation on their part, at least superficiality is reduced and the spirit of collegiality and general awareness among the faculty is strengthened.

#### *Improvement in administrative structures*

Administration is the most problematic matter and one in which perfection seems impossible. It is, however, an absolute necessity. The success of modern education is greatly related to improvement in the management structures of administration.

Not only is there a lack of trained personnel at seminaries and schools of the Chinese church, but a lack of resources and finance as well. In a situation of financial straits it is even more difficult to develop administration. Education administration is a skill and a field of expertise. It is often said that administration is an art. If this is the case, then seminary administration is an art among arts, for an administrator who has not received theological education will not be able to communicate with seminary faculty, let alone lead them.

A seminary can only invest money; it cannot make a profit, and so the best use of finances is something every seminary president has to learn. Achieving the greatest benefit through the use of the smallest possible amount of money is not easy. We must be economical, but we must also develop and grow. A frequent mistake of seminaries

in financial terms is to reject development in favor of economy. This results in “no change for fifty years.” Deng Xiaoping said that development was the important thing. If an educational institute does not change over ten or even twenty years, it is like a child that never grows up; it is abnormal. In order to develop, we must increase our investment in people and resources. The rapid growth of some universities in Europe and America is due to large investment by government. We do not have the same resources, but greater and appropriate investment of funds is something the leadership of the church can consider. Only with sufficient funds will we be able to provide assistance to students, compensate faculty adequately, bring facilities up-to-date, support research, and thus realize our full potential. Particularly as we are striving to move forward with theological reconstruction, we must make every effort to support, encourage and reward outstanding contributions from faculty in this regard as a way of affirming and commending their active participation and contributions.

Renovating and bringing our facilities and equipment up-to-date is also an important part of theological education at present. When universities are all online, can the seminary not provide such a service for its students? What an isolated and backward pedagogical environment that creates. Online learning actually is a concept of modern open learning. Open learning and realizing the student’s individuality and creativity are important theories in modern education. If we strengthen our administration and management, online learning will enliven our students’ thinking and broaden their vision.

### *Interaction between the seminary and alumni*

The Seminary needs to set up a good educational system and institutional mechanisms by which alumni can have the opportunity to return for further study and “re-charging.” At present further training and education has become a virtual necessity. If a person studies at seminary only once, he or she will be easily worn down by the times. Nanjing Union Theological Seminary is the highest seminary in the country, and therefore, in addition to its B.D.

and post-graduate programs, it should offer “continuing pastoral education” for those with their B.D.s, if conditions permit. Their alma mater should be a place of continuing benefit for students.

As alumni, we should support our alma mater. Alumni are a great resource for the seminary. If each one loves, cares about and supports the seminary, it will be well-run. Alumni have been formed by the school and tempered in the church. Perhaps there is something we have gained by our educations that we can make known to the seminary. Such things will be the spiritual riches of the institution. Alumni should also support the seminary financially, for we have all shared in its resources. It is because of the contributions of those who were here before us that we are given this opportunity to grow. What we put into the seminary today will assist in the growth of those who follow us: this is an important rule of education. A considerable contribution to the income of seminaries in other countries comes from individual graduates and alumni who give through the churches. Relying on such support from alumni, the seminary is able to increase its resources and investments, and help more students get an education. Mutuality makes a vital seminary. Today as we celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, with a view to its continued future growth, I would like to invite the leadership of the CCC/TSPM, the Seminary Board of Trustees and the alumni to join in creating a scholarship fund to be called “The Bishop K.H. Ting Scholarship Fund” as a way of expressing gratitude to Bishop Ting for his outstanding contributions to theological education in China and to Nanjing Union Theological Seminary.

Chen Yilu is vice-principal of Guangdong Union Theological Seminary. *Nanjing Theological Review*, 4(2002): 24.

1 Yuan Ruixiu, *On education reform overseas*. (Guangzhou: Guangdong Higher Education Press, 2002), 271.

2 Liu Huajun, *K.H. Ting: Leader of Chinese Christianity*. (Nanjing: Nanjing University Press, 2001), 332.

# **Toward a *Tao* Christology: Rethinking Christology in the Chinese Context**

CHEN YONGTAO

Running the church well on the Three-Self principle has been a priority for the Chinese church for a considerable period of time. Concretely, this means that the Chinese church needs “to administer itself well, support itself well, and propagate itself well.” The task includes not only constructing a polity for the Chinese church, but also the development and renewal of Chinese theological thinking. Theology is the thinking of church and a church always takes root in a particular history and culture. Theology, in consequence, naturally and inevitably, is historical and contextual. Thus, theology cannot be done in isolation from the concrete cultural, historical, social and political context. Theology must speak to the “here and now.” Only then can theology be a living theology, developing with the changing times. Thus, any theological current must be “current” theology.

As Chinese theological workers, we see clearly that Chinese church needs its own theology with Chinese characteristics. Only when our theology stands in the cultural and political context in which Chinese church lives can it speak its own message to our people.

Christology is not only an important part of systematic theology, but is also closely related to believers’ life of

faith. It not only influences Christians' view of church and salvation, but inevitably affects Christians' view of the world and of non-Christians as well.

The majority of Chinese Christians nowadays still hold to the "traditional" or "doctrinal" christology imported by Western missionaries long ago. This christology is based on the Nicene and Chalcedon Creeds. It is over-theoretical and over-hellenized, and seems less helpful for Chinese Christians today as they face their own historical, cultural, social and political context. The Chinese church needs to reconsider christology and to gain some new light from it. Some Chinese church leaders and theologians have done a great deal of helpful work in this area since the early part of the last century. Among these, K.H. Ting's insights on "the cosmic Christ" have been most influential. This concept has greatly broadened the space for the Christian church in a non-Christian world.

Tracing the thinking of an older generation of church leaders and theologians such as Y.T. Wu, T. C. Chao, Xie Fuya (N.Z. Zia), Xu Baoqian, K. H. Ting, Wang Weifan, and so on, I have found that, an ethical Christology may can be a step in the right direction in the development and renewal of Chinese theological thinking. It is true that Christianity does not simply equal ethics and morality; neither is Jesus an educator or a moralist. Yet it cannot be denied that Christianity is an ethical religion. The teachings of Jesus, indeed the whole Bible, are a huge ethical and moral treasury.

Generally speaking, Chinese culture is ethical, not theoretical. It places greater emphasis on moral teaching than on theoretical disputation. In this regard, it is closer to the Bible and Hebrew thought than to hellenized Christian thought. Therefore, an ethical christology will be more easily understood by Chinese Christians than a "theoretical" christology, and more suitable for the Chinese church in accommodating itself to the reality of Chinese society and its cultural context.

The faith of the Incarnation offers great possibilities in the Chinese context for this kind of ethical understanding of christology. The Word was made flesh in a Jewish con-



text. The place in which the Word was made flesh could refer not only to the small Galilean town of Nazareth, but also to countless places in different contexts. And the fact is that “each one of these places, through its unique culture, allows Christ to be made flesh, flesh which can be sensed and touched by people who live in different cultures.”<sup>1</sup>

It is true in some degree that the incarnated Christ lived in a culture, and that any christology must be a cultural understanding. In this sense, although there is only one Jesus Christ, there can be many christologies. Each community, even each person can have its/his/her own understanding of christology.

The Word also became flesh in the culture of China and thus Chinese Christians should construct our own christology. Because the christology we have now was imported by Western missionaries long ago, it is alien to Chinese people. This being the case, how shall we construct a christology in the Chinese context? What christology will be more familiar to and more acceptable to Chinese people? These are urgent questions for Chinese Christians.

Bishop K. H. Ting, a Chinese theologian and the church’s spokesman has said that there are two “Cs” for the church in China. One is “Christ,” and the other is “China.” This suggests that Chinese Christian theology must be inculturated in the Chinese context, and the same is true for the understanding of christology in the Chinese context.

In seeking a christological understanding, it is not difficult for us to understand Jesus Christ as *tao* made flesh. He is God-becoming-human in Chinese culture and in contemporary Chinese situations. Apart from this contextual understanding, there can be no authentic Chinese christology.

As a Chinese Christian and a seminary teacher, I much prefer the wording of the Chinese Bible that translates “In the beginning was the Word” as “In the beginning was the *tao*.” (When we speak of *tao*, a host of meanings leaps to mind: principle, word, way, method, reason, truth, and so on.) Jesus Christ is *tao* become flesh in Chinese culture.

This is our unique understanding of Jesus Christ in our own context. We can call this *tao* christology, christology in which the *tao* can become flesh.

In this article, I will begin by arguing the necessity of constructing our own christology in the Chinese context, and then offer a possible starting point for Chinese christology. I am trying to take both the Bible and our own experience, not the Creeds, as the starting points for my thinking of christology. In the body of this paper, I would like to use three metaphors to talk about Christ from three different perspectives. All three metaphors have ethical meaning, and together they point to an ethical Christ. These are: a kenotic Christ, a cosmic Christ and a suffering Christ. This Christ is not a dead Christ. He is a living One, and He is close to our life. He calls for us to “follow” him, to practice his teaching of life. He is an incarnated God, and he is with us, among us. He also shares our anxiety, joyfulness, sweetness, and painfulness. As an incarnated Lord, he can't be caged in doctrine; rather, he lives in our life as a living One. My conclusion is that this reflection on an ethical and practical christology may present a possible direction for christological reflection in the Chinese church today.

*The Chinese context must have its own christology*

Lucien Richard rightly points out, “Christology must be an attempt to trace the way from Jesus of Nazareth to the Christ of Christian belief. For while the theologian has to tell a story that is not only his or her story but the story of Jesus of Nazareth, he or she must tell it in a different way in every generation.”<sup>2</sup> This suggests a dynamic understanding of christology, which is to say that each culture, even each generation should have its own christological understanding. Christ is living, and our understanding of Christ should be living too.

But, as one Asian theologian says, christology has become passé in Asia, because we still rely on the formulas of Nicea and Chalcedon which are largely unintelligible to the Asian mind.<sup>3</sup> Thus, as Christians living in Asia, it is necessary for Chinese Christians to re-understand christology in their own context. Without such a re-under-

standing, classical christology may have little, if any, bearing on the real daily lives of Asian Christians. We should thus do christology in our own cultural and social-political context.

It is true that a proper relationship must be maintained between the present Christ and the historical (biblical) Jesus. For this very reason, "Christology must constantly and simultaneously move in both directions. It must be both critical and practical. This is possible only if we take part in the past event. ... And we must bridge the distance in time between the past event of revelation and the present reality of our own faith, for the truth of our relationship to primitive Christianity. Understanding the past Christ-event and self-interpretation are inseparable." <sup>4</sup> Therefore, each culture, indeed, each generation, has to attempt to retrace the way from Jesus to the Christ from within the context of its own concerns and anxieties. Similarly, "contemporary Christology can only discover its own truth in dialogue with its cultural setting." <sup>5</sup> In this sense, christology must be a translation and an interpretation. This means that any adequate christology must be contextualized or enculturized.

Thus, christology must be historical and cultural christology. Theologians can do christology only in their own context and their own culture. They must face their own problems and their own questions in doing their christology. Therefore, "a vital christology must maintain the tension between the present responsibility of faith, as it attempts to express the Christ-event, and the historical dimension and grounds of that event in the Jesus of Nazareth anew and for its day. Christology must maintain a sense of historical distance between past and present continuity with it. And it must do this within a living tradition often maintained through a most radical discontinuity." <sup>6</sup>

For this very reason, Chinese theologians cannot ignore the present Chinese church's situation in doing christology. We must face the situation in which the image of Christianity is that of a "foreign religion," and in which many Chinese see it as a "foreigners' religion." In another respect, in spite of estimates that Christians in China now

number approximately 20 million, the Christian population is still in an absolute minority. Christians are marginalized in society, both economically and socio-politically. They are seen as being mainly elderly, female, illiterate and economically underprivileged. What is more, some have been happy to be thus marginalized, and have even taken the initiative to marginalize themselves. In this context, it is apparent that classical christology has few implications for most Chinese people. Chinese theology must reinterpret christology in its own settings. Thus, a biblical Jesus is, to some degree, more meaningful for Chinese Christians than a doctrinal christology.

For historical reasons, Chinese people find it difficult to accept the classical Christology that was directly imported into China by western missionaries. This christology is highly westernized and radically exclusive, and it has little to say to Chinese people today and critiques of it have been going on in China since early last century. This christology implies a kind of theological imperialism, and is alien to Chinese people. In its exclusivism, this ecclesiological-centric christology rejects Chinese culture. It can be fitted into Niebuhr's model of "Christ against culture." Because of this, it has been very difficult for Christianity to put down roots in the Chinese cultural soil. Therefore, some Chinese theologians (such as T. C. Chao, Wu Leichuan, Xie Fuya, Xu Baoqian, K. H. Ting, Wang Weifan, Chen Zemin, etc.) have, since the 1920s, been calling upon the Chinese Christian Church to develop its own approach to a Christian theology in general, and to christology in particular. There is a cry for the construction of a Chinese christology. Without an appropriate understanding of christology, there will be no appropriate Chinese theology. This cry is echoing in the present movement of the renewal of theological thinking in Chinese church.

D. M. Yeager rightly says that, "for H. R. Niebuhr, the substance of 'Christian social ethics' cannot be abstractly and definitely fixed but must be worked out by Christians interpreting and responding to their complex, varied, and changing particular situations."<sup>7</sup> This is an appropriate path not only for "Christian social ethics," but also for Christian

theology. Chinese theologians, as they do theology in general and christology in particular, must re-understand these fields in particular Chinese settings. As they face their own particular situations, the necessity to reconstruct christology in the contemporary Chinese context is very evident. This reconstruction is also reinterpretation. This means that there should be continuity between this re-understanding of and the classical understanding of christology, between doing christology in the Chinese context and doing christology in other contexts.

*Doing christology in the Chinese context: Where to begin*

There is a clear shift from classical christology to contemporary christology. To a greater or lesser degree, nearly all contemporary christologies give their attention to the “historical Jesus.” Although classical christology may still have something to say about Christ in the contemporary Chinese context, in doing christology in the present Chinese context, we must have a different starting point from classical christology.

The liberation theologian Jon Sobrino prefaces his critique of the definition handed down by the Council of Chalcedon with a discussion of the nature of dogma. In terms of his own understanding of theology and of his own context, Sobrino is most enthusiastic about focusing his own christology on the historical Jesus. He consistently emphasizes christology from below as he develops a christology in the context of Latin America. Therefore, he defines Jesus as a part of the historical reality in the struggle of poor people for liberation. In employing this approach, he makes the historical Jesus the primary focus and even chooses this as his starting point.

He gives several reasons for this. He believes that although there are many possible starting points for doing christology, the historical Jesus is most appropriate and effective one. Early in his *Christology at the Crossroads*, Sobrino explains why he and other Latin American liberation theologians choose to adopt the historical Jesus as the starting point for doing christology. To some degree, his is correct in saying, “Our Christology will (by starting

with the historical Jesus) avoid abstractionism, and the attendant danger of manipulating the Christ event. This history of the church shows, from its very beginnings, as we shall see, that any focusing on the Christ of faith will jeopardize the very essence of the Christian faith if it neglects the historical Jesus. Finally, we feel that the historical Jesus is the hermeneutic principle that enables us to draw closer to the totality of Christ both in terms of knowledge and in terms of real-life praxis. It is there that we will find the unity of Christology and soteriology.”<sup>8</sup> Clearly, there has been a radical shift here from the Christ of faith to the historical Jesus as starting point of christology. As Sobrino has seen, the historical Jesus can truly bring concreteness and historicity to christology.

African American theologians have also found the essential significance of Jesus in the lives of African Americans. They hold that the Jesus of history is important for understanding who Jesus was and his significance for black people today. By and large they have affirmed that this Jesus is the Christ, that is, God incarnate. They have argued that in the light of their experience, Jesus means freedom, freedom from the socio-psychological, psycho-cultural, economic and political oppression of black people. In other words, Jesus is their political Messiah. “To free (humans) from bondage was Jesus’ own definition of his ministry.” This meant that as Jesus identified with the lowly of his day, he now identifies with the lowly of this day, who, in the American context, are the African Americans.<sup>9</sup>

The “historical Jesus” is surely important for us. But, searching for the historical Jesus does not mean that one can get back to a real “historical Jesus.” As I understand it, the “historical Jesus means the “biblical Jesus.” The Bible is simply a witness to, but not a biography of, this Jesus. Thus, it is impossible for us to find the real “historical Jesus.” We see a “biblical Jesus,” who is, in fact, a theologized “historical Jesus.” All references to the “historical Jesus” are theological ones. As one theologian says, “One cannot discern with certainty what Jesus said, did, or thought. All the records we have about Jesus, even the very earliest ones, are already responses to Jesus. Thus, they are

already christologies, even if of an implicit sort.”<sup>10</sup> This suggests that in doing our own christology we need to go back to the biblical Jesus, not a historical Jesus.

It is true that contemporary christology cannot be read directly from the earliest traditions about Jesus, yet these earliest traditions are constitutive for christology today. It is possible, of course, to build christologies on later developments in the history of Christian theology. For instance, christologies often have begun with the declarations of the Council of Nicea or of Chalcedon, reading the biblical texts expecting to find and therefore finding the fully human, fully divine Jesus, the second person of the Trinity. As important as these conciliar definitions have been to illuminating who Jesus is and might be for us, we need to go behind them as far as possible to their own sources in the scriptural witness.

As a Chinese theologian rightly says, four conditions are necessary to construct a Chinese theology: revelation (including the authority of the Bible), tradition, culture, and praxis (or experience).<sup>11</sup> Similarly, the construction of a Chinese christology require these same four foundations. Any christology must surely have a biblical basis. Without this biblical basis, there can be no authentic christology. Then, what is the starting point for christology in the Chinese context?

The Bible tells us (Mt. 16:13-20) that Jesus once posed two questions to his disciples while they were in the district of Caesarea Philippi: “Who do people say that I am?” and more precisely, “Who do you say that I am?” An authentic christology must begin from these questions. Other people’s, other theologians’ understandings of Jesus are important. But the most important thing for Chinese Christians today is who we say Jesus is in our own context. Thus, doing christology in our own situation is doing christology in the Chinese context. Apart from this context, we cannot do our christology. Therefore, doing Chinese christology must take as its starting points both the Bible and our own praxis.

I agree with Lucien Richard that the starting point for a contemporary christology cannot simply be biblical doc-

trines about Jesus, nor just the historical Jesus. “What men and women of today experience and hope for must be one of the constitutive elements of the Christian response to Jesus’ own question, ‘Who do you say that I am?’”<sup>12</sup> This is true for Chinese Christians in doing our christology as well. Our starting point for christology thus should be both the “biblical Jesus” and our own experience of this Jesus.

From this starting point, in our own Chinese context, an appropriate christology should thus be a biblical christology in some sense. It must have a strong biblical basis and also be in harmony with our own experience. When we make the Bible and our own lived experience the starting point for our christology, we will discover that Christ is not a conqueror, but a servant. God is a suffering God who suffers in our own sufferings. He loves all human beings, Christian and non-Christian. God is with Chinese Christians, also with the Chinese people, among Chinese people, and in Chinese people. And to some degree, we can also find the image of this Christ in Chinese culture.

#### *Tao christology and a few metaphors*

It is certainly true that Chinese christology is only on the way. Although many Chinese theologians have started to do christology in the Chinese context, there still is no “one” Chinese christology as yet. But what they have done may be a pointer to a “Chinese christology.” As I understand it, a *tao* christology can perhaps be “Chinese christology” in our own context.

Luis G. Pedraja very much appreciates that “Spanish Bibles and Liturgies provide a certain advantage over other languages by translating references to Jesus as God’s verb. When we speak of Jesus as a Verb, it is difficult to reduce faith to just belief without action.”<sup>13</sup> Pedraja may be right. But, for me, the Chinese Bible’s translation of “Jesus as God’s word” into “Jesus as God’s *tao*” has an even more dynamic meaning. Jesus Christ is not only a living Verb, but also a living *tao*, a God-human with us.

Although most Chinese Christians still hold a view of christology directly imported from the West by missionaries as I mentioned above, some Chinese Christians have



started to try to enculturate Christianity into Chinese culture. For them, the Word of God is *tao* which can incarnate in Chinese culture.

The *tao* of God not only can, but must, become incarnate in Chinese culture. Using the Buddhist concept of embodiment (*huashen*) to illuminate incarnation might allow us to more easily understand the possibility of incarnation of the *tao* in Chinese culture. We may see the flesh which the *tao* becomes in Chinese culture as an embodiment or *avatara* of the *tao*. There is not necessarily only one *avatara*; they may be limitless, and there may be different types.

It is not the purpose of this article to discuss the possibility of the incarnation of the *tao* becoming flesh in China, nor to attempt to construct a *tao* christology, but to reveal some ethical components of such a christology. In light of my understanding of some characteristics of *tao*, I will try to draw a picture of Jesus Christ from some different perspectives. Jesus Christ is the humble or kenotic Christ. He is also the suffering God, who suffered and also suffers with and among Chinese people. Jesus Christ is still a loving God. He is a cosmic lover. In what follows, I would like to present this understanding of christology through several metaphors.

### *Metaphor 1: Jesus Christ is like a bowl*

The first metaphor points to Christ's kenosis or humility. Jesus Christ is God's *tao* made flesh. It is easy for Chinese people to understand that *tao* is like an empty bowl, "Which in being used can never be filled up./Fathomless, it seems to be the origin of all things./It blunts all sharp edges, /It unites all tangles,/It harmonizes all lights,/It unites the world into one whole."<sup>14</sup> Likewise, for Chinese Christians, it is very easy to understand Jesus Christ, *tao* made flesh, as an empty God. It is a kind of kenotic christology.

