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edited by Janice Wickeri
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From the Editor

Since the re-emergence of Christianity in China in 1978, women believers have been in the majority—75% (see p. 125 in this issue)—in Protestant churches. Their resourcefulness and dedication contributed to the strength of faith that kept the church alive through the years of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976); they are active in both established churches and home worship gatherings; in leading and participating in lay training courses and social service; many pursue theological studies.

Women are the majority in churches generally throughout the world (and among believers in other religions), but this strength in numbers is not necessarily reflected in church leadership positions. In China, this situation has been gradually changing; women are increasingly prominent in leadership positions in the churches, something which is unique in Protestant churches in East Asia. The Rev. Dr. Cao Shengjie is the first woman elected President of the China Christian Council (2002). As of this writing, four of eighteen seminary principals are women. At Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, the Rev. Dr. Gao Ying has been named Vice-Principal; her colleague as Acting Dean of Studies is the Rev. Wang Peng. Like the authors whose work is included in this issue, women are well-represented on the faculty at Nanjing and other seminaries. Many women (all those published in volume 20) have studied overseas.

This 20th volume of the *Chinese Theological Review* highlights this trend with a selection of essays and a sermon by these women theologians. They represent different generations of leadership in the Chinese church and they are writing in a variety of disciplines. The need for a clearer and stronger Chinese Christian identity, articulated theologically and understood practically by ordinary Christians, emerges in many of these essays. A strong sense of Christian identity, one with relevance in modern Chinese society, would be a model for those outside the church seeing answers
to the challenges and dilemmas of modern life.

Cao Shengjie sees self-propagation in Chinese church as crucial to the role of the church in society, which relates to the broader society as a minority group. She discusses the errors in missionary methods in the past and the dangers of "evangelism at any cost." She is concerned with identifying ways in which Christianity can be made relevant and attractive to non-believers in Chinese society today. An engagement with persons of other faiths has been poorly understood in the Chinese church. Rev. Cao asserts the need for ecumenical dialogue and its importance in a world where increasing violence is justified on religious grounds.

Gao Ying deals with the tendency in the Chinese church for Christians to divide this world from the next and place all hope in the afterlife. Her concern is theological: What is it we hope for in this world; why do we place this hope in God? For her this eschatological hope is "not the human being's movement toward future, it is human beings' present reliance on things that promise a good future by God through the resurrection of Christ." (40) Her concern is also pastoral. She feels it is the task of the Christian church to offer more spiritual guidance which "could help people to overcome concrete challenges in their lives rather than try to escape them." (49) The church needs to provide a more convincing vision of Christian hope.

Wang Peng offers an extended historical reflection which is also an appreciation of the way an earlier generation of Chinese Christians grappled with the question of Christian identity and the church's role in society. Her essay is occasioned by her reading of Y.T. Wu's book Christianity and New China (1940), a series of essays and reflections on Christian response to the crisis of the war with Japan. She finds a sense of Christian self-sacrifice and an awareness of Christian responsibility to the community and the world.

Lin Manhong writes on the need to have both a clear Chris-
tian identity and a proper understanding of the relationship between the individual, church and society. Christian values and ethics have been at the center of social recognition of Chinese Christians, a social witness to the life of faith. Though not offering a comprehensive ethical theory, Lin emphasizes that the work "should be helpful for Christians in China to bear witness in society in addressing the relationship between the individual, community and society."

Zhang Jing provides a feminist reconsideration and contextualization of the story of the Syrophoenician woman (Mk. 7: 24-30). She finds a resonance in the Bible message for Chinese traditional culture and resources in this understanding for the role of women in a modern Chinese church. She engages with current post-colonial understandings of the text, but finds that a reading in the Chinese context adds a new dimension and appreciation of the woman herself. She hopes her reading of the story will be part of a needed effort to strengthen the voices of ordinary Christian women, who tend to hold to patriarchal views of Bible and their own role.

Beginning in this volume, authors will be introduced at greater length in a separate Contributors’ page. This is intended to help readers get a better sense of the theologians who are writing in China today.

An Index to volumes 11-20 of this journal is provided as well as the usual Index of the Nanjing Theological Review.

I am grateful to the authors of these essays. Any errors in representing their work are entirely my own. I would also like to thank Philip Wickeri for consulting on the contents of volume 20, and for his editorial assistance.

The various levels of church bodies and offices are referred to as CCC or TSPM with appropriate regional modifiers (local/regional, etc.) or (at the national level) CCC/TSPM. Biblical quotations are taken from the NRSV, unless another version has been used in an original English piece. Personal names are given in the
Chinese manner, family name first, except for persons who commonly use another form, such as Y.T. Wu, K.H. Tīng or Wenzao Han.

Volume 20 of the *Chinese Theological Review* marks an important transition in the life of this journal. Our publisher remains the Foundation for Theological Education in Southeast Asia. Rev. Dr. Marvin D. Hoff, who was executive director at the time, oversaw the creation of the journal in 1985 and remained, with his wife Mrs. Joanne Hoff, its strong supporter through the ensuing years. Dr. Hoff has retired and Dr. Henry S. Wilson has succeeded him as executive director of the FTE and publisher of this journal. Dr. Wilson has extensive experience as a theologian and educator. We look forward to a long and amicable cooperation in publishing the *Chinese Theological Review*. Dr Wilson is based in India and his contact information can be found on the inside front cover. Editorial and subscription correspondence should continue to be directed to the editor at the US address, also given inside the front cover. Please also note that the editorial and subscription email address is now ct.review@sbcglobal.net

Janice Wickeri
San Anselmo
Mission in the Chinese Church

CAO SHENGJIE

Before his ascension, Jesus instructed his disciples, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Mt. 28: 18-20); and “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1: 8). This commission clearly meant that the disciples were to gather together and await the coming of the Holy Spirit and to rely on the power of the Holy Spirit to spread the gospel, witness to the Lord and enable the gradual development of the church.

In the past twenty years the growth of membership in the Chinese church has been relatively rapid. This is due to the power of the Holy Spirit, the people’s inner spiritual longings and the elimination, through the work of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, of the obstacle of Christianity being seen as a “foreign religion.” The church all over China follows the guidance of the Holy Spirit as it builds up the church and preaches the gospel in all sorts of ways. However, beyond China there are still those who advocate using their own methods to enter China and make a big show of “evangelistic” activities. This cannot but cause us to give careful consideration to how we should properly understand mission. We must
sum up our churches’ experience and gain further understanding of what is involved in mission practice in biblical and theological terms.

**Mission cannot be separated from building up the church**

Verses 18-20 of Chapter 28 of Matthew’s Gospel begin with the words, “Go therefore,” which illustrates that this is a commission given by Jesus to the whole body of disciples, a mission given to the whole church. Its content is not limited to “mak[ing] disciples of all nations,” but continues with “baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” referring to the sacrament, and “teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you,” referring to the sacred teaching, the Word. Performing the sacraments and teaching the Word are both functions of the church. If we say that mission is directed to those outside the church, then performing the sacraments and teaching the Word are directed to those in the church, those who already believe in the Lord. The church must embrace both these functions if it is to embody the presence of the Lord Jesus through all the ages.

Preaching the gospel is vital to the church mission. If the church does not preach the gospel, it is not the church. Likewise, the church does not realize this commandment of the Lord if preaches the gospel, but does not emphasize building up the Body of Christ. Why can we not simply preach the gospel without stressing the building up of the church?

1. The work of mission has always been organized and undertaken by the church. When the Lord Jesus began preaching, he first chose twelve disciples to work with him and he sent seventy persons out two by two to evangelize. When they returned, he heard their reports and gave thanks to God for them (Lk. 10: 1-21). When prior to his ascension Jesus specially entrusted his disciples with this commission to spread the gospel, this was to show that the church must take up this important task. It was only after the Holy Spirit descended upon the gathered disciples at Pente-
cost, that Peter was given the power to preach. Following Paul’s vision and call, he still had to be accepted by the disciples in Damascus (Acts 9: 10-19). We see in the Book of Acts and all that followed, that Peter, Stephen, Paul, Silas, Timothy—all were sent by the church when they went out to preach the Gospel throughout the land, sometimes beginning with the laying on of hands as a sign (Acts 11: 23; 12: 25; 13: 3).

Protestant Christian theology believes in the priesthood of all believers and in this sense, each Christian has the responsibility to bear witness and to evangelize. But if we then believe that mission is entrusted to the individual and that there is no need to be linked to the church, this is not in accord with the teaching of the Bible. When Jesus was in the world, there was a man casting out devils in his name and Jesus said, “Do not stop him; for whoever is not against you is for you” (Lk. 9: 50). This incident took place prior to Jesus’ sending of the seventy. We should remember that Jesus also said: “Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters” (Lk. 11: 23). The issue lies in this word, “scatters,” and whether the actions of the “scatterers” help Jesus’ work, or hinder it. From the perspective of the historical development of the church, instances of individuals “making crooked the way of the Lord,” increased as the church gradually developed. Those recorded in Acts include Simon, who performed magic (8: 9-21); Bar-Jesus (13: 12) and so on. Criticism of heresy is even more common in the Epistles. Historically the church held a number of great councils which all dealt with the incursions of heresy. All this goes to show that the church has a responsibility to ensure that the work of mission is kept on the right track, for if evangelism departs from the orthodox doctrine and the organization of the church, it easily falls into heresy.

2. The content of mission is based upon the Bible. What is preached must be the result of the church’s reflection—and guided by theological thinking. Some think that the content of the gospel is
very simple, but in fact it is no simple matter to accurately explain what Christianity means. In the time of Paul, for example, in the church at Corinth, “Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom,” but Paul clearly stated that “we proclaim Christ crucified.” Paul stressed that in preaching the gospel, he did not make use of “lofty words or wisdom” (1Cor. 2: 1). Actually, Paul himself admitted that “among the mature we do speak wisdom, though it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish” (1Cor. 2: 6). What he stressed in that time and that place “were not with plausible words of wisdom” (1Cor. 2: 4), but giving exceptional consideration to the context of that time—heresy had already been spread under the guise of “wisdom” and heresy of every kind abounded. If he did not proclaim Christ and Christ crucified, then the gospel would be put at risk.

The content of the gospel is unchanging, and human demand for it is likewise eternal. But how one should preach in the midst of different cultural traditions and in the different contexts of different countries, has become the focus of research in contemporary missiology. Why does the church in China today need to undertake theological reconstruction? An important goal is to better do mission in China in a new age. As it has been described in the work report of the Sixth Joint Standing Committee of the CCC and TSPM, “The theological reconstruction which is being carried out in Chinese Christianity at present, is to integrate our national ethos and culture in explaining basic Christian faith and moral principles in this context.” If we wish to accurately and effectively spread the gospel in this time, we cannot do so apart from theological reconstruction.

One of the greatest difficulties facing the Chinese church today is that in some places there has been a big increase in the number of Christians, but, due to various circumstances, pastoral work has not kept up, and a direct result of this is that the quality of faith [knowledge and understanding of what the faith entails] has
gone down, gatherings are chaotic and superstitious ideas spread like wildfire. Foreign groups in particular that do not respect the Chinese church organize and send personnel to incite clandestine activities. Some go so far as to introduce heresy and extreme ideas and some propagate the theology of their own denomination. There is proof that some spontaneous small groups are easily influenced by all sorts of heresy, deviate from orthodoxy, and become captive to heretical cults such as “Eastern Lightning.”

