

# CHINESE THEOLOGICAL REVIEW 1985

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## PREFACE

I am very pleased to be asked to write the preface to this first issue of the Chinese Theological Review.

Chinese is now so extensively used in the Chinese churches that friends outside not well-versed in the language find it frustrating trying to know some of the thinking that is going on among Chinese Christians. The Review is truly something that has come for such a time as this, and we hope it can appear regularly on a year to year basis.

There are persons abroad who try to make out that the Chinese church and its Three-Self Movement (for self-government, self-support and self-propagation) are opportunist, serving political purposes and preaching a biased message not fully Christian. Just a casual reading of the articles presented here will show how little ground this accusation has. This accusation is actually based on a very condescending view of church members. The fact is that, in our structurally post-denominational church, our Bible-loving, Bible-honoring and Bible-studying Christians are not theologically so blind and indiscriminating as to fall victim to false teachings thrust upon them by preachers.

On the other hand, I wish to give my personal reaction to the alarm and disappointment voiced by some friends abroad upon their failure to find in China anything approaching liberation theology, and that after over thirty years since Liberation! To them Chinese Christianity is still "pre-liberation" and "colonial," and Chinese Christians, theologically conservative and politically pro-socialist, are compartmentalized and dwell in two realms. Even granting that the church services they attend and the sermons they hear are not representative of the whole of China, their impression is not altogether wrong. In fact the articles collected here may to a certain extent confirm their impression. While I do not mean to justify this state of affairs, I do feel that, in this connection, a Chinese angle of approach may be worth mentioning.

The separation of spirituality from society and the viewing of things as belonging to two realms has had a long history within the church with quite strong theological undergirding. It represents one important tradition in the 19th and 20th century missionary heritage and still has strong staying power in China today. What has come to be a motto in the Three-Self Movement, *ai guo ai jiao* (love the church and love the motherland), at least permits this dichotomy. After all, compartmentalism has not proved itself in our post-liberation period to be such a harmful thing as it sometimes has been in the past. Our observations over the last thirty years do not bear out the judgment that such a stance necessarily leads Christians to be apolitical. Certainly these Christians are no less participatory than other Christians or other citizens. Furthermore, they change theologically too, although the changes are not so spectacular as some of our friends would like them to be.

The Three-Self Movement and the more recently organized China Christian Council aim at uniting all men and women of Protestant faith. We want to avoid the reproduction of the pattern in some other countries in which Protestants are grouped into "ecumenicals" and "evangelicals." Faith, hope, love and experience combine to tell us that, in the concrete situation of China that we find ourselves in, it is possible to avoid that pattern. Hence we want to insure the growth of this unity and do nothing to jeopardize it. The last thing we want is a split in the fellowship. For the sake of this unity, in matters of faith, worship and theology, our policy is generally one of equality and mutual respect, not one of offending or inciting people's religious feelings. To convert certain Christians from their compartmentalism to theologies with articulate social and political content, or vice versa, is not our priority. Our priority is to work together on such things as printing Bibles, reopening churches, publication of Christian literature, strengthening theological training centers, working both in political and

theoretical fields for the better implementation of the policy of religious freedom, improving the work of Christian nurture in churches as well as in groups meeting in homes, and so on. These are the very things which unite us and help us discover and learn from each other.

Ours is a unity worth paying the price for. We have not found that this unity results in stagnation. Three-Self is a newborn thing since Liberation and independence. It is neither "pre-liberation" nor "colonial." It is a mass movement in which very many Christians move forward together, although perhaps at a slower pace than expected by some.

With all the importance given these days to contextualization, it may not be in fashion to say that in our view theology must be in conversation not only with the social and cultural context within which the church finds its being, but also within the minds and hearts of the masses of the Christians within the fold of the church. A "contextualized theology" appreciated only by socially conscientized intellectuals abroad but foreign to its own church constituency right at home is an anomaly. We are supported spiritually and materially by our own Christians in China. To them is our first attachment. To be truly their own native sons and daughters is the glory of our theologians. We write first of all for domestic consumption, that is, for Chinese Christians' nourishment and edification. We meet them where they are in ways they can accept. We do not impose on them anything they are not ready for. Theological changes are definitely taking place, but these changes, instead of attuning themselves to elitist tastes elsewhere, must reflect and push forward changes - slow as these may seem-in the spirituality and intellectuality of the masses of Chinese Christians. Theologians and rank-and-file Christians need to be in a dialogical give-and-take relationship of mutual learning and nurturing. Dialogues with culture, with natural and social sciences, with philosophy and with theologians' international community are valuable insofar as they can be channeled to serve the needs of rank-and-file Christians. We value the work of those theologians who can part with their individualistic heroism, humbly and not condescendingly orient themselves to the fellow-Christians at their gate, listen earnestly to them, learn from them and summarize their insights. Chinese Christians are supporting all the positive changes in our society brought about by socialism. The religious commitment and spirituality of these Christians-no matter of what sort theologically -cannot really remain untouched by their social and political stand, although in many cases the changes are just "touches" and are nothing drastic. It is for theologians to be sensitive to these touches and to reflect them honestly and reverently in their work.

It is this new, unprecedented width in the range of Christian oneness, brought to reality as "ecumenicals" became more evangelical and "evangelicals" became more ecumenical in the last thirty years, that I think is the growing edge of Chinese theological renewal and deserves more attention and thanksgiving.

If all of this is a defense, it is one not of compartmentalism, but of the right of Christians of all sorts to be equally regarded, of our responsibility to keep Christians of all sorts in the common bond of fellowship, and of the importance of staying close to and reflecting and molding the constituency given to us.

I want to express most sincerely my and the readers' gratitude to the editor of this volume, Janice Wickeri, of Tao Fong Shan Ecumenical Center and of Ta Kung Pao, Hong Kong, and Philip Wickeri, Overseas Coordinator of Amity Foundation, China, and of the same Ecumenical Center, for their wide reading of Chinese journals, their judgment in the selection of articles and their careful and excellent work of translation. Thanks are also due to Ewing W. Carroll of the China Liaison Office, Hong Kong, of the United Methodist Church, U.S.A., Peter J. Barry, M.M. of the Holy Spirit Study Center, Hong Kong, and Dr. Peter Lee of Tao Fong Shan Ecumenical Center for translating some of the articles, and to the Canada China Program of the Canadian Council of Churches, the China Study Project and to the journals,

Missiology, Ching Feng and Bridge for their kind permission to use translations and articles prepared by them. Finally, I want to thank Marvin Hoff of the Foundation for Theological Education in South East Asia for his thoughtfulness and faithfulness in seeing this project through the press.

I sincerely believe the publication of this Review will help greatly in presenting the thought-content of present-day Chinese Protestantism in international inter-church exchanges across language barriers. I am sure I represent the authors of all the articles and Chinese Christians in general in saying that we are grateful to the readers for their interest, concern and prayers, and that we would appreciate their reflections on the phenomena herein made manifest as something of what Protestantism is in present-day China.

K.H. Ting

*Nanjing, China*  
*November, 1985*

## EDITOR'S NOTE

The Chinese Theological Review (I) is the product of a desire to make available to a wider readership a broad spectrum of current Chinese theological writings. Its aim is to be a link between the Christian community in China and those abroad through the more widely current medium of the English language, providing to those outside China a vivid picture of Chinese Protestant thinking as it has been evolving over the last five years. At the same time, through both current writings and by the inclusion of a much earlier piece, the Review seeks to show the background as well as the underlying continuity of developments as reflected in the self understanding of Chinese Christians.

This is not a collection of essays and documents about the Chinese Protestant Church. That Church speaks here for itself, in its many different voices, out of its many different experiences; from veteran evangelists to professors of theology to a recent seminary graduate. Since there is an active interest overseas in what is preached in the churches of China, we are especially happy to include a selection of sermons, most of which have not previously been available in translation. Materials have been selected from those published in *Tian Feng*, Sermons, and the Nanjing Theological Review during the period from 1980 to the present. Several essays (Theological Mass Movements in China; Chinese Christianity in Theological Reflections; and The Church in China: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow) were originally written in English for presentation or publication abroad. No attempt has been made to be exhaustive, but rather to present an overview of the range of subjects and approaches reflecting the multifaceted unity of the Church in China today which Bishop Ting refers to in his preface. At the same time, we have tried to collect in one volume a number of materials which have had great importance for the Christian community in China during these years, such as the Foreword to the new hymnal and the Catechism.

The reader will find Y.T. Wu mentioned in several of the essays and sermons, as an honored founder of the ThreeSelf Movement and as a powerful influence in Chinese theological thinking. One of his essays has been included here in an appendix because it represented something new in Chinese theology in its time and because it illustrates the links between past and present theological developments in China.

Pinyin romanization has been used to render Chinese names and terms, except where another form is more familiar or is known to be a personal preference. All Biblical quotations are taken from the Revised Standard Version unless another version had been used in a previously published translation. Sources and a brief identification of the author follow each article.

I would like to express my thanks and those of every one associated with the Review to the Chinese authors of the articles for allowing us to share their work in this way. I would particularly like to thank Bishop K.H. Ting for kindly consenting to write the preface. Any errors in presenting or translating the materials here are, of course, my own.

I would also like to thank Philip Wickeri for assisting in the selection of materials and Rev. Marvin Hoff and the Foundation for Theological Education in South East Asia for support and encouragement for this project. Ms. Grace Tang, Mrs. Shirley Goss, Mrs. Margaret Allen and Mrs. Joann Robson of Tao Fong Shan Ecumenical Center gave much appreciated assistance in typing and proofreading the manuscript, and Mr. David Thome, Mr. Ekman Poon and colleagues of the Asia Pacific Office of the United Bible Societies provided their expertise in typesetting and format. Personal thanks are also due the other translators who are listed individually following each article. Where no other translator or source is indicated, the translation is my own.

Janice K. Wickeri

*Advent 1985  
Hong Kong*

# **ADDRESSES AND STATEMENTS**

## **RETROSPECT AND PROSPECT - K.H. Ting**

Opening Address Before the Third Chinese National Christian Conference

Delegates, Colleagues and Fellow Christians:

The Chinese National Christian Conference has not met for quite some time. That we are able to gather together today is the result of several factors: the smashing of the gang of four by the Chinese people under the leadership of the Communist Party; the end of disturbances and the realization of unity and stability over the last four years; the efforts over the last thirty years of Chinese Christians, who cherish both our church and our motherland, to uphold the principle of self-government, self-support and self-propagation for our church; Christ's protection of our colleagues and fellow Christians during the ten years of turmoil, enabling us to hold fast to our faith and maintain our Christian fellowship. Above all else, our gathering here today is due to the leading, the blessing and the grace of our heavenly Father and eternal loving God. With grateful hearts, we have come to take part in this conference.

In the four years since the smashing of the gang of four, and especially during the recent months of preparations for this conference, a great many pastoral workers and lay people around the nation have been looking to the future and pondering the question: What should the Chinese Church be doing in the days to come? The Standing Committee of the National Three-Self Movement discussed this question in our enlarged week-long meeting held at the end of February. Since the distribution of An Open Letter to Brothers and Sisters in Christ Throughout China by that meeting on 1 March of this year, Christians from around the nation have been more concerned about this question, and they have put forward a great number of opinions and suggestions.

We have come to the realization that now it is no longer as it was before Liberation: What the Chinese Church should be doing has become our own question, and it will be decided by we ourselves, rather than by others for us. We are controlling our own affairs and our discussions have been most enthusiastic. The independence of the church has actually been achieved. We are inspired and rejoice over this, in our belief that the Three-Self Patriotic Movement is very precious, and the outlook for Chinese Christianity is very hopeful.

It is especially worthwhile to point out that although we have been separated by great distances and have not seen one another for a long time, although we have had many different experiences over the past years, and despite the fact that outside anti-China forces have never ceased in sowing dissension, we are surprisingly united in our views on so many important matters. It can truly be said that we are "of the same mind, having the same love, in full accord and of one mind." How would we be able to explain this unity of heart and mind had not the Holy Spirit been at work, allowing us to communicate with one another in Christ.

I would now like to draw our opinions together in order to facilitate our further discussions over the next several days.

I think that what I have to say may be summarized in three sentences:

- (1) The accomplishments of the Three-Self Movement have been great;
- (2) The mission of the Three-Self Movement is not over;
- (3) The church must not only be self-run but well-run.

(1) The accomplishments of the Three-Self Movement have been great.

Although a small number of missionaries and church leaders proposed that the church implement the principle of self-government, self-support and self-propagation even before 1949 it could be truly realized on a nationwide scale only after Liberation. The Chinese people were oppressed by feudalism over a long period of time, and since the nineteenth century they were oppressed by colonialism and imperialism as well. The Chinese people have an anti-imperialist, anti-feudal revolutionary tradition, but Christianity entered China under the protection of the Western powers during the period of Western colonial expansion into China. Our people have a hatred of the unequal treaties which were forced upon China, but the foreigners' right to do missionary work depended on these very same treaties. Thus, ever since the entry of Christianity into China, it was difficult for the Chinese people to accept this religion because, although originally good, it had become an appendage to the machine of Western aggression, having a thousand and one links with colonialism and imperialism. Feudalism, imperialism and bureaucratic capitalism long weighed like three mountains on the backs of the Chinese people. Although there were missionaries and Chinese Church leaders who sympathized with and supported the people's efforts for liberation, in general, Christianity most often stood on the side of the reactionaries rather than with the Chinese people. As far as quite a large number of us are concerned, as a result of our affiliation with that kind of Christianity, our national consciousness certainly became weak; we were not of one mind with our own people and seemed to have become semi-Western. It was because of this that some of our Chinese people had the distressing saying: "One more Christian means one less Chinese." This saying was not without its measure of truth. At that time Christianity was generally regarded as a foreign religion about which they harbored deeply negative feelings. The clamor within the Church against the Communist party and the people was especially loud around the time of Liberation. How could the Christian gospel be effectively preached under such conditions when Chinese Christians and the people of the motherland lacked a common language? At that time, China was the country in which the Western missionary societies spent the most money and the field to which they sent the most missionaries. But the number of Christians was never large, and of that number quite a few were "rice" Christians.

Such a Christianity backed by foreign power lost its source of support after Liberation. As it became isolated within China, Christianity faced a difficult situation. It was then that Chinese Christians discovered that God would not quench the dimly burning wick of Chinese Christianity, but would enable it to begin to shine forth. In God's providence two things came to our aid: the first was the policy of religious freedom of the People's Republic of China, formulated by Chairman Mao and Premier Zhou; the second was the Three-Self Movement launched by Chinese Christians ourselves. It may be said without reservation that these two are signs which show that God has not abandoned us, but has prepared for us a new opportunity and a new beginning.

Communists being atheists, how can they also advocate the freedom of religion? There was a time when many of us raised this question, but after many years of observations and learning through experience, we do not feel that it is such a difficult thing to understand.

Communists are forthright. They do not cover up their view of religion but bring it out in the open for all to see. There are parties and politicians in the world who make use of religion for their own ends while making a big show of their respect for the church and their assistance to the faith. Because the Communist party does not wish to make any use of religion, it can forthrightly express its view of religion in no uncertain terms. We are completely free not to accept the Communist Party's religious outlook, but this should not suggest that we oppose all Communist Party points of view. For example, it would make no sense for us to oppose the Communist Party's proposal for the United Front.

The Chinese Communist Party attaches tremendous importance to the United Front. Communists know better than anyone else that building up the New China is not only the work of one party, but of all the people. They are uniting all who can be united for the common struggle. Like all other citizens, those



who believe in Jesus Christ ardently desire a strong and prosperous motherland and look forward to the early realization of the four modernizations; it is only natural that Christians are part of the United Front. There is freedom to maintain any religious faith and outlook and any worldview, under the principle of mutual respect. It is in this way that unity and stability, the formation of the United Front and the realization of the four modernizations are made possible. In the West there are those who persist in saying that the Communist Party wants to make uniform everyone's worldview and does not permit people to believe in religion. This view is utterly incorrect and reveals a real ignorance on the part of those who would think that the communists are so foolish.

The gang of four and the Communist Party are completely different. The gang of four wanted neither the four modernizations nor unity and stability. They had no use for veteran cadres, intellectuals, religious believers or the United Front. Because they wanted to eradicate religion, they had no regard for the policy of religious freedom. They disbanded all the Religious Affairs Bureaus, whose duty it was to act on behalf of the government in implementing the policy of religious freedom on all levels. The gang of four is not the Communist Party and the Communist Party is not the gang of four. The two should not be confused.

It was precisely because the Chinese Communist Party had this policy of religious freedom that we Christians were protected by the state after Liberation, even though we were not very popular with the people. Thus, Christianity was given the opportunity for a continued existence.

But this was not all. God also moved leaders with advanced thinking within the church to launch the Three-Self Patriotic Movement.

For Christianity to continue to exist in China and to serve as a witness to Jesus Christ, it would not have been enough to rely only on the national policy of religious freedom. It was also necessary to develop much more of a common language with the Chinese people, so that a foreign religion could be transformed into one which was China's own. Three-Self is a patriotic movement of Chinese Christians. It encourages Chinese Christians to develop a sense of national self-respect, to love our motherland, and to dedicate ourselves to the goal of national prosperity, walking and thinking together with our compatriots. With regard to the church, it stands for self-government, self-support and self-propagation, advocating an independent Chinese Church run by Chinese Christians ourselves.

The Three-Self Movement has accomplished at least the following three things over the last thirty years.

First, making Chinese Christians patriotic Christians. The Three-Self Movement helps us to differentiate major issues of principle in politics, so that we come to see that it is right to love the motherland. In 1949, many Christians did not quite understand the people's liberation movement and objected to it so much that "some of us, in complying with the wishes of certain individuals, prayed that God would drown the Liberation Army in the Yangtze River which it was about to cross to liberate the whole country. Today, no matter where we Chinese Christians meet, the overwhelming majority supports the people's liberation movement heartily. We give thanks to God in our prayers for the achievements of socialist New China. We are all willing to make our contributions toward the four modernizations of our country. That Christians should love our country has been taken for granted. This is the first time that a whole generation of Christians has emerged in this land of China who are patriotic and who have a common language with our compatriots since Christianity was introduced into China in the 19th century.

"Patriotism" is a good word. Moses, Daniel and many other prophets in the Bible were patriotic. In Western countries, however, abuse of this word has caused many righteous people to loathe it so that, as

soon as they hear the word 'patriotism, " they think of national chauvinists who bully weak nations, of those die-hards who wave banners for reactionary governments, crying: "This is my country, right or wrong." As for us, we would see first of all what a country has wrought for its broad masses before we make any evaluation of it. New China is the people's China. It exists for the broad masses of the people. It has brought liberation, benefits and happiness to its people. It is revolutionary and progressive. We love this country, of course. Needless to say, New China still has bad things left over from the old society and the people themselves have shortcomings. But the people have also been trying hard to overcome these shortcomings and bad things, in order to make the cause proceed from victory to victory. We feel therefore in the right and fully justified to love such a motherland.

Patriotism is the profound feeling of the people toward their motherland. This feeling reflects the self-respect and the self-confidence of the nation. It embodies the heroic commitment and struggle of its people to make their motherland independent, prosperous and strong. A patriot works actively to overcome the backwardness of the country, but without the inferiority complex which unduly humbles him or herself. Nor will he or she do anything which hurts the national dignity or falls short of national prestige.

We Christians see more clearly today than before that the Christian faith does not demand from us that we negate or look down on our nationality, but rather that we acknowledge it in good faith. The Book of Revelation tells us Jerusalem will descend from heaven one day. At that time there will be no temple, and many things which we have in today's world will be no more, including nationality. All these things will become one in Christ and Christ will become all in all. But today is not yet that day. Today, in consonance with divine providence, people belong to this or that nation and country. When the son of God became flesh, even he did not become a stateless nihilist. Jesus and many of his disciples were Jews. The gospel took form by uniting itself with Jewish life and culture. Paul also had strong national feelings, he called his compatriots "my brethren, my kinsmen by race." We are born Chinese not by our choice, not our parents'; it is God who so ordains. In this world, we cannot be good internationalists in the world family unless we first are patriots and stand with the Chinese people.

Secondly, changing the countenance of Christianity in China. Christianity in China has by and large rid itself of the control and exploitation of imperialism, bureaucratic capitalism and feudalism. It has become a religious community of self-government, self-support and self-propagation. It is no longer a dependent of foreign missionary societies, but is organized by a part of the Chinese citizenry out of our faith in and love of Christ. It is more and more a Christianity with Chinese characteristics. This Christianity does not take European and American Christianity as the norm, but it is also not anti-foreign. While affirming the universality of Christianity, we understand that Chinese Christianity cannot talk of making contributions to world Christianity unless it rids itself of its colonial nature, ceases to be a replica of foreign Christianity, does not antagonize or dissociate or alienate itself from the cause of the Chinese people, but joins them in that cause, plants its roots in Chinese culture, forms a Chinese self, and becomes a Chinese entity.

Chinese Christianity cannot change or cover up its history. Rather, we have to fully accept the historical lessons and write new pages for our history. The Three-Self Patriotic Movement has changed the countenance of the Christianity of the semi-colonial, semi-feudalistic old China to bring it into consonance with the face of socialist New China. It has cleansed the church and enabled the light of the gospel to shine forth.

These two accomplishments of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement lead inevitably to a third one, that is: the Three-Self Movement has helped persons in various circles of our society to gradually change their impressions of Chinese Christians and Chinese Christianity.

When Chinese Christian leaders put forward the principle of Three-Self it was affirmed by Premier Zhou, and soon afterwards was supported and encouraged by the People's Daily. During all these years, Chinese Christianity has implemented the principle of self-government, self-support and self-propagation, and Christians throughout the country have been doing many patriotic deeds. In the eyes of an increasing number of our compatriots, Christianity is no longer a foreign religion and Christians are no longer looked upon as foreign-worshipping or mere rice Christians. More and more people have recognized that Christians too are Chinese citizens who have the same national self-respect as they do and that Christianity is a religion which Chinese citizens are fully entitled to believe and uphold by their own choice. That there is such a change in public opinion means there will be fewer obstacles on the way to implementing the policy of religious freedom in the country. At present, the Three-Self organizations are helping in many ways to implement the policy of religious freedom in various parts of the country. In our work we come across many cadres and people who understand that Christianity is no obstacle to the four modernizations. They have good will towards us, respect our faith and firmly adhere to the policy in dealing with us. In the past 30 years, quite a lot of people have accepted the gospel of Christ and joined the church. The number of Christians throughout the country has increased to a certain extent. Anyway there is no sign of decrease. Now how could this be possible without the efforts of the Three-Self Movement to create the necessary conditions and to set up a new image of Chinese Christianity? Many things point to the fact that, because we have carried out the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, Christians and Christianity have undergone changes, and more and more people have a new understanding of, and a new relation with, Christians and Christianity. We deem it an honor that our Christianity was not tolerated by the gang of four. The maltreatment meted out to churches and Christians by the gang of four was unpopular precisely because Christians had carried out the Three-Self Patriotic Movement after Liberation. The broad masses of the people knew that this treatment was not in keeping with the policy of the state. We had the people's sympathy, and that is very precious.

We Christians have the mission to witness to Christ in our motherland but, owing to the historical fact that the introduction of Christianity into China was connected with the imperialist invasion of China, the doors of China have long been closed to the gospel. In view of our long-term mission to witness for Christ, it is obvious that our three accomplishments have tremendous historical significance. Looking back now, we can say that opposition to the Three-Self Movement not only showed a lack of patriotism, but in a sense also negated the cause of the gospel and therefore was harmful to the cause of Christianity. We can also now say that the anti-Three-Self road was politically unjust and religiously self-destructive for Christianity. Without the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, Chinese Christianity could not have a present to speak of, nor would it have a future. This has become very clear among us Chinese Christians.

(2) The mission of the Three-Self Movement is not yet finished.

The accomplishments of the Three-Self Movement are great, but its mission is still far from finished.

The pioneering stage of the Three-Self Movement is past, but its results must be consolidated, defended, enlarged and developed. This requires us to carry on the Three-Self Patriotic Movement.

For a long time, the Three-Self Patriotic Movement has held high the banner of patriotism, helped us to distinguish wrong from right, to cherish the country and the church, to become good Christians and at the same time good citizens. The Three-Self Movement must continue to hold high the banner of patriotism, helping our fellow-Christians in our political study and in making our contributions, together with the people of the whole nation, to the task of safeguarding our national stability and unity, of realizing the four modernizations, of bringing about the return of Taiwan to the motherland and of opposing hegemonism and aggression and safeguarding peace.

There are many new Christians who, besides lacking spiritual edification, know little of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement. Christians are eager to receive education and reeducation on the movement. We should therefore explain to them the principles of self-government, self-support and self-propagation as well as the compatibility of loving one's country and one's church. With the help of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement we must teach fellow-Christians of the whole nation, especially the younger ones, to care deeply for our motherland and the socialist cause, and be proud of the history and progress of our country. We must help them to observe the teachings of Christ, to increase the demands they make of themselves, to study and work hard, to oppose the corrosion of unhealthy thinking coming both from inside and outside of China so that, no matter whether it be in the family, in the neighborhood, in production or at their work posts, they are all good witnesses who bear beautiful fruit, thus shining forth for the Lord and their motherland.

Today, whether we Christians go to church to attend religious activities, or meet in homes for worship, we are all glorifying God and benefiting our fellow-men so long as we praise and serve God, exhort each other, and edify each other. However, there are anti-China organizations abroad which wantonly proclaim an "underground evangelism" and raise money for their own designs. They claim to establish in China their so-called "underground churches." Let it be asked, if they indeed have no ulterior motives and are not doing some illegal business, why must they go underground? Some leaders of these organizations live very corrupt lives, their actions are not worthy of the word "evangelism." For the sake of protecting our church from impurity and of safeguarding our national security, we must heighten our vigilance over their use of religion to make money, to launch anti-China propaganda and to carry out their subversive plots against us. We church workers and Christians are resolved to observe the laws as loyal citizens. We are resolved to protect the name of the church, disapproving of anybody inside or outside China who humiliates the church by conducting in the name of Christianity, illegal activities detrimental to the physical and mental well-being of our fellow Christians and to public order.

To defend and uphold religious freedom is an integral part of the Chinese people's efforts to uphold socialist democracy and the legal system. The efforts we religious people make from the standpoint of patriotism have been regarded by Chairman Hua in his speech at the recently held National People's Congress as "precious efforts." This gives us great encouragement. Today, the policy of religious freedom is being implemented in various parts of the country and remarkable strides have been made as far as Christianity is concerned. This is something Christians throughout the nation feel happy and heartened about. But for various reasons, the implementation of the policy of religious freedom still meets with difficulties in many places. That means we still have a lot to do. The Three-Self organizations must therefore continue to do their best to assist the government and the groups concerned to perform this aspect of their work well.

The above-mentioned are all tasks which the ThreeSelf Movement still has to do. It is for this reason that we say its mission is not yet finished.

(3) From a self-run to a well-run church.

With respect to the church, the main question which the Three-Self Movement asks is who should run the Chinese Church. The answer is quite clear: it must be self-run, Chinese Christians ourselves have to take over its management. Once this question has been settled, we are faced with a second: how can we make it a well-run church, that is, how shall we build up the body of Christ? The emphasis in self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating is on the "self"; this means ourselves. Now we must go one step further. The Church must be well-governed, well-supported, well-propagating.

The Three-Self Movement has never worked for Three-Self for its own sake. From its beginning, the movement envisioned a well-governed, well-supported, well-propagating Church of Christ growing up on

Chinese soil. The Lord has shown us that, in order for Christians to build up the Body of Christ in China, we must model ourselves after the church of the Apostolic age. We must obey the God who reveals Himself through the Bible. We must absorb the fine traditions and the solemn lessons of church history. And we must allow the Holy Spirit to show us a path which others have not walked before but which is appropriate for China. We must dare to leave behind the insights and symbolic representations of faith gained by other nations, other ages and other Christians to allow our own spiritual experience to blossom forth, so that the wisdom and stature of the Chinese Church can grow together with the love of God, men and women for it. However, the policy of religious freedom, along with many other correct policies of the Communist Party, was destroyed during the year of turmoil owing to the obstructive and destructive ultra-leftist line represented by the gang of four. Jesus' instruction to us to accomplish the building up of the church was also obstructed in this way.

We are sorry to note that, even though our brothers and sisters are so enthusiastic, the church has not done well in ministering to them during these years. If church members do not live in consonance with the Bible in matters of faith and spirituality, they will gain nothing good. If the church does not act in consonance with the Bible, it will tend to be side-tracked, giving rise to disorder. This does not benefit Christians, the church, or society in the least.

We know that we should be humble and cautious in explaining the Word of God. In dispensing Christ's truth we must be comprehensive and genuine. We must not go according to any human meaning because it is not ourselves we are propagating, but Jesus Christ as Lord. Christian gatherings and church life do not depend on surroundings but, as Paul reminds us, "All things should be done decently and in order." In this way, we will be fit to serve the Lord, so as to more easily give shape to the Body of Christ and witness to those outside the Church. There are places now where it is not like this. Christ's truth is falsely spoken, it is not comprehensive and loses its wholeness. When people gather, the leader follows his or her own will. There are even those who do not hesitate to say whatever some people would like to hear in order to better their own position. Serving Christ becomes the path to riches and the church is made very impure as a result. These circumstances are easily exploited by evil persons. Christians today hunger and thirst for the gospel. We must do well our work of carefully watching over them, guiding them and training them. Then the evil ones will be deprived of their opportunities and the Church many develop in good health.

Pastoral workers and lay people in the church have been moved by one and the same Holy Spirit to share in common the conviction that, today, as we continue to carry out the work of the Three-Self Movement, the work of tending the Lord's flock by a well-run church has already been placed on the agenda for Chinese Christianity.

After the turmoil brought on by the gang of four, we Chinese Christians are urgently in need of Bibles. In order to offer pastoral care, the Chinese Christian Church must publish the Bible. At present, we want to continue to publish the edition now in common use, both in order to meet the urgent needs and to supply our members with what they are accustomed to.

Over the last decades, there have been developments in our Chinese language and written characters. Ancient Biblical manuscripts have also been newly discovered. Therefore, it is necessary to carry out revisions of the Chinese translation of the Bible in order that it better expresses the original meaning. This, however, is a solemn, holy work and it must be carried out with care. It is impossible to estimate now when a new translation can be published and supplied for members' trial use. In any event, it will be number of years hence.

We would all like to see periodicals published which would be helpful in introducing basic Christian doctrine, in studying the Bible, in cultivating the life of the Spirit, and in raising the standard of our

colleagues' work.

Furthermore, we all feel that regular teaching at Nanjing Union Seminary should be promptly resumed in order to carry out theological education appropriate to our situation in China and to prepare servants for the Lord's use.

Christians are gathering together in meetings throughout the country, enjoying fellowship in Christ, mutually helping and encouraging one another. But, we are still relatively scattered. We lack ties with other members of the Body of Christ. We don't get the supplies, the interchange, the assistance that we should have. Because of this, we may sometimes be off the mark. We have all felt that we should find ways to enable Christians in any place who wish to benefit from mutual ties to do so.

The proposal to form a Christian organization to carry out certain kinds of church work including those enumerated here and to serve the church and its members according to the principles of self-government, self-support and self-propagation has met with approval throughout the country. It can be seen that this is indeed a universal desire of our Christians.

After study and discussion by all concerned, we can see more clearly now that the national Three-Self organization and the national Church affairs organization both have as their subjects Christians in China. One is a people's organization made up of Chinese Christians as Chinese, the other is a Christian organization made up of Chinese Christians as Christians. If the Three-Self Movement is a patriotic movement on the part of Chinese Christians, then the church affairs organization will represent a Three-Self Patriotic Chinese Church Movement on the part of Christians who uphold patriotism and the Three-Self principle. Both organizations cherish the church and the motherland.

In all matters touching on faith, our principle is one of mutual respect, neither meddling with each other's faith nor making it uniform.

The following Question has been raised: Why not put the handling of church affairs under the National Three-Self Patriotic Committee as one of its subsidiary departments, as a church affairs subcommittee, for example; Why do we need another structure?

We know that in the situation where we have not had an organ for handling church affairs, the National Three-Self Committee could not help but take on some of the church's own work. For example, rather than awaiting the formation of a church affairs organ, it did much of the work toward publishing the Bible. We also know, however, that it is the patriotic movement of Christians in the entire country. The objective of the Committee of the Chinese Christian Three-Self Patriotic Movement, is: to unite all Christians in China so as to take an active part in socialist reconstruction and in patriotic movements, to adhere to law of the land, to assist the government in implementing the policy of religious freedom, to work for the complete realization of self-government, self-support and self-propagation by the Chinese Christian Church, to eliminate imperialist influences, to oppose aggression and to defend peace. It was on this basis that the national Three-Self Movement Committee was formed. How can an organization with such a purpose regularly and permanently take on the duty of developing the work that is the church's own? We can envisage a great deal of work and church affairs. If we gave this work to the Three-Self Movement the latter would have to expend a great deal of effort on it. In reality, this would change the original nature and purpose of the Three-Self organization, and its Three-Self principles would be diluted.

In the same way, the idea of making the Three-Self Patriotic Movement subordinate to the church affairs organization is also inappropriate.

For this reason, and taking the actual and historical situation of Christianity in our country as a point

of departure, we believe that it is most suitable to set up two different organizations at the national level, even though there may be some duplication of personnel. The national church affairs organization and the national Three-Self Patriotic organization will be on an equal footing, each with its own particular emphasis. The two are comparable to the two hands of a body, joined in a relationship of intimate cooperation. It is not a case of one leading the other. With these two organizations, the scope of our unity is even broader.

As for whether each locality is to set up its own church affairs organization, or how such an organization should be set up, these are matters for each locality to consider for itself.

At the enlarged meeting of the Standing Committee of the national Three-Self Movement, we sought the guidance of God and had deliberations on the question of forming the new national organization, and decided to carry out the necessary preparations. As we hold this national meeting, we hope we would continue to seek God's guidance on this matter and to exchange ideas fully.

During this national meeting, let us look toward the future and deliberate about how Chinese Christianity should be hereafter. This is certainly not to exclude discussion of the past or present, nor to exclude local problems. If we exclude these, we would not do a good job of discussing the future either. I hope we can, as the saying goes, "Say all we know without reserve." Especially on the subject of making the church well-governed, well-supported and one in which the propagation is done well, we have valuable experiences which are worth sharing.

With respect to organization, we are to revise the constitution of the Committee of the Christian Three-Self Patriotic Movement and elect a new committee. Then we are to deliberate on the question of the church affairs organization. If conditions are ripe, we can take advantage of this conference and form the organization on the foundation which has already been prepared.

Colleagues and fellow-Christians, before I close, I would like to speak for a moment about our international relationships. We are all happy to note that New China has friends all over the world. There are also a good number of individuals and groups, in churches outside the country, including some former missionaries to China, who have shown friendship toward both New China and Christianity within New China. They are happy to see China's progress on all fronts and they have no intention of interfering in the internal affairs of either our nation or our church. They support and help us through prayer and other means. We don't speak of them in the same breath as overseas anti-China forces. Rather, we welcome their friendly attitudes and are grateful for their prayers and assistance. Chinese Christianity cherishes its own special path, but this does not exclude beneficial international contacts, which we prize. We are willing, insofar as it is within our ability, to develop mutual friendship and give-and-take relationships as within the Body of Christ with foreign churches and Christians that treat us as equals and respect our principled stand of independence and self-determination.

Although we have a good many friends in foreign religious circles, there are also some who are fanning the flames of anti-China-ism. They exploit our ten years of turmoil in order to deceive Christians. They depend on political and economic power and unscrupulously spread rumors to slander New China, attacking the patriotic thinking, speeches and activities of Chinese Christians. They flatly deny the lessons of past foreign evangelistic activities in China. They ignore the Chinese Christians' independence and self-determination in the work of the gospel and the justice, reasonableness and necessity of self-government, self-support and self-propagation. They look upon Three-Self as a thorn in the flesh and pretend to be ignorant of it, vainly attempting to return Chinese Christianity to its colonial past. Chinese Christianity is now more unified than ever before but they are extremely dissatisfied with this fact and are striving to divide us. To deal with this kind of outside meddling and infiltration, all Christians in our country must, in the spirit of patriotism, increase our vigilance, guard the fruits of the past thirty years and

defend the Three-Self path of our church. Christians in our People's Republic of China would use the words of Paul in confronting those who vainly hope to induce us to abandon our Three-Self path: "For I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of my ground for boasting."

We want to declare before the whole world: church and evangelistic work inside China is the right and responsibility of our Chinese Church; no people outside China, regardless of the color of their skin, should carry on any activity of a missionary nature inside China or directed at China, without the expressed consent of Chinese Church authorities. If such people were indeed motivated by nothing but their faith, then they would at least stop to consider Paul's statement: "My ambition is to preach the Gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on another man's foundation" (Rom. 15:20). Once Corinth had a church, Paul said to the Corinthians that he wanted "to preach the Gospel in lands beyond" them, in order to avoid boasting of work already done by others, for he did not want to preach the Gospel "in another's field" (2 Cor. 10:16). Now, outside of China there are those who are trying to mobilize Christians to leave their own places where their preaching is most suitable, and send them into our field, thus destroying the foundation of our thirty years of Three-Self. We cannot help asking, why would they want to do this?

We want to bring Christians in other countries to see our Chinese Christian aspirations for independence. We want to help them to distinguish right from wrong on this matter, so that they may be friends of New China and friends of the Christian Church in New China. We are opposed to the anti-China plotting and the propaganda, infiltration and meddling on the part of anti-China elements in religious circles overseas.

Colleagues and fellow-Christians, the Three-Self Patriotic Movement is just, it is reasonable and it is necessary. It has an important political significance as well as an important theological and spiritual significance. Today, this movement must continue to develop towards the future. At the same time, all of us see clearly that tending the Lord's flock, the task which Christ entrusted to Peter after his resurrection, is also the task which has been entrusted to us by our Risen Lord. Our Christians urgently need the church to guide them along a path in which the church and the motherland can both be cherished. They are like the five thousand who came to hear Jesus Christ. We cannot send them out running and searching hither and yon, lest they be cheated. According to the Lord's own instructions, we should instead let all sit around him in an orderly manner. We should take out the five loaves and two fishes to present to Jesus, so that he might take them, bless them and distribute them to all. In this way everyone will have enough to eat, and the church will be able to develop in good health along the correct path. This will be good for Christians, for the church and for the motherland. Although our own strength is limited, we believe that, with the grace and blessing of our Lord Jesus Christ, a self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating Chinese Church, in consonance with the realities of our motherland, can grow up and become strong on our soil and in our people's midst. With this church we can make a great contribution to our motherland and to the world.

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## **ANOTHER LOOK AT THREE-SELF - K.H. Ting**

Can Three-Self be dispensed with, or is it necessary? Chinese Christians attach great importance to this question.

From the middle of the 19th century on there were people in the church who spoke of Three-Self. They realized that if the church was to thrive in any country, it could not be dependent on foreign countries for long; it was necessary for local Christians to support the church themselves. Some were dissatisfied with racial injustices existing in the church. Others, out of a sense of national awakening, were averse to missionaries and national preachers who taught Christians not to love their motherland. These experiences were all valuable. However there were also those who, mouthing Three-Self slogans, used indigenization as a facade, or advertised that they had already practiced Three-Self, in order to cover up the foreign religion which they in fact represented. At that time few people discussed the importance of Three-Self from the perspective of the nature of the church. It was also hard to find people who spoke of the necessity of Three-Self from the standpoint of defending the motherland.

On the eve of China's liberation, questions about Three-Self subsided in our church. At that time, the most outstanding question was: will there be freedom of religion in China under the leadership of the Communist Party? Will it be possible for the church to continue to exist? Many Christians prepared themselves to go to jail or to undergo all kinds of persecution. But for Christians in China the answer to this question became clear, for the most part, by the early 1950's. Beginning then, Chinese Christians more and more realized that this was not the biggest problem.

This is not to say that the policy of religious freedom has been well implemented in each and every part of the country since the early 1950's. We know that after 1957 there were ultra-leftist tendencies, and that excessive relapses occurred, especially during the Cultural Revolution. Since the downfall of the gang of four, the government at all levels has been doing tremendous work to carry out the policy of religious freedom. However, even today problems still exist in many places. Three-Self organizations and Christian councils must continue to work with the government at all levels to solve these problems. So long as there is resistance to and transgression of the policy of religious freedom, hindrance of normal religious activities and violation of people's rights, we are obliged to work with concerned parties to seek proper solutions. At the same time, we will oppose all unlawful activities within the church, as well as infiltration from abroad.

But we realize that the attitude towards religious freedom of all bodies in China which determine policy, make laws or are involved with administration (the National People's Congress, the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the Central Committee of the Party, the Central People's Government and the Religious Affairs Bureau of the State Council) is very clear. What remains are only problems of implementation on the local level, and these problems are receiving more and more attention as time goes on. The Bureau of Religious Affairs clearly expressed support for our proposal regarding the revision of the article on religion in the national Constitution. This gives us great encouragement. During the past three years, Protestant

churches have been opening and re-opening at the rate of one or two churches every two or three days. This is also an indication of the situation with regard to religious freedom in China.

Not long after liberation, Chinese Christians began to realize that if there was to be a bright future for the church, it was not enough to depend only on the state's policy of religious freedom. It is true that people are free to believe in Christianity, but do they want to exercise this freedom? In the early 50's did not some people exercise their religious freedom by leaving the church?

The Holy Spirit acting through history made the church in China ask itself a question far more important than that of religious freedom. This was the first time that Chinese Christians all over China formulated and tried to answer our own question. It was a question about the nature of the Chinese Church: how was the church to break away from a place it was unwilling to be in and enter a new life? How was the church to repent, to change, to re-direct and renew itself, to establish itself as the Body of Christ, to make the church not only a church in men's minds, but primarily a church according to the mind of Christ?

Chinese Christianity was not without an answer to this question. A common and concise answer, which all the Christians of the country could accept and support was: Follow the Three-Self road.

Usually participants in any great movement in history cannot completely comprehend its full meaning right from the beginning. It is only after the passing of a few years, several decades, or even several hundred years that the full meaning becomes clearer and clearer to posterity.

In the beginning, Christianity was merely a sect of Judaism. Because it had not yet broken out of its Jewish narrow-mindedness, Christianity required people to accept Jewish laws such as circumcision in addition to accepting Jesus as Lord. Paul introduced the idea of justification by faith over against justification by law, which enabled Christianity to break out of its Jewish framework. This provided the necessary conditions for Christianity to become the common religious faith of the people of every race on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. It also provided the necessary conditions for Christianity to become a Western religion, and finally, a world religion. This was the first barrier in history which Christianity broke through, and it was perhaps the most important barrier. The incidents recorded in chapters 10 and 15 of the Book of Acts had much to do with the future course of church history, and even of world history, but Paul and Peter had no means of foreseeing this.

However, Christianity is still basically a Western world religion or a world Western religion. Men and women today are yearning for a new breakthrough. On the horizon of history, besides Christianity in its western form, we will see it in eastern and southern and northern forms, and forms which embody the special cultural characteristics of each people. Then, the multi-colored picture of Christianity will really appeal to people's hearts and move their inner beings. During the last several years, far-sighted men and women in churches of every country have come forth and promoted a Christianity that takes root in their own countries. We value such work and accomplishments very highly despite its fragmentary and limited nature.

The church in China is very small. But in two respects the Chinese Christian Three-Self Movement is significant for world church history as a sort of breakthrough.

1. Located in the eastern part of the world and in such a country as China, Christianity is now making itself indigenous on a large scale, at a comparatively rapid pace and at a deep level. Many Christians throughout the whole world (including missionaries) had this dream, but it is now being fulfilled.

2. Historically, since the appearance of this new thing called socialism; in a society with a history of several thousand years of feudalism and over one hundred years of semi-colonialism; at a time when several hundred million people, having gone through a long serious trial so that even today they are carrying its wounds, are anxious to bring about more changes and are using both their hands to construct a new life under socialism; at a time when industrial and agricultural production, cultural thinking, morality and the spiritual life are all undergoing changes and present China with a rich, colorful and very lively new prospect; in an environment where many new things are so inspiring even as there are old things which still cause people to sigh, Christians, numbering very few in the whole population, are consciously trying to root Christianity in the soil of their land, so that new qualities will spring forth. This has never happened before in history. This is the unique characteristic of the mission of our Chinese Christians. Our success will strengthen the faith many people in China and in the world have in Christ and in the church. Our failure would be their loss.

Thus, colleagues and fellow Christians, when Three-Self is promoted, it is not due to anybody's ambition to reach for something beyond our grasp, waiting to astonish people by performing something unnecessary. The reconstruction of the motherland requires that Chinese Christians act in this way; the mission of witnessing to the gospel requires that Chinese Christians follow this path; the self-realization of the catholicity or universal nature of the Christian Church requires that Chinese Christians do this. We will speak below of these three aspects.

### **I. The Reconstruction of the Motherland Obliges Us to Act in This Way.**

After the Opium War, China was considered the sick man of East Asia, and suffered all kinds of humiliation at the hands of foreign aggressors. Foreign warships and troops could go anywhere they pleased, and foreign goods occupied our markets. National industry could not compete and survive. The people suffered poverty and sickness, and beggars filled the streets. Today this situation is long past. Chinese Christians are happy and thankful because of this. It is only reasonable that we develop an ardent love for New China.

The incarnation of God not only shows us God's great love by entering the world, experiencing human misery, and completing his work of salvation by dying on the cross, but at the same time, it tells us something of how we should regard the flesh and material things. Because they are channels by which God enters into the world, flesh and material things are not to be despised. They are worthy, and can become, indeed ought to become, vessels conveying holy love. We believe that God's love and concern for man is all-embracing. Bodily and material life, intellectual development, the socio-political sphere, ethics and morality are all included

within the realm of God's love and concern. He wants us to escape from suffering, and enjoy peace and prosperity in a more reasonable social system. Such an environment will be more helpful for seeking and discovering truth, and for knowing and submitting to God's revelation.

We know that Christ, the Word incarnate, was a citizen of a particular country, not a man without a country. He did not adopt a nihilistic attitude towards his own people. He studied his national culture and religious traditions. He announced that he came not to abolish these traditions, but to fulfill them. His people were under the political domination of Rome, and because of this, when he looked on the capital city, he wept. This was patriotism in that situation.

In the Bible, patriotic feelings often showed themselves in the grief and indignation the people harbored when their motherland was in peril. Psalm 137 is quite typical:

By the waters of Babylon there we sat down and wept, When we remembered Zion. On the willows there we hung up our lyres. For there our captors required of us songs, and our tormentors, mirth, saying, 'Sing us one of the songs of Zion!' If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither! Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy!

However, the Bible also portrays a patriotism filled with exaltation at the renewal and reconstruction of the motherland. Psalm 126 is an example:

When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, We were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; Then they said among the nations, 'The Lord has done great things for them.' The Lord has done great things for us: We are glad. Restore our fortunes, O Lord, Like the watercourses in the Negev! May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy!