Lucien Richard argued, "The kenotic Christology of the New Testament seemed most appropriate." He saw this christology as the most expressive of Jesus' own message and best reflected in Philippians 2:5-11 and in the Gospel

of Mark. It is true that, in the form of God, Jesus Christ recognized his equality with God not as a matter of getting, but of giving. His kenosis means that God's glory is thus "demonstrated in shame and weakness. Divinity in other words issued in generous self-giving, not in self-aggrandizement."<sup>15</sup> The christological hymn of Phil. 2:6-11 presents the self-emptying of Jesus as the revelation that to be God is to be unselfishness itself. In his life, "Jesus pursued a style of service even to the act of complete self-giving."<sup>16</sup>

Lucien Richard contends that Philippians 1 and the Gospel of Mark establish a paradox which must permeate all Christian life—salvation and well-being are "attained not by conquest, not by domination of the other, but by self-effacement and self-giving love which leads ultimately to self realization. The coming of the Kingdom is realized through self-actualization of the other. Real authority and power lie in compassionate, persuasive love, in weakness."<sup>17</sup> I could not agree more.

There is a similar expression of the power in weakness in a Chinese classic:

To remain whole, be twisted!  
 To become straight, let yourself be bent.  
 To become full, be hollow.  
 Be tattered, that you may be renewed.  
 Those that have little, may get more,  
 Those that have much, are but perplexed.

.....

He does not show himself; therefore he is seen every where.

He does not define himself, therefore he is distance.  
 He does not boast of what he will do, therefore he succeeds.

He is not proud of his work, and therefore it endures.  
 He does not contend, and for that very reason no one under heaven can contend with him.<sup>18</sup>

Another passage in Lao Tze has same implication:

Nothing under heaven is softer or more yielding than water;

But when it attacks things hard and resistant,

there is not one of them that can prevail.

For they can find no way of altering it.

That the yielding conquers the resistant.

and the soft conquers the hard is a fact known by all  
men,

yet utilized by none.

Yet it is in reference to this that the Sage said

“Only he who has accepted the dirt of the country can  
be lord of its soil-shrines;

only he who takes upon himself the evils of the coun-  
try can become a king among those what dwell un-  
der heaven.”<sup>19</sup>

A kenotic christology, starting “from below” means that the crucified, the suffering humanity of Jesus is the locus of God’s revelation and God’s being. God’s love is not simply revealed through the Words of Jesus but through action and deeds of kenosis, a self-emptying which led to the cross. This kenotic God put himself at human beings’ side to suffer with them and for them. This self-giving love of God demands a radical self-emptying. Here love and suffering co-inhere. In this sense, Jesus Christ is “the periphery-oriented authority of the crucified Lord,”<sup>20</sup> and his periphery-orientation makes us the center of his love.

The nature of kenosis is the abandonment of self, the taking up of the cross. Jesus not only carried his own cross, he taught his disciples to take up their crosses and follow him. Such kenosis is depicted by Paul in Romans 1:26-32. It symbolized the spirit of sacrifice and the turning of humans from self-centeredness to God-centeredness. As a revelation event, the cross can symbolize the necessary self-emptying as a path to new life. In the cross we discover the fundamental law of the divine life itself: “Power is to be found in weakness.” Thus, kenosis, the self-emptying and self-giving, is to be understood as characteristic of the life of God. It is “a characteristic of God’s action.”<sup>21</sup>

It is not difficult to find some similarities between empty *tao* and the kenotic Jesus Christ. In *tao*, we find a Chinese expression of God’s kenosis. The *tao* is like an empty bowl. Likewise, Jesus Christ who was the *tao* became flesh as kenotic God and humble man. Jesus Christ is

like a bowl.

Bowls play a very important part in the daily lives of Chinese people. They can be symbols of our daily life because many Chinese people use them daily to eat and drink from. Bowls are part of our daily lives. In some sense, our physical life cannot exist apart from bowls, which imply that without food there is no life. Unlike Europeans and Americans, Chinese do not greet each other by saying “How are you?”, but with the phrase, “Have you eaten?” Although many of the younger generation greet each other by saying things like, “Chatted in QQ?” “E-mailed anyone?” “Made any money lately?” or “Won the lottery?” etc., most Chinese people, especially those who live in the countryside, are still accustomed to greeting each other with “Have you eaten?” For most Chinese people, eating well and enough is the number one concern. It’s the same in most Asian countries. This being the case, it will always be easy to maintain the relationship between people’s understanding of God and the “bread of life.” As one Asian theologian says, “When starving people eat the food, they experience God ‘in every grain.’ They ‘know’ and ‘taste’ God when they chew each grain. Food makes them alive.”<sup>22</sup>

My use of a bowl as a metaphor for talking about Jesus Christ here was inspired by an English scholar who connects *tao* (the Way) with a bowl. As we have seen above in the citation from the *Tao te ching*, the *tao* has several characteristics: 1) like the rim of a bowl, *tao* has neither beginning nor end; 2) *Tao* is shaped like a bowl. It is an indivisible whole; 3) like a bowl, *tao* is empty inside. This is what makes a bowl a bowl. *Tao* is also empty inside, and just for this reason, it can contain all things; 4) *Tao* is open to the outside, as is a bowl. The nature of the *tao* is self-humbling. *Tao* is open to the outside and pours itself out. It gives to all, and embraces all; (5) Finally, *tao* is useful. *Tao’s* nature is self-giving and self-humbling. It doesn’t try to lord it over anything or anybody, but simply and silently gives itself up.<sup>23</sup>

Here, it is not difficult to find similarities between a humble *tao* and a kenotic Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, Son of God is open to outside, to all, like a bowl. His hands stretch

forth; they reach out to God in absolute obedience, and they also reach us with complete and humble love. He is humble. Like the rim of the bowl, Christ has neither beginning nor ending. He is as eternal as the Father. He is “the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End”(Rev. 1:8). He is and was and is to come: the Almighty. All things were created through Him. But this Christ emptied himself, like the inside of a bowl. In a sense, the emptiness of Christ is the core of the gospel. God has destroyed the barriers between humanity and God, and by this emptying out, is with us always. God became flesh, not to be above us, but to become human like us. As Philippians says, “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, and being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross” (Phil. 2:5-8). Through his action of emptying himself, we are able to see and to know Him. This is the inner humbleness of God. Only through God’s kenosis, can we see and know God.

It is much easier for Chinese Christians to accept such a weak and humble Christ who is with us even in our suffering and weakness. Jesus Christ is God become human, not a human become God. He is made human, not to show power, but for love; not to be glorified, but for mercy. Christ’s strength does not lie in his might, but in his weakness. Christ’s victory is not in his glory but on his cross, in his suffering. In his kenosis, he brings us abundant life. As the New Testament scholar N.T. Wright says, Jesus Christ is truly the victory of God. But the victory of Jesus Christ comes not through power, but through his love, and his kenotic act. In his kenosis, he is exalted by the Father. This kenotic Christ is God to us and in us.

*Metaphor 2: Jesus Christ is like the sun*

My second metaphor is the sun, which points to the cosmic Christ. The cosmic Christ shines like the sun on all creation. As “great Tao pervades everywhere,” the light and

heat of the sun pervade the whole cosmos. In the same way, in this cosmic Christ God's light embraces the whole creation. This Christ loves and takes care of the whole cosmos.

China is an agricultural society, and in an agricultural society, the sun is vitally important. Without the light of the sun, plants cannot grow, there will be no harvest, and thus none of the food necessary for life. The sunlight shines on the whole cosmos, everyone and everything. It rejects nothing and no one. Jesus Christ is like a just sun, and his love is for all creatures. God also makes "His sun rise on the evil

An understanding of Jesus Christ as the cosmic Christ is not new. It comes from Paul's understanding of Christ in Colossians and Ephesians. It is also one of the main emphases of Asian theology in general and Chinese theology in particular.

Leivisons argued according to Colossians that the cosmos has its origin, present sustenance and fulfillment in Christ. Christ is the origin and the goal of creation (see Col.1:16b, 1:17b, 1:20a). This perception of Christ has implications for Christianity's relationship to other religions and cultures. Besides this, the other foci of Colossians 1 are cosmic unity and the universal accessibility of God to the creation through the mediation of Christ.<sup>24</sup> Leivisons' arguments here are especially important for the Asian situation. The minority status of Christianity in Asia in general, and in China in particular, has not, then, led to a minor presentation of Christ. On the contrary, the scope of Christ's presence is cosmic. This cosmic Christ is beyond the Christian Church.

For Chinese Christians, what the cosmic Christ reveals to us is not God's omnipotence, but God's love. God's nature is love, and God is the cosmic lover. God is love enacted. Without God's love it would be impossible for us to love others. God's love initiates a new possibility for being human. As K. H. Ting says, "That Christ is cosmic gives us assurance that God is the cosmic lover, not any cosmic tyrant or punisher. He works by education and persuasion rather than coercion and forced obedience. He lures and

invites and waits for free response and does not resort to scolding and reprimanding. That is why many of us in China find the Gospel's analogy of the transformation of seeds and growth of plants in air, rain and sun more appealing than that of beating and controlling the sheep with rod and staff. God's is the will-to-fellowship, not the will-to-power."<sup>25</sup>

This cosmic Christ is not only the ascended Christ, but also the Christ who lives among us. We can find the image of this cosmic Christ in our next-door neighbor, and in a Christian in our church. Jesus Christ also lived and still lives in our community. He was and still is someone we could call upon to understand our plight and to give us hope. We also can find this image of the cosmic Christ in the love of Christians and also in any good deeds of non-Christians. This understanding can pave a way for us to identify with our people.

The Chinese Church is extremely small and weak. As Chinese Christians, if we want to identify with our people, we must discover new meaning in this cosmic Christ. This Christ enables us to see a God whose love is inclusive and not exclusive. God's love embraces all people, and all life in the cosmos. This understanding of cosmic Christ can shine great light on our treatment of the relationship between non-Christians and Christians, between church and society.

In his essay, "Christ in Cosmic Context," Jurgen Moltmann contends that without text there is no context and without context, there is no text. His text is the biblical tradition of the creation wisdom and the cosmic Christ. His context is the ecological crisis of the earth-system. The most important context for us as Chinese Christians is our particular social and cultural context. In this context, a biblically-based cosmic Christ can bring meaning to our own christology. Truly, "when we see the world, we see God's divine nature and eternal power."<sup>26</sup> Jesus Christ is cosmic lover and cosmic governor.

The sun as metaphor here points to God's universal love. God is the cosmic lover. Understanding of Jesus Christ as the cosmic Christ is not new, but, for Chinese Christians,

the significance of knowing Christ as having a cosmic nature lies essentially in ascertaining two things, as K. H. Ting has pointed out: 1) the universal extent of Christ's domain, concern and care, and 2) the kind of love which we get a taste of in Jesus Christ as we read the Gospels being the first and supreme attribute of God and basic to the structure and dynamic of the universe. In light of this love we get an insight as to how things go in the world.

Christ is not so small as to concern himself only with religious or spiritual or ecclesiastical things, or only with believers, or only with making converts of those who do not yet consciously believe in him. He is the one who sustains the universe by his word of power (Heb. 1:3). His is the primacy over all creation. Christ has everything to do with Creation. His concern is to bring Creation to its fruition when love, justice and peace become the rule. Redemption does not stand against Creation but is one process with Creation. Not only communities of Christians here and there, but humankind as a whole and, indeed, the whole cosmos, are within the realm of Christ's redemptive work.<sup>27</sup> This understanding is very important for Chinese Christians. Christians in China are in an absolute minority. If we want to witness well to God in China, we must first witness to this inclusive love of God. This will help to ease the distance between ourselves and the rest of the Chinese people.

In Romans 5:15-17, Paul speaks of the infinitely greater impact of Christ on humanity than that of Adam. We are elated and get a sense of liberation upon reading this. The incarnation profoundly affects human and cosmic life in all its aspects. It is inconceivable that any area of human endeavor should be unaffected by the few who profess a belief in Christ. All truth goodness and beauty come from this Christ. He shines in all that is fair in the world, no matter whether this is to be found in the Church, or outside it.

That Christ is cosmic gives us assurance that God is the cosmic lover, not any cosmic tyrant or punisher. God works by education and persuasion rather than coercion and forced obedience. He lures and invites and awaits our free response



and does not resort to scolding and reprimand. That is why many of us in China find the Gospel's analogy of the transformation of seeds and the growth of plants in air, rain and sun more appealing than that of beating and controlling the sheep with rod and staff. God's is the will-to-fellowship, and will-to-love, not the will-to-power or will-to-control.

For Chinese Christians, to discard the image of a vengeful, frightening God, God the omnipotent, in dealing with humans, and to come to adore God the Lover, the Sympathizer, the fellow-sufferer who comes to us, is a shift that is truly liberating, and also truly necessary. It is an entirely new understanding for Chinese culture and not foreign to it.

This cosmic Christ is related to the kenotic Christ. A passage from Lao Tze's *Tao te ching* says:

The supreme Tao, How it floods in every direction!

This way and that,

There is no place where it does not go.

All things look to it for life,

And it refuses none of them:

Yet when its work is accomplished it possesses nothing.

Clothing and nourishing all things,

It does not lord it over them.

Since it asks for nothing from them,

It may be classed among things of low estate;

But since all things obey it without coercion.

It may be named supreme.

It does not arrogate greatness to itself,

And so fulfills its greatness.<sup>28</sup>

This passage prepares the Chinese soil to receive a Christ whose dimensions are cosmic. This Christ is the cosmic lover. He loves Christians, and also loves non-Christians. His love permeates everywhere. He fills the whole cosmos with his great love and self-giving mercy. In this Christ, we can find something which helps us in welcoming goodness outside of the church. God is not only the Christians' God, but also the non-Christians' God. God is the Lord of the whole universe. In Jesus Christ, all are in-

cluded in God's impartial love and mercy. This cosmic Christ is God with us.

*Metaphor 3: Jesus Christ as a suffering mother*

My third metaphor is the image of a suffering mother. This points to Christ's suffering in the midst of love. Chinese Christians have a great appreciation for this image of Jesus Christ. Our experience tells us that a mother will suffer for her children; this is suffering for others. This suffering Christ is God for us. Not only does this Christ weep for our pain, he suffers personally for us, he takes up our sins and burdens. He dies, and lives, for us.

Suffering has given the people of Asia their history. Our history is truly the history of suffering and pain. As C. S. Song says, "Suffering makes our history really historical. It makes our history truly contextual."<sup>29</sup> In our own context, "Asians do not have to look for suffering; it comes to them.... They cannot choose one kind of suffering as against another kind of suffering; suffering chooses them. In short, for them to be is to suffer."<sup>30</sup>

For Asian Christian theology, therefore, it is important that God addresses the experience of suffering through a "gravity-bound" love that draws God into history and into the historical lives of human persons. The sign of "gravity-bound" love is God's suffering with humanity. God suffers "with" humankind. "This suffering God feels pain-love; that is, God loves people to the extent of feeling their pain, as a mother feels pain in childbirth for the child whom she loves. Jesus was the pain-love of God in his earthly life."<sup>31</sup>

Japanese theologian Kazon Kitamori posed the theology of the pain of God as a necessary approach to understanding the Christian Gospel in its fullness, which addressed both the theological environment and Japan's immediate historical circumstances. For him, the pain of God emerges from the conflict between God's wrath and mercy. "God suffers pain when he tries to love us, the objects of his wrath."<sup>32</sup> I agree with his understanding of God's pain-love, but do not agree that the pain of God emerges from the conflict between God's wrath and mercy. It is my understanding that God's fundamental attribute is God's love.

Thus, God's pain arises because of God's love for us. In God's love, God suffers with us in our own sufferings. God does not need to suffer, but out of love for us freely shares in our pain. "The distance between love and suffering is very short indeed."<sup>33</sup>

We find the biblical foundation of the identification of Jesus with human suffering in the portrait of the suffering servant in Isaiah 53:3. Suffering people can thus identify with Jesus on the cross, his deepest point of suffering. The biblical portrait of Jesus as the suffering servant finds its Asian counterpart in Jesus as the pain-love of God. Like many Asian theologians, Byung Mu Ahn, a Korean theologian, contends that Jesus' suffering is the core of the christology.<sup>34</sup>

Many Asian theologians, especially Asian women theologians, have started to portray Jesus through the image of a mother. They see Jesus as a compassionate one who feels the suffering of humanity deeply, suffers and weeps together with us. Some even go so far as to clothe Jesus in the image of Guanyin (Kuan Yin). For them, "since Jesus' compassion is so deep, the mother image is the most appropriate one for Asian women to express their experience of Jesus's compassion."<sup>35</sup>

Turning to the Chinese context, I would like to say that this third metaphor of Jesus Christ in the Tao-became-flesh christology, that of the suffering mother, is most appropriate. It is one Chinese Christians can appreciate. Jesus Christ is like a suffering mother whose love is a kind of self-giving love. This image of the suffering mother is also familiar to Chinese people in general.

Let me cite two more passages of Lao Tze, which refer to the nature of *tao*:

Rear Creatures, then, feed them,  
 Rear them, but do not control them.  
 Feed them, but never lean upon them;  
 Lead them, but do not manage them.  
 This is called the Mysterious Power.<sup>36</sup>  
 But the myriad creatures are worked upon by him;  
 he does disown them.  
 He rears them, but does not lay claim to them;

Feeds them, but does not lean upon them;  
 Achieves his aim, but does not call attention to what  
 he does;

And for the very reason that he does to call attention  
 to what he does.

He is not ejected from fruition of what he has done. <sup>37</sup>

We can see from this that *tao* is like a mother who cares for and loves her children with a self-giving love. This love must contain a kind of self-surrendering, and suffering.

Jesus Christ is like this *tao*. He loves his people as a mother loves her children. Jesus Christ loves us, and also suffers for us. When we are suffering, Jesus Christ is with us, among us, and in us. He also carries our cross for us. Chinese Christians much prefer this image of Jesus Christ, a Christ who suffers because he loves us. He loves us; thus, he suffers for us.

Historically speaking, China as a nation has experienced too much suffering. Therefore, for Chinese, the mother image relates not only to love, but also to suffering, and this suffering mother is lovable and understandable. During the Cultural Revolution, for example, when thousands of Chinese people were detained, struggled against and persecuted, thousands of mothers suffered with their children. The nation's catastrophe, and the home's tribulations, all weighed down upon the shoulders of China's mothers. When their sons and daughters suffered, many Chinese mothers suffered with, and also suffered for, their children. In these mothers, we can see the image of a suffering God. God suffered with and for us. This is why many Chinese Christians know that the reflection of Christ is to be found in a mothers' love.

Jesus Christ therefore took up his cross for all human-kind. In this human suffering, he experienced our pain. In the same way, God truly suffered for the Chinese people in their suffering. In those who suffer and struggle for life, God is present as an object of history. In those who act out of love for others, in those who struggle for the lives of others, we also see God as a historical subject, acting on behalf of others. Through those who struggle on behalf of life, who act out of love and compassion for others, God

becomes incarnate as a subjective agent of history. For this very reason, the risen Christ is a suffering Christ, one who died on the cross for the sake of human beings. Therefore, all who have endured suffering, torture, and oppression find a deep connection with the crucified Christ, who stands in solidarity with all the countless victims of oppression and suffering in every place, culture and time.

This Christ is no stranger to Chinese Christians; they know him well. Many Chinese Christians have found Christ in the course of their search for a mother's love. Xie Fuya wrote in his autobiography that because his mother constantly called upon the name of Buddha on his behalf, he saw in his mother's love the great love of God, and finally became a Christian. The image of the suffering mother is lovable and understandable for them. Christ as a suffering mother is Christ who is among and with us in our suffering. He was and also is a suffering God.

In one of his essays, another Chinese theologian, Wang Weifan, once mentioned his mother's suffering for her sons. His father died when he was seven years old, and his mother endured many hardships in her life, all for her son's sake. For the sake of him, his mother chose her path: a life of hardship and humiliation. For his stepbrother, the child of his father's first wife, Wang's mother set out on a long and arduous journey during the war years, which eventually led to her death. He writes, "For her own son's sake, she chose the hardships of life, and for a son not her own, she was willing to risk danger and die.... When I recall my mother's love, and read again the passage 'by his bruises we are healed' (Is.53:5), I cannot but say that the shadow of the cross is reflected in that mother love which is shaped by traditional Chinese culture."<sup>38</sup> This is not the experience of all Chinese mothers, but the image of a suffering mother is nonetheless a common image of Chinese mothers. A mother who loves is always a suffering mother. In the same way, Christ is the God who suffers for love. He suffers because he loves the world and us. He loves his creatures, and therefore, he suffers for the whole creation, as a mother suffers for her children. We discover the image of the suffering Christ in the image of the suffering Chinese mother.

N. T. Wright rightly points out that western scholars are observers, not participants. They use so-called objective methods to observe the objects of their research. They image Jesus as a great teacher of truths-divorced-from-real-life.<sup>39</sup> For Chinese Christians, this western-style understanding seems very biased. Jesus is not only a teacher, but also a self-giving lover. He so loves us that he carries our sin and suffering. He is God with us, and among us. The cross is the sign of God's suffering in Jesus Christ.

In those who suffer and struggle for life, God is present as an object of history. God truly suffers in the suffering of the Chinese people. Through Jesus' incarnation, God reveals to humanity the image of God we bear in ourselves, impelling us to see God in each other. The Incarnation locates God's presence in the messy reality of life, and more specifically, it locates it in the struggle for life. Therefore, in the struggle for life, Jesus Christ is with us. In our tears, we can see Jesus' tears for us.