A shocking incident described in an article titled, “Solving the Riddle of the Mysterious Disappearance of 38 Farmers in Zaoyang,” shows the dangers of extreme ideas. In the 1990s, a self-styled evangelist named Han Zhifu was active in Zaoyang, Hubei, and is said to have attracted over a thousand converts. He put it about that the world would end in the year 2000, that the earth would explode, and only those who followed him “into the wilderness” would escape the disaster. In December 1999, 38 farmers who were taken in by Han sold their belongings and followed him to Xinjiang to await the rapture. They passed through seven provinces on the way including Sichuan (11 persons left the group along the way); 27 returned to Hubei and built three shelters deep in the mountains where they lived in secret. When they were discovered in December 2002, they had only 19 yuan left among them. If they had not been discovered, there might have been a tragic mass suicide. It is high time to take a clear look at whether such “evangelization” as this benefits or harms the church.

If foreign churches and believers are truly concerned about whether the Chinese people have received the gospel, they should respect the sovereignty and ministry of the Chinese church and make contacts through legal channels, rather than simply following their own inclinations.

Missionary methods must not offend the nature of the gospel

“The gospel” is the good news that God so loved the world
that God gave his beloved Son to save it. According to the New Testament, this good news may be characterized in several ways:

1. God’s saving grace. Paul says, “it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith” (Rom. 1: 16). This is what we usually speak of when we refer to personal salvation. For God so loved the world that he sent his only Son into the world, to be crucified on the cross for our sins, to fulfill this saving grace. Everyone who receives this saving grace can escape the bonds of sin and be reconciled to God, becoming a child of God.

2. The good news of the Reign of God. According to the Gospel of Mark, Jesus’ came first to Galilee to preach God’s good news, “the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near, repent and believe in the good news” (Mk. 1: 15). The good news Jesus preached was linked to the kingdom of God. This kingdom meant not only the new heaven and new earth of the millennium; it also included life in this world, “the kingdom of God is among you” (Lk. 17: 21). Luke tells us that Jesus’ earliest preaching of the good news took place in the synagogue in Galilee where he fulfilled what the Prophet Isaiah had foretold: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Lk. 4: 18-19). What is spoken of here is not only personal salvation, but that through the gospel God’s grace will be spread in the world to the many who stand in need of it.

3. The gospel of peace. In Ephesians 2: 11-19, Paul speaks specially of Christ on the cross paying the debt with his own body, reconciling humanity to God, and enabling people to break down the walls between them and Gentiles and Jews to be united. As Paul says, “So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near” (Eph. 2: 18). And so we say that Christianity advocates peace.
4. The gospel of glory. Paul also calls the gospel glorious, the gospel that "...conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me" (1Tim. 1: 11). Throughout the Old and New Testaments, the Bible frequently mentions that all creation, including nature and human beings, should manifest God's glory. (Ps. 19: 1; 21: 5; 50: 15, 23; 1Cor. 10: 31) The gospel is closely linked to God's glory. Calvin says that those who accept the gospel should make glorifying God the object of human life.

These characteristics of the gospel show that its essential nature is not simply personal salvation. It also embraces the mission of the church to carry out the will of God and to enable those who do not yet know God to see in the person of believers and in the witness of the church, the hope of peace. All this is for the purpose of revealing God's glory.

Since the purpose of evangelization is to tell people this message, then the methods of evangelization should also be in line with the requirements of this message.

There are many ways to evangelize. In the Book of Acts, one of Peter's sermons brought 3000 people to Christ (2: 41). Other examples include Philip's conversation with the Ethiopian (8: 35); Paul's argument in the Athenian marketplace (17: 23); and Paul's comforting his fellow passengers during a storm at sea (27: 24). The circumstances differ, but the basic message is common to all. A variety of methods may be employed with excellent results, as long as they accord with the essence of the gospel.

Throughout the history of the church, there have been situations when missionary methods were inappropriate. Some methods may have seemed effective at the time, but in hindsight actually produced negative results. In the 4th century for example, following his conversion, the Roman emperor Constantine proclaimed Christianity the state religion and used political force to evangelize which brought many people into the church. But the results were mixed, and led to corruption in the church. Medieval Catholicism
began the Crusades under the guise of "gospel," with a goal of converting the infidels. The results were that untold numbers of the innocent lost their lives and lasting enmity among nations and peoples was created. In the final analysis, the good name of "mission" was sullied by methods that did not accord with the essence of the gospel and which deviated from its true meaning.

Memories of western mission boards evangelizing under the protection of the unequal treaties in the 19th century are still fresh in the Chinese church. After the first Opium War (1839-1842), when the masses of the people were in dire poverty under the control of the invader, foreign mission boards proclaimed that: "the gate has been opened for the gospel." To be sure, Christianity entered China, but the good name of Christ was greatly sullied in the process. The millstone of Christianity as a "foreign religion" became the stumbling block for many Chinese when it came to accepting the gospel of Jesus Christ. It took fifty years of effort by the Three-Self Patriotic Movement to change this situation.

In 1949, on the eve of the establishment of the People's Republic of China, there were some in the Chinese church who had been influenced by erroneous political ideas. They referred to the coming Liberation as "Doomsday," and made "fleeing for one's life" the theme of evangelism. Some people, vacillating and uncertain, were converted at the time. But the fact was that "Doomsday" had not come. The faith of those who were converted by these ideas was shaken and they soon left the church.

Since the beginning of the era of "Reform and Openness" (1978) some self-styled evangelists have appeared in China. There are all sorts of reasons for their rise, including self-interest, jockeying for leadership and the religion craze. They preach randomly about signs and wonders in a situation in which they do not fully understand the truth and run about casting out demons and healing. In some areas where they have been active the number of believers has grown, but they have caused constant social disor-
der as well. In the 1980s, in Henan and Anhui, there were cruel and tragic “child sacrifices,” and “drownings [as a way to heaven].” At the same time, outside hostile forces took the opportunity afforded by the policy of openness, to pour in money, personnel and publications in support of these self-styled evangelists in China and their illegal activities. The message of these preachers, in spite of their intention to “evangelize,” frequently urged believers to break the law: for example, they opposed the registration of meeting points, saying “the church belongs to heaven,”; they quoted the biblical verse “listen to God, not to men,” out of context, calling on believers to leave home and family and neglect their fields in order to go out and “spread the gospel.” Wherever they went, they split the church and created social unrest by claiming that there is “no salvation in big churches,” and that “the end may come at any time.” “Evangelization” of this sort does not liberate people, it does not bring peace to society, or glory to the name of God. In fact it has already caused irreparable harm to the nation, to the church and to individual believers. There is a profound lesson for us here.

**Mission must follow the leading of the Holy Spirit, beginning where we are and moving outwards**

Acts 1: 8 records Jesus speaking to his disciples before ascending to Heaven: “you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

After this the disciples gathered in Jerusalem and received the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. Peter and others began to establish a church among the Jews in Jerusalem (Acts 1-7). Then the church moved into all Judea and Samaria (Acts 8-9), and later to the Gentiles, and on to Rome. The Jews were first for they were the chosen people. According to the prophets, they should be “as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth” (Is. 49: 6).
In Acts we see that as the apostles spreading the gospel, they followed the leading of the Holy Spirit and proceeded in the order mentioned above, from Judea to Samaria and beyond. They clearly sought guidance every step of the way, and whenever they met with a problem, they looked for new solutions. For example, the Jerusalem Meeting resolved the question of whether Gentiles had to be circumcised (Acts 15). Following that decision, Paul and others wanted to evangelize in Asia, but the Bible says “having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia, ... they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them” (Acts 16: 6-10). Obviously one cannot evangelize wherever one wishes just because evangelization is a good thing. We believe that everything is in the hands of God: whether the gate to the gospel stands open, whether people’s hearts are ready—these things are known to the Spirit. Acting on one’s own wishes creates a great many artificial barriers to fulfilling the commission the Lord has entrusted to us.

As the church progressed, its development was still a matter of bringing the gospel to those around it. There were exceptions: some individuals were sent by the church to other places to evangelize (for example, St. Augustine was sent to England). Only after the 17th century did European colonialism spread throughout the world, and with it, the “missionary movement.” The fact that the gospel was brought to people in many places produced good results, but the “missionary movement” was manipulated by the aggressors. In their assault on other cultures and their control over the churches that were established, harm was done to the light of the Christian message. Our church has learned the lessons of this history and in recent decades we have run the church well according to three-self principles. Because of the heavy duties of pastoral work, we do not have the strength at present to respond to calls to assist in the ministry of churches in other countries. It is mainly at home that we train lay workers and encourage believers to lead
their families, neighbors, friends and colleagues to voluntarily enter the door of the church.

Our church values exchange with churches overseas, sharing in ministry, and at the same time we observe the stipulation in our Constitution that says “Religious groups and religious affairs shall not be dominated by foreign interests.” In spite of the fact that there is a lot of work to do for the gospel in their own countries, some foreign churches, without seeking the consent of our church, go ahead and send in people to China. The damage that results from such methods is as I have described it above.

In the past dozen years, some international church groups have spread the idea that in Asia and the Middle East there are still a lot of “unreached peoples,” (meaning those who have not received Christian faith). They advocate concentrating their strength for a “mission drive” directed at atheists and Muslims and have even said that the path of mission will move along the “Silk Road” that passes through China to return to Jerusalem. In their eyes, this is the only way to bring about the “fullness of time.” so that the Lord will come again soon. The Bible says “…no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation” (2Pet. 1: 20). Yet, this plan for a return to Jerusalem is merely the result of some people making their own interpretation of a “prophecy”. There is no biblical basis for it. Even less is there a mention of the Silk Road in the “fullness of time.” So much conflict and antagonism has grown up between the Israelis and the Arabs in the Middle East and the manipulation of religion for terrorist purposes has caused so much physical harm to innocent people. If the people I have been referring to put their plan for “evangelism” into practice, I fear there will be even more bloody conflict among religious believers. Can this be in accord with God’s love for humankind and God’s gift of peace to humanity?
Acceptance of the gospel is predicated on human free will

Genesis chapter 1 verse 27 tells us that humans were made in the image of God. “God’s image” reflects God’s nature, including God’s love, justice, goodness, trustworthiness. It also includes “free will,” that is God is a God with an independent will, God acts according to God’s own will. “Whatever the Lord pleases he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps” (Ps. 135: 6). “The Lord of hosts has sworn: As I have designed, so it shall be; and as I have planned, so it shall come to pass” (Is. 14: 24). The Lord also gave this “free will” to humans. Adam became a “living being” with the “breath of life” (Gen. 2: 7) and this included the power of freedom of choice as to whether he would follow God’s commands and maintain a close relationship with God. In Genesis 2: 16-17, God tells Adam and Eve what they may not do. In Chapter 3, we see our ancestors listening to the snake, making a wrong choice and sinning, which leads to serious consequences. This is a tragic fact. People may think that a human being created by God would obey God and all disastrous consequences would have been avoided. But this is not the way of God’s creation. God is a God with an independent will and the human beings God creates also have the power of freedom of choice. God preferred to pay the great price—to send God’s only son into the world to be crucified upon the cross, to crush the snake and fulfill salvation. God was unwilling to strip human beings of their free will, because God could not act against Godself.