During the disaster-ridden days experienced by the Chinese people, many of us did not cry with our suffering compatriots. This guilt is very hard for us to wipe out. Since the Chinese people have overthrown the three big mountains of feudalism, imperialism and bureaucratic capitalism, great changes have taken place. Today, on one-seventh of the world's arable land, we can feed one-fourth of the world's people. This is a great accomplishment. Now our country is putting more and more energy into the four modernizations. We Christians should be filled with gladness at the reconstruction of the motherland, and rejoice with those who rejoice.

However, the work of liberation is of long duration. China is still far from ideal, and there are vast areas of underdevelopment and darkness. People are now working hard in every field to expand the bright side and to overcome the dark side. They are making progress in the conquest of underdevelopment. Naturally, Chinese Christians do not stand aloof from all this activity. In the life of the nation, the church should make a clear distinction between right and wrong. She ought to protect, learn from and promote the good, and bring about the accomplishment of the good quickly. At the same time, the church ought to criticize and oppose evil things, and hasten their demise. This is real patriotism in today's situation.

As for the Christian church itself, we should naturally make certain adaptations so as to suit the conditions of the motherland. When Christianity entered China, it was associated with Western colonialism. This had serious consequences for both China and the Christian church. It was necessary for Chinese Christians to open a new page in the Day of Christianity. Today our country is independent and autonomous. If the Christian church as an organization does not seek independence and autonomy but continues to rely on others, would not this make the church a foreign enclave within the People's Republic of China? If foreign enemies are allowed to use our religion to carry out their objective of invading and destroying the rights and interests of the motherland, and reversing the new life of the people, would not this make our Christian church the partner of these enemies in New China?

Patriotism, whether it comes from grief and indignation over danger to the motherland, or from exaltation at her progress, arises from a sense of right and wrong, a sense of justice, and a sense of national belonging. It has led people to unstintingly perform all kinds of work and make all kinds of sacrifices to advance the motherland's welfare. It is something praiseworthy. Our Christian church ought to nourish this spirit, and certainly not despise it. During these years, Christians in our country have produced great results along the path of Three-Self and have sprung up on many fronts, making contributions to the welfare of the people. Some have even made outstanding contributions. They have not failed the teachings and aspirations of both the motherland and the church. These stirring examples of love of country and of one's church are the pride of the Chinese people and of the Chinese Church. They are worthy of our emulation.

There is a line of thought overseas which is critical of the patriotism of Chinese Christians. It says that a good Christian cannot but hold a different political view and be a member of the opposition, and that he or she should necessarily oppose whoever is in authority. This is the mission of the prophet, they say. We seem to have heard something similar during the Cultural Revolution. It called for people to rise up and make revolution against the revolutionaries. We cannot agree with this dose of poison in the garb of revolution. The Chinese people paid a great price before acquiring state power. We are just beginning to change our old society and create a new life for ourselves. Why should this state now become the object of revolution? Is this not a call to destroy our own cause? Patriotism impels us to support the new social system won by the people, to defend it, to eliminate the remaining bad parts, and to correct and improve it. The theory which opposes itself to any and every authority is not in accord with patriotism but with anarchy, subversion and counter-revolution. We wonder why those people who want us to accept this theory do not seem to carry it out themselves in their own countries?

## **II. In order to Bear Effective Witness to the Gospel, Chinese Christians Must Promote Three-Self**

Buddhism and Islam also came to China from abroad, but today everyone considers them Chinese religions. Christianity is different, for until a short time ago people considered it a foreign religion. This was because it had not become sinicized in personnel, finance and thought. Sometimes, politically, it even stood on the side of the invader. This was the major reason why the Chinese people resisted Christianity for many years.

In the 1950's, Y.T. Wu and other Christian leaders began to promote Three-Self. Although even the People's Daily wrote an editorial in support of it, old habits die hard, and many continued to regard Christianity as a foreign religion. At that time the survival of Christianity depended mainly on the state's policy of religious freedom. Only survival was possible; bearing witness was out of the question.

Because Three-Self conforms to the essence of the church and is in accord with the tide of history, it soon received the support of Christians throughout the country and the sympathy of the great mass of the people, once it was launched. This change in the people's view of Christianity is irreversible. Today, in the decade of the 80's, in spite of shortcomings in our work, more and more people in China have come to recognize that they should no longer look upon Christianity as a foreign religion.

This change has tremendous significance for our work of bearing witness to the gospel. It enables us to have more opportunities to associate with our fellow-citizens, and to have more of a common language with them. We have freed ourselves from a situation of separation from the masses. Christians are active in many fields: politics, culture, industrial and agricultural production, health and technology. It is possible for us to make many friends and exchange opinions with others. We can learn many things from our fellow-citizens and others are also interested in listening to the message of Christianity from us.

In the last 30 years Christians have not become fewer, but have increased to the highest point in Chinese Christian history. In analyzing the numerous reasons for this, it cannot be denied that the basic one behind all the others is that Chinese Christianity has opted for the Three-Self road. With the disappearance of foreign oil, foreign matches and foreign cloth from the vocabulary of the Chinese people, is it thinkable that a foreign religion would remain? Indeed, should it be possible for this foreign religion to remain for sometime, how would it fare? Would people be willing to associate themselves with it? Would they have good feelings towards such a religion? Would they take the step to accept Christ as Lord? If so, what would it mean?

In two thousand years of Christian mission history and in the more than one hundred years of missionary history in China, there are numerous examples, both positive and negative, which help us to discover this extremely important law: the rejection of a transplanted foreign organ is not only a biological and surgical phenomenon, but also a big question in mission history, and becomes especially acute in the wake of national consciousness when the situation can even burst into an intense conflict. From this we learn that, if the church is to be firm, it cannot rely upon the support of political power inside or outside the country. The only way to gain its right to be heard is for the church to practice the Three-Self principle and to become the church of its own country.

Everybody who has tried to lead others to Christ knows that to lead someone to accept the gospel of Christ is entirely different from leading someone to visit a park. Nor is it as simple as sending somebody a copy of the Bible. This is because the gospel of Christ demands that man in the first place recognize the problem of sin. The concept of sin, especially the concept of oneself as sinner, is considered to be something stupid and is not taken to heart by ordinary peo-

ple. This is a stumbling block inherent in the gospel. To all people, the gospel itself has the nature of being foreign. This foreignness often makes us resist and reject the gospel. But we simply cannot eliminate this element in order to make the gospel easier for people to accept. Without it, the question of salvation becomes pointless. What is left would be but an ordinary set of teachings exhorting people to be good. Although this is good too, it is no longer the gospel. That is to say, because the gospel is gospel, it is no light matter for people to commit themselves to it, as if there were no resistance. The gospel carried in itself this cause for resistance to accepting it. For this reason, the preacher must take special care to safeguard the channel through which the gospel comes into the human heart. He or she should not allow any additional foreignness to stand in the way, lest further resistance and difficulties be caused. In this way, if there are people who refuse to accept the gospel, it will only be due to its inherent stumbling block, but not to foreign materials external to the gospel put there by the messenger.

There are some people overseas who ignore the lessons of history, trampling on our Three-Self principle of the past 30 years. In the name of evangelizing China they are re-creating in the minds of the Chinese people the image of Christianity as a foreign religion. They rely on nothing but a certain economic superiority, shielded by certain anti-China political forces in places like Hong Kong, and protected by the foreign passports which they possess. Relying on these things they think that they are a cut above other people, that they may occupy a commanding position, and that they can defy our principled stand. Considering the size of the world, we can see that this kind of position which consciously takes an attitude of animosity towards our Three-Self stand may for sometime attract a few blind followers, but it certainly offends the broad masses of the Chinese people who have stood up, and it will arouse their strong aversion and disgust. If this approach to evangelism is allowed to be carried through, only shame will be brought to Christ and the door to the gospel will be closed. Precisely because there are such people, we cannot but pose the question of jurisdiction over the work of evangelism and church-building inside China. Several years ago, a pastor of an overseas Chinese church came back to China to visit his relatives. After having come into contact with many Christians, he came finally to the conclusion that preachers who have left China for over 20 years are no longer qualified to preach in China. Christians abroad are no longer able to feel the pulse of the Chinese people or to understand 'the limits God has apportioned us' (2 Cor. 10:13), and who "boast beyond limit, in other men's labors" (15), leaving behind the fields which they know well and insisting on coming to China to do something not in their own line of duty, should listen to this overseas Chinese pastor.

### **III. For the Christian Church to Finally and Fully Realize its Catholicity, Christians in China Should Proceed in Our Own Way.**

Paul said that in the coming ages God would show forth the immeasurable riches of his grace toward us in Christ Jesus. The unfathomable riches of Christ are like a treasure which is waiting to be opened up by Christians of different cultures and up-bringing, and then to be integrated into the common treasury of the whole church. It is in this process that the church achieves its catholicity. The cultures of nations need the grace of Christ's gospel for their sublimation, and the church of Christ can prosper only by absorbing from the cultures of all nations.

Today, Christianity is a world religion. It is no longer the religion of a certain people or a few peoples, but has spread to many countries in all continents. Its world-wide scope is to a great extent connected with the colonial expansion of capitalism, and thus it has congenital deficiencies and weaknesses. The catholicity of the church includes, to be sure, the extensiveness of the church in geographical terms. But this is, after all, only a question of expanse and does not exhaust the meaning of catholicity. Catholicity in all its fullness should include the question of depth, which is the more essential, i.e., how the church takes root in all cultures, so that the radiance of the gospel, shining through the prisms of the various particular cultures, gives off a brilliance which stirs the hearts of men and thereby greatly enriches the treasury of the universal church. Only in this way will worship before the throne of God be like a hundred flowers blossoming and like multiple colors showing forth, enhancing the joy shared by God and men alike.

Measured by this demand, the church in the world today is still far away from the full realization of its catholicity. As far as the church in China is concerned, we have taken a few important steps on the road of Three-Self politically, personnel-wise, organizationally and financially. This is precious and fundamental but we still cannot say that our church is already well-governed, well-supported and well run. We are still lagging very far behind, especially with regard to correctly understanding and assimilating our contemporary Chinese culture and historical heritage, so as to integrate it with Christianity to the highest level permitted by our Christian faith, and relinquishing all those things from Western tradition which are not integral to the church.

A year or two ago, an Asian church leader wrote that the church in his country was as yet only a dot on the missionary map of Western churches. This remark is deeply poignant. When the New Jerusalem comes down from heaven, with its twelve gates in the east, west, north and south, inviting the multitudes of every nation and tribe and tongue and people to pass through, will the Chinese church have its own contingent? Or will it simply be a dot on the map in the offering plate of other contingents?

Paul told us that it pleases God for all the fullness to dwell in Christ. The fullness which is inherent in Christ, his manifold wisdom, has yet to be absorbed, digested and exchanged by people of various particular cultural backgrounds, so that it can be shared by all in the church. In this way the church marches towards the goal of actualizing its catholicity. According to the teaching of Paul, the breadth and length and height and depth of Christ's love are only to be comprehended by all the saints. The Book of Hebrews also tells us that God "has foreseen something better" for the church, that all those throughout history who have been tested for their faith "should not be made perfect apart from us."

It is therefore clear that individuality and catholicity, particularity and universality, are not contradictory, or mutually exclusive, but are complementary to each other. The fuller a church in a particular country actualizes its particularity, the richer the diversity of the whole church and the more substantial its universality. If the church in a particular country cannot even attain its independence, then talk about interdependence with other churches is largely empty words.

Here let us consider the movements of theological reorientation at the grass-roots which



took place in Chinese Christianity during the 50's. This movement was spontaneous, not organized by anybody. But it had a very strong mass character and was extensive. Having entered the historical stage of New China, thousands upon thousands of grass-root Christians, though aroused by patriotism, did not want to give up their Christian faith lightly. But they were unable to keep intact a lot of the theological viewpoints instilled in them in the past. At a time when they were establishing their new political standpoint, they had to do some hard theological thinking themselves, so that they could not only face up to the political reality but find a viable theological position as well. This was a movement from the bottom up. At first, not too many clergymen were involved. Far more numerous were those who found themselves on the border between church and society, those who were drawn into the current of the times, such as Christian workers, peasants, teachers and other intellectuals, and some of the pastors at the grass-roots who were close to these people, among whom we especially cherish the memory of Rev. Huang Peiyong.

Is the world in the hand of the devil? What is the status of the world in the mind of God? How should Christians look at history? Should Christians only be concerned with questions of belief and unbelief and of life after death? Should Christians be concerned with issues of right and wrong? Should they differentiate good from evil? What is meant by being spiritual? Should Christianity negate and deny reason? What is the scope of God's care and love and of the work of the Holy Spirit? How does one assess the true, the good, and the beautiful outside the realm of the church? How should Christians think of the nation? Of patriotism? What is the place of the Bible in divine revelation? How should one look at the holiness of the Church in the face of the many evil deeds being exposed there? How can we recognize anew the holy love of God, His intentions in carrying out the on-going work of creation redemption and sanctification? In this providence of God, how should the role of Christ as revealed in Colossians and Ephesians be understood? These and other problems have impelled us Chinese Christians to reflect and to explore. Thousands of articles were written, a small portion of which appeared in publications such as *Tian Feng*, *En Yan*, and *Theological Review*. They helped form the vigorous upsurge in theological thinking among the mass of church-goers, showing forth the flowers of a mass movement in theology.

What is most precious is that these problems which cropped up in history were raised and discussed by Chinese Christians themselves. This was a Christian mass movement of self-enlightenment. Some of the opinions expressed might be extreme, but what was extreme could be corrected. We should not negate the essential aspect of the movement simply because there were some extreme opinions in it. What is fascinating is that the creative activity of theology shifted from theological professionals to grass-root believers. I do not know whether there were similar theological mass movements during the period of the Reformation in Europe or during the Peasant Wars in Germany. Anyway, this must be a rare phenomenon in church history. Today we must proceed on the basis of this theological re-orientation movement; we must not retreat. We should encourage that spirit of daring to think, daring to blaze new trails, daring to enable theological thinking to open its doors to the reality of the world. We should identify ourselves with what we can and reserve differences where we must. In this way we not only usher Chinese Christianity into the possibility of dialogue with others, but also strengthen its theological foundation, develop its own characteristics and substantially enrich the catholicity of the church.

There are people who as soon as they talk about the catholicity, universality, ecumenicity or internationality of the church, ignore and forget all important differences. They show a kind of excessive tender-heartedness marked by not distinguishing between right and wrong. It seems as if 'fellowship in Christ' were something which neglects principle, standpoint or vigilance, a situation in which everyone is just kind and nice to everyone else. This is a vulgarization of the church's catholicity, making of it an extremely shallow cosmopolitanism which encourages people to pay no attention to the weal and woe of their motherland. Genuine catholicity is a process of development. The firmer a national church roots itself among its people, the stronger its individuality and the more it contributes to the catholicity of the universal church. Because of this, though we affirm the universality of the church and are consequently developing certain international contacts, we do not place this above everything else. Old China lost a lot because our customs were in the hands of foreign powers and we could not levy tariffs to protect the development of our national industry. Today, in order to protect the growth of the Chinese church and to keep it free from an excessive pounding from abroad (even if this is 'a pounding of love'), our international contacts cannot but be limited and selective. We are not keeping this as a secret. The international contacts which the Chinese church entertains must be in accord with our Three-Self principle, or at least not detrimental to it.

Chinese Christians ardently love Christ, the Bible and the church; they also ardently love their motherland. Whither do we lead this enthusiasm of the believers is something for which we must be held answerable before God and the Chinese people. It is often said that we should satisfy the spiritual needs of our fellow Christians. This is right in principle. But we must examine first of all whether those needs are consonant with God's nature and will whether they are consonant with his revelation and guidance to the Chinese church today. To be spiritual is good, but when the teaching of the Bible is put into the context of present-day Christian life in China, what is it to be spiritual? Today, in the church in China, whether it be in pastoral work, in education for Christian nurture, in worship, preaching, prayer, church life or the formation of sound spirituality, there is a new life style and witness which is suitable to Christians in New China. Viewpoints, thoughts and methods which match the spirit of the Three-Self principle are breaking through old conventions to emerge and grow to maturity. These new born things in the church will be loved and welcomed by the broad mass of Christians. We should love them, want them to grow and to be successful that they might soon blossom and bear fruit; we have no reason to despise them. Nor have we any reason to hold fast to the old things we learned in the past that are already without vitality today.

In certain places there are bad elements who neither belong to the church nor know anything about Christianity. Yet they are carrying out misdeeds and cheating honest people in the name of Christ, using the practice of reactionary superstitious societies. Some of them even resort to beating, smashing and looting, in true cultural-revolution style, committing crimes and doing all manner of evil. These things go beyond what we call religious questions. Be these elements in the church, the home or any other place, we must not be misled by their religious garb, but must oppose them in no uncertain terms, and support the authorities concerned to restrain them by law, so that our Christianity will not be discredited.

Today, the reality of the Chinese Church is still far from the church in the mind of Christ.

In many places, the pastoral work of the church has been neglected and the situation has still not improved much. In some places there is a lack of content in worship services and Christian meetings about which our members have their complaints, but for a long time we have made no improvement. In other places emphasis is put only on church growth, without knowing that nurture should be more important in the present situation, for otherwise our faith would become one-sided and even heretical. In some places people lack mutual respect in matters of belief, with the result that fellow-Christians are hurt and alienated. Some of our faithful have not yet heard of activities through which many things that are non-Christian have been brought into Christianity. In addition, there has been interference and temptation from outside which tries to pull us backward and destroy us. All these things tell us that the task of the Three-Self Committee and the China Christian Council is both tremendous and glorious. We are glad to point out that, though our problems are many, and though we are not all very wise, but are simply the small "five loaves and two fishes," yet God's work takes great strides forward, overcoming all obstacles, exceeding all we have ever dared to imagine. It is a test for faith, it is also a calling for us to be of one heart and one mind. May we say that all those who are in consonance with the teaching of the Bible and who believe in Jesus Christ as Lord wherever they are, are members of the Church, and it is they who are to be served, to be united and to be strengthened by the Three-Self Committee and the China Christian Council. In matters of faith we must uphold the principle of mutual respect, not opposing or slighting one another. We need especially to heed Paul's reminder: "Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and up builds itself in love. "

The Three-Self Committee and the China Christian Council are but temporary vessels, the scaffold of the building in the construction process. We too, each one of us, are but the numerous bamboo poles or steel tubes which form the closely-grouped scaffolding. As soon as this building of the body of Christ is completed, standing uniquely on the horizon, the scaffold will disappear. Yet, today, the Three-Self Committee and China Christian Council still have much to do. We must do our best. Let us be the many ordinary bamboo poles tied together by the rope of love and be humble; let no one of us protrude, but rather form as a whole a strong scaffold; let us find our tiny, individual task and meaning in the building up of this work of Christ - the Chinese Church.

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## **THE CHURCH IN CHINA - YESTERDAY, TODAY AND TOMORROW - Cai Wenhao**

Address delivered at the Consultation with Church Leaders from China of the Christian Conference of Asia, 1982.

Your participation in this consultation shows that the Christian leaders of Asia are deeply interested in China and the Chinese churches. We are eager to listen to your views and opinions. I am sure these will give us insights or sidelights to improve our ministry for the better growth of our church. We are also willing to share sincerely with the conference conditions in our church and our own ministerial experiences and to join in common discussion. Compared with the churches in some of our neighboring countries, the church body in China is only a small one, but we are grateful to God for he loves and looks after our church just the same. He has given our church in China an abundant life. It is now growing both in size and in spirituality.

### **Why Does the Church in China Need Three-Self?**

The church is the body of Christ and the Christian believers in all nations are the members of that body. We believe that the church belongs to Christ, and only to Christ; the relations among churches are relations of members of the same body.

As Chinese history tells us, the entrance of the Protestants into China since 1807 has been interlocked historically with the invasion of Western powers. Missionaries in early days served foreign invaders in many ways, some even helped in drafting the unequal treaties. Mission schools for a long time were the supporters of colonialism, forbidding Chinese students to take part in patriotic activities and stripping them of their right to love their motherland. Thus, in the eyes of the Chinese people, Christianity was a "foreign religion" - a part of alien colonial forces. As we look back to the Boxer Movement of 1900, the anti-Christian movement of 1922 among Chinese students in Beijing and the anti-Christian movement in 1927, we find that all these were basically directed against foreign aggression and not against Christian doctrine. People were against the use of Christianity by foreign powers for invading China. This was all that the name "foreign religion" signified. The Church of China, so long as it was labeled with such a dishonorable term, could not expect any rapid growth. Before liberation, the Protestant population at its strongest was only 700,000 less than two in one thousand Chinese people. The door of evangelism could never be opened wide.

For nearly two hundred years, the missionary groups sent by so-called "mother churches" of different nations put in enormous amounts of effort and money trying to build the so-called "younger churches." The numerous denominations and sects brought in by the mission societies transplanted among us a variety of denominations and sectarian groups which were greatly detrimental to the communion and unity of church members and the growth of the true church. The result was that Chinese churches for a long time were called "the foreign mission churches," and were the objects of the continued benevolence of foreign churches. There was no brotherly relationship in the church's international contacts.

Movements for church independence were organized on a wide scale and quite a few small independent churches and societies were founded on the principle of self-government, self-support and self-propagation. But the foreign mission forces had no desire to give up their control. Consequently, the church in China as a whole did not achieve any real independence although, as bitter historical experiences have taught us, such independence was indispensable for the wide dissemination of the gospel in the land of China.

### **Thirty Years' Experience**

After the liberation of China in 1949, the Chinese Church entered a new historical age. It was now situated in a new social environment. In this new China, the colonial features of the past had disappeared. There was a new mood and a new spirit, and human relations had changed greatly as a result of the wiping out of exploitation and oppression. The church now faced a new challenge to rethink its nature and mission.

Would the church in China identify itself with this New China? Should the Chinese Christians support the new developments?

Many Christian leaders were deeply convinced that the function of the church at any time and in any place should be both priestly and prophetic. Like Amos, Jeremiah and other prophets, the church ought to have a message relevant to the times, calling the people to witness to God's justice, charity, peace and truth in national and church life. These Christian leaders organized half of the Christian population in China to endorse a manifesto for a Three-Self Patriotic Movement, supporting all the good and just deeds of New China and standing with the masses to wipe out social evils. Many signed for the campaign, while a few hesitated as they questioned whether Christians could be patriots. They took a "wait-and-see" attitude towards New China. I myself was once an outsider watching how New China would take shape. Then I saw many of the social evils being wiped out in a brief time, how exploitation was done away with, and how social justice received increasing emphasis. I was reassured after seeing the miraculous accomplishment of so many great social reforms which had long been sought by the church. Were they not the will of God and the work of His own hands? I then joined the movement and learned to love my motherland as many of God's other children did. I love the New China not only because I am a Chinese citizen, but even more so because I am a Christian.

The thirty years' experience has proved to Chinese Christians that their affection for the motherland and their affection for the church are not mutually exclusive but harmonious. The patriotic stance of Christian believers in the last thirty years has gradually wiped out from the minds of the rank-and-file of our people the image of a "foreign" church. The church in China began to be recognized as the church of China. The door of evangelism is thus opened.

I would like to point out another thing which is also proved by our thirty years' experience. That is, we Christians enjoy religious freedom in New China. The policy of freedom of belief is practiced by the Communist party so as to unite people for the purpose of building a better country. The united front principle of "seeking common ground while reserving differences" holds true about religion as well, and seeks to respect people's religious faiths. We are convinced of the sincerity of the government in implementing this policy. The government,

on the whole, has given assistance to us to solve those problems related to the legitimate rights of church bodies. The ten years of turmoil during the Cultural Revolution caused incalculable loss to the country and to the church. Religious freedom was violated. Now the policy is being restored and implemented in many ways - through the return of church buildings, for example, and the payment of compensation for financial losses. The Three-Self organizations at different levels are now helping with the work of rebuilding the church. Many local churches have been restored for worship services and other programs. Since the China Christian Council was born in the Third National Christian Conference in Nanjing last October, a nation-wide program of rebuilding work has been going on. Now, the second edition of the Bible and a variety of Christian books are being published; a training program for local ministers and lay leaders is being planned; and the theological seminary in Nanjing has reopened.

### **Importing of Bibles**

The question has been raised as to whether Bibles should be imported into China. Our position on this matter can be simply stated in three points:

1. Bibles are still in short supply but, as a matter of principle, we ought to meet the need ourselves. We do not want to see China return to the status of a mission field of overseas churches. It may take longer before the supply of Bibles becomes satisfactory, but we think it is worthwhile to wait because the principle of Three-Self is all-important for the true evangelization of China.

2. We are not opposed to people sending in or bringing in small numbers of Bibles for friends and relatives as gifts.

3. We are opposed to any publicity or campaign abroad capitalizing on our shortage of Bibles as a means of anti-New-China and anti-Three-Self propaganda, or as a means for raising money. You may be interested to know that in 1980 we published 50,000 New Testaments and complete Bibles. We hope we can publish more in 1981.

### **The Church of China Tomorrow**

Once the rebuilding work began, there appeared in the church many exciting things. The Christian population is now larger than before. The church has given up its sense of aloofness. It has growing spiritual wealth gathered in the hearts of believers. The worshippers' devotion to the Lord is unprecedentedly evident, and the sacrificial spirit of the clergy today is admirable. We are convinced that the success of our church-rebuilding program lies in the affection and loyalty of clergymen and lay Christians.

An even more precious thing is that many things which happen in Chinese churches today are nearer to what the Bible teaches. And at the same time they are more Chinese in their mode of expression. Thus favorable conditions are created for us to make the church more biblical, and more easily accepted by the people in China.

Let me mention a few things which might throw some light on the situation and enable a

better understanding of the church in China today and tomorrow.

1. The church in China has now entered a nondenominational period. The sectarian consciousness has gradually faded away among church members. The work of Three-Self has paved the way for nondenominational churches. The Three-Self Patriotic Movement stresses mutual respect in matters of faith, and longs to see the churches give up all sectarian bias. Is it not St. Paul who urges us to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace? This unity which we have long prayed for has now begun to bloom in our churches in China.

2. Another thing that has appeared in the church of China is the multiple form of worship life.

Numerous home worship gatherings grew up during the time of the Cultural Revolution when all churches were shut down and Christians had to get together in homes to worship quietly. In recent years, quite a number of churches have been reopened with the help of Three-Self organizations. Many worshippers have flocked in, enjoying happily the liturgy and sermons which they had missed for a decade. There are still many worshippers going on with their home meetings, either because they are waiting for church buildings to be made available or because they enjoy these small gatherings which they are used to. The Three-Self organizations and China Christian Council treat them as members of the body of Christ and help them in all ways. My Drum Tower Church in Hangzhou and the local Three-Self Committee are now helping the home meetings - with preaching, celebrating sacraments and even in the matter of repairing meeting rooms. At the same time, the lay leaders and worshippers of the home meetings are taking part in the activities of my church and the Three-Self organization. This brotherly coexistence of regular churches and home gatherings in a way enriches the worship life of our church in China. The distinction certain Christians abroad are making between home Christian meetings and Three-Self, as if only those Christians worshipping in church buildings are for Three-Self, is an entirely false one.

3. Another special feature of the present church in China is that God has mobilized a great number of lay workers to serve the churches. It was natural in the years of turmoil during the Cultural Revolution, while the churches were closed and clergymen were being persecuted, that the load of preaching and teaching in home gatherings fell upon the shoulders of lay workers. Now, as a result, more lay workers share in the ministry. Even the clergy today, whether young or aged, work along with the lay workers whole-heartedly. This new feature, which was commended by St. Paul, will be a permanent Chinese mode of church life. The China Christian Council will give the lay leaders movement its full support.

4. Another trend is towards the deinstitutionalization of church enterprises. Putting aside the problem of evaluation of church-related schools and hospitals and other enterprises of the past, we are now in a socialist society and the church in China today has stopped running these enterprises. Going through this deinstitutionalizing process, the church in China has returned to being a faith community. This change actually reflects the change of church structure. It enables the church to concentrate all its efforts on better ministerial work for bringing about a widening influence of the gospel.

5. Thirty years' experience has shown that the most effective way of evangelism is through personal contacts, especially through oral witness and life witness. Christian believers today are witnessing in various ways to the Lord in their professional posts and other areas of life, "taking thought for what is noble in the sight of all" (Rom. 12). They are concerned about the welfare of people and the future of their motherland and the world. They win converts with the love of Christ.

Now the problem is: Can the Chinese church which possesses all these new features continue to grow in the land of China?

We believe in the eternity of the church as much as in the eternity of God. To doubt the future of the church is to doubt God himself. This is our faith and the measure of our trust in the power of God. But, as to visible churches, they are lampstands. If anyone of them gives no light, no witness and no love, God would remove that lamp stand from its place (Rev. 2). The same is true of the visible churches in China. God would remove those which fail to witness. The history of Christian churches in China illustrates this.

As we all know, the Nestorian Church entered China by the silk road as early as the Tang dynasty, and then again in the Yuan dynasty. But why did it fail to take root in the soil of China each time?

To take root in a place, a church must identify itself with the people of that place. The Roman Catholic Church re-entered China in the later part of the Ming dynasty. The Jesuits Matteo Ricci, Adam Schauull and Ferdinand Verbiest brought to China the western science which China needed. They studied the Chinese classics, helped the Chinese government edit the solar calendar, taught mathematics and astronomy, made maps and translated books on science. They had no association with any political attempt to invade or occupy China. They won the warm support of Chinese emperors and officers. Some of the important Chinese officers became Christians who helped build cathedrals in Beijing, Hangzhou and other cities. In those days, the Jesuits were different from the Franciscans and Dominicans in that they wanted to take a more lenient and permissive attitude to some of the old Chinese Confucian rites such as ancestor worship. That would have helped to make Christianity indigenous, but the Vatican was against the Jesuits and favored the Franciscans and Dominicans. Today, as we look back, we realize that all three orders worked almost entirely among the higher-class people and were detached from the common people of China. They had no sympathy whatever with the peasants' movements of those days. That was no way for Christianity to take root in China. You have probably heard that the tombs of Ricci and his Jesuit colleagues have recently been repaired by the Chinese government. They are remembered by the Chinese people because of their contribution to science in China.

As for the Protestant Church in China, it was labeled "foreign religion" for a long time. As it had not identified itself with the people of China, it could not win them to Christ., This is attested to by the following figures. During the Ming dynasty, the Jesuits enlisted 110,000 to the church in 50 years while the Protestant Church counted only 55,000 converts in the 86 years up to 1893. Today believers in China have greatly increased in numbers.

The increase is not, as some people say, due to some people's so-called disillusionment



with the political situation. There might be a few such, but they are exceptions. I think the real reason for the increase today is that because of the Three-Self Movement the Chinese Church has changed the attitude of people towards Christianity, and there exists a new relationship between Christianity and the common Chinese people. Chinese Christians are today giving heart-winning witness to the gospel, without any foreign influence.

This then is the future of the church of China. As we keep to the Three-Self road, calling Christians to the service of the country and of our people and giving a prophetic message for the age, the future of the church in China is assured. God will bless this lampstand, and it will shine forever in the great land of China, and his name will be glorified as the people see the good works of the church.

*Ca Wenhao (Peter Tsai) is Vice-President of the China Christian Council and pastor of the Drum Tower Church Hangzhou.*

# **ON THE QUESTION OF A CHURCH AFFAIRS ORGANIZATION - Zheng Jianye**

**Statement delivered at the Third National Chinese Christian Conference, Nanjing, October, 1980.**

Brothers and sisters, the idea" for establishing a church affairs organization was proposed this spring at the enlarged Shanghai meeting of the Standing Committee of the National Three-Self Movement where, after earnest study and deliberation, it was decided to discuss the question again at this national conference. There has been a careful discussion of this question during the last few days at this conference. After hearing reports from each group, the presidium appointed me to make a statement before the conference offering some explanatory remarks for our consideration. Owing to my own inadequate grasp of concrete conditions, and also because I ought not to take up too much of your time, I can but briefly bring together several questions for your father discussion. I take full responsibility for any inadequacies or inaccuracies in my presentation, and I by no means represent the position of the presidium.

I would like to discuss three points:

## **(1) The Long Cherished Hope of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement**

We will naturally recall that the question of establishing a church affairs organization was originally one of the goals of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, something which many of the founders of the movement of the last generation hoped for all along. Conditions which were not ripe before have only now come to fruition. This brings to my mind the first and last verses of the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews. The scriptural passage puts it this way, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the men of old achieved divine approval...And all these, though well attested by their faith, did not receive what was promised; since God had foreseen what was better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect."

Bishop Ting's opening address and our discussions over the last two days have reviewed the course of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement since its inception. As our thoughts turn on our predecessors such as Mr. Y. T. Wu, Bishop Robin Chen, Bishop I.T. Kaung, Dr. Y.C. Tu, Rev. H.H. Tsui, principal Ting Yuchang, Rev. Chia Yuming, Rev. Chen Chonggui and others, it is as if we have been surrounded by a cloud of witnesses. At the outset, it was they who led us in turning Chinese Christianity away from the control and exploitation of imperialism, creating the necessary conditions for the establishment of a truly pure church. This church was to be governed, supported and propagated by us Chinese Christians. It was to be set up under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and in conformity with the Bible, rather than according to any foreign tradition or the view of any individual church leader. We recall that their early work was not easy, nor was their burden light. Moreover, there was at that time no way of predicting whether or not their beautiful hope could be quickly realized.

After intense struggle since Liberation, our National Three-Self Committee at its enlarged

meeting held in Beijing in 1956 issued the call for church-building according to the Three-Self principle. Not long afterwards, union worship services began to be held in various places. Although this was a great step forward in the process of constructing a Chinese Church, it was only a beginning. What we basically achieved at that time was independence by casting off foreign control and exploitation by internal reactionary forces; moreover we put an end to denominationalism, the unhealthy situation in which each church went its own way. Without these prior conditions, there would be no way to speak of building up the church in New China. We did not, however, think that we had reached our peak. The Chinese Church wanted to do more than hold worship services, even though they were union services. The Church is the Body of Christ, and in this Body we are to be mutually supportive branches. This means more than just worship. At that time, we were prepared to move forward. But then, there erupted the great confusion brought on by Lin Biao and the gang of four, not only making the continuation of our regular activity impossible, but also wrecking our tentative accomplishments. Along with many cadres, intellectuals, and patriotic personages around the country, many of our brothers and sisters in Christ also suffered injuries, and some even died in indignation. As to their past prayer and struggle, as it says in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, "by it (they) received divine approval." From beginning to end, they did not lose hope, but at that time they did not "receive what was promised." Why was this? Was it because God our Father had cast us off as orphans and would no longer be with us? History has shown very clearly that this was not the case. We Christians believe that, instead, this revealed the wonder of God's will. "God had foreseen something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect." As it will be in the final days, so it is before our eyes at this very moment. They did not immediately receive what they had hoped for at that time, but today they can receive it with us.

Today, the great mission before us is to make concerted efforts to accomplish the sacred duty which our predecessors were unable to complete. Is this not the special call and grace of God our Father for this generation? Of course, our work and responsibility are as difficult as that of our predecessors. What's more, they did not have time to complete their work before returning to be with the Lord. Actually, it does not mean much whether it is they in the past or we in the present, for it is only through the Spirit of the Lord working in us that any of us are able to accomplish anything. Today, as we come together to hold this conference, temporarily leaving our regular places of work, our brothers and sisters urgently await our return. I think it is almost like Elisha crossing the river with Elijah shortly before he was to be received by God. The other believers remained on the opposite side of the river awaiting his return. As Elijah was about to be taken up, he asked Elisha what he wanted. Elisha replied, "I pray you, let me inherit a double share of your spirit." Later, Elijah, "went up by a whirlwind into heaven," as he was received by a chariot of fire and horses of fire. Over the past few years, several of our brothers and sisters of the last generation were also received by the Lord before their work was completed. After Elijah ascended into heaven, Elisha did not go into mourning, but resolutely took up the mantle of Elijah, wrapped himself in it, and continued the mission of his predecessor. The river still obstructed the path before him, but Elisha took up his mantle and struck the waters which parted in the same way as they had for Elijah. Seeing what Elisha had done, the other brothers and sisters said upon his return, "The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha." As we meet here today, if we would also ask God to inspire us with the same spirit that moved our predecessors so that we might resolutely take up their responsibility, when we return to our posts, the Lord will certainly be able to use us to do the work with which we have been entrusted, united in a common effort

with the rank-and-file Christians. A number of delegates have mentioned that, when they came out to this conference brothers and sisters in various places were praying for us' and that they are urgently waiting for us to tell them when we return of the new light we have gained. If they see that the same spirit which inspired our predecessors is today moving us useless servants, then they will certainly be excited by the conference and give thanks to God.

## **(2) The Situation of Christianity in China Today**

As delegates reported on church conditions in different places and on a variety of pressing questions we have recalled many things from the past.

Since our Chinese Church broke away from foreign control and exploitation by internal reactionary forces the situation has been basically healthy. But during the ten-year catastrophe, a lot of our organizational structures were wrecked and many of our pastoral workers found themselves in an extremely difficult position, to the extent that many brothers and sisters could only be 'secret Christians' like Joseph of Arimathea or Nicodemus. But in this situation the work of the Holy Spirit never ceased. What is most remarkable is that not only did the number of believers not decrease during this period but, in some places, it even increased. As a result of the great confusion of the times, however, some weeds sprouted up along with the good crop of new believers. This has created one special feature of Christianity in China today: Chinese Christianity has entered a new stage of development, but at the same time it is facing a new and complex situation; Chinese Christianity has developed quite rapidly, but at the same time it has become somewhat jumbled and disorganized. How, then, are we to view this new situation?

Reports from many places indicate that as we resume worship gatherings, we frequently see with us a number of new Christians as a result of the pastors' direct efforts. With grateful hearts, we are thankful to God, for despite our difficult situation, he has provided us with an unusually good and bountiful harvest. It is just as Jesus said, "For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.'" This is so that the "sower and reaper may rejoice together." Can we ignore these new brother and sister Christians because we did not know them in the past? Jesus said, "I have other sheep, that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd." As we read these verses of scripture today, it is as if the real picture is right before our eyes, a picture with which we are very familiar. What we are facing today is not only the responsibility of resuming our past church activities, but also the momentous task of guiding all those 'that are not of this fold' to Jesus Christ, the one great shepherd of us all. There is another aspect of this which we must also not fail to consider. The inability of many well-trained pastoral workers to do regular work has had an unavoidable effect on the shepherding of the flock. The supply of sufficient and good quality spiritual food has been inadequate. Although the sheep are many, their spiritual nourishment has not always been good. Although there are many new Christians, they have not received adequate spiritual cultivation. Those newly called to do the Lord's work long for more training, but they cannot get it. This spring at our enlarged meeting a pastoral worker very aptly pointed out, "Sheep have two characteristics: the first is that they are gentle and the second is that they may be led astray." The reality of Christianity in China today is that these two features are both present at the same time: one is that an extraordinarily large number of sheep are hungry and thirsting after "sweet streams and fragrant grass," the other is that some sheep lacking the ability

of judgment have been led astray. The fact that the devil is busy creating disturbances wherever the Holy Spirit is at work should not be overlooked. The devil may even appear in the form of an "angel of light" to lead people down the fork in the road. All those who truly love the Lord should conscientiously observe this point for the protection of the flock.

After the distribution of An Open Letter to Brothers and Sisters in Christ Throughout China, we received letters from Christians in many places around the country. They warmly support the proposal for setting up a national church affairs organization, and in their earnest prayers ask God to use his omnipotent right hand to hasten its early realization for the service of churches and be-lievers throughout the country and the promotion of increasingly closer unity. These letters both inspire us and spur us on. Even more, they are a testimony to God's beautiful intention. They reveal to us that brothers and sisters in Christ throughout China, no matter where they gather together and serve, whether in the temple in Jerusalem or on the mountains of Samaria, as long as they worship in spirit and in truth, are deeply concerned about the realities of the church in China today, both welcoming and supporting the proposal to form the national church affairs organization.

### **(3) The Character and Work of the Church Affairs Organization**

A number of valuable recommendations have also been put forth in group discussions at this conference concerning the character and work of the church affairs organization. In order for us to complete the work of our predecessors in the light of the actual situation of contemporary Chinese Christianity, and to effectively carry out our responsibility as a Chinese Church according to the Three-Self principle, the church affairs organ we envisage would certainly not be a national church, nor would it be a superstructure imposed upon local churches, but rather an organization for serving all churches and Christians throughout the nation. We have proposed that it be named the China Christian Council. It will handle those matters which local churches cannot easily do by themselves, such as the translation and publication of the Bible, the production of literature of Christian nurture, the opening of a seminary for the training of pastoral workers and theological researchers and so forth. At the invitation of local churches, it may also send people to undertake visitations, so as to strengthen the relationships and promote the exchange of opinions among brothers and sisters in different places. When necessary, it can also organize discussions and study of questions which are of our common concern. Although we can say that we have ended the stage of denominationalism in matters of faith, there are still some places where, despite overall agreement, there remain certain differences, as a result of different historical backgrounds and past experiences. We believe that hereafter we should continue to uphold the tradition we have maintained since the launching of the Three-Self Movement, that is, the practice of mutual respect and not seeking to make faith uniform.

As far as relationships among individual brothers and sisters or among local churches are concerned, we all believe that we should act in accordance with the apostle Paul's teaching, "(Be) fore bearing (to) one another in love, (be) eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

Brothers and sisters, this church affairs organization, that is, the China Christian Council, is to be inaugurated at this national conference called by the National Committee of the Three-

Self Patriotic Movement. It will be yet another fruit of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement. Once it has been officially set up, it will be a sister organization of the Committee of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement. The relationship between the two will be like two arms of one body, united together in our head Jesus Christ. Although each will have a different emphasis in its work, their basic spirit will be entirely the same. Bishop Ting has already spoken very clearly of this in his opening address, and now it has been agreed upon in group discussion to establish this kind of relationship. The relevant stipulations for the structure of this organization will be formulated in this spirit. The draft constitution which the last Standing Committee proposed to the presidium, has now been put before this conference by the presidium. Insofar as it will soon be distributed in each group for discussion, it is unnecessary to explain it point by point at this time.

*Zheng Jianye is the General Secretary of the China Christian Council  
translated by Philip Wickeri  
reprinted courtesy of Ching Feng*

## **OPEN LETTER TO BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST OF ALL CHINA FROM THE STANDING COMMITTEE OF THE CHINESE PROTESTANT THREE-SELF PATRIOTIC MOVEMENT**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ in all parts of China:

First of all we greet you in the name of Christ. We can not but thank God for being able to address you once again openly in this manner. His rod and his staff were never far from us as we moved through the valley of the shadow of death. His promise to Joshua, "I will always be with you; I will never abandon you" (Jos. 1: 5) has been actualized in our midst these years.

Today, through this letter, let us speak to you about things of our common concern.

For the first time in over ten years the Standing Committee of our national Three-Self Movement met in Shanghai during the last week. As we listened to colleagues' reports on church conditions in different parts of China, we felt specially close to our brothers and sisters in the whole household of God and prayed with special fervency for God's blessing on you.

In closing our meeting today we are struck by the fact that the meeting has been so similar to the one in Jerusalem as recorded in Acts 15. We did not have a set agenda. We just let the Holy Spirit guide us as we entered into all subjects of deep concern to us.

Although in the recent past the policy of religious freedom was trespassed upon by the Lin Biao and the gang of four cliques, and although many of our clergy and leaders of Three-Self organizations had to suffer all sorts of persecution alongside leading cadres of religious affairs bureaus and other governmental organs, as well as many intellectuals, yet it heartens us to learn that large numbers of Christians all over China have persisted in their faith, that their service, prayer and waiting before God has not ceased and they have witnessed well in places where they work. We have seen that the church has not let her light be put out but has gone through trials and been strengthened, and that our witness to Christ also has not been dimmed but has in quietude borne fruit. All these years we have firmly believed that the correct line of the Communist Party would return to New China. We have firmly believed that the policy of religious freedom laid down by Chairman Mao and Premier Zhou Enlai was correct and could not be permanently abrogated by anybody. We have firmly believed that the Chinese church, through the Three-Self Movement, would become cleansed and fair, an abode for the Lord. We have firmly believed that upheavals would pass and stability would be restored, bringing a bright prospect for New China. And we have firmly believed that we Christians who cherish a love both for our motherland and for our religious faith would surely be able to work alongside the rest of our Chinese people and make our contributions to our motherland.

Brothers and sisters, today, China has indeed returned to the correct orientation. As we met and listened to all the encouraging reports summarized above, we were greatly moved and inspired by Christian examples. They turned our hearts to thanksgiving. Our faith in the gospel of Christ became strengthened. We are resolved more than ever to unite and do the work entrusted us by God and by the fellow Christians of the whole country, so that what we have

firmly believed can all become reality.

We need to develop and strengthen further our movement.

The Three-Self Patriotic Movement has achieved a great deal in the course of the last thirty years. As a result of this movement more and more Chinese Christians have come to cherish our motherland. There is a heightened sense of national pride on our part as Chinese and we are now much closer to the people of China in our thought and action. As a result of this movement Chinese Christianity is no longer a tool exploited by imperialism or by other reactionary forces. It is now basically a religion adhered to by Chinese citizens. Also as a result of this movement more and more of our Chinese people and cadres have changed their attitude towards Christianity. It is no longer a foreign religion encouraging its adherents to be unpatriotic but is a religion governed, supported and nurtured by Chinese Christians ourselves. These are all very important changes coming from the perspective of Christian witness in China during the future course of history. And we could not possibly see these changes had this movement not been initiated by the late Mr. Y.T. Wu and other faithful servants of God.

Today, we fellow Christians all over China are rebuilding our Temple with the same zeal as that of the Old Testament prophets Haggai, Zechariah and Zerubbabel. We believe that under the guidance of the eternal God our Father the glory of the latter Temple will be greater than that of the former.

We gave heed to the yearning of our brothers and sisters in all parts of our country for the publication of our own Bible and have decided to hasten this work.

We gave heed to the hunger for other Christian publications and we will move ahead as fast as possible to meet this need.

Well-trained clergy and church workers are needed everywhere and we will resume the work of training such personnel.

In some parts of China the policy of religious freedom has not been very well implemented and we want to do our best to assist our government and other related bodies in putting the policy into effect.

We need to strengthen our relations with Christian communities throughout the country, help solve their existing problems and help Christians in their endeavors to glorify God and benefit men and women.

We also need to help elevate the consciousness of church members so that all Christians in China will love our motherland and adhere to the laws of the state. At the same time we must prevent anyone with ulterior motives from using Christianity as a cover for activities detrimental to social order, thus endangering our people and defaming our church.