For Chinese Christians, the resurrection truth also tells us that it is through loss, poverty, suffering and death that life is attained. It tells us life does not depend on power, wealth or property, but on the Risen Christ, the Lord of life, who is also the Ascended Christ, sitting at the right hand of God and upholding the universe by his word of power. This Christ is a suffering Christ who died on the cross for the sake of human beings. He still suffers with us and for us. In our suffering, we can see the image of Jesus Christ as a suffering mother.

*Conclusion: A practical or ethical christology*

Of course, there are other metaphors for Christ in Chinese theological thinking, but due to the limitations of time and space, I have focused only on three in this essay. In any case, it seems accurate to say that Chinese christological thinking is more practical in nature, unlike the western tradition which is more theoretical. For Chinese Christians, Jesus Christ is not an object of theoretical thinking, but a subject for practical imitation. Therefore, our christology is to follow Jesus Christ—the kenotic, loving, and suffering God—rather than to think about him. *Tao* christology

should be “walking” christology, not “thinking” christology.

Xie Fuya, the Chinese philosopher and theologian, contends that the Chinese christology that is in the process of taking shape should be very different from western christology, which is theological and philosophical, more concerned with profound metaphysics. The core of Chinese christology should be a band of saints who imitate and follow Christ. We should have our Chinese Paul, our Chinese John, our Chinese Augustine and our Chinese Aquinas. Chinese christology will have no interest in a debate over creeds, doctrines or dogmas. Chinese christology will directly study Jesus Christ, who is both God and human, human and God, and follow the life of Jesus so that he can be a new moral model for Chinese people. In terms of theory, we will build a new theory in which heaven and humankind form a whole, so that we can fulfill the old heaven-human-in-one theory (*tian ren heyi*) of Chinese tradition. In this sense, a Chinese church which makes christology central will contribute many Christian *junzi* (the Confucian ideal of the gentleman-scholar).<sup>40</sup> It is in terms of such praxiological aspects that Xie terms christology “Christ studies,” suggesting that christology in China is not a matter of discussing Christ, but studying to be like Christ. This clearly reveals the essence of the Chinese christology that is taking shape.

I cannot help but add a resounding “yes” to his insight. What I have done above and what Xie says is consistent to some extent. We are seeking the footprints of an ethical Christ. For Jesus Christ is a kenotic Christ. He is also a cosmic lover. This Christ suffered and still suffers with and for suffering people; he is there in their midst. By following Christ, the Chinese church can contribute many Christian “exemplars” (*junzi*) to the Chinese church and Chinese society. For this reason, the Chinese christology which is in formation should be practical christology. An ethical christology is a practical christology. It demands that we not only talk about Christ, but follow Him in all the fullness of our lives. These Christian exemplars will be able to bring about the kingdom of God, to make God’s will done on earth as it is in heaven. This is the significance of an

ethical christology.

In Christ, heaven and humanity become one. The *tao* is not only the word of God, but also the way of God on which human beings can walk as the sons and daughters of God, and as the followers of Jesus Christ. This *tao* is not far from us, but very near us, around us and within us. This *tao* has to become flesh in our own culture. And it will enhance our understanding of Christology in our own context. As part of the ongoing theological reflection taking place in the Chinese church, an ethical christology provides a possible direction for the formation of a Chinese christology.

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- 1 See Wang Weifan, "The Word Was Here Made Flesh," *Chinese Theological Review*: 8 (1993): 92.
- 2 Lucien Richard, *A Kenotic Christology* (University Press of America, 1982), 2.
- 3 See Virginia Fabella, "An Asian Woman's Perspective," in *Asian Faces of Jesus*, edited by R. S. Sugirtharajah (Maryknoll, NY, 1993), 217.
- 4 Lucien Richard, *A Kenotic Christology*, 2.
- 5 *A Kenotic Christology*, 17.
- 6 *A Kenotic Christology*, 68.
- 7 See Glen H. Stassen, D. M. Yeager, and John Howard Yonder, *Authentic Transformation: A New Vision of Christ and Culture* (Abingdon Press, 1996), 97.
- 8 Jon Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads*, 27.
- 9 See Jaequelyn Grant, *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1989), 215.
- 10 See *Christ in A Post-Christian World*, 43.
- 11 See Wang Weifan, *Chinese Theology and Its Cultural Resources*, (in Chinese) (Nanjing: Nanjing Theological Seminary, 1997), 1.
- 12 *A Kenotic Christology*, 100.
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## Context and Theology

LI XINNONG

Theology is more than an academic discipline, for it is linked to the mission and faith of believers and the faith of the church community. The general assumption behind statements such as “the priesthood of all believers,” “theology is the proclamation of faith,” or “the truth of the gospel is eternal,” is that through creation and salvation, God is constantly at work—in the history of the peoples of the Bible, in the history of the early church, and in all the world, which of course includes Chinese history and Chinese church history. This essay will look at the interaction of the theological thinking of the faith community in practice and in context, in order to explore possible ways in which to deepen our theological thinking.

### *Inspiration from people’s history in the Bible and early church history*

Theology is the proclamation of faith; it is also people’s experience of meeting God in their lives, the interaction of God and human beings in context.

Faith has its tradition, truth its source and life its maintenance in God’s creation and nurture. Our faith is a commentary on the faith tradition in the course of our lives; it is the practice of truth. Faith and theology are both subject and objective life experience. God spoke to the Israelites in ancient times as well as to the early church, and thus the Israelites and the early church had their faith proclamation and their theology—they encountered God in their context

and the experience of that encounter is recorded in the Old and New Testaments. Here there is also an issue of the faith tradition and the commentary upon it. Therefore, theology is first of all a praxis of life, and the spirit of this praxis is what we who do theology in the Chinese context should study.

We have seen that the faith praxis of the Israelites and the early church have been recorded and have become today's scriptures. God spoke to Abraham through his surroundings, and through Abraham's own or his family's actions, revealed his eternal plan and care. The vicissitudes and experiences of Abraham's life are the interaction between human beings' deep feelings towards God and God's revelation to human beings. Human theology here is not a matter of scholars' theories, but of the "praxis" of life's dependence on God. Abraham faced the religious chaos in Ur, political upheaval, human vagaries. His life experiences were founded on his faith in the one true God, and by this he entered the "promised land,"—an ideal, a hope.

Of course the stories of the three ancestors (found in Genesis 1-11 and elsewhere) were told and retold and interpreted in the faith tradition by the theologians of the exile. This tradition would have meaning for Abraham in his context and even more for later generations.

The Israelites' life experience was similar. They developed their own historical theology from their own history. The center of Old Testament historical theology is concentrated in Deuteronomy and this shaped the "D" tradition. God spoke to the Israelites in different contexts, and they were thus trained to be a self-conscious people. But there were other voices as well. The wisdom literature, by the openness of its cosmology and its view of truth, candidly and sincerely accepted truth from "outside the church" or outside the history of the Israelites, because it recognized that wisdom and joy lived among the people of the world. This gives us today, in our discussions of contextual theology, a possible methodology and ontology; its practical and timely approach is one we should note and ponder deeply. "In the Old Testament all the prophets proclaimed God's word to the Israelites within a particular context.

Before the exile, Amos spoke his warning to them and Ezekiel comforted God's people after their exile and enslavement."<sup>1</sup> The prophet Isaiah's theology of the cosmic Lord is theoretically more advanced than that of the wisdom literature. It speaks of God as being outside the history of Israel, speaking in this external context, within which God finds appropriate servants to do God's will. For example, the case of Cyrus, which offers the Israelites a theology for survival as a people: "In the Jewish Christian tradition, God is a God who originally could only act within the history of the chosen people. Thus, the salvific action of God was set outside the history of the Asia region. This view in fact limits both the freedom and power of God. In Amos' time, the Israelites held to this theological view, yet this was a view criticized and challenged by the prophet (Amos 9:7). In addition, the prophetic message of the Book of Isaiah offers no support for such an exclusivist and self-styled triumphalistic view (Is.10:5; 45:1-4). It would be unimaginable as well as indefensible to locate the work of God as Lord of Creation in Asia as occurring after the western missionary movement. The view that the Spirit of the Creator God was entirely absent from the long history and future of the rich religious cultures of Asia will never gain solid support or rational affirmation."<sup>2</sup>

The early church was also located in "context." Its knowledge of the plan and will of God was even more precise, ordering its theology. For example, the synoptic gospels illustrate some of the differences in understanding of the Second Coming. Matthew faithfully records the Lord's words; Mark is even more succinct; Luke's account involves the everyday life of the church and makes clearer that Jesus calls his disciples to live good lives in the world, as witnesses to his gospel. This has allowed the church in later times to have a clearer understanding of the Second Coming.

"In the New Testament, the Jews are under Roman rule and the Jewish religious leaders advocate observing the letter of the Law as a means of safeguarding Jewish tradition, but the Zealots plotted the overthrow of Roman rule. Jesus' gospel of the heavenly kingdom was aimed at this

rather complex context. When Christianity was preached in the gentile lands, and the early church was gradually established, Christ's gospel encountered a new cultural context, and absorbed quite a lot of Greek and Roman religious and philosophical thinking."<sup>3</sup> The Jerusalem meeting opened the way for preaching to the gentiles, adjusting theology on the basis of life experience in the church. The Holy Spirit is always speaking to people in their context, guiding them in the formation of their own theology. The Holy Spirit works in the churches of China and churches in all Asian countries, guiding each church to form its own theology in its context. "Some people think the Christian gospel is universal, and if we over-emphasize its contextuality, this may harm the unity of the church and create divisions. Such a view is actually based on a popular misunderstanding that we can completely understand God, or grasp the gospel in its entirety. The mystery of God is beyond any human powers of imagination, nor can it be limited to any society or culture. The gospel is universal and it belongs to all humanity. It has concrete meaning for any context. But with our human limitations we can only understand God within a particular context."<sup>4</sup> Yet the statement "the truth of the gospel is eternal and unchanging," cannot be taken as theology and tradition according to concrete biblical example or as found in western churches, to be rigidly imposed on our own theological praxis. There are several questions here: how do we deal with the relationship between Scripture (written revelation) and faith traditions from the West? How, in today's context, shall we interpret the Bible, and preach that true and living word to the people? How do we deal with traditional culture and our present context? What is the relationship between God's work in Asia's history and present to the revelation of the written text? These are all questions Chinese theology has to deal with. This is not empty metaphysical theory, but comes out of the life praxis of the church.

*Contextual theological praxis of the Chinese Church and other churches in Asia*

People need the truth; they are drawn to eternal happi-

ness and joy. At the same time, human knowledge, especially knowledge of God, is limited, and knowledge of the truth of creation and salvation and of God's work in history, is even more limited. Thus, one must be extremely careful in doing theology in context and proceed with great respect for the truth. One cannot make human learning or a little human knowledge of the truth into a reason for human arrogance. This is something Bishop K.H. Ting teaches us constantly. Therefore, whatever "theological" theories we have are all contextual theologies. Human beings need salvation, they need God's mighty hand to support them, they need the inspiration of the light of truth, they need the grace to know God. And so human struggle, and spiritual and physical difficulties, should become the entry points for the gospel and for life practice. Asian theologies—theologians of grassroots theology, Minjung theology, theology of the marginalized, homeland theology, etc.—all proceed in this way, as do Chinese theologians. Grassroots theology was created by teachers and theologians in the churches of the Philippines who saw themselves as sharing with the people as blades of grass, lifting the joys and sorrows of the people into theological theory, and gaining identification with the people. Minjung theology makes the exodus and the care for the people shown by Jesus in the Gospel of Mark the focus of Bible interpretation and moves from this to act as advocates for the people in society.

The fate of Korean churches in modern times is linked to that of the Korean people; in difficulty and struggle, the Korean churches have attained identification with and the admiration of the people. The Chinese church in modern times has not, in general, taken active initiative to share weal and woe with the Chinese people. We must consider and ponder this.

In the late 19<sup>th</sup>/ early 20<sup>th</sup> century, western hermeneutics was marked by textual criticism, bringing about a major shift in the understanding of the Bible and God's revelation. This scholarship had an impact on the Chinese and other Asian churches. Some took it up directly as a ready-made tool, and along with the churches' awakening, gained

their own knowledge of historical criticism and textual criticism and there followed a return to the Bible. The revelation of the Bible and the work of the Holy Spirit are the foundation stone on which we do theology and the source of our motive power and vitality. In biblical hermeneutics, human beings and God interact and create our own theology in context.

In the context of socialist society, our Three-Self theology and the present theological reconstruction are the summation and sublimation of the church's life practice. The crux lies in how we come to know more profoundly God's work of creation and salvation in modern Chinese history and build our own ecclesiology, so that the most ordinary member in our church can understand and support theological reconstruction, and it will not be an empty slogan.

We know that God always speaks to people and to churches in concrete contexts. So our theology should be one that moves with the times, a theology of life practice under truth and the Holy Spirit.

Life in this sense includes both the life of the individual and of the church. Life exists in relationship and in context.

Theology should be intimately related to real life. Yet what theological people (especially theological people in Chinese seminaries) easily overlook and so often lack is a contextualized message, a message for the real life of the church. They easily enter into an ivory tower and follow along the path of western theology. However, western theology primarily reflects the theological thinking that is drawn from the western context. Since China has a unique context, it should naturally have a Chinese contextual theology that reflects on that context, one that affords believers, as they deal with the realities of their own lives, a lively theology to draw upon.

"The term contextual theology, has come into frequent use only recently, yet the concerns of contextual theology are the same concerns Christian faith has always had. Christianity believes that God is at work in human history, that believers must seek to understand God's will in the context of their own cultures and societies, and then preach

God's message."<sup>5</sup>

"Indigenization refers to the way traditional culture responds to the gospel; contextualization on the one hand does not overlook this responsibility, on the other hand it focuses on secularization, technology and the struggle for human justice. These are all processes of history in the modern Third World."<sup>6</sup> The modern movement for unity and ecumenism also focus on social complexity, humanization and liberation, issues which have caused the church to shift its concerns from the explanation of texts to practical issues of how to reflect on human suffering and oppression.

As for methodology in contextualization, there must first be real participation in society, focusing on God's "will in history," only then does text explication follow (as in the case of liberation theology). Then this explication takes place even more under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, with loyalty to the truth, commitment to Christ and to the church. The Bible takes pride of place and interpretation interacts with and challenges its surroundings, with the highest and ultimate aim being to allow the gospel to speak to every real situation of human life, thereby preaching the gospel in language that the people in this place can understand.

In the encounter between the text and the context, the text challenges the context, and vice-versa. The interpreter's task is to facilitate the encounter of the text with real human issues to produce a dialogue, to enable faith and deeds to come together under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to link the text and the context, that God's word may be proclaimed. Therefore, contextualization is a reflection process of the church, a reflection process undertaken using the text, the word of God, and the unique human condition as a context. Contextualization is a missiological concept, and is also closely linked to hermeneutics.<sup>7</sup>

The mission of the church is to continue the incarnation in history, that is, to make the truth of Christ's creation and redemption known to people, to realize it in the realities of life. Therefore, contextualization is the most important task of the church's mission.

"The Incarnation itself is the best model for carrying the text into the context. Jesus Christ is the word of God.



He became a Jew, identifying with a particular culture and lived within the confines of a history. At the same time, he elevated that history. Through his life and his work, he expressed a contextualized model of education. ... an expression of the process of contextualization, can be gleaned from the apostolic writings and the life of the early church. If we compare Paul's approach, whether in speaking about the basics of theology or in preaching the word, in the synagogue in Antioch in Pisidia (Acts 13:16-41) and in the Areopagus in Athens (Acts 17:22-31), we find it was entirely different from one to the next. In each place his methods reflect the exigencies of the context."<sup>8</sup>

"Context" includes the interpreter, and this interpreter is the person or church in the environment of the faith tradition, the people and culture, or the concrete political and economic situation. Therefore, "contextualization" includes so-called "indigenization." Indigenization is used to indicate how the traditional culture responds to the gospel. Contextualization on the one hand, does not ignore this responsibility; on the other hand, it emphasizes the struggle among forces for secularization, technology and human justice.<sup>9</sup>

The hermeneutical circle sees the interpreter as static, and makes the text and the interpreter objective objects for scientific study, it does not bring the "context" together with history or with the life experience of the interpreter. Yet in actuality, the relationship between the interpreter, the text and the receptor is one built up layer upon layer. "On the one hand, the interpreter identifies with the text through faith. On the other hand, through reflection and study, the interpreter preserves a distance. In the same way, the interpreter maintains the same identification and distance with the context, so that the text dealt with in this way may encounter the context and real contextualization take place. When the text and context meet, they can dialogue: the context bringing its questions, seeks answers from the text. At the same time, the text raises new questions and challenges for the context and demands a response from the context." In this circle of response and exchange, "the text should take the initiative and leading

position.” ... “The sole source of faith for the interpreter is the Holy Spirit, the interpreter believes the Holy Spirit will inspire, enabling the interpreter to come to a greater and greater clarity with regard to the real meaning of the gospel and of how the gospel can respond to each and every human context.”<sup>10</sup>

In true contextualization, the interpreter, while identifying with the environment, must maintain a spirit of dedication to the triune God and the church.

Therefore, any theology of contextualization must also be praxiological: we do not look for theoretical evidence from the Bible, but in a three-way interaction, allow the biblical text and the Spirit to be in dialogue. The hermeneutical process is the process of the church partaking in God’s work of redemption and creation in history. Bishop K.H. Ting’s perception of the Cosmic Christ and God as Love is such a praxis. At the same time, Minjung theology, theology of the marginalized, grassroots theology, homeland theology and Japanese theology are also praxiological.

Therefore, in a purely scientific or technical sense, the hermeneutical circle depends on our necessary grasp of historical critical research and all sorts of new methodologies in biblical research: textual criticism, redaction criticism, literary criticism, etc.; all are essential. However, we must believe that the Holy Spirit is leading us to understand in context what God wants us to do, and what the text is saying to us Chinese theologians today as we do our own theology.

A basic point is that theology must face the sufferings and cries of human hearts in a pluralistic context. These sufferings and cries come out of the many symbolic images of traditional culture, religion and folk tales, as well as from the modern political and economic environment.

Therefore, to a certain extent, theology cannot simply be “knowledge about God,” metaphysical argument, or the discourses of Greek philosophy, but must be “human issues and knowledge about humanity,”<sup>11</sup> Christians’ reflection on faith in context, or in the words of K.H. Ting, “the church in the act of thinking.”

“What is the basic substance of human culture as ex-

pressed in language and culture? In fact, all languages cause people to come into contact with the basic truth every religion seeks to understand; the difference lies only in the means of expression. These truths encompass: the meaning of human life and its fate, human obstacles and limits and the endless potential for transcending these difficulties, human and cosmic liberation"<sup>12</sup> This view reflects both indigenization and contextualization investigations. The essential point lies in uncovering the (church and cultural) life represented by the signs and symbols, or the realities of life and the conditions of real life. In Asia, religion transcends national, ethnic, social, political and even ideological barriers. Buddhism, whether Mahayana or Hinayana, holds sway among most countries and peoples of central and south Asia, and Confucian thinking has molded not only the history, culture and politics of the land of its birth, but influences the nations of southeast Asia as well. The nation with the largest Muslim population is not located in the Arab world of west Asia, but in southeast Asia, in Indonesia. Furthermore, various forms of ancestor veneration are part of the lives of most people in Asia. Thus, in terms of religion, culture and history, Asia differs from other nations, especially those of the West.

This view rests on a basic assertion: that God is working in the history of every country in Asia. Remember the doctrine of God as creator Lord, breeding in our cultures wisdom and biblical clarity, seeking in common the source and meaning of life in the depths of human hearts, and reflecting the mystery of the Creator God. We should have theological freedom to move between the world of the Bible and the world of Asia, to broaden our theological vision and gain a deeper perception of God's saving action inside and outside Christian history. This is to say that having a clear picture of our context can enable us to have a clearer understanding of the particular features of God's work in Asia and to know more clearly what God expects of us as theologians in Asia. In this way, the responsibility of Christian theology is not to rationalize or dispute universal doctrines, but to enable us as Christians to open our hearts and minds to the different ways in which God works. God

uses different methods to work in different places, in different times and among different peoples. We Christians must perceive God's will and goal for Asians.

Thus, theology is an involvement in and practice of life, "the praxiological spirit," means the spiritual essence of doing theology, even more it means the methods and guiding tenets for doing Chinese theology. The theological process is a practical one.

Our inspiration is to see God as the God who carried out creation and the work of salvation in the history and context of China. We must make a theology out of Chinese history, culture, religion and reality, our own experience and civilization. Theology becomes "reflection on faith" in this way and not through some metaphysical "erudition about God."

*Mission and Status of the Church: Building an Ecclesiology for the Church in the Chinese Context*

The greatest misperception about context in traditional theology is its bias against cultured, or educated, circles. "Culture" is not static, but dynamic, connected to all the vigor and liveliness of human life. If we look at culture from another angle, that of the experience of human existence, incarnational creation and salvation are all contained within culture. We want to avoid wandering about among concepts; rather we should be practitioners of life.