In the Old Testament when God chose Abraham and called Moses and others, God always demanded a response from them. On Mount Sinai, God made a covenant with the Israelites, that the people willingly obey God’s voice, keep God’s covenant and be God’s treasured possession out of all the peoples (Ex. 19 : 5-8). Later, throughout the Old Testament, the Israelites continually made choices, sometimes obeying God’s commands, sometimes turning their backs on the true way. And God continuously restrained, re-
minded and even warned them through the Law and the prophets, but God never forced the Israelites to do anything. They enjoyed free will.

In the New Testament, the Lord Jesus comes into the world as a human being; at thirty he begins his ministry, saving people from physical illness and bondage of the spirit. All he did came from his love and empathy for people. He traveled throughout the lands of the Israelites, spreading the gospel and working many miracles. But those who ate and were fed, the lepers who were healed, did not all follow him and Jesus never forced them.

Paul referred to the process by which people were saved and became righteous in this way: “one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved” (Rom. 10: 10). “Believing with the heart” and “confessing with the mouth” are subjective human choices and acts, showing that faith is an action of individual choice, which no one else can make for us.

To take our understanding a step further, there are sound reasons why faith can only be a matter of individual choice and cannot be forced:

1. To receive faith in God is a response to God’s love. And “love” can only be freely given. Parents wait for the infant’s responding smile, or yearn for a naughty child to come forward on his own, admit his wrong and correct it. In the past, in Chinese Christian homes, some parents forced their children to attend church, and some youths forced their intended to convert to Christianity, or the marriage would be called off. If the child or loved one did as required, it was always out of obedience to the parents or to the will of the beloved, not because real faith was present. Today, many who do not come from Christian families are coming to church of their own accord and receiving faith with sincere hearts.
2. Only a free choice is a responsible act. If God had not bestowed free will upon humans, there would be nothing called good or evil, no question of whether one had accepted the gospel by choice, and humans would not have to take responsibility for their actions. But not only must we take responsibility for our actions on this earth, we must face God’s final judgment.

China’s population is 1.3 billion. Atheists believing in no religion whatsoever are in the minority; so are those who clearly profess a certain religion. The majority tend toward spirits or ancestor worship, or they are fatalists. The soil for religious faith is here. The government has a clear policy of freedom of religion, guaranteeing freedom of religious belief. The freedom not to believe in religion is also guaranteed. This is very fair and reasonable. We enjoy freedom of religious belief; in fact there are people who have never believed in any religion who convert to Christianity and those who were believers in other religions who convert to Christianity. We give thanks to God for this. But this does not mean that we can force our faith onto others. We must respect the free will of others, not only because we ourselves enjoy the power of freedom of choice, but even more because freedom of choice is a basic right bestowed on human beings by God.

Evangelism is the work of the Holy Spirit. Paul said, “...no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit” (1Cor. 12: 3). The methods we employ in mission to enable people to understand the gospel must be consonant with our national ethos. It is through prayer and the movement of the Holy Spirit that people are enabled to make their own choices in matters of faith and receive the truth of Christianity with gladness.

The goal of the gospel is salvation through love, not condemnation

The Lord Jesus is the only Son of his Father. He gave up his life on the cross to fulfill the great work of salvation. John’s Gospel
twice describes Jesus upon the cross as being “lifted up” (Jn. 3: 14; 12: 32). When the Israelites in the wilderness disobeyed God’s commands and were bitten by poisonous serpents, they had only to look upon the serpent of bronze and they would live (Num. 21: 9). We lift the cross high in order to tell people that “God is love,” divine love, merciful love, love with compassion and grace, love that gives up its life for people. This love is mysteriously attractive to humans. It can attract the most evil of persons, the headstrong, those who consider themselves righteous, those who merely exist: all who need to be loved. We must be able to fully and completely express this great love of the cross.

When Jesus was in the world, he did not condemn sinners who did not immediately respond to his great love. The woman caught in adultery, for example, who was brought before him. According to the Jewish law of the time, she could have been stoned to death. But Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again” (Jn. 8: 11). Even those who nailed Jesus to the cross, though they did not repent, the Lord did not utter curses of condemnation against them; rather he was filled with forgiveness and he said, “Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Lk. 23: 24).

Some people are in the habit of using John 3: 18, “Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God,” to show that unbelievers should be condemned. But a careful reading of John 3: 14-21 reveals that it is followed by that most famous verse, 3: 16: “God so loved the world.” Verse 17 says explicitly, “Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but on order that the world might be saved through him.” “To condemn” is not God’s goal. God’s goal is to call people to “salvation”. Verse 18 says “those who do not believe are condemned already”; but verse 19 provides a commentary on the term “condemned.” The reason
these people “have not believed in the name of the only Son of God” is that “their deeds were evil,” they hate the light and love the darkness, “so that their deeds may not be exposed” and this is why they have been condemned. And so when we look at the whole meaning of this passage, we understand that the people who do not believe mentioned here are those who maintain evil deeds in their moral life, those who “love darkness rather than light.” The writer closely relates “not believ[ing]” to “do[-ing] evil,” and doing evil naturally ends in a choice for self-destruction. It is not that God is pleased to condemn them, but that they “are condemned already.”

When Paul speaks of his own situation prior to his conversion, he calls himself, “a child of wrath” (Eph. 2: 3), the “foremost” of sinners (1 Tim. 1:17). He made this assessment after the light of Christ had shone on him. This profound understanding came through a sharper experience of the darkness of sin. It was not something with which he wished to label those who had not yet believed. When he was preaching the good news to the people of Athens who believed in many gods, he did not say, “You idol worshippers should be destroyed,” but rather began by referring to the “unknown god.” He taught them with skill and patience, saying that all people, including those who did not yet know the Lord, are all made by God “from one ancestor.” He affirms the people’s “search for God,” “perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us” (Acts 17: 22-31).

In the past there were evangelists in the Chinese Church who one-sidedly quoted the passage “dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world” (Eph. 2:2), calling those who did not yet believe in the Lord “living dead” which made those who came to hear them go off in a huff before they had heard the good news. The author of a book published overseas called The Revelation of Heaven and Earth claims to have seen heaven and hell and vividly portrays the fires of hell
burning off chunks of human flesh...what is the biblical basis for that? How is getting people to believe in the Lord by terrifying them in this way much different from the demons and heresies of folk religion?

In his essay "A Chinese Christian’s Appreciation of the Atheist," Bishop K.H. Ting analyzes differences among atheists. The situations of the many who have "not yet believed" (I like to use this phrase, because they may not believe today, but may tomorrow), do in fact vary: some persist in their sin and will not repent; others have not yet had the opportunity to hear the gospel. Romans 2: 14-15 tells us that "their own conscience" functions for them. Some have not believed because we Christians act as stumbling blocks, so that people are tripped up in matters of faith. On the basis of the Bible’s teachings, we receive the saving grace of the cross, for God in Christ Jesus has destined according to God’s purpose (Eph. 3: 1-12). As for how God will deal with all sorts of people in the final judgment, I agree with what Richard Mouw says in his He Shines in All That’s Fair, these are "hidden things." As Paul said, "God judges people in Christ"; these are not things we can judge. The Lord himself is judge.

The witness of the gospel is founded on broadness of heart

On a spiritual level, the church includes all of God’s sons and daughters from ancient times to the present, here in China and across the world. The Church in the world today is still a body which witnesses to the Lord. It exists in the midst of a great number of those who have not yet accepted Christian faith and it must be a golden lampstand, letting the light of Christ shine forth, bringing even more people willingly into the Lord’s flock.

Before his ascension the Lord instructed the church to witness to him. At the mention of witness, we first think of preaching, or of evangelical literature and like methods to enable people to hear the truth. This is work the church should do and we must train
evangelists for it and study appropriate mission methods. But witness does not only refer to preaching the gospel orally. A significant experience of the Chinese church in the last fifty years has been the witness of the lives of Christians: "be salt and light, glorify God and benefit the people." Many have been impressed by Christians' virtue, their values and orientation of service to others. This witness made them willing to come to the church to hear the Word and to believe in the Lord. There is a great deal of such witness everywhere in the Chinese church. However, there are still weaknesses in our witness, one of which is that the church pays quite a bit of attention to encouraging Christians to witness through their personal lives and not enough attention to the witness of the Church as a whole. During Jesus' ministry on earth, his work of preaching was closely linked to compassion for people, to healing, and freeing them from spiritual bondage. The traditional modes of church activity include not only evangelism but all sorts of other acts of service. Chinese Christians are a very small social group and many people in our society have never understood what Christian doctrine is or why Christianity exists. If the church in this world is only concerned about how many people believe in the Lord and is not able to express the abundance of its love and vitality, or the special contributions the church can make in society, how can society understand that its existence has value? How shall the church express the truth that "God so loved the world"?

In the past the church was influence by narrow theological thinking; only the number of believers mattered. This is one reason why the Chinese church has not stressed a holistic social witness. Service was limited to Christians in the churches, or it had to be directly related to getting people to convert. There was also a lack of empathy toward those who did not yet believe, a lack of tolerance and, in some places, whether consciously or not, a "theist/atheist" antagonism was propagated. When I attended morning
and evening prayers while studying overseas, prayers were always offered for the unfortunate things happening in the world, asking God’s compassion. In our Chinese churches at worship there were seldom prayers offered for these things. On a certain level, this reflects our indifferent attitude to others. We need to realize that the church must have a broadness of heart in order to make a good witness.

David said with great perception: “The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He will not always accuse, nor will he keep his anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities” (Ps. 103: 8-10). God wants all to be saved; God does not want one person to be lost. But God continues to be patient to this day, waiting for people to respond to him. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said: “...for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous” (Mt. 5: 45). This principle has never changed. In the Old Testament, though the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah was great, God was still happy to listen to Abraham’s repeated entreaties (Gen. 18: 23-33). Nineveh was not destroyed in the end, for God cared about the infants and other souls in the city (Jonah 4: 10-11). In the New Testament, James and John wanted to call fire down from heaven to consume the Samaritans who would not receive the Lord, but Jesus rebuked them (Lk. 9: 51-56). How far were the disciples’ hearts from the heart of Jesus!

Christians have a heart to love the soul in others and their urgency for preaching the gospel hope is in itself a good thing. But the Bible reminds us that “zeal” must be “enlightened” (Rom. 10: 2). Even more, it must be vigilant, it cannot move toward “zeal” or “extremes.” As we saw in behavior of James and John above—“If you do not receive the Lord, you should be consumed by fire”—such an attitude is frightening. In the 1950s I heard about a young Christian woman who was adamant that her mother convert, but
for a long time her mother would not. Then the mother became ill and the daughter prayed that God make her even more seriously ill, so that she would be forced to believe in God and her soul would be saved. An attitude like this is a warping of human nature. I also knew a Christian university professor who never evangelized in the classroom, but persisted in treating his students with Christ’s love, guiding them with lofty moral virtue. Many were converted because of him.