In short, we need to greatly strengthen the pastoral work of our Christian communities. This is an urgent task which calls for our deep commitment and leads us in a most concerted way



to see the necessity of the formation of a national Christian structure. After earnest prayer and long deliberation we have decided to proceed with the preparatory work for this organization. This organization aims at giving the necessary pastoral help to Christians and Christian communities across China. It is above all a serving agency. In any question that has to do with our faith our principle is to practice mutual respect and not to interfere with or impose uniformity on our beliefs.

The relation between this new national structure and the Three-Self organization will be that between the two hands of a body. There will be no question of one giving and the other accepting any leadership. The formation of the new body does not at all imply the winding up of the work of the Three-Self Movement and its organizations. The latter work is rather to be carried forth more extensively and deeply. We need to continue to uphold the banner of the motherland and give encouragement to Christians to unite with the rest of the Chinese people, contribute to the task of the four modernizations, safeguard the stability and unity of our country, oppose aggression and defend world peace. We need to continue to uphold the banner of national independence, of self-government, self-support and self-propagation, promote Three-Self re-education among our Christians, raise further the sense of national self-respect, defend the fruits of the Three-Self Movement, enhance the love of the brethren and the practice of mutual respect in matters of Christian faith which have become the heritage of our Movement, and guard against the divisive tactics of those trying to undermine the Movement.

We are aware that in churches abroad there is a small number of people still hostile to New China today. They attack our principled stand on Three-Self and put their hands into our church life in the name of "evangelism" and "research." Regardless of the color of their skin, they are in reality trying to push Chinese Christianity back to the colonial past and earn for it again the onus of a foreign religion taking its stand against the Chinese people. We would hope that these individuals will not receive the support of other Christians abroad and their leaders. We are sure their pursuits will not bear good fruit in the long run.

As to those Christians abroad who assume an attitude of equality towards us and respect our principled stand on independence and self-government, we are ready to enter into friendly relations and fellowship with them.

In order to turn our intentions into fact, we have decided to call a national Christian conference in the near future in which, aside from the discussion of other important questions, we will produce the new national committee of the Three-Self Movement and go into the question of the formation of the national Christian organization. These are matters which concern every Christian and we request you to put the conference in your prayers. If you have any opinion regarding our Christian work in China today, please write to us at 169 Yuan Ming Yuan Road, Shanghai, so that we can take it into consideration at an early stage.

As we meet we remember with love our brothers and sisters in Taiwan and sincerely hope for the return of Taiwan to the bosom of our motherland within this new decade. Then we will be able to join together in rendering our common worship to the One Lord. Let all our fellow Christians pray and work for the dawn of that day.

In spite of the fact that we are unworthy servants of Christ, let us pray that, in God's blessing, a Chinese Church befitting the new countenance of our motherland will soon arise on the beloved soil of China.

*The Enlarged Meeting of the National Standing Committee of the Chinese Protestant Three-Self Patriotic Movement 1 March 1980  
from Tian Feng, 1 (October, 1980).  
reprinted courtesy of Ching Feng.*

# THE THIRD NATIONAL CHINESE CHRISTIAN CONFERENCE

## Resolution adopted on 13 October 1980

We, one hundred seventy-six delegates from the different provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions of China, including nine fellow Christians from five different national minorities of China, took part in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Third National Chinese Christian Conference held in Nanjing from 6 to 13 October, 1980.

Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we met together for earnest prayers, for a retrospect of the path our Lord has led the Chinese Church to take during the last thirty years, and for a thorough discussion of the urgent tasks and important problems that the Chinese Church is facing today. The conference achieved very satisfactory results.

We are unanimous in recognizing the great accomplishments of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement. As a result of this movement, the patriotic consciousness and sense of national self-respect on the part of Chinese Christians have been greatly heightened, and the colonial dependence on foreign support of the Chinese Church has been changed into self-government, self-support and self-propagation, in consonance with the realities of New China. More and more of our Chinese people have thereby turned away from their unfavorable attitude towards Christianity, thus enabling the light of the gospel to shine forth in our country.

We are resolved to continue to hold high the banner of patriotism and to guide the rank-and-file of our fellow-Christians to be with our people in making greater contributions to the task of safeguarding our national stability and unity, of implementing the four modernizations, of bringing about the return of Taiwan to our motherland, and of opposing hegemonism and aggression, and safeguarding world peace. We are resolved also to observe the laws as loyal citizens, disapproving of any attempt to carry on, in the name of Christianity, illegal activities detrimental to people's physical and mental well-being or to public order, thus humiliating the name of our Lord. We are further resolved to make every effort to safeguard the citizens' right of religious freedom and to assist the government in implementing its policy of religious freedom in all respects.

God has entrusted us today with the task of building in this land the Chinese Christians' own church in accordance with the truth of the Bible. We endorsed unanimously the proposal made this last spring at the enlarged meeting of the Standing Committee of our national Three-Self Movement and subsequently enthusiastically supported by colleagues and fellow-Christians throughout the country, that a national Christian organization be formed, to be named the China Christian Council. There is a division of labor between the Council and the National Committee of the Three-Self Movement. Their relationship is one of cooperation. In accordance with the present needs of the churches and Christian organizations in our country, the Council will give major attention to the work of improving the pastoral care of Christians all over China, including the training of appropriate church workers, publication of the Bible and literature of Christian nurture and strengthening the ties among churches and fellow-Christians.

The number of Christians today has increased as compared with the past. All those obedient to Christ who worship in spirit and in truth, whether in church-buildings or in homes, pledge to be of one mind in looking up to Jesus on whom our faith depends from start to finish. In humility and mutual love, sparing no effort to make fast with bonds of peace the unity which the Spirit gives, we will guard together the interests of our Church and of our motherland, both of which we cherish.

While holding fast to the Three-Self principle, we are open to friendly relations with churches and Christians abroad on the basis of equality and mutual respect, thus witnessing to our common fellowship in Christ. But we are strongly opposed to the small number of people abroad who take a hostile attitude towards New China, disregard the authority of the Chinese Church and our Three-Self principle, make efforts to split up the Chinese Christian communities and even engage in anti-China subversive activities under the guise of spreading the gospel. We believe most fellow Christians in other countries would not approve of such offensive activities. The designs of these people are bound to fail.

Throughout the conference we felt we were bathing in the grace of God. The Spirit was indeed moving in our midst. Owing to the fact that during these years we have been throwing off denominational prejudices that divided us, we were able to enjoy deeply the goodness and pleasantness of brothers and sisters dwelling together in unity and the felicities of the communion of saints. Fully conscious of the personal guidance of our Lord Jesus Christ the Great Shepherd himself, and of the support of prayers on the part of our fellow-Christians throughout the country, we were enabled to carry on our serious discussions and achieve very fruitful results. We are confident that God our Father will surely continue to lead us in overcoming various difficulties as we with one mind respond to his calling.

*from Tian Feng, 1 (March, 1981)  
courtesy of Ching Feng*

## **ESSAYS**

### **CHINESE CHRISTIANITY IN THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS - Shen Yifan**

Since the founding of New China, fresh theological thinking has proven new vitality in the life of the Chinese church, and given fresh impetus to the advance of Christian work. This essay is a personal observation of the theological situation in China.

#### **The Theological Outlook of the Church in Old China**

Christianity was introduced to China during a time of feudal oppression and foreign penetration. The masses of the people lived in extreme misery. The Christian message brought to them was characterized by escapism and otherworldliness. The world was regarded as dark and hopeless, dominated by Satan, and all human beings were thought to be totally depraved and helpless. Human suffering caused by social oppression and foreign aggression was explained as the penalty of our sinfulness. The believer, through his faith, was given a promise of heavenly bliss in a future life, and all non-believers were to be condemned.

A typical instance of conversion was described by a missionary in the 19th century. It was about a poor illiterate peasant whose only piece of land was seized by a rich man who wanted to build a tomb on it. He tore down the tomb several times and was imprisoned and put in chains for this action. Later, he managed to escape from prison and lived the life of an outcast. One day he wandered by a chapel where an evangelist was preaching and eventually he was converted. Very soon his sense of being wronged was entirely gone, and he was filled with unspeakable joy. His friends thought he must have gotten back his land. "Oh, no," he replied, "but I have found something worth a myriad farms. I have found the living God and his Son Jesus Christ and am an heir to possessions worth more than the whole world."

This is a rather pathetic story, but it shows how in the old days numbers of Chinese people in the lower strata of society were attracted to Christian preaching, largely because they found it to be a spiritual compensation for their degradation and suffering.

Many missionaries, though earnest in their devotion to evangelism, were not always free from the western mentality of their time. China was often depicted as an uncivilized and sinful country, and our rich cultural heritage was seen as nothing but heathenism. A well-known missionary of the last century once spoke nothing but heathenism. A well known missionary of the last century once spoke militantly of the missionary task in China as "to fight against the principalities of darkness, save the people from sin, and conquer China for the sake of Christ." Thus the preaching of the Gospel was often bound up with the spreading of western ideas, and a sense of national inferiority was often created among Chinese believers. An extreme example of the denationalizing effect of missionary teaching is an interpretation of the oracle about the fate of the sons of Noah in Genesis 9. It was said that Japheth, Shem and Ham represented the white, yellow and black races respectively, and therefore, according to that oracle, the white people had the right to "dwell in the tents of" the yellow people and to keep the black people in servitude.

The racist interpretation was quite widely circulated and accepted by some Christians as "Biblical truth."

With the awakening of national consciousness during Dr. Sun Yat-sen's revolution in 1911 and May 4th Movement in 1919, and with sharp criticisms of Christian missions by the anti-Christian movement in the 1920's as "cultural aggression" by Western powers, some Chinese Christian leaders and thinkers came to realize that the Christian religion could not take root in Chinese soil so long as it was intertwined with western ideology and way of life. They began to promote the indigenization of Christian thinking and tried to accommodate it to traditional Chinese culture. Some of them believed that all truth converged and that there was common ground between Christianity and Confucianism. Others taught that the Christian gospel will fulfill the teachings of Chinese sages by supplementing the humanistic content of Chinese philosophy with Christian supernatural revelation. They shared the view that Christianity in China must assimilate the elements in China's cultural heritage, and express its teaching in Chinese philosophical notions. This was the first attempt in original theological thinking made in the Chinese church, but this trend had its limitations. The Chinese theologians mentioned above paid so much attention to ancient philosophers and traditional culture that they took little account of contemporary intellectual developments. They were quite detached from the people's struggles against colonialism and feudalism in their time.

A few Christian thinkers, such as Dr. Y.T. Wu and others, seriously reflected on social realities in China and began to see the theological significance of the Chinese revolution, the aim of which was to overthrow feudal exploitation and foreign domination and to win national independence and social liberation. They believed that respect for human dignity and struggle for social justice are an essential part of the Christian message if we are to have a total understanding of God's salvation. They saw God's will at work in the rising tides of popular movements that pressed for fundamental political and social changes. They believed that there could be no future for Christianity in China if it were still burdened with Western mentality and its ramifications. Despite ideological differences, they found there were possibilities of co-operating with the revolutionaries in destroying the old social structure and establishing a new China.

### **New Realities Gave Rise to Theological ReThinking**

In the years following the founding of New China in 1949, we Chinese Christians have witnessed tremendous social changes in our country. The polarization in the distribution of social wealth has been checked, and the social evils that were rampant in the old days have been gradually eliminated. The people who used to be in the lowest strata of society have gained their dignity and rights, and the standard of living, as compared with the time prior to the establishment of the People's Republic, has been greatly improved. What has impressed the Christians most is the appearance of a new type of people, many of them Communists, who have won the love and respect of the people by their self-sacrificing spirit and noble deeds. How are we to explain these facts theologically?

A few preachers and evangelists were only slowly aware of the theological bearing of these fundamental changes. Early in 1950, one minister referred in his sermon to the "red horse"

(of bloodshed) as signifying the revolutionaries. By the end of 1950, when there was an upsurge of national protest against American involvement in the Korean War, an evangelist preached on the different fates of the three sons of Noah, so as to justify the expansion of the white race in the territories of the yellow race. Then, early in 1951, another evangelist asserted in his preaching that those Koreans killed by American bombing died because of their own sins. All these utterances aroused criticisms and protest from Christians in their congregations. Many Christian leaders saw clearly that theological thinking in China must first of all be purged of its colonialist stains.

In the fall of 1950, the Three-Self Movement for the Chinese Protestant churches was inaugurated, and the Three-Self Manifesto was proclaimed by 40 church leaders, with Dr. Y.T. Wu at their head. The purpose of this movement was to have the church in China freed politically, financially and ideologically from foreign control. The manifesto stressed among other things the need for a deeper understanding of the Christian faith. Later Dr. Y. T. W u explained that "self-propagation is not just a question of who are to propagate, but also a question of what is to be propagated." He called for the elimination of escapist ideas and the creation of Chinese Christians' own way of doing theological thinking.

At that time, Christians were confronted with problems of Christian ethics, such as whether Christians could be "above the world" and "above politics," and whether Christians should "love their enemies" under all conditions. Many people argued that since a person is a social being, one is consciously or unconsciously always taking sides in social and political issues, and it is impossible to be a-moral and apolitical. What is important for Christians is that they should be with the people and identify themselves with the masses in their struggles and aspirations. Many people also could not agree with the view that in order to love our enemies, we must give up any resistance to aggression and oppression. They distinguished between personal enemies and public enemies. While we must be forgiving and magnanimous to the former, we must punish the latter if we have true compassion on the broad masses who have been wronged by those enemies. The holy love of God implies God's wrath upon injustices and His judgment on the unjust.

### **Mass Theological Discussion and Awakening**

The theological fermentation in the early years of the People's Republic was challenged by certain extreme theological viewpoints that advocated a radical dualism of God and the world and that of the spirit and the body. The world, they stated, is in total darkness, being opposed to the divine light. An attitude of hostility towards the world and also towards all non-believers was advocated. One attains a perfect life by having communion with the divine fountainhead, which is a state that transcends all moral values and judgments. A person who has been elevated to such a "life" is freed from all moral obligations. All the fine deeds on the part of those without such a "life" are counted as worthless.

The proponents of these views declared a number of things:

- Christians and non-Christians are two entirely different species of people. Their ideas and judgments are diametrically opposed to each other. Of the world does not hate us,

but loves us, it only means we have the wrong way and have compromised ourselves with Satan and become friends of the world.

- Anything that is true and good and beautiful in the world is the work of Satan "transformed into an angel of light."

Some of them even went further and asserted:

- God does not care about the question of good and evil. To insist on the principle of right and wrong and the principle of good and evil is not Christianity. Christianity teaches about life, but not about good and evil, nor about right and wrong.
- The Christian life supersedes the distinction between right and wrong. What wrong is wrong, but what is right is not always right.
- Human deeds are a telling evidence of men's hostility toward God.
- Let us understand that to distinguish between right and wrong is sin, to distinguish between right and wrong is death, because only those who reside in death would do this.
- Good and evil are on the same side, they are on the same way, life is on another way. Christians must not only refuse evil, but also refuse good.

However, most Chinese Christians could not accept these ideas. Between 1953 and 1955, several articles appeared in the church magazine *Tian Feng* criticizing those extreme theological views. In July 1953, a group of readers wrote to the journal, refuting the ideas proposed in a book called *Holy Without Blemish* that the world is dominated by Satan, and that the Christian church, being the elect, is so united with God our spiritual fountainhead that it is made entirely holy and free from any sin or failure. In August of that same year, K.H. Ting, in an article entitled "Evangelism and Church-Building," criticized the over-exaggeration of the doctrine of justification by faith and enumerated its negative consequences. Early in 1954, Dr Y.T. Wu, in his essay "Freedom through Truth," emphasized the unity of "fountainhead" (faith) and "fruits" (works) and asserted that Christian faith affirms rather than obliterates the principle of right and wrong. In February 1955, an exegetical essay "The Witness of Faith" by Qing Mu, expounded the proper meaning of 2 Cor. 6: 14, and repudiated the teaching that fosters total antagonism between believers and non-believers.

In 1956, *Tian Feng* organized a mass discussion on theological issues which Christians were most concerned with, such as Christian attitudes toward the world and Christian attitudes toward their fellow men. The discussion was enthusiastically participated in by pastors, theological professors and students and lay people. There were diverse viewpoints but the debates centered on four main issues:

One: Is the world dominated by Satan or ruled and controlled by God? Most people held that while Satan lures people to sin and sabotages the moral order, God, the Creator and



Redeemer, rules and controls the world. All that is truthful and good comes from God. Hence all escapist views about the world are not justified.

Two: Is human nature totally depraved or, in spite of our original sin, does it still in some way or another embody "the image of God"? Many argued that although "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God," there are still inner struggles "between conscience and flesh" (Rom. 7). The Gospel is God's way for overcoming our sinfulness, but the good deeds of people in general who act according to their conscience should be appreciated rather than condemned.

Three: Are believers (church) and non-believers (society) inimical to each other or, while maintaining our unique Christian faith, can we and should we live in love and harmony with society? It is true that the Gospel is always something challenging and even a stumbling block to nonbelievers, but justification by faith should not make us Christians self-assertive and arrogant. The principle governing the relations between believers and non-believers should be love, since only through love can we bear good witness to the Gospel and make ourselves acceptable to society.

Four: Do faith and morality exclude each other or do they imply each other? For most people, the fallacy of antinomian ideas is downright repudiated. The Gospel is not just morality and morality cannot replace the Gospel. But the Gospel does not repudiate morality. The Gospel that repudiates morality is not the true Gospel. God is he who 'loves righteousness and hates wickedness.' Christians therefore, should "abhor that which is evil and cleave to that which is good."

### **The Debate on the Problem of Suffering**

In 1959, lively discussions were again occasioned by certain passages in Mrs. Charles Cowman's book *Streams in the Desert*. This work is a devotional book for daily reading which has been translated into Chinese with some adaptations. The book was popular in old China because it was found to be very comforting to those in distress and suffering. Since radical social changes took place after the new China was founded, there has been more understanding about the social causes of human suffering. Some Christians began to question the fatalism and passive submission advocated by some parts of that book. All suffering, its author exhorts, is from God and is God's blessing. Therefore, all suffering should be happily endured, and all evildoers tolerated. Two questions of moral theology were raised: 1) Is it the will of God for people to suffer? 2) Does God teach passive submission to all suffering?

With regard to the first question, many people held that one must not accept all suffering as from God. God does punish evildoers, but there are also innocent sufferers, whose distress is caused by the evildoing of other people or is a result of an evil social system. It is not God's will for these people to suffer. The will of God is for all people to enjoy peace and prosperity, rather than to suffer calamities and disasters. "Lead us not into temptation, and deliver us from evil" To regard all tribulation as from God would cover up and even justify human sin and injustice.

As for the second question, many people maintained that God does not demand passive submission to all distress. According to the apostle Peter, we must distinguish between suffering

for doing good and suffering for evil-doing (Ps. 3:17). If we suffer for doing good, God will make it a blessing, but we should also resist the evil that causes suffering. And if we suffer for evil-doing, it is God's punishment in order to make us repent from our sins.

These discussions have not given a thorough answer to the problem of suffering. But certain fatalistic views were criticized and an analytical attitude was adopted towards this issue.

### **Reconstruction of the Church and the Revitalization of Theological Thinking**

The development in theological thinking was unfortunately interrupted by the so-called Cultural Revolution in the 1960's and 1970's. But we are thankful that our nation has survived these ten years of turmoil and disaster and has regained its vitality. The resuscitation and new developments in our country and the restoration and reconstruction of the church in China has given fresh impetus to theological reflections.

Compared to the theological thinking in the 50's, that of the 80's is more constructive than critical, more theological and doctrinal than exegetical and hermeneutical, more christological and Trinitarian than anthropological and ethical. In sermons and theological discussions, one can find the following trends:

#### **New Insights into the Doctrine of Incarnation**

As "the Word was made flesh, and dwelled among us, full of grace and truth," our belief in the incarnation therefore rejects any notion that depreciates the mundane world and material life. It is also incompatible with those ideas that foster detachment and resignation from society, the nation and the world. It breaks down the traditional dichotomy between the sacred and the profane, the antithesis between God and humanity and that between God and the world. God is only opposed to human sinfulness and disobedience. The incarnation affirms all just, honest and self-sacrificing efforts in human life and opens up the way for their acceptance by God.

#### **Deeper Understanding of the Meaning of the Cross**

Chinese Christians are now transcending and discarding the controversies between the personal gospel and the social gospel, because neither can adequately express the essence of the Gospel of the Cross. The Cross manifests God's saving grace; it also signifies the basic truth about the universe and human life. "Except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abides along; but if it die it brings forth much fruit." This is the objective law of nature, and it also bespeaks the salvific truth of the Cross. Age-long controversies about relations between grace and nature, revealed theology and natural theology are wonderfully and beautifully solved and unified in the Cross. The stereological implications and the cosmic significance of the Cross are integrated and combined. We still hold that ultimately man can be reconciled to God only through redemption by Jesus Christ, who died for us on the Cross; yet we also see that the paradoxical truth of the Cross is being verified through people's sacrificial and noble deeds, whatever be their beliefs and ideologies.

#### **The Particular and Universal Inspiration of the Holy Spirit**

We Chinese Christians are gradually giving up our narrow views about the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit convicts people of sin, inspires them to receive salvation and gives them power to propagate the Gospel. But His work is not limited to these. He takes part in the work of creation from the very beginning, and He continually bestows people with wisdom and knowledge. He is the Spirit of truth, and "He will guide you into all truth." Note "all truth"! The Holy Spirit is at work in all human advances and achievements in philosophy, science, culture and the arts. We are trying to establish a church which is rooted in the Chinese soil. We have no right to refuse the guidance of the Holy Spirit and to take a nihilistic attitude towards the cultural, scientific and philosophical attainments of the Chinese nation. Many Chinese Christians have become more and more convinced that it is imperative for us to draw nutrition from the Chinese culture, past and present, for the building of our own system of theological thinking.

Many old theological formulas still need to be reexamined and new theological issues to be tackled. But theological reconstruction for the church in China is now under way. We trust that the time will come when more creative and systematic work in theological thinking in China will flourish and bloom.

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## **THEOLOGICAL MASS MOVEMENTS IN CHINA - K.H. Ting**

**Lecture delivered at Rikkyo University, Tokyo, 23 September, 1984**

The year 1949 was a special year for China. From one standpoint the United States "lost" China in that year and, from another, in that same year the Chinese people got their liberation. For us Chinese Christians that liberation marks the beginning of a process in our church known as the Three-Self Movement. I will have other opportunities to discuss that movement. For the present I will try to describe how Chinese Christians have striven to find their own path in the theological undergirding of their faith.

There were two things which greatly jolted us Chinese Christians upon liberation. First, through direct contacts with revolutionaries, we found them on the whole to be very different from Chiang Kai-shek's Kuomintang officials, and far from the caricature of them made by some missionaries and Chinese church leaders. They were certainly not the monsters and rascals they were said to be, but quite normal human beings with idealism, serious theoretical interests, and high ethical commitment. For the liberation of their compatriots, many of them sacrificed their all. To serve the people was not only a slogan but also the life purpose of many of them. They have taken over from ancient Chinese sages the teaching that they are to be "severe in making demands of themselves" and "sad before the whole people are sad and happy only after the whole people are happy." Many practiced mutual criticism and relentless self-criticism in order to make themselves useful to the revolutionary cause. And, although they had no high regard for religion at all, they did not attempt to persecute or liquidate religion either. Here I am, of course, talking about the true revolutionaries, and neither the pseudo-revolutionary ultra-leftists of a later decade, nor the disappointing party members whom the rectification movement today aims to reform. In discovering these true revolutionaries, the Chinese Christians were both happy for seeing in them the hope for the future of China and fearful before the haunting question whether or not there was still any ground for the existence of Christianity. Indeed, at that time a number of Christians, in joining the revolutionary ranks, did move away from the church and from faith.

Second, there were some in the church who refused so stubbornly to be impressed by the new arrivals on the scene that they began to advance not only theological but highly political arguments to negate liberation and New China. The world is the realm of Satan, they said, condemned to imminent destruction. The Christian is not to love the world and whatever is in it, even that which is lovable. Those who accept Christ and those who do not constitute an absolute contradiction, with no common language between the two. Human beings are evil and a person who does not confess faith in Christ can do nothing good, and the better his or her conduct the more truly he or she is Satan masquerading as an angel. The animal with two horns and the red horse referred to in Revelation are actually representations of the Communist Party. On the basis of this hermeneutics New China will be short-lived. The church is holy and without blemish and, therefore, needs no change and should reject all criticism and self-criticism. The right/wrong question or the good/bad dichotomy is not God's concern. What God is concerned with is not any ethical distinction between good and evil, right and wrong, justice and injustice, because God is opposed not only to human evil but also to human good. The doctrine of the security of the believer ensures to those elected by Christ the freedom to do anything, while others are condemned no matter how good their work is. This provided the assurance of God's acceptance

of a Christian, even if he or she should commit all sorts of crimes against the new life the people had only recently entered into. That is antinomianism and, in the early 1950' s, was the main theological weapon used by those in church circles who were determined not to be reconciled to the fact of New China. It won some Christians for a time, but was disgusting to many more Christians, and drove some of them away from the church for good.

These two facts set Chinese Christians thinking. On the one hand, while being truly impressed by the conduct and deeds of the revolutionaries, many of us found it impossible to take leave of Christ but chose to say with Peter, "You, Lord, have the words of eternal life. To whom can we go?" On the other had, antinomian reactionism actually wanted us to stand and work against the people's liberation movement with all its goodness and beauty, and that was certainly an ethically indefensible alternative. Caught in between, Chinese Christians all over the country started to do theological reflection on their own. It was a mass movement seeking theological reorientation, entirely spontaneous, involving tens of thousands of Christians in restudying the Bible in relation to social changes around us and in discussion, oral as well as written. I recall that in sixteenth-century Germany the Reformation also impelled the posing of "new thoughts" against "old thoughts" in many households, as recorded by T .M. Lindsay and other church historians. But I do not know if there were many phenomena in church history that were comparable. Perhaps history has traditionally been written so much as the feats of leaders ad geniuses that any mass movement, least of all a theological one, would not have been given importance. But in China, in the early 1950's, theology came out of the theologian's study and became a tool in the hands of lay men and women struggling to keep their faith vital and yet enabling them to relate themselves positively to the new reality as they found it. This was a mass movement for self -enlightenment, not incomparable to the Enlightenment in Europe if we remember Immanuel Kant's characterization of the Enlightenment as "man's release from his self-incurred tutelage." And tutelage is "man's inability to make use of his understanding without direction from another." Kant says, "Have courage to use your own reason! That is the motto of the Enlightenment!"

Participants in this movement of theological rethinking were at first mostly rank-and-file Christians and clergy at the grass roots. Those who were theologically trained tended to keep themselves a little aloof from the discussion, which they perhaps regarded as something not quite sophisticated enough. This is understandable: they were situated in the rear and hence not quite sensitive to the poignancy of the new problems and were rather critical of theological propositions crudely put, while lay Christians were situated at the boundary between the church and the world and could not but feel the pressure of these problems and be driven to formulate questions, think them through, and attempt to answer them. Their main recourse had to be the Bible, which, when reread, gave them "new lights" or "new insights," as so commonly referred to in China since then.

A mass movement is not like doing embroidery and cannot be expected to show neatness and precision. There is no lack of over-statements. But two lines of W.H. Auden's poetry give a good description of the contribution the theological mass movement made to the Chinese Church:

Ruffle the perfect manners of the frozen heart,  
And compel it once again to be awkward and alive.

Much of the discussion at the early stage had to do with questions about the world and about human beings. The world is certainly no paradise, but is it hell? Human beings are, of course, no angels, but are they, as a rest of Adam's sin now so depraved that they are completely insulated from truth, goodness, and beauty, each of them just "a worm five feet tall"?

To our revolutionary humanist friends, we like to point out that between the actual moral state of humanity as it is and the vision of the highest state humanity aspires to attain there is a distance which humanity, by its own ability, certainly cannot bridge. Many conscientious revolutionaries, in all their seriousness in self-examination, would readily feel at home in Paul's predicament about his failure to do what he knew he ought to do and his inclination to do the very thing that he hated (Rom.7:15). In other words, human beings are not in the state which God means them to be in. The factor in human nature which makes this so is appropriately called by Christians sin. Human beings cannot depend on themselves but have to depend on God's deliverance in order to quit that state. True, as far as China is concerned, the change from feudalism-capitalism to socialism is all-important for the restoration of human dignity, but the change has not done away with this state of human spiritual poverty. "Lord, you have made us for yourself so that we can find no rest until we find it in you" - many human beings living within the socialist system are echoing this utterance of Augustine's from the depth of their hearts. So, in China today, whether or not religion still has its ground to exist in spite of all the improvement in material, cultural, and moral life is no longer a question for Christians. The fact that the number of Christians in China has increased and not decreased in the last thirty-five years also partially answers the question. We only hope and pray that the way will soon come when Christians will have the love, the light, and the language to communicate with revolutionaries on matters of basic conviction which will strengthen and not impair mutual understanding and national unity.

On the other hand, it is important for any understanding of the Chinese Christian mind to know that for thousands of years there has been an absence in the teachings and writings of sages and scholars of the idea of an inborn perversity in human nature. Rather than seeing any need to explain this perversity by resorting to some theory of a fall on the part of the first human beings, ancient Chinese folklore simply accepted natural humanity. According to ancient Chinese mythology, the first humans (who took part in creation) included a woman, Nu Wuo, who mended the broken heaven and set up pillars to support it when it got slanted. "Nu Wuo tempered multi-colored stones to mend the heaven with, and chopped off the feet of the sea turtles with which to support heaven at its four corners," according to Lieh Tzu, in "Emperor Tang's Queries" (also, Huai-nan Tze, "Lessons from Surveying Cosmic Mysteries"). Therefore, the human person is the supreme hero on whom even the universe depends for support. This concept of the relation between the celestial and the human is vastly different from much of Western philosophical anthropology.

Mao Tse-tung the poet was very much an inheritor of this tradition when he wrote (1934-35):

Mountains!  
Piercing the blue of heaven, your bars unblunted!  
The skies would fall  
But for your strength supporting.

Mencius, widely regarded in China as second only to Confucius himself, taught that human nature is essentially good. It was he who said, "All human beings are compassionate in heart," and referred to that universal compassion as "the beginning of benevolence." This compassion and humility, discrimination between right and wrong and a sense of shame, are all innate and are "the beginnings of goodness." Since the Song dynasty, this has been the prevailing view of human nature among Chinese intellectuals. Down to the 1920's, any Chinese pupil in learning the first Chinese characters would study the "Three-Character Rhyme", and it opens with the sentence, "At one's birth, a person is good by nature."

Because of the age-long education in this spirit, Chinese, in spite of all the suffering they have borne, are at the bottom of their hearts optimistic. They are likely to affirm that even in war what is disclosed of men and women is not just their brutality and evil but also their fortitude and comradeship. Then, in the course of the Chinese revolution and reconstruction, there have emerged countless men and women of courage, ingenuity, and self-sacrifice.

From this background it is easy to see why Christians who do recognize the fact of sin and human finiteness find it impossible to go so far as to ignore the latent image of God in humankind and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the world by lightly resorting to the formula of "utter depravity," or seeing, with Nietzsche, humanity as "only a disease on the skin of the earth."

We do not want to negate all cultures outside the influence of the church. There are certainly movements approaching in various degrees the Christian understanding of God in these cultures, which we cannot afford to sweep aside as valueless. We find, for instance, that 3,000 years ago the Shih ching, in a section named "Ta Ya" had this to say:

Abundant sacrifice to heaven stood,  
Burnt-oblation ascending,  
Divine favor descending,  
Simple fragrance arriving timely,  
God's blessing bestowed kindly,  
After her son's selfless offering,  
Eternal afflictions cease coming.

And Lao-tzu is supposed to have said over 2,500 years ago:

There is already begotten before  
Heaven and earth came into being:  
serenely silent,  
peacefully alone,  
eternally faithful,  
the Immovable Mover, like  
the caring Mother of all things.  
I do not know its name  
and describe it as Tao.

Can we fairly say that these are worthless or worse than worthless just because they have

emerged outside the Christian tradition? Toward non-Christian spirituality we certainly should avoid the arrogance of the elder brother in our Lord's parable, or that of Jonah in his attitude to the Ninevites. We should welcome any and every move Godward on the part of men and women, no matter how slight.

Human sin has affected creation, but the created world, after all, is still under God and not the devil's occupied territory. Otherwise, in what sense can we honestly say, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son to the world," or that "God became flesh in Jesus Christ"? Commenting on Romans 1:20, Luther says, "For all things that God made were 'very good' (Genesis 1:31) and are still good." For his proofs Luther went on to quote from 1 Timothy 4:4, "Everything created by God is good," and from Titus 1:15, "To the pure all things are pure." Luther affirms that "all creation is the most beautiful book or Bible; in it God has described and portrayed himself."

In the 1950's Chinese Christian journals published hundreds of articles dealing with the question of the world and humanity. What I have given you is only a description of the general thrust of ideas advanced in those years.

From debating on the level of God's creation and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, not only in the church but also in the world and in history, Chinese Christians moved forward and grounded their thinking on a more solid Christological foundation. Many Chinese Christian intellectuals from a Social Gospel background found, as if for the first time, the Christ of St. John's Gospel and Ephesians and Colossians and claimed him as their own. He is the preexistent *Logos*, the crown or the fulfillment of all creation, the revealer in all fullness of its nature and meaning. His incarnation is not an intrusion into an alien world, but a renewal. They listen with joy to Paul's words of adoration of the Christ as "image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; for in him all things were created, in heaven and earth, visible and invisible; whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities - things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Col. 1:15-17). We Christians in New China reread this passage with thanksgiving because we find it liberating. The ascended Christ is like sunshine filling the universe, both its mountains and its valleys, and bringing out every spark of color latent everywhere. Reality is one gigantic process, one in which matter and simple organisms attain higher and higher forms of existence, with the loving community as the ultimate attainment of the image of God on the part of men and women, just like the triune God in a community of love.

Justin Martyr spoke of the *Logos Spermatikos*, the presence of seeds of the *Logos* in all human beings. This view has been received warmly by many Chinese-thinking Christians in recent decades.

We also appreciate the words of Thomas Aquinas to the effect that grace does not supplant nature, but perfects it. Indeed the New Testament sees all creation as embodying Christ from the very beginning. Grace is not so much added on to nature, as in Luther's simile of snow falling on a dunghill, but is the ground for nature.

Christ spoke of the joy of the mother for having given birth to a child into the world.



Here we are again led to see that Christ harbors no antagonistic attitude to the world, to humanity, and to nature.

Romans 5:15 becomes full of meaning to us as we read it again in the new light: "If many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many." The words "much more" take upon themselves a meaning previously untapped. We are led to see that Christ is stronger than Adam, the gift stronger than disobedience, and grace stronger than sin. It is inconceivable that the incarnation of the Son of God should have made less of an impact on humanity than the fall of Adam. Too often we make sin universal, while narrowing down divine grace and redemption to a limited few, as if Adam has left a deeper imprint on humanity than has Christ. The verse assures us that our human solidarity with Christ is more universal, more decisive, and more efficacious than is our solidarity with Adam. The greatest word in the New Testament is not "sin", it is "grace."

Thus, as we shift away from the belief/unbelief antithesis, as the sole question Christianity asks of humanity, to a greater appreciation of the unity of God's creative, redemptive, and sanctifying work in the universe and in history, many contemporary thoughts and movements begin to be seen, not in contrast with the divine revelation or destructive of it but, rather, as aids in illuminating it, partial as they in deed are. They are not adversaries but glimpses of the way of Christ. In looking at realities this way, we think we are not diminishing the significance of the unique divine Christ, but are magnifying his glory and confirming his claims.

God being love, the final fate of happenings and undertakings in nature and history cannot be their total destruction. They will be sifted, some surely to be destroyed but others to be transfigured and sublimated in Christ and by Christ, to be received by God at the final consummation. They will be safe and secure in God's hand. Hence, there is not only the historic but also the ultimate importance and value of what one does with nature and in the world and makes of oneself. All of this deepens our understanding of the Christ and puts the people's historical movements with all their shortcomings and flaws in the perspective of cosmic evolution. T.S. Eliot aptly describes this experience of the discovery of the greater Christ:

... The end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started  
and to know the place for the first time.

China makes so much of 1949 as the year of the people's liberation that Christians elsewhere have wondered what Chinese Christians since 1949 think of liberation theology.

We think very highly of liberation theology as a theology permitting and mobilizing Christians in Latin America to join with the masses of people around them in their struggle for independence, democracy, and a more humane socioeconomic system. We also appreciate liberation theology for its emphasis on context and praxis. The resultant biblical hermeneutics is fresh, eye-opening, morally impelling, and politically conscientizing. We consider liberation theologians to be our friends and inspiring fellow pilgrims.

Our reservation is that, much as we do see the urgency of the taking over of political power by the peoples in the third world from the hands of foreign intruders and despotic rulers, we in our situation do not see fit to absolutize liberation and make it the theme or content of

Christian theology. We are ready to see context and praxis as test ground for truth, but we hesitate to go further and take them as source for salvific knowledge. Inductive knowledge basing its material on experiences of historical existence will need the depth and mystery of deductive knowledge with its basis in revelation. Messages we collect through both channels collaborate to lighten our darkness about human nature and to lead us to see that the theme of Christian theology must of necessity be the reconciliation of God and humanity in Jesus Christ.

From our revolutionary history we realize that the poor, by virtue of their disadvantageous position in society and their lack of vested interests, on the whole suffer less from attachment to the status quo, as they have nothing or little to lose in a revolutionary change, except the fetters of poverty and degradation. As a result, insofar as social questions are concerned, other things being equal, there is some epistemological advantage on their part, which the privileged are not likely to possess to the same degree or with the same ease.

However, we, especially in our postliberation state of affairs, would hesitate to think that the poor, just because they are poor, are necessarily the bearers of truth and that the mandate of history is necessarily in the hands of the poor in their struggle against the rich. To be poor is miserable. The poor deserve justice. But poverty is not virtue unless voluntary, and it does not always bring with it wisdom. To make a messiah of the poor just because they are poor, and to pit the poor against the rich without the guidance provided by correct theory is neither Marxist nor Christian. We saw its harm all the more clearly during the Cultural Revolution, which turned out to be very anti-cultural and not in any sense a revolution either. In post-liberation China, especially after the problem of private ownership of the means of production was solved, we entered the historical period of national consolidation and reconstruction. The advocates of "perpetual revolution," however, still saw class struggle as the key for this stage of history, as much as it was during the previous stages when the forces of reaction were still in power. In order to make revolution perpetual they decided that the revolutionary camp was to be composed of all the poorer people, and the counterrevolutionary camp was to be composed of the richer persons, especially the intellectuals and the veteran revolutionaries who were now the power holders. We saw the havoc this view of history caused to the unity and the reconstruction of the country. These ultra-leftist dogmatists, in the name of the revolution, created a tremendous amount of chaos and anarchy, which hurt so many Innocent people. They did many of the things that the enemies of China would like to have done but were unable to do.

Negative praxis in China teaches us a lot about the danger of absolutizing the revolutionary justice of the poor just by virtue of their poverty. We need a saner understanding of human nature, including the human nature of the poor, so as to work for a social system in which the power of human egoism can be most effectively curtailed and in which human nature finds the best environment possible for its flowering into something of beauty.

Thus, while traditional Western theology dialogues with Western philosophy and explains sin in terms of the history of the doctrine of sin, and liberation theology dialogues with present-day third-world realities and aims at overcoming the forces of sin through social struggle, we in China want our church and theology to take root in the Chinese soil, and guard the concept of sin both from its simplistic denial by humanist optimism and its unwarranted universalization in the name of orthodoxy. If much of European theology helps believers live

with the reality of world hunger, and liberation theology moves them to share in the struggle for overcoming hunger, we in New China are concerning ourselves with the evangelistic task of showing our fellow citizens, to whom hunger is no longer the number one problem, that we do not live by bread alone but by the word of God.

Ours is a big but in many ways still backward country. Our church is a small one, still having the task to live down completely the stigma of being a Western import. In the last thirty-five years our experiences as a nation, as a church, and as individual Christians go . a long way to tell us that strength is found in weakness and life in death. Resurrection from the dead to us is not just something that happened to Christ, but a principle or law that governs nature and history. An old Chinese poem seems to express aptly our experiences:

With mountains and waters all around  
We wondered whether there was a way out.  
Flowers brightened us up in the dark shades of willows,  
And we soon found ourselves reaching another village.

And we come to know the Risen Christ all the more intimately. We realize more surely than ever that between alpha and omega there is not a straight line, but there are many zigzags and curves. Catastrophes and suffering of which we had plenty during the so-called Cultural Revolution are but the mother's birth pangs. They bring forth one after another newborn things, "for the end is not yet." "When a woman is in travail she has sorrow, because her hour has come; but when she is delivered of the child, she no longer remembers the anguish; for joy that a child is born into the world" (Jn.16:21). This, to us, is history. Creation is a process as yet incomplete and subject to frustration. Birth pangs are antecedent to the emergence of creatures who will eventually respond to their Creator and cooperate among themselves lovingly, intelligently, and voluntarily. They will then be truly sons and not slaves. A world still in this process must inevitably be one in which ugliness and devilry have their place. We may recall the inspiring words of Teilhard de Chardin: "Someday, after we have mastered the wind, the waves, the tide and gravity, we shall harness for God the energies of love; and then for the second time in the history of the world man will have discovered fire."

Our Christology is not one that lingers at the divinity and Godlikeness of God. In Christ we know God is no severe taskmaster. As Hosea tells us, God leads us with cords of compassion and bands of love; he becomes to us one who eases the yoke on our jaws, who bends down to us and feeds us. The root attribute of God is not his omnipotence, or his omniscience, or his omnipresence, or his self-existence, or his majesty and glory, but his love. Love is not just an attribute of God, but is Godlike, for God is Love. He is the Lover at the heart of reality. The disclosure that God is one who loves with the kind of love embodied in Jesus Christ, crowns and corrects whatever else may be said about God. Love is creative and seeks the very best. God is not only the source of cosmic order and the first cause of all happenings in the world. In a more important sense, he is the Lover to whom every chain of cause and effect returns in the end. Everything that is of some good is not going to be lost, but is safe in God, that is, will be preserved and transformed for that kingdom to come in which Love will be supreme. That is essentially what is meant when we say God is sovereign.

With this theological orientation we approach the vicissitudes of world affairs in both

calm detachment and passionate involvement. It is a longer view of history than any humanly possible, and yet makes sharing in the day-to-day burden and struggle for the renewal of the people's life worthwhile. It makes the role of the Christian at once participatory and critical.

After all these years we still have different theological tendencies. But they coexist in mutual respect within the fellowship of Christology, true to the New Testament and to the tradition of the church. That fellowship, evolving out of a mass movement shared by all Christians, is providing the theological ground for the unprecedentedly wide-ranging post-denominational unity which the China Christian Council embodies.

What has been said above is merely one Chinese Christian's assessment of the theological fermentation in China in the wake of her political liberation. At present the three theological questions that are uppermost in our thinking are perhaps (1) Christology, (2) Evangelism, and (3) an Ecclesiology that can help us make the transition from the unity of the China Christian Council to that of the one Church of China.

The seven churches in Asia Minor were situated in different milieus and faced with different problems, and consequently received different messages from the Holy Spirit. But at the end of all seven messages the same exhortation appears: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." This explains the desire on the part of Japanese as well as Chinese Christians to get acquainted with each other's spiritual histories and dramas. Our present visit to Japan and this presentation have been made with the faith that through hearing the Spirit's message to each other, Christians in Japan and in China can strengthen each other, and together enter into the wisdom of God more deeply.

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## THE LOGOS DISCOURSE IN ST. JOHN'S GOSPEL - Luo Zhenfang

The Gospel according to John has been called the "spiritual gospel." A second-century church father compared that gospel to an eagle, which, of all the birds, flies the highest and sees the farthest. The Gospel of John is the witness of Jesus' "beloved disciple" John. With singular insight, he made Jesus into 'the Word from the beginning"; this is an idea that is not found in the first three gospels. While all the four gospels narrate the deeds and teachings of Jesus, John's Gospel has its special character. What is particularly different is that a Prologue (1: 1-18) is placed at the beginning of the book, with the explicit intent of expounding the mystery of "the Word made flesh." What implications does this concept of the "Word" in the Gospel of John have? Before John, were there considerations of the Word, and what implications do they have? These are the questions to be taken up in this paper.

The Greek word for the Word is *logos*. This Greek word has unusually rich meanings. In the Old Testament *logos* means the word of God. In Greek philosophy it refers to the rational nature of the universe. In Chinese philosophy the word *dao* also has very rich meanings. This paper will investigate how John adopted the concept of *logos*, then prevalent, to explicate Christ, so as to enable the Gospel to be propagated ever more fully; at the same time this paper will attempt to make a comparison between the concept of *logos* and Chinese thoughts about *dao*. John made use of the concept of *logos* to explain Christ as the Word made flesh, and *dao* in Chinese philosophical thought has extremely rich meanings, so that considerations in these respects would serve as reference materials for the self-propagation of the church in China.

### I. The Concept of Logos in the Old Testament.

The author of John's Gospel derived a large part of his thinking from the Old Testament. We already mentioned above that in the Old Testament *logos* refers to the word of God. Words (*dabar* in Hebrew) are the medium for the transmission of ideas, and God communicates with human beings by means of his word and thereby reveals himself to humankind. The word of God has another important connotation: when God speaks in words he shows power, the power to fulfill his purpose. The Book of Isaiah has this to say:

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and return not thither but water the earth, ..... so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it. (55: 10,11)

The prophet used poetic language to explicate the meaning of God's word. God's word is like rain and snow, which, once come down, will not return for naught. Rain and snow water the earth, enabling plants to grow; in like manner, the word of God surely has a function to perform.

In the beginning when God created heaven and earth, he said, "Let there be light," and there was light. Both the Old Testament and the New consistently affirm that the world is created by the word of God. The word of God has two meanings: (1) his words create, for God through his words shows power, to accomplish the work of creation; (2) his words are revelatory, for in

Old Testament times God reveals his words to the prophets, who in turn transmit God's will to humankind (see Jeremiah 1:4; Ezekiel 1:3; Amos 3:1).

The Prologue says "He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through Him" (1:2,3). This is the word of God which creates. The Prologue also makes mention of light in particular (1:4, 5, 7, 9). Light in John's Gospel refers to God's revelation especially. At the end of the Prologue John says: "No one has ever seen God: the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made Him known" (1:18). Jesus as the Word of God, came to the world and in concrete living manifested God. This is the word of God which is revelatory. Thus we see that the dual meanings of the word of God in the Old Testament appear in the Prologue.