Past missiology developed in the West and mission work took the Paul who was "Jew and missionary in one" as its spiritual guide. In Israel and in the Christian church, the tree of salvation, what is meant by "evangelism" is the conversion of gentiles who receive or take up this tree of salvation; Israel and the church came together in one, together forming "salvation history" and gentiles could only climb aboard. As for Paul, Jews were the nucleus. Then the nucleus expanded to include all Christians; but as for those gentiles who were not part of this inner core of Jewish-Christians, the church looked coldly, even hostilely, on them. This kind of attitude, pushed to its extreme, shaped a fortress mentality in the church; surrounded by darkness and heresy, its mission became defensive, to the point that

the biblical mission to preach the Christian message was simplified to the work of revival. Conversion and church growth became the primary church duty. Conversion meant entry into the church, proclamation of the faith, joining the team. "Conversion" came to mean leaving everything behind in order to be a member of the church. In the nineteenth century, European and American churches sent numerous missionaries overseas. Though they established many churches and certainly spread the seeds of the gospel, the missionaries lacked understanding of the culture, history and traditions of the countries to which they were sent, and their bias and prejudice frequently harmed the cultural traditions of the peoples they worked among. At the same time they often subjectively saw the theology produced by their own culture as normative and universal. As they demanded that the people accept the gospel, the missionaries also wanted them to accept the missionaries' culture, which led to a humiliating situation for local churches. At the same time, this kind of gospel, divided from the indigenous culture, even when spread throughout the Third World, had no relevance to the real lives of local peoples; it could not carry the true meaning of the gospel. Because of this, it is unsurprising that it took on, in these places, a highly spiritual and other-worldly coloration, which led to local Christians' hostility to their surroundings in this world. Actually this is a foreigner's attitude and reduces the incarnational mission of the church to a simplistic idea. The church is both a fellowship of those who have been saved and a continuation of Christ's incarnation in time and place. The theological explorations of the Chinese church into "ecclesiology" have been rather weak, and this raises a question for us: what, after all, does it mean for the church to exist and to grow? We should bring all the implications of the mission to spread the gospel and of incarnation into the actuality of the church.

The church exists as a vessel for God to use to fulfill God's work of mission; this is the meaning of its existence. Evangelism by God is that evangelism by which God's suffering love enables human liberation from suffering and hardship. The incarnation is Christ's self-emptying and the

model for the church. Therefore, the attitude we should adopt as we do theology and live as Christians is to act as the Lord's disciples among the people, receivers with them of the goodness of the gospel, together with them worshipping and raising our eyes the Lord of salvation who created all things. For, "through the incarnation of Jesus Christ, humankind received liberation, through the suffering and sacrifice of the cross, all oppressors were overthrown, and all forces of humiliation, and self-sacrificing love identified itself with human despair, cast into suffering and through his resurrection proclaimed his power and gave hope to humankind."<sup>13</sup>

We can gain insight here from K.H. Ting's God is Love, and Cosmic Christ theologies. Our church and our believers do not take a "church as fortress" attitude and seek to overcome the world, but modeling themselves on God the Father, unite with their neighbors through love, entering together into the work of God's creation. Christ is Lord of the cosmos, why should we seek to overcome the world through human strength? This is not to deny the Great Commission, but rather to deepen and broaden our mission. Thus, Chinese theology is not a matter of concepts but rather is rooted in the life experience of Chinese people; it is the practice of God's love for human beings. The duty of us theologians and theological students is to look with Christian eyes upon the world around us, shaping a worldview, lifting up the experience of believers at the grassroots, making theology from life. The incarnation is fulfilled in a definite and particular time and place. This is the theological basis for establishing a Chinese ecclesiology. God is the center of the cosmos. The church, as a human organization, is not the center of the world. "Our understanding of the church should not stop with the definition of its status, or abstract conceptual description, the church should not simply be some body praising on high. Like the incarnate Christ in human form living among other humans, the church must be incarnated and with believers be joined to its social surroundings, culture, politics, economy and every reality ... only within the living experience of people will we be able to discover

the role and status the church should have.”<sup>14</sup> An actualized or contextualized theology is one that adjusts and changes with its context. And this is a description of the establishment of Chinese theology.

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# Theological and Cultural Reflections on the Relationship between Church and Society in China

YANG DONGLONG

Christianity is a foreign religion in China, and did not truly begin to put down roots in this 5000 year-old civilization until Ming and Qing times. By then, Christianity had been developing for over a thousand years, and when it came to China it was a mature religion with set creeds, doctrines and fairly mature doctrines and church disciplines. This being the case it could easily debate with heresies and protect the orthodoxy and purity of its faith. At the same time, upon entering another mature and civilized society, it met with strong resistance and naturally came into conflict with culture. What is culture? In general terms, culture is the sum total of the material and spiritual wealth created in the process of human society and history. In a narrow sense, it is the consciousness of a society along with the system and organizational structures that adapt to it. Culture is a historical phenomenon. Every society has such a culture that has adapted to it and that develops along with the development of material production in that society. Culture as an ideology is the reflection of a specific culture, politics and economics and in turn has a huge influence on and role in that specific culture, politics and economics. With the birth and development of a people, culture takes on ethnicity, and thereby develops and shapes an ethnic tradition.<sup>1</sup>



A common phenomenon in the Chinese Church is the distancing of many Christians from culture because of their obedience and loyalty to Jesus Christ. In some cases they may undertake a counterattack on their own culture and become a new grouping. This is because, on the one hand, many Christians, faced with the contradiction between Christ and culture, have recourse to a superficial biblical understanding, especially of the teachings of Jesus. Three points of criticism are most common. First, Jesus urges his followers to withdraw from the desires of the world and not worry about what they will eat, drink or put on. They are to lay up their treasure in heaven and seek the blessings of the kingdom of God; they are not to fear those who threaten their lives: and they are to reject worldly authority and obey God rather than human beings. Niebuhr said that such behavior on the part of Christians leads to human difficulties.<sup>2</sup> Secondly, in his teachings, Jesus seems to ask people to rely on the grace of God rather than encourage human achievement, negating all human endeavor in society. There is a saying of Celsus: "If Romans relied upon nothing but the commands of God, would there be a Rome today? Perhaps they would have been just like the Jews..."<sup>3</sup> Thirdly, the exclusivity of Christ. Jesus said,

"Do not think I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have come not to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and one's foes will be members of one's own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me" (Mt. 10: 34-38).

And 1 John stresses:

"Do not love the world or the things in the world. The love of the Father is not in those who love the world; for all that is in the world—the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride in riches—

comes not from the Father but from the world” (1Jn. 2: 15-17). And there are other passages such as “believers may not be yoked together with unbelievers.”

In this essay, I will attempt to describe and analyze this phenomenon.

## **The Relationship between Church and Society as expressed in Theology and Culture**

### *Believers and non-believers*

Many Chinese Christians like to separate people into believers and non-believers and call those who believe in Christ those who belong to God (spiritual people). Non-believers they call secular or gentiles. Thus faith or belief becomes the standard by which to divide people. Those who believe in Christ have been blessed with salvation. Non-believers are on a par with poisonous snakes; they are enemies of Christ. One who is not in the grace of Christ is under the power of Satan. Therefore, believers may not be yoked together with unbelievers: they cannot work together, or intermarry. Christians should seek Christian colleagues and Christian spouses. They believe that the place of bad people who believe in God is much higher than that of good people who do not believe. And so when a good unbeliever dies, he or she has no share in God’s grace. In 1998, Bishop K.H. Ting criticized those who dismissed the good deeds of those heroes who fought the floods, pointing out that to use belief and unbelief to differentiate those around one was not helpful for the spread of the gospel and Christian witness.

Belief in Christ is the difference between Christians and non-Christians. If those who do not believe in Christ cannot be chosen and called out by God, then there would be no Christian church. However, in China, once one is called and becomes a Christian, after the first flush of excitement, he or she will discover that they are only part of a very tiny group and that there is a huge gap between the teachings of the Bible and traditions of the church on the one hand, and the society and culture on the other. Christians are regu-

larly taught that only by severing their relationships with the things of this world, and living God-fearing lives, can they be worthy of the name Christian. For those who are on good terms with the world are enemies of Christ. Many Christians hold to this understanding. If there is salvation outside of Christ, then why would one necessarily become a Christian? Since one has become a Christian, then one should be loyal to Christ and to the church. Those who do not believe in Jesus (including good people) can only live in degradation, enjoying the pleasures of sin. They are in no way comparable to Christians, those sinners who claim to have been called.

These phenomena are widespread in the church in China. As emissaries of the Savior, Christians enter this evil world filled with a sense of superiority, to be “all things to all people, that some might be saved.” We might say that this sense of superiority is both the confidence and grace that God gives to Christians as well as the “spiritual arrogance” of Christians themselves. It is not difficult to see that Chinese Christians’ concept that believers may not be yoked together with unbelievers is related to the fact that Christianity in China has always been small and weak, an immature group. If such a group does not do something new and original to emphasize its special character, it will be inundated and sink in the vast waters of the secular society. At the same time we can see that the spiritual arrogance of Christians is related to the low view of Chinese culture held by western missionaries who preached the gospel in China. Additionally, the view that believers cannot be yoked together with unbelievers is also related to the religious and philosophical diversity of traditional Chinese society.

Belief is a very important matter for Christians, but use of belief vs. unbelief as a means to classify the righteous and the unrighteous creates an opposition between church and society. The difference between these two (belief/unbelief) is belief in what and unbelief in what, something that cannot be simplistically be used to classify people as righteous or unrighteous. Some scholars have suggested that to enable Christianity to take root in China, we should

hereafter emphasize the doctrine of “love.” The issue of belief/unbelief need not be so important. Love can blend harmoniously with all sorts of humanisms, belief is limited to Christians. The idea that only through belief can one enjoy the grace given by God and that without it (belief) all is emptiness, is perhaps the most important factor in shaping the idea today that church is church and society is society: two separate entities.<sup>4</sup>

In his “Establish a correct view of the Bible,” K.H. Ting says, “It might be a good idea for us in China to play down the idea of “justification by faith,” for this would help people know and understand Christ. This is not Martin Luther’s time. Our encounter is with the Chinese people; if some think it is dangerous for me to speak of “playing down,” I am willing to hear them out, and we can consider this together...” K.H. Ting feels that God is a cosmic God, the creator God, and the world God’s creation. Salvation and sanctification cannot be separated, and the source of all these is Love, the key that opens up all existence. This is a question of how to view the Bible. Bishop Ting says, “In the beginning, we made belief and unbelief the only question Christianity posed to humanity; only later did we realize that God’s creation, salvation and sanctification are one in the cosmos and in history.” In the light of the Holy Spirit, our knowledge of the Bible is constantly growing deeper; at the same time our social environment is constantly changing. It is reasonable, then, that our view of the Bible should adjust and change. If we can come before God in humility, we can say with confidence, this is the light God has given for our age, to bring us to God. One of the quite crucial issues for the theological reconstruction currently going on in the Chinese Church is the establishment of a correct view of the Bible.

*The existing relationship between Christian faith and real life in the modernization process*

The teaching and practice that centers around the idea that “believer and unbeliever cannot be yoked together” has had a rather long history and deep impact. Even now there is quite a large segment of Christians who hold this view.

As times change, there are new developments in the relationship between the society and the church as well. Chinese Christianity is growing in the footsteps of modernization, working silently on its behalf. At the same time, it enjoys the rich fruits of modernization.

The church has never been a financial entity; it is not suitable for the church to engage in economic activities. Jesus rebuked his disciples saying, "You cannot serve both God and Mammon." Facts show that it is wise and proper for the church to keep well out of economic activities. Once churches have become involved in financial dealings, they find it creates a great many difficulties for their preaching and pastoral work. If a church makes a profit, giving will go down, even though the church's real income hasn't risen and, because it is involved in financial dealings, the church co-workers are not as involved in the church's ministry, and some even come to grief over money. Some churches may incur losses through financial dealings, even resulting in losses in church property; the church building itself may be sealed off by the courts. It is easy for a church to lose its identity and proper witness in the midst of financial dealings, and such losses are inestimable. Being of this world, the church is also a social organization which needs financial support. But the church is not the usual sort of social group; it is rather a spiritual group. Its needs are met by love offerings from the brothers and sisters. A church leader explained things to a government official this way: "Yes, the church needs money, but the government need not worry, the church does have money—the money in the believers' pockets. As long as the believers are happy, the church need not worry about money."

The church's refusal to take part in financial dealings does not mean that the church refuses to be part of the modernization process. Quite the opposite, the church encourages believers to take an active part in the economy, to strive to make money and to strive to give money. For work (making money) is what Christians are put on earth to do. The Bible encourages believers to work hard, for when one has more than enough, he or she can help others in need. Yet Christians who are involved in business may meet

many tests and difficulties, such as unfair competition, corruption and so on.... The Bible teaches "Differing weights are an abomination to the Lord" (Prov.20:23). But in the face of the fierce competition of the marketplace, the Christian has often to make choices in the midst of a complex social and business culture. It is a comfort to know that Christians who do well often love the Lord more and serve the church more enthusiastically. This is a clear challenge to the many people in society who deteriorate morally when they become rich. Therefore, Christian ethics and virtue provide a treasure of spiritual wealth to China's modernization.

### *The stand of Christian faith against folk religions*

Though Confucianism is emblematic of traditional Chinese culture, at the popular level a pantheistic folk religion predominates. This folk religion has had a far greater impact on Chinese people's thinking, especially among the rural population than Confucianism. Respect for ancestors and worship of gods and spirits are its main content. Over the past twenty years of the policy of reform and openness, folk religious practices in some areas have experienced a return to life, with large-scale construction of temples, and in some areas, worship takes place not only in set venues, but is often seen in the streets and alleyways, inside and outside the temples. Superstitious folk religious practice insinuates itself under the cloak of traditional Chinese culture, but this is exactly the sort of worship of idols that the Bible condemns and that the Christian churches have forbidden. The majority of Christian churches oppose participation by Christians in idol worship or related activities, and to a certain extent, this distances the church from the society. Due to the fact that folk religious practices are often part of involvement in social activities, the absence of Christian participation is often taken as a sign of shirking of proper social responsibility, and this creates tension between the church and society. We can say that the greatest pressure the church is facing at present comes not from an atheist ideology, but from local forces of feudal superstition. In some places, the local residents will not permit the

building of churches, and even if government pressure is brought to bear and a church is built, the placing of a cross is often not permitted, because their thinking says that the God of the Christians is all-powerful and if a church is built, their own gods will not dare to come near to be worshipped. The refusal of Christians to worship idols and other gods and spirits often earns them dislike and prejudice from their neighbors. For example, one who becomes a Christian is often considered unfilial (because they do not venerate the ancestors according to folk religious practice) and loses benefits and status within the family or clan. However, due to the implementation of the government policy of religious freedom, such bias toward Christians is gradually diminishing. At the same time Christians express their own position on matters in a positive way. For example, on the one hand, Christians refuse to give the expected contribution for such activities, but on the other hand, they are active in social welfare efforts, giving time and labor, and helping to create a better environment. While keeping well away from idol worship, the church is making efforts to establish cultural forms which can express Christian faith. For example, at important festivals and holidays such as Spring Festival, Christians give a spiritual and Christian interpretation to traditional customs: pasting up rhyming couplets with a spiritual meaning, taking advantage of the holiday to hold gospel meetings and revivals, imbuing important occasions like marriages, funerals, etc. with Christian meaning. These are all significant attempts. Because the church in every place shows forth the virtues such as love and holiness, the expressions of Christian faith are gradually becoming known and admired in society and more and more people are drawn to Christian civilization, especially young people and other more enlightened types.

### *Ecumenism and patriotism*

For the most part, Christianity came to China in tandem with the forces of imperialism, and its teachings were strongly colored by western missionaries' colonialist culture. This made it seem that the message Chinese Christians received was that it is enough to be citizens of heaven,

or that they should orient themselves toward the western countries and study their lifestyles. It is hardly to be wondered then that Chinese critiqued this phenomenon by saying, “one more Christian means one less Chinese.” Christians were looked upon as second-class foreigners or as foreigners’ slaves, and Christianity as a tool of aggression against China, while the Chinese church was seen as the comprador of imperialism in China. Thus, whenever there was tension between China and a foreign nation, a great deal of pressure would be put upon Christians—they became scapegoats.

Historically, though we cannot entirely discount the patriotic sentiments or ethnic spirit of Chinese Christians—for there are a lot of excellent witnesses in this regard—the relationship between the concept of nation taught by Christianity and Chinese nationalism was one of tension. In general, the Christian concept is broader than that understood in China. The Christian is not only concerned for his or her own nation and people. It is a more universal concern that includes all nations and all peoples, because all the earth belongs to Yahweh and Christians have a father in heaven, God. Christians make no distinction on the basis of nation or race; all are brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ; all belong to one family. When Christians from different places come together, they feel very close to each other, but this is not easy for non-Christian Chinese to understand. Yet, in terms of the relationship of nation and state, state and religion, Christians need to have a deeper understanding.

Today, Chinese Christianity advocates love country, love church; glorify God and serve the people: these are not only demands of the times, but even more an intrinsic and important part of Christian faith, with a wealth of biblical evidence behind them. In my remarks at the first flag-raising ceremony at Guangdong Union Theological Seminary, I spoke of my understanding of patriotism: “I love my country, this place which gave birth to and nurtured me.” This is the common voice of each one of us, for we are each born in a particular country, just as we are born of our parents. For the Israelites, two things could not be forgotten: God and the fatherland. Consequently, in times of chaos



and defeat, the prophet Daniel prayed three times in the direction of Jerusalem each day. In China, we have had the great patriots Su Yu, Yue Fei and Wen Tianxiang, whose moving stories are known to all Chinese.

Globalization and unification are unavoidable trends. The phenomenon of stronger and bigger countries “picking on” smaller and weaker ones will continue. What can Chinese Christianity do? I believe that with striking a balance between patriotism and universalism as a prerequisite, we should actively establish and develop friendly relationships with Christians overseas. This will both deepen our fellowship in the Lord, is consonant with the spirit of Christian ecumenism and unity, and will deepen people-to-people understanding with other countries. Misunderstandings and violence can be eliminated and world peace maintained, providing a peaceful international environment for our modernization. This is a mission Chinese Christianity can strive for.

*This life and the hereafter*

The teaching Christians receive from the Bible and from the church stresses both concern for human life in this world, living a good life day to day through grace, but also longing for that eternal, incorruptible country. Human life is very limited, and by counting our days we learn wisdom. This limited life will pass away, but for Christians, death is not the end of life, but the beginning of a life transformed and made new. Thus, Christians can smile in the face of death, and in the midst of difficulties, have an even stronger hope in the joys of that eternal life to come. This is Christian eschatology.

Whether we reason from biblical teachings and revelation or from logic, the end of the world is an inevitability. Many people say that several thousand years have passed since Jesus said “The Kingdom of God is at hand,” yet we have not seen the world coming to an end. Does this mean there will be many years yet before the end? We can affirm that there will be thousands more years of human history to come. Yet in China, for various complex historical reasons, Christians’ hope for the end of the world has been

the object of suspicion and attack. Around the time of liberation, because some foreign missionaries were very anti-communist, they tried to harm the fledgling new China through their preaching on the end times. Today as all China is striving for economic construction and a prosperous socialist China with improvements in the people's standard of living, if Christians continue to preach the end of the world, it seems like a negation of the people's efforts and achievements.

In fact, Christians hope in the world to come because Christ makes us look calmly upon the future, to look for another, better, world. Today, as we see the environment being destroyed, Christian eschatology can serve as a warning. The world's ability to endure the damage imposed on it by humankind is not without limits; if humanity does not reflect on its ignorant behavior and desist, nature will punish us. The disasters that affect the world are certainly related to the damage and overuse of natural resources that have upset the ecological balance. If people do not come to their senses, and protect and cherish this world God created, "the end of the world" will come upon us. If we can set aside purely political views and take a level-headed approach in using theology and other disciplines to care for the future of humanity, the positive significance of eschatology will show forth.

## **Conclusion**

The relationship between church and society has had many expressions, both in history and the present: contradictions, unity, adaptation and failure to adapt, and these are related to Christian doctrine and its growth in history. However, another equally important reason is China itself. Facts show that contradictions are nothing to fear, the fearful thing is to lose one's selfhood in this cultural environment and be lost as was Nestorianism in its time. Unity and conflict between Chinese Christianity and Chinese society is fully expressed in the piety and perseverance of Christian faith. When state power oppressed the church, many Christians, in order to express their loyalty to Christ, acted on their beliefs and were willing to lose family and

property and social guarantees and endure physical and spiritual hardship, in order to leave some basis for the resurgence of the Chinese church. Christianity's relationship to society and culture during the modernization process is, on the one hand, to witness to Christian faith, and on the other, to breathe new life into a renewal of Chinese culture. Following our reform and openness, some scholars found that the Christian spirit helped in China's modernization, so they hoped to use Christian culture to enrich and influence China. In my opinion, this is the positive significance of both the contradictions and the unity that exists between Christianity and society and culture.

As both parties affirm the positive significance of the contradictions, we as Christians must not forget the reality and teaching of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. As we enter into the particular culture and society in which we live and share in the weal and woe of our fellow Chinese, we invite and accompany them as they experience death and new life in Christ. In this way, the Christian spirit achieves a positive and profound significance.

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1 *Cihai Encyclopedic Dictionary*. (Shanghai: Cishu Publishers, 1979), 3510.

2 Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*. (Taiwan: East Asian Graduate School of Theology, 1986), 4.

3 *Ibid.*, 6.

4 Lu Shiqiang, "Reasons why modern Chinese intellectuals oppose Christianity," in *Essays on the Indigenization of Christianity in China*, 214.