**Interfaith cooperation for good does not insult the gospel mission**

In the high-tech information age that is the twenty-first century, religion has not withered but continues to develop. Yet religion is not uniform in every place and nation. Among the world’s population of approximately 6 billion, about 2 billion are Christians (including Catholics and Orthodox). That leaves about two-thirds of the population who believe in other religions or none at all. The pluralization of religion is an objective fact.

The western scholar Samuel P. Huntington has written that world wars are due to a clash of civilizations between east and west. This conclusion is over-simplistic and ignores the fundamental reasons for political and economic clashes. But different cultures can clash. In some sense religion is also a part of culture. If every religion chose “the “extremist” option and others did not accept it, some would not hesitate to use any method to create conflict and to attack the opponent. We have seen the damage that can ensue in the 9-11 incident, in the Middle East and in Kosovo.

Since the last century, enlightened persons have advocated “dialogue” not “confrontation” among all religious faiths. One of the positive results of dialogue is “mutual understanding,” a calm and dispassionate appreciation of the other’s position, pursuits and ideas in service to an objective exploration. It should be acknowledged that due to the extremely conservative theological thinking
common in the past, Chinese Christianity knows very little of what other religions believe and indeed is very strongly exclusivist, denouncing them across the board as “idolaters” or “demons.” Since the founding of new China, many of our colleagues and fellow Christians in the church have taken part in the National People’s Congress and in political consultative associations and other similar social activities, where they have had exchanges with persons in broader religious circles. They have gradually come to feel that these other persons too have their own worthwhile pursuits in the spiritual world and in the improvement of human character. Though we believe only Christianity has the ultimate truth and hope others will accept Christian faith, though we do not agree with the doctrine of other religions, in a situation where others have not yet been convinced, we should not make this the occasion to see believers in other religions as enemies. Another positive result of “dialogue” is “seeking the common ground while reserving differences,” which means that rather than insisting on our own position we cooperate in matters acceptable to both sides, and enrich humankind together. We should first build unity and harmonious relations between those of different religious beliefs.

Some people fear that this sort of “dialogue” out of respect for others’ faith is a rejection of “evangelism,” a compromise of one’s own faith. This is not so. Christians who take part in dialogue have not in the least rejected their own basic faith. Rather the object is to better explain what one’s own faith is. We must all do deeper theological study and formulate appropriate explanations of the theory of creation, of salvation and of ecclesiology. This does not water down faith, but elucidates it and enables a dialogue which considers matters of faith in a more rigorous fashion. It avoids confrontations based on misunderstandings or bias.

As for us, to cooperate in doing good with others is a way of naturally expressing the witness of the church among the people. For “take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is pos-
sible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all” (Rom. 12: 17-18). This is the Bible’s teaching.

China is a multi-ethnic, multi-religious nation. We believe that “harmony is precious.” Our cultural tradition is one of absorbing everything, and this has never given rise to the brutality of “religious conflict.” In today’s world, many of those God created still live in the midst of war, violence, poverty, hunger and illness (such as AIDS), and many who do not believe in religion or who believe in other religions have organized all sorts of groups that strive to rescue humanity from its sufferings. Society welcomes us to join in these efforts. The CCC/TSPM has newly established a “Social Service Department” for the purpose of offering our services for the needs of the people. Chinese religious circles have formed the “Peace Committee of Chinese Religious Circles” to work for world peace. All these are opportunities to witness to the gospel!

In 2000, Dr. Wenzao Han and myself were Christian delegates in the Chinese Religions Delegation at the UN Millennium Peace Summit of World Religious Leaders. I have also participated in the Asian Conference on Religion and Peace and other similar conferences. My experience tells me that these are in no way a “muddling” of faith. No one at any of these meetings demanded that others change their faith. In working with others for peace, we not only enable harmony in our relations with others and increase unity, but through such contact we have the opportunity to introduce the truths of the Bible related to God’s will and Jesus’ fulfillment of peace on the cross. Isn’t this spreading the word? How will people know that the God we believe in is a God of peace, justice and love if we Christians sit on the sidelines while believers of other religions strive for peace?

Conclusion

China’s mission work is the responsibility of our Chinese Church. To conscientiously carry out the Lord’s commission in our
own context, we must do the following:

1. Through theological reconstruction, more thoroughly implement our policy of “running the church well according to three-self principles.” The CCC/TSPM must study how to organize and train personnel in the use of methods appropriate to our national ethos with the goal of further improving work on two fronts: evangelism and pastoral care for believers, thus addressing the sometimes chaotic situation that exists within the church.

2. The church spreads the gospel, but not only this; emphasis should also be given to witnessing to the gospel. We urgently need, through activities such as working for world peace, engaging in social service, etc., to draw nearer to the people, identifying with the masses’ fate, sharing one breath, while at the same time enabling them to know the great love of Jesus Christ and be attracted to conversion.

3. Conscientious respect for the religious freedom of those who do not believe in religion and those who believe in other religions, praying for them, helping them to understand Christianity. Where conditions permit, we can advance mutual dialogue step by step. Whatever happens we must not permit the type of extremist behavior that would attack non-believers or those who believe in other religions.

4. Among Christians, we must work to eliminate the sort of harmful theological thinking that stresses that believers must be “separated from,” “isolated from,” even “opposed to” nonbelievers in the life of this world. We want both to spread the gospel and at the same time to advocate harmony among people, and cooperation in doing good. For if we do not have a foundation of unity in these matters, we cannot be successful in the work of evangelism either.
The Suffering of Christ Makes Foolishness of the World’s Wisdom
1Cor. 1: 18-28
GAO YING

According to what is written in the Bible, today is the historical Jewish feast of the Passover; it is also the eve of Jesus’ Passion. It was on this night that Jesus and his disciples observed the Passover meal together according to Jewish tradition. At this Last Supper, the Lord himself gave thanks for the bread and the cup and announced: This is my body; this is the cup of the new covenant. From then on the bread and the cup became the representation of Christ. The bread represents the Lord’s body and the cup his blood. At the Passover table, the Lord through his inauguration of a new ritual of remembrance for us, imbued the bread and the cup with new meaning, and from then on we no longer called this the feast of the Passover, but rather the Lord’s Supper. Tonight, as we students and faculty of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary gather together, we do so to remember, in our reception of the Eucharist, that Jesus Christ died for us.

According to the understanding of sacramental theology held by most mainline Protestant Christians, our belief is not that the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper, having been blessed, undergo some mysterious material or chemical transformation and become the actual flesh and blood of Jesus; rather we emphasize a spiritual understanding of the symbolic meaning of the Eucharist—
that the visible objects of the bread and wine of the Eucharist symbolize that invisible spiritual presence. This spiritual symbol possesses a powerful permeability and mystery. The symbolic significance of the memorial meal lies in receiving the bread and wine through which we share in the Lord’s death and resurrection. We have a part both in Jesus’ death (our sins are nailed to the cross and die with Christ) and in his resurrection (we will have eternal life with the Lord).

However great an impact some incident or person has had on the course of history, its historic role may be short-lived or limited unless it is remembered by later generations.

In New Testament times, when Palestine was under the rule of the Roman Empire, countless people were executed by crucifixion. The overwhelming majority of those who died in this way have been forgotten, buried in the dust of history. They include ordinary people, those at the bottom of society who were seen as hostile elements by the Roman regime. Their names were deliberately expunged from the record. Among all those who were crucified, only the name of Jesus of Nazareth has been remembered through the ages. Not only has Jesus been remembered by the people, he is remembered even more by his disciples as the God crucified for sinners. The record of Jesus’ Passion in the gospels is the most detailed of all the records of instances of crucifixion in ancient documents.¹ Christ’s death on the cross, along with his resurrection is forever the most important message preached by the Church.

However, the Jewish concept of Messiah could not accept as savior a Jesus who died on the cross for them. The cross, which represents humiliation and the coming Messiah, the Savior and judge of the end of time, could never be mentioned or discussed together. Thus, the event of Jesus’ dying on the cross was treated as scandal and denied by the mainstream religion and culture of the time. But it was the common people, those who did not represent
mainstream religion or culture, and those on the margins of society, who were first attracted to his gospel, both during his life and following his death. They belonged to the lowest rungs of society, the little people of lowly status. They were fisherfolk, farmers, shepherds, tax collectors, prostitutes, lepers, Gentiles. They were as Paul described them: not many were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But it was people just like these, ignorant in the eyes of the wise people of the world, yet chosen by God, who spread the gospel of a Jesus crucified for sinners. It was just such a group of ignorant, weak and lowly ones who formed the first church and became the first disciples. Jesus’ death and especially his resurrection caused the disciples, who had lost faith for a time, to take heart and to recover their hope (Acts 2: 1-4). They cared little for the things of the world; wherever they went, they knew nothing but Jesus crucified (1 Cor. 2: 2). God worked through these “unlettered little people” to raise up the movement of the gospel. They overcame tremendous difficulties, breaking through centuries of every kind of Hebrew and Roman ingrained religious and cultural tradition, opening up a new way of Christian faith.2

God made this “foolish” message of Christ crucified into the gospel which saved humankind. The gospel was the power of God, a challenge to the major religions and mainstream culture of the day, the authorities of self-styled orthodox religion and those who were wise in the way of the world. Christianity would no longer be a Jewish sect, but emerged from Judaism as a new and developing independent religion, breaking through ethnic and regional limits to move onto the world stage. The Gospel’s ultimate influence on the whole world brought about a fundamental change in the traditional values which had long dominated the western world. The death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth thus became one of the core themes of our Christian theology.

History can amaze us by the similarities we find in different
ages. Chinese Christians today are not like the disciples of that
time, who preached the gospel in a Roman world that shone with
the brilliance of ancient Greek wisdom. But in this ancient eastern
land with its thousands of years of splendid culture, though divided
from the early disciples by historical differences that cross space
and time, we are the heirs of those disciples who represented an
identity outside the mainstream. We preach as they did Jesus cru-
cified, a message the surrounding body of the culture sees as fool-
ishness.

For many years, knowledgeable Chinese Christians have tire-
lessly explored points of convergence between a Chinese tradi-
tional culture founded on Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism and
the western Christian gospel, seeking a path by which Christianity
could move toward indigenization. This exploration has been very
precious and hard won; it also has real significance. At the same
time, there is no doubt that this message of Jesus crucified in and of
itself represents a contradiction with our Chinese national cultural
tradition. In fact, the present clash between the gospel and tradi-
tional Chinese culture is a continuation in another form of the clash
between the gospel and orthodox Judaism and Greco-Roman cul-
ture in ancient times.