In ancient Israel the prophets transmitted the word of God; besides, there were wise men who transmitted God's wisdom. The Book of Proverbs in the Old Testament contains many words concerning wisdom, the most prominent of which is the poem in praise of wisdom (Proverbs 8). The poet personified wisdom, and in the poem are many words characterizing wisdom, very similar to words in the Prologue. For example, the Prologue begins with "In the beginning was the Word"; and the poem in praise of wisdom says:

The Lord created me at the beginning of his work the first of his acts of old. (Proverbs 8:22)

Wisdom as well as the Word existed before the world. The Prologue says "He (the Word) was in the beginning with God, all things were made through him" (1:2-3). The poem in praise of wisdom has "When he established the heavens, I was there. ... Then I was beside him, like a master workman; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always" (Proverbs 8:27, 30).

The Prologue emphatically says that before heaven and earth were made the Word was with God, and all things were made through him. Similarly, before God created heaven and earth and the myriad things, wisdom was beside God, as the master workman creating all things. A master workman is a skilled craftsman, who assists God in designing plans and in creating all things ever more beautifully. All this is poetic language, describing the wisdom of God in his creation. God's creativity transcends time and space, so that it can be described only in imageries such as one finds in poetry. As Laozi said, "The nameless is the beginning of heaven and earth." Before heaven and earth came into being, *dao* was already there; but because *dao* transcends time and space, Laozi said, "I do not know its name, but I shall call it *dao*."

This way of saying things transcends the limit of speech.

## **II. The Concept of Logos in Greek Philosophy and Philo**

As we have said before, in Greek philosophy *logos* refers to the rational nature of the universe. Stoicism in particular has developed this idea notably. As this school of philosophy sees it, the universe is a remarkably orderly whole because it has been profoundly stamped with a rational nature. That we can gain knowledge and know all the laws of the universe is due to our rational nature, which is a very small part of cosmic reason. Cosmic reason forms the natural laws in nature and the moral laws in society. The Stoic philosophers called rationality in the

cosmos divine *logos* and saw in man's mind the seeds of *logos* (*logoi spermatikoi*) which promote human moral consciousness. If only the human person will obey the moral consciousness in him and act according to reason he will lead a life of noble morality. This kind of thinking is very akin to the thought of Chinese Neo-Confucianists of the Song dynasty. The Song Neo-Confucianists conceived of the cosmos as having its roots in *li* (reason), and that is *dao* (way). Cheng Yi understood the material world in terms of intermittent life and death, but *li* (reason) never changes, and the material world has reason as its basis. Reason is the highest principle in the natural order and also the highest principle in the social order. Cheng Yi believed that reason is not born, nor will it die, and it neither increases nor decreases, manifesting itself as the constant moral principle in human life. If man acts according to the reason of heaven, he will certainly prosper and flourish.

Between the Greek philosophical conception of *logos* and *logos* (the Word) in the Gospel of John, there is yet another great distance. The *logos* of Stoic philosophy is an immanent divinity in the universe, which cannot exist independently of the universe, and which, moreover, is not the almighty God, creator of the universe and all things in it. If according to Stoicism, man will realize moral perfection by following the rational *logos* what need is there for salvation? Hence John could not have directly accepted the Greek philosophical concept of *logos*. In Hellenistic Judaism the concept of *logos* went through a period of development and transformation, the exponent of which is the Jewish scholar Philo in the first century.

Philo (b.circa.20 B.C., d. 50 A.D.) was a Jewish scholar of Alexandria. What he taught about *logos* had a definite influence on the Prologue of the Johannine Gospel. He held firm to the Judaic belief in the one transcendent God. ("Transcendence" means that God exists independently of the universe and apart from it.) Philo believed that God is far away from the world and his self-existence is transcendent, with *logos* mediating between God and the world; *logos* was first created by God before the creation of the world, and is also an instrument of God's for the creation of the world. Philo adopted Stoic thought, and recognized *logos* as the cosmic reason that constitutes the world and the fullness thereof. The *logos* is secondary to God but is outside of God. On this point Philo was very different from the understanding of *logos* in the Gospel of John. John thought that *logos* and God are of the same body, and that *logos* is God.

Philo inherited the thought of the poem in praise of wisdom in the Old Testament, and at the same time adopted the Stoic teachings about *logos*, in order to explain the relationship between God and the world. The Greek word "*logos*" has double reference to both speech and thought. Philo thought that *logos* is not only speech or command issuing from God but is also the reason for the existence of the universe. *Logos* transcends the universe, and is at the same time immanent in it. It is the plan shown by the universe and the purpose of the universe's existence. The *Logos* is the thought of God as is manifested externally and is therefore God as he is revealed. Philo thought that aside from the being and existence of God, he is unknowable even his being and existence are known only to some persons who have perfection of character. *Logos* is not only the thought and plan of God as is manifested in the universe, but is also the power which creates the universe and upholds its existence. Philo taught that *logos* is not only the medium whereby God creates the world but is also the medium in which God proceeds to rule over it. If people can come before God, that is also due to the mediating role of *logos*, so that it may be called "the high priest."

Summing up what has been said above: the Greek word "*logos*", originally has the meaning of speech and at the same time it means thought. When John made use of the word "*logos*" to explain Christ, people at that time, coming from different backgrounds, had different associations with the word. Those with background in Greek philosophy interpreted *logos* to mean the cosmic reason. John took one further step to explain that this omnipresent cosmic reason is concretely realized in the earthly life of Christ - the Word became flesh. On the other hand, those whose background was Hebrew thought conceived of the *logos* as the word of God, including the creative word of God and his word of revelation. Just as the author of the Letter to the Hebrews said "By faith we understand that the world was created by the word of God" (11:3).

God created the world through Christ, and through him he spoke to us (Hebrews 1:2). That is to say, Christ is the Word of God's creation as well as the Word of his revelation. Christ is the Word of God, and in the end God's Word entered history, realizing itself in the earthly life of Christ the Word became flesh. John reinterpreted the concept of *logos* thus making it possible for people with different intellectual backgrounds to enter into the meaning of the incarnation of Christ. This sheds light on the self-propagation of the Chinese Church. The translators of the Chinese Bible translated *logos* into *dao* using a traditional Chinese concept to explain Christ. We may proceed to compare the Chinese concept of *dao* with *logos*, showing the similarities and differences between the two.

### **III. The Concept of *Dao* in Chinese Philosophy.**

In the Chinese language "*dao*" is the *dao* in *dao lu*, meaning road or way. It is the path on which all changes in life and nature travel or the law by which they abide. The ancient thinkers of China endeavored to discover the fundamental laws of the universe and of life, and these laws may be called *dao*. Laozi was the first to systematically propound the concept of *dao*. He taught that *dao* is the fundamental law of the universe. He said, "Man abides by the earth, the earth abides by heaven, heaven abides by *dao*, *dao* abides by itself naturally." Man obtains the law from earth, earth obtains the law from heaven, heaven obtains the law from *dao*. In this manner one goes from one level to a higher level, one law is understood to be more fundamental than another, until *dao* is reached, with no higher level to go. "*Dao* abides by itself naturally" means: *dao* has no other source from which to obtain its law, it is its own law, with no other law more fundamental than itself.

Laozi also said: "Something had had its being, even before heaven and earth were born.... I do not know its name, I shall call it *dao*." This is similar to what John said, "In the beginning was the Word." Both strongly contended the preexistence of *dao* or the Word. Before heaven and earth *dao* already existed. After Laozi came Zhuangzi, who said, "That which was born before heaven and earth, could it have been material substance? What gave birth to matter could not have been matter" ("Zhi-bei-you"). Heaven and earth are not materialistic world. *Dao* existed before the materialistic world. Could *dao* have been materialistic? Since *dao* existed before the materialistic world, it gave birth to material things, and that means that *dao* itself could not have been material substance. This is what is meant by "What gave birth to matter could not have been matter."



The Bible has a similar idea: "What is seen was made out of things which do not appear" (Hebrews 11:3b).

*Dao* is non-material, outside the realm of empirical knowledge. Hence Laozi said, "*Dao* is like something, but it is elusive and evasive" (Chapter 21).

The idea is that *dao* has its being, but it is beyond the empirical and cannot be grasped. "*Dao* is hidden and cannot be defined." "You look at it, it has no shape; you listen to it, it has no sound" (Zhi-bei-you). This is to say that *dao* cannot be observed by the senses. Nevertheless, "*dao* has emotion and can be trusted," according to Zhuangzi. *Dao* decidedly is real. Zhuangzi also realized that *dao* is the absolute that transcends time. "Its beginning cannot be known, its end cannot be known" ("Da-zong-shi").

Inasmuch as *dao* is the root of the universe, it is omnipresent. "Vertically it fills heaven and earth. Horizontally it stretches to the four seas" ("*Yuan Dao*"). *Dao* is the origin of all things: "*Dao* begets one. One begets two. Two begets three. Three begets all" (Laozi, chapter 42). "One" refers to the unified whole before the material world is differentiated into all things. "Two" and "three" refer to heaven, earth, the moon, the sun, etc. The Prologue of John also has it: "All things are made through him (*logos*)". Laozi also said, "All things under heaven are born from being. Being is born from non-being" (Chapter 40). The things that are produced from the unified whole prior to the differentiation of the material world are "being." They have "being" in that they are tangible objects of sense organs, but *dao* is the reality which transcends the senses. *Dao* is eternal, beyond time, so that Laozi said, "Heaven and earth cannot last forever, but *dao* lasts forever" (Chapter 16).

How does Chinese philosophical thought conceive of the relationship between *dao* and God? This is an interesting question. Generally speaking, those philosophers who had a personalistic conception of God were Confucius, Mozi and Mencius. However, the *dao* spoken of by Laozi and Zhuangzi is a non-personalistic being. Not until the Western Han did Dong Zhong-shu suggest that "*Dao* originates from heaven, heaven does not change and so *dao* does not change." The "heaven" spoken of here is God who has personality, yet *dao* referred to here is the fundamental principia of the universe and life, which is different from the *logos* of John's Gospel. The *logos* is personal. Regarding this question Laozi had the following understanding: "*Dao*, used but never filled. An abyss it is, like an origin from which all things come. .... A deep pool it is, never to run dry. I do not know whose offspring it may be. It is like a pre-figure of God" (Chapter 4).

To paraphrase the above: *Dao* is empty, without any shape, yet its function is inexhaustible; its roots lie deep, being the origin of all things including heaven and earth; although it cannot be observed by sense organs, yet it exists. We do not know from what it comes, but it seems to be more fundamental than God and precedes God. *Dao* "produces but possesses nothing, acts but insists on nothing, has seniority but governs not."

That is to say, although *dao* produces all things, yet it wants nothing to be its own; although it is the origin of everything, yet it is not like a personal God who has his sovereignty

over all and rules all. Zhuangzi had similar thoughts. He said, "*Dao* accounts for the existence of the spirits and of God, and begets heaven and earth" ("Da-Zongshi"). This is to say, that God and the spirits whom people worship are able to fulfill their promises due to the work of *dao*. Chinese philosophical thought probably conceives of heaven as a personal God, and recognizes *dao* as the fundamental principle, or conceives of *dao* as even more fundamental than God, thus *dao* is a non-personal reality. However, John said, "That light is true light, enlightening to all who live on earth" (1:9).

The ancient and contemporary sages of China and abroad are to a greater or lesser degree enlightened by the true light, yet they cannot completely reflect the perfect and faultless true light. Hence we only know that 'the glory of God is shown on the face of Jesus Christ' (II Corinthians 4:6b).

#### **IV. Several Important Points in the Prologue**

In our discussion of the Prologue we have traced the intellectual background of John, we have considered the concept of *logos* in the Old Testament and in Greek philosophy, and we have proceeded to make a comparison between *logos* and *dao* in Chinese philosophy. All these give the impression that *logos* in the Gospel of John is a profound philosophical problem.

Actually, when John's Gospel was written in the first century, *logos* was a concept known by everyone, and was not just a technical term in the studies of the philosophers. John merely adopted the concept of *logos* to explicate the divine nature of Jesus. John's Gospel is not a book discussing philosophy but is the testimony of "the beloved disciple" John who sat close to Jesus during the last supper. The aim of writing the Gospel of John is "that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through your faith in him you have eternal life" (John 20:31). The question to which John sought to give an answer is how man may have eternal life because he believes in Jesus Christ. What John recorded was the first-hand experience of the earliest believers in Christ: how they obtained salvation through Christ, what they knew from Christ: "We have seen his glory, which is the glory of the only begotten son of the father" (1:14b). What John called attention to was the problem of salvation. If Jesus is resurrection and life, and has the great power of salvation, then he is certainly the incarnation of God, he is God.

John believed that Jesus Christ is the Word of God which was with God at the beginning, so that at the outset he said, "In the beginning was the Word." His idea is that before time begins, before anything was made, the Word was there already. Laozi also thought that *dao* "was born before heaven and earth." John continued next: "The Word was with God, and the Word was God."

The first part of the sentence considers the substance of the Word, the Word and God being of the same substance; the second part is about the nature of the Word, the Word having divine nature and on an equal footing with God. "All things are made through him; there is nothing that is made is not made through him." This second sentence reinforces the previous sentence, and there are two reasons for this reinforcement.

One, at the time of John a theory had it that the angels and other spiritual beings also

participated in God's work of creation, but John especially repudiated this theory and instead emphasized the point that all things were created by *logos*. Second, some people thought that matter is eternal, but the Christian doctrine of creation asserts that God created all things out of nothing, and matter has being because it is created by God. Laozi also suggested the thought, "being comes out of non-being."

The Bible reminds us that human beings are creatures whose life is so short that it hardly counts anything; yet persons are the objects of God's love and they have the possibility of attaining eternal life.

Chinese philosophers put forward the twin categories of *dao* and *qi* (vessel). "Xi-ci-zhuan" has this saying: "Thus the metaphysical is (the realm of) *dao*, the 'physical' that of *qi*." *Dao* with no shape nor visibility, is the general law of all things; *qi* is derived from the will of *dao* and includes concrete things with shape and visibility. *Dao* is the spiritual reality and it created the myriad things which have shape and body. The concepts of *dao* and *qi* have some resemblance to the Johannine idea that all things are created through the *logos*.

John said, "In him was life, and the life was the light of men" (1:4). Ever since the fall, human beings have lost the life given by God; only in *logos* is there true life. The light represents the truth revealed by God; it also represents the perfect stage attained by man after he has found the truth - the joy of saving grace. John also said the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (1:5). To overcome can also be translated "to accept" which means to understand and to comprehend. Darkness IS the power of sin. The light, thanks to Jesus Christ, shines in the world, but the power of sin rejects the light. That Jesus was nailed on the cross proves what the power of Sin, by rejecting the light, can do. But from the standpoint of the Greek language, "to accept" may be translated into "to overcome." Although the power of sin always wants to extinguish the light, yet it cannot overcome the light. "The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world" (1:9). The *logos* that has existed from the beginning is like the sun shining in every person's heart, and hence all men have a sense of right and wrong. But regrettably, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). The glory of God may be understood to mean the image of God. Man was originally created in the image of God, but ever since the fall, the divine image in man has been disfigured or blurred; the sense of right and wrong is no longer clear and distinct. Nevertheless the true light of *logos* shines in every man, and in man therefore there is at least that much light remaining. All people who are in pursuit of truth are to a larger or lesser extent enlightened by the true light. The inspiration of poets and artists, the shining thoughts of saints and sages and all the inventions and creativities of humankind, all these are the results of the illumination of the true light.

"He was in the world, yet the world knew him not" (1:10). For the verb "was," in the Greek text the tense is past continuous, to indicate the state of continuity. The idea is that before the Word became flesh, it was immanent in the world; somewhat like the cosmic reason spoken of in Greek Stoic philosophy, it resides in the universe, forming the basic laws governing the motion of all things. The Chinese Lao-Zhuang philosophical school also has this saying, "it is what makes the mountains high, what makes the abyss deep, what makes the animals run, what makes the birds fly, what makes the sun and moon shine brightly, what makes the stars move" (From "*Yuan Dao*"). As Paul in Athens said to the Greeks, "He is not far from each one of us, for

'in him we live and move and have our being,' as even some of your poets have said" (Acts 17:27,28). *Dao* is the basic reason for the existence and dynamics of things that all the mountains, rivers, birds, animals, the sun, the moon and the stars move and exist is due to the effect of the action of *dao* in the universe, yet the world does not recognize the *dao* that is immanent in it, even as it does not know Christ who was the Word incarnate in the flesh. "He came to his own home, and his own people received him not" (1:11). This sentence particularly refers to the historical fact of Jesus' coming to the world. Though Jesus worked amongst the Jewish people, yet he was rejected by them. What Chapters 1-12 of the Gospel of John record is this period of Jesus' work. "But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God" (1:12). Chapter 13 of the Gospel says in the beginning, "having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end" (13:1). Because the Jews in general rejected Jesus, he left them and concentrated on working amongst the disciples who believed him. Are not all people the children of God? People should understand the mind of God and follow His will, and in this way they can become the children of God. In China there have also been thinkers who use the father-son relationship to explain the heaven-man relationship. For example, Wang Chuanshan of early Qing times said, "Father and son are different bodies and are separate entities, but what gives continuity to them is the will; heaven and man are different bodies and separate entities, but what gives continuity to them is *dao*" (From "Shang-shu-yin-yi"). This is to say that though father and son are not of the same body, yet they should continue the will of the parents; though heaven and man are not of the same body, yet if man follows heaven in his deeds, then heaven and earth can become one. However, ever since the fall, humankind has lost the status of being God's children. Only if men gain redemption through Jesus Christ, and thus be born again, will they become God's children again.

"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth" (1:14). "Flesh" (*sarx*) in the original language is "human" or "human nature," not just the body of flesh and blood. The Word is the absolute that transcends time and space. How can it enter into history to become a human being with flesh and blood? Judaism believes in the one, transcendent God, so that it does not have the concept of God becoming a human person. In the above we introduced the thought of the Jewish scholar Philo concerning *logos*; he would certainly not advocate that the *logos* be embodied in a person.

The incarnation is the singular contribution of John to Christian thought. Since the duty of this paper is to explore the origin of John's thought, it is fair to ask: Was there any trend of thought in antiquity which resembled the concept of incarnation? Some New Testament scholars think that, even though incarnation is outside the realm of thought of Judaism, yet in Jewish thoughts about wisdom of the first and second centuries B.C., the embryonic form of incarnational thought was already present. The Wisdom of Solomon and the Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) not included in the Hebrew Old Testament but in the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament, are actually component parts of the Old Testament. The Wisdom of Solomon contains the following passage about wisdom:

She is but one, yet can do everything; herself unchanging, she makes all things new; age after age she enters into holy souls, and makes them God's friends and prophets, for nothing is acceptable to God but the man who makes his home with wisdom. (7:27-28) Wisdom, like *logos*, is a reality transcending time. Wisdom is as close to God as the angels are, but she can

enter into the holy souls, quietly doing the work of sanctification to make people the spokesman of God. In Hellenistic Judaism wisdom developed into the *logos*. The work of wisdom in the hearts of men is the work of the *logos*. Since wisdom or the *logos* can enter into the depth of the heart and soul to become close to men, then, such a perfect man and the Son of God, as Jesus, may become the Word incarnate.

The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us. "Dwelling" in the original language means "stretching up a tent." The Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach has a passage describing wisdom in Israel stretching up a tent and living amongst the people:

My Creator set up a tent for me. The Lord said, make your home in Jacob, find your heritage in Israel. In the sacred tent I ministered in his presence and so I came to be established in Zion. (24:8,10)

Wisdom or the Word lives amongst people: this wish is realized in Jesus Christ who is the Word in the flesh. The thought that *dao* should be close to the people was also found in ancient China. The Book of Means: "The Master says, *dao* is not far from the people, and if someone makes *dao* into something that is removed from people, that cannot be *dao*." This is to say that *dao* must be within easy reach of the people, and should not make people feel that it is far away and mysterious. The accessibility of Jesus throughout his life rightfully satisfies the wish of humankind that God be with the people.

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translated by Dr. Peter K.H Lee.*

## **CONCERNING "BRETHREN DWELLING TOGETHER IN UNITY" - Xin Jian**

A few days ago I happened to meet someone who had recently become a Christian. I asked him whether he had attended a service recently, and on what subject the minister had been preaching. He told me that he had heard a good deal which was of a spiritually uplifting nature. "But", he said, "there was one point I didn't understand. The minister spoke on one occasion of the verse of Scripture about "brethren dwelling together in unity". (He was referring to Psalm 133:1, "Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity".) The more I listened, the more it seemed that all he was saying was that Christians must get along together harmoniously. As in one family brothers and sisters should all be on good terms with one another, so those who believe in Jesus should be even less likely to quarrel. Need anything more be said?" His words made me think deeply. One has, in fact, to say to a new Christian that wrangling in the Church is inconceivable, but that since the Church is, after all, an earthly institution, and is made up of people who live their lives in specific historical circumstances, we cannot avoid facing up to realities.

### **Divisions and Cliques are an Obstacle to the Preaching of the Gospel**

I looked back more than thirty years to the situation then facing the Chinese Church. At that time there were a great many separate church buildings. In one City, or even in one street, the distance between two churches might be only a few dozen paces. In some cases it might be only one little building, or even one room in a building, but outside was a sign denoting some particular church. A new believer would be baptized and attend worship in the church at which he happened by chance to have heard the Gospel and been converted. This was an inevitable process, and choice did not really enter into it. However, once he had joined the church, the pastor or some other leader would inform him, "Our church is the genuine one, other churches have gone astray;" or, "Our church is a spiritual one, other churches have no life in them". Or even, "Our church alone is the true church, other churches are false and their members can not be saved". At that time there were actually people who specialized in using this kind of talk to induce those who were already Christians to leave the church to which they belonged and to join theirs instead. The churches which lost members abused the others for being "sheep stealers" and as a result Christians were utterly confused and did not know whom to believe.

This kind of division in the Church arose at a very early stage. We have only to look at 1 Corinthians 1:10-17; 3:1-9, to see that these divisions existed in the Corinthian Church at a very early period. Paul had been preaching in Corinth for eighteen months. Apollos was an eloquent evangelist who also preached at Corinth. Cephas, or Peter, was a powerful apostle. Some people made use of their names to form separate parties. Some said, "I belong to Paul"; some said, "I belong to Apollos"; some said, "I belong to Cephas". There were still others who were no doubt expressing their dissatisfaction with these divisions by saying, "I belong to Christ." In fact, all should belong to Christ, but now there are those who, in emphasizing that they belong to Christ, imply that others do not, with the result that yet another sect arises.

Are such divisions in the Church in accordance with God's will, and do they glorify God?

Of course not! In John 17, Jesus before his departure foresaw that such a situation would arise in the Church, and he specially prayed: "Keep them in thy name which thou hast given me, that they may be one, even as we are one". In this way, "the world may believe that thou hast sent me." (John 17:11, 21) The Father and the Son are one, and the Church is the earthly witness to Christ. So if the Church is to be endlessly divided, how can the world believe that Jesus is the Savior whom God has sent? In times past, people were unwilling to come to church; some went so far as to call the church a "religion shop", "a set of cliques", and what a hindrance that was to preaching of the Gospel!

### **Christ is the Church's One Foundation**

It is clear that we who are called Christians believe in one God the Father, we serve the one Jesus Christ as Lord, we accept the leading of the one Holy Spirit, and we read the one Bible. These are fundamental points of unity. The Church's one foundation is Jesus Christ - "other foundation can no man lay." (1 Corinthians 3:11)

As we read in Acts, when the Early Church began preaching the Gospel, the apostles based their preaching on their experience of living with Jesus. At that time there was no such thing as a written Gospel, nor was there any traditional doctrinal statement (such basic doctrines as that of the Trinity were not established until the Council of Nicea in 325). But the believers were all of one mind in one place, praising God and experiencing the joy of being together. Three times Paul uses the same expression: "confess that Jesus is Lord" (Romans 10:9; 1 Corinthians 12:3, Philippians 2:11) and the Church was built up on this simple common foundation.

When Paul was drawing attention to the errors of the Corinthian Church, he particularly emphasized this by saying, "Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul?" (1 Corinthians 1:13) The word of the Cross is at the heart of salvation. What we must preach is Christ crucified. Paul is only the sower of the seed, Apollos is only the one who waters it; it is God alone who enables it to grow (1 Corinthians 3:5, 6). However great may be the contribution of any individual to the Church, he is no more than God's servant, so why should any man be exalted above Christ? Is this not clear evidence of living "after the flesh" and not "after the Spirit"?

In Ephesians 4:1-16, Paul goes a step further in expounding 'there is one body, there is one Spirit,... one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God.' Since the Church is the Body of Christ, there is only one Church and it cannot be divided. It is very wrong for anybody through selfish motives to divide the Church and dismember the Body of Christ.

### **The Variety of Spiritual Gifts Helps in Building up the Church**

Someone may argue that the divisions in the Church are not entirely due to selfish motives on the part of individuals. They may arise from differences of organization, of ways of worship, of theological opinion, or of interpretation of the Bible. This is no doubt true.

We have already mentioned that the Church holds in common to "one Lord, one faith,

one baptism, one God". From such fundamental aspects of the faith, no radical departures can be tolerated. For example, at the beginning of the 4th century, the faction of Arius at Alexandria proclaimed that Christ merely had "human nature" and not "divine nature". In order to safeguard the purity of the faith of the Church, the Council of Nicea denounced this as "heresy". Later on, in Egypt and Syria, there arose another heresy called "monophysitism". It acknowledged only the divine nature of Christ, and not his human nature. So the Council of Chalcedon likewise denounced that. Hence there can be no deviation from the Trinitarian doctrine of the Father, the Son and the Spirit, nor from the belief in the divine and the human nature of Christ.

But in considering the circumstances surrounding the elimination of heresies, we need to observe that from the very beginning, the Church did not insist on uniformity when it expressed the varieties of the faith.

Take the four gospels, for example. Their common feature is a record of the words and deeds of Jesus when he was on earth, so that one could say that they form a biography of Jesus. But since the thought, background and experience of the writers were dissimilar, their main points are not really identical. Mark's gospel was the earliest to be written, and was accomplished all at one go, without any concern for minor details. Although it is not very detailed, yet it gives a complete outline of the life of Jesus. Luke gathered together a great deal of minute material, and he laid special emphasis on the Lord's gracious dealings with foreigners, with poor people in difficult circumstances, and with women. The main concern of Matthew's gospel is with the Jews, and it constantly quotes the Old Testament to prove that Jesus is the Messiah whom the prophets foretold. John's gospel was written somewhat later. It is not so much concerned with a record of events as with using these events to explain how Jesus was the "Word" who was in the beginning. What is recorded in the four gospels is, generally speaking, similar, but the first three gospels are closest to each other, and so they have been called "synoptic gospels". In specific sections, however, there may be quite a few differences, even to the extent of contradictions in the record. For instance, in the account of Jesus' cleansing of the Temple, the first three gospels place this before the Passion (Matthew 21:12, 13; Mark 11:15-17; Luke 19:45, 46), but John's gospel places it at the beginning of Jesus' ministry (John 2:13-16). So some people ask such questions as: At what time did Jesus actually cleanse the Temple? Did it happen once or twice?

Again, in recording Jesus' healing of the blind man, Luke says Jesus healed a blind man when he was entering Jericho (Luke 18:35). Matthew says that it was when Jesus was leaving Jericho that he healed two blind men (Matthew 20:30). Mark says that when he was leaving Jericho Jesus healed one blind man, Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46-52). So some people ask: Did Jesus perform this miracle when he was entering the city or when he was leaving it? Was it one or two blind men that he healed? In fact, in the gospels there really are significant differences. But we cannot on this account accuse anyone of making a wrong record or of leaving something out. We can only thank God that his Spirit has inspired these authors, through their varying records, to enable us to gain a comprehensive and complete life of Jesus.

In the fourth chapter of Ephesians, Paul carefully expounds the variations in the gifts which God has bestowed on people. In the service of the Lord, each person's function varies, just as the writers of the gospels each had his own style of writing, but the main emphasis of what they recorded was the same. So in the Church there were those who had the functions of



apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. But they had one aim in common: "for the equipment of the saints, for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11, 12). It is the same with preaching the Gospel; some people use 'the utterance of wisdom,' some use "the utterance of knowledge" (1 Corinthians 12:8), but all are the product of the grace of the Holy Spirit so that the one would be able to supplement the other.

### **Only a Broad Mind can Produce Good Fruit**

Since we acknowledge that God's spiritual gifts are of various kinds, it is not surprising that the gifts people receive from God are sometimes of one sort and sometimes of another. The question is how we regard the views of those who are not the same as ourselves.

Paul said to the Christians at Corinth that 'his mind was broad', and he urged them not to "have a narrow mind" (2 Corinthians 6:11-13). In looking at the teachings of the Bible and the history of the Church, it will make a great deal of difference whether one's approach to the varying gifts in the Church actually involves an attitude of "breadth" or of "narrowness."

Those with a narrow attitude always consider that it is only their own views which are "genuine truth" and they deny the validity of the different outlook of others. But very often what people regard as "firm truth" is really firmly held error. It not only fails to help people, it even brings disgrace on the name of the Lord. Paul had a traumatic experience of this kind of thing. Before he met the Lord on the Damascus Road, he violently persecuted the disciples of the Lord, and even thought he was displaying great zeal for God! In the Middle Ages, the Inquisition, which represented the Church, supposed that the monk (Giordano) Bruno's "unlimited universe" theory was contrary to Scripture, so it tortured him for eight years, and in the end it bound him to the stake and burnt him alive. A few centuries went by, and more and more scientific discoveries proved that Bruno's views were correct. In actual fact, as far as a true Christian is concerned, isn't the recognition of a limitless universe a greater evidence of God's creative activity? Why have we got to oppose the conclusions of science in order to safeguard the truth of the Bible?

The narrow-minded person faces another danger: that of forsaking society and living on his own, disappearing down a cul-de-sac far removed from God's purpose. Ever since Martin Luther reformed the Church, Protestants have been involved more and more in the phenomenon of division. I once heard the following story: In a certain place there were some Christians who thought that the beliefs of the church to which they belonged were not sufficiently orthodox, so they formed a separate church. Not long afterwards, some of them felt that the rest were not spiritual enough, so they too broke away. In this way, people gradually broke away until at last there was only one married couple left, so they concluded that they were the only two who could agree. But one morning, the husband discovered that his wife's views on a certain verse in the Bible were not the same as his own, which meant that they could not possibly worship God together. So then, if this is how Christians behave, how can there possibly be a Church? Where can there be any witness to the Gospel? How can God's will be fulfilled on earth?

If someone has a liberal outlook, it need not necessarily mean that he lightheartedly abandons the views he has received from the Lord. But he will be willing to respect what other people have received from the Lord. He does not impose his views on others, nor does he go

about pointing out the failings of others; instead he displays a humble and understanding spirit in dealing with all kinds of problems.

Jesus gave us this excellent example: There was someone who was not one of his followers, but who nevertheless preached the Gospel. The disciples wanted to forbid him, but Jesus said: "He that is not against us is on our side" (Mark 9:40). The Lord did not have an attitude of antagonism or rejection towards those who were not direct followers of his.

The Early Church the attitude of the apostles towards Gentiles varied. James the brother of the Lord directed the Jerusalem Church, and it was Jewish Christians who were the objects of his concern. At first Peter was also a firm upholder of the Law and refused to have any dealings with Gentiles, but the vision he experienced at Joppa made him begin to cast aside his prejudices, so that he was willing to go to the house of Cornelius and preach. Owing to his upbringing in Tarsus, Paul's contacts with Hellenistic culture were more numerous, so that after his conversion he became "the apostle to the Gentiles". Despite the differences of emphasis in the work of these apostles, they all respected the commission each of them had received from the Lord. In the letter to the Galatians we are told that Paul opposed Peter to his face. This was because his "dissimulation" was inconsistent with the truth of the Gospel. Apart from this, they did not attack each other. Paul called James, Cephas and John "pillars of the Church." They, on their part, extended to Paul "the right hand of fellowship." They all agreed that the Lord had given each of them a particular mission: "that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcision" (Galatians 2, 7-10). When the Jewish Christians at Jerusalem faced a famine, the Gentile Christians at Antioch took up a collection to relieve them.

On the question as to whether Gentile Christians should or should not be circumcised, a discussion arose in the Church, and that was why the apostles held a council in Jerusalem. After Paul and Barnabas had described what God had done among the Gentiles, Peter and James immediately agreed that they could not impose upon the Gentiles "a yoke which we have not been able to bear," and "should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God" (Acts 15:10, 19). Although Jewish Christians were still circumcised, it was agreed that Gentile Christians were not to be compelled to undergo that rite. This decision was of great significance for the preaching of the Gospel throughout the world.

In the Corinthian church there was a difference of opinion regarding the eating of food offered to idols. In accordance with the regulations laid down by the Jerusalem council, Christians were forbidden to eat food that had been offered to idols. But in ancient Greece and Rome there were altars and shrines everywhere. Some banquets were simply sacrificial feasts. The sacrificial animals that were not burnt in the temples were taken to the market and sold. In those circumstances did it mean that Christians were not to attend any feasts or even eat any meat offered for sale in the market? Some Christians felt that since there was only one true God, idols had no significance at all, so that they could eat with no harm to their conscience. On the other hand, there were Christians who felt that the sacrificial victims were objects of idol-worship and were defiled. So was it right to eat or to refuse? If everybody attacked everyone else over this question, there might have been a great controversy. But let's look at what Paul said. He said, "Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do" (1 Corinthians 8, 8). Christians could eat at a feast or eat what was bought in the

market, "for the earth is the Lord's and everything in it" (1 Corinthians 10:26). He considered that it was not a question of keeping rules (according to Galatians 4:10 this included such regulations as "days, and months, and seasons, and years"), but of how one observed God's will in one's heart. But because he loved the Church, and did not wish to bring about the downfall of any of his brethren, he was willing to forego eating meat and to limit his own freedom.

### **Endeavor to Maintain the Unity of the Spirit**

We are grateful to God for the leading our Chinese Church to cast aside our sectarian prejudices, so that all those who are the Lord's children can come together and sing his praises with united voices, and all can pray with united hearts; "for brethren to dwell together in unity" is certainly very beautiful. When foreign Christians now attend our services they admire this spirit of unity in our worship. Some of them have said: "You have achieved what we have been aiming at for many years, but without success." They have given praise together with us for the miracle with God has achieved.

Although we have made some progress in the direction of unity, we are still deeply aware that the path ahead of us is a very long one. We must be "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit" (Ephesians 4:3); we must recognize that unity is not something accomplished in a moment, but is not achieved after unremitting prayer and tireless effort.

During these past years our Chinese Church, building upon its common foundation, has shown a spirit of love and mutual forbearance, and has been bound together by peace. It has had as its main aim learning the lesson of humility and mutual love under the illumination of the Holy Spirit. Everyone must display humility concerning himself and must maintain a spirit of love and understanding towards others. In this way, differing points of view will not turn into conflict, but instead we can mutually complement each other and so fit in with one another as to build up the Body of Christ.

*from Tian Feng, I (1982).*

*courtesy of the CHINA STUDY PROJECT.*

## **RELIGION, SPIRITUAL CULTURE AND NATIONAL UNITY - Zhao Fusan**

Address delivered at the National Congress of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, March, 1985.

*Editorial note:* The situation with regard to the implementation of the government's religious policy is improving year by year. Of course there are still some problems outstanding, as Mr. Shen Derong points out in his article in this number. He quotes the words of the Deputy Chairman of the National Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, Yang Jingren: "We must not place too high a value on what has so far been achieved, and we must not underestimate the difficulty of the problems that face us, nor must we relax our efforts as we engage in the task of supervision and surveillance." Even in these days we learn of instances where the religious policy is being disregarded. In some places churches are not only not being restored, but they are actually still being demolished.

So, should we really be optimistic or pessimistic with regard to this policy, as we look ahead? We say we should still be optimistic. The present situation in this regard is definitely improving as time goes on, and that gives us grounds for optimism. We would say to our readers: The present atmosphere of democracy in the political life of our country is constantly growing stronger, and people's thoughts are becoming increasingly more emancipated and more lively. At the National CPPCC held in March this year, Rev. Zhao Fusan, a member of that body and Deputy-Chairman of the National Three-Self Movement, issued a statement on Religion, Spiritual Culture and National Unity. We need not point out that such a statement could not have been issued during the Cultural Revolution, and could hardly have been uttered even in 1983. This statement will be effective in clearing away misunderstandings concerning "leftist" influences affecting the implementation of the religious policy. This "leftist" influence still maintains its ground, but more and more people, including some Marxist-Leninists in academic circles, are taking a more objective and impartial attitude towards religion, and are no longer simply dismissing it as mere "opium." Such trends as these form a reliable basis for our optimism. Naturally, we still need to work hard to ensure that our optimism does not prove groundless.

In August of last year I accompanied the delegation from the National CPPCC which visited Xinjiang, and I received much instruction and enlightenment. Just before the end of the visit, when a report was being made to the leaders of the autonomous region, I prepared a short statement under the title of Religion, Spiritual Culture and National Unity. During the past half-year or so, I have continued to give some thought to the subject, and I now offer you some of my tentative ideas.

**Religion is an inseparable element which has permeated the history and culture of every nation.**

In general, it may be said that the literature, poetry, art, music, dance, sculpture and architecture of every nation, and consequently its philosophy, its morals, its social customs, and the history of how its way of life has developed, have all in varying degree been influenced by

religion. Everyone is aware of the influence of Christianity on the history, the culture and the social order of every country in Europe and America, the influence of Islam on the various countries of Western Asia and North Africa, the influence of Hinduism on India, and the influence of Buddhism on the countries of North-East and South-East Asia. In Chinese history, religion has never played a prominent part among the Han people, but even so, the influence of Buddhism and Taoism are everywhere apparent in Chinese literature, art, philosophy and morals, and in the thought, speech and way of life of the masses. Still greater is the influence of religion on the history and culture of the minority races of our country and on the other nations of the world.

**The culture of each nation as it has been shaped by religion should be handed on as its spiritual cultural heritage.**

The historical and cultural heritage of a nation is a heritage which should be handed down whenever that nation shapes anew its spiritual culture. If we were to suppose that a culture with a religious pattern brought about through the impetus of religious thought and feeling simply belongs to the mere refuse of that people's civilization and is to be rejected, does it imply that so far as China is concerned, the greater part of the artistic treasures of Dunhuang, the carvings and sculptures of Datong, Longmen, Maijishan and Dazu; the popular literature of the Tang Dynasty; the Potala, the Gandan monastery, the Sera monastery, the Drepung monastery and the Zhashilunbu monastery in Tibet; the Ta'er monastery in Qinghai; the Great Mosque at Kashi and the Sugong pagoda in Xinjiang, together with the story of King Gesa'er, as well as the Tibetan Buddhist scriptures, with their many kinds of knowledge, - are they all to be rejected? When we deal with Indian culture, must we reject the Bhagavadgita, the Upanishads and the Indian poems, dances and works of art from the Ajanta Caves? When we deal with European culture, are we to reject Dante's Divine Comedy, Da Vinci's Last Supper, Raphael's Madonna, the complete range of Michaelangelo's frescoes in the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican, Milton's Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained, Tolstoy, Dostoievsky's Brothers Karamazov, the many musical works of Bach, Handel, Mozart and Beethoven, and the whole range of European medieval philosophical thought? It is quite evident that if we were to do so, we would be very foolish. If we regard religion as nothing but the opium by which the exploiting classes control and poison the laboring people, and at the same time advocate the restoration of Buddhist temples, the protection of religious relics and the printing of the Chinese Tri-pitak, would this not be self-contradictory, and would we not in the course of the contradiction be abandoning the very principle which throughout the ages has been regarded as right and proper? The impression given to outsiders would be that the restoration of Buddhist temples, the safeguarding of religious objects and the printing of the Chinese Tri-pitak, and so on, were merely performed as a show-piece for foreigners, and thereby doubts would be cast on the genuineness of our national theories and policies. Can we extricate ourselves from this kind of predicament. How can we reconcile our theory and our practice?

**We must have an altogether more scientific understanding of religion**

It all comes down to a fundamental understanding of what religion is. The meaning of anything is to be explained in terms of its inherent logic. When we speak of the integration of history and logic, we may say that the inner essence of anything is what emerges in the course of

its entire history. Religion is one part of the spiritual culture of any race. It is one thing to ask how it is to be evaluated, but its objective existence is a fact of history. In a society in which class exists, it certainly has been used by the exploiting class as a tool of government, but this is only one part of the function of religion in any society, and not the whole of it. When the proletariat and the revolutionary people carry out that revolution in order to overthrow a reactionary government, they need to concentrate all their energy on the main issue. In such a situation it is understandable that their view of religion should emphasize that it is a tool employed by the exploiting class, an opium which poisons the people, an obstacle to the people's political awakening. Nevertheless, to regard religion as an opium is clearly inadequate as a complete explanation, and so it is certainly not satisfactory as a scientific definition.

When we evaluate an individual, we maintain that an overall, historical evaluation should take place, since only so can we reach a scientific understanding. We reject the view that you can attack a person for one failing without taking other aspects into consideration, since such a view would be one-sided and would run counter to the complete picture presented by historical truth. Since this is the situation even with an individual, how much more should it apply to a social phenomenon that affects millions of human beings, that has so long a history, that is so varied, and has so changed in the course of its development?

One generation uses a simple and valuable expression to summarize a truth, related to its own particular historical background, and their successors take a rigid stand, maintaining that it is an eternal, unchangeable truth, handed down by the "sages," failing to recognize that everything undergoes change in the light of time, place and circumstance. Where knowledge is concerned, a failure to look for scientific development is on the same level as a failure to understand the viewpoint and method of dialectical materialism and historical materialism. It is true that the world view of religion is aligned with idealism. But religion and philosophy have both their points of contact and their differences. Religion cannot be equated with philosophy. To understand religion, one must begin with the particularity of contradiction. Even idealist philosophy cannot be denied its proper place in the history of philosophy, nor its function in influencing the development of philosophy. In actual societies, idealism is common enough, and human knowledge often includes developments that do not fit in with reality or that lag behind reality. It is also a kind of idealism that presents a distorted image of objective facts and obstructs people's participation in revolution and construction. Without careful analysis can all this be described as opium, and can we consider that we have made a scientific investigation, and imagine that thereby the problem has been solved?

Simply to say, because it is not a science, that religion is "a fantasy of human subjective consciousness, an illusion, a distorted image," or is "a political tool of the reactionary classes" or "opium," is equivalent to saying that it does not fully reflect objective existence, and so is harmful. That is detrimental to a respect for the thoughts and feelings of the minority races regarding their cultural history, and is therefore an obstacle to national unity. Today, we are face to face with the outside world, so we need to raise very substantially the level of scientific culture of the whole people. This must include understanding the historical culture of all the nations of the world. In the past, there has been a simple denial of religion, so when we have examined foreign history, culture and society, we have time and again overlooked their religion. Where their culture is concerned, we have hardly avoided being regarded as ignorant. With

regard to politics, we are considered to be incapable of knowing how to respect the history and culture, the thoughts and feelings, of other nations. This encourages foreigners to look down on us and take unkindly to us.

Consequently, I think we need to emphasize that religion is a part of the historical culture of every nation. In class-ridden societies, religion has been used as a tool of government by the exploiting classes, so that it has had the effect of dulling the sense of revolution in the laboring classes. In a socialist society, where class has been abolished, this negative effect has been greatly weakened, so that we should be all the more willing to regard religion as a part of the cultural history of every people. In this way it can be an aid towards internal cohesion and in bringing about the Four Modernizations. It can also be of benefit in the development of friendly and peaceful relations with other nations, and in bringing about an international environment favorable to the Four Modernizations in our country.

### **We should unite Chinese religious believers in the common task of building up a socialist spiritual culture**

The past thirty-five years have provided evidence of the necessity and the possibility of uniting all religious believers in China, regardless of race, in the common establishment of a socialist material culture. In establishing socialism, a firm hold needs to be maintained on the two cultures (material and spiritual). But can we succeed in uniting religious believers belonging to all the racial groups in the country in setting up a socialist spiritual culture? In the light of what I have already said, this is a vital question if there is to be a further step forward. We need to consider an analysis of the heritage of the spiritual culture of our various races, and also the fresh creativity of each race within our nation today. With regard to the first of these two stages, I have already expressed my views. But how should one regard the connection between religion and the building up of a spiritual culture on the part of the various races in our country? If religious people can take part only in the building up of the material culture of socialism, and if they are then pushed aside when it comes to spiritual culture, or are simply criticized, then religious people will only be able to proceed halfheartedly along the road to socialism. In the areas occupied by the minority groups this raises the great problem of the unity of the nation. If this problem is not dealt with effectively, a proper and stable relationship of unity will not be achieved in the vast western area of Tibet, Xinjiang, Ningxia, Qinghai, Inner Mongolia, Sichuan and Yunnan, and all the programs of reconstruction will fail to proceed smoothly. This indicates that this is not an academic problem unworthy of serious consideration, but a theoretical problem of political importance, as well as a practical problem.

What is to be included in a socialist spiritual culture? According to my understanding, it is what Mr. Deng Xiaoping has recently proposed. It includes ideals, conduct, civilization and discipline. Every one of these items is such as followers of all religions in China can accept. Every type of religion has its own standards of behavior and its standards of social ethics are both absolute and metaphysical. But along with such individual items as Do not steal, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not covet, Speak the truth, Put the interests of others before one's own, there are also a number of others which have absorbed the standards of secular society. They do not contradict socialist conduct, so because religious believers lay emphasis on ethical conduct, they can be easily induced to take part in socialist reconstruction. According to

one point of view, the establishment of a socialist spiritual culture would mean criticizing religious ethical conduct. I think that such a sweeping opposition to religious standards of conduct would not be beneficial, but rather the reverse. To take a specific example. When situations undergo change, the practical form that ethical conduct takes also changes accordingly. (For example, supporting opposition to wars of aggression is just; criminals should be punished in accordance with the law so as to protect the mass of the people, and in this way the criminal can be educated and reformed.) If major issues of principle such as these can be clearly set out, the experience of the past thirty-five years has proved that they are acceptable to believers. The Constitution acknowledges that the citizen is entitled to freedom of religious belief, that is to say, every believer is also the master of his destiny in our country. When, under socialism, both cultures, the material and the spiritual, are being established, all the people, regardless of religious belief, have the same rights and duties, and these are guaranteed by the Constitution. People who hold differing world views need not on that account feel they are compromising. Our Chinese Patriotic United Front exists to unite the whole people in the establishment of the two cultures. In this period, when socialism has been established it is just as necessary to achieve a united front on culture by seeking common ground and accepting minor differences.

We attach great importance to the influential role of religion in the historical culture of every people. We acknowledge that the cultural heritage of every people in our nation that has been shaped by religion is something that should be handed on in the setting up of a socialist spiritual culture. We also acknowledge that believers may enter wholeheartedly into the setting up of a socialist culture. And so, whether or not this may be helpful in understanding and carrying out the policy of religious freedom, it certainly will be helpful in uniting the mass of believers in setting up socialism. These are my thoughts on the subject; I welcome your comments and criticism.