## Women Disciples of Jesus

CHEN KUANRONG

Three women appear in the gospel of Mark in the description of Jesus' passion and this is the first time so many women are introduced in Mark by name (Mk.15:40). From the beginning of this gospel right up until this point, the writer describes a number of women, but except for Herodius, who plots the death of John the Baptist (6:14-29), and Mary, Jesus' mother (6:3), they are not named. Most of these women are mentioned in conjunction with their menfolk: Simon's mother-in-law (1:29), Jairus's daughter (5:23), the daughter of the chief priest's servant (16:16), etc. Some others are mentioned because of their special circumstances: the woman afflicted for twelve years by the flow of blood (5:25), the widow who gives her two mites (12:42), the woman who brings the jar of costly ointment (14:3), etc. Why doesn't Mark name these women? Mainly because he was deeply influenced by the male-centered biases of the society of the time, and perhaps also because he planned to highlight the special character of the male disciples in his writing.<sup>1</sup> Munro goes further in saying that there are in fact many lively examples of women in the gospel, but that Mark deliberately suppresses and hides women.<sup>2</sup> Her view may be exaggerated. I think Mark was simply limited and influenced by his times. It is hard to imagine the people of Mark's time accepting a Jesus who interacted with women and had women followers. To enable people to hear and accept Jesus' good news, he had to adapt to the standards of his time and culture.

The first time Mark introduces these women is when Jesus has been nailed to the cross and he goes on to mention them three times: when Jesus is being nailed to the cross, they are standing far off watching (15:40); when Jesus is buried, they keep watch over the tomb (15:47); early on the first day of the week, they see the risen Lord (16:1). They were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, along with Salome. The Bible tells us that the Lord had once banished seven devils from Mary Magdalene (Lk.8:2; Mk.16:9). As for the other Mary mentioned here, James may be Alphaeus' son, and thus the James the younger who was one of the twelve. Some believe that this Mary is Mary the mother of Jesus, for James and Joses are also mentioned among Jesus' brothers (Mk. 6:3). Salome is very probably the mother of the sons of Zebedee mentioned in Matthew 27:56. But who were these women really? I won't go too much into this. They are not mentioned at all in the first portion of Mark's gospel. We cannot know what their relationship to Jesus was, or their backgrounds. At the conclusion of Mark's gospel, the author simply says, "These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem" (Mk.15:41).

Here we see that these women who have been named must be the core persons of this larger group of women, as Peter, James and John were the core of the disciples (see Mk.5:7; 9:2; 14:33). This may suggest that these three women had a similar status and reputation to the three male disciples. Dewey asks why Jesus did not appoint these women as disciples. Perhaps because in preaching his message so that people would hear and accept it, he had to adapt to the cultural standards of his time.<sup>3</sup> From the time Jesus began to preach until his death, in many incidents in his life, Mark records his relationship to women, but in nearly every case, we see nothing of their responses or speech. In Mark's general sense of followers, there were certainly both males and females, those who "followed him," and "surrounded him" certainly included many of both genders. However, as Jesus walked to the cross, it

was only the women who risked their lives to accompany him. Mark uses the term “disciple” forty-six times, at times specifically to mean the Twelve, but in the majority of cases to mean the followers of Jesus. Thus, the gospel suggests that Jesus did not only have twelve disciples, but a host of them, including women. Jesus’ women disciples are part of this group. As Jesus’ life is coming to an end, Mark mentions these women three times in a row; if this is not consistent with what has gone before, it is because Mark is conscious of the fact that they are extremely important to the resurrection event. They are eye witnesses to Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection. We can say that they are the most authoritative witnesses to the incarnate Son of God, Jesus. I will discuss their roles further below.

### *Watching over Jesus*

*“There were also women looking on from a distance, among them were ... and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem” (Mark 15:40-41).*

When the Lord Jesus was filled with authority and glory—in healing the sick, driving out demons and teaching the crowds—the male disciples were much in evidence, following closely beside him. When he prophesied his death three times, they strongly denied Jesus’ destiny on the cross. They could not face reality; in fact they wanted to avoid it. When Jesus was put upon the cross, they fled. They could not measure up to the women, who watched and saw clearly. Some of them had not even seen what had happened yet. But this group of women, because they had been following Jesus closely, saw when Jesus was nailed to the cross (15: 40); saw when he was buried (15:47); saw that the stone at the door of the tomb had been rolled away and saw a young man there (16:4-5); they saw the place where Jesus had been laid (16:6); and they saw the risen Lord (16:9). They saw the most significant times in Jesus’ life: when he was crucified, died, was buried and rose again. These crucial times happened to be those which formed the core of the disciples’ preaching, the core of Christian faith, as Paul said, “...Christ died for our sins in accordance

with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures” (1Cor.15:3-4).

Watching expresses the women’s care, concern and grief for Jesus, and shows us the depth of their relationship with Jesus. Even if they had not acted as they did, their relationship with Jesus would have been the same. But they risked their lives to keep watch, and this reversed the situation of grief and suffering of the (male) disciples. When they brought the good news of the resurrection to the disciples, the Twelve immediately began to give thanks and praise. Thus, the women were the first to spread the good news of Jesus’ resurrection; of course, even more significantly, they were the first to see the risen Lord. How were these women superior to other people, such that the Lord treated them with such generosity and kindness? Mark tells us only that they were the ones who used to follow him and provide for him (15:41).

#### *Follow the Lord*

*“... these used to follow him ...when he was in Galilee” (15:41).*

In describing the women following Jesus, Mark, usually uses the progressive form to show that from some time in the past, that is from the time they were called and saved, they began to follow the Lord, are still following him now and will continue to follow him. No matter how smooth or difficult the path, they will follow closely. For women to develop this close following type of relationship with a man was unusual in the first century Palestine of Christ’s time, something difficult for people to imagine. The commentaries say that in the society of that time, all rabbis were male and it was expected that those who became disciples of a rabbi would, at some point, also become rabbis. People expected that disciples of this sort would all be men. The disciples followed the rabbi wherever he went, studying the scriptures and the law to hasten the day when they themselves would be experts in explaining the traditional law. Jesus was called Rabbi, but his way of teaching

his disciples was completely different. Here we see that in this, Jesus had already broken with the tradition of the times.

“Follow” has three meanings in the text. First, it means the crowds who followed Jesus (see Jn.18:15; 11:31); second, it means to accompany (see Mt.14:13; Jn.6:2); third, to follow someone in the sense of being a disciple (see Mk.2:14). For Mark, it always has this third meaning. To follow Jesus meant to deny oneself and take up the cross. Jesus said, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” (Mk.8:34). Here, on the one hand, Jesus hopes that more people will accept his invitation to follow him; and on the other, he sets a high standard for those who do. The original meaning of “deny oneself” is to negate and cast aside one’s own plans and rights—to give oneself completely to God, taking Jesus as Lord, as king, following the Lord’s heart in all things, and obeying his will. The first time Jesus prophesied his passion, Peter objected fiercely, earning Jesus’ rebuke, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things” (Mk. 8:33). Before this, Peter had acknowledged, “You are the Christ, the Son of God.” Not long after, he denies Jesus’ destiny and work. We can see that casual recognition in words is easy enough, but genuine action is very difficult. Though Peter acknowledged Jesus as Christ with his words, he did not apprehend the true meaning of the phrase.

In Rome in those days, the cross was the most painful and humiliating punishment for rebels and errant slaves. “To carry one’s cross,” meant to see oneself as dead before God, to give one’s entire life over to God’s will; it does not mean to take up all sorts of insults from society. When we meet with danger, we should, like Jesus, face up to it with courage and challenge it.

In chapter 1 verses 14-20, Mark records the scene in which Jesus begins to call his disciples. Jesus was walking along the shores of the Sea of Galilee when he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting their nets, and said to them, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.” They immediately put aside their own work and followed



him. The text says followed to emphasize the immediacy of their action. They had not been following him, but now they did. Mark seems to foreshadow the disciples' eventual failure, because we can say that their following Jesus is superficial. They had taken the first step, and then stopped. Why say this? A reading of the whole gospel shows that Mark never uses the word "provided for" of the disciples, though this is not to say that they never provided for Jesus. Mark simply wants to say here that the disciples failed often on their path of following Jesus. They often thought of their own needs—authority, status, name, without regard for the Lord's desires. I will discuss this in more detail below.

*"these...provided for him when he was in Galilee" (Mk. 15: 4).*

In the Greek world, to "provide for" describes the work of a servant. It has two layers of meaning: 1) to greet and wait upon guests, to accompany them at table—usually the work of a male slave or servant; 2) the work of the female slave or servant, mainly to provide and prepare the food, to care and watch over the home and care for the children. In general it means to aid and support someone, to use one's own resources to provide for another. It can also mean to make a donation or to assist. Serving someone else suggests that one loses one's own freedom, or wealth, or exhaust's one's energy. Thus people would rather be served by others, than to serve.

When Jesus was nailed to the cross, the disciples scattered. Though to their way of thinking they had followed Jesus, this was to fulfill their own needs. They did not proceed from God's point of view to accord with the mind of God. In this they resemble some people in the church today, who follow the Lord only to get things from him. They do not willingly give, nor are they willing to suffer humiliation along with the Lord, but are only willing to share in the Lord's glory. Jesus' words on true leadership within the community of faith were aimed at the disciples' desire for authority, position and reputation. Jesus taught them saying, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and

servant of all” (9:35). The people of this world seek higher status, they want others to do their bidding. In their goings out and comings in, in all they do, they have many attendants following and waiting on them. But church leaders should serve the people. Jesus severely criticized the disciples’ quest for authority, status and reputation and taught that they should learn to serve the people. He left us a good example in himself: Jesus washing the feet of the disciples, and wanting the disciples to imitate him: this is a very good model of service. He served others, but was not served by them. We might ask, who else did Jesus serve and how, apart from washing the disciples’ feet? Why don’t we find this in the Bible? From the gospels we see that Jesus’ entire life was a life of serving. By his life he gave the word new meaning: he served people with his life. His service reached its apogee on the cross. He sacrificed his life to redeem all humankind. Some people think they deserve to be served by others, and never think of serving others themselves. But Jesus teaches them, “For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mk.10:45).

Mark 1: 29-32 tells the story of the healing of Simon’s mother-in-law. He uses the past tense here to describe the process of healing. When Simon’s mother-in-law had been healed, she got up and began to serve them. Here, “serve” is in the progressive. By using this form the author is trying to tell us that not only did Simon’s mother-in-law immediately get up to prepare everything they would need that night, she also served them frequently in the days that followed, providing things for their daily lives.

Did Mark deliberately put the calling of the disciples together with the calling of Simon’s mother-in-law, using “follow” and “serve” separately in each story, to explain the role of the disciple? This is how Mark describes this group of women disciples, saying that they regularly followed the Lord and served him.

“Follow” and “serve” are the Lord’s call and teaching; these are also the free choice of human beings. Because of the Lord’s verbal call, the disciples put down their own work and followed him; because of the grace of the Lord’s

omnipotent healing, he called Simon's mother-in-law and so many other women to follow him, and they served him constantly. They received the Lord's call in the same way. But when the Lord suffered upon the cross, and the (male) disciples ran away, vacillating between belief and non-belief, trembling between success and failure, in the grip of depression and pain. The crowd of women, on the other hand, continued to follow him closely without regard for others' opinion. They continued to serve the Lord. As Mark writes, their "service" commences with Jesus' ministry. The service of Simon's mother-in-law, for example, continued until the end of the Lord's work in the world, when he was laid in the tomb. Jesus said, "Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor" (Jn. 12: 26). The concept of "service" is shown to be extremely important to Jesus' teaching. Without following there can be no service, no watching. These women establish their status as disciples upon "following" and "serving"; therefore, no matter what circumstance they may meet with, their following the Lord and serving the Lord's desires never changes. And just for this reason, God gave them incomparable glory, allowing them to be the most authoritative witnesses to the risen Lord.

Following and service are what the Lord requires of his disciples. Jesus' women disciples truly received his teaching and put it into practice. When Jesus was preaching, they followed close at hand, serving him. When Jesus came into glory in his work, they were silently happy for him. When the Lord was crucified, they were silently sorrowful, suffering with him. After Jesus had been laid in the tomb, at dawn on the first day of the week, they came bringing spices to the tomb, to anoint him, but he had already risen. Thus they were the earliest to see the risen Lord. And thus we see that the following and service of the women disciples, in faith and practice, left an excellent model for later disciples. Their unity of faith and action has been won the same respect and admiration through the ages as the humility of the virgin Mary.

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# Peace, Justice and People's Security

## A Chinese Perspective

LIN MANHONG

In the post-Cold War era, as we step into the new century, more and more concerns about people's security have emerged, and our understanding of what constitutes human security has also been broadened. From a new concept proposed by the UNDP, we learn that people's security in today's world does not only mean the threats to a country's border, rather, it is something that is closely related to people's daily life, such as job security, income security, health security, environmental security and so forth. These human security issues are the emerging concerns of people all over the world including us Chinese, for large numbers of people in China are facing problems caused by these issues due to the impact of a changing world and society.

In this presentation, I'd like to reflect on promoting people's security from a people's perspective, for one of the objectives of this consultation, to my understanding, is to advocate that people "take the stand that people themselves are responsible to ensure their comprehensive security through their struggles, movements and initiatives."

As we view people's security in Asia, many worries and concerns soon arise. Due to time limitations, I will first share with you our major concerns on issues ranging from job security to income security and from resource security to environmental security in China, and then further elaborate on how we shall act on our responsibility to promote

people's security in the aforementioned areas.

Since the end of the Cold War, market-oriented economic systems have spread and the process of economic globalization has accelerated. The economies of many developing countries have become part of the international economic system and economic globalization is one of the most important characteristics of the current era. Nations all over the world are experiencing opportunities as well as challenges brought about by economic globalization. Being the largest developing country in the world, China is naturally among them.

Since China's reform and opening up in 1979, we have gone through a tremendous change. The economy has gradually shifted from a planned economy to a market-oriented one. As more and more foreign companies invest in China, great opportunities as well as greater risk, problems and challenges are created. To catch up and keep pace with the global economy while further accelerating economic reform, China has had to lay-off workers, creating severe problems in the area of job security for many.

When China operated under a planned economy, once a person was assigned to a state-owned factory, his or her job security lasted forever. People were proud of working in the same place for years without being transferred. They probably never imagined that at the end of the twentieth century, some workers in state-owned enterprises would be asked to leave their job. According to recent statistics, by the end of 2000, 13 million workers were laid off in China. In the city of Shenyang, among a population of 6.7 million, about one million people face being laid off from their jobs. Predictions indicate that another 3 million Chinese workers will be laid off this year (2001).\*

Most of these laid-off workers are in their mid-40s. As children, they suffered from natural disasters and lived in poverty. As teenagers, they experienced the Cultural Revolution and many of them were sent to rural villages to work in the fields. They had no opportunity for a good education. Soon after the end of the Cultural Revolution, they returned to the cities and were assigned to workplaces. They had no choice in the matter. Today, as the impact of

reforms is being felt in state-owned enterprises (SOE), these middle-aged workers, lacking professional skills and high-tech training, are losing their jobs. Some laid-off workers sadly consider themselves a lost generation, for after years' of hard work, rather than preparing to enjoy the good life, they have become a burden to both family and society.

The lack of job security not only threatens the workers in the SOEs, but also people in rural areas. With the rapid growth of China's economy in cities since early 1980s, many young farmers have migrated to the urban areas to become temporary workers with no guarantee of job security. Once they experience urban life, most no longer want to go back to till the land. If they lose their jobs, their fate is dire. In exceptional cases, some have returned to run small private businesses in the townships, but they also have to deal with the pressures of competing with other laid-off workers who also want to start their own businesses. Moreover, a recent survey indicates that around thirty per cent of the rural population are excess labor force. These people can hardly have any job security in their daily life.

The lack of job security inevitably results in a lack of income security. In many places, laid-off workers only get 200 *yuan* per month compensation. With such a small amount, they are not able to support themselves, let alone their family. Young people migrate to townships to run small businesses, hoping to get rich quick. Their lack of income security, coupled with the desire for quick money often causes them to lose their integrity. The income gap between the city and the country further indicates that farmers have less income security. For instance, the average urban income for the first three quarters of 2000 was 4719 *yuan*, while rural income was only 1500 *yuan* for the same period, less than one-third the urban figure. I assume the thirty per cent rural population who are excess labor force have no income security at all.

Job and income insecurity is threatening our people and has become one of our major concerns. Some other problems, if we do not pay enough attention to them, will become a severe threat to us very soon. Hence, our concern

also reaches to the areas of resources security and environmental security.

Resources include both human resources and natural resources. I will focus on natural resources, especially water resources. We are all aware that human beings are threatened by lack of water. It is estimated that by the year 2025, three billion people will suffer from water shortages. Serious lack of water may lead to regional or even world conflicts. Already, lack of water has become one of the key reasons that people are driven from their homes, and there are now 25 million “environmental refugees” in the world. China, as the largest developing country in the world, is no exception; we, too, are threatened by the scarcity of water. The wasteful use of water and water pollution has greatly intensified the water crisis in China. China is one of thirteen countries in the world suffering from water-poverty.

At 2800 billion cubic meters in total volume of water resources, China ranks sixth in the world. But this means only 2300 cubic meters per person, 121<sup>st</sup> place in the world. Despite the scarcity, water use efficiency is very low in China. In agriculture, it stands at 30-40%, 2-2.5 times that in the developed countries; water use for each unit of GDP is 15-100 times that in the developed countries. In addition, wastewater discharge is increasing at 1.8 billion tons per year, and daily discharge is 164 million tons.

Water pollution is, of course, an environmental problem; and pollution is one of the greatest problems when we talk about environmental protection. China has serious pollution problem—air pollution, sound pollution, white pollution, water pollution and so forth. Urban areas suffer from a growing number of vehicles, many of them with inadequate exhaust controls. These same areas are often home to a number of factories without proper effluent management. A report shows that 65% of environment quality complaints are related to sound pollution. The noise comes mostly from trains, vehicles, construction yards, interior decoration, supermarkets, entertainment centers and so on. Water pollution has made 23.3% of river sections unsuitable for irrigation purposes, and entirely eliminated fish and shrimp in 45% of river sections. In addition, of 118



inspected cities, pollution exists in various degrees in underground water in 115 and 40% have been seriously polluted.

I believe that the aforementioned problems are to be found not only in China, but in many other Asian countries and even in developed countries. These concerns are not just ours; they are regional and global concerns. I believe that this is the very reason that brought us, a group of Christians representing our churches and people, here together. What shall we do to facilitate the transformation of our societies and to influence the policies and practices of our authorities? In this respect, I want to share with you what Chinese Christians think we should do in our society.

Christians in China are in a minority as they are in many other Asian countries, but as a community, they are an indispensable part of society. What can the church do to help solve these problems? The church, as part of the Body of Christ witnessing the glory of God's creation and as a social community on earth, should have her own reflections and put them into action.

The church should first of all consider social concerns to be her own concerns. Although many Christians in China have come to abandon the traditional understanding that the church should separate itself from society, quite a number of Christians in China still show indifference to what is going on in society. They still believe that Christian faith has nothing to do with secular society or with people's prosperity. What the church needs to do is to keep reminding itself that to follow Christ is to take up the cross, which Jesus did, by participating in society. The church should understand that taking up responsibility for the protection of resources and environment, promoting people's prosperity and safeguarding peace, justice and people's security is to fulfill God's mission for us on earth. Hence, the church should have her own voice in society speaking for justice and her own action in meeting these challenges.

Back to specific issues. It is the lack of opportunities for sufficient education and inadequate professional skills that result in the laying-off of workers. The church should call on society to provide more professional training op-

opportunities for laid-off workers and encourage them to take on new challenges in this new era. I am glad to report that church-related organization such as the YM & YWCA and the Amity Foundation are very much involved in providing opportunities for training laid-off workers. These organizations have held many classes in computer training, foreign languages and other professional skills. We hope that in the future, there will be more church-run professional training programs.

We also need to call on society to optimize the social security system in China, for it will not only will benefit people who do not have job security, but also guarantee people's income security to a certain extent. It is a good sign that some local governments are trying to adopt new methods to increase farmers' income. Under the precondition of stable total production, they want to optimize the variety of farm products, as well as quality, distribution and processing ability. Relocation of excess labor force will receive due consideration as well. In addition, to help some people solve their financial problems, Christian should call on their churches to commit a portion of their Sunday offerings to assist the needy around them.

We need to call on society to educate people that natural resources are not unlimited. It is everyone's responsibility to treasure and protect our natural resources, such as economizing on water usage. A recent survey shows the average usage of water per person per day in China is 161 liters. If water-saving measures were introduced, only 2/3 or even half that amount would be needed daily. The repeated utilization ratio of water in China is only 30-50%, while that in the developed countries is 75%. Efforts need to be concentrated in this area. According to experts, to enhance the rate of wastewater treatment in urban areas, and to promote cleaner production to reduce the industrial water and its discharge are two good proposals for controlling water pollution in China, and these proposals have been adopted by many local governments.

Environmental degradation affects human survival and development. Only some of the causes of environmental problems are natural; we humans are responsible for the

rest. Therefore, we need to call on society to first pass a good environmental protection law. To date, we have the initial draft of an “environmental protection law.” The law aims to provide a comfortable environment for people by adjusting human environmental behavior. It claims that every citizen has the right to protect the environment and to live in a safe environment.

We should also call on society to learn from good examples of implementing the environmental protection law. In many big cities, afforestation is being done, and since 1998, Beijing has invested nearly 30 billion *yuan* in adopting dozens of measures to treat air pollution. Monitoring shows that air quality in Beijing city proper has notably improved as a result. The city of Ji’nan recently released an announcement on the “blue sky project.” It states that all the restaurants and dining halls should complete pollution emission declarations before March. Lampblack cleaning equipment must be installed and restaurant waste water must be filtered. The “blue sky project” also includes plans for the regulation of exhaust emission in new vehicles. Some cities are dealing with so-called white pollution. For instance, starting from March 1, 2001, non-biodegradable plastic bags will be banned in Kunming; fines are to be set at 10,000 to 50,000 *yuan*. Markets that use non-biodegradable plastic bags and individual violators will also be fined.