Along with the dual locus of social development and the
gradual changes in traditional culture, what history reveals to us is
this: whether in China or elsewhere, today or in the past, the mes-
sage that Jesus was crucified and died to save humankind from its
sins always moves beyond our human capacity to understand. Jesus’
death and Christ’s resurrection are both special revelation given to
us by God, something which is beyond human wisdom. Of course,
I am not saying that Christianity is basically an irrational religion.
On the contrary, we must use our own ability and reason to under-
stand God’s word. Christian faith should be a witness based on
using our powers of comprehension to think about God’s revela-
tion. But at the same time, God’s special revelation contains within
it the mystery of sacred wisdom, it is marvelous, and there is no way the limited, rational wisdom of humans can take its measure. It is not my intention to deny the rationality of China’s traditional culture nor devalue its precious wisdom. But if we follow the logic of the reasoned wisdom of traditional Chinese culture, there would be no way to prove or deduce the reasonableness of Jesus’ death on the cross or the truth of his resurrection. Just as the elements to construct basic Christian faith were not present in ancient Greek philosophy, yet there were at least some philosophic concepts with characteristics similar to our Christianity. Later the Church even adopted some of its terminology and methods, yet the two remained very different in their thought patterns and approaches to thinking. This is to say that whether we are speaking of Chinese or of ancient Greek rational thinking, all are affected by the limits of our mortal wisdom. God did not grant us knowledge of Godself through human wisdom. It is rather the crucified Jesus who witnesses to the wisdom of God. God turns our mortal wisdom to foolishness, so that we humans are unable to rely on our own wisdom in knowing the truth of Jesus crucified (1 Cor. 1: 21). It is not my intention to denigrate the worth of civilizations east and west, but God makes the wisdom of the world pale by comparison to the unique revelation of Jesus’ crucifixion.

Jesus’ suffering, death and resurrection were commemorated daily in the common life of Christians in New Testament times. Yet under the dual oppression of Jewish authorities and Roman rule, the term “Christian” denoted a crime. Being a Christian came at a price, and sometimes the price was death. Some years ago in Rome when I visited the catacombs where the graves of Christians from the early church are located, I imagined how they risked their lives in those days, gathering in secret, celebrating the Lord’s Supper and I was shaken to my core by the rock-like strength of their faith. The humiliation of Jesus’ death on the cross brought down the ridicule of the mainstream culture, not only upon Jesus’ himself,
but upon all those believers who would follow him. Even the term "Christian" bore the taint of discrimination, such that when these Christians gathered together to celebrate the Lord's Supper, using the bread to symbolize the Lord's body and the wine to symbolize his blood, they were misunderstood. Many of those around them thought they were a group of uncivilized heathens who ate human flesh and drank human blood. They were objects of derision. Christians and the crucified Jesus of Nazareth were spurned by mainstream society. The bread and wine that represented Christ's death for us are both tragic and laudatory, both foolish and wise, though absurd, yet glorious. In the eyes of Jews who observed the Law and Greeks who worshipped philosophy, there was nothing more foolish than to preach a crucified Jesus. Yet, it was just this foolish witness that became the source of the wisdom given humans by God. "For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength" (1 Cor. 1: 24).

Dear colleagues and students, today, you and I have been called by the Holy Spirit and chosen by God. Let us put aside our desire to be seen by the world as intelligent or as wise; let us sit lightly to the temptations so many feel for material benefit and enviable social position. It may be that when we are seen as foolish in the eyes of this world, that is exactly when we become vessels in God's hands, precious in the sight of our Lord, co-workers with God. It is then that we become God's handmaidens and servants, spreading the saving gospel of Jesus. Though we are lowly, foolish and weak, God has chosen us overturned the wisdom of this world and given us the wisdom of Jesus on the cross. "God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God" (1 Cor. 1: 28). The faith of the crucified Jesus has become the power of the weak, the wisdom of the foolish, the glory of the humiliated.

This evening, we sisters and brothers here at the Seminary
will celebrate the Lord's Supper together, experiencing his suffering and humiliation. On Sunday we will share in the glory of Jesus' victorious resurrection; tonight Jesus will bid us farewell, on Sunday God will enable us to meet Christ anew. Every time we receive the Eucharist, we are filled again with the wisdom of the crucified Jesus. This is also the process by which we are once again renewed by the Holy Spirit, once again gird up our purpose, and take up our cross and follow him. Amen.

3. Tenney, 65.
God’s Promise and Eschatological Hope
GAO YING

Theological consideration of eschatology requires the exploration of both the history of the universe and the history of contextual cultural experience. The issue is whether we live in a world that is not only meaningful for the present but also for the future. That is why the focus of discussion in this essay will be theological reflection on the nature of eschatological hope. This hope in God’s purpose beyond the end of history is grounded in the concept of reconciliation between the creator and creature through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The goal of this essay is to bring to the eschatological resource of Christian belief the Chinese Christian eschatological perspective gained through my own experience. In the body of my essay, I will discuss my theme in four points: 1) Christian hope and the unity of the world of heaven and earth, that the latter are in a complementary fellowship and community of God’s created beings 1; 2) Theological imagination and eschatological expectation; 3) God’s promise of the world and eschatological nature; and 4) The eschatological character of the universal church and eschatological application in the context of the Chinese church.

In my conclusion I will touch on the methodological, hermeneutical and epistemological problems of dealing with a complex subject such as eschatology. What makes the study of eschatology particularly difficult is that as finite human beings, we may well, in principle, never be able to understand adequately. Methodologi-
cally speaking, we can talk about eschatological hope only in terms of metaphors and analogies.\textsuperscript{2}

However, what it is significant in my view is that eschatological hope deals with reality, which helps us to understand the personal existence of human beings in the context of our real history with the promising love of the triune God.\textsuperscript{3}

The Need for Eschatological Explication of Christian Hope

1. Christian Hope and the Unity of the World of Heaven and Earth

Assumptions about the future and ideas of another world beyond history, especially ideas of religious origin, have for a long time been a favorite research subject of theological eschatology and related sciences.

While the biblical tradition speaks about the hope of heaven in two modes: heaven above and heaven to come, it prefers, for reasons that we shall now explore, to speak in a primary way of the heaven to come. The idea is to convey something of the relation between this world and the other world. The idea of a world to come implies that it is something absolutely new, something that, like all future events, rests solely in the hands of God. (Mt. 24: 36, 43). This interpretation of the duality of heaven and earth is merely a reflection of the dichotomy of the human being, a concept which influences many Chinese Christians today who faithfully believe in it and convey the pertinent message. It demonstrates that Chinese church is in its post-colonial mind-set, which affects its theological thinking, including its eschatological perspective.

Here the question arises: Is God’s creation necessarily a dual world? If in conceptualizing this we assume that the work of creation was something completed all at once, then the division into heaven and earth seems merely contingent. But if we perceive God’s creation from the idea of continuous creation and continuous eschatology, it immediately becomes clear that this world, which
has been created by God, and which continues to be created every moment, is the open world to its creator. The world not only exists in the presence of the creator but is also sustained and lived by the Spirit of the creator. The creating God makes the world more alive. The earth is not in itself but within its creator, within the creator's will of love, united with creator's hope of promise; it is not only with its creator but also with all God's creation including heaven, because heaven is also God's creature. In this sense both heaven and earth are the open system to God and therefore are hope of God.¹

But how should this open system of heaven and earth be articulated? Can Christian hope for the resurrection of the dead remain true to this open earth? How can we avoid the trap (Mt. 22:29) of merely speculating about a virtual reality beyond the realm of this world? How can a "realistic eschatology" help us to understand this earthly reality better in order to take up our responsibilities here on earth? Does Christian hope imply that human finitude will be transcended, or are some aspects of finitude also characteristic of the eschaton? How should the continuity between human bodiliness on earth and a resurrected body in heaven be understood? This begs the further question of the continuity between this earth and the new earth. Obviously, an adequate cosmic eschatology clearly forms a prerequisite for an adequate personal eschatological understanding of the correlation of heaven and earth.²

In my experience as a pastor in the Chinese church we usually do not really talk about heaven because the traditional doctrine of creation does not talk about heaven except as related to eschatology. In many Chinese Christians' understanding heaven is a place far from human beings' real life. It is the symbol of future hope and the place where we are going to be after death. Heaven is increasingly understood and declared as the place of salvation for souls.

Note that there is also an element of patriarchal teaching in
this dual concept of the world. Father represents heaven and mother symbolizes the earth. These patriarchal symbols indicate that “Father Heaven” rules over “Mother Earth.” It is of course true that in the biblical tradition heaven is always used to describe that place where God is, from where God acts, and towards which prayer and praise are directed.

But this traditional idea leads me to examine God’s creation of heaven and earth. If we look at salvation history as a whole, and consider the becoming-human of the Son of God, the participation between God and human beings is much richer than those simple marks of sovereignty and obedience would suggest. The love of God is quite evidently directed towards the earth, and the world in which human beings exist. The object of love cannot have a “below or a later,” or less. 7 The relationship between God and God’s children is based on love but not in a monarchical way. We should have to say that heaven is the chosen dwelling place of God, but that the chosen dwelling of the Son is the earth, on which he became a human being, died and rose again, and where he will come in order to fill our Christian hope with his glory. But then the chosen place of the Holy Spirit must be seen in the coming direct bond between heaven and earth in the new creation. I see that although heaven and earth are certainly distinguished through their creation, they none the less exist in the fellowship of creation, and are in continual communication.

What happens to earth touches heaven too. That is why we cannot talk about a contrast in the relationship between heaven and earth, we can only speak of a complementation. We cannot think of the one as over against or superior to the other, we can only talk about the fellowship and community of God’s created beings. 8 In this case Christian hope is the particular way in which the ultimate heaven becomes the present world. Hope in this sense realizes the eschatological future, eschatological heaven that has entered into present world. That is why it would be a mistake if we
attempt to interpret heaven as the kingdom of God. Because the kingdom of the God of glory embraces not merely heaven but earth too, and presupposes the creation of “a new heaven and a new earth.” It is not only earth that requires a new creation, heaven requires a new eschatological creation too.\(^9\)

The traditional teaching of a dual world has certainly been challenged by Jurgen Moltmann in his book *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation And The Spirit of God*:

For the earth the heaven means the kingdom of God’s creative potentialities. The heaven is the relative transcendence of the earth, and earth the relative immanence of heaven... Then when we say that God dwells in heaven, acts from heaven, and that God’s will is to be done on earth as it is in heaven, these symbolic expressions become comprehensible. Here, heaven means the openness to God of the world God has created.\(^10\)

The author’s methodology invites us to understand that if things visible means the finite world, then things invisible means the relatively infinite world. Human beings are God’s finite and mortal creatures. This is why God’s heaven can also be called a finite but immortal creation, while the earth can be seen as a finite and transitory creation. For theology heaven and earth are the two sides of the divine creative activity, the divine love and the divine glorification. It is therefore essential, theologically, to understand heaven and earth both within God, which means in the process of God’s continuous creative activity, in the process of the incarnation of Jesus Christ, and in the process of transfiguration through the Holy Spirit; to discover God in all the beings God created and to find God’s life-giving Spirit in the community of creation that they share.\(^11\)

Both heaven and earth are within in the history of this Trinitarian God, and it is only in this history that they will become comprehensible in all the fullness of their relationships with God’s
promise of hope. If we perceive that heaven reflects both the transcendence and the immanence of the Trinitarian God we should realize that heaven is not merely the symbol of the eschatological future but is also linked with present hope, experienced by the grace of God, incarnated by Jesus Christ and transformed by the Holy Spirit. Heaven is no longer merely manifested by transcendence of the Trinity of God as eschatological future but also by the immanence of the Trinity of God, which symbolizes the present hope.