*Zhao Fusan is professor of the Graduate School of the Chinese translation courtesy of The China Study Project*



## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CHRISTIAN FAITH IN THESE CRITICAL TIMES - Y.T. Wu

Translator's note: This essay first appeared as the afterword to the volume *Christianity and New China*, edited by Mr. Y.T. Wu and published by the Association Press (YMCA) in June, 1940.

Y.T. Wu (Wu Yaozong; 1893-1979) was a leading figure in the Chinese Christian Three-Self Patriotic Movement from its inception until the Cultural Revolution. Wu was baptized as a young man in 1921 and became a YMCA student secretary in Beijing. In 1924, he went to the U.S. to study, receiving a joint M.A. in philosophy from Union Theological Seminary and Columbia University in New York in 1927. During this period he was greatly influenced by Harry Ward and Reinhold Niebuhr in theology and by John Dewey and William James in philosophy. Later he returned to Shanghai to serve the YMCA as editor-in-chief at the Association Press, and was involved in publication work for most of his career. Wu was the founder of the Protestant weekly *Tian Feng*, an initiator of the "Christian Manifesto", a participant in the preparatory committee of the Chinese People's Consultative Conference and, later in life, a member of the standing committee of the Fifth National People's Congress.

The afterword presented here follows a series of essays by other prominent Christians on the relevance of Christianity to social questions. At one time a pacifist involved in the Fellowship of Reconciliation in China, Wu moved during the 1930's towards the social gospel, and then, by 1940, towards a limited synthesis of Communism and Christianity. His emphasis throughout was on the contribution of the Christian perspective to the social enterprise. This essay is an outline of Y.T. Wu's approach to Christian faith, an approach from which Wu never wavered over the next four decades. It is translated here in full, because of the insight it provides into the personal faith of a man who came to lead the Three-self Movement in China.

I was not raised in a Christian home but became a believer 22 years ago. I was then a graduate of a technical school and had been working for several years. I went through a long period of thinking and questioning and it was after this that I became a Christian. I was at the home of an American friend of mine one evening and read for the first time the verses in Matthew called the Sermon on the Mount. They affected me deeply. I felt that the truth they spoke of was that which I had been seeking in vain for over a decade. They brought me great comfort as well as great excitement. They were like a lamp illuminating the path my life should take. From then on I read the New Testament eagerly and the foundation of my Christian faith was built thereon. In the 22 years since, there have been two passages in the Gospels which have most strengthened my faith:

"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well." (Mt.6:33)

and "For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake, he will save it." (Luke 9:24)

Let me go on to describe below what I believe to be the fundamentals of Christian faith.

## MY FAITH IN GOD

The most fundamental Christian belief is faith in the existence of God. Is God, in the final analysis, an objective reality? Or is God merely a figment of human imagination? I once made a painstaking inquiry into this question, and I now feel I have found a rather satisfactory answer to it. On the surface, God seems to be just an empty word. But I believe that this word represents the existence of an absolute truth, all objective truth in the universe. Religionists believe that the truth of the universe is a unity. It is one and it controls all history and human life. The reason they call this objective truth God, is not because God resembles a man although the God in the minds of many believers is "in man's image" - rather it is because they want the term God to symbolize the absolute strength and power of objective truth for human life. As truth controls all, God controls all. If we understand this point, then the question of the existence of God need not be resolved, is in fact already resolved, because reality, that is, objective truth, is pre-existent. Humanity later gave objective reality the name of God. As for religionists saying that God created the universe and all that is in it, that is no different from saying: truth created the universe and all that is in it. To ask, "If God created the universe and all that is in it, then who created God?" is equivalent to asking, "who created truth?" There is no answer to this question, nor any reason to pose it.

But Christian faith in God, is of course, not so simple. Not only does it have an intellectual component, but a pronounced emotional one as well. Although thinking Christians do not see God as a long-bearded king sitting on the throne of paradise, neither do they approach God as scientist, using their intellectual faculties to consider the truth they are seeking. In a Christian's life God is master, king, father. A Christian has spiritual fellowship with God; that is, through prayer and the Holy Spirit, a Christian can receive God's guidance. The role played by emotion in matters of faith may seem to be superstition, something which departs from objective reality; but in fact, this is not the case. Take prayer as an example. What we call prayer is coming humbly face to face with objective truth to await revelation. In prayer, a person should have an even more comprehensive apprehension of objective reality; one's heart should feel the truth even more acutely. The person praying should also have an even firmer resolve to follow the truth. All these are not lessons of the intellect only, but are also replete with emotion. Religionists are certainly this way and even scientists cannot help being a bit like this. If a religionist emotionalizes objective reality out of an emotional need, even to the point of anthropomorphizing it, this is just like any other individual or an artist doing the same. And if this subjective effect is built on objective reality, if it is controlled and corrected by objective reality, it does no harm to that reality and even enriches it, making it more responsive to human needs.

Let me now speak briefly of the significance of belief in God for life.

Firstly, one who believes in God should be more enthusiastic in the quest for truth, more profound and sincere; the ultimate goal should be a life in which the truth is fully realized because he or she believes that truth is revelation from God, just as Jesus said, "I have come to witness to the truth." Therefore, no matter where truth is found, a Christian should accept and follow it. Then why have so many religious believers historically been the most rigid and the most conservative, those most opposed to the truth? This is because they have not sought a God

manifest in objective truth, but have made gods of their own opinions and prejudices. And it is because of the pronounced emotional component of religion that they have done this. Properly used, the emotional component is an instrument for the liberation of human life, as Jesus says: "and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free." Improperly used, religion can become the greatest force to oppose truth. This force has been manifest not only in religion's opposition to science since the Middle Ages, but it is also evident in the conservative, stubborn religious power with which Jesus had to contend and by which he was finally nailed to the cross. In his day this religious power was represented by the Pharisees and Scribes among the Jews. The emergence of Christianity itself is the fruit of a striving for truth and freedom.

Secondly, one who believes in God should be bolder and stronger because of it. Human life is a paltry thing controlled by many unpredictable forces. Therefore a believer who ceaselessly seeks God's will and follows it will inevitably feel that there is a great power which activates, supports and helps in whatever he or she does. A Christian knows that no matter what the obstacles, setbacks or defeats, whatever accords with the will of God must finally be realized. Even when all is darkness and there appears to be no way out, those who believe in God can never be pessimistic or lose hope, can never cast aside the path they believe to have been revealed by God, or the mission they have been given because they believe that what should be done can be done, that all difficulties can be overcome, all problems resolved. The reason for a Christian's will power and resolve is this belief in God who controls the universe and human life. This God possesses supreme power and this power is the power of truth.

Thirdly, one who believes in God should be extremely happy and at peace. Not because there are no difficulties or questions and certainly not because human life is strewn with rose petals, but because he or she relies on God, on the truth, and feels that the successes and failures of the world are insufficient to control one's destiny or to upset the equilibrium of one's heart. In the Gospel of John, Jesus says, "In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." This is a vindication of the inner peace and assurance of one who believes in God. But this is not to say that a believer can maintain this kind of inner peace and happiness constantly. We are so easily deceived by unnecessary worries and shallow vision. We so easily see only what is near and insignificant and not that which is far off or significant. Because we live in such a small world, we do not find the comfort, encouragement and peace we should find in the great truth of the universe. But at such a time, one who believes in God has a secret way to recover equilibrium. Kneeling before God, the believer lays down all hopes, troubles, problems, weaknesses and sins and then waits, prays, appeals, gives thanks and praise and thus recovers peace, finding new light and strength. Even Christ himself felt troubled and depressed before he suffered, especially on the cross. It seemed as though all were lost: "My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me!" But through earnest prayer, he placed everything in God's hands and recovered the peace of his heart. This appears to be an experience that cannot be explained through the intellect. In actuality, the explanation is very simple: one who frequently comes face to face with great truth, obeys and relies on it, will inevitably have such a spiritual experience, because as Jesus said, "Blessed are the humble in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of God."

This is a brief exposition of the most central belief of Christianity - the existence of God and God's significance in human life. In the course of my own thinking and experience I have found this faith to be reasonable and based on objective fact. It can be corrected and enriched at

any time by new objective facts. It is faith, not science, but it certainly does not run counter to the tenets of science and can accept any truths discovered by science, indeed truth from any quarter. The strength of such a faith is that it can accept the truths that the average person can accept, while adding to this the rich emotional significance which faith brings to life. In the past few years, I have done some cursory reading in materialist philosophy. On a theoretical level, materialism and religious faith are absolutely opposed. However, although they begin from totally opposite points, in my rather superficial consideration of the two, I have not yet discovered where in history or in human life their absolute opposition lies. Perhaps this is because my religious faith is "heterodox" or because my understanding of materialism falls somehow short, but at least I believe that the conflict between these two is not as most popular theorists describe it. At all costs, I believe that the world has only one common truth, and this truth is certainly not the monopoly of this or that school of thought or -ism, but can be discovered by anyone in any age. Of course, any belief or faith is profoundly affected and limited by its times. But this is not to say that among them there is no truth which surpasses time and place, which is everywhere valid and immutable. I believe that there is such a truth among Christian doctrines. And because of this, I believe that Christianity is not only able to progress with the times, but to move ahead of its age and lead the way forward.

## **WHAT I KNOW OF JESUS**

Besides faith in God, another fundamental tenet of Christian faith is Jesus Christ. During these 2000 years, the average Christian's knowledge and understanding of Jesus has been exceedingly confused. He has been called God, man, eschatologist, realist, politician, pure religionist, pacifist, advocate of military force. But among all these confused views, there is one which is commonly recognized and that is that in Jesus, God is clearly manifest.

We cannot see or hear God; we have no way of fathoming God. However, for most Christians, Jesus' life and teachings show forth clearly the nature of God, just as Jesus himself said, "He who has seen me has seen the Father." This statement of Jesus is fully witnessed to in the gospels. Jesus was a flesh and blood man, able to cry, laugh, feel hungry, weary, worried - he even feared death. However, when Jesus was healing or teaching people, he showed a superhuman ability, one which perhaps each of us possesses, but which because of spiritual or physical inhibitions we cannot give full rein to. But what is manifest in Jesus does not end here. Those who heard him speak all felt that his words had authority. The crowds he attracted sometimes followed him into the wilderness, forgetting even their hunger. An adulteress seized by the people was brought to him. They wanted to stone her to death. Jesus stood silently among them and finally spoke but one sentence, "Let him among you who is without sin cast the first stone." When that menacing crowd heard this, they went away one by one. Another woman in sin wept at Jesus feet, her tears falling on his feet. She used her own hair to dry them and even brought perfumed ointment to put on them. Twenty years ago a noted dramatist called this a story of great beauty. The disciple Peter was an irresolute person with an irascible temperament. When Jesus told his disciples that he would suffer, Peter said that no matter where Jesus went, he, Peter, would follow. But after Jesus was arrested, Peter denied him three times. After the Lord's death, and especially at Pentecost, Peter became another person. He preached boldly, witnessing for Jesus. Moreover, so the story goes, he was later martyred. The experiences of these people seem to lead us to an inescapable conclusion: In Jesus, and especially in Jesus crucified,

they saw God. What they saw was so moving and beautiful that they felt these things were the stuff of which human life was made. They seemed to discern that if there were a God in universe, this is his manifestation.

What kind of God, then, was the God made manifest in Jesus? Without doubt, a God of love. From the standpoint of ordinary experience, the universe appears cold. It is neutral, even cruel. As Laozi says: "Is then the world unkind? And does it treat all things like straw dogs used in magic rites?" But Jesus affirms that God is love. He makes God the father who loves us knows all our needs, is merciful and helps us. Because of this, he tells us that the first commandment is to love God. Now then, is Jesus' concept of a loving God a product of the imagination, or does it have a basis in fact? This leads to the most difficult question in human life: that of suffering. Some suffering in human life can be avoided, some can be completely abolished, but some - birth, age, sickness death and the unexpected calamities of flood and earthquake, are inevitable. The end of the world which will surely come one day is one of these disasters. But, In the face of these facts which seem inimical to human life, Jesus states boldly: "God is love." He believes suffering is but a tempering God gives to humankind and that God will come to aid us in our suffering. One of the greatest contributions of Christianity is to teach people to win a victory out of suffering and defeat. This is certainly not to tell people to submit to suffering and defeat, to surrender, but the opposite. Christianity tells us to deal with all the suffering of human life in a sacrificial spirit of active forging ahead and struggle. The cross of Jesus is the best example. On the surface, the cross represents tremendous suffering and tragic defeat. Today, however, 2000 years later, most Christians and non-Christians think that the spirit of the cross IS the great sacrificial spirit without which there can be no salvation for mankind. The existence of such a spirit is the reason the world can progress, that human life can have meaning. Looked at in this way, the spirit of the cross changes suffering and defeat to victory and success. In all the teachings of Jesus, the most profound statement is tat: "For whoever would save his life will lose it and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." This is not just a negative way of dealing with suffering, but a positive way to win the world. Because Jesus had this kind of awareness when he was on the cross, he believed in God's love to the last and could place himself completely in God's hands. In saying God is love, we can only bring this kind of fact and experience as witness.

In human life much suffering naturally seems unnecessary and completely without meaning. However, one who believes in God can also look at this suffering with an attitude of trust and obedience as an indispensable part of the whole plan of God's merciful love and thus gain inner peace. Briefly put, these are the reasons why Christianity proclaims that God is love.

What significance does Jesus' belief in a loving God have for us? I believe there are two which are extremely important: 1) for self-liberation and 2) for social change. How can belief in a loving God liberate us? Jesus tells us that God knows all our needs. He asks us to observe the "birds of the air, they neither plant nor reap, they neither spin nor weave, yet not even Solomon in all his glory was arrayed as one of them." Therefore, Jesus tells us not to worry, saying "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these thing shall be yours as well." He tells us not to be anxious; he does not tell us not to plan or work. He tells us to put our hearts at ease, to rely on the merciful love and the strength of God. If we can be set free from all unnecessary anxieties and fears, we can recover our innate independence and freedom of spirit. Therefore

Jesus tells us: "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light."

Secondly, the belief in a loving God has profound revolutionary significance. God is love, the father of humankind, and we are children of God. Therefore, people have unlimited value in the eyes of God. Jesus said, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." He told a parable. A man had a hundred sheep and lost one. Later when he found that sheep, his joy at that sheep was greater than at the 99 which had not been lost. For Jesus, what ever negates the value of human beings, whether it be system, class, individual or nation, should be opposed. Therefore, we believe that were Jesus born today, he would certainly be against the oppressive social systems and devastating aggression and war. But though Jesus' faith was so revolutionary, he did not as did many of the Jews of his day, advocate the overthrow of Roman rule by military force. The crowd once wanted to make him king, but he fled. When he entered Jerusalem, the people welcomed him enthusiastically, believing him to be the awaited Messiah. But later they were disappointed when they realized that the reforms advocated by Jesus were inner and religious, not those of political revolution. Then the mood of the crowd changed immediately. Although Pilate, as ruler appointed by Rome, said that Jesus was guiltless and wanted to release him, the Jews would have nothing but that he be nailed to the cross. These events witness to the fact that Jesus did not die in a fight against Roman rule, but for his opposition to traditional religion and because he disappointed the patriotic crowds of the time. Does this then prove that Jesus' faith was not revolutionary? I believe such a conclusion is totally mistaken. The reason that Jesus did not at that time advocate military overthrow of Roman rule was certainly not that he thought that rule good, nor because he was willing to surrender to it. As I see it Jesus did what he did because 1) he advocated love as the means to any goal; 2) he felt that if the inner life of the Jews was not improved, they basically did not have the ability to overthrow Rome; and 3) the comparative might of Rome vis a vis the Jews at that time was like pitting an egg against a rock. But these facts do not in any way detract from the revolutionary spirit of Jesus' teachings. By placing such a high value on humanity, he left no leeway for surrender to any evil force. Today, 2000 years later, when we read his rebuke to the Pharisees and scribes, we cannot but be filled with deep veneration.

But why is it that Christianity, revolutionary in its essence, so easily becomes a conservative, even. Reactionary force in history? I believe the reasons are: 1) Christianity has often been manipulated by the rulers; 2) Christianity easily tends towards idealism and becomes an escapist faith, and 3) the emphasis in Christianity is not on the reform of society or the individual in any given period, but on the salvation of the whole of humanity and the realization of the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, as far as the present social order is concerned, there is no concrete and solid reform scheme. But we believe that the revolutionary spirit of Christianity can break through the bonds of tradition and be made manifest in every era. This manifestation was especially evident in the twenty years following the conclusion of World War I but I cannot go into the details here due to lack of space.

There is yet other important point in the religious thinking of Jesus which should be included here and that is that Jesus believed that human beings are sinful. He believed that there was only one completely holy entity, and that was God. As for human beings, not only were

they now living in sin, but the tendency toward evil, except when reborn in the Holy Spirit, existed in them forever. Therefore although a human being has absolute value this value does not arise from human perfection. Because humanity is sinful, an individual should be self-effacing and sympathetically tolerant and forgiving towards others, always seeking the holiness and goodness of God. As Jesus said, "You therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." In Christian thought there is the perception of Jesus as an absolute pacifist who did not advocate military force. There is also the perception that military might and strength do not run counter to the spirit of Jesus. However there is a common point between these two factions; that is, they recognize humanity's sinful tendency and therefore even if military might or strength must be used, they do so with sympathetic and compassionate hearts even toward enemies and we should do like wise. Because of this unusual understanding of human nature, Christianity differs at certain points from most popular views which advocate revolution, revolutionary methods, and revolutionary expectations.

This is a brief exposition of my views on the most fundamental tenets of Christian faith. There are many things of great significance which cannot be clearly stated in these few words, nor can they really be fully and satisfactorily expressed through the medium of the written word. There may be many who feel that the important doctrines haven't even been touched on here. But I hope that by concentrating on the main points I can help my readers to have a clear outline of Christian faith, and that through this they can understand what I have to say below concerning the contribution of Christianity to New China.

## **THE CONTRIBUTION OF CHRISTIANITY IN THESE CRITICAL TIMES**

Protestantism came to China over 100 years ago. During this period, whether because of weaknesses on the part of Christians themselves or misunderstandings on the part of non-Christians, there have been many anti-Christian movements. The most recent took place from 1922-27, following the May Fourth Movement. At that time, Christianity was seen as an imperialist tool and as the vanguard of cultural aggression. Materialism was also introduced into China at this time and people criticized religion even more from this standpoint, equating Christianity with other religions as a phenomenon of a certain period of social development. When the factors which cause this phenomenon have been negated, they say religion itself will be negated and will wither away. According to this, religion undoubtedly has no place, whether in theory or in action, in the present, and none in the future. But in the last four to five years, the people's attitude towards Christians and Christian groups has greatly changed. This is due to Christian support of government policies of resistance and construction and especially their service to and relief for wounded soldiers and refugees, along with their propaganda work for justice internationally. Christianity is no longer an imperialist dupe, nor a tool of cultural aggression. Quite the opposite, most Christians are seen as persons with a sense of justice, struggling along with others for freedom and equality in China. People especially praise the sacrificial spirit of Jesus crucified. Although the philosophical criticism of Christianity by materialists is unchanged, at least they believe that Christianity has its place and contribution to make in China at its present stage. This good will towards Christianity is most appreciated. However, many people cannot have a very deep understanding of Christianity's contribution in the present stage because they lack a profound knowledge of the fundamental tenets of

Christianity. Therefore, it appears that we must say a few words from the standpoint of Christianity itself.

First of all, I would like to briefly introduce the views of Christianity's most progressive thinkers and leaders on social issues. With the end of World War I, and especially with the world-wide economic panic of 1929, there was a common feeling among them that the capitalist social system had gone into decline. It created economic inequities and class antagonism and inevitably led to international disorder and cruel wars. In their view, it should be replaced by the equal and free socialist system which works for the good of the masses of the people. On this point, it can be said that the understanding of these Christians does not differ greatly, from that of Communism.

But they have three major criticisms of Communism: 1) Although Communism can be said to be scientific in revolutionary method, its goals are utopian in the sense that Communists believe that all the evils of the present society are products of the present social system. When the present social- system is changed, not only will all these evils be abolished, but humanity will make unbounded progress from then on. In the Christian view, although reform of the social order is a great step forward, the tendency to evil in humankind cannot thereby be eliminated. Human selfishness and ambition remain the same and will find new expression in a new environment even if these expressions of evil are not so frightening as formerly. 2) Communism frequently sacrifices respect for the value of dignity of the individual to the good of the collective and the goals of the revolution. These Christians do not deny that the ultimate goal of Communism is human liberation, nor do they deny that the sacrifice of the individual is at times unavoidable in the revolutionary struggle, but they feel that in Communism there is a tendency to use any means to an end, and there is often the danger of placing all importance upon the collective while slighting the individual. 3) They feel that Communism is excessive in positing the value of human life on material needs. This is not to say that these Christians do not recognize that in certain circumstances the spiritual life is controlled by material conditions, but they feel that one's spiritual life is not completely subject to the material life. It has its independence. Therefore the value of human life is not totally founded upon material considerations.

Whether or not these three Christian critiques of Communism are defensible is certainly a valuable subject for discussion; but whatever our opinions, these two types of thought have great influence in the world and opportunities for mutual criticism and study should be found. We believe that each has its unique contribution, its strengths, its prejudices. We hope that these two ways of thought, superficially so different but with so many essential points in common, will each play its part in shaping the new culture in the future.

Having briefly introduced the Christian attitude towards current social problems, we can proceed to a discussion of Christianity's possible contribution to the war of resistance and the national construction of China. First, I believe that Christianity should now fully play its part in resisting aggression. Jesus said when he began his ministry: The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has appointed me to preach the good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. " These few sentences are filled with a sense of justice that is against aggression and oppression. In the past few years, Christians of the



world have not only supported China's just war of resistance, they have also begun widespread movements against aggression, fascism, imperialism and war. Although there are, some Christians who still follow the command to love one's enemies and do not advocate the use of military force to stop aggression and resist oppression, their just cries against evil forces are the same. Today when insane wars of aggression spread everywhere, Christianity's strength in advocating righteousness and safeguarding justice would be of great importance especially among small weak peoples.

Secondly, Christianity should become a primary force for realizing and safeguarding democratic politics. Christian doctrine respects human dignity, individuality, and freedom all important ingredients in democracy. Since the days of the apostles Christians to protect freedom of belief, have said, "We must obey God rather than men." The slogan of liberty, equality and brotherhood, raised by the tide of democracy which toppled the feudal systems in Europe and America in the 18th and 19th centuries, also had its source in Christianity. Because of government control of thought and faith in Hitler's Germany, Christians rose to the attack without consideration for loss of wealth, position or life. In China, happily, the movement for constitutional Government has already begun and the call for democracy is widespread throughout the country. At this time, the Chinese Christian movement should not only give abundantly of its strength to advocate the constitutional movement; it should also take the lead in training the people in the habits, lifestyle and knowledge needed for democracy. Democracy is extremely important to victory in the war against Japan. Even more it is a right the people should enjoy and a duty they must discharge during and after the war. Here also Christians should make a very great contribution.

Thirdly, yet another need of China in the process of war and rebuilding is the firm unity of the whole people, especially cooperation between different factions. After the Xi'an Incident, we had the handshake of cooperation between the two parties in China, the CCP and the KMT. This is an historic miracle. Ensuring that this cooperation continues as well as calling on the whole people to continue to maintain a strong united line so that China's struggle for existence and independence will not be cut off midpath should be our foremost concern now. One of the teachings of Christianity is "to be one in unity," to rid ourselves of the enmities among us and to serve the people with sympathy and understanding. Such an attitude is exactly what is needed in today's China. Jesus also taught us to be the "light" and the "salt." Light means being a good example to others, so that they may see our good works and give glory to our Father who is in heaven. "Salt" means being reconcilers among people, purifiers, and being against corruption. If Christians can achieve this, then they can help in removing all that now works against unity and creates division, thus enabling the future of the Chinese people's liberation to be rock solid.

Fourthly, as we said above, many thinking Christians believe that the present social system is already in its demise and that it should be replaced with a more equitable, more reasonable socialist system. Due to differences in time and environment, the realization of such a new social system would naturally require different methods and steps. However, to realize the final goal, we, in this time and in this place must provide continual impetus, planning and strength, so that progressive forces daily increase and backward forces daily decrease. The time has not yet come in China at its present stage when we can realize a socialist society; the necessary conditions are not present.

At the same time, we know that we should not, that we must not, allow Chinese society, now or in the future to follow anew the path of an already defunct capitalism. In such period, the prevailing view seems to be that we should, on the one hand, encourage private capital in order to construct an economic base, while putting management of certain heavy industries in government hands on the other. At the same time, excessive development of private capital should be limited. This is a transitional development, neither capitalist nor socialist. During this time Christianity has two important tasks: 1) Through education, it should cultivate the people's understanding of and demands toward the new society; 2) In order to establish the economic foundations of the new society, it should promote and encourage new economic organizations such as cooperative societies and train the skilled personnel needed by such organizations. If Christianity can achieve these two tasks, it will be a real impetus toward the eventual realization of the new society.

What form should Christianity adopt in helping to achieve the four tasks outlined above? I think it should function as a people's movement. What we need most at present is a detached, non-political, non-factional people's force that can proclaim the masses' demands. Because of its broad relationships at every level among the people and its comparatively detached stance, Christianity should be able to become an important component in such a people's force. During the recent years of the war of resistance, China's strength to progress has indeed been liberated and developed, but the vestiges of corruption and backwardness are still deeply ingrained in many places and these cannot be eradicated in a short time. The strength of the people is the strongest weapon to safeguard and witness to the more rapid development of progressive forces and the more rapid destruction of backward forces.

The people's demands are an important force in history. Only when the people become aroused can hope emerge from unprecedented difficulties. Looking at the history of the Republic of China in the past thirty years whether it be the overthrow of the Manchu (Qing) dynasty, the defeat of Yuan Shikai and the northern warlords, or even the Marco Polo Bridge incident and the ironing out of internal squabbles prior to the War with Japan - this becomes evident. The future will be no different from the past. It is our hope that Christianity will join hands with all progressive forces in the nation to complete this significant historical task.

In addition to this, Christianity can also do what is most needed, the work of international propaganda and the facilitation of east-west cultural links. There are many Western Christian missionaries serving in China, and Christianity is itself an international organization. Of those calling for justice for China on the international scene since the start of the war with Japan, many have been Christians and missionaries. Because of their international connections, their voices carry a great deal of weight. They not only endorse China's just war of resistance; they oppose all international wars of aggression. Christianity is an important component of international unity against aggression, and Chinese Christians should become important elements in that unity. On another front, Chinese Christians should, through their Christianity, introduce the burgeoning culture of the West to China and vice-versa. During the past hundred and more years, Christianity has made a considerable contribution in introducing Western culture to China; in the present process of the construction of New China, Christianity's task in this regard is particularly important.

## THE CONTRIBUTION OF CHRISTIANITY TO SPIRITUAL LIFE

I spoke above about Christianity's contribution to life in society; now I want to speak about its contribution to the individual spiritual life. Our present age is one of chaos, one in which the foundation and structure of society has been shaken and transformed to its very roots. At such a time, particularly in those places already under the aggressor's control, it is easy for many people to become pessimistic and disappointed, and those with ulterior motives take advantage of this chance to disseminate the poison of defeatism. In world politics in recent years, especially since the outbreak of the war in Europe, many people have felt that the advance of the forces of international aggression and the chaotic situation in general all point to humanity's return to barbarism.

In such times, there are two things which can help us. See clearly the evolution of the world and enable us to avoid falling into negativism and pessimism simply because we cannot get a grip on things. The first is social science, which tells us that the evolution of society follows definite laws. It tells us that the present social system, due to its own internal contradictions, must inevitably collapse and evolve into a new social system. Those who understand social science feel only happiness and expectation in the face of the present world situation, not negativism or pessimism, because they can understand the present through the past and grasp the future out of the present.

The other thing which can help us in maintaining a correct attitude toward the present world is Christian faith. Christianity believes in a merciful and just God who moves in history using the set laws of social life to manifest his will. Christians believe that the power of God is over all other, and they believe that his will, no matter how circuitous its way may be, must inevitably be realized in history. The forces of evil in the world may triumph for a time; the conservative forces in society may temporarily turn back the clock. However, the forces of righteousness, of progress and all that is conducive to historical advance, will inevitably triumph over all corruption and evil and will usher in the new age. Because of this, not only are Christians not pessimistic in the face of the present world chaos, but because they can already see the seedlings of the new world in the collapse of the old, they should be filled with courage to go forward.

The two viewpoints above toward the present situation and history, one scientific and one religious, seem superficially opposed and exclusive. However, I believe that there is no fundamental conflict between them. We can go so far as to say that they are two different views of the same truth. Social science can make a clear and detailed analysis of every phase of social evolution. This is an indispensable tool for our knowledge of the present world. But Christianity, because of its world view and outlook on life, gives us a deeper and boundless faith, and enables us, in whatever circumstances, to know that the ultimate future of the world is in the hands of a just and merciful God and not in the hands of international aggressors or oppressors. Such a Christian faith is fully expressed in Old Testament prophecy and in the teachings of Jesus. It is exactly what we need in this age. Possessed of an unwavering faith, we have the strength to overcome the many difficulties before us and to endure the unavoidable individual difficulties and sufferings in this changing age. All this is the price we must pay for the new age, but

because our expectations for it are boundless, individual vicissitudes are not important. This can also be called the Christian spirit of "Salvation on the Cross." The failures and successes of this kind of spirit are insufficient to shake or to defeat its will. This is another contribution of Christianity to the life of the spirit today.

I hope the above is an adequate representation of the true spirit of Christianity. It is my hope that this kind of spirit can become a primary force in the construction of New China today. In these two or three years, many people have taken a new interest in Christianity. According to reports, in spite of today's inflation and transport difficulties, the sale of the Bible and other Christian books have surprisingly broken all pre-war records, and young readers account for a large number of these. We should be grateful for this. We hope that this is not only a new development of Christianity itself within China, but even more that the new phase of Christianity born out of the new age in China will be able to elucidate anew the precious Christian spirit and thus make a unique contribution to world Christianity.

*reprinted courtesy of Ching Fing, 28: 1 (March, 1985)*

## **SERMONS**

### **FAITH LEADS US FORWARD - Chen Zemin**

**Text:** Hebrews 11:39-40; 12:1-2 Romans 8:24-25

November 10 this year is the five hundredth anniversary of the birth of Martin Luther. On 31 October, 1517, the 34 year old Luther posted his famous 95 Theses at Wittenberg University in Germany, raising a challenge to certain doctrines, customs, and institutions, particularly the selling of indulgences (letters of remission of temporal punishment) practiced by the Catholic Church of the day. His action was nothing unusual in itself, but simply a type of academic debate common at the time. He himself never thought that it would ultimately lead to a great disturbance in Germany, and go on to reverberate across the whole of Europe, bringing the Western hemisphere into a new historical era. Today, 31 October 1517 is often taken as the starting point of the religious reformation in Europe, marking a new period in the history of the dissemination of Christianity throughout the world. On Sundays from 31 October to 10 November, Christian churches throughout the world are holding commemorative services, and all kinds of special gatherings are being held in Europe, particularly in Germany, source of the Reformation Movement. Our seminary principal, Bishop Ting and Mr. Han Wenzao were invited to Germany to take part in some of these activities. Academic and historical circles are also organizing various activities. Chinese historical circles are calling a forum in Changsha, Hunan, to look at Luther as a major figure who furthered the advance of history.

What, after all, caused this Christian from a family of ordinary miners and petty businessmen, to become a key figure at a turning point in world history? What were the factors that played a decisive role in his religious life and beliefs?

We are theists. We believe that God is the master of world history, that the entire universe, from its creation and gradual development through its progression to the point where it completes God's ultimate aim is under the guidance of God. The achievements and influence of any great historical figure are all due to the unfathomable wisdom of God. It is neither the heroes who make the times nor the times which make the heroes, but God. Working through concrete figures within the limits of historical conditions, God synthesizes objective and subjective factors in order to complete his will, to enable humanity to know God better, and to see in this evil world God's love and grace for us manifest in Jesus Christ, that relying on faith in Christ, we may be reconciled with God and become coworkers with him, recognizing the responsibility we bear to "run the race that is set before us," in hope.

Martin Luther is one witness among many in history. He put forward three principles during the Reformation which have been called the principles of Protestantism. They are: 1) The primacy of Biblical authority; 2) the priesthood of all believers; 3) justification by faith. Justification by faith in particular has been an extremely important principle in faith and theology. Protestantism and Roman Catholicism are quite different in their understanding of this idea, and it has produced a split between them. Actually both Roman Catholicism and Protestantism believe in the principle, but differ in their specific interpretation of it. Their

dissimilarity lies in differing understandings of the two concepts, 'faith' and 'justification.'

In Christian theology, the concept of 'faith' is generally understood in two ways, or on two levels: one is perceptual: expressing agreement, recognition, acceptance. In Latin, *assensus*. In English, assent, implying attitudes of recognition, praise and acceptance towards truth, doctrine and precepts. (For example, belief in the existence of God, that God is just and merciful, belief that Jesus is the son of God, the savior, belief that the Bible is inspired by God and that every truth necessary for salvation is found therein, belief in each item set forth in the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed, etc.) This is a type of knowledge. Therefore it is often linked with past factual events or doctrines and lessons which have been shown through revelation. It is mainly the application of intellect through the mind, convinced of something which lies within the realm of truth and thus accepting it. Another type of explanation believes that faith is not only intellectual knowledge, approval or acceptance, but also on this basis, an attitude of trust, dependence and devotion. In Latin this is *fiducia*, in English, trust or commitment. Such a faith not only recognizes certain doctrines as true, or accepts certain tenets of belief but, because of the reliability of the God or truth one believes in, because of the certainty of it, we are enabled to commit our entire lives to the object of that faith. And because of this attitude of faith, human life becomes more meaningful, more valuable, has goals and hope. Although we are sinful, weak, limited and imperfect, when we have accepted this faith we can gain a kind of power (which we call grace) from the God and truth we believe in which enables us to find unity, peace and harmony in the midst of the sufferings, conflicts and anxieties of human life. With faith, human life is no longer meaningless 'futile passion.' This kind of faith is not only an intellectual activity, but encompasses will, emotion, and the entirety of human life. Faith is a most basic attitude of human life, a most profound dynamic force, with this kind of faith, we are no longer like rudderless boats adrift on the vast sea, but have direction, goals, meaning. Such a faith not only acknowledges the past and accepts certain tenets or doctrines taught in the past, but integrates the past, the present and the future.

Hebrews 1:1 says: "In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son." All this refers to past revelation, which must also function for us today, leading us ever forward. We are not called simply to believe this or that past revelation, not merely to approve truth as it was accepted in the past, but to "know profoundly who it is we believe in" on the basis of this revelation, to know that what we believe in today is true and reliable. Revelation does not end with the present, but calls us to run forward in faith. God is a God not of the dead but of the living. The truth of the past is not all. God, through our attitude toward him, continues to lead us into ever more, ever newer truths. The living refers not only to those of us who are alive today, but to the generations of the whole of humanity who will continue to exist after us. The meaning of human existence, the meaning of faith, can only become clear in the connecting of the endless past with the immediate present and the boundless future. Therefore, faith is not only a matter of the past determining the present, but more importantly, of the present creating the future. Thus faith has two meanings: perception and commitment.

Perception often stops at the level of knowledge or intellect and is often linked only to the past. If our understanding is confined to or stops at this first meaning, if we think that faith is simply belief in certain doctrines and tenets, belief in past events, or in what people tell us the

past was like, this will make a living faith into knowledge of some type, into ossified doctrines, or even superstition.

Of the many debates in the history of the church, quite a few were pointless. They frequently arose because of differing understandings of certain doctrines adopted in the past. Due to interminable squabbling over the first meaning of "faith," debates about the past on the perceptual level, often led even to discord and denominationalism. This was the case with scholastic theology. The majority of Roman Catholics at the time held that faith was acceptance of those doctrines and tenets passed on by the church along with the pronouncements of the church Councils. They thought one had only to believe in these to be a Christian and be saved. The principle of justification by faith which Martin Luther comprehended from Romans enabled him to realize that "faith" was not merely limited to this "knowledge" or "agreement" level. He emphasized that faith was the commitment of the whole of human life to the grace of God as revealed in Christ Jesus, the response of the whole of human life to God, a type of dependence on the trustworthiness and reliability of God. Because God is true, merciful, and can be relied upon, we can and should offer and commit our entire lives *to* God. Such a faith can never be merely "knowledge", "understanding", "agreement", or other such intellectual activities. It consists primarily of will, dedication and commitment, as well as hope and love. Such a faith frequently goes before certainty when we do not yet completely know. Through faith we are enabled to seek, to probe and gradually to know.

This type of faith is not a blind unfounded faith, but is revealed to us in many ways and in many times by God himself. Hebrews, chapters 11 and 12 are a paean to faith, pointing out the relationship between faith, hope and action. "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Both faith and hope are linked to the future because if something is already seen, there is no need for hope, no need for faith. So the "faith", spoken of here and hope are in reality one and the same. If there is hope, there must be faith. This faith can bring us resolution, endurance and strength, a clear sense of direction and mission, a belief in things to be accomplished in future. Because the future carries within it factors not yet seen, it requires faith. Noah received instructions from God for things not yet seen. He built the ark before he had seen the flood because of faith. Abraham was also called through faith. When he left his home place and set out, he didn't yet know in what direction he was to go and did not know how God's promise would finally be fulfilled. There were many unknowns set before him, so faith was required. And it was on the basis of just such faith that Abraham went bravely forward. Moses was called to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. He also did not know the road he was to follow and the future was beset with difficulties. But he relied on faith, believing that the God who guided him was true and reliable. Boldly and with confidence he followed God's guidance and went forward. Many other examples are given in Hebrews, and the final summing up says, "And all these, though well attested by their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had foreseen something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect." Today we have a part in these better things which God has prepared for us, and this should urge us to consider more our own responsibility and mission.

Many prophetic figures in history who initiated great movements and furthered the advance of history all relied on a type of conviction which produced hope or "vision". Because this faith or vision could be realized only in the future, there was always some vagueness and

uncertainty. There could only be a direction or a rough sketch of things to come.

Martin Luther was such a prophetic figure. He was an ordinary man, limited and weak. He had made mistakes, but throughout the twists and turns of his life, he saw a vision through faith. He did not see this vision clearly or completely in the beginning. When he posted his 95 theses, he had no idea what would happen. He hadn't thought of splitting with Catholicism, and certainly never dreamed that such a great change would come about in the church because of him. He was groping forward. But he had faith. Not a faith based on the knowledge or acceptance of tenets or doctrines that had been passed on to him from the past by the church of Rome. Quite the opposite, it was a faith based on a suspicion, even a negation of certain doctrines from the past. His faith was of the second type - that of commitment, a trust in God without reservation. This kind of faith was manifested in his attitude toward God and human life. Only with this kind of faith was he able to face the emperor and so many other opponents at the Diet of Worms and after debate, say without reservation, "Unless I shall have been convinced by the witness of Scripture or of evident proof from reason - for I do not believe either Pope or Councils by themselves, since it is agreed that these have often made mistakes and contradicted themselves - I am overcome by the Scriptures I have quoted, my conscience is captive to God's word: I cannot, and I will not, revoke anything, for to act against conscience is neither safe nor honest." And then he added in German, "God help me." Although at the time he could not see what the ultimate result would be, yet God's ordering of events enabled him to play an important role at a turning point in history by relying on faith.

Unfortunately, this faith, so lively, so filled with the power of resolution in the beginning, and which relied on trust in God to push it forward in the race, became an ossified perception of doctrine among some of its adherents as the 16th century turned to the 17th. This period of time saw the growth of so-called Protestant scholasticism. Protestant churches have been deeply and pervasively influenced by this kind of scholasticism. One of the reasons for the emergence of denominationalism was the existence of differing understandings of traditionally handed down tenets of faith, a looking to the past and a confining of faith to the "knowledge" or "acceptance" of things past. Martin Luther certainly turned his eyes to the future, upward, to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of his faith, as he ran the race set before him. The era of Martin Luther's reforms in the church happened just as Europe was entering the capitalist period. He ushered in a new situation for church development, enabling the gospel to be accepted and understood by the people in a new historical situation. We cannot imagine what the situation of Christianity might be in the world today had there been no church reform movements like those initiated by Martin Luther and his coworkers.

Today, our Chinese Christian Three-Self Patriotic Movement is located in one of the largest countries of the world, a country which has entered upon a historic turning point through socialism. We must witness to and spread the gospel under these completely new historical conditions. Some thirty years ago, Dr. Y.T. Wu and others initiated this Three-Self Movement, relying on a faith like Luther's. They had come to realize that the church was in need of reform; that many things could not be handled according to the old ways anymore, but they could not see clearly what was to happen in the future. Since this kind of faith is always linked to unknown factors and hope, they were able, through the guidance of God, to believe that God would use the church in New China to fulfill his will. Even now, there are many things which we have not seen



clearly. But we will see more and more clearly the mission we bear and the task God has entrusted to us. Our faith is not backward looking and is not excessively concerned with splitting doctrinal hairs because that can only sow discord and distrust. We should look forward in faith. In the last thirty years, we have already cast off the burden of denominationalism which encumbered us in the past and the burden of dogmatism. We have realized that we must share weal and woe together with our motherland and its people. This is the most important condition for bearing witness to the gospel in China.

In our theological thinking, we have begun to apply the principle of mutual respect, and to overcome past divergences such as the so-called old and new cliques or fundamentalism and modernism, and take a new path suitable to our church and the spiritual needs of Chinese Christians. This path can both sustain and carry on the vitality of Christianity as well as suiting the conditions of our modern society. It is a path for propagating the gospel with Chinese characteristics. This is only a beginning and the task before us is still fraught with difficulty. Many prophets, from the saints spoken of in Hebrews- Abraham, Moses and so on up to the 16th century Martin Luther, all relied on the kind of faith we have been discussing to run forward in the race. They were coworkers with God as he created history and they witnessed to us. We should also lay down all our burdens and patiently and deliberately, filled with faith and hope, run forward. With this correct attitude towards faith, I believe God will use us and is even now using us to complete the mission he has entrusted to us in this age.

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## THE MEASURING REED OF GOD - Jiang Peifen

**text:** From the front of the gate at the entrance to the end of the inner vestibule of the gate was fifty cubits. (Ezekiel 40:15)

Then I was given a measuring rod like a staff, and I was told: "Rise and measure the temple of God and the altar of those who worship there, but do not measure the court outside the temple; leave that out, for it is given over to the nations, and they will trample over the holy city for forty-two months.

And he who talked to me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls. The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its breadth; and he measured the city with his rod, twelve thousand stadia; its length and breadth and height are equal. (Revelation 11: 1-2; 21:15-17)

King Solomon took seven years to build the house of the Lord (1 Kings 6:37-38). When he dedicated the temple, the glory of the Lord filled it, "And when the priests came out of the holy place, a cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord" (1 Kings 8:10-11.). But several hundred years later, the temple had become a den of iniquity, such that the glory of the Lord could not endure it and rose up away from the temple step by step, over its threshold and out of the city (Ezek. 8:11). The prophet Ezekiel, who honored God and loved his people, felt extremely sorrowful upon seeing these things, and God comforted him, revealing to him the temple yet to come, one which would please and satisfy God. This temple would be constructed entirely according to God's specifications in appearance and plan. Even the ordinances, laws and rites for the worship of God would be carried out according to his will (Ezek. 43:10-12). The distance from the outer court to the holy place, the measurements of the holy place, the threshold of the gate of the temple, the windows, jambs, and vestibules, all would meet exact measurements (Ezek. 40:38-42). Water would issue from below the threshold of the temple gate and become a river, and the depth of this river would be measured exactly with a measuring line (Ezek. 47:1-8). The prophet saw a temple filled with the glory of the Lord, the eternal dwelling place of God, the place where God and man would dwell together (Ezek. 47:7).

The temple is where God and man come together. The New Testament tells us that the church is God's household, God's temple. All those who believe in the Lord will no longer be "strangers or sojourners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God." When the church is built, it will "grow into a holy temple in the Lord; ...the dwelling place of God in the spirit" (Eph. 2:19-22). The Bible also says of everyone who believes in God and is united to the Lord, "your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you" (1 Cor. 6:19-22). No matter whether we worship and serve God together, or live individually according to God's will, God is with us. The question is whether or not the church is moving forward in accordance with God's will, whether it is built on God's specifications. Do the Christian's words and actions please God? Do they manifest God's magnificence? Meet God's specifications?

What surprises us is that when such a magnificent temple was being built measurements

were made not with a gold or silver measuring rod, but with an ordinary bamboo or reed rod. Not with a gold or silver line, but with a flax line of no value. This does not seem at all appropriate for the construction of such a grand temple, but these are the facts.

This brings to mind the greatest miracle to take place in the universe; that the master of creation, the Lord of heaven, God's beloved son, became human and entered history. This Christ, moreover, was born "in the manger" of an inn in the small Jewish town of Bethlehem. The sign by which the shepherds were to know him was that he was "wrapped in swaddling cloths" (Luke 2: 12). If not for the angels' announcement, the shepherds would never have gone to an inn seeking to worship him. It would have been hard for them to imagine that this child, "wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger," was the son of God, the Lord and Savior of humanity. If not for the star's guidance, the wise men from the east would never have gone to Bethlehem seeking to pay their respects to the new king. Was there any difference between this tiny holy child and other children? If there had been, would Herod have expected him to be included among the male children under two years old whom he had slaughtered?

And who would have thought that this Jesus - who grew up in the home of a carpenter in Nazareth, who was active along the banks of the Sea of Galilee; this Jesus who was at times too busy to eat, so tired that he lay down in the prow of the boat and slept - was the holy one of God, our savior Jesus Christ? Jesus had no seat at the banquet, and no seat of honor in the assembly hall. "... his appearance was so marred; beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the sons of men" (Is. 52:14). He was ever concerned with people's joys and sorrows, their comfort and distress, their health and sickness, their salvation and loss, their life and death... He loved each person, everything concerning each one was deeply etched upon his heart.

Christ cared for all ordinary people, the child, the widow, the tax collector and the criminal... he stretched out his hand and touched the one suffering from leprosy, he entered the criminal's house, he dried the tears of the distressed, he pulled up the oppressed, he looked for those who had strayed from the right path, he saved the lost. "He opened the eyes that are blind, brought out the prisoners from the dungeon" (Is. 42:7). "He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away" (Luke 1:53). His mouth spoke forth grace, he spread the gospel of the kingdom, but he severely rebuked those who harmed the people through political or religious power, showing them no pity. He placed great importance upon the most commonplace things of life: a wild flower, a bird, a seed. From things considered most ordinary by the people, he drew forth God's will, speaking of extraordinary truths.