We hope that through the influence of actions such as these, and increased awareness about the need for environmental protection, our people can live in an environment with clean air, clean water, sunshine and tranquility. We believe that with the joint efforts and prayers from all nations and peoples, the world will be better tomorrow.

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\*All statistics are taken from the website of the National Statistics Office of China, 2000.

# Theological Reconstruction and Church Development

JI JIANHONG

Church development involves various facets, but in general, it includes two important aspects. One concerns institution building, that is, church administration, which provides the base for church development and assures the smooth undertaking of church ministries. The other concerns the spiritual growth of the church. This involves providing both spiritual guidance to individuals, to enable them to better serve the Lord, and witnessing to society, so as to glorify God while benefiting people and society.

Jesus once asked the disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" Giving the answer to this question has been an important task for the churches for centuries. Churches in different times and different contexts have to provide their own answers to "who Jesus is" to their people. The witness we bear and the message we proclaim should be in keeping with the times.

The revelation of the incarnation is authentic, but we have to realize that the experiences of incarnation and the grace of the cross for people in different times, cultures and contexts are quite different. Therefore, expressions of the incarnation and the grace of the cross can all be different. Human beings are social beings. Communities, including religious communities, are social communities. The consciousness of human beings and communities are conditioned by existing social consciousness. Society however, is not unchanging, but rather undergoes continuous change and development. Our responsibility and that of

the Church is to promulgate the unchanging fundamental Christian faith in an ever-changing and ever-developing society. This reveals a crucial fact: theological thinking, that explains the rationality, authenticity, and accuracy of our fundamental faith, must be under constant adjustment, modification and enrichment in accordance with the changing times and changing society. Otherwise, we cannot fulfill the Great Commission God has given us: to spread the Gospel to the ends of the earth and to glorify His holy name on earth.

How God reveals His Will and Truth through the Holy Spirit is not absolute. He leads us into His abundant grace in a relative, progressive and continuous manner. Both church history and the Bible bear witness to this most significant point. That also provides the theoretical basis for us to strengthen theological thinking.

Take, for instance, the attitude to the state. With the changing times, the nature of the state changes as well. We must, therefore, make the necessary adjustments in our theological thinking. In Romans, Ch.13 v.1-6, St. Paul emphasizes: "let every person be subject to the governing authorities", and "those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore, whoever resists authority resists what God appointed". On the other hand, the teachings in Revelation are drastically different. There is a switch in position from obeying the rule of Rome to being hostile and opposing. Why? During Paul's time, the Roman authority basically reigned "in righteousness" and ruled "with justice". The authority of such a ruler is from God, and is the instrument of God. Therefore, the rule shall be obeyed. When John wrote Revelation, however, Roman rule had become arbitrary, prurient, wicked, tyrannical and violent. The nature of the regime had changed and such an authority shall not be obeyed or respected. This clearly shows that theological thinking must adapt to different historical periods.

There are two dimensions to this. They are general and particular. These two dimensions apply to the theological thinking that the Chinese Church is calling for today.

The particularity relates to the special historical circumstances in which Christianity came to China, and the spe-

cial policy of some current western interest groups towards China. Regardless of whether it is of the past or the present, they share one thing in common, that is, to articulate and use certain theological ideas in a dubious manner to serve colonial expansion and to mislead believers. Against this background, church growth and the spiritual needs of Christians are being used as a means to oppose China and the Chinese people. In its extreme form, it breeds opposition to science, rationality, society and humanity.

For instance, these groups proclaim that the world is evil, full of sin and unrighteousness. Thus Christians should not love the world or worldly affairs, especially in a socialist country governed by a Communist Party. Christians are told that their citizenship is in heaven, and therefore are urged to refuse the supervision of the authorities and to disobey laws and regulations. This has led some churches and innocent believers to oppose the government, to oppose social development and nation building. The following is a typical example: A Christian woman used to be committed to her work, actively participating in the community and showing great concern for the country's development. She bore good witness among colleagues and neighbors, receiving many awards from her work unit and community. Later on, however, she was misled by false teachings and regarded herself as having loved the world and worldly affairs. She saw herself as having sinned and having been separated from God. To love God with all her heart and spirit and to separate herself from the world and from sin, she returned all the certificates of merit to her work unit and the community.

To provide another example: These groups belittle human beings, who are God's creation and considered good by God, claiming that human beings are full of evil and unrighteousness. They reject the function of ethics and morality by saying that where sins increase, grace abounds all the more. They believe that, in God's eyes, human righteousness is worthless as rags.

They treat rational thinking, knowledge, intelligence as something derived from the soul, and condemned by God. The more inventions people have, the farther people stray

away from God.

Affected by such theological ideas, some believers engage in practices that are incompatible with their faith, with some of them becoming extremely anti-reason, anti-science and anti-humanist.

From these examples, it is clear that there are, at present, two completely different trends in theological thinking, with different effects on churches, congregations and society. The idea of theological reconstruction that the Chinese church is advocating aims to distinguish theological thinking that is Biblically grounded and able to provide a sound explanation of fundamental Christian faith, from thinking that is anti-material, anti-rational, anti-social and anti-humanist. The latter must be abandoned. Our purpose is to construct a theology that encapsulates the special experience and special gift of our Chinese Church with a sound grounding in basic Christian faith.

Responding to God's commission, the Apostle Paul served the church "to make the word of God fully known". This is a commitment and a command, not only for Paul, but for all those who have become servants of the Church. For those of us who are God's servants in the Chinese Church today, this commitment and mission is clearly the vision before us. To construct a theology with Chinese characteristics will be decisive in fulfilling God's special commission to make the word of God fully known at this time. God's commission is the energy and resource for theological reconstruction.

In promoting theological reconstruction, the National TSPM and the China Christian Council have set up some major guidelines and principles.

1) The major task of theological reconstruction is to develop a theology that is Biblically grounded, provides a sound explanation for basic beliefs and keeps up with the times. We will draw on the experience of the Chinese Church in the past 50 years in constructing a theology with Chinese characteristics to provide direction for the development and spiritual growth of the church in China.

2) The majority of church workers, both clergy and laity, seminary faculty and students, and all Christians who

have the necessary cultural background, academic ability, religious knowledge, spiritual experience, and intellectual capability will constitute the essential task force for theological reconstruction.

3) Diversity and plurality shall be encouraged as long as there is a basic respect for the Bible and as long as there is a common understanding of basic Christian faith.

4) We should not criticize certain theological schools while one-sidedly canonizing other schools. We are against drawing lines between theological schools.

5) We respect the fruits of earlier theological efforts and will use our rich historical resources, but we will not simply repeat or cater to what is foreign. We are clear that the Chinese church is the subject (not an object) and will select, from foreign sources, what we consider useful. We are also clear that the modern era is the focus, and what is historical should be adapted to the contemporary.

6) We should integrate the need for popularization with raising standards, and combine research at the grassroots with the work of experts.

Questions have been raised about whether theological reconstruction will succeed. In this task, we can derive confidence from the following:

1) Over the last fifty years, the TSPM has gone through difficulties, but also experienced God's abundant grace. The experience, insights and inspiration of the last fifty years constitute a very precious resource for theological re-thinking today.

2) Through the last fifty years, the Chinese Church has developed a large core of people made up of theological faculty and lay workers who are academically, theologically and Biblically competent.

3) Even more precious is the group of senior church leaders who are committed to God's ministries and are full of wisdom and knowledge. This constitutes an irreplaceable force and resource.

4) There is much in terms of earlier theological efforts that we can study and consult.

5) "Strengthening theological reconstruction" is the special vision that God has bestowed on the Chinese



Church, and it is God's significant commission to us. God will lead the way with abundant grace.

6) God has prepared a wonderful social context for us to enjoy the freedom to carry on the task of theological reconstruction. This task has the understanding, sympathy and support of the government.

All these will assure success in our efforts at theological reconstruction. We move forward with confidence. In the past four years, we have enjoyed achievements and experienced the joy of God's blessings. We trust that through God's abundant grace we will be led towards greater success.

Talk delivered during CCC/TSPM visit to the WCC in Geneva, April, 2003.  
Reprinted with thanks from *Amity News Service*.

## The Status and Role of Women in the Growing Church of China

CHEN MEILIN

I am proud to be able to share about the status and role of women in the growing Church of China from a woman's perspective. Since the restoration of churches in China in the early 1980s, women Christians have actively participated in all kinds of church activities and made great contributions to the growth of the Church in China. It is like one woman pastor has said, in the early days, it was women who first witnessed the resurrection of Jesus; today, women are still the backbone of Church life.

We may say the tremendous change in women's status in the Church in China is a reflection of the improvement in the social status of women in Chinese society as a whole. There are two sayings which vividly describe opposing views on the status of women in society. One is "women without talents are virtuous", the other is "women hold up half the sky." In the past, China was deeply influenced by teachings which stressed the authority of the husband, and women were regarded as inferior to men. This kind of traditional understanding of women is quite similar to that of the Jewish tradition in Biblical times. It stresses that women have to be confined to their homes, and wives are subject to husbands. In the past, women could not even keep their own names after marriage; they had to adopt their husbands' surnames. This went to such an extreme that women even had to bind their feet to show obedience to their husbands. After several revolutions in China, women's social status has now changed dramatically. This

is evident in the growth and development of women in the Church. Here are some statistics which I personally find very encouraging:

1) Over 75% of Christians in China are women; in rural areas, around 80% of believers are women.

2) There are over 400 ordained women pastors in China, and 98% of these were ordained after the Cultural Revolution.

3) These 400 women pastors constitute 26% (over one quarter) of the total number of pastors in China.

4) There are 7,047 women church workers, including lay workers. This comprises 44.5% of the total number of church workers.

5) Over one third of the faculty in the 18 seminaries and Bible schools in China are made up of women and, among them, two are principals of their seminaries.

6) Among the leadership of the National Committee of the TSPM and the China Christian Council, three are women, including the president of the CCC.

The growth of women and the development of women's ministries depend not only on social reforms but also have much to do with the deepening of theological thinking in the Church in China. In his articles, Bishop K. H. Ting shows great respect towards feminist theology and actively responds to it by saying "Our knowledge of God is not to be circumscribed by what we know of human maleness. Our understanding of God's love needs to be broadened and deepened by looking at human womanhood and motherhood too. We have come to see that, when Jesus calls God Father, what he means is not that God has a sex and is male and not female."\*

Today more and more Christians and Bible scholars have realized that, apart from the traditions recorded by Biblical authors who were influenced by the patriarchy of their times, there are many chapters and verses which describe the love of God from a woman's perspective. For instance, in Isaiah 49:15, God is compared to a mother who is nursing her child. It says, "Can a woman forget the infant at her breast, or a mother the child of her womb? But should even these forget, I shall never forget you." In Psalm 131:2 we read,

“But I am calm and quiet like a weaned child clinging to its mother.” In these Bible verses, when talking about the caring character of God, the Biblical authors chose the same image of a mother to describe the same theme. Women Christians are especially drawn to these verses for, as women, they suffer from sexual discrimination and oppression in a male dominated society and church.

Awakened Chinese women Christians are making efforts to overcome prejudice and make people realize that men and women are both created by God and share the same image of God. Men and women are equal in the eyes of God. One joyful thing is that, at the Bible Interpretation Consultation which was held recently in Qingdao, a group of women pastors, women teachers and women preachers emerged who have tried their best to study the Bible from a woman’s perspective, challenging traditional theological thinking. They had a heated and fruitful discussion on Paul’s understanding of women. Papers were also presented at this consultation and, from the titles of the papers, we can see how courageous and wise they are: “God’s Image Found In Men’s Strength And Women’s Gentleness;” “Women As The Majority In Proclaiming The Good News.” These women read the Bible through women’s eyes and they try to disclose the uniqueness of the truth of the Bible so as to encourage more women to be the light of our times.

I have been observing and studying the reasons why women have become the majority in our growing and developing church. In fact, this is a worldwide trend. Due to political and economic tensions, it is women who have first become marginalized, the overlooked and the victims. This is quite common in different countries and different cultural traditions. Women who need more help and comfort have been keener on religion than men because of the comfort and reliability religion can offer. In China, you can see that there are more women than men in churches, and most lay people are women, although, in general, most of these are women from the countryside who did not receive much education. The fact that half of all seminary students are women is another feature in our church. Women students at seminaries will eventually bring more women

preachers and clergywomen in to the church. Women are very active in participating in all kinds of church ministries, such as leading worship, preparing the sacraments, witnessing to the Gospel, helping in theological education, visiting people, working in church bookstores, serving as church accountants and pianists, singing in the choir, being involved in social service, and so forth.

Women have realized their own value through their own efforts. Here I want to make a comparison. During the Anti-Japanese War, the Anglican Church ordained a woman pastor but this was never recognized by the wider Anglican Church. In 1949, there were only a small number of women pastors. Now we have over 400 women pastors and among them 98% were ordained during the last twenty years. We can predict that, in the future, more women will join in serving the church and taking greater responsibility for building up the church and proclaiming the Gospel. Rev. Cao Shengjie is the first woman president of the China Christian Council and we are all very proud of her.

The National TSPM and the China Christian Council have established a Commission on Women's Work. This is the first women's organization in Chinese Church history. Through its influence, 18 provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions have also formed local commissions on women's work, while three other provinces have commission coordinators. Still another three provinces are currently in the process of forming commissions on women's work. The commissions on women's work at different levels have been well accepted and popularly recognized in the church. With the encouragement of the Commission on Women's Work at the national level, many women lay workers, seminary faculty and clergywomen have received various forms of training. Many churches have also run literacy classes to enable illiterate Christian women to read the Bible, and they have also prepared training programs for women. It is worth mentioning that, since 1995, Chinese Christian women have also joined with the worldwide Christian community in the World Day of Prayer for Women. This is one area of Chinese Christian involvement in ecumenical activities.

I want to quote what one woman pastor has said, “The task of women’s liberation is an everlasting task.” This helps us realize that, even though the status and role of women have been more and more recognized, there still remain great challenges on the way towards women’s total liberation. In the church, we believe that God does not show partiality in the process of creation, redemption and sanctification of human beings. Nevertheless, some people have manipulated Scripture verses to support “male chauvinism”. They use Paul’s words to belittle women without studying the context in which St. Paul lived. As a result, some churches do not want to ordain women. Even if women are ordained, some churches still do not allow women to take charge of the sacraments as men do. Up to now, some churches even insist that women should not preach or deliver the Eucharist during menstruation because women are considered “unclean” during that period and also for a certain length of time after giving birth. Even some women church workers themselves believe this.

There are few women Christians in decision-making bodies at different levels of Church organizations. At the Fifth National Chinese Christian Conference, it was hoped that women would comprise 30% of the total number of participants at future conferences, but this goal has never been reached. Only 21.3% of the participants were women for the Fifth Chinese Christian Conference, with 26.1% for the Sixth and 26.9% for the Seventh.

Another issue we are concerned about is the rising rate of divorce and domestic violence, which threatens our society. Divorce is considered offensive in the church. If a woman pastor wants to get divorced, her church members, as well as her church, won’t allow her to do so. It is easier for male pastors to get divorced. Whenever Christian women have family difficulties, they go to women pastors. To whom can women pastors and church workers go if they have marital difficulties? In a local church in Shanghai, a woman elder together with her colleagues, despite tremendous opposition and pressure, helped a woman in their church who suffered family abuse for a long time to get divorced and start a new life. For these kinds of problems, many

believers, especially women, have asked the church to set up counselling programs on marriage and family life, or to help them engage legal advisors to help solve their problems. Our church magazine *Tianfeng* has a page on women and marriage which is welcomed by readers. Many women readers write to us for advice and guidance.

A correct interpretation of the Bible is one precondition for freeing women from their traditional bondage and affording them full participation in society. It is also important to improve their legal awareness and ability to protect themselves. The Church in China upholds the Three-Self principles; we must also advocate that our women practice the “Four-Self” principles, i.e., self-administration, self-support, self-confidence and self-respect. We also encourage our women pastors and women church workers to learn from outstanding and talented women in the Bible and take them as good role models, so as to understand what role they should play and what responsibilities they should take on in the church of our times. In recent years, we have been sending women seminary graduates abroad to further their study and get more theological training so that some women will be prepared to engage in feminist theology studies.

May the cry of “Awake, awake, Deborah!” be the call of God to Christian women in the Church in China today. May God bestow a new vision to the Christian women of China, so that they can make their own contribution in building the Lord’s church on the Rock.

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\* Love Never Ends: Papers by K.H.Ting, (Nanjing: Yilin Press, 2000), 259.

## Preaching and Serving Churches

MEI KANGJUN

As Christians in China, we continually preach the message of reconciliation between people and God in Jesus Christ within an indigenous Chinese context. We strongly believe that this message of reconciliation should be spread outside the Church, to allow more people to be able to experience the love of God. The Church needs to serve the people of the world. In worship and fellowship, we help congregations understand that God is concerned with us offering service to people around us, a concern which should be shared by all those who love God.

One of the important characteristics of modern Chinese society is its amazing transformation from the traditional to the modern, a process not only of changing social structures, modernization and urbanization, but also of renewal and the readjustment of people's ideas and concepts in this rapidly changing environment.

As part of society, the Church needs to adhere to the behavior and regulations common to the society in which it finds itself. Sociology defines "society" as a community or group of unique and specific people, a community in which people are living and interacting together. Therefore, the societal nature of churches should be folded in to our ministries of preaching the Gospel well and serving the people well. In this way we can achieve the aim of all God's creation enjoying reconciliation and concordance with God.

How should we interpret the relationship between



preaching and serving? Bishop K.H. Ting has said that salvation does not belong to any individual but to the whole of society, that the Good News is related to social service as demonstrated in the Gospels. "What makes the Christian gospel the gospel lies in its proclamation that this God is love, that this God reconciles humanity to himself and human persons to each other. To this end, God became flesh, and opened the door of reconciliation through the cross... Humanity's being reconciled to God is of course more fundamental than human persons being reconciled to each other. When a person has been reconciled with God, that person is motivated to work at reconciling with others."

Among the social service projects carried out by Chinese churches, there are medical clinics and elderly nursing homes which meet local needs; there are "Loving Heart Primary Schools" mainly for poor kids in mountainous and remote areas to go back to school; there are special "Technical Training Schools" set up to instill renewed confidence in those who have just been released from prison; there are "Drinking Water" projects specifically for farmers living in inconvenient mountain areas. All these are testimonies to an interaction between Gospel preaching and social service in the indigenous Chinese context.

Because the salvation of God does not belong to any individual but to society as a whole, we can understand a link between God's creative and redemptive work in our social service ministries. "God created male and female. God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion 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). God gifted us with wisdom and ability, demanding us to love Him more than anything else and to love our neighbors as ourselves. Everybody has the responsibility to love and the right to be loved. Before the Ascension, the resurrected Jesus Christ commanded all his servants in the Church to go out in to society and make disciples of all nations "in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1Pet.2:9).

The establishment of the Social Service Department of the China Christian Council in June 2002 is a symbol of our desire to carry out this social service ministry in a more standardized and systematic way, a sign that a Church with vitality needs to have its own vision-God's will being done through the history of human beings. We are encouraged and inspired by God's love so much that, even in the process of serving the weakest group, we realize the necessity of serving the Lord first so as to understand Him more thoroughly.

Knowing that there is a strong message of service in the Gospel, we are also aware of the difference between the social service work done by the Church and that done by other organizations. Generally, social service work done by society offers specific help according to certain institutional guidelines. And, it is social service communities and NGOs who take care of such service at an international level. This kind of social service work is often included in the social security system of a country, usually in regard to issues of survival, reconciliation of family members, counseling youth and renewing those who break the law, etc. The function of social service work is to help people in trouble to leave behind their problems, to prevent the re-occurrence of social problems, to alleviate social conflicts and to bring order to society.

Meanwhile, the social service ministry done by churches, inspired and guided by the Holy Spirit, involves experiencing the spirit of social service through communication among church members, loving each other, praying for each other and supporting each other.

Therefore, as a consequence of faith, Christians have an important social responsibility to care for other people, to help people in need and to solve their problems. This message must be preached in each particular context. The Church exists in society, where we should see ourselves as servants not as masters. "For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mk. 10:45). As long as churches demonstrate beautiful behavior as their witness to faith, they can attract others through personal example as well as through verbal

instruction. In doing so, churches are encouraged to adjust to a changing society and to help society know the Church better.

We admit the influence of churches on society. But, it would be a form of ignorance for Christians simply to think that the function of the Church is limited to saving souls only, that churches have no need to serve the people of the world now. Without doing good to people around them, a serving Church cannot demonstrate Christian rebirth. And it cannot demonstrate how Jesus's teachings inspire His disciples to make full use of their blessed gifts to serve others. Without exemplary behavior, it is hard for the Church to explain that the healing of Jesus is not only powerful for our bodies but also for our souls and minds, not only helpful to individuals but also to society as a whole.

As Bishop Ting has emphasized, there are many teachings in the Bible telling us how to be of benefit to other people. Among them, faith, hope and love abide, with love more important than faith and hope. Great love is demonstrated when we let people see good deeds and virtue which compassion and faith inspire. In fact, through the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we are blessed with more peace, happiness, sympathy, endurance and reconciliation.