In this theological examination of the dual world described in the words “heaven and earth,” we should perceive the goodly form of God’s creation; it is not a conflicting and divided world. God created heaven and earth, which are both eschatologically open to God. From heaven and through heaven God acts on earth. Because of this the world has an eschatological future. Heaven represents the relative-beyond of the world, and earth is the relative this-worldliness of heaven. In heaven creation has relative transcendence. In the earth creation find its relative immanence. The world open to God possesses in itself the dialectical structure of transcendence and immanence.

2. Theological Imagination and Eschatological Expectation

To substantiate how I am going to articulate Christian hope beyond death is theologically challenging, for I see the problem for theological imagination on a subject like eschatology. Here is indeed one understanding the difference between creation and eschatology, between time and eternity, between the finite and the infinite.

It would be helpful if this section could begin with the engagement of a hermeneutical approach, which would lead us into a comprehensive theological discussion as the focus of this section how Jesus’ proclamation of Kingdom and his death and resurrection affects Christian hope of faith.
What did Jesus of Nazareth want to achieve during his three years' earthly ministry? The proclamation of the kingdom of God was Jesus' major task as he broke between the time of "this" world and the time which operated in the next. This expectation of the kingdom of God inspired Jesus but also drove him to his death. Jesus promised his disciples that the Son of Man, herald of the kingdom of God would come before they had finished their mission to Israel (Mt. 10:23). But despite the death of Jesus, God still did not act, the world was neither transformed by the triumph of the kingdom of God nor received the second coming of Jesus Christ. The world catastrophe was further delayed.

What is there then to hope for after Jesus' death? The early Christians waited in vain, for the coming of the kingdom of God in the immediate future, as Jesus had described it, was based on a presumed event. Here the question of how expectations of the future arise and how these expectations are connected to Christians' attitudes and patterns of behavior is the task of hermeneutics and theological eschatology, or a combination of both disciplines. The biblical understanding of the second coming of Christ is quite central in the earliest Christian documents, as also in the creeds, doctrinal statements, and liturgies of the churches. From scriptural messages to the eucharistic acclamation: "Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again," the hope is constant and is repeatedly affirmed.

But what are we to say about this hope today? When after centuries this eschatological hope has still not been fulfilled, what are we to say? Facing profound disappointment of the belief that he will come again what are we to say? What we ought to believe in? On the one hand we believe biblical hope is a confident hope because the hope relied on is God, is trustful hope, hope as confident in God. However, at the same time, biblical hope is a constantly redefined hope—a hope in which the balance between the "already" and "not yet" has never been finally resolved. In my point
of view a substantial theological eschatology of proclamation addresses the question: What is it that we hope for? This is a fundamental question for all theological eschatology. It can't be ignored.

Apparently, Jesus second coming is delayed. Will it never come to pass? If that were the case, it would be more important to continue to work with Jesus' spirit. Jesus of Nazareth hoped to bring God's new world into being – and he brought his own life for the sake of this expectation. Although he died his spiritual message did not. We can no longer hope as Jesus hoped – but we can continue to work in his spirit. 15 From this perspective the delay of the second coming would contribute to constitute the origin of the church. Christianity had gradually to come to understand that it had to adapt to the world, that the church was obligated to carry on the hope of Jesus. That is how the early Christianity became the church. In other words the birth of the church came about through the failure of the eschatological expectation of the Jewish Christians.

The origin of the early church demonstrates that eschatological hope has an intimate relationship to faith, and faith is at the center of the Christian hope for the resurrection of Jesus Christ. 16 Hope beyond death is not based merely on the desire to transcend human finitude. It is also not based primarily on the hope for vindication in a life after death. It cannot be based on a speculative postulation that there is a realm of eternity beyond the boundaries of space and time either. Instead eschatological hope for the resurrection of the dead is essentially a hope in Godself. It arises from the complex and pluralistic witnesses in the Judeo-Christian tradition to the promises and everlasting faithfulness of the living and eternal God. It is a trust in God the creator who transcends human and cosmic finitude and who maintains an unconditionally creative relationship with the created order. More specifically, it is a confirmation of the Christian belief in Jesus Christ, the risen one. It expresses the Christian hope in the power of the Spirit, who makes
all things new. This comes to fruition in the hope that in death we will meet not nothingness but someone: the God of grace who raised Jesus Christ from death.¹⁷

As early Christians experienced the great disappointment of the delay of the second coming, Christians, now more sober and thoughtful, found it necessary to give up their expectation in favor of an approach that could help them become established on a long-term basis. Therefore, the kingdom of God is “near” not in the sense of here and today, but in the sense of could be “here” and “tomorrow”. “Nearness” means the dwindling distance in time.¹⁸

Eschatology is thought of with respect to the relationship between the world and the kingdom of God on the one hand, and to the relationship between natural science and theology on the other. Christian hope is the practical and present approach to eschatology.

Today in our Chinese church, from my pastoral experience, I have discovered that for many Chinese Christians their faith is simple and sincere, yet they don’t quite understand theological terms such as eschatology. For many of them talking about pre-millennium or post-millennium, for example, is irrelevant to their present and concrete life. What has come to affect their faith of real belief in God in terms of Christian hope is the reality of the threat of individual death. How could Christians relate their faith with the understanding of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, which encourages them to hold hope for believing in the continuation of that life beyond the death of body? This is not an abstract, theoretical question but an ineluctable religious issue faced by all believers. Therefore, substantial theological discussion must be able to embrace the essential concern: what is Christian hope?

As a Christian coming from the communist country of China I am familiar with the atheist advocacy of the annihilability of the person. As a matter of fact, this assumption scares many people, even faithful party members. Why? Because this claim offers no hope to individuals, especially those facing life and death threats. It
is human beings' nature to seek for hope, which not only affects one's attitude toward the future beyond death but also the whole of effectiveness related to one's present life. Death is real to all human perceptions and powers, even those of atheists.

Christian belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ offers the great hope for the continuity of life beyond death, in which death is the necessary cost of life. Eschatological hope is not the human being's movement toward the future, it is the human being's present reliance on things that promise a good future by God through the resurrection of Christ. This is resurrection as the completion of the human continuous eschatological potential, resurrection as eschatological reinterpretation, resurrection as eschatological transformation.¹⁹

3. God's Promise of the World and Eschatological Nature

Eschatology traditionally deals with the "last things"—end of the world, resurrection of the dead, the final judgment, and eternal life. Primarily it teaches in two senses: that which lasts and that which comes last.²⁰ Therefore, it is crucial for us Christians to comprehend God's purpose of creation and God's will for the world. In this section I will examine the traditional dogma of God's creation by reconsidering the relationship between creation and the world, and how that generates eschatological nature. Although there might be some similar points with the previous section in discussing the duality of heaven and earth, here the central articulation is the relationship between God as a creator and the world as God's creature.

As Chinese Christians we were indoctrinated with the biblical understanding of the "end of the world"—eschatology is deeply grounded in the traditional teaching of Christianity, which takes dualistic attitudes towards God and God's creation. In this way of thinking, Godself and God's creation belong to two worlds: celestial and terrestrial. God is conceptualized as the abstract and tran-
scendent, existing somewhere in a remote celestial place, far away from our real life experience. The living world of human beings is under the power of Satan and controlled by evil, which is total hopelessness and decay. Anything that belongs to celestial world is holy and immortal. Anything that is seen as terrestrial is sinful and demonic. This way of thinking developed a theory of antithetical relationships in the Chinese church: God and the world; heaven and earth; soul and body; and man and woman.  

This doctrine taught us that God could not be described by human terms and the world could not be understood as a divine creation of God. In other words God was not worldly and the world was not divine. God and the world were defined over against each other.

Because of this assumption of a great division between celestial and terrestrial worlds, God is believed to be over against the world. The world becomes a passive object while God is impassive and unfeeling toward creatures.

We acknowledge that in the biblical traditions of the Old and New Testaments, experience of the world as creation is determined by belief in the revelation of the creative God in Israel’s history. What becomes evident is that theological tradition speaks of twofold knowledge of God: knowledge derived from creation and knowledge derived from scripture. In this case we have to ask ourselves some serious questions: What does God mean for the world which God creates and sustains? What does it mean for the world to be God’s creation, which is different from God, and is yet designed to correspond to God eschatologically? With what objective theological right is nature seen and treated as creation with God’s promise? Under what subjective conditions do human beings in their present condition have hope in the future? Or is the world only experienced as creation in the light of the self-revelation of the creative God?

Note that traditional Christian thinking takes the divine state-
ment in Genesis 1 that creation is "good" seriously. Although this
claim is supported by the scientific discernment of progressive evo-
lationists, the traditional doctrine of creation has been re-examined
by contemporary theology. The traditional doctrine of creation
emphasizes the difference between God and the world. But con-
temporary continuous eschatology no longer focuses on the dist-
tinction but rather its correlative, which implies that God's hope is
in the world and the presence of the world is in God.

As I have discussed the conception of both God's transcen-
dence and immanence in the previous section, we see that the re-
relationship between God and the world is mutual and reciprocal
rather than a "one-sided relationship(s)." God is indwelling in
creatures, therefore God is in an intimate relationship with each of
God's own creatures, participating in the process of the world
through God's Spirit of the universe. The world is also in a living
relationship with God. This is underlined in Jurgen Moltmann's
book:

God creates the world, and at same time enters into it. God
calls it into existence, and at the same time manifests Godself
through its being. It lives from God's creation power, and
yet God lives in it. So if God as creator stands over against
God's own creation, God also stands over against Godself.
If the creation stands over against its creator, God again
stands over against Godself. The God who is transcendent
in that world is one and the same God.

This means in God there is no one-sided relationship of su-
periority and subordination, command and obedience, master and
servant. Our starting point here is that all relationships reflect the
reciprocal indwelling and mutual interpenetration of the Trinitarian
Being: God in the world and the world in God; heaven and earth in
the kingdom of God, pervaded by God's glory; soul and body
united in the life-giving Spirit to a human whole; women and men in
the kingdom of unconditional and unconditioned love. Through the Son, God creates, reconciles and redeems God's own creation — present in God's reconciliation and God's promising of that creation. We human beings are God's creatures, being reconciled with God through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we are therefore, granted by God's hope and promise. Eschatology means, and has meant from the beginning: that the justification and vindication of our lives — their meaning and value — are not in our hands, but in God's hands, not in good fortune or bad, but in God's kingdom of love and righteousness. In the face of death — our own death and the death of the universe — our hope is not in some immortality we possess as natural endowment.

Rather, we trust that in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ we have seen God's victory over the powers of evil, sin and death. We claim the promise that because Christ lives we shall live also. Our ultimate confidence is not in ourselves, nor in nature, nor in history with its countless human achievements, but in God — who has made us for Godself. Christian hope is not based on predictions of the future, but in trust in God's love, the overflowing love from which everything comes that is from God. God's hope is towards reconciliation and the redemption of the world through the suffering patience. In the triune God is the mutuality and the reciprocity of love. The principle of mutual interpenetration of the Trinity is a formulation of the mutual indwelling of creator, the Son and the Holy Spirit, as the Gospel of John illustrates (14:11).

In this understanding of the relationship between God and God's creature, God is not only recognized as the creator but also the preserver, savior and the promiser, God manifests the world as God's creation with eschatological hope.