The eternal love of Christ, his eternal life and truth, is like that river that issues from the temple. In two thousand years it has never ceased flowing and the more it flows, the greater its depth. Today more people than can be counted have found eternal life through belief in Christ. The stagnant waters of their lives have become life-giving waters, and on either bank the rich fruits of life take shape.

Christ is the son of man in whom God is pleased and satisfied. "He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature" (Heb.1:3). Jesus is the staff by which the church is measured. One who trusts in Christ, who is united to the life of Christ, is a partaker of the divine nature. (Eph. 2:5-6; 2 Pet. 4:1) He "leads a life worthy of the calling to which he has been

called," and should "show forth the word of life" (Eph. 4:1; Phil. 2:16). The way to do this is to emulate Christ, to show forth his life, to accord with Christ's 'measurements', to glorify God and benefit people.

Thanks be to God, in the past thirty years, the Chinese church has died and lived with the Lord and has received new life. The church is no longer split into denominations, no longer cut off from the people of our nation. Chinese Christians, following the teachings of the Bible and obeying the guidance of the Holy Spirit, have carried on the work of the church independently. The church is witnessing among the people, and the name of God is glorified both here and abroad. But this is far from sufficient, we ask the spirit to move people to make ever more genuine offerings, that filled with the wisdom of the holy spirit, people of faith, acting according to God's will and the teachings of the Bible, will be of one heart and mind in building the Lord's temple. At the same time, we ask God to enable every Christian to be filled with the loving life of God, to show forth Christ in their daily work, to live as Christ lived, and bring more people near to Christ.

Please recall that the rod by which we are measured is of bamboo, of reed and flax, extremely ordinary things. Jesus' eternal life, the brilliance of God's glory, are manifested through ordinary things. Truth, greatness and glory are found in the midst of the ordinary. Jesus instructs us, in the presence of the God of justice, to separate the sheep from the goats, not according to what wondrous things they have done, not according to how many people praise them or how much money they have donated, or how many times they have prayed. Rather, he says: "for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me." "Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Mt. 25:34-40). The Bible says: "by a man's measure, that is, an angers" (Rev. 21:17). Human perfection "is from above, coming down from the Father of lights" (James 1:17). The will of the Father in heaven must be carried out in the world. The 'standard' of God must be measured in the concrete actions of people toward one another. "Take thought for what is noble in the sight of all" (Rom. 12:17).

A conscience that tells truth from falsehood and good from evil has been placed in people by the creator. What concerns God is what you do to others, whether you return to others blessings or curses, happiness or anxiety, whether you encourage them in going staunchly forward or cause them to stumble. What help do you give to those you love, to your neighbors, friends, classmates - what kind of model and strength do you show to them? Have you filled with good food the thirsty in spirit? Have you given hope to the despairing? Have you raised, in God's love, those downtrodden reeds or trimmed the dim wick? These are all very ordinary tasks which are not noticed by others. But they are all important to God, when "done to one of the least of these my brethren," they are done to God himself. Thanks be to God, today there are many pious Christians who although they may not have time to attend worship each week, yet in their ordinary jobs, in doing the work they should be doing devotedly and faithfully, whether in school, hospital, shop, village or home, offer countless good deeds in love of God and in the name of the Lord, for the benefit of others. The witness of Christians who honor God and love others, which has been published in Tian Feng, moves us deeply, and we cannot but return glory to God together with them. But there are even more brothers and sisters who unobtrusively

sacrifice their own interests for others, living lives to the glory of God and the benefit of others. And all this is noted by God.

May God in his grace lead the Chinese church, and each one who believes in him, and may the eternal life of Christ, be witnessed to in the church in each age. May the eternal truth of Christ flow ceaselessly among us and spread and grow. Our one hope is that the church on earth may be built according to the measurements of the Father in heaven, that the New Jerusalem soon descend from heaven, that the Kingdom of God soon arrive, and that God may be with us forever.

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## **GOD'S PROMISE AND HUMAN FAITH - Gao Ying**

**Text:** And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness in realizing the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promise. (Heb. 6:11-12)

The Bible has been inspired by God. We Christians believe that it is the word of God. Generally speaking there are two main types of subject matter in the Bible. One speaks of what God requires of us, the other speaks of God's grace. The Bible talks about what God wants us to take responsibility for and about the grace given to humanity by God.

What God says about grace is twofold: God's promise and the reality he has brought into being for us.

Humanity wants to obtain God's promise and enable the word of God to be fulfilled in our lives. But this is conditional - it depends on our faith. What then is the relationship between faith and the promise? This is what I want to think with you about today, brothers and sisters, "God's promise and human faith."

What is God's promise? When the Bible speaks of God's promise it refers to the covenant established between God and humanity: that is, what God has agreed to accomplish for us. In popular terms, a promise is one person's agreement to do a certain thing for another person. We should clearly distinguish here between the promise and the reality. They are two different things. A promise speaks of a future event, reality indicates what has already happened. That is to say, a promise is something that will be done, reality is what has been done'. The promise is what God will do for us in future, reality is what God has already done for us.

Many promises are conditional. If we fulfill certain conditions we will obtain what God has promised and reality will then be an expression of God's love for us, his knowledge of our powerlessness and all that he has done for us. In the Bible, a promise is that which God says before he acts. Reality is that which God says after acting. We must receive God's promise in faith. The reality which fulfills the promise should not only be accepted in faith but enjoyed.

In the Bible, we can see that God's promise is not the same as reality. For example, John 14 records that as Jesus was leaving his disciples to be crucified, he comforted them saying, "Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me.. .And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself." This is the Lord's promise to the disciples, but they will have to wait until he comes again before this promise will be realized. Again, as Jesus said to the disciples, "...it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you." This is also a promise. On the day Jesus rose from the dead he breathed on the disciples saying, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (Jn. 29:22), and this promise became reality. Again, in Luke 24:49, Jesus says to the disciples, "And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high." This is a promise. The disciples wait until Pentecost - the coming of the Holy Spirit - when God's promise is fulfilled.

We can also see the difference between promise and reality in our everyday lives. For example, a boy was about to have a birthday. His father loved him and had long ago promised to give him a birthday present as well as to take him out for the day. When the day came, the father had bought a lovely present for his son, and took him to the park, where they spent a happy day together. This was the fulfillment of the father's promise to his son. The son believed in his father's promise; believed that he would keep his word. Before his birthday came, he knew expectation and comfort and on his birthday, he could enjoy the reality.

Now we understand what God's promise is, and what the difference between promise and reality is. Next we may ask, how then will God's promise be fulfilled in us? That is to say, how can we make God's promise become real in ourselves? The Bible tells us that the only condition for the fulfillment of God's promise in us is our faith. The power which makes God's promise reality is faith.

Christian faith is not produced of nothingness. It must be girded by God's promise. Faith is built upon this promise and not upon reality. That is, before God's promise has been fulfilled, we believe in his word.

You may ask, isn't this the opposite of human experience? It's easier for us to believe in what already is than in what people say will be. As the saying goes, "Seeing is real; words are empty." This means that what people say is often unreliable; one can only truly believe what one sees with one's own eyes. Yes, the more experience of life a person has, the less they are inclined to believe rashly in what people say, because their experience tells them that people are often undependable. But don't forget brothers and sisters - these are all things that take place between people worldly experience - and our belief and our reliance are upon God. Our faith in God is spiritual experience. Things which we can see and touch are experienced through our senses and thus we believe in them. Therefore people wait until things have happened before they are willing to believe. Faith, however, deals with what is invisible - spiritual phenomena - which are not perceived by the senses. God's promise is one of these invisible, spiritual things, so we must receive it in faith. Just as Paul said, "for we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7). Our faith allows us to see to the heart of what is meant by God's promise. Our faith is a basis for those as yet unseen things of God's promise. It allows us to see that which cannot be seen with the human eye. It enables us to be patient and wait, "for he endured as seeing him who is invisible" (Heb. 11:27). We believe in God's promise because God is dependable. He will never abandon us. We need only accept it in faith and God's promise must be fulfilled in us.

Let me tell you a true story. There was an elderly Christian woman who with a firm faith sought grace from God because of his promise, since the Bible told her, "him who comes to me I will not cast out" (Jn. 6:37). So when an atheist derided her saying, "You believe in a God who is invisible and cannot be touched, silent and formless. No shadow precedes him, no footprint remains behind. If God does not keep his promise, what will you do about it?" The old woman answered, "If God does keep his promise, I lose my soul it's true. But God also loses his might." Actually this can never happen, because the Bible says, "He cannot deny himself" (2 Tim. 2:13). "Has he said, and will not do it? Or has he spoken and will he not fulfill it?" (Num. 23:19). God is dependable. Millions of Christians throughout history have borne witness to this in their

personal experience. In God, there is no ambivalence and his reliability is the assurance of his promise to us. The God on whom we rely is a true and living God, authentic and reliable, whose words, actions and thoughts are one. The Bible tells us clearly, "God does not lie." All the might of the nature of God is embodied in his promise. And God's promise will never fail those who believe in him.

Therefore, all that is required of us is faith in God's promise, unqualified faith. Believing through faith, we can obtain God's promise. If we want God's promise to be realized in us, we must pray and wait in faith as well as believe. Believe, pray, wait - all three are necessary to the realization of God's promise. To put it another way, it is through our belief, prayer and waiting that God accomplishes his promise in us.

(1) Believing through faith means that before an event has taken place, we first believe on the basis of God's word. In Jn. 20:29, the risen Christ says to the disciple Thomas: "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe." This is to say that God's tremendous promise and abundant grace will certainly be upon those who are able to believe in things not yet seen on the basis of God's word. Because of faith they will certainly enjoy all that God has promised to bestow upon them. We find in the Bible many of these people who have believed though they have not seen. Their faith is a perfect witness for us.

When our ancestor Abraham was called by God to go forth, he saw before him the boundless distance. He did not yet know which way to go, did not know where God would lead him and did not understand how God would accomplish his promise. But he wavered not at all. Because of God's word, he believed before the promise had become reality. Because of the call of faith, the eyes of faith had already enabled him to see "a place which he was to receive as an inheritance," which God had promised him. He was not sentimentally attached to his earthly home, but looked only to the city God would build and immediately followed God's will. Leaving home resolutely, he stepped onto the endless road of faith.

In faith, Noah believed in the dependability of the promises of the covenant between himself and God. Though at the time there were no signs whatsoever of destruction to be seen upon the earth, he prepared the ark according to God's instructions. People went on eating and drinking, working and marrying as before. Only Noah believed in God's word before those things had yet come to pass. The eyes of faith enabled Noah to see the approaching storm. He believed firmly in the reliability of God, that God would not abandon the covenant he had made with him. Because Noah believed in God's word, his whole family was saved in the end. God's promise was fulfilled in them.

Faith is built upon God's promise and not upon human experience. This means that things which we consider impossible in human experience can all be accomplished for us through God's promise. But if, relying on human experience we underestimate God's promise, we cause that promise to come to nothing in us.

We are all very familiar with that passage in the Bible which records the miracle of Jesus calming the sea. A storm arose on the sea just as the disciples were rowing across it in a boat. Because of the headwind, the boat was tossed about. Then the disciples saw Jesus walking across



the waters. The disciple Peter said to him: "Lord, if it is you, bid me to come to you on the water." And the Lord promised him, saying, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat and began walking across the water. When Peter saw the roaring waves, his human experience made him grow cowardly, and this lack of faith caused him to forget what had just taken place when Jesus walked across the sea, and he doubted the promise that Jesus had just made to him. And he was reproached by Jesus: "O man of little faith, why did you doubt?" (Mt. 14:31). Peter's weakness shows that he does not yet realize that God's promise surpasses human experience. On the basis of human experience, Peter had underestimated God.

Peter's first steps upon the water were an expression of faith upon hearing the promise of God. But when he saw the waves on the water, and was faced with a calamity beyond his past experience, he lost faith and thus began to sink. Brothers and sisters, we are also like Peter. When we rely on what we can see rather than responding in faith to God's promise, we will sink. The faith that is pleasing to God does not rely upon what can be seen but upon God's authentic promise to put it into action.

There was once a group of sightseers who went to visit a mint and were observing the molten metal being poured into the coin molds. A worker said to one of them, "Sir, if you put your hand into the water bucket, I can pour molten metal over it and your hand will not be burnt. Are you willing to try it?" "No, thanks", the man replied, "I believe you." A little while later, the man's wife came over, and the worker put the same proposal to her. The wife immediately said, "Of course, I'll try." And when the woman took the hand over which the molten metal had been poured out of the water bucket, it was not at all burned, but completely unharmed, just as the worker had said it would be. After this experiment, the worker turned to the man and said, "Sir, you said you believed me, but in your heart you did not really believe. Your wife believed me completely."

Beloved sisters and brothers, aren't we sometimes like that man with regard to God's promise? - although our lips say we believe, are there doubts in our hearts? Or are we like Peter - believing more in our own experience than in God's word? Or are we like Abraham - trusting completely in God's promise? When Abraham set forth from his home, he didn't know where God would lead him nor how God would accomplish his promise, but he had no doubts. For-saking all, he followed God's guidance, and at last, all God's wonderful promise and blessings were fulfilled in him. Because of this he became the "father of our faith" and a model for all God's sons and daughters to emulate.

(2) If we want to enable God's promise to be accomplished in us, we must pray in faith as well as believing in faith. 2 Chronicles 1:19 says: "O Lord God, let thy promise to David my father now be fulfilled." This means that the promise is fulfilled through an entreaty to God; we must pray in faith before this can happen. No matter what our circumstances, no matter what difficulties we may encounter in our individual lives, God has a fitting promise for us. His promises are suited to the needs of each one of us. It is only necessary that a person of faith pray to God to draw them forth.

Matthew 15 records that there was a Canaanite woman who though she had never seen how Jesus healed sickness, believed in faith because Jesus had promised "Ask, and it will be

given to you." "For everyone who asks receives." She believed that Jesus was a descendent of David and would certainly have the power to cure her daughter. Her faith impelled her to pay no notice to Jesus' silence nor to the reply he gave her. She simply held on to Jesus and would not let go, begging him to be merciful. Seeing all this, Jesus was extremely pleased and moved and he praised her saying, "O woman great is your faith! Be it done to you as you desire." The faith of the Canaanite woman is a great faith because she prayed in faith and did not doubt. She believed what Jesus had said, "Whatsoever you ask shall be given to you." And this finally enabled Jesus' promise to be accomplished in her.

(3) In addition to believing and praying in faith, in order to have God's promise accomplished in us, we must also wait in faith before God. God has not promised that faith can immediately obtain all that it desires, and this requires of us that we wait patiently before God. The Bible tells us we must be the imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promise. The Old Testament records that from the time God promised Abraham that he would give him a son until God fulfilled this promise, twenty years passed. During those twenty years, Abraham did not see any action by God nor any sign whatsoever that God was acting, but he did not lose faith in God because of this. When the time appointed by God arrived, his faith and patience were finally rewarded. David also waited over twenty years from the time God promised he would be king until he was made king. During this period of waiting, his faith was severely tested, because the time of waiting for God is more difficult than that of entreaty, but his faith enabled him to obtain God's promise at last.

Among those of us who are gathered here today, there are many elderly brothers and sisters who have been Christians for many years. Many have probably had the following spiritual experience: in the face of God's promise, faith and waiting often go together. During the period of waiting, we may meet with testing, even opposition, from many quarters. This requires of us that we learn how to persevere in our reliance on God in the face of adversity. If, in the process of waiting, we do not lose faith in God's promise, then when the day appointed by God arrives, our faith and patience will certainly be rewarded by God and God's promise will be upon us.

I once heard the following testimony from a woman classmate at the Seminary: the husband of a devout Christian woman was wrongly arrested as an anti-revolutionary during the three-anti's, five-anti's campaign, and died in prison soon after. She was made to return to her home in the countryside with their three young children. They had no means of support and were politically branded as members of an anti-revolutionary's family. Life was extremely difficult for them but even in the midst of such bitter suffering, she never lost faith in God, for she believed in God's promise for her children: "a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench." During those days she loved most to recite Psalm 23. Often, she would take her children up the hillside to gaze at the blue sky and pray through her tears: "O God on your heavenly throne, I raise my eyes to you. How does the servant gaze upon the master's hand or the serving girl upon the hand of her mistress? Even so do we gaze upon Jehovah our God." Thus did this sister, in faith, raise her eyes to the Lord and wait.

Finally, God's promise was realized in her. Today, not only has her husband been cleared, but two of her daughters have been called to study theology. When they came to church and recited Psalm 23 for the first time together with the other brothers and sisters there, they could

not help weeping. After twenty years and more of waiting and hoping, their faith has finally gained God's promise for them. They are blessed and their hearts filled with gratitude and praise to God.

Hearing this testimony, I was also moved to tears. Yes, I believe that there are many here among us today, especially among our older brothers and sisters, who have had similar experiences, who could also give moving testimony, particularly from the Cultural Revolution when normal religious life was disrupted. Many of them did not lose hope, but believed in the promise of the Bible, "... having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end" (Jn. 13:1). They held to their belief that God would certainly lead the Chinese church; that one day the gate of the gospel would once more open wide. Today, the Chinese church is experiencing a resurgence and the prayer of these sisters and brothers to God over so many years, their waiting, their hopes, have been realized. God's own promise, awaited in faith, has been accomplished by his hand. We thank and praise God because his abundant promise has not failed those who relied on him. Although we have walked through the valley of tears, God's promise has changed this valley to the promised land. Our faithful waiting has brought great blessings in God's promise. Today God has heaped even more grace upon the Chinese church, and the fruits of God's promise for us are greater than ever before.

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## SO TEACH US TO NUMBER OUR DAYS - Tang Matai

**Text:** Psalm 90

Sisters and brothers, truly the years rush by. In the blink of an eye, we have stepped into mid-December, 1981. The next two weeks we shall pass in the happiness of our Savior's birth. Today, let us consider the text: "So teach us to number our days." This is a verse of a psalm written during the busiest and most anxious days of Moses, a faithful servant in the house of God. As you know, at a certain point in a song, the composer will place a rest to allow the singer, the musician and the audience to pause to reflect and to savor what has just been sung, to keep silent and await what they will hear next. This increases their appreciation of the beauty of the song. When you read a psalm, you frequently come across the word *selah*. *Selah* indicates that pause to ponder and wait.

Moses, the man of God, was not only a religious man used by God, but one revered as a great leader by the Israelites: a people's hero. He not only set down many statutes and decrees and drew up detailed orders of ritual; he was also a poet of ancient times. Four hundred years before the great Jewish poet David, Moses had already set down the famous Psalm 90. Although not many of his poems have come down to us today, each one we have is significant, not only for the beauty of its rhetoric and the richness of its poetry, but for its deep meaning and the profound lessons it holds for the reader. Therefore, I will first spend some time on a brief consideration of the psalms of Moses.

The life of Moses spanned 120 years, and can be divided into three periods. From childhood to age 40, he was the son of Pharaoh's daughter, embracing the wisdom of ancient Egypt within the palace. From age 40 to age 80, he wandered in the wilderness of Midian, a solitary shepherd, gaining in spiritual growth and cultivation. From age 80 to age 120, he was called to serve God as the leader of the Israelites, to bring the chosen people out of Egypt to the banks of Canaan. So it was only in the latter period of his life that his work was successful.

During this period, Moses wrote three very famous psalms which reflect his greatness. The first, recorded in the 15th chapter of Exodus, v. 1-18, was written after the flag of Moses began to triumph over the forces of Pharaoh at the time the Egyptian soldiers were drowned in the Red Sea. It is a song of thanksgiving and praise to Yahweh. Nowhere in the psalm does he praise himself; all glory is given to God. The psalm should be recited and carefully studied by every child of God.

A second psalm is found in Deuteronomy 32: 1-43. Written on the eve of the conclusion of his task, it has a last testament quality. You should realize that in spite of his lofty age of 120, Moses was a spry old man, "his eye was not dim nor his natural force abated" (Deut. 34: 7). The last day he lived on earth, he spared no effort in his work and carefully taught the chosen people. This psalm is indeed a representative work, worthy of recitation and even more, of study.

There is, in addition, a third psalm, the one we have chosen for today - Psalm 90. This Psalm was quite possibly written when Moses was around 100 years old. During his busiest

days, he paused to number them. Therefore, if we say that of the three psalms by Moses, number 90 was written at the heart of his final 40 years of work, then "So teach us to number our days," may be said to be the heart of the central psalm.

It might be that a Philistine would not treasure his own life. But one who is conscious that important tasks are entrusted to her or to him would never be willing to waste this light. Thus King David once entreated Yahweh: "Lord, let me know my end, and what is the measure of my days; let me know how fleeting my life is!" (Psalm 39: 4). Moses also sighed to God: "Thou dost sweep men away; they are like a dream, like grass which is renewed in the morning: in the morning it flourishes and is renewed; in the evening it fades and withers." These two great men both felt that life passes in the twinkling of an eye! How precious are one's days!

Since our lives are so short and precious, how should we use them? As the year draws to a close, we should have a summing up, an accounting. It is time. James, the Lord's younger brother, once commented on the ways some people make plans: "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and get gain: whereas you do not know about tomorrow. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes" (James 4:13-14). Human life is like morning dew! This is not a discouragement. This is a fact.

I once learned a profound lesson at a memorial service for a young man. It came from a love letter he had written his fiancée while away on a pleasant trip. Besides expressing his love, he told of his business plans and also enclosed a precious gift, something he wanted especially to give to his heart's love. But who could have known that on the very day his fiancée received the letter and gift, he would be killed in an accident far away? Human life is like the morning dew; our lives are as narrow as the palms of our hands! How empty and dangerous it is to rely only on ourselves in all things. We should listen to James as he instructs us: "If the Lord wills, we shall live and we shall do this or that" (James 4: 15). Therefore, let us begin today, each offering our days from now on to God for his use, doing our work according to the will of God. As the apostle Paul has said, "And he died for all, that those who live, might live no longer for themselves, but for him who for their sake died and was raised" (2 Cor. 5:15).

Secondly, as the year draws to a close, shall we examine ourselves and see what our work has been? Let us have a *selah*, let us grow quiet for a moment, and listen to the admonition of our Lord Jesus, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal" (Mt. 6:9-20). Of course, this admonition is not limited to telling us to carefully save up some money, to become misers! He is telling us to consider the question: is your work concerned only with the material or should you be concerned with the spiritual? Is it concerned only with this life? Have you not neglected the world to come? It is a pity that so many people work hard all their lives only for material gain and neglect the spiritual. It should come as no surprise that in the face of reality, they often find human life empty! We must remember Jesus' warning: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Mt. 4:4). God's word is truth, is life. Therefore, to receive the word of God is to gain the treasure of heaven, to receive the blessing of heaven. Whoever is willing to work for God has already laid up treasure in heaven.

A Christian, standing on the foundation of Christ, should be a wise and steadfast builder, happy to use his or her days well to build something solid and incorruptible. The apostle Paul once reminded the Christian church in Corinth: "Now if anyone builds a foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble - each man's work will become manifest; for the day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each has done. If the work which any man has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire."

In the closing days of this year, we should examine our own work. Someone may have done work that is of gold, silver or precious stones, work that passes the test and is pleasing to God. Someone else may have done work that appears to be very good and receives much praise and appreciation from by-standers, but which after all, cannot stand the test of fire. In the twinkling of an eye, it is reduced to nothing. Sisters and brothers, have you ever examined your lives? The things you have done in days past? We ought to ask God today to teach us to carefully number our days, so that the work we do will not be wood, hay or stubble, but gold, silver and precious stones - work that will stand the test of time and more - God's test.

Finally, I ask you, sisters and brothers, to listen to something St. Paul wrote to Timothy: a precious lesson and an encouragement, heartfelt words to one who will come after. Paul's summation of the numbering of his days is also a victorious song of triumph. He says: "As for you, always be steady. Endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. For I am already at the point of being sacrificed; the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith. Henceforth, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me, but also to all who have loved his appearing" (2 Tim. 4: 5-8). That Paul was able to sing such a song in his last days was due to the fact that he had numbered his days. He had already worked with utmost fortitude and had devoted himself to building a solid and incorruptible foundation in his work for the Lord.

Could Moses, the man of God, be any different? He was a faithful servant in the house of God, a great and unique leader among the Israelites, but he did not think of himself as great. He realized that he could boast of nothing but hard work and worry, empty things quickly gone. If, during his lifetime, he had failed to do what was entrusted to him, then all his days would pass away under God's wrath. So, although he was in the midst of the busiest and most troublesome days of his work, he needed to grow quiet, to ask God to teach him to number his days and to find wisdom. In thinking back upon his days wandering in the wilderness, he would be unlikely to mistake them as spent in vain. Though they were days of bitterness and misfortune, in his inmost self he was filled with happiness; the beauty of the Lord came to him. Though he wandered in the Sinai for many years, and even reached the beautiful banks of Canaan, the promise of the promised land was unfulfilled for him. Did he fail when success was already within his grasp? As long as Moses gained wisdom in numbering his days, and then numbered God's abundant grace and love, he knew that he had not fought alone nor failed on the very brink of success. He could sing his song of victory with confidence:

Let the favor of the Lord our God be  
upon us, and establish thou the work  
of our hands upon us, yea, the work of  
our hands establish thou it. (Psalm 90:17)

Sisters and brothers, as this year draws to a close, let us all grow quiet for a moment, make a silent *selah*, examine ourselves and pray, asking God to teach us to number our days and to make good use of future days to bear even more fruit, not only in receiving grace from God, but in returning glory to God our Father.

I wish you, sisters and brothers, a Merry Christmas and, even more, blessings in the New Year.

Tang Matai was pastor of Dongshan Church in Guangzhou for many years until his death in 1984. This was his last sermon, written just before his death and delivered to the congregation by a colleague.

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*reprinted courtesy of Bridge*

## **MORE BLESSED TO GIVE THAN TO RECEIVE - Liu Qingfen**

**Text:** Acts 20: 17-38

This passage of scripture recounts how Paul, just before hurrying off to Jerusalem during his third missionary journey, speaks to the elders in the church at Ephesus where he has labored day and night for three years, painstakingly carrying out his preaching and pastoral duties. His words to them are tremendously meaningful parting words of advice and farewell. As Paul said, "I know you will see my face no more...", (Acts. 20:25) the elders were deeply saddened. His words were sincere and earnest wishes spoken from the bottom of his heart, not just ordinary talk.

There are several points in this passage which merit our attention, especially the last sentence, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

One is the length of this passage. Occupying 22 verses, it would take considerable time to recite. However, the account of Paul's three years in Ephesus occupies only 41 verses of Chapter 19. A comparison of the total words given to the two shows the ratio is about 2000 to one while a comparison of chapter and verse totals exceeds two to one. It is quite obvious that in the eyes of the author Luke, this passage occupies a very important position.

Second is the content of this passage. During this three years in Ephesus, Paul experienced so much. What does he say? He does not talk about the power of the Holy Spirit over his life; whether he laid hands on some of the disciples, or the Spirit's descending upon them (Acts 19:6). He does not talk about God's working through him in unusually mysterious ways either (Acts 19:11), nor does he mention how, through the wisdom of the Spirit, he preached and debated (Acts. 19:8, 9).

Paul also fails to elaborate (there is just a brief mention) on why he "died every day" or why he was "in peril every hour" or why he "fought with beasts at Ephesus" (see Cor. 15:31, 32). He also fails to describe the varied and serious adversities he faced (see 2 "Cor. 1:8) or how God delivered him from the hands of death. Most people would consider these to be matters of considerable import, but Paul barely mentions them, if at all.

What inspires us is Paul's reiteration about his time in Ephesus, "How I lived among you from the first day. " Three times Paul uses the idea of "all", namely "serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and trials", "how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything (all) that was profitable," and "In all things I have been an example for you." This passage illustrates Paul's unwavering conscience, how he practiced what he preached and lived up to his word in all he did whether in dealing with God or with other people. He set a good example, not only for the church in Ephesus, but for us as well. From such descriptive terms as "from start to finish", "always", "unceasingly day and night", etc., we can see that Paul's three years in Ephesus were like three years' untiring diligent effort wrapped into one day's work. Whatever needed to be done or said he did and said. This spirit of pouring oneself out is truly deeply moving.



Therefore we can say this passage is an incisive summary of Paul's three years' work with the church in Ephesus. It is also the essence of and testimony to his love for God and humankind. Of course this passage also reflects Paul's wholehearted devotion and trust towards the Ephesian elders and his devout commitment to God.

Third, at the conclusion of this penetrating summary Paul quotes the words of Jesus, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." The radiance of the gospel gleams in these nine words. They not only put a finishing touch to the entire passage, but capture the crux of the Lord Jesus' earthly ministry. What is especially worth noting is the fact that this phrase is not recorded in any of the Four Gospels, but is something unique to Paul. Therefore, it is especially valuable, enabling us to approach more closely the depths of Jesus' salvation. For this we are especially grateful to God.

This phrase, "It is more blessed to give than to receive," is particularly valuable because it accurately summarizes the essence of much of Jesus' valuable teaching. It is like putting on a strand of precious pearls-the finishing touch.

We should explain that the relationship between giving and receiving is that between abandoning and obtaining. Originally they were the same. The Chinese term used here, *shi*, means to "bestow" or "give" and it is sometimes used with the term for "give up," *she*, to mean "to give alms." The Chinese term used here for receive means "obtain" and can even be used to describe the relationship between life and death, faith and love, and so on.

Let me give a few examples by way of explanation:

1. Jesus said, "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mt. 20:28). To be served by others is to accept or receive. To serve others and give up one's life is to bestow or give.

2. When Jesus called Peter and Andrew, he said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men." They immediately left their fishing nets and followed Jesus (Mt. 4:19, 20); abandoning their nets, they won people. This is also giving and receiving, but giving is the prerequisite for receiving.

3. Jesus told his disciples "You received without pay, give without pay" (Mt. 10:8). This explains very clearly the relationship between giving and receiving. It tells us that we who are recipients of God's grace, should not store up for ourselves, but rather should give freely.

4. To the rich young ruler seeking eternal life Jesus said, "One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute it to the poor, and you will have treasures in heaven; and come, follow me" (Luke 18:22). In other words, Jesus told the man he must first rid himself of worldly possessions before he could receive any heavenly riches and walk with the Lord on the path to the kingdom. Because the young ruler could not part with his earthly riches, he went away a sad man.

Contrast this with Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector who entertained Jesus. He told Jesus,

"Lord, half of my goods I give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold" (Luke 19:8). He firmly resolved to give up his earthly possessions and thus was saved. Because of this Jesus said, "Today salvation has come to this house." Not only was Zacchaeus saved by God and received God's grace, but God received a man who had previously been lost.

5. Jesus instructed his disciples saying, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Mt. 16:24, 25). Jesus pointed out quite clearly that we must deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow him before receiving the blessing of eternal life.

6. Jesus also used the parable of the grain of wheat falling on the soil to speak of the relationship between giving and receiving. He said, "Truly, truly I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his life loses it and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life" (Jn. 12:24, 25).

7. In the parable of the Good Shepherd, Jesus said "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep...For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have the power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again; this charge I have received from my Father" (Jn. 10:11, 17-18). This is precisely the relationship between giving and receiving, which even extends to the relationship between death and resurrection. Jesus truly died, truly rose from the dead and was revealed as the Son of God. Regarding Jesus' sacrificial death and coming again, Paul has a very moving account which says "He (Jesus) though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross." This clearly shows Jesus was thoroughly sacrificial. God not only raised him from the dead, but "highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:6-11).

Jesus is not only "coming again", but rose from the dead and achieved the victory that was his and also "when he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men" (Eph. 4:8). Therefore he enables us who have died unto our own sins to be raised anew with him, together to sit in heaven and receive God's abundant grace and incomparable eternal glory.

I could give many more examples to show the relationship between giving and receiving, to show the truth of how much more blessed it is to give than to receive. But time does not permit any further elaboration. To summarize what I have been saying: whether it be earthly possessions or the gift of God's grace, our talents or our lives, we all must give and receive - like Paul as he served the Lord and served others. In this way we too will be greatly blessed.

Regarding worldly wealth, it is clear that if we think only of receiving and not of giving,

we are merely greedy. We are like the rich man Jesus denounced. His barns were too small so he begrudgingly tore them down and built bigger ones thus enabling him to store his grain and possessions. He believed this would bring him spiritual peace and happiness. Who would have imagined it - he not only lost his own soul, but ended up with empty barns. He is like those who gain the whole world but forfeit their lives. No good can come of this, only harm (see Matthew 16:26).

Because of this, Paul said that the love of money is the root of all evil. We must be alert and on guard to rid ourselves of all greed. Conversely, if we rid ourselves of earthly treasures, we will receive those treasures stored in heaven and be even more blessed.

As for receiving the Lord's grace, power and life, if we only receive and do not give, no good can come of this either. This is because if we only think about ourselves and storing things up for ourselves, then we distance ourselves from the source of Christ's living water. Just as the prophet Jeremiah quotes God saying, "For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water" (Jer. 2:13). When speaking about the living water he offered, Jesus said, "But whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (Jn. 4: 14). He also said, "If anyone thirst, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, 'Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water' " (Jn. 7:37, 38). The source of this river of living water is Jesus; the living water he gives will not run dry.

It is imperative that we believe in and are united with Christ in order to receive that source of living water. But receiving this water does not mean that everything in our lives will be all right. We must rid ourselves of all inner obstacles and be cleansed of our sins. We must be freed of obstructions, as when knots are scraped away from within a length of bamboo. Then we become a free-flowing pipe through which the Lord's living water can flow. Only then will the water surge with increasing momentum, converging into many rivers. A little stream becomes a large river, flowing to eternal life. This is the only way to make progress in our spiritual life and we will then be more abundantly able to enter God's kingdom.

Fundamentally speaking, the Triune God we profess is all-giving, not all-receiving. God gave his only begotten son for us. He gave his all completely for us. Our Lord Jesus was rich but became poor for our sake. During his three years of ministry, he had no time to eat, no place to sleep, no respite from his work, no rest from his labors. He gave himself without considering the cost and struggled with no thought for his own well-being. Finally, he gave his own holy body and shed his own precious blood. All this was to complete his salvific act for the people of the world. That the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, comes from God to rest humbly within our hearts as a pledge of our redemption is also an act of giving. Because of this we can say giving is the basic nature and essence of God. He is able to give all, because his very nature is unlimited abundance. He is the source of all goodness, truth and beauty, especially of the sacred and pure love of God. He also has limitless power and ability and is able to grant grace to people. We who have received God's grace, have received it at no cost to ourselves, hence our disposition is different from that of God; we should take Christ's heart as our heart and joyfully and willingly serve the Lord and others. Following Christ, the grace we have received should be fully given away, then

we will be worthy to be the sons and daughters of God.

We still want to make clear that the phrase "It is more blessed to give than to receive" means that giving must precede receiving. This does not mean that we give in order to receive. That would be using giving as a means to an end, which is false giving. Jesus warned those at prayer and fasting not to do so for the sake of outward appearance or for the praise of others. This does not please God. Charity done under cover of darkness, going into the inner room to pray, fasting secretly: such good works seek a reward or response from God. They are not done to show others.

When we speak of "blessing," there are many examples in scripture, all suggesting that receiving *comes* through giving. Abraham's offering of Isaac was a sincere sacrifice of his only beloved son. Because *of* this God greatly blessed Abraham, and through him all the nations were blessed.

The holy mother Mary was blessed and has been praised by generations through the ages, because she gave herself completely to God's will. Fearing no scorn or mockery from others, she totally trusted in God. And in accordance with the angel's announcement, she let God's will be manifested in her body and thus conceived by the Holy Spirit and bore the Lord Jesus.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus began to speak about the various types *of* blessed persons. The poor in spirit will receive the kingdom of heaven; the mourners will be comforted; the meek shall inherit the earth; those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be satisfied; the merciful shall obtain mercy; the pure in heart shall see God; the peacemakers shall be called children *of* God; the persecuted will receive the kingdom of heaven. Looking at the outcome *of* this we can see that these various people all received many blessings. But when we look at the cause, when we ask why they were blessed, we see that giving was a prerequisite; only through giving were they able to receive. To be poor in spirit is to give away one's self, to feel impoverished; mourning is feeling grief and regret for one's own sin or grieving over others' sufferings; meekness is ridding ourselves of head-strong stubbornness; hungering and thirsting for righteousness means ridding ourselves of pride and complacency; *to* be pure in heart means ridding ourselves *of* filth and selfish desire; merciful people give up their own worldly possessions to help others; peacemakers give of themselves to serve as bridge-builders between people; to be persecuted for righteousness' sake is to give oneself for justice. All these come down to sacrifice of self, a giving up of one's own selfish concerns, seeking God's kingdom and righteousness, offering oneself as a living sacrifice and in all things following God's will, doing that which is pleasing in God's sight and commendable to others, and praising the Lord's name. The Sermon on the Mount shows us that giving is the prerequisite for being blessed.

In summary, I feel Christianity is a religion of giving. As the Lord Jesus taught, "Take up your cross," even to the point that like Jesus, we "give our life for our friend." Jesus gave his life for us to express his great love. We should also have this kind of sacrificial spirit for others, even to the point of sacrificing our lives for our brothers and sisters.

In the final analysis, "It is more blessed to give than to receive", because we firmly believe that God is just and trustworthy and his promises perfect. As David's Psalm says, "With

the loyal thou dost show thyself blameless; with the pure thou dost show thyself pure; and with the crooked thou dost show thyself perverse. For thou dost deliver a humble people; but the haughty eyes thou dost bring down" (Ps. 18:25-27). Through David God also tells us, "Blessed is he who considers the poor! The Lord delivers him in the day of trouble; the Lord protects him and keeps him alive; he is called blessed in the land..." (Ps. 41:1,2). In speaking of a righteous person the Psalmist says, "God has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures for ever..." (Ps. 112:9). Jesus also taught us, "Give and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put in your lap" (Luke 6:38).

Cornelius, the Italian cohort centurion at Caesarea, was a devout man. He and his household feared God, gave alms liberally and prayed constantly to God. His prayers and alms were remembered before God. God also instructed him to find Peter and *to* preach Jesus' gospel *to* all the world. This he did and was greatly blessed.

Jesus' brother James also tells us, "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: *to* visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world" (James 1:27). This is a very precious teaching for those who are devoted and God-fearing persons. Thanks be to God that in our work, he has moved many brothers and sisters in their work place, on the street, at school, factory, home and in many situations, to be able to give lovingly of themselves for others, to help those in need, *to* care for those facing adversity and hardship, and to care for and attend to the needs of the elderly and infirm. Such persons really honor God. Their sacrificial charity and helping others is already pleasing to God. God will bless them even further, adding many kinds *of* grace and enabling them to be continuously fulfilled and able to do even more good works.

Let us again consider a conversation between Jesus and Peter. This will help increase our understanding of "It is better to give than to receive." Peter said, "... We have left everything and followed you." Jesus replied, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundred-fold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, without persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life."

How do we understand these words of Jesus? I think we should look at them from an altogether higher standard of morality. For instance, once when Jesus' mother and brothers sent someone to find him, Jesus replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" And looking around on those who sat about him he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother" (Mark 3:33-35).

Some believers have no children but have reared lots of orphaned children. These orphans all become their children. We can say this is the principle of "receiving a hundredfold". To say here that houses and lands will be "received a hundred-fold" does not mean that one buys houses and lands and becomes a landlord; it has a loftier significance. China's Tang dynasty poet Du Fu wrote a poem entitled "Poem Composed After My Thatched Hut Was Destroyed by the Autumn Wind," which we can use to illustrate this truth. At the time, Du Fu lived in a tattered and leaky thatched hut, suffering from the bitterness of the drenching winter rain. But rather than thinking of himself, he thought instead of the thousands of poor, cold and starving scholars. He

writes: "When shall we get thousands of decent huts where poor scholars can find comfort and security from the elements? Alas, when shall this vision become reality? I shall be content to exchange the destruction of my own house for it. For this, I shall be content to freeze to death." Du Fu wondered how to obtain thousands of decent houses for all the poor scholars of the world, in order to make them happy, to protect them from the wind and weather. If one day this ideal could be realized, the poet would be contented even were his own hut to become even more dilapidated, even were he to freeze to death himself.

I believe we Christians should have such noble sentiments and generous hearts. Only in this way can we really accurately comprehend the meaning of "hundred-fold" and understand the precious truth in Jesus' words, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." We should also learn further from Paul's example when he said, "For three years I did not cease day or night to admonish every one with tears." "I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities." "In all things I have shown you that by so toiling one must help the weak" (Acts 20:31, 33-35). Also as Paul said, "We put no obstacles in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way" (2 Cor. 6:3, 4).

As Paul suffered and toiled for the gospel, working day and night, may God bless us and enable us to continuously and unceasingly carry out God's way and truth. May all praise and honor be given to God.

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translated by Rev. Ewing W. Carroll, Jr.*

## THE MAGNIFICAT - Sun Hanshu

**text:** And Mary said,

My soul magnifies the Lord,  
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden,  
For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed;  
for he who is mighty has done great things for me,  
and holy is his name.  
And his mercy is on those who fear him from generation to generation.  
He has shown strength with his arm,  
he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts,  
he has put down the mighty from their thrones,  
and exalted those of low degree;  
he has filled the hungry with good things,  
and the rich he has sent empty away.  
He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy,  
as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his posterity forever.  
(Luke 1:46-55)

In the early days of the church this passage from the Gospel of Luke was given the name Magnificat. Around the 6th century the practice began, especially in monasteries, of chanting the Magnificat at either morning or evening prayers as the high point of the service. Some churches still do this today. We certainly do not approve of merely formal liturgies, having words but no spirit. However, this emphasis on the Magnificat is reasonable and ought to be since the Magnificat really inspires people. What Christian does not feel warmed in heart and liberated in spirit reading this passage of Scripture? Everyone wishes for a heart like Mary's, everyone longs that his or her soul may become like Mary's, everyone wants to learn how to praise God.

### **"MY SOUL MAGNIFIES THE LORD, AND MY SPIRIT REJOICES IN GOD MY SAVIOR"**

Mary's soul was turned toward the Lord, magnified him and rejoiced in him. This is what inspires Christians of every generation and attracts millions who love the Lord. It is a model for us, setting down a path which we can follow.

All one's thoughts and desires, feelings and aspirations, the whole of one's being (especially the inner self) and life can be summed up in magnifying the Lord and rejoicing in him. This is to make the Lord the center of one's life and God the master of the universe. Happiness is being attentive only to God's will and carrying out his commands. In the beginning Mary did not fully magnify the Lord and rejoice in him in this way. The day the angel Gabriel greeted Mary and told her that through the Holy Spirit she would give birth to a son, Mary was at first "greatly troubled" and "considered in her mind" what these words might mean (Luke 1:29). She asked, "How can this be, since I have no husband?" (Luke 1:34). Finally, completely

forgetful of self, Mary revealed her inner soul, and in sincere faith and obedience, calmly yet joyously burst into the precious Magnificat. A person who loves and obeys the Lord and wishes to reach this spiritual state, must go through a tortuous process of struggle. An important step in Mary's progress to this state was her discovery in scripture of the spiritual experience of those who had preceded her. She very likely thought of Hannah's prayer: "My heart exults in the Lord... I rejoice in thy salvation..." (1 Sam. 2:1-10). Perhaps she recalled David's prayer when he planned to build a temple to the Lord: "Thy name will be magnified forever" (2 Sam. 7:26; 1 Chron. 17:24). Can we receive light and inspiration from the Bible? An important key to this is whether we can become as humble as Mary and in all matters acknowledge that God "has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden" (Luke 1:48). When Mary realized her own low estate, she, like Isaiah, could then perceive "the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up" (Is. 6:1). To really comprehend God and to experience his omnipotence and mercy, his holiness and justice, his truth and reliability is to lay the foundation stone for magnifying and rejoicing in him.

### **"FOR HE WHO IS MIGHTY HAS DONE GREAT THINGS FOR ME."**

Here Mary calls God "he who is mighty" because she firmly believes that God is all-powerful and that there is nothing he cannot do. In the Book of Genesis we read: "When Abram was ninety-nine years old the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, 'I am God almighty, walk before me and be blameless.' " (Gen. 17:1). To be a blameless person one must firmly believe, must grasp, that God is an almighty God. One must believe that God created all things in the universe. As Isaiah says; "Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, who formed you from the womb: 'I am the Lord, who made all things, who stretched out the heavens alone, who spread out the earth.' " (Is. 44:24). God also sustains and rules over all things, "upholding the universe by his word of power." (Heb. 1:3) God's power is not only apparent in the material world, but in the spiritual world as well. "For it is God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). God's power created natural light. Even more, it was God's power which created the true light, spiritual light, the light glorifying God which shone on the face of Jesus Christ. Compared to the power of creation, the power of redemption is even more worthy of honor and praise. "What is the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe" (Eph. 1:19). As for the immeasurable greatness of God's power, Mary comprehended and experienced this more deeply than anyone else. Mary's words, "He has done great things for me", truly reveal the intense fervor of her soul. When, through Mary, Jesus took flesh and became man, almighty God wielded his immeasurable power, and the light of life, the true light, the light glorifying God in the face of Christ began to shine in the midst of men. These really are great things. And it was for these great things that Mary and every devout Jew longed day and night for the arrival of Israel's Comforter. They awaited the Messiah, whose coming had been foretold by Moses and the prophets, believing profoundly that God's promises would certainly be fulfilled. This expectation extended over years and generations, and it was still unclear how "the comfort of Israel" would come, how the Messiah would be born. At the angel Gabriel's greeting Mary was "greatly troubled." She was completely unaware that the long-awaited Comforter and Messiah was about to arrive. By "a careful consideration" of the angel's words, and especially through the witness of Elizabeth (Lk. 1:39-45), Mary realized that the prophecies of the saving power of God and the incarnate Savior-Messiah were about to become manifest and be fulfilled through her body. Thus, representing the whole people of Israel and indeed, all humankind, Mary could not refrain



from proclaiming, "He who is mighty has done great things for me."