On December 8 2002, supported by and coordinated through the Social Service Department of the National TSPM / CCC, the church in Henan Province donated wheel chairs to some disabled people. This one example demonstrates that the social service ministry of Chinese churches is opening up directly to the weakest people in China and trying to usher human relationships into a more reconciliatory stage. Witness such as this will help make preaching the Gospel more attractive, will allow more people to communicate with each other and will make our service to God pleasing in His sight.

The Elderly Nursing Home run by the Christian church in Ningbo City (Zhejiang Province) offers round-the-clock service. They also provide daily spiritual devotions, prayer meetings, scripture readings and fellowship activities for the seniors in their care. A comfortable material life together

with a joyous spiritual life let these elderly people, who need care and love, deeply believe that God is the origin of all this goodness and kindness.

We witness to the Gospel through the social service ministry of the Chinese Church not only because we think about or speak about such things daily but because of the strong love and compassion that naturally come from the bottom of our warm, servant hearts. Christians need to match their words with their deeds. If their words can explain their deeds and their deeds can confirm their words, their love is all the better expressed in good service. In this sense, social service will surely be an important means for Chinese churches to express and convey their love to society.

In our social service ministry we fully understand that it is the right of each person to have a fulfilling life. Since God has given us the duty to help others achieve reconciliation, we need to care for others, not only because we are human but, more importantly, because we need to bring the great Love of God to those around us. In our social service ministries we are naturally going to encounter various kinds of complex social problems. On the one hand, we need to look upon God and rely on His help at all times. On the other hand, we need to work closely with other social service departments to solve problems. For instance, a church in Hubei province set up an “Ark English Training School” to help young people in the city who are behind in their studies. These young people are encouraged to face challenges bravely and receive help with their English studies in order to build up confidence again. Greater confidence is also helpful in preventing some social problems. For the love of God, we need to put our hearts into this work of helping people enjoy reconciliation with each other.

“Peace be with you. As the father has sent me, so I send you” (Jn. 20:21). This world was created by God and looked good in God’s eyes. It surely can work in harmony with God. We would never deny that our social service ministry in China is influenced by the surrounding environment, both socially (politics and economy), culturally (morals, customs, lifestyle etc.), and interpersonally (human rela-

tions, communication between believers and non-believers). Nonetheless, we especially experience the following while carrying out this ministry:

- a life of believing in and learning from Jesus.
- a witness of loving each other.
- acts of mutual help between both believers and non-believers.

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\* Love Never Ends - Papers by K.H.Ting (Nanjing: Yilin Press, 2000), 246-246.

## Some Thoughts on the Subject of Theological Reconstruction

K.H. TING

The reconstruction of Chinese theological thinking has become a central issue for China's Protestant Christians. Yet, since embarking on this great adventure three years ago, success has so far been limited. This is only natural, as renewal in theological thinking touches upon people's personal thinking, and adjustments in thinking cannot be achieved overnight. If we want to win people's hearts and minds, we must do much more praying, discussing and waiting. We can say that, over the past two or three years, the issue of theological reconstruction has created relatively large divisions among China's Christian intellectuals, and the effect of these divisions on other matters is growing. Some observers think that the existence of such differences indicates chaos. I do not agree. Since the idea of theological reconstruction was launched, theological discussion in China has grown livelier, and this is a quite different situation from chaos. Through lively discussions we will reach a more sophisticated level of theological understanding and will ultimately achieve a higher level of unity, which is what the Chinese Church needs.

When we talk of theological reconstruction, we first need to clarify the difference between theological thinking and basic faith, for some people think that theological reconstruction is an attack on our basic faith. It is my hope that through this study group, we can come to the consensus

that theological reconstruction and basic faith are two separate things and should not be discussed together.

Our basic faith was codified centuries ago in the Apostles Creed and the Nicene Creed. In our efforts to renew our theological thinking, we respect the basic faith condensed within these two creeds. However, the world has changed since these creeds were adopted and so have people's ideas. In order to interpret these two creeds in ways suited to our times, we need to adjust our theological thinking. Otherwise, how shall we maintain our basic faith? Since our basic faith must not waver, our theological viewpoint needs to be adjusted.

Theological reconstruction was not discovered by the Chinese Church at the end of the twentieth century; it has been taking place continually in the Christian Church for two thousand years. We even find instances of this in the Old Testament period. For example, in 621 BCE, Josiah was king of Israel and in Canaan, people set up sites for worship in high places. These small worship sites were scattered everywhere. In some places God was called Yahweh, and in others, Baal. There were various other names used as well. Upon entering Canaan, the faith which had come down from Moses faced a proliferation of worship sites to various deities. This is what we call polytheism; wherever one went, one could worship the local deity. During Josiah's reign, a refurbishment of the Temple was undertaken and in the course of making repairs, a book was discovered and taken to the King. As the King heard it read, he knew it as a command from Yahweh, a command of great importance: Israelites were permitted to worship Yahweh only in the Temple in Jerusalem, and all other sites of worship must be destroyed. This action was important in bringing about a monotheistic faith. This event is recorded in 2 Kings 22.

The change from polytheism to monotheism was a tremendous adjustment in theological thinking. Politically, it contributed to the unity of the Israelites. When all had read the book presented to King Josiah, they tore their clothing, an Israelite practice to express penitence. We find this mentioned frequently in the Old Testament—they put ashes on

their heads and tore their garments—and this is what they did upon the discovery of this book. They went out and burned and destroyed the many small worship sites. This was a very courageous thing to do. Theological reconstruction in the Chinese Church today is a much more harmonious matter. Compared to what we read in the Bible, our theological reconstruction is going much more smoothly. Following upon the story told above, the majority of the Israelites felt that worship of Yahweh as God should be centered upon Jerusalem and the Temple there became the center of their religious life. I think this groundbreaking change that took place during the reign of King Josiah deserves our attention. Basic faith did not change, but the place where God was worshipped changed dramatically and this change brought about others: monotheism took precedence; the system of sacrifices and the priestly order were introduced; the religion was based in Jerusalem, where the Israelites also maintained an important political center. There are many other examples of theological reconstruction in the Old Testament. In addition, the many prophets of the Old Testament all had their own unique theological vision.

Are there instances of theological reconstruction in the New Testament? In my opinion, there are many. Jesus Christ himself represents a great adjustment in theological thinking. We know that the Jewish people keep the sabbath according to their Law, and there are many regulations concerning this practice. Its observance by different factions may be stricter or more relaxed. All agree that work is not allowed on the sabbath, but they may differ on what exactly constitutes work. Even walking is regulated. As far as I know, a strict observance says that in order not to offend against the sabbath rules, you may only walk as far as you can throw a stone. This is only one rule among many that bind the people. But Jesus said, “The sabbath was made for humankind and not humankind for the sabbath.” With his acquiescence, Jesus’ disciples dared to pluck heads of grain from the fields on the sabbath. When they were criticized for this, Jesus repeated his statement, “The sabbath was made for humankind.” When people are hungry, what is



wrong with eating some heads of grain from the fields? Jesus often said, "You have heard it said ... but I tell you ...." In this way he was telling us not to be conservative and hidebound.

In Acts 10 and 11, we see how traditional and conservative Peter's theology was, while at the same time we see how patiently the Holy Spirit worked in Peter, step by step helping him to change, and come gradually to see that God's love did not stop with the Jews, but extended to the gentiles as well.

Liberation from rules was developed even further by Paul in his discussion of justification by faith. Paul opposed laws and regulations like those concerning the sabbath that bound people too tightly. He stressed that people were already justified through their faith alone. Was Paul in this way a liberator? Did he not liberate the Jews from the strictures of the Law? It was a very courageous step. Justification by faith also freed them from the rule about circumcision. This thinking made an important historical contribution by changing Christianity from a small group within the Jewish religion to a faith open to everybody.

Some people think that justification by faith is the theme of the whole Bible. But in fact only two of the sixty-six books of the Bible mention justification by faith: Romans and Galatians. Paul's debates with the Jews, where he mentions justification by faith, occur only in these two books. There are also places in the Bible where justification by faith is not commended, a classic example being in James. A few verses from James will show that the Bible is not only about justification by faith. "What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you?" ... "For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead." ... "You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone" (James 2:14; 26; 24). My point is that in the sixty-six books of the Bible, it is only in two books of the New Testament that Paul develops his concept of justification by faith, in order to free the Jews from the Law. And, at least in James, the concept is questioned.

In 49 CE, Paul, Peter, Barnabas, James and other dis-

cipling, one to two hundred in all, met in Jerusalem. One important decision taken by this meeting was to preach Christianity to the gentiles—Corinthians, Ephesians, Thessalonians, etc. Following on this meeting, the many non-Jews who lived in these regions would not have to accept the strictures of the Jewish Law and therefore the gospel of Jesus Christ spread among them. If not for this important meeting in 49CE (see Acts 15), Christianity would have remained a small Jewish sect and the truth of Jesus Christ would not have been preached to the gentiles. This means China, too, would not have received Christianity, and we would not be sitting here today speaking about Jesus Christ. Therefore, the church council of the year 49 represents an important adjustment in theological thinking—that the gospel is for all people, not just for the Jews. This breakthrough came about under Paul’s leadership. We can also see that justification by faith was a fine example of theological reconstruction for that time.

In fact, we find similar instances not only in the Bible but also in church history. Martin Luther is a case in point. After Paul, justification by faith was not much emphasized for a long while; Martin Luther was its second champion. In 1516 he posted his ninety-five theses on the door of a church. Why was he opposed to the papacy? Because of the practice of selling of papal indulgences. The idea was that after a person died, the soul went first to purgatory; family members could reduce the time the departed spent in purgatory by buying the so-called indulgences. The selling of indulgences was very profitable for the papacy and helped in the construction of St. Peter’s in Rome. Luther was strongly opposed to the practice because he felt it cheated believers of their money and property. His exposé of this practice was one of his most prominent theses. In theological terms, this marked an important adjustment in thinking. People relied on faith to gain righteousness, not indulgences. Luther opposed other church regulations as well, including a celibate clergy. (Luther had been a priest himself and married a former nun.) In Luther’s time, justification by faith was a means of opposing the Pope and liberating the people, or at least alleviating their suffering.

Luther was followed by others in the Protestant Reformation: Calvin, the Czech Jan Hus, etc., and the reformation spread throughout Europe and England. The churches which came out of the reformation produced further new denominations, like Methodism, which developed from Anglicanism. Each reform movement illustrates the adjustment as well as the liveliness of theological thinking.

From the above we can see that, throughout the past two thousand years, new theological ideas have continually appeared, and theological reconstruction is not some recent Chinese invention. All I have said here today is to make this one point: it is not that the TSPM and CCC wish to start something new that has never been done before in Judeo-Christian history. Our current efforts to renew our theological thinking are in complete accordance with church tradition and history. In order to maintain our basic faith, these methods are reasonable and necessary.

The missionaries who brought Christianity to China can be divided into two groups: The first group comprises those who came to China offering services like schools, and universities. The second group is made up of those who came with the aim of increasing the number of believers in China. Those who came to build schools and hospitals were not, in general, too concerned with evangelizing among those they sought to help. If they came to run universities, they might be teaching chemistry or engineering and their energies were focused on education. Those who came to build churches measured their success by the annual number of converts. I studied at St. John's University where there were very few new Christians among the students—and sometimes none—but the university did not consider this a failure, as conversion was not one of its emphases. For the other group of missionaries, evangelism was primary, they went to the churches in order to set the people's faith on fire. They felt there were too few Christians in China and they wanted to increase the number tenfold, even ten-thousand-fold. These missionaries had two ways of attracting potential believers. The first was offering material advantages to the potential convert. For example, children of Christian parents would gain access to Christian schools,

or if you were an obedient Chinese, close to the missionaries, your children had access to scholarships abroad and so on. Many people who received these benefits, admired the foreigners greatly. Some studied their methods of preaching so closely, that when they spoke, they sounded like foreigners. You may not have met such Chinese pastors, but I came into contact with many such in my youth. How foreign were they? They spoke Chinese with a foreign accent, as if only in this way could they be confident that what they preached was Christian. This resulted in a situation in which, in the eyes of ordinary people, Chinese pastors were half-foreign. On occasion, these pastors could help people in the courts because they could presume on their friendship with foreigners, who would intercede with the authorities. This was another aspect of advantage and the situation was common.

Their second means of attracting converts was through exaggerated descriptions of heaven and hell. For China's simple-minded ordinary people, the threat of hell and the prospect of heaven were very strong incentives to accept Christian faith. Of course, many people genuinely believed and accepted Christian faith, but in general it was common to convert in order to gain some advantage, and because of fear of hell and desire for heaven. At Liberation, Christians in China numbered 700,000, a number that concerned the missionaries. The mission boards which sent them to China, Japan and other countries, required reports on how many conversions and baptisms took place, and placed great importance on these numbers. Thus, getting people to convert was crucial for these missionaries and their methods were heaven, hell and justification by faith.

Justification by faith meant that no matter what your deeds were in your everyday life, whether you were honest or not, your political attitudes: all this counted for nothing. As long as you had faith, in the eyes of God, you were justified, and thus you could enter heaven. Otherwise you were going to hell. In fact even today, many Chinese become Christians primarily in order to enter heaven and escape hell. They fear hell, but heaven attracts them.

This leads us back to the question of justification by

faith. The notion of justification by faith has played an important role in liberating believers—first, when Paul fought the “legalism” among Jewish believers and then a second time when Martin Luther voiced the idea in order to oppose the pope. However, in many developed countries today, the idea of justification by faith has been watered down because it easily creates conflicts between believers and non-believers. In this context, it is worth noting that, in the modern Chinese Bible translation of 1979, the expression “justification by faith” does not appear even once. Instead, the expression “to have a harmonious relationship with God through faith” is used instead.

Today, as we meet here at Nanjing Seminary, the staff and students are polarized. A great number of students work hard to participate in the reconstruction of Chinese theological thinking—they re-read the Bible, write papers, discuss and reflect. I think they will be the future pillars of the Chinese church. But there are also a number of indifferent students who exert a bad influence on their fellow students. Just as Nanjing Seminary is polarized at this point in time, so our whole church is divided into different groups. This diversification does not mean chaos but rather reflects a diversity of theological reflection and will help us to renew and deepen our theological thinking.

I hope that, after a lengthy period of time, a new form of Chinese Christian faith will emerge, a rational Christianity which, at the same time, has a strong sense of right and wrong; a Christian faith that emphasizes Christ, morality and a loving God. Such a Christianity would bring an important message to the whole world.

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## **Adjustments in Theology are Necessary and Unavoidable**

K.H. TING

Recently there has been much talk in Chinese Christianity about theological reconstruction. Theological reconstruction does not attack or change basic Christian faith, but safeguards it. Through theological reconstruction, our basic faith will be expressed in terms that are more accessible and more reasonable, and this will aid believers in their understanding and will strengthen basic faith. And non-believers, our friends outside the church, will be more willing to hear the good news the church has for them. We should not fear theological reconstruction then, but welcome it as a good and important development. Christianity has been in existence two thousand years, and during this time, theological reconstruction has been constant, and the process has resulted in better theology. If we do not want to call this reconstruction, we may term it development, adjustment or improvement.

I would like to discuss a number of examples to show how, though our basic faith does not change, it is usual for theological thinking to undergo adjustments large and small.

Before the slaves were freed in the U.S., they were treated as little better than animals on the southern plantations. The church then believed that black people did not have souls, but had been born simply to labor for the whites. Some black people even believed this themselves. This view

provided a theological basis for the oppression of black slaves and their maltreatment by the slave owners. Capitalism had begun to develop in the northern part of the nation, and Lincoln led the north in a civil war against the south under the banner of freeing the slaves. After the war, many pastors and theologians began to affirm the humanity of the African Americans—they were also children of God and could be baptized into the churches. Later African Americans started their own churches and seminaries. This is a modern example of how the church can, and must, adjust its theological thinking. This particular change was vast and came about quite quickly. It also brought about the demise of the southern slavery-based economy, an illustration of the way in which developments in theology and capitalist society are interrelated.

Birth control, which the church historically opposed, is another example. The church's opposition was based on the biblical exhortation to "be fruitful and multiply," seen as a blessing from God. As a result many believers had large families, which impoverished them and kept their educational level low. Today, the situation is greatly changed and one- and two-child families are the norm in Europe and North America. The new theological thinking is that it is not God's intention that people be poor and downtrodden. It pleases God more for parents to put their energies into raising one or two children well. As for China, the church no longer advocates large families, nor do many believers want to raise six or seven children. This also marks a big theological adjustment.

Other attitudes which were once supported with biblical evidence and have now been supplanted by new theological thinking include polygamy and the church's opposition to divorce.

Do we find examples of adjustment in theological thinking in the Bible? Many. Take Acts, chapters 10-15, for example. Peter's theology was quite simple in the beginning: he took everything over from Judaism—that the Israelites were God's chosen people, observance of the sabbath, circumcision, etc. On accepting Jesus as Lord, he added the belief that Jesus was the awaited Messiah. Under the gradual

guiding and revelation of the Holy Spirit, which brought him down from the rooftop to meet the gentile Cornelius, he came gradually to the realization that Jesus was not only redeemer of the Jews, but of the gentiles as well. Together with Paul, Barnabas and others, Peter held the meeting in Jerusalem where the decision was taken to break out of the bonds of Judaism and allow the good news to be preached to the Romans and Greeks. To do this, the Christians had to abandon the Jewish customs such as keeping sabbath and circumcision. These changes allowed Christianity to evolve into the world religion it is today. That meeting in Jerusalem, which took place about 49 CE and is recorded in Acts 15, was crucial in the history of the church. This one example is sufficient to show that there is historical evidence in the Bible of theological thinking in the church being adjusted with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

There are people in the Chinese church who like to point to the contradictions between so-called modernists and so-called fundamentalists, putting theological reconstruction in the so-called modernist camp and saying that the so-called fundamentalist theology needs no adjustment. They insist that theological reconstruction is factional in-fighting. They are mistaken. Were Peter, Paul and James modernists? In 49 CE there was neither modernist nor fundamentalist. For two thousand years, the Holy Spirit has been guiding constant adjustment of theological thinking without regard to camps or factions.

A couple of months ago, I was looking through the most important publication of American fundamentalism, or we might say evangelicalism, *Christianity Today*, and saw a report about a conference among pastors and theological educators on the topic of the fate of non-Christians after death. Some felt that as non-believers they would go straight to hell, where they would suffer the fires of eternal damnation. Some felt this would be too merciless an action on God's part and proposed the idea that after death both the flesh and spirit of non-believers would be destroyed, something they felt to be more humanitarian. And there was a third view: because of God's grace, non-believers too would share in eternal life. Such a conference shows



that within fundamentalism or evangelicalism people also feel the need for adjustment of theological thinking, and that things are in process.

These examples tell us that changes are always taking place in theological thinking in the church. Theology in this way differs from the church's basic faith, whose tenets, such as belief in the Trinity, Christ's Incarnation, death on the cross for all and resurrection after three days, are firm and unwavering. Precisely because these tenets of basic faith do not change, it is imperative for theological thinking to change with the times and make necessary adjustments. Change takes place in theological thinking in order to protect and safeguard our unchanging basic faith. We firmly believe that the cross brought to completion the work of bringing God and humanity together, but how this came about, we cannot say for sure, and this gives rise to numerous theological views. We need not fight over these, but can adopt an attitude of mutual respect. Changes in theological thinking take place in order to safeguard the immutability of basic faith.

The appropriate distinction between basic faith and theological thinking was an important development achieved through theological study in the Chinese Church by the TSPM in the decade from 1940 to 1950. This development enabled Chinese Christianity to guarantee maintenance of a pure basic faith while having a lively thinking and witness, and was beneficial to bringing about unity among Christians on the basis of their common basic faith. We cannot but recognize that making the appropriate distinction between basic faith and theological thinking is not something humans could invent on their own; it is the Holy Spirit leading the church. We recall that the letter to the gentiles from the Jerusalem meeting said, "The Holy Spirit ...and us." Today the experience of the church in China is even more marked by the presence of the Holy Spirit working with us.

Jiang Zemin, chairman of the Communist Party of China, called for an active adaptation of religions in China with socialism. There is no reason at all to oppose this. Suppose we do not adapt to socialist society. Shall we then

adapt to capitalism, imperialism or feudalism? For the good of our nation, as well as for the survival and witness of the church itself, we should naturally adapt to socialist society. This is the natural choice of every responsible citizen and every responsible believer. We cannot be satisfied with a mere politic expression. Genuine adaptation must have an intellectual foundation. For Christians, genuine adaptation must include theological adaptation. Our pastors should not content themselves with preaching a word from fifty or one hundred years ago. Adjustment must take on vitality of expression and be marked by Jesus' promise, before he left us, that he would send the Spirit among us to lead us into all truth.

Friends, the twenty-first century is upon us, a century in which educational levels will continue to rise. Even now, many intellectuals come to the churches full of expectation, willing to listen to our message. They arrive full of expectation, but leave full of disappointment. Why should this be? The church *is* growing, but our message does not attract people with a modern mindset. Let us welcome theological reconstruction with open arms, so that the church will no longer fall behind, but be a lively community that keeps up with changing times.

Recently, the TSPM/CCC set up a "Theological Reconstruction Promotion Team" whose function is to 1) heighten awareness of the importance of theological reconstruction among our co-workers and fellow Christians, especially clergy; and 2) assist church offices closely involved in theological thinking (seminaries, publications departments, etc.) to thoroughly implement the spirit of theological reconstruction. Our goal is to gradually raise the theological level of Chinese Christianity and foster understanding of theology in world Christianity so that we would be able to participate in theological exchanges with Christians all over the world. This is truly a great responsibility and I hope all our colleagues and fellow Christians will support it. I am retired from my positions in the TSPM/CCC, but I will do my utmost to support this endeavor which is so important for the future of our church.