The above illustrations respond to questions: how does God experience God's creation of the world, which generates eschatological hope? What is God's promise for Christian eschatological hope through God's reconciliation with the world?
The Christ-event developed because the salvation event is still incomplete. The purpose of eschatology is formed and recreated by God to give salvation to all people of God on the earth, especially the suffering. Salvation is promised to the world of all children of God, including the powerless and the hopeless. But it is also important that we don’t try to use the expectation of eschatology to create our own theory or action. For example, when the new millennium was approaching, there were evangelical preachers in the northeast part of China influenced by fundamental Christian groups from South Korea, who crossed the border, trying to use eschatological scriptures to provoke Christians to commit suicide or to leave everything behind and just wait to be taken up to the Lord before the “catastrophe,” which was to take place by the end of the century. Such distorted scriptural eschatological speculation caused considerable human tragedy. But that should lead us to ask some poignant eschatological question such as: Why did life carry on without radical change to history? Why did time continue for us Christians after Friday and Easter Sunday? What does resurrection of the body mean to the Christian in terms of conceptualizing hope beyond death?

However, it would be a mistake if we conceptualize eschatology only as looking to “the last things” or to better times to come. It does not simply concern itself with what comes “afterwards” or encourage spiritual visions of the future to escape the present. Eschatology is about the hope that is within Christian persons in this world, here and now. It is about God’s promise and our future and the relationship between the two. The fundamental questions it asks are: Why are we allowed to hope? What is the reason for our hope? Here, then, is reconsideration of eschatology from the vantage point of Christian hope rather than a study of “the last things” or “the end of all things.”

Because hope is not merely grounded in a system of doctrine, but in the commitment to the one who has promised to “make
all things new.” This eschatological nature of hope enables us to take up the issue of death more seriously, but takes even more seriously God’s lordship over death. Beyond the final death is the all-encompassing love of God, who in the resurrected Jesus Christ bestowed God’s eternal life on all. The eschatological nature of hope based on the death and resurrection of Christ does not deny the finitude of all created beings but transcends it. The hopes of the finite to participate in eternal life are not based on their own nature but exclusively on God maintaining God’s unconditional creative relationship to what God has created even beyond death.

The gospel of Christ promises a continuity that is maintained beyond the discontinuity of the death of finite life, a continuity that is already promised in the proclamation of the gospel and in the celebration of the sacraments. Without an element of continuity, the vision of eschatology is simply hopeless, with no coherent connection with the story of creation. Nevertheless, there is also a sense of discontinuity in the whole process of God’s creation. As John Polkinghorne points out:

This duality of sameness and changed is implied in the Christian tradition by the use of phrases such a “the new creation” and “the resurrection of the body.”

The creation of God is a process of the combination of both continuity and discontinuity. We Christians believe that discontinuity is God’s free action for the ultimate fulfillment of the divine promise. This is how we Christians talk about the eschatological future of “a new heaven and a new earth,” which is based on belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ—distinguishing theological eschatology from secular futurology. It means that we only trust in God’s love, which transcends our destiny beyond our death. However, up to this point I see the necessity of articulating further how God’s steadfast love acted in history and beyond history with our human beings’ experience and understanding of the past and present. As
Christians with faith in God as creator, in Jesus Christ the life-giving and in the sanctifying Holy Spirit, we are therefore inspired to hold our eschatological hope and witness it theologically. The eschatological concept of discontinuity and continuity is experienced by Christians in our justification, where we as sinners are made discontinuous with our sinful actions and then assured the continuity of God's graceful relationship based on God's steadfast love and mercy and not on our past as sinners.

As the creator God's nature is love, God vindicates all God's creatures and pulls everything to obedience to Godself, but not tyrannically. If we trust that steadfast love is the nature of our creator we would also expect that this creator would transform and renew all creation in Jesus Christ by the "end" but not to wipe everything away; sanctifying the old but not punishing. In this case eschatological discontinuity does not mean disrupting the process of creation but make the connection between old and new, between present and future into God's divine purpose. 31

To sum up, I see eschatological nature as the hope of transformation and renewal of the whole creation, not merely the salvaging of human "souls." The eschatological hope is the hope of "a new heaven and new earth," for creation renewed, not destroyed. The biblical perception of "resurrection of the body" leads us to a deeper appreciation for God's promise and power of reconciliation and the whole created order. Christian eschatology opens us to the possibility of the present and gives new meaning to our past.

Our emphasis on God's hope of the world today does not mean we discard the biblical tradition. On the contrary, it is a return to its original truth: through God's cosmic Spirit, God the creator of heaven and the earth, its present hope in all God's creatures, and in fellowship with all creatures.32
4. The Eschatological Character of the Universal Church and Eschatological Application in the Context of Chinese Church

There is no doubt that today the Chinese church is more seriously challenged than ever by the great concern of eschatology, which needs not merely theological discussion but also spiritual guidance. The church has a huge task to fulfill on the topic of how to understand God’s divine revelation and apocalyptic metaphor. We need to interpret eschatological scriptures more articulately and be more discerning, especially in the area of the relationship between God and the goodness of God’s creation and between God and God’s promise of reconciliation for all things in Christ. Chinese Christians are more spiritually thirsty than ever before for a faithful and hopeful articulation of eschatology.

The present situation of the church in China is quite critical in terms of the trend of fundamentalism.

Ever since the Communists took power, enthusiasm for preaching on the eschaton has increased among the group of fundamentalist believers. With the eschatological assumption that Jesus’ “second coming” would destroy the people’s movement and overthrow the present regime. Given the fact of the ten years of tremendous social disaster and political turbulence caused by so-called the “Cultural Revolution” from 1966 to 1976, all churches and seminaries were closed down and clergy were sent to “reform through labor,” supposedly having their religious belief transformed into atheism.

A considerable number of faithful believers suffered physical injury during this severe and massive violation of human rights throughout China, which included religious persecution. Nevertheless, the political situation had a great impact on people’s belief and psyches, in that they were driven to become more conservative and formed “underground” house churches or house church gatherings besides the established churches, which were reopened
after the Cultural Revolution. House churches are bodies not affiliated with the institutional church. The established church has registered status and hence enjoys the protection of law, while the house gathering is an unregistered religious group. Such religious activity is principally considered as illegal although it has been growing rapidly. With this intertwined situation of both religion and polity one could imagine why many house church members are interested in scriptural teaching on eschatology, which contrasts with the pulpit of the established church.

Eschatological scriptures in the Book of Revelation and the Book of Daniel are favored among preachers from the house churches. They interpret scriptures literally, using the metaphor of “adultery” to attack the established church for its collaboration with the atheist government, citing “Red Dragon” and “cataclysm,” alluding to the evil power of Communism. As the new millennium drew near, enthusiastic speculation regarding the eschaton was bound to rise among many members of house church as I have indicated in the previous section. Individual preachers attempted to convince people that they had been given a preview of the divine timetable for the precise date of the “second coming.” Those who had very limited theological background were roused to look for the imminent coming of Christ, which was high on the eschatological agenda as we entered the year 2000. We can anticipate that over the next decades the subject of eschatology will continue to gain increasing interest, especially among house churches.

The fundamentalist influence on the one hand and the dramatic social and political changes on the other all perplexed Chinese Christians’ understanding of eschatology. In these bewildering circumstances many Chinese Christians will accept almost anything that seems to offer hope and God’s promise in the midst of any political change that threatens to overwhelm them. What is offered as eschatological perspectives today among those funda-
mental groups in China is a distortion of biblical interpretation and counterfeit hope. But the fact is that falsified teaching that takes the Bible literally has becomes popular and attracts great crowds. This phenomenon indicates that the institutional church has not been able to provide effective and sufficient hermeneutical teaching on eschatology in order to meet the considerable needs of believers.

Therefore, it is the task of the Chinese church to explore the biblical teaching on Christian hope, to offer more spiritual guidance on eschatological reality, which could help people to overcome concrete challenges in their lives rather than try to escape them. If the church does not or cannot provide a more convincing vision of Christian hope and a more theological hermeneutical approach to eschatology, then people will certainly choose to go where those needs can be met and addressed. It is my belief that when the rich biblical image of eschatological hope been taken seriously and articulated faithfully, it can and does provide the sense of spiritual guidance for those Christians. Thus, the church has serious theological tasks to do.

The Church is an eschatological reality. This is to say that the Church as the gathered community of the faithful, bears witness to God’s saving activity in the world in the past, the present, and the future. The people of God, historically constituted as Israel and the church, live with the knowledge and experience of God working in and through them to accomplish God’s purpose with the hope that God will carry God’s plan of redemption and reconciliation to fulfillment in the future. The Church exists as an eschatological reality insofar as it recognizes that it lives within a creation, not merely a cosmos, and that this creation itself is shot through with the active presence of the one who creates, redeems, reconciles and sustains it. The Church is the eschatological community, bearing witness to and participating in the divine action in the world.³³

My experience of the church in China demonstrates that ecclesiology can’t be separated from eschatology. It is the Church,
enlivened and empowered by the Spirit, that proclaims the fulfillment of the promise of God in the person and work of Jesus Christ and bears witness to the world that he is making all things new. The Church occupies that space between the already of the cross and resurrection of Christ and the not yet of the fulfillment of God’s new creation, and as such, is a provisional institution. The Church is not equivalent to the dominion of God but bears witness to that dominion, which has been inaugurated in Jesus Christ and moves towards final consummation. This should warn us away from an overly realized eschatology. The Church does not initiate the dominion of God on earth; neither does it passively await the consummation. Rather, the Church in its proclamation and witness to Christ participates in that which God is bringing about for God’s creation. The Church, the people of God, exists to be God’s agent of reconciliation, a transforming presence in the world until all things are subjected to Christ.  

The vision of the Church is based on “God’s promise love, which is the ground of liberating hope for the future is already the foundation of the Church in faith.” Christ resurrection is the foundation for the Church’s eschatological hope that all things are being made new in him through whom all things were made. The eschatological hope, therefore, is rooted in the historical saving event of Christ’s death and resurrection, while at the same time living within the perspective of a not-yet-realized future. This tension is what shapes how the Church lives in the present and defines its message and mission. The Church’s hope, the realm of God’s saving activity. Far from an eschatology that hopes for flight from this world in decay or an apocalypticism that views the end as a divine wiping-clean of the slate, the Church engages the world as an active participant in and witness to the transforming power of God, who brings the exiles home and who causes rivers to spring forth in the desert. 

In my view Christ’s resurrection was not an escape from death
but an overcoming of the power of death, so is the Church’s relation to the world through the Church. An ecclesiology construed eschatologically, is therefore reconciling work. This world is the world for which Christ died. It is the object of God’s reconciliation and recreation through Christ.

God in Christ enters into the midst of God’s own creation and, as the second Adam, engages the world for God’s glory. The self-offering of Christ, therefore, is the content of the Church’s primary discourse of eschatological hope. This means that from the Church’s eschatological perspective, the world is no longer an object to be used by us and for us, which is idolatry, but the world is understood as icon, pointing beyond itself to its creator. Living between the times, the Church bears witness to God’s promised future, which a person’s relationship to God’s hope is transformed in Christ from magic and idol to sacrament.36

Conclusion

Perhaps the most comprehensive treatment of theology is creation from an eschatological perspective. Any thoughtful reader will find here a wealth of stimulating and provocative ideas. In the best Socratic tradition, a book raises many more questions than it answers. I am aware of the fact that in this essay I have raised theological and eschatological questions and tried to respond to them through discussion and argument but still may not be able to provide adequate answers to all questions.