### **"HOLY IS HIS NAME"**

Mary not only understood that God is a mighty God, she did not forget that God is a holy God; "Holy is his name." Mary praised God's holiness at the same time that she praised his almighty power. Mary was able to connect God's power with his holiness only because her knowledge of and honor for God had reached such a profound and mature stage. There is nothing that God cannot do; he is almighty. "God said, 'Let there be light', and there was light.." But God's omnipotence cannot run counter to his holiness. Mary and every devout Jew would remember the story of Moses leading the people to meet God at the foot of Mt. Sinai (Exodus 19). "God is a consuming fire," the Book of Hebrews (12:29) tells us. People must first purify themselves, only then can they approach God. We recall Isaiah's experience in the temple: as the angels were singing their "Holy, Holy, Holy" in praise of God, Isaiah felt that his lips were unclean. They had first to be touched by burning coals from the altar before they could be considered clean. God's holiness is a consuming fire which destroys all filth and sin. After the fall, humankind deserved to be destroyed by the consuming fire. Unless turned back from the fallen state and cleansed of sin, humankind could not come before God. However, a fallen humanity could not pull itself up through its own power. This was brought about through the power of redemption. Because God could not violate his holiness and could not reckon the sinful as sinless, he used Mary and the power of the Incarnation to save a humanity dead in sin. God changed humanity's filth to holiness. This is both a proof and a manifestation of his holiness. "For God has not called us for uncleanness, but in holiness, ... so that he may establish your hearts unblameable in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints" (1 Thess. 4:7; 3:13). And in another place: "Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, and make holiness perfect in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1). These are exceedingly important teachings from the Bible which help us understand God's holy nature. The holiness of God's name springs from the holiness of his nature. God's holiness gives rein to the power of his salvation and redemption on the cross, that we too might become holy. This is the reason why Mary in her Magnificat praised God's power at the same time that she praised his holiness. In the first line of the prayer that Jesus himself taught us we have these words: "Hallowed be thy name" (Mt. 6:9; Lk. 11:2). They teach us to acknowledge that God is holy, and how important this is for the Christian. If we have learned to praise the Lord's name as holy, then we have understood the depth and value of the spiritual experiences and the abundance of true knowledge contained in Mary's words: "Holy is his name."

### **"HIS MERCY IS ON THOSE WHO FEAR HIM."**

Mercy is the implementation and manifestation of God's love. "God is love" (1Jn. 4:8). This passage tells us that love is the eternal nature of God. Before the creation of man and of all other things, God is love. We cannot imagine this kind of love. Just as "no one has ever seen God," so no one is able to comprehend God's eternal love. Thanks be to God: "By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us" (1Jn. 3:16). And, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (Jn. 3:16).

The kind of love we can comprehend is mercy. God's mercy issues forth from his love. We can say that God's love is the source and his mercy the flowing stream. When we bathe in the waters of God's mercy, we can think of the source and realize that God is love.

According to the holiness of God's nature, if a person sins or defiles him or herself, that person deserves damnation and a just retribution - death. But in accordance with his nature which is love, God desires to save us from the clutches of death and to permit humanity to enjoy eternal life. At the same time, in saving sinners God cannot violate his divine holiness. Holiness and justice cannot harm love and mercy, indeed if they are to flow unobstructed, these two must be accompanied by love and mercy. Thus came about that marvelous means of salvation - reparation on the cross. The cross revealed to us the severity and uncompromising nature of God's holiness and justice, but from it we can also understand the breadth and depth of God's love.

Mary's awareness of God's mercy was more penetrating than that of any other person. Although her own soul would be pierced by a sword (Lk. 2:35), Mary fully understood that the power of salvation would be realized through her. God's holiness and love would be accomplished in Jesus, and he would bestow his mercy on the generations of those who fear him. Mary understood best that "In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins" (1 Jn. 4:10). When Mary realized this, she was even more willing to be the lowly handmaiden of God and to let the angel's words be accomplished in her body, and for this, she praised God's love and mercy.

**"HE HAS PUT DOWN THE MIGHTY FROM THEIR THRONES, AND EXALTED THOSE OF LOW DEGREE; HE HAS FILLED THE HUNGRY WITH GOOD THINGS, AND THE RICH HE HAS SENT EMPTY AWAY."**

When Mary became conscious of God's mercy and love, she naturally became aware that God also wants people to love and show mercy to one another. "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1 Jn. 4:11). Everyone knows that the prime example of the lack of love in human society is the humiliation of the powerless by the powerful and the oppression of the hungry by the rich. These things create hatred among people. Mary was not unmindful of the tragic history of the Israelites, how they had been slaves in Egypt and how they later suffered continuous oppression and devastation at the hands of the Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks and Romans. What's more, besides suffering aggression from foreign enemies, Israel's own political and religious system, represented by the king and the priests, also cruelly exploited and oppressed the people. Mary herself lived under the ruthless political rule of the Roman Empire. Every day she observed the vanity of the proud Roman officials and the haughty Jewish upper classes. She saw how rude and greedy these rich and powerful people were, and how tragic and difficult was the life of the poor and hungry. Mary was certainly aware of, was sympathetic to and supportive of the uprisings led by court slaves and rustic shepherds. She rejoiced at their victories; even more, she was saddened at the blood shed in their defeats. Filled with righteous indignation, Mary believed that God would "show strength with his arm" and bring about a radical change in this state of affairs which was contrary to his will. Mary deeply longed for a time when people would live in a state of mutual love. Actually all the prophets of former times had cherished such hopes:

"He shall judge between many peoples and shall decide for strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore, but they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree, and none shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken" (Micah 4:3-4).

"But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (Amos 5:24).

In this section of her Magnificat, Mary treated these hopes as if they had already been realized ("scattered", "put down", "exalted", "filled the hungry with good things", "sent empty away" are all in the past tense). This shows that Mary had unshakeable faith that Jesus' coming would satisfy the prophets' longings as well as her own. The love of Jesus Christ impels us to love God, and can definitely impel us to love one another. Finally, Jesus' love will definitely wash away hatred among people and bring about a beautiful world: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased."

**"HE HAS HELPED HIS SERVANT ISRAEL, IN REMEMBRANCE OF HIS MERCY,  
AS HE SPOKE TO OUR FATHERS, TO ABRAHAM AND TO HIS POSTERITY  
FOREVER."**

The words "to remember. Abraham and his posterity" obviously refer to the covenant established between Yahweh and Abraham (Gen. 17:1-18). When Mary speaks here about God remembering the covenant with Abraham, she has in mind God's trustworthiness, that he will definitely fulfill his promises. "Know therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations" (Deut. 7:9). Here Mary praises this trustworthy God and extols his dependability. How hard it was for the Jews of Mary's time, the posterity of Abraham, to believe that God was a trustworthy God! This was especially true for the "humble" and "starving" lower classes, who were victims of all kinds of oppression and torment. Added to this was the destruction of the temple (not only was the exterior destroyed, but the interior was polluted - "it had become a den of thieves"), which hurt the people even more. Therefore, their hopes in a Messiah frequently wavered. Mary, too, could not avoid having doubts. But upon hearing the angel's words and understanding of Jesus that "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there will be no end." (Lk. 1:32-33), Mary's faith was strengthened. She now firmly believed that the Messiah would come and that God's promises would be fulfilled. The words, "He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his posterity forever," came from Mary's heart and were a song of praise of the trustworthiness of God. No matter how history may twist and turn, or what injustices may occur, God is Lord of history. Society and all created things are in his hands. God is a trustworthy God, and he bestows his mercy on many generations.

Like Christians of past generations, we too receive nourishment from the source of living water, the Magnificat. Each time we recite it we receive new light and inspiration. Why is this?

Of course, every line in the Bible brings light and inspiration, but the Magnificat especially. This is because Mary's imagery is deeply moving for people. Its inspiring power lies in Mary's fuller vision and knowledge of God. Mary perceived God's almighty power, his holiness, his love, his concern that all men love one another, and finally, his trustworthiness. Thus her faith, hope and love had a solid foundation, and this produced a soul which magnified the Lord and rejoiced in him. In God's eyes Mary's Magnificat is worship "in spirit and truth." How moved we are by this! We ought earnestly to follow in Mary's footsteps, that is, in the path of the knowledge and obedience of God, in the path of the Magnificat. In the words of Paul's letter to the Philippians: "I press on towards the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:14).

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from Sermons 3 (June, 1982)  
translated by Peter Barry, M.M.*

## OUR WEAKNESS - Zhao Fusan

Sermon given at the closing worship service of the September 1982 meeting of the China Christian Council and the Three-Self Patriotic Movement.

**Text:** For consider your call, brethren; not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth; but God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong, God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. He is the source of your life in Jesus Christ, whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption; therefore, as it is written, 'Let him who boasts, boast of the Lord.' (1 Cor. 1:26-31)

In his closing remarks, Bishop Ting referred to "our weakness." With the meeting just finished and everyone about to return home to continue the Lord's work, I am moved to speak of this point.

To speak of "our weakness" now is inappropriate in two ways. First, we have just commemorated the thirty-second anniversary of the Three-Self Movement; thirty-two years ago quite a few people felt that this movement was not worth a thought or that it was bad, but today we thank the Lord for the past thirty-two years. Second, in this week of meetings, we have reviewed the two years since the 1980 national meeting, during which there have been great developments in every aspect of our work, and for this we are also thankful. At this time to specially mention our weakness seems inappropriate.

During this meeting, we have truly seen great progress in the church, but at the same time we think of the problems to be solved after our return home. Recently, the Yasili Church in Beijing has been returned and must be repaired and we also hope to get back the surrounding buildings; these things are very worrisome. I know that each area has its own building problem; the YM/YWCA has this problem. Sometimes even a small thing causes vexation when one tries to do it well. It is not easy for people to understand why we want to establish the Lord's church, a new church; the explanation requires effort. Thinking of this is very worrisome. To a great extent I speak of weakness because I am weak; I often feel this. But I am also likely to become annoyed when there is too much to do and I am bored when there is too little to do. My heart is troubled in the face of difficulties. I do not want to think of my own weakness, yet I have to think of it. I am even more reluctant to recognize my weakness; I always like to think myself strong. The Bible mentions our weakness many times. Besides the first chapter of Corinthians, Romans 8:26 says that the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. 1 Cor. 1:25 also speaks of "the weakness of God," not that God is weak, but he seems so through the eyes of humans.

How have these thirty-two years of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement been spent? They have all been spent in weakness. Thirty-two years ago we had many difficulties. Since then, every time we hold a meeting we all feel as if we carry a heavy burden, that we have not enough strength. Today we still feel weak. Let me reflect on the church's two thousand years: whenever the church has felt its own weakness, the Spirit of the Lord has intervened. After the Lord had

risen and ascended, when the disciples gathered together to pray, they felt very weak. It was at that time that the Holy Spirit descended. During the Middle Ages in Europe the church was very powerful and influential, but we feel that the church of that time did not manifest the glory of the Lord. Therefore, not only during the thirty-year experience of the Chinese Church, but also in the whole history of the church, when the church felt weak, it has been able to do some work. This seems contrary to common logic, but it is a historical fact. The work we have done in the past thirty-two years is simply two things: appeal to Chinese Christians to become a part of their people and appeal to the church to distance itself from imperialism and colonialism. One is uniting, the other is separating. During the Cultural Revolution, we were able to endure a test of fire only because we had accomplished these two things. These two things have given the Chinese Church a very firm foundation. Also, because we have done these two things, in the past two years we have been able to see the church progress step by step.

How are weakness and strength related? In Paul's letter to the Corinthians he said: "And I was with you in weakness and in much fear and trembling" (1 Cor. 2:3). However, we all know that Paul had great strength. Therefore the strength of Christ's disciples seems to be strength in the midst of weakness. Paul also said "No human being might boast in the presence of God." Only when we are aware of this can we be useful to the Lord. When we seem to be useless then we are able to accomplish something by relying on the Lord. In weakness, by relying on the Lord we are strong. This is the basis of our hope for the Spirit of the Lord to act in our church.

Bishop Ting just said that, "Resurrection is not a return to the past." I would like to add another sentence, "Independence is not conceited self-reliance." We have followed the independent road for thirty years, but this certainly does not mean that we consider ourselves always right. When we feel ourselves weak, then our spirit is awakened. When people feel themselves strong, they are likely to be arrogant and think they can do anything; only when we feel weak we think of going to the Lord, we feel in need of the Lord. In our thirty years' experience we have also felt our weakness and need to be with the people; we have felt our weakness and need for mutual support among members of the body. Now, we have gathered together from all over to share our experiences and light; this is also mutual support. When we are weak, we are willing to rely on the Lord, be with the people, and be supportive of one another. If we feel very capable, then we do strange things, we stray from the Lord, we stray from others. This understanding comes from thirty years of experience. Pray that the Lord will awaken us so that we always see our own weakness and thus feel the need for God, the need for the people, and the need for other members of the body.

The course of the last thirty years has also given us a realization: every day we worry, why can things not develop a bit faster? But frequently, if we look back after a time, we suddenly discover that things have already changed a great deal. Our anxious mood and feeling of weakness seem to be connected, but without realizing it, the Lord is in our midst, working with us. May we be on the alert constantly, may we keep close to the Lord, may we always feel the need for the Lord, the need for our brothers and sisters; then we will have strength in weakness. The way the Lord has led the church from the time of the apostles until now, this will be the same way the Lord leads it in the future.

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# THE PROPHET JOHN THE BAPTIST - Bi Yongqin

**text:** John 1:16-34; Mt. 3:1-17

In the Old and New Testaments, we read of all the miracles of God through which were shown his love and salvation for humanity. This tells us the Bible is truly a book of saving grace. It also tells us that the relationship between humanity and God can only be set right through the work of salvation. Thus, God's entire plan of salvation and the deeds through which it is made manifest in every age must be realized through people. We may call these people the workers who bring the age into being. In the Old Testament they were termed servants of God", "prophets", "holy ones", etc. In the New Testament, they are known as "disciples", "teachers", "rabbis", "instruments" and "vessels." All these titles show that they were people used by God.

The final prophet of the Old Testament era, John the Baptist was at the same time the first evangelist of New Testament times. He led the Jews from the Jewish faith to the Christian faith. He introduced the age of grace out of the age of the law. John the Baptist was a most suitable person to act as bridge between these two ages. That he could play such an important role was due of course to his own special abilities, but, more importantly, it was due to the training given him by God, which enabled him to become a suitable instrument of God. Let us consider the example of John the Baptist together.

## **Chosen by God**

Although John the Baptist was active in the early part of the New Testament era, several hundred years before, the Old Testament prophet Isaiah had foretold that God would raise up a man. That man was John the Baptist. Isaiah said, "A voice cries: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, and make straight in the desert a highway for our God. And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.' " (Is. 40:3;5) Before he was born, the angel told his father Zechariah that this child was given to the Israelites by God, that he would be filled with the Holy Spirit while in his mother's womb and that he would turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He would understand the mind of God and lead the chosen people to cast off the curse of the law, and enter into God's grace to enjoy liberating glory as sons and daughters of God.

## **Trained by God**

The Bible foretold a voice crying in the wilderness. Although he was born into a priestly family eight hundred years later, John the Baptist also experienced the wilderness. The gospel of Luke records: "And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness till the day of his manifestation to Israel." (Luke 1:80) God has many and varied ways to train a person and the wilderness is frequently the site of such training. It was on Mount Hebron that Abraham worshipped and waited upon the Lord. Although Moses lived in an Egyptian palace, it was only after he had been tested in the Sinai wilderness that God called him to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. The prophet Elijah lived as a hermit in a cave on Mount Horeb until he could accomplish his mission. The apostle Paul received a revelation from God while in



seclusion in the Arabian desert and then carried out the task entrusted to him. John the Baptist's life in the desert tempered him body and soul. His simple life helped him not to envy vanity nor care for the things of the flesh. It made him hate evil and cleansed him body and soul, so that he could concentrate his whole being on love for God and humanity. Thanks be to the Lord, he used miraculous ways to train his servants, to make of them instruments to carry out the tasks given to them.

### **With the Spirit of Elijah**

In the Old Testament book of the prophet Malachi it says, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with a curse." (Ma1. 4:5-6) In that day the prophet Elijah held up the justice and holiness of God as a perfect witness to the truth. Malachi's prophecy pointed to John the Baptist. In his work John, like Elijah, dared to point to the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and Sadducees, denouncing them as a brood of vipers, as trees which would not bear fruit; warning them that if they did not bear fruit that befits repentance, they would be like trees cut down and thrown into the fire. This kind of passion for the truth, the spirit of speaking out through a sense of justice, would not be possible without the spirit of the prophet Elijah.

### **His Central Message**

John's message was directed to the Jews and it was one they were particularly in need of. In general this message can be divided into two parts.

First, repentance. The Bible tells us that God clothed humanity in animal skins after the fall to hide their shame. Thus, salvation comes from God, we cannot accomplish it through our own power. God used sacrifice as a figurative way to teach people, to enable them to approach him. After a time, God also gave the Israelites the Law, allowing the chosen people a standard of conduct to adhere to. But the Law could not save the people, its function was to name them as sinners. It could only lead people onto the path of salvation and to Christ. To be saved, one must rely on the saving grace of God and accept the cleansing blood of the Lord. God sent his son Jesus Christ, who became flesh and died on the cross, to complete the just and loving work of salvation. Because of this, there are two lines in the Old Testament. One is that God demands justice from people (this includes the Law). They are asked to serve him in Godlike holiness. The other line is concerned with prophecy, the signs and promise of salvation outside the Law, clearly indicating to people that God has prepared for them the way of salvation. The prophecy in the 53rd chapter of Isaiah is very clear. It explains that Jesus Christ is the one way of salvation prepared for humanity by God. Whoever relies on him will be freed from sin, draw near to God and become a child of God, a member of God's family.

The Jews were very familiar with these passages of the Bible. They knew that they had experienced over a thousand years of slavery since becoming a nation. Relying on the Law for salvation, relying on sacrifice to approach God, they had not found peace in their hearts nor the happiness and comfort of proximity to God. Once they heard John the Baptist preaching the path of repentance, they could not but flock to him, from Jerusalem, from all the Jewish lands and

from beyond the Jordan. We can see that 'repentance' is the broad road laid down by John the Baptist to lead the Jews from the Old Testament to the New, from the law to grace.

Second is John's witness to Christ. When John the Baptist saw that Jesus had come to him, he said, "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (Jn. 1:29) Through this witness the prophecy of Isaiah in the Old Testament: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God" (Is. 40:2) is fulfilled indeed. Two disciples who heard this witness then followed Jesus walking upon the bridge erected by John, always forward, never back. Just as John the Baptist himself said, "he is mightier than I" (Mt. 3: 11). He was humble before the Lord, honoring him as mighty. John the Baptist was truly worthy to be called an evangelist and a fit subject of our study.

The power and influence of John's cry, "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world", cannot be measured. The main reason it is so powerful does not lie in John's being an effective evangelist, but in the fact that he witnessed to the Jesus Christ he had seen with his own eyes. In the words of the disciple John: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life - the life was made manifest, and we saw it, and testify to it..." (1 Jn. 1:12). Seeing the Son of God, Jesus Christ, with his own eyes was a profound experience in John the Baptist's own life.

The first step in his "seeing" of Christ was God's own witness to his son as savior of the world (Jn. 8:18; 5:39). This was already foretold and recorded in the Old Testament, most clearly in Isaiah 53, where it says Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. The second step in this "seeing" was the revelation to him by God that "He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit" (Jn. 1:32-34). The third step came when Jesus came out of the River Jordan after being baptized. The Holy Spirit descended on Jesus in the form of a dove and there came a voice from heaven saying, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Mt. 3:17).

John compared the circumstances of the baptism of Jesus with the revelation made in Isaiah 53 and could see that this was the witness of the trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. His testimony made all who heard follow Jesus Christ as his disciples. Although John the Baptist's service to God was very brief, his achievements were outstanding.

John the Baptist was the precursor who opened up the way for Jesus Christ. His work was to be a connecting link, carrying God's plan forward. And the Lord was well pleased with him, saying "among those born of women there has risen no one greater than John the Baptist..." (Mt. 11:11). We can see that he occupied an important place in God's plan of salvation.

Dearly beloved brothers and sisters, there is much we can learn from the life of John the Baptist. He knew the age he lived in, he followed God's guidance, he accepted what God gave to him, he understood God's plan for him, he knew the message to be preached and the mission to be accomplished. May God open our hearts, have compassion upon us and make of us instruments suitable for his use so that we may bear witness to that eternal life which we have seen with our own eyes and heard with our own ears.

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## THE HOLY SPIRIT AND US - K.H. Ting

Sermon preached at the Service of Thanksgiving on the 30th anniversary of the founding of the Chinese Protestant Three Self Patriotic Movement, August, 1984

**Text:** For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from unchastity. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. (Acts 15:28-29).

At its inception, the Christian church did not separate itself from Judaism. The first Christians were all Jews, and though they acknowledged Jesus as Lord and awaited his coming, they continued to practice circumcision and to observe the whole of Jewish law and custom, believing that only in this way could they please God. However, a problem quickly arose: did non-Jewish Gentiles also have to accept Judaism and Jewish law and custom when they heard the gospel and accepted Christ as Lord? At that time, some assumed that since Jesus was a Jew whose followers formed a sect within Judaism and since those who brought the gospel to the Gentiles were Jews, then when Gentiles became Christians, they should of course accept circumcision and all Jewish law and custom just as the Jews did.

But Peter, Paul, Barnabas and others did not see things this way. They saw with their own eyes that Gentiles who did not keep the law also received the gift of the Holy Spirit when they accepted Christ. Therefore, they did not favor imposing the demands of Judaism upon these people. Paul advocated justification by faith. In Romans 3 he says: "a man is justified by faith apart from works of law. For no human being will be justified in his sight by works of the law..."

These were two very different positions. The former would continue to restrict Christianity within the confines of Judaism and legality. If this had been the case, the nourishment Christianity received from Greek thought would have been greatly curtailed and it could not have developed well-formed doctrines of its own such as the doctrines of Christ as the Logos, the Incarnation, justification by faith, the church, the Holy Spirit, the Trinity and many others. None of these would have been possible. A Christianity strongly flavored by Jewish ethnicity could not have spread throughout the world. But Paul's position was that the Christian church should proclaim in every nation that people were to be justified by faith alone. This broke through the restricting confines of Judaism and liberated Christianity from the captivity of Jewish law and ritual. Prominence was given to Christ. Only through belief in Jesus Christ would one find life. This is plainly the crux of a gospel God has prepared for all humanity. It is only because of this position of Paul's that we can find several million Christians in China today.

The 15th chapter of Acts describes a meeting in Jerusalem that Peter, James, Paul and the other apostles held to discuss this entire matter. That meeting was extremely important in deciding the future course of the church and indeed for the future course of human history in the centuries to come. The Spirit itself was at work in that meeting, leading and inspiring the apostles, opening their ears to what Peter and Paul had seen of God among the Gentiles. They reached a decision. In proclaiming the gospel to the Gentiles, Jewish law should be set aside. The

meeting sent a letter to the Gentiles which said, "For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us (The Holy Spirit and us: this was an unusual phrase) to lay upon you (meaning the Gentiles) no greater burden..." (15:28). The Holy Spirit and the apostles worked together at that meeting and reached a decision together. Because of this, justification by faith was upheld, liberation from Judaism called for and a great victory gained over the Judaizers. At this meeting, Christianity was born out of Judaism. Gentile Christians everywhere could organize their churches as the Holy Spirit guided them. They were no longer appendages of the church in Jerusalem. From then on, in order to witness well to Christ's truth, a church should always shed old ethnic bonds whenever entering a new environment. As we have seen, churches appeared in many places during the New Testament period. They were all under the care and guidance of the Holy Spirit, all localized, all had their unique characteristics and local color. They maintained a posture of mutual support toward the church in Jerusalem, but they were on an equal footing with it, not in a subservient or parent-child relationship.

There are those who say that the term "Three-Self" cannot be found in the Bible and they are right. But we may ask whether Three-Self as a principle or as a task is to be found there. I believe it is. The 15th chapter of Acts deals with just this question. What Paul speaks for on behalf of the Gentile churches is exactly the selfhood which our Three-Self stands for. His point about justification by faith and his opposition to the notion that one may be justified by keeping the law, allowed Gentile churches to cast off the burdens placed on them by the so-called "mother church" and find their own path.

No matter where the gospel has been proclaimed in the past 2000 years, this question of following one's own path has gone with it. Each ethnic group, each country, must ask itself this: Does acceptance of Christ as Lord mean at the same time acceptance of the culture and nationality of those who come to proclaim the gospel? Does belief in Christ imply severing relationships with one's own people and becoming stateless or semi-foreign?

There was a missionary to Africa who said he wanted African Christians to become just like whites in all respects except the color of their skin. Is this a good approach to mission? There are numerous independent churches in Africa today, independent administratively, financially, and in evangelism. Is this wrong, then?

Two points need to be made. We must implement Three-Self (1) in order to spread the gospel far and wide, and (2) in order to establish the Body of Christ.

One is justified by belief in Christ. This is indeed the gospel. But there is a pre-requisite: people must first see that they need justification; that is, that they are unrighteous, that they are sinners. Paul said that he himself experienced situations in which he wanted to do good but could not while he found himself doing those very things which he did not want to do. This is the result of the rule of sin on humanity. If we examine our consciences humbly, we will find that we have also had such experiences. But those who have done evangelistic work know that it is not easy to get people to recognize themselves as sinners. Natural man always sees himself as good. Sin is an alien concept. But this alien concept is an integral, inherent part of the gospel teaching. We have no right to do away with the problem of sin in order to make it easy for people to accept the gospel. For as soon as the problem of sin is done away with, there is no more question of

justification, no longer the need for a gospel. A gospel which does not speak of sin is no gospel at all. All this is by way of saying that Jesus places a demand on those who proclaim the gospel: sin is the only permissible alien concept because it is inherent in the gospel and cannot be avoided. All other alien factors, all other stumbling blocks which make it difficult for people to accept the gospel, must be eliminated from it. This includes such things as association with colonialism or unequal treaties or the contradiction between the evangelist's actions and his or her words. All such obstacles to the propagation of the gospel can and should be eliminated.

Think for a moment of the last half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th, when of all the foreign mission fields of the Western churches, China was the most important, with the most missionaries, the most Christian colleges, middle schools and hospitals. There were, however, few Christians. Protestants numbered at most 700,000 including rice Christians. Today, after 30 years without missionaries, without financial aid, without Christian schools or hospitals, without material benefits to attract believers, the number of Christians has not decreased but rather has increased and has increased three or four times the original number. Of course, there are many reasons for this, but the most fundamental underlying one is the fact that through the Three-Self Movement the Chinese Christian church has got rid of its image as a foreign religion, and has caused more people to be willing to hear what the gospel is saying. God has indeed used Three-Self as a tool. Today, when there is no longer foreign oil, foreign lamps or foreign cloth in China, how great the damage caused by the existence of a foreign religion would be to the propagation of the gospel! The original 700,000 Chinese Protestant Christians could not have increased to three million in such a situation.

Therefore, Three-Self is very necessary to the spread of the gospel.

There is yet another reason why Three-Self is a necessity. Christians from each era, each ethnic group, each nation must enter into the immeasurable abundance of Christ out of their own particular backgrounds. They must gather together, share mutually and enrich the spiritual treasure house of the church if the universal church of Christ is to be fully realized on earth.

In chapters 2 and 3 of Revelation, the Holy Spirit writes letters to the seven churches in Asia Minor. The circumstances of each church were different. Each had its own merits and drawbacks. Each had received Christ in its own way. The Holy Spirit did not desire all seven churches to conform to one pattern. Thus, his message to each varied. But the close of each letter is the same: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." We can see that the Holy Spirit wants the churches to exchange what they have received so that grace can be multiplied through sharing it. When we Chinese speak of Three-Self, neither "self-sufficiency" nor "self-isolation" is included. We want not only to strengthen relationships among churches within China, but also to uphold and develop relationships with churches internationally. We cannot afford not to hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

In the 21st chapter of Revelation, we read of the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven. This holy city is foursquare with 3 gates on the east, 3 on the north, 3 on the south and 3 on the west: 12 gates in all. This tells us that at that time Christians will come to the New Jerusalem from all directions, forming into colorful and multifaceted processions representing the churches of every place and people. We hope that the Chinese church will form a worthy

procession of its own on that day, entering the city from one of the eastern gates, offering itself to God. But it goes without saying that if we did not follow the spirit of Three-Self in establishing the body of Christ in China, we would be merely a dot on the Western missionary map. We should not understand the universality of the church in merely geographical terms. The concept needs depth as well as breadth and this requires us to allow the glory of the risen and ascended Christ to be reflected through the prism of every local and ethnic church, bringing even greater glory to Christ. This is what Paul meant when he said, "For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God." Where is the universal church? Where shall we seek it? The universal church is not in New York or London, not in Rome or Geneva, but within particular churches. There is no universal church apart from local, concrete, particular churches, just as we can see no abstract person apart from you or I, this or that person, this man, that woman, this adult or that child. The better the Chinese church follows the path of Three-Self, the more we shall be blessed and the greater will be our contribution to the spiritual wealth of the universal church.

This is how I have taken my understanding of Three-Self from the Bible. Three-Self is a necessity then for the spread of the gospel and for the establishment of the Body of Christ.

Some people overseas say that Three-Self is an invention of the Communist Party of China. Not only have these people not studied the Bible, they have not even studied history. In England in 1850, long before there was a Communist Party in China, Henry Venn coined the terms "self-administration", "self-support" and "self-propagation", saying that these were to be the goal of mission. He entreated missionaries to be like St. Paul. This meant that they should plan to make themselves dispensable as soon as possible, and not stay over the long term. English Christians in the 16th century rid themselves of the domination of Rome and formed a church of their own. In the words of the present Archbishop of Canterbury, that was a three-self movement too.

Based on the Bible and on history, we can say that wherever the gospel has been propagated over the last 2000 years, the Three-Self question has accompanied it. Whether the term has been used or not is of minor importance.

Some people have hesitations about Three-Self because they have been disappointed by the actions of some others who flaunt Three-Self. If this is the case, we must try persuasion, help and pray for those who flaunt it, asking God to help them see and correct their mistakes. But we should not place too much importance on human behavior. Humanity has its weaknesses and hypocrisy. If we limit our perspective to this, even the church would become offensive to us for after all, isn't it also composed of the same people? Are we so much stronger than they? We must study the Bible in order to find the essence of Three-Self. We should grasp this essence and unite with other Christians to work steadfastly for Its Implementation.

I myself neither understood nor supported Three-Self all at once. When Mr. Y.T. Wu and other senior church leaders initiated the movement, I was still living in Switzerland. On my return, although I did not oppose Three-Self, I did not immediately support it either. I wanted to look things over first, to find out something about it. My attitude was that of Gamaliel: "If this plan or this undertaking is of men it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow

them. You might even be found opposing God!" (Acts 5:38-39). Later I saw more clearly. I learned from the New Testament what the church's path ought to be. Three-Self was St. Paul's way; it came from the Lord himself. Once, when the risen Christ appeared to the disciples, John said softly to Peter: "It is the Lord." I seemed also to have heard those words: "It is the Lord." The hand of the risen Lord himself was pointing the way. And I laid down my burden and began to support Three-Self.

The Rev. Jia Yuming, one of our beloved senior church leaders, also went through a wait-and-see period with regard to Three-Self. When a certain point was reached, after waiting upon the Lord half the night, he received from the Lord the words, "The source is unpolluted." He then resolved to support Three-Self. Later he was chosen to be vice-chairman of the national Three-Self. So we can see from this that we need not be concerned so much with the persons involved, but with the Bible and with the source. If we look to humanity, we will stumble. If we look to the Bible and to the source, we cannot go wrong.

Let us place the path we have followed for 30 years before God's altar. Let us place there also the future path of the Chinese church and seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Where the church is corrupt, O Lord, cleanse it,  
where it is mistaken, correct it,  
where it is lacking, enrich it,  
where it is divided, grant it love,  
where it has lost the capacity to witness to Christ, bring it back,  
where it is presumptuous and complacent, grant discipline,  
where it has humility, goodness, unity and mutual love, bless and strengthen it.  
All this we ask in the name of Jesus Christ, the head of the church. Amen.

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from Tian Feng, 5 (September, 1984).  
reprinted courtesy of Bridge.*



## **OUR YEARS PASS AWAY - Wang Weifan**

**Text:** For all our days pass away under thy wrath, our years come to an end like a sigh. The years of our life are threescore and ten, or even by reason of strength fourscore; yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we flyaway. Who considers the power of thy anger, and thy wrath according to the fear of thee? So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom. Psalm 90:9-12

The ninetieth psalm, most ancient of all the psalms, is a "prayer of Moses, the man of God." In it the man of God, Moses, speaks of the eternity of God and the transience of humankind and how to bring that human life which "flies away" to its home, the dwelling place of God "from everlasting to everlasting," where it will find its innate eternal significance.

The ninth verse "our years come to an end like a sigh" is Moses' verdict on the empty waste of time that is human life. The original Hebrew word here translated as "sigh" is extremely rich in its connotations and has been rendered differently in various translations. We may find spiritual nourishment and enlightenment in each translation.

### **(1) "OUR YEARS COME TO AND END LIKE A SIGH"**

This is the translation found in the "Union Version" . currently in use in China. On the basis of this translation we can infer that this prayer of Moses was written after the Israelites' forty years of wandering in the wilderness. The 600,000 males who followed Moses out of slavery in Egypt that year were all alike guided by the pillars of cloud and fire of Jehovah, and all received the same supernatural food from him. But they were rebellious. During their arduous Journey they were forever looking back nostalgically upon the small material comforts of their time of slavery, forever putting Jehovah to the test over the food and drink trifles of life. In addition to this, they defiled themselves as idolaters and the majority of those 600,000 were infected with licentiousness. With most of them "God was not pleased."

Except for two, Aaron and Joshua, they all died there (1 Cor. 10:1-11). On average, over 40 died each day. One after another their graves sprang up across the vast wilderness. Looking back over the past forty years from the banks of the Jordan, Moses could not help but feel that it had all been but a mournful cry, a sigh! This was a life lived out under the wrath of God; consumed and overwhelmed by it, a life passed away under the awesome judgment of God because of iniquity and secret sin. Therefore, Moses prays saying, "Who considers the power of thy anger, and thy wrath according to the fear of thee?" (Psalm 90:7-8). That is to say, who can know what kind of judgment God in his anger may execute. Who fears God according to the power of his anger and wrath? (Psalm 90:11)

The lives of God's sons and daughters should be cheerful and happy, not full of toil and worry. These should be lives filled with his love, not his wrath. When we cross from one bank of the Jordan to the other and look back over past events, it should not be a sigh which comes forth, but a beautiful hymn. Before the throne of paradise, the lamb has redeemed the saints with his own blood and the song which comes forth is like the "sound of many waters," like "thunder. "

And the new song each one sings cannot be learned by any other. Each of our lives is a "new song" composed of our own destinies. Each step we take along the road as we follow the lamb - in simplicity, purity, flawlessness - is another note in this new song. This song will be the comfort, the warmth, the most perfect memory we leave to the world, and it will be sung forever without end.

## **(2) "OUR LIVES ARE LIKE A RIDDLE"**

The word translated as "sigh" in Chinese is used in its positive sense in the original language. Its negative sense is translated as "riddle" in Psalm 49:4.

The lives of many of God's sons and daughters are an unintelligible "riddle" to their own families and to those around them. Our prayers, our Sunday worship, even the 'Lord, Lord' upon our lips can all be means of telling others we are Christians. Yet often it goes only this far and no farther! Our lives, our thoughts, our feelings, our work do not indeed tell others what kind of Christ is the Christ we believe in.

When Matthew, Mark, Luke and John wrote their gospels, they often had to "translate" the Hebrew. If they had not translated "Immanuel," people would not have known that Jesus' name signifies "God with us" (Mt. 1:23). If they had not translated "Rabbi," people would not have known that Jesus Christ may be called "Master" (Jn. 1:38). In the disciples' proselytizing and in their letters, they also had frequently to "translate" the Hebrew which the Gentiles had no way of understanding. If they had not translated "Melchizedek," no one would have known that the son of God, whom Melchizedek resembles, Jesus Christ, is "king of righteousness." Were "Salem" not translated, people would not have known that our Lord is a "king of peace", a "prince of peace" (Heb. 7:1-3; Is. 9:6). We must also do this kind of "translation." The difference is that we do not use language to translate. We use our lives.

The lives of God's sons and daughters should be a "letter from Christ" (2Cor. 3:3). The reader of a letter cannot directly see its author. But even so, one can perceive the author's love, care and concern therein. The Christ seated at the father's right hand was long ago taken up into heaven (Acts 1:9). But he has left many letters behind for the world. All these "letters from Christ" include our own. Can we allow Christ, using the ink which is the Holy Spirit, to write deep in our hearts, stroke by stroke, word by word, sentence by sentence, that which he wants to tell the world? Can we allow our families, neighbors and colleagues to come to know our Lord through our inner hearts, through each word and every action of our lives?

## **(3) "WE SPEND OUR YEARS AS A TALE THAT IS TOLD"**

This is the term used in the English King James version. The entire passage reads: "we spend our years as a tale that is told." The root of the word translated as "sigh" contains the meaning "discuss/talk about." In Psalm 37:30, its verb form is translated as "talketh."

When we read Numbers we can see that the Israelites' forty years in the wilderness were indeed a long story, no more than a story whose plot was made up of a string of weaknesses and

defeats, a shocking story, and not a victorious one. It functions as a negative object lesson or warning. It cannot give any positive inspiration.

But the Bible does hold many beautiful stories for us. There is the faithful father Abraham going out in obedience, longing for a more beautiful homeland, being tested. And there is the story of his offering of his sole beloved son (Gen. 12:1-9; 17:1-8; 22:1-19; Heb. 11:8-19). There is Moses who prefers to suffer along with his own people, casting off a life within the Egyptian royal palace (Ex. 2:11-15; 3:7-17; Heb. 11:24-29). There is the story of David, who served the counsel of God in his own generation (Acts 13:36). More than these, there is recorded in the gospels the story of Jesus who "came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mt. 20:28).

Every person who has left us and gone to Jesus has also left behind a story for us. We have especially their purity of spirit, their beautiful footsteps, the work they have done because of faith, the suffering they have endured because of love...all these are ever encouraging us, the living, those still learning to serve the Lord. And we ourselves must in the same way leave a story for posterity. Every step we take, each detail of our lives are all components of this story, of our individual histories. The question is, will the story we are to leave behind be a comfort and encouragement to posterity, or will it become a stumbling block to them?

#### **(4) "OUR YEARS DIE AWAY LIKE A MURMUR"**

The New English Bible published by Oxford Press in 1970, uses this term since the word translated in the Chinese Bible as "sigh" also has the meaning in the original of a "humming noise." It is used in the Bible for an entire range of sounds: thunder, a lion's roar, the ringing of a harp, the murmur of running water, the sighing of a light breeze, the cooing of a dove. So murmur is a justifiable translation here.

There is a saying, "much thunder but little rain," and another "footsteps sound on the stairs but no one appears." This is a good portrayal of some lives. Flashy but without substance; impressive looking but shallow.

On the surface King Solomon's service to Jehovah appeared spectacular. The first sacrifice, at Gibeon, consisted of 1000 whole sacrificial animals (2 Chron. 1:2-6). Later he constructed a resplendent temple in Jerusalem which took 7 years and the strength of 180,000 workers to complete (1 Kings 6:38). One sacrifice which took place upon completion of the temple consumed 22,000 cattle and 12,000 lambs (1 Kings 8:62-63; 2 Chron. 6:4-5). But behind all this splendor, Solomon lacked David's profound spiritual experience. Add to this the spiritual degeneracy of his later years and it is not surprising that when Solomon was writing Ecclesiastes, he would say "Emptiness, emptiness, says the Speaker, emptiness, all is empty" (Eccle. 1:2). Moreover, on the basis of his own bitter experience, he advises posterity, "Remember your Creator"; "fear God and obey his commands; there is no more to man than this" (Proverbs 12:1, 13).

The mere pursuance of splendor in the spiritual life is vanity. It is unacceptable because it is an instance of thunder without rain. "Fear God and obey his commands," only this is a solid

path for the spiritual quest.

.Once, before he suffered, while on the road to Jerusalem, Jesus cursed a fig tree which had leaves but bore no fruit. Of course it was not only that fig tree he was referring to, but the Pharisees and Saducees of the day and a formulaic, doctrinaire, stagnant and suffocating religion without inner vitality.

We must always produce some fruit which will satisfy the Lord; we must not be "all leaves and no fruit" when we face him. Our own spiritual lives should be thus as should the work we do for the Lord. There should always be some gold, silver and fine stone in the results of our work which will live forever. We must not seek after those of wood, hay and straw which cannot withstand the test. We can "fool ourselves and others" for a time, but we cannot finally withstand the flames before the throne of Christ! (see 1Cor. 3:10-15)

### **(5) "OUR LIVES ARE OVER IN A BREATH"**

This is the translation given in the Jerusalem Bible published in the United States in 1966. "Breath" can also be understood as "flavor."

We are human because when we were created, aside from the dust which makes us mortal, there was the "breath of life" which comes from Jehovah (Gen. 2:7). What differentiates humanity from animals is that only humanity was created in God's image (Gen. 1:27). When Adam failed, humanity did not completely lose this "breath" and "image" of God. No matter how far humanity goes from the perfection of God, it retains some resemblance, and furthermore, it has the possibility of becoming more like God. Without this possibility, there would have been no need for Jesus to ask of his disciples, "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt. 5:48).

The pollution of sin can damage that image of God within us. It can alienate the breath of God within us. When God smelled the fragrant smoke of Abel's sacrifice, he also smelled on his hands the blood of his brother (Gen. 4:8-11). Before the fragrant smoke of Noah's burnt sacrifice reached him, Jehovah smelled the earth's corruption and violence (Gen. 6:11-12; 8:20-22).

What pleases God before the throne, that place where God and humanity meet, is the aroma of fragrant incense, not "unholy incense" (Ex. 30:1-10; 34-38). What God requires of his sons and daughters is to spread everywhere "the fragrance of the knowledge of him" (2 Cor. 2:14).

And our lives should be lives which spread the fragrance of Christ everywhere. The fragrance of Christ is his "sacrificial love." To "walk in love," means to treat others and do all things in love, to serve other people, this is a fragrant incense which has the sacrificial love of Christ in it. It is this incense of "sacrificial love" which we need, not immorality or impurity. (Eph. 5:1-4)

### **(6) "OUR YEARS ARE LIKE A COBWEB"**

This is the English translation of Smith and Goodspeed (The Complete Bible: An American Translation, 1927, rev. 1935). The passage reads: "For all our days vanish in thy wrath; we come to an end; our years are like a cobweb wiped away." "A person leaves behind a name; the swallow, its call." But once a spider's web is brushed away, no trace is left behind.

The names of many people are recorded in the Bible, as well as the spiritual riches they have left to us. Enoch is the model of one who walks with God. Abraham's witness was one of faith; Moses' was the law; while David left us the Psalms. The prophets left us the profound love of concern for one's country and people. In the four gospels the apostles left us the image of Christ which we gaze upon and adore.

But there are others, too, who have left nothing behind. Apart from their birth, we have only their death; between the two nothing else is recorded. There is no one in the Bible who lived longer than Methuselah at 969 years. Consider that life of 969 years, however. A life nearly a thousand years long. The Bible finishes with it in three short verses (Gen. 5:25-27). Furthermore, outside of having multiplied the human race through generations of sons and daughters, there was nothing else about him worth remembering in the eyes of God. This is a life like a cobweb that has been brushed away-it leaves no trace. It was not as good as that of his father Enoch who "walked with God three hundred years" (Gen. 5:22). Nor like that of his descendent Noah. Noah "was a righteous man, blameless in his generation", and like his great grandfather, "walked with God" (Gen. 6:9).

Through our lives we must always leave behind something for those who follow. Not like grass or a flower, for the wind passes over it, and it is gone" (Psalm 103:16); nor like "grass which is renewed in the morning; in the morning it flourishes and is renewed; in the evening it fades and withers"; still less should we live as if drunk, with nothing between life and death but a "dream" (Psalm 90:5-6).

### **(7) "OUR YEARS PASS AWAY LIKE A THOUGHT RECONSIDERED"**

This is from the German translation and there is a translation into classical Chinese which uses this rendering. The term "think better of" is descriptive of the speed with which human life passes away, with extreme haste, like the moment in which something is thought better of. "Thou dost sweep men away; they are like a dream..." (Psalm 90:5).

In the sight of the eternal God, a thousand years is but "yesterday" that is past, or as a "watch in the night" (Psalm 90:4). Let alone the few score of a person's life which does not surpass one hundred! But just because this is so, we have an even greater need to know how "to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom" (Psalm 90:12). "To number" means first of all to count. Beyond middle age, one should know that one's own days" can be counted on one's fingers." As the great patriot Yue Fei said, young people should also "not wait until youth has been wasted away" so as to avoid bringing shame upon their creator. Going deeper into the meaning of "to number", we find that it also means "to weigh anew". We need to "weigh" our own past "anew", "to be aware that one has failed in the past and try to retrieve these losses in the future" as the poet Tao Yuanming put it, and thus get a heart of wisdom.

We have all wasted a great deal of time in the past, emptily cast away the hours. Some has been caused by our own weakness and idleness, some we have been deprived of. "Time flows like the waters of a river." This is Confucius' lament for time which has slipped away and cannot be recovered. But we believe that lost time can be redeemed. Colossians and Ephesians both speak of "making the most of the time" (Eph. 5:16; Col. 4:5). We must "make the most of" today and tomorrow; we must "redeem" the yesterday already past. We need not vainly lament the ephemeral nature of human life, nor be depressed to no avail over the lost years. In the eyes of the eternal God, although a thousand years are as a day, a day is also like a thousand years, its value and significance linked to the eternity of God. A drop of water cannot avoid being dried up, but if it flows into the vast ocean, it will remain forever. The eternal Lord is the home and dwelling place of my life. I will offer this brief human life to God with both hands and, like the drop of water in the river, may it live forever.

"Abide with me" is not an evening prayer nor is it a world-weary, pessimistic hymn. Its author, Henry F. Lyte, was a man who devoted himself to work for the Lord even though he was plagued by many illnesses. Others urged him to rest, but his answer was: "it's better to polish it to nothing than let it rust away." When we come to the line, "In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me," what we sense is a person who "floats on the vast sea of life like a tiny bit of flotsam"; who will find there with the everlasting God a home and dwelling place of deliverance and peace; a person whose life embodies a "using up, not a rusting away," staunchly facing life's challenges. "The ox knows when evening comes and needs no whip to spur him home," may be the best gloss of "fast falls the eventide, Lord with me abide." One who finds a resting place with God, one who joins the transience of humanity to the eternity of God, though "the darkness deepens" will see "heaven's morning break," and in the moving spirit described by the poet Li Shangyin in the line ' , And the silkworms of spring will weave until they die,' will live out those years of life which yet remain.

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from Sermons, 4 (November, 1982)*

# **HYMNOLOGY**

## **FOREWORD TO THE CHINESE HYMNAL 1983 EDITION**

Thanks be to our Heavenly Father for the coming into being of this hymnal, eagerly awaited by congregations all over China. It is the result of the prayers and efforts of many brothers and sisters throughout the country. It is yet another witness to the Holy Spirit's guidance in building up the body of Christ ever since we began to implement self-government, self-support and self-propagation and entered the post-denominational period. This volume will make us better able, in our worship and gatherings, to "teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God" (Col. 3:16).

This hymnal is the product of a specific historical period in our Church. The editorial policy and procedures, along with attempts at indigenizing the hymns, all reflect definite historical characteristics.