# Theology and Context

## Speech on the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Churches in China

K.H. TING

What is theological reconstruction and why is it important? There are still those persons in the church who do not have a very clear understanding of the issue, and some who misunderstand it. Others think that it is an attack upon our basic faith and therefore will have no part of it.

Basic Christian faith is not the same thing as theological thinking, and we should make a distinction between them. Our basic Christian faith comes as revelation from God; it is not a matter of somebody making some pronouncement which then becomes faith. Faith is from God, not something thought up by humans. The Trinity, the Incarnation, the resurrection of Christ: these are basic creeds of Christian faith and do not change. We live amid changes and as times change all sorts of questions arise; these new questions tend to present difficulties for believers. Theologians and teachers of theology put forth theological views based on their studies to assist believers to be able to understand and continue to maintain their faith in a new era, to help them continue to be loyal to their basic faith. Thus, theological viewpoints can change; in fact they must.

Many theological views receive a lot of emphasis for a certain period of time, but when circumstances change, their importance diminishes and new theological views take

prominence. Prior to the American Civil War, for example, it was the view (a theological view) that black people had no souls and that there was nothing wrong in working them like animals on the land. Lincoln freed the slaves by the war, and this theological view gradually lost ground. Thus theological viewpoints can be played down and even disappear. There are many other examples as well. In the Bible the mother of the sons of Zebedee implores Jesus that one day her sons will sit, one at his right side and one at his left. This is her prayer. But Jesus rebukes her—this will not come about because of her prayer, though we should pray. It is the content of her prayer that is the problem and Jesus helps her adjust the theological view reflected in her prayer. There are very many theological views in the church; for example, those regarding the Lord's Supper. Theological views can differ greatly: some say real wine should be used for communion, others want grape juice; some worship on Saturday, others on Sunday. These are the result of different theological views and are not a part of basic faith.

Theological reconstruction or adaptation can help us to better maintain our basic faith unchanged. I believe it is crucial to separate basic faith from theological thinking.

In fact, our thinking requires frequent adjustments on all fronts. Communist thinking is also being continually adjusted. For the past few months, I have noticed in the newspapers the phrase "the three represents," though I didn't know who was being represented. Later I saw an article that explained this did not refer to three persons, but was a request that Party members represent three important things: the advanced forces of production; advanced cultural direction; and the greatest benefit for the great masses of the people. The Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference journal, *CPPCC*, noted that the "three represents" summarized scientifically and in three aspects the aim, nature and duty of the Communist Party. They were formulated to answer the question of what sort of Party should be established for a new historical era. As Chinese Christians, we should care about these "three represents." Once I understood them, I felt greatly comforted,

because the “three represents” do not say that the Chinese Communist Party represents anti-religious forces. Today the conflict between theism and atheism has been diminished. Prior to the Cultural Revolution, if a newspaper or periodical carried an article on religion, it would almost certainly lump it together with the idea of religion as opium. In those days, if one did not call religion opium, one would be suspected of not being a genuine Marxist. Today, we have no more articles like this, the “opium theory” has been vastly played down and we can see from this that Communist thinking is constantly changing too. My confidence in the Chinese Communist Party’s policy of freedom of religion was increased by learning about the “three represents.” Thinking in natural science is always being adjusted as well. Thus, if some adjustment takes place in Christian theological thinking, it is nothing remarkable. Playing down some theological views today is permissible, and in fact, necessary.

Recently, in Qingdao we held a symposium on approaches to the Bible. One’s view of the Bible is extremely important; it is the “master switch.” If we have an incorrect view of the Bible, we will be incorrect in many things, and in our thinking. On the final day of the symposium, I said in my remarks that perhaps Chinese Christianity could play down the idea of “justification by faith.” I said this because it is overemphasized in China, as if it is the all in all of Christian faith. The idea is that anyone who believes will go to heaven after death, and those who do not believe will go to hell. This is an idea that denies morality. By extension, Hitler and Mussolini, as Christians, would be in heaven, while Confucius, Laozi, Mozi and Zhou Enlai, non-believers, would be in hell. This is the only logical conclusion according to this idea. Such a Christianity may appeal to some, but can we really imagine that most Chinese would be willing to accept it over the long run? Some people say, I really love my parents, but as non-believers they will be in hell while I, as a believer, will enjoy heaven. I really cannot bear such thinking. I have received letters from a few pastors who say they can no longer stand in the pulpit and preach such things. They are pastors of conscience and

so they welcome theological reconstruction and put their hopes in it.

At the Qingdao conference on approaches to the Bible, there were dozens of people present when I raised the idea of playing down justification by faith and I asked those who did not agree, as well as those who did, to speak with me afterwards. A number of people felt that playing down this idea would allow a better understanding of God, enable people to know God as a God of love. If God were to send people to hell because of their unbelief, this would create problems in our idea of God—how then could God be a God of love?

The word “justification” in the Greek New Testament has no equivalent in Chinese, which creates problems in interpretation. We should note the way Today’s Chinese version deals with this. Today’s Chinese Bible was published in 1979, sixty years after the Mandarin Union Version. Today’s Chinese Bible does not use the Chinese term *chengyi* for justification as the Union Version does. In most cases where the Union Version has *chengyi*, Today’s version translates as “in an appropriate relationship with God” (Rom.1:17; 3:28, 30; 4:5, 25; Gal.2:16, 21; 3:8,11,21,24; 5: 4,5). This is both in line with what most theologians in the world today understand by “justification or righteousness” and is extremely helpful in correcting the mistaken view of “justification by faith” found in grassroots churches.

When we speak of playing down the doctrine of “justification by faith” then, we mean first of all a superficial and doctrinaire understanding, which, with the mention of “justification by faith” makes a simplistic connection with heaven and hell as if this were the whole meaning of “justification by faith.” Actually, in the Bible Paul’s use of “justification by faith” is always closely linked to the important ideas of grace, reconciliation, being made new in Christ, tearing down barriers, etc. In Paul’s letters, the word “hell” does not occur. Paul said, “For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh” (Rom. 9:3). What feeling is this? In our discussions of “justification by faith,” this is something to keep in mind.

The uplifting of justification by faith by Paul in the first century and Martin Luther in the sixteenth, was not a matter of dealing with the question of individual salvation only, but a desire that those already in the church would oppose Jewish legalism and papal hegemony. Some people think that without justification by faith, Christianity has nothing to offer. There are no grounds for such a worry. Paul's writings contain many messages which should be loudly and uniquely proclaimed, and which are more easily accepted than justification by faith, for example, "faith, hope and love, these three; and the greatest of these is love." In fact, if we are not willing to play down justification by faith, but insist on emphasizing it, we will create a host of theological difficulties for ourselves (for example, whether or not truth, goodness and beauty exist outside the church).

To play down does not mean to eradicate. Playing down simply means not making this the all in all of Christianity, but manifesting *all* the riches of Christian faith. We live in a socialist society, and Chairman Jiang Zemin hopes that religions can adapt to this socialist society. Socialist society is at present the most advanced society known to humanity. There are still many bad things left from the old society, such as drugs, corruption and waste, and we do not want to adapt to these things, but to those things which are the essence of socialism, especially in terms of adapting our thinking, and not only general thinking, but theological thinking.

At the same time, Christianity must adapt to our ever-progressing society, and narrow the gap with Chinese intellectual circles. We Christians cannot be content to stay at a lower level, but must dialogue with intellectuals to ensure our future. Otherwise, we will begin to resemble Falun gong or some other cult. If that happens we will not have a future. Thus, theological reconstruction is not only for adaptation to socialist society, but to raise our level to that of our culture and intellectual circles. If we do not do this, intellectuals will look down on us and pay no attention to us. We will be left behind.

The level of theological studies in the West is in many respects higher than our own and many westerners with

theological education are not that willing to have anything to do with us. In the 1950s, they were interested in understanding how we would implement Three-Self Chinese Christianity under socialism, but they are not so interested in what we are doing now. Some say our colleagues have only two phrases they trot out for foreign guests: "Thank the Lord," and "Praise the Lord." These are fine, but not conducive to discussion. Christians overseas feel there is no theology in the Chinese Church or that our theology is very primitive. When we send delegations overseas, or invite people here, what sort of theological thinking shall we have for discussions? In four years of seminary, few of our students are able to achieve a high level of theology. People from churches overseas do not simply want to hear "Praise the Lord"; they want to have a theological discussion. Even at the seminary, they feel that China has no theology. Theological reconstruction aims to raise the level of theological thinking in the Chinese Church, so that we have a theology to discuss.

We have had some concrete results in theological reconstruction over the past two years. I have seen a letter from an instructor in the philosophy department at People's University, and another from an instructor at the Party School in Anhui, both expressing how pleased they were that we are undertaking theological reconstruction and that they had great hopes for it. They are intellectuals but not Christians, and they did not want to see Christianity go the way of Falun gong, but rather wanted to see it improving. I have received even more such letters from colleagues within the church. These letters made me very happy and made me feel even more the need for theological reconstruction. We must not disappoint our friends inside and outside the church.

We in the TSPM and three-self organizations at all levels, provincial and municipal have been promoting theological reconstruction for nearly two years, but there are some colleagues within three-self organizations who are still not very committed to it. Why is this? One reason may be that they are not very sensitive to theology or to what theology is. Another reason may be that for decades TSPM



has stressed broadening unity and this has become its paramount focus. We must continue to emphasize unity, but sometimes this has meant that people are afraid to deal with theology in case it affects their basic faith. This has caused stagnation in theology. Another reason may be that they do not understand the changes that have taken place in theology worldwide. Today in Martin Luther's Germany the opposition to the pope has been played down to the extent that they speak of signing a pact of friendship with the Vatican, announcing the cessation of their disagreements over "justification by faith." I hope Chinese pastors will not simply follow the methods of nineteenth century foreign missionaries and some church leaders for the sake of church growth and pushing faith only, but rather emphasize Jesus' morality and ethics. This is in keeping with theological trends in the world today.

Some say you are liberals, modernists while we are traditionalists, evangelicals: we cannot adjust our theological thinking. But this doesn't really appear to be so. Several months ago, we had as our guest the Anglican Archbishop of Sydney, Australia, a prominent evangelical. When we introduced Chinese theological reconstruction, he thought this was an excellent thing for the Chinese church to do. He quoted Jesus' teaching from the Bible: "You have heard it said ... but I tell you ...": isn't Jesus telling us to adjust our theological thinking here? Though he is an evangelical, the archbishop upheld the adjustment and reconstruction of theological thinking, and held up Jesus as a model for us.

I hope that our clergy, theological teachers and students will lead the way and show our Christians that they are participating in theological reconstruction. When the TSPM and CCC send delegations overseas for meetings and visits, the first criterion is politics, then language; theology should also be a consideration. We don't pay much attention to people's level of theological training when putting delegations together at present and most of those we send are not really able to have a theological discussion, which leads to foreigners thinking that we have no theology. I recently met a friend who had gone overseas to attend a

meeting and asked him a few questions about it, but he couldn't answer them, saying merely, "I just went along to familiarize myself with the situation." This is not good enough. In future I hope we will consider people's theological abilities in choosing those to send overseas.

I hope what I have said here will help you in considering the value of theological reconstruction, and enable it to continue to develop, so that there may be a new day in Chinese Christianity, pleasing to our friends in and outside the church here at home and garnering respect in the church ecumenical.

# Development and Enrichment of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement

K.H. TING

This is the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement. Our view of those fifty years is closely related to how we will see the movement fifty years from now, and to how well TSPM/CCC run the church. I would like to share with you my own view of these past fifty years.

As I see it, there have been four high points in these fifty years. By high point I mean developments and clarifications in the organization's self-knowledge and guiding thought which had an all-round impact on its work, and which raised it to new levels.

1) Exposure of the relationship between western missions and western imperialism in China, raising the anti-imperialist consciousness of believers and advocating the three-self line of self-government, self-support and self-propagation. This was the beginning of Three-Self. We know that the reputation of missionaries is very high in Christianity worldwide, and the courage and boldness our church displayed in daring to attack them, show that they served imperialism, and announce our independence amazed Christian circles around the globe, engendering both anger and criticism as well as praise and commendation.

2) Since Three-Self was something new, well- and ill-intentioned questions were raised both at home and abroad; enemies, in China and overseas, sought to attack it; and in China itself, a mass movement in theology and biblical interpretation arose very naturally. Many articles in which

ordinary Christians discussed these issues appeared in the church monthly *Tian Feng*. Some articles found evidence of three-self and patriotism in the Bible and in church history. There were many responses here and abroad, and overseas there were critiques of the missionary movement and calls for independence on the part of churches in Asia, Africa and Latin America. All this confirmed the reasonableness of three-self and patriotism for our colleagues here. At the same time, a new discipline appeared in the West: a “new missiology” which was a critique of traditional missionary organizations and thinking, reflection on approaches and advocacy of churches not being run by missionaries, but by Christians in Asia, Africa and Latin America themselves. There was interest in learning about the Chinese Three-Self Movement and some adopted a friendly attitude toward it. Canadian Christians led the way in this transformation, which is still ongoing. This new missiological thinking continues to have a great impact and has shaped an attack on the original “mission boards.”

3) Running the church well. The aim of TSPM; that is, to enable Christianity in China to be independent and to achieve self-government, self-support and self-propagation, is endorsed by the majority of our co-workers and fellow-Christians. They also support running the church well; that is, making it well-run, well-supported and a church in which self-propagation is done well. Under the rubric of running the church well, the China Christian Council was established as a separate entity. But because of the long experience of ultra-leftism, many government cadres and co-workers in the church harbored lingering fears that the slogan “run the church well” represented a church standpoint separate from the standpoint and interests of the Chinese people. We knew that the Communist Party is atheist, opposed to religion, and we had heard them say that the church should gradually disappear; in that case why speak of running it well? I recall that Li Zuomin, assistant secretary general of the Central United Front Department held a long discussion with several dozen church co-workers one evening, in order to dispel our anxiety on this score, so that we might set our fears aside and go about running the

church well. I also remember the deputy head of the Religious Affairs Bureau under the State Council, Wan Yaobin speaking at what must have been a meeting of the joint standing committee of the TSPM/CCC. He also told us that the government supported us in running the church well. We were delighted to hear it and our experience in these years tells us that the Party also supports it. In fact the TSPM was founded in order to create conditions for running the church well, and the CCC was founded to serve as the body to run the church well.

4) Advocating theological reconstruction. There are very many aspects to running the church well and the solid construction of theological thinking in the Chinese Church is the most fundamental, most crucial step in running the church well.

At present many Christians emphasize preaching the gospel and conversion. But if the message we preach is done up in outmoded theological thinking, can it attract modern people whose thinking has already undergone a great renewal? When the incarnate Jesus came into the world, he brought a new message, which we call the New Testament. The New Testament developed out of the Old Testament. Jesus often said, "You have heard that it was said to the ancients, ...but I tell you, ...". Our theological thinking also need to be renewed before it can persuade, before it can attract people's attention to the message of Christ.

Some of our co-workers have long been exposed to missionaries or theology teachers whose thinking is extremely conservative, and they like to say that they pay no attention to whether something is theology or not, but speak only of Life and faith. They say, if we have the Bible, faith and Life, that's all we need. We don't need to worry about right and wrong. I think they are mistaken. We are human beings, we can think, and these brains we think with were also given by God. If we use our brains, our thoughts will turn to issues and problems. As Christians, when we read the Bible, we cannot help but think of the issues raised by the Bible and by faith, we cannot help but be led to think of the challenges and attacks on faith occasioned by the real world.

Human beings cannot exist without thinking and a church cannot exist without thinking theologically; there are no Christians without some sort of theological thinking. Whenever you say a few words about a passage in the Bible, whenever you pray, your view of God and your view of the Bible are apparent in your words, and this is theology.

Party Chairman Jiang Zemin calls upon religion to adapt to socialist society. I do not think we need to see this as prejudice against religion or some sort of harassment of religion. It is not only religion that needs to do this sort of adapting. The need also arises in education, literature and the arts, the social sciences and ethics.

Recently, among some co-workers, the idea arose that three-self was enough and that theological reconstruction was something they could take or leave, as they wished. It is also said that others concern themselves only with theological reconstruction, thinking that it has replaced three-self. If such tendencies exist, I think both are superficial. Chairman Jiang spoke of actively promoting the adaptation of religion to socialist society. We know that mere mouthing of slogans is a very low form of adaptation. Genuine adaptation must take place in thinking. For religious circles, this must be theological adaptation. Theological reconstruction is not simply making theology adapt to socialist society, it also removes theological obstacles to patriotism and socialism, providing an intellectual foundation for support of patriotism and socialism. And this was the original goal of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement. Theological reconstruction is one with the work of the TSPM; we should not place them in opposition to each other.

To enliven theological thinking, we advocate the diversification of theology in the church; it would be inappropriate to defer to a single authority. Theology in any church should be pluralistic. The Bible lifts up one Christ, one faith; but theological viewpoints should be many, we should not require that they be unified. We should not label someone an “unbeliever” simply because his or her theology is not our own. This makes the church into a “police state” where we are cut off from pastors and co-workers with views different from our own. At the least, this is

unethical and unloving. To say someone belongs to “the unbelievers’ clique” is to accuse them of being a false Christian, someone who should be ejected from the church. Who gives us the authority to judge?

It is not only on the church level that theological reconstruction is needed; every clergy and co-worker in our church needs individual theological reconstruction. In worldwide Christianity today, especially in the mainstream churches, there is a view that our clergy is lacking in theological thinking and have little of interest to say in dialogue. Cannot we as individuals do something to address this situation by improving our own theological awareness, step by step?

These are what I see as the four high points of the fifty years’ of the TSPM. It was not my intention to see these as chronological; they are all part of the development and enrichment of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of Protestant Churches in China.

## **Two Staunch Friends of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary:**

**Y.T. Wu and Luo Zhufeng**

K.H. TING

As we celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, we naturally want to remember our many colleagues and friends. I want to speak about two of them particularly: Y.T. Wu and Luo Zhufeng.

There are so many things worth remembering about Y.T. Wu. I want to mention just one—how in a Chinese church which had little regard for theology or even reason, he stressed the importance of theology and theological training and thereby won a solid standing for Christianity among Chinese people, especially in intellectual circles. In the early 1950s, China had many seminaries of all sizes, which were very scattered and depended for financial support on mission boards in the U.K. and U.S. When the Korean War broke out, and the U.S. government froze all financial transactions between the U.S. and China, these institutions were thrown into chaos, with no way to support their staffs. There were voices in the church then that spoke only of things spiritual; these voices proposed safeguarding the churches and leaving the seminaries to sink or swim. Y.T. Wu resolutely advocated for uniting the seminaries to be self-sufficient and to see the difficulty through together, without abandoning a single teacher. This raised confidence among colleagues and co-workers, and over a dozen semi-



naries in east China first came together in Nanjing to form Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, retaining a large group of staff and financial strength, though it was hard going initially.

Later, about a dozen northern seminaries, with their staff and students joined Nanjing Union Theological Seminary as well. Y.T. pointed out that our guiding principle in this union must be to respect each other in matters of faith and practice.

But the establishment of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary and the support of a few other seminaries could not satisfy Y.T. Wu. He was more concerned with how we should manage to keep up with the times, and what sort of theology we would have to equip our students, staff, the Chinese churches, our clergy colleagues and Chinese Christians in general. This was a question of the renewal and upbuilding of theology, which at times could hardly be managed. It is for us now—his successors—to continue Y.T.'s legacy in promoting theological reconstruction.

The second person I would like to speak about is someone many of us remember often: Comrade Luo Zhufeng. When Nanjing Union Theological Seminary was first established, he was head of the Religious Affairs Bureau of East China and a frequent visitor to the seminary. His humble, sincere and friendly attitude made him many staunch friends here.

In recent years, we have often heard it said that the government should strengthen its oversight of religion, as if cadres were managers who had no need of oversight themselves, and those in religious circles were not in control, but only objects of this oversight. When Luo Zhufeng came to the seminary, he seemed like someone here to learn or a friend; everyone found him very accessible. He always said that though he was not a Christian, still, the fact was that Christianity had a two-thousand-year history, so many theologians, the fruits of whose study were accepted by so many, and that all this was part of our human heritage. In a large nation like China there must be some who were familiar with and studied Christianity; China could not be left behind in this area. He also said that if one day he were no

longer a cadre involved in government religious work, he would like to become a student of Christian theology and even a scholar of theology. Those who pursue a narrowly-define “spirituality” tend to discount theology, while Luo, a Communist intellectual, thought so highly of it. It is worth mentioning that Luo later wrote a book *Religion under Chinese Socialism*, a scholarly affirmation that religion is not an opiate.

During the Cultural Revolution, some rebel factions in Shanghai turned up an essay I had published in the *Nanjing Theological Review* in 1957, “On Christian Theism.” They claimed it was my way of propagating theism and had to be criticized. I heard that they had big character posters ready. But Luo Zhufeng opposed them. He said that even the head of the Party School propagated atheism—was that any different from the head of a seminary publishing an essay on theism? Because of Luo’s intellectual acumen, the rebel factions were unable to argue with him, and so he was able to protect me. He was a true friend. He himself came under attack as well—the rebel faction forced him to live in a dark corner where he could not even stand up straight. Yet he did not forget to protect a friend. I have always been immensely moved by Luo’s example.

Talk delivered during celebrations of 50th anniversary of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary.

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