This demonstrates the academic challenge in this field. For instance there has always been awareness that in eschatology we face the hermeneutical and epistemological problem of theology in a particularly dense and intensive form. In eschatology, we not only have to deal with the regular hermeneutical problems of religious language that result from the categorical distinction between creator and creature, but we also have to take into consideration the difference between the present state of the world and a future
state of complete fulfillment.\textsuperscript{37} What makes this eschatology particularly difficult is that this difference is something that we as finite human beings will, in principle, never be able to understand adequately. How can we begin to comprehend if it transcends the limits of our knowledge by definition? Methodologically speaking, we can talk about eschatological hope only in terms of metaphors and analogies. For example the concept of continuity and discontinuity between body and the hope for the resurrection of the body is best understood in terms of the analogy with the bodily resurrection of Christ.\textsuperscript{38}

However, what is significant in my view is that eschatological hope deals with the reality that we human beings are recognized and become transformed within our community by God. Eschatology deals with Christian hope and the kingdom of God, the reign of true life. Hence the core of eschatological hope is to understand the personal existence of human beings in the context of their real history and to expand the personal symbol of hope, which is “eternal life,” with the historical symbol of hope, which is “the Kingdom of God.” The kingdom of glory is the indwelling of the triune God is God’s whole creation. Heaven and earth will become God’s dwelling, the surroundings that encompass God. Eschatology is the methodological and hermeneutical reflection of what faith gives us to think.\textsuperscript{39} Natural science is concerned with the description and explanation of the universe, the reign of real life.

But in our religious tradition knowledge of God does not exist without knowledge of the world (and knowledge of the self). That is why consistent eschatology is trying to grasp the knowledge of God that faith has given. If eschatological hope rests ultimately on the faithfulness of God, it is essential to seek knowledge of the divine creation, which symbolizes God’s divine hope for all God’s creatures.\textsuperscript{40}

For Christian theologians, the Bible is not a convenient di-
vinely dictated handbook in which to look up the answers, but is the records of persons and events that have been particularly open to the presence of divine reality and through which the divine future may most transparently be discerned eschatologically. And I believe that is the task of eschatology.


5. Ibid.


10. Ibid., 165.


18 Gerhard Sauter, “Jesus of Nazareth, ‘Bearer of Hope’?” 34.


30. Ibid., xxiv.


Crisis and Hope: Theological Thinking During the Anti-Japanese War
Reading Y.T. Wu’s Christianity and New China¹
WANG PENG

During the 60th anniversary of victory in the War of Resistance against Japan, I read Christianity and New China, edited by Y.T. Wu, and it caused me to ponder deeply. In those days when “cities were reduced to ashes and the countryside was laid waste; when the bones of loyal Chinese were piled as high as mountains and blood flowed like flood waters,”² at a life and death juncture which meant survival or annihilation for the Chinese people, the question of the value and meaning of Christian faith inevitably arose in the minds of thoughtful people. “In this great age, my Christian faith, is like a small boat, sailing from a placid river into the great vast sea and encountering a fierce gale.”³ For a Christian of conscience in China, the relationship between Christianity and society, faith and the fate of the nation and people, had never before been so closely linked and had never given rise to this sort of deep reflection and action.

The manuscript of Christianity and New China was completed in May 1939 and was edited and published in 1940. There were two sections: “Christianity and New China,” and “My Christian Faith.” The former consisted of responses to the question “Can Christianity Keep Up with the Times?” The second section was devoted to the writers’ personal reflections on what they felt to be

the most basic elements of Christian faith and their meaning in this
great era. The "Editor's Forward" presented the aim of the vol-
ume as follows: "we believe that there is in Christianity a central
belief, an eternal truth. The substance of this truth never changes,
but in practice, it can indeed change with the times and be ex-
pressed in varying ways. But what, after all, is the central faith of
Christianity? There have been many responses to this question in
Christianity's two thousand years of history. In this twentieth cen-
tury, at the start of the 1940s, especially in a China engaged in
fighting Japan and struggling to establish a nation, it seems neces-
sary for us to examine ourselves anew and give a new account
with regard to this question. For we believe that the tremendous
changes in world history in the past twenty years and the baptism
of fire Chinese Christians are going through now, provide a tem-
pering that can bring out the purest Christian faith." The volume
collected 26 essays (out of 50 possible contributions) representing
authors of varied theological thinking and denominational back-
grounds and even scholars from outside the church. All reflected
from a variety of angles the face of Christianity in China at the time,
placing vividly before us theological thinking and the inner experi-
ence of Chinese Christians in those unique times.

The 1940s were a unique period for Christianity in China. On
the one hand, as the "anti-Christian Movement" faded into
history, the clamour of opposition to Christianity slowly died down
and Christianity gradually won people's respect. On the other hand,
Christianity was facing interrogation by modern science and think-
ing and there were some who still had misunderstandings and criti-
cisms of basic Christian faith. Following the Marco Polo Bridge
Incident (July 7, 1937), Christian faith came under fire, subject even
more to a life and death struggle. In the years of suffering during
the anti-Japanese war when the whole people underwent a bap-
tism by fire, the new challenge for personal faith in the midst of the
nation's crisis was how, amidst darkness, blood and the fires of
war, hope, light, life and peace could be found.

1. Christian Responses to the War Against Japan: Service and Sacrifice.

Some writers have posited three types of Christians and churches during the period.

The first were characterized by unfounded opposition and self-centered escapism. Some Christians, were basically opposed to any form of warfare, they had a sincere hatred of the cruelty of the aggressors, and felt this was the highest form of criminal behavior; but at the same time they did not propose that the victims seek their liberation through armed force. These Christians and the churches they led took no effective action in response to the pain and wounds sustained by China in the course of her resistance, beyond the tears that welled as they watched the fire from the sky and the bodies of their compatriots piling up, beyond their cries of "It's a crime! A crime!, beyond the silent prayers of no consequence, asking Yahweh to abolish war.\(^5\)

The author of these words saw these people as "pedantic" Christians, "shepherds who had abandoned their responsibility." One feels sorrow at their suffering, but anger at their passivity. Amid the violence of the war of resistance, such Christians and churches as these were in a tiny minority.

The second type were activist servants. This group was concerned for society and opposed the war of aggression. They provided relief for the refugees, supported the dispossessed, healed the wounded, and donated medicines. When the newspapers announced that some city had been bombed or had fallen to the enemy, these Christians set up relief work of all sorts. Their courage and commitment were superior to every other group. Without a
doubt then, in the last two years [early 1940s], more than ten million refugees in China have been helped by the Christians.\(^6\) Though they did not cross swords with the enemy on the battlefield, in their principles and by their actions they actively supported and sustained the war effort. The majority of authors in the book supported people like this and their resistance activities in the rear.

The third kind were those who died for their principles. This group of Christians threw themselves directly into the throes of the war, in the spirit of Jesus Christ who sacrificed himself upon the cross, safeguarding justice and peace with arms and their blood.

I have many Christians friends who have given their lives for the liberation of their people and that of all humanity. In a sacrificial spirit, without regard for their own safety, they have struggled with all the forces of evil and some have truly sacrificed themselves as Jesus Christ did upon the cross. In this war, countless Christians have been involved in the work at the front lines and in the rear, and these are no longer individual Christians only, but often whole churches. Why do they do it? From the standpoint of the people, they do it for their motherland. As Christians, they do it because they have truly accepted the teaching of Jesus Christ—it is for love, and through love they fight evil. This was even more obvious to many foreign Christians in China. Prior to the outbreak of the war, when Christian involvement was limited to individuals and did not include so many entire churches, we could still call this a happenstance; but for the last two years, church involvement in the people’s liberation enterprise, has become so widespread that they have become a significant strength within the war effort. This leads us to a profound belief that in China, at least, Christians and the churches have truly received the teachings of Christ and are practicing what they preach.\(^7\)
Even more precious is the fact that this enthusiastically positive assessment of Christian involvement in the war of resistance came from the pen of a non-church scholar sympathetic to Christianity.

It is an undisputed fact that Christianity has universal love at its center. Jesus Christ's two commandments of love required his disciples to "love each other," to "love one's enemies," etc. and these became the central Christian message for over two thousand years. Universal love is one side of the coin, for without love, there is no Christianity. The problem lies in how to understand the commandment to "love your enemies." Is it unprincipled? The majority of the writers contend that such an unprincipled idea distorts Jesus' teachings, as tolerance for and accommodation to evil.

As was mentioned above, the views on this issue of Y.T. Wu himself, the editor of this volume, underwent a process of development. In the early 1930s, Y.T. Wu was a leader in the Fellowship of Reconciliation in China. He was influenced by the thinking of the founder of the Fellowship, the Englishman H. T. Hodgkin, to renounce participation in all forms of war. It was his belief that "War does not solve anything. We furthermore oppose all force of arms that stems from hatred and revenge." Even in the bi-monthly Reconciliation which Y.T. Wu edited (just 17 issues published from June 15, 1931), when readers asked: at a time when Japanese imperialism continues armed aggression against us, how are we to practice reconciliation? Isn't speaking to our enemies about love tantamount to suicide and capitulation? Y.T. Wu's response was: those who practice reconciliation believe deeply that war, whether an act of aggression or defense, cannot solve basic problems. He preferred to choose unarmed resistance such as non-cooperation and breaking off economic relations.  

However, when the resistance of people throughout the nation ignited, Y.T. Wu's thinking about reconciliation began to change. The fires of war caused him finally to give up the chairmanship of
the Fellowship of Reconciliation. When he wrote "Trends in Christian Thinking over Thirty Years" in 1948, he had completely given up his promotion of reconciliation: "Reconcilers propose the absence of war as a way to promote world peace; if this is simply an individual's way to witness to faith, there is not cause for much criticism, but if one thinks world peace can be achieved solely by means of love, that is really vanity." In fact, we already have a clear indication of this change in Y.T. Wu in the book *Christianity and New China*.

In the final chapter of this book, in speaking of the contribution of Christianity to Chinese society, he says:

First, I think now is the time for Christianity to fully put into practice its anti-aggression role. At the beginning of his ministry, Jesus said: "The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Lk. 4:18-19). These few sentences are filled with a sense of justice that is anti-aggression and anti-oppression. During recent years [1940s], not only have Christians worldwide united to protect China's war of resistance, there has been widespread initiation of movements against wars of aggression, fascism and imperialism. Though there are still many among Christians who act on the basis of the teaching to love one's enemies, and who do not promote the use of arms to halt aggression and resist oppression, their voices of justice against the forces of evil have the same effect. Today, as aggressors start frenzied warfare everywhere, Christianity's power to promote fairness and protect justice, especially among the weaker peoples, should be extremely significant.10

Wu found light in the message of Luke's gospel and in the
power of opposition to fascism by Christians worldwide, he saw God acting in history. Did Christians lose faith in the belief that "God is love" because of the cruel war and the hardships they suffered? One of the authors in the volume expressed his feelings in vivid words:

God is all love. In a present obscured by clouds of war; in a world where might is right, to believe that God is all love, is truly not