### **1. HOPES AND EFFORTS**

Before the Chinese Church achieved Three-Self, denominational divisions resulted in the use of dozens of hymnals. Almost all the lyrics and melodies used originated in the West and translations of the better-known Western hymns varied widely. Chinese Christians hoped for a long time to have a hymnal suitable for all our churches, one which would reflect the special nature of the Chinese Church. Our predecessors made great efforts toward this end, but due to historical circumstances, their fine aspirations could not be truly realized.

With the founding of New China and the implementation of Three-Self by the Christian Church, many Christians, especially in recent years, have hoped that a hymnal suitable for the whole country might be published as soon as possible, and that every effort be made to have more hymns composed by Chinese Christians ourselves. Especially since the Third National Christian Conference in October, 1980, the Three-Self Movement and the China Christian Council have placed great importance on this matter. In February, 1981, the two organizations decided to set up a sacred music work group, and in March of the same year an announcement appeared in Tian Feng soliciting lyrics and music for the new hymnal. The response was enthusiastic, with contributions coming from nearly every province, municipality and autonomous region in the country.

The group undertook a great quantity of work. It sought to understand the way hymns are used in local Christian communities; to solicit opinions; to collect draft compositions; to study the hymnals published in the past as well as related domestic and foreign materials. In March, 1982, the Three-Self Committee and the China Christian Council invited a representative group of church leaders and Christians knowledgeable in the area of hymnology and sacred music, to form a standing body, the Chinese Christian Hymnal Committee, to research and promote the work of our Church in this area. Furthermore, an Editorial Committee for the present volume was set up under this body along with an editorial group responsible for day-to-day work

(consisting of the members of the original sacred music work group).

To satisfy the urgent need of Christians throughout the country as quickly as possible, time taken in editing this book was necessarily limited. The task to continue the unfinished work of past generations is however, assumed with great enthusiasm by Christians today. With the precious materials of the past and with the help of numerous fellow Christians, this work has been completed in a fairly short time. It is, of course, only an initial step in realizing a long cherished hope of Chinese Christians.

The present volume is a collection of 400 hymns. Of these, 292 are known in churches all over the world, the lyrics and melodies having been chosen from hymnals used in various Chinese churches in the past. In addition there are six translated hymns which did not appear in any previous Chinese hymnal or for which a new translation has been done. 102 of the 400 hymns have either lyrics or melody composed by Chinese Christians or are adaptations of Chinese tunes. 56 of these have been composed by Chinese Christians in recent years. In addition to these 400, 42 short spiritual songs have been selected and appended to the hymnal.

## **2. MUTUAL RESPECT AND COMPREHENSIVENESS**

Denominationalism has virtually disappeared in the Chinese Church. Christians from different traditions respect each other in matters of faith, cherish one another as members of the same body and join together in our work. These are the basic conditions under which the publishing of this hymnal has been made possible. This book strives to uphold the principle of comprehensiveness, on the basis of the fundamental oneness of our faith.

(1) We have chosen, insofar as possible hymns that Christians from every church background are familiar with and enjoy singing, including those useful for different facets of group worship and personal devotions. In comparing hymnals published by various denominations in the past, we discovered that although each might have its own merits and limitations, there was a great deal in common in terms of contents: collected there were hymns the majority of Christians love to sing. Some of the more widely-known hymns embody the common spiritual experiences and insights of Christians in every age and place; it is these which form the common spiritual wealth of Christians throughout the world and they are treasured by Chinese Christians too.

The hymns in the present collection have been selected from over ten hymnals representing different denominational traditions: Hymns of Universal Praise, Hymns of Praise, Chinese Hymnary, New Hymns of Praise, Selected Sacred Songs, Evangel Hymnal, Hymns of the Christian Assemblies, Ling Liang Hymnal, Hymnals of Salvation, Praise and Victory, Morning Star Choruses, Rod-and-Staff Choruses of the Church, etc. Although the translations of the hymns are different, the original text is the same. Of the 292 widely-known hymns, we have chosen, as many as 122 of them, i.e., 41.8%, appear in at least four of the nine most widely-used hymnals.

(2) We have done our utmost to choose hymns which have various special characteristics in terms of words and music and which are rich in spirituality as well. Hymns rich in spirituality



have been produced in each of the differing traditions and in each historical period. Since the Christian message has been received by different groups in different ways, all these hymns can become part of the common treasure on the premise of mutual respect, as long as they are not exclusivist. Some of the hymns accepted for this volume were originally found only in one hymnal. This is because we feel that eliminating denominational prejudices does not imply that we must get rid of the varied treasures of different traditions, but rather that we should gather them all into the abundance of our one Lord Jesus Christ.

Historically speaking, this book includes hymns from the early Church (e.g. The Gloria Patti), Greek sacred songs from the Middle Ages (e.g., The Day of Resurrection), and Latin hymns (e.g., Veni Spiritus) as well as hymns from the Reformation (e.g., A Mighty Fortress Is Our God), etc. There are two ancient Chinese hymns: Praises to the Trinity and Salvation is a Nestorian Christian hymn which came to China in the Tang Dynasty. The words are based on a text discovered in the Dunhuang Grottoes. The words of The Admiration of Christ were written by a Ming Dynasty Christian and set to an adaptation of a traditional Chinese melody. We have also included a newly discovered translation by Y.T. Wu of Grant, good Lord, that we serve Thee as we might, the text being a prayer by the 16th century Loyola. Although the language is rather classical in style, we have kept the original text because of its historical significance.

Geographically, in addition to Chinese and Western hymns, we have included new translations of hymns from other Asian countries, such as The Prodigal Son from Japan; Praise God, From Whom All Blessings Flow, from India; and Sursum Corda (tune) from Burma.

(3) In terms of language and musical style, we have not emphasized uniformity, but have sought to preserve variety. Previously published hymnals varied greatly in terms of language style and word choice. The Editorial Committee took a cautious attitude toward this in order to preserve the composer's original meaning insofar as possible. Lyrics created by Chinese Christians were changed as little as possible. In the case of translations, since each was different and only one could be chosen, all were checked against the original where possible, both to seek the correct rendering and to allow the text to better complement the music. In those cases where it was felt greater changes were needed, the original author, translator or editor has been contacted. In order to show our respect for the tremendous efforts of our predecessors at blending church music more closely with Chinese culture, instances in which their translations employed a more classical vocabulary to express the Christian faith have not been greatly changed. There are hymns in which the original translation was insufficiently refined, or in which the lyrics may not even rhyme; however, in order to show consideration for the preferences of some Christians, we have simply revised or polished here and there and very little new translation has been done. As for music, this volume accepts both solemn music and lively gospel tunes, as well as some chants which have historical significance in the development of Church music.

(4) The principle of mutual respect is also exemplified in the arrangement of the table of contents. Baptism by sprinkling and by immersion are listed alongside each other, so also are Holy Communion and Breaking the Bread. In consideration of those Christians who see no need to observe set holy days of the Christian Year, the table of contents does not contain such a section, but those who do observe holy days can use the table of Hymns Suitable for the Holy Days of the Christian Year.

### 3. INDIGENIZATION OF SACRED MUSIC

As long ago as the 1930's, there were those in the older generation of our Church, such as T.C. Chao, Timothy Tingfang Lew, Ernest Y.L. Yang, Jia Yuming, Zhu Baoyuan, Wang Jimin, Zhou Shuan and others, who had contributed in their different ways to the indigenization of Church music. Some examples of their work are Song of the New Earth, which reflected the yearning of Christians in the darkness of the old society for the coming of the Kingdom and The Chinese Church is Independent, which expressed the ardent expectations of Chinese Christians for an independent, self-administered Church. We have done our best to include this type of hymn in the present volume and have followed the original texts in order to preserve the historical flavor. Their efforts could not make greater progress because of the historical limitations of the time, and we have collected here only 40 some such compositions from several hymnals.

Present historical conditions differ greatly from the past. In recent years, there has been a great increase in the number of Chinese Christians composing texts and music for hymns. From March, 1981, to September, 1982, we received a total of 423 batches of manuscripts from Christians in different parts of China, containing a total of 2,256 hymns. The editorial group conscientiously read and appraised the words and music of each hymn. Following this sorting process, ten tentative drafts of this volume were printed during 1982, and guidance and opinions were sought from specialists in the field and from church leaders. Trial performances were held in Shanghai, Nanjing and other places. Christians in many fields were asked to take part in numerous discussion groups from which opinions, requests and suggestions were gathered. While the drafts were being revised, the original authors were frequently consulted and only with their agreement were the versions finalized.

The authors of the hymns chosen for this volume come from over ten provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions including Beijing, Shandong, Henan, Hebei, Zhejiang, Fujian, Guangdong, Guangxi, Yunnan, Shaanxi and Liaoning. They represent national minorities as well as the Han. For example, Praise and Worship, is a Miao tune; Jesus Ascends to Heaven, a Korean one. The authors include a minister in his nineties as well as seminary students in their twenties, clergy as well as laity, professional musicians as well as ordinary workers and peasants. As these facts show, the work of producing hymns has become one in which Christians throughout the whole country participate.

With regard to music, the majority of the newly-written hymns are in the style of Chinese national music. These include Chinese tunes with only minor revisions such as The Risen Christ, and ancient zither tunes, such as The Miraculous Pen of Divine Work. Some of these compositions represent explorations of how hymn melodies may be indigenized and yet accord with the tradition of Church music.

We wish to specially thank three advisers for their outstanding contributions to this work. Bishop T .K. Shen, member of the editorial group for Hymns of Universal Praise and specialist in liturgy, enjoined us before his death to adhere to the path of indigenization of hymns. Another member of the editorial group of the above-mentioned book and specialist in Church music, Prof.

Ernest Y.L. Yang, guided our editorial group in its reading of related materials. Prof. Ma Geshun, well-versed in the composition, editing and conducting of sacred music, gave pointers on melody and harmony in many of the compositions.

The content of the Chinese hymns chosen here is varied. They can be used on different occasions of public worship and individual devotional life. For example, the section Asking Blessings on the Nation, includes works from early this century and from the 1930s as well as from the present, thus expressing the feelings of generations of Chinese Christians in our love for both country and Church. The hymns in the section Loyal Service, reflect the witness of our Chinese Christians for whom love of God and service to humanity are intimately connected. There are also some hymns which express different aspects of Christian life in China, such as Joyous Service, Respect for Elders and Hymn of Thanksgiving Upon Completion of a New House.

This book is the fruit of the combined efforts of brothers and sisters throughout the country. It represents a new attempt to compile a hymnal for our Church which expresses the specific spiritual experience of Chinese Christians and is suitable for nationwide use. Our experience is insufficient and shortcomings are unavoidable, but it is our hope that this volume can be continually improved through our common efforts. We hope that the publication of this collection of hymns can be a beginning of the deeper and broader development of Chinese hymnology and sacred music.

We solemnly offer this hymnal to God our Father as a first fruit and as a service to all churches and Christians in our country. We pray that with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit this book can make worship in our churches ever more reverent, the spiritual life of Christians ever richer and our unity ever more steadfast, until we joyously sing together the new heavenly song before the throne.

*The Chinese Christian Hymnal Committee*  
*March, 1983*

## LEARNING FROM THE SAINTS

words: Peter Tsai

music: Eleanor Tsai

- (1) Father of faith Abram is, Obeying God, gave his son.  
Faith alone his righteousness, I will learn of him.
- (2) God called Moses, "Go to save your own people from being slaves.  
"Teach them to keep my commands." I will learn of him.
- (3) David is the shepherd king, Loved God, people and country.  
Sins confessed with true repent. I will learn of him.
- (4) Peter is the Apostle, First knew Jesus Christ of God,  
Feeding sheep to love his lord. I will learn of him.
- (5) Paul is Christ's most faithful one; Building church and preached the cross;  
Shared Christ's suffering with deep joy. I will learn of him.
- (6) For all the saints, ages past, whose life of faith always lasts;  
Loved by God, and loved by us, We will learn of them.

translated by T .K. Chiu

harmonized by Tabitha Henken

## I WILL GO WITH THEE

words: Wang Weifan

music: Lin Shenben

(1) Winter has passed, the rain is o'er.  
Earth is a-bloom, songs fill the air.  
Linger no more, why must you wait,  
Rise up my love and follow me.

CHORUS: Jesus my lord, my love, my all,  
Body and soul forever yours.  
In dale so dark, I long for thee.  
Spring has returned, abide with me.

(2) O Lord thy face I long to see  
Thy still small voice, reveal to me.  
Thy tender care, thy joy so dear  
O precious dove with me be near.

(3) O my belov'd, I'll follow thee  
Far from the rocks, the hills and sea.  
Midst all the songs and blossoms anew,  
In your firm steps, I'll follow you.

translation: Ewing W. Carroll, Jr.

# **CATECHISM**

## **The Compilation of the Catechism**

*Tian Feng No.2, 1984*

We praise the Lord that the Catechism compiled by the China Christian Council was published in September, 1983, and has been issued to churches and Christians throughout the country. The book is not very large, but it represents the prayers and united efforts of Christians in many parts of China. It is, in addition, a witness to the guiding hand of God. We would now respectfully offer a few comments on the work that was involved in its preparation, and would offer our thanks to our heavenly Father for his grace and to our fellow-Christians for their interest and help.

Some time back, not long after the formation of the Christian Council, a number of our fellow-Christians expressed the hope that we would soon be able to set out the materials for a rudimentary knowledge of the Christian faith. During the next two or three years, there was, throughout the country, a swift advance in the work of rehabilitation. Faced with this happy situation, everybody was deeply concerned with the way in which the questions facing Christians could best be resolved. Especially was this so with regard to new Christians and those enquiring about the faith who had not long been aware of the gospel, as well as those shouldering pastoral responsibilities, for all of whom these expectations were very acute. A great many Christians, either by letter or orally, made proposals to the Council in which they requested that a plain and simple catechism be produced in the form of questions and answers, by means of which Christian doctrine could be taught in a traditional form. This could serve both as basic material for those who were being instructed in the faith, and as a work of reference for Bible classes and individuals in their Bible-study.

The urgency of this demand was very evident. But it was equally clear that this involved a heavy responsibility. This was not a task in which at the whim of somebody's imagination pen and ink could be casually applied. In the Course of our prayers it became clear to us that at the present time the Church in China is facing a new stage in God's unique grace. On the one hand, we are facing fresh responsibilities never before encountered, and on the other hand we are facing new problems never raised before. We must, therefore, exercise both faithfulness and humility in the presence of God. We must neither evade our responsibilities, nor must we fail to recognize our own limitations and the practical difficulties that confront us. At the same time, we must firmly maintain our faith in the guiding hand of God, who would aid us in the completion of our tasks.

### **Preliminary Assumptions**

Before putting pen to paper, we first set out some preliminary ideas:

1. This was to be a fresh catechism following upon the dissolution of the denominations. From the second and third centuries onwards, the use of questions and answers as a means of

instructing new believers in the faith had become an established custom of the Church. In the course of subsequent developments and changes, especially during the period of religious reform in the 16th and 17th centuries, the division of the Church into sects and denominations led to a gradual increase in denominational catechisms, in which emphasis was given to their own respective points of view. Although in general these denominations gave expression to the light which their experience had shed upon them, unfortunately, in the particular circumstances of their time, they did not give due weight to their common heritage, and were engaged in constant recrimination. Nowadays, we have been the recipients of God's grace, enabling us to enter upon a new situation in which denominations have practically disappeared, and we do not wish, by blaming the denominations of the past, to create a new sect. Instead, we wish to appropriate the best elements in each of the various traditions of the past and gather them together into one. So we must exert every effort to incorporate those essential doctrines which are universally accepted as indispensable.

2. We must strive for full agreement and mutual respect. The unity which has been enjoyed by the Chinese Church during the past few years has led everyone to see that the essential doctrines which are held in common are precisely those which churches that in the past followed different traditions were determined to maintain, and comprised the most fundamental components of faith. But in addition to these, some varying points of view continue to exist. We consider that where these points are concerned, we should maintain the policy of mutual respect for each other's views. In view of this we felt compelled to set side by side different ways of translating, of understanding and of practice, and not force all into one mould.

3. Minor differences are to be retained, and critical judgments avoided. We noted that in the past, where there were different traditions there may have been a few entirely different doctrines. We believe that in such situations the policy to be adopted is that of "retaining differences". To put this policy into practice, it was felt that since everybody had reached fundamental agreement on the basic doctrines of the faith, these minor points of disagreement should not be included in the catechism, nor should they be the subject of mutual criticism, as this kind of difference of opinion should not be allowed to mar our unity in the Lord and our Christian fellowship.

4. Chinese Christians have undergone a unique spiritual experience. Apart from the basic doctrines which the earliest Christians received from Christ himself, the God who was, who is, and who always will be, has, through the perpetual progress of history unceasingly bestowed new light upon Christians of every land and every age. So now our Chinese Church embodies many new spiritual experiences. This does not mean that we may alter the pure doctrine firmly held by the universal Church, but rather that in particular historical situations each important article of faith comes to be understood more completely than before. These insights were revealed to us in the course of making practical arrangements for our work. For example, we felt that the first chapter should deal with the Bible, and that a basic principle should be the citation wherever possible of relevant, biblical chapter and verse in each section. At the same time, we felt it was most important that we should maintain a correct attitude towards the Bible. Or again, we felt that there should be a thorough exposition of such basic doctrines as the Trinity, the Saving Work of Christ, and the Work, and Gifts of the Holy Spirit. At the same time, dealing in a practical way with the issue of how one should act in a manner consistent with one's Christian

calling meant that considerable emphasis should be given to the two chapters on The Church and the Christian Life, or "Sainthood". In the course of the practical work of doing justice to these various emphases, we reminded ourselves that we should do our utmost to embody the special insights and illumination that have been incorporated in the spiritual experience of the Chinese Church in recent years.

5. Finally we reflected that in the sight of the Lord we were but useless servants, and that faced with this heavy responsibility our strength was but meager. Although this book has already been produced, it cannot but contain shortcomings and unsuitable passages. Still more are we aware that the China Christian Council is simply there to serve and has no right to "issue orders". This book is simply provided as a work of reference for our fellow-Christians, and we earnestly hope that everyone will offer suggestions which will help in making improvements in the future.

### **The Editorial Process**

We have already described the preliminary procedures; later, during the course of compiling the book we received from colleagues all over the country a great deal of practical help, which gave us valuable encouragement in our task.

1. Here is a brief outline. At the beginning of 1982, the China Christian Council, having received suggestions from colleagues in many quarters, decided to compile this catechism, and commissioned Zheng Jianye, Jiang Peifen and Wang Weifan to form the editorial board, with Wang Weifan to do the actual writing. In July of that year the first draft was completed. This consisted of seven chapters, with 175 sections, to which were added as an appendix the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, The Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed. At that stage it was given the name "Questions and Answers for Believers." After some revision, during August of that year it was mimeographed as "draft for suggestions" and copies were sent out to local Christian councils and to a certain number of representative Christians. By the end of 1982, on the basis of suggestions which had been received from various quarters, the committee had undertaken two stages of revision, involving additions and deletions, so as to give seven chapters with 100 sections. In January 1983, the second "draft for suggestions" was mimeographed and sent out as before. In June and July, two further revisions took place on the basis of the suggestions that had been received, but the number of chapters and sections remained the same, with the further addition of "A Summary of the Law" to the appendix. A note was added just before the appendix to explain the significance of the various documents, and also making it clear that although various Christian traditions held different views about these documents, the principle of mutual respect for each other's views should be maintained. A few minor additions and deletions were made in the main body of the book, and the name was changed to "Questions and Answers on Important Doctrines of the Christian Faith". So when the final version was sent to the printer in July 1983, it was actually the sixth draft, and it was officially published in September.

2. The suggestions we received were very extensive. Although the first draft of the catechism was simply put forward by the committee as a mere tentative version, the suggestions that were sent in came from all quarters of the country, both in the form of oral statements and in letters. So by the time the final version took form it was no longer the product of a small group,



but was the united effort of more than a hundred letters full of encouragement and pertinent suggestions. Some contained suggestions arising from meetings held under the auspices of local Christian councils to discuss the draft sent out for suggestions, while others were the result of careful perusal by individuals of the drafts. Among these, there were not only letters from prominent leaders of the Chinese Church in various parts of the country, but also some from ordinary believers springing from the grass-roots. There were suggestions not only from elderly servants of the Lord who were in their 80's, but also from young people in the seminaries, who were still in the early stages of Christian training. Their origins lay in widely varying Christian traditions, and could almost be said to include every sect and denomination found in pre-Liberation China. For a small book concerned with Christian doctrine to have given rise to so wide-ranging a discussion would in those days have been virtually unthinkable. We are deeply aware of the immense value of the grace which God has bestowed upon the present-day Chinese Church. We could not help including the following observation in the Introduction to our book: "At a time when our Chinese Church enjoys essential freedom from its multifarious sects and divisions, when for the first time God has provided us with this unique situation which enables us to embrace the varied forms of illumination encountered in the history of the Church, so that all may be mutually enriched and developed, we are entering together upon the unsearchable riches of Christ."

3. We have received enthusiastic support. Apart from the many letters offering practical suggestions, there were also many which strongly supported our editorial policy. Old Mr. Charlie Yan of Beijing said, "It is an honest book, which rightly divides the word of the Lord". Old Mrs. Bi Yongqin of Hangzhou highly approved of the thorough citation of scripture passages. She said, "It deals briefly and to the point with many of the themes which so many of God's children wish to understand. It includes the basic faith and life of the Christian, and deals with the truth, the Christian way and our daily life and work. It is the square and compass in the hands of the older Christian, and it is the rule and measure for the young and enthusiastic. It provides a short cut for all the Christians who are taking part in the spiritual race." Those who wrote approved of the method we had adopted of clarifying the basic doctrines of the faith on the basis of scriptural texts. They were of the opinion that this procedure will be of help in guiding and building up many who are young in the faith, as well as helping to guard against and to vanquish many biased and confused opinions. The Rev. Zhang Xianzhou of Kunming said, "From now on, as a result of studying this catechism, Christians will not only be strengthened in the faith; they will also know what to believe and how to act. It will be a great help not only to the ordinary Christian, but also to a number of preachers." A great many people indicated strong support for the policy of mutual respect and for each others' views on the principle of seeking agreement and preserving differences. The Rev. Liu Qingfen of Tianjin said, "The contents of the catechism are completely in accord with the basic beliefs held in common by all the earlier denominations." Ms. Cao Shengjie of Shanghai said, "It explains the fundamentals of the faith in terms of the yardstick which could be accepted by the great majority of Christians". With regard to such differences of opinion as still remain among Chinese Christians, many correspondents expressed their support for the disinclination of the catechism to force everything into a common mould, and they took note of the way in which the catechism often used alternative terms side by side, such as the two terms for "God", "baptism", "Parousia", and the Ten Commandments. On the other hand there were those who laid emphasis on the preservation of differences, and would prefer the inclusion in the catechism of one view or the other, not both. The catechism is

certainly not meant to be regarded as a kind of binding credal statement. What we said in our Introduction on this point has gained widespread support, but it needs to be re-emphasized, namely, "The fundamental source of our faith is grounded in God's revelation, and not in edicts pronounced by any human being". The fact that throughout the book the citation of scriptural references is so plentiful in comparison with our explanations affords plenty of scope for elucidation or expansion by our fellow Christians, and it must not be assumed that there is any insistence on uniformity in respect of any entry.

In the course of our work we laid great emphasis both on maintaining the purity of the traditions of the Church and on recording with gratitude the new light which the Lord has bestowed upon us. We have done our best to embody some of the unique spiritual characteristics of today's Chinese Church, and at the same time to maintain as our standard that which is universally accepted. For example, there IS an emphasis on such theological insights as "God's most basic, most essential quality is love" and "God is constantly seeking man and carrying out the work of man's salvation, constantly awaiting man's reconciliation with him and the reconciliation of man with man." Then there is the harmonization of such paradoxes as "Justification is through faith" and "Justification is through works", or "salvation is by grace, through faith" and "Work out your own salvation." We have had to expound on the basis of scripture our belief that the Christian must love God, his country and his people, and the grounds for our faith that the Chinese Church must proceed along the Three-Self-path. All of this is a reflection of the light and leading which the Chinese Church has experienced during the past thirty years. We have been greatly encouraged by the letters we have received from such elderly Christians as Bishop Xue Pingxi of Fuzhou, the Rev. Xu Hua of Shanghai and Mr. Wu Guoji of Guizhou. Everyone has praised the work of compilation, but much of that praise has been excessive. What is more important is this: The unanimity of the aspirations and convictions of all concerned has indeed proved once more that we have day by day been lovingly led by the hand of the true and living God.

# One Hundred Questions and Answers On The Christian Faith

## Introduction

Thanks and praise be to our Heavenly Father, who has enabled our Church, after it has been subjected to so many kinds of discipline, to achieve an ever-growing measure of maturity and health. In these favorable times we need to receive heavenly food from Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith, so that the Body of Christ may be built up until we arrive at unity in the truth, sharing that heavenly food with all our brethren and sisters. This will ensure that they need no longer be content with milk, but may proceed to maturity as they feed on solid food, so that thought leads on to understanding, and truth can be distinguished from falsehood.

God is now bestowing his rich grace upon our Chinese Church, and day by day the Lord is adding to our number those that are being saved. While our hearts are filled with thanksgiving, we are especially conscious of the heavy responsibility we bear for feeding the lambs and tending the flock. We have been urged by many of our colleagues and fellow-believers to prepare a fairly simple little book which should nevertheless contain all the basic doctrines in the form of questions and answers, for general use. It is with a view to carrying out this commission that we have produced this volume of "Questions and Answers on Important Doctrines."

We hope that this catechism can be of use in the enquirers' classes which are held by churches in various localities, serving as basic material enabling new Christians to learn important truths. It could also serve as a work of reference for Bible classes or for individuals studying the Bible.

More especially we wish to thank God because at a time when our Chinese Church enjoys essential freedom from its multifarious sects and divisions, when for the first time God had provided us with this unique situation which enables us to embrace the varied forms of illumination encountered in the history of the Church, so that all may be mutually enriched and developed, we are entering together upon the unsearchable riches of Christ. It is in accordance with this point of view that this catechism has been compiled. Where various traditions still hold differing views, we have followed the policy of showing mutual respect for the opinions of others, and seeking common ground while maintaining our differences, without forcibly demanding uniformity. This book is simply offered to provide a service for churches and Christians throughout the country, with no intention of demanding identity of outlook on the understanding of each subject. We are all aware that the fundamental source of our faith is grounded in God's revelation, and not in edicts pronounced by any human being.

In the course of its compilation, this catechism has time and again received warm encouragement, careful scrutiny, and pertinent suggestions from our fellow-Christians, from pastors and elders, and from those engaged in theological activities. These contributions came from north, south, east and west, and included men and women, both old and young, and the traditions they represented were many and various, extensive and wide-ranging. Some people wrote letters thousands of words in length, while some deliberated over the exact choice of words and others pondered over the choice of themes or carefully checked the biblical

references. The arrival of almost a hundred extremely earnest letters was a clear indication of the concern and devotion of Christians all over the country for this sacred task. We have valued even more greatly the prayers of churches and Christians throughout the land. We are grateful to our fellow-Christians, and still more grateful to that Great Shepherd of us all, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Because of our own limitations and the shortage of time at our disposal, this book cannot but contain defects and errors. We hope our readers will go on pointing these out, so enabling us to make improvements in the future.

*CHINA CHRISTIAN COUNCIL, July, 1983.*

To see the text of the Catechism, please click. below.

["One Hundred Questions and Answers of the Christian Faith"](#)

## APPENDIX

The following items are important documents in the history of the Church, and have been widely respected. As a result of constant development through the centuries, successive generations of Christians have varied in their understanding and use of these documents, nor have their translations been identical. This appendix is inserted here for reference. Mutual respect should be shown when traditions and practices vary, and uniformity should not be imposed.

- a. The Lord's Prayer (cf Matthew 6:9-13; Luke 11:2-4).
- b. The Ten Commandments (cf Exodus 20:1-17; Deuteronomy 5:6-21).
- c. A Summary of the Law (Matthew 22:37-40).
- d. The Apostles' Creed. (The fundamental beliefs which had been handed down from apostolic times were formulated into a creed in the 2nd century and reached their final form in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7th century.)
- e. The Nicene Creed (Completed at the Council of Nicea in 325 and revised in 381).

*translated by Rev. Brynmor Price  
Courtesy of The China Study Project.*

# **BIBLE STUDY**

## **HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE (excerpt) - K. H. Ting**

First of all, let us welcome young believers to come and study the Bible with us.

Chinese Christians are Bible-loving Christians and many are familiar with the Bible. The ten years of turmoil deprived many Christians of our right to read the Bible, but not only did we not forget the Bible during this time, we longed for it even more. A number of Christians copied large sections of the Bible into their notebooks, or kept them in their hearts, memorizing texts to repeat to others. Soon we will be able to get the Bible again, one which is printed on China's own paper. I believe that everyone will show even greater devotion in studying the Bible when it is available and, having accepted the instruction of the Bible, will put it into practice and experience its truth more deeply. Thus, we will be like the light and the salt of society, and thereby give beautiful witness to Christ.

Now let us discuss how we should study the Bible.

Let us be clear right from the beginning: the Bible is not a riddle; it is a letter written by the Father in heaven to his children. He wants us to understand it. He does not want us to grope blindly in the dark, nor to depend on this or that authoritative interpretation. He certainly does not want us to blindly accept any person's deliberately mystifying explanation of the Bible. Our heavenly Father has given us his word as a lamp for our feet and light on the road, to illuminate our paths in the world.

Some Christians think that the Bible is difficult to understand, and they dare not read it or try to understand it by themselves. Actually, if we are willing to follow the lead of the Holy Spirit, we need not fear. Psalm 119:130 says: "The unfolding of thy words gives light." God himself wants us to understand the Bible.

### **The Theme Of The Bible**

Although there are sixty-six books in the Bible, there is only one theme: how God loves human creation and has prepared in Christ the way of our salvation. We should not depart from this theme in explaining any section of the Bible. If we abandon it, then the Bible cannot be explained.

The Bible begins by talking about God, and ends by speaking about humanity. Genesis 1:1 says, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Revelation 22. 21 says "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with. all the saints. Amen." From beginning to end, the whole Bible speaks of the relationship between God and humanity, and of the changes which occurred in this relationship.

Two important questions which God addressed to people who have sinned are recorded in the third and fourth chapters of Genesis: "Adam, where are you?" "Cain, where is Abel your

brother?" When Adam sinned, his relationship to God was damaged and his relationship to his brother also.

Adam's first utterance to God in the Bible is: "I was afraid." (Gen.3:10) After Adam sinned, he heard the sound of God, was afraid and hid himself. The final human utterance to God in the Bible is: "Come, Lord Jesus." (Rev. 22: 20) There is no longer cause to be afraid of God, nor to hide from God, whose presence means happiness.

It is a tremendous change to go from fearing God to welcoming him, from hiding from God to seeking his face. This change is the work of God. Through the incarnation of the Son of God Jesus Christ, his death on the Cross and his resurrection from the dead, we can enjoy this change. The entire Bible never departs from this work which God has accomplished for us, whether it speaks of the incarnation, the good works of Christ on earth, his suffering, resurrection and ascension into heaven, or about the work of the Holy Spirit in the world and in the Church. The Old Testament ends with a "curse" (Mal. 4:6), and the New Testament ends on a note of "grace". (Rev. 22:21) This makes clear what God has done for humanity.

To unite all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth, (Eph. 1:10) we can say that, this, is the direction in which the whole Bible is pointing. "One" is the briefest and at the same time the fullest, character in Chinese. The Bible tells us that in God's eyes God and humanity should be one and in harmony. But this unity has been broken. Both the relationship between God and humanity and that among people, lost their harmony. Afterwards, through the great sacrifice of Christ, this "oneness" of relationship has been restored. "For he is our peace, who made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end." (Eph. 2:14-16) This progression from unity to division, and from division to unity, is the clue to penetrating the meaning of the whole Bible.

The Bible helps us to know God as the Lord of creation. He creates all things out of nothing and good out of evil. God himself is a fellowship formed of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, a community which carries out the work of creation. Within the universe, God not only wanted to create the human being as an organism, he also wanted to make this being holy through education, redemption and the work of the Holy Spirit. And continuing the work of creation, he intends that the human race would at last voluntarily form a community. This community would then work along with God, with one mind and one heart, voluntarily, without the least coercion. This is the final goal of creation. The whole Bible tells us how God began his work of creation, how great were the difficulties in creating this new being, and how great were the contradictions and struggles between God's love and human sin. It also tells us how God himself carried out the work of education, how becoming flesh, God entered the world, and completed the work of salvation, showing Christ to be Lord of the world, Lord of history and Lord of the Church. The Bible tells us how this work of creation will finally reach completion in a new heaven and a new earth. At that time, all the limited but positive results achieved by human efforts and sacrifices throughout history, will not be thrown onto the scrap heap, but will be accepted, blessed, transfigured and brought to their completion and perfection. At that time, the little bit of truth which we see will give way and we will be able to gain insight into the whole truth.

## **The System Of The Bible**

Some people think that the Bible is an unsystematic book whose contents are complicated and confusing. If we stand outside the gospel and look at the Bible, this criticism is perhaps true. But we who have accepted Jesus Christ feel that the Bible is quite a symmetrical and systematic book.

Everything in the Bible has Christ as its center, everything comes together around Christ and points towards him. The earliest and the latest parts of the Bible are separated by over a thousand years, but Christ is the key to all of it. Christ removes the contradictions in the Bible. Christ Jesus himself said: "You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me." (Jn. 5:39)

In the opening section of the Bible we read: "In the Beginning God created the heavens and the earth." (Gen. 1:1) At the end of the Bible we read: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth." (Rev. 21:1)

Genesis tells us: "The waters that were gathered together He called Seas." (1:10) Revelation tells us: "and the sea was no more." (21:1)

Genesis tells us that "the darkness He called Night." (1:5) Revelation tells us: "and there shall be no night then." (21:25)

Genesis tells us: "And God made the two great lights, the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night." (1:16) Revelation tells us: "and the city has no need for sun or moon to shine upon it." (21:23)

Genesis tells us that God warned Adam: "for in the day that you eat of it you shall die." (2: 17) Revelation tells us: "and death shall be no more." (21:4)

Genesis tells us that God once said to man: "I will greatly multiply... your pain... you will work hard all your life." (3:16-17) Revelation tells us that God will wipe away every tear from his eyes, "... neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore." (21:4)

Genesis tells us that God once said: "cursed is the ground because of you." (3:17) Revelation tells us: "there shall no more be anything accursed." (22:3)

Originally the devil tempted Adam; afterwards the devil will be destroyed forever.

Originally humanity was thrown out from where the tree of life grew. Later we read: "the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month, and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations." (Rev. 22 :2)

Thus, clearly there is a common thread going through the Bible from beginning to end. This Bible indeed has its own system. How does this come about? Through Christ.



If you take your Bible, both Old and New Testaments, and very carefully open it to the middle, you will find the Psalms, the words of praise. Placing words of praise in the middle of the Bible tells us that our responsibility while living in the world is to praise and honor God. Of course, this does not mean that we must sing the Psalms all the time. The most important thing is that in our conduct we are neither selfish nor prejudiced towards others, and that we wholeheartedly support and carry out work which is in consonance with the will of God. Such a life praises and glorifies God.

Someone has gone to the trouble to figure out that the exact center of the whole Bible is Psalm 118, verse 8. This verse of the Bible has ten characters, divided into two phrases of five characters each. The first phrase is: "It is better to take refuge in the Lord," and the second phrase is; " ... than to put confidence in man." The two verbs in this verse, "to take refuge in" and "to put confidence in" form the true meaning of the word "religion." What is a person's religion? Regardless of what is said, we must look at where refuge is sought. What in the last analysis is the basis of confidence?

And the central message of the Bible is Christ. The Bible wants us to take refuge in Christ, to put our confidence in Christ.

### **Knock, And the Door Will Be Opened For You**

There are some things which everyone will pay attention to: wild wind and violent rain, landslides and falling rocks, earthquakes and raging fires. But not everyone gives heed to a tiny sound. For we can only hear it if we become quiet, pray and quiet search and knock.

How are we able to hear the tiny sounds of the Bible? By asking questions. The questions are like door knockers. When we ask our questions, many seemingly very common Scriptural passages reveal a very uncommon message.

"The word became flesh." That was a very uncommon thing in our world. It happened only once in human history. But when the Incarnation took place, was it spectacular? Did it shake heaven and earth? Certainly not. "And this will be a sign for you. You will find a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger." (Lk. 2:12) So we see that Christ's outward appearance was of a most common kind. But in his very commonness is embodied something unexpectedly uncommon.

We should not suppose that any passage of Scripture contains nothing new for us just because of our over-familiarity with it. We must ask questions. The Bible is not afraid of our questions. People have raised countless questions regarding the Bible for many centuries, but the Bible has not been overturned by them. Ask questions, and the truth will become apparent. It's a shame that we are lazy in our thinking and would rather memorize the Bible than ask questions.

In the Gospels Jesus himself asked questions about the Old Testament many times. As soon as he asked, the hidden truth of the Scripture became apparent. (cf. Mt. 12:3-5, 22: 31-

33,41-45; Lk. 20:17; In. 10:34-36)

Faced with a passage of Scripture, what kind of questions can we ask? We can at least ask the following:

What is special about this passage of Scripture?

What is uncommon about it? What are its special features?

Why must it be said? What if it had not been said?

Why was it said like this, and not like that?

How would I have said it? Why doesn't the Bible say it as I would? People often say meaningless things. But with the Bible it is different. Whether the Bible says much or not so much, little is said by accident. Things in the Bible are mostly said with a purpose. But we can't always know the purpose at a glance. It is not by accident that the Bible speaks of certain things. Nor is it always accidental that it does not speak about other things. And if the Bible speaks of certain matters in this manner rather than that, very probably this is no accident either.

If we really hunger and thirst for righteousness we must conscientiously ask questions. Then we would be cooperating with the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit would consider us worthy of being taught.

Let us take the parable of the Prodigal Son as an example. (Lk. 15: 11-32) Many Christians feel that this passage of Scripture is already too familiar; nothing new can be gained by studying it again. But are we really all that familiar with this passage? Let us ask a few questions.

### **The Younger Son**

"The younger son said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that falls to me.' " (v.12) What does this verse of the Bible tell us?

From this passage of Scripture we can see that the younger son actually felt that there were some things that he deserved. He did not realize that he owned nothing in his father's presence. He felt that he had a kind of right to ask his father for this or that. This was really a very serious mistake.

We should understand that we do not have any deserved inheritance. The only thing that we deserve is God's reproach.

How many times have we Christians felt that there were some things which we deserved to receive from God because we have gone to church, said our prayers, read the Bible, and sacrificed some money and time for church business? This is really pitiable thinking. "When you have done all that is commanded you, say, 'we are unworthy servants, we have only done what was our duty.'" (Lk. 17:10)

After the younger son left his father, he became 'wantonly dissolute.' (v.13) He seems to be really free. He could do whatever he wished and sin to his heart's content.

But is this really freedom? Is it really freedom to do whatever one wishes, or to commit any kind of sin one wants to? This is certainly not freedom. It is to become a slave of sin.

Who are the really free persons? Only those who in the face of temptation are able to overcome evil and not commit sin are really free.

No matter whether we are talking about individuals or families, the Church or the nation, discipline is necessary and is not to be taken lightly. How can being wantonly dissolute be called freedom? It is to be controlled by sin, to be the slave of sin.

Saint Augustine calls the restrictions which keep people from committing sin 'blessed restraints.' This is the function of discipline. The younger brother did not want discipline. To him nothing was greater than freedom. This is not Christian faith; it is outright individualism. The New Testament mentions freedom many times, but always in connection with knowing the truth and struggling against sin.

The younger son met many difficulties. Coming to himself, he thought about the happiness of his father's house, and said, "I perish here with hunger." (v.17) Why does the Bible record this sentence? How does it help us to better understand the younger son and, at the same time, to know ourselves better?

From this sentence we can see that the younger son now clearly recognizes the seriousness of his predicament. His condition is not "OK", "generally all right", nor "about the same as others." He is starving to death.

Do I, likewise, really recognize the condition of my soul when I come to God? My own poverty and hunger? If I do not comprehend my condition as in danger of imminent death from hunger, or if I consider myself to be "generally OK", will my repentance be heartfelt and deep?

The younger son "came to himself," (v.17) and said, "I will arise," (v.18) "and he arose." (v.20) Here we have three steps: awakening, decision and action. How do these three phrases help us to better understand the younger son? What kind of impulse do they arouse in us?

"I will arise." He arose, and where did he go? Do I have this same resoluteness of will? If I were in his place, even though I got up, would I not think about first going some place else to try my luck?

"Give me." (v.12) This was the request he made of his father when he was leaving home. "Treat me as one of your hired servants." (v.19) This is the request he made of his father upon his return. Do not these two requests represent the two completely different attitudes we have before our Father? One kind of prayer asks the Father to give me this or give me that. I regard myself as the center of everything. God is merely an errand boy, or a supplier. Another kind of prayer asks

the Father to change me, to use me. The Father is the center of everything. I am an instrument, a servant.

Please observe that when the younger son left home, he felt that he had a deserved inheritance. Now that he has returned, he relies only on the love of his father.

Now let us look at the older son.

### **The Older Son**

The older son "was in the field." (v.25) This tells us that he was not afraid of honest work. He is not the kind of person who just eats and doesn't work. He is not a bad guy.

"These many years I have served you." (v.29) These words from the mouth of a son make us wonder: in the last analysis, does he still consider himself a son? Or has he unconsciously changed the father-son relationship into one of master and slave?

"I never disobeyed your command." (v.29) How does this sentence help us to see the innermost thoughts of the older son? His self-flattery, for instance. Not to disobey the father's commands - is this the only thing he can do to satisfy the father's heart? Can such a son be considered to know his father's heart?

From this sentence, how does the Bible lay bare our own innermost thoughts? Is not our obedience often also only negative; that is, just not disobeying the father's commands?

It's a shame that many Christians have never asked: What does the Father want me to do? They just try not to do what he does not want them to do, thinking that to be a Christian means only something negative, that we must not do this or that. In this way, most of them become overcautious little people before the Father. Don't we know that God wants us to be his active sons and daughters? God does not want us to meekly submit to his will but, instead, to positively and happily fulfill it. We must not just ask God to keep us from stealing, from killing or hating people, from telling lies or committing adultery. We should, in a positive manner, and with great courage, seek God's kingdom and justice.

How does the older son address his father? (Please count the six "you's"). Again, in his father's presence, how does he speak of his brother? ("This son of yours"). How much love is there in this person's heart? "You never gave me a kid." (v.29) His real prayer is basically: give me this, give me that. It seems that only his personality is a bit reserved. In the past he was patient and silent. He did not open his mouth. Now he is angry, and so pours out the real words of his heart. What actually was the difference between him and his brother when the latter left home? Doesn't he, in his heart, also secretly feel that he has many "deserved things" that should come to him?

"That I might make merry with friends." (v.29) What does he consider to be merry-making, or happiness? Was living and working these many years with his father happiness? No, he only feels that this is a responsibility, a sacrifice, a burden. It is too drab. He feels that it is

time for a change.

Now whether we are preachers or lay people, we should be like Mary: "My spirit rejoices in God my savior." (Lk.1:47) We should not use ideas such as "sacrifice," "Suffering for Christ: or "carrying the cross, " to explain our actions. Nor should we make an example of ourselves pity and comfort ourselves, raise up ourselves or boast about ourselves because of the suffering experienced during the ten years of turmoil, as if it were we who took care of God and not God's grace that took care of us. It IS as if we have benefited God, so that we can now rely on ourselves using the right we have earned to run away from God at least occasionally and seek happiness elsewhere! Consider what David says about God: "Thou art my Lord; I have no good apart from thee." (Ps.16:2)

".... with harlots" (v.30). You the older brother did not leave home with your younger brother, and you have not seen him after he returned, so how do you know? Isn't your hatred so deep that you can very well forego evidence and immediately believe rumors and hurry to spread them? It IS really like this: when we harbor hatred for other persons, we always think of their defects, as if they are worse than they are. How hard it is to believe that they can do good, and how easy to believe that they do evil!

Hearing about his younger brother, he immediately thinks he has sinned. And when he thinks of sin, he immediately thinks of prostitutes. Psychologists intent on "thought association" would no doubt tell us that this really reveals what the elder brother himself is usually thinking about.

Is not the Bible rebuking us here? We in the Church are too much like the older brother. This is true of the Church all around the world. We are too arrogant. We hate the younger brothers. We are lacking in love for our fellow human beings. We are not pleased that they seek liberation from suffering and turn to the right path. Instead, we refuse to meet them, and are unwilling to recognize them as our brothers. We are even angry with our father and censure him. This kind of attitude is terrible. We are only kicking the younger brother out, or hindering him from returning to the father's house. In today's world many people do not believe in Christ and do not come to the Father, and one important reason is that our hearts are too much like that of the older brother.

### **The Father**

Let us consider the father. Is he too lenient? What would I do if I were the father? Would I have agreed to divide the property and allowed the younger son to leave home? When the younger son returned home, how would I have treated him? When the older son became angry, how would I have treated him?

See how full of compassion the father was! Before the prodigal son had even arrived at the door, the father's whole body - eyes, heart, legs, hands, arms, lips - became active. (v.20) He uses his whole body and soul to meet his child.

This is truly the heart of our heavenly Father. We can see this from the words "came to

himself" which Jesus uses.

The younger son committed many sins and suffered much; then he "came to himself." (v. 17) To wake up or to come to oneself means "to become oneself again." We can see how sublime the human being is in the eyes of Jesus and of the Father. When one commits sin, one loses him or herself. But when one turns away from evil and comes back to the father's house, one returns to him or herself again and becomes a real person.

There are those who think that the human being is nothing other than a "sinning animal." They think that to sin is the essence of being human. They think that people live in sin like fish in water. In Jesus' eyes the term "sinning animal" is not suitable as a definition of the human being. When human beings sin it means that they lost themselves. We are only free when we turn away from sin. Then we really become human, just as a fish becomes itself again when it returns to the water.

Here we see what a lofty view of humanity Jesus has, how deep a trust he has in us. And from this we can see how concerned the heavenly Father is about human suffering. His love does not change even though we go far away from the Father's house. He hopes for our return. He believes that we will return.

Do we have the same concern for others? Are we only able to love those similar to ourselves - a few "older brothers"? And are we indifferent or apathetic towards the younger son?

Note that the younger son had originally prepared a few suitable words to say to his father when they met. But when he was actually face to face with his father, he could not get the prepared words out in time. When he saw his father's compassionate expression, these words became superfluous.

Now our God has prepared another older brother for humankind, "the first born among many brethren." (Rom. 8:19) He does not regard his brothers or sisters as enemies. On the contrary, he has become a bridge for us to return to our Father's house. "Therefore he had to be made like his brethren in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make expiation for the sins of the people." (Heb. 2:17).

*from Tian Feng I (October, 1980)*

*Staff translation*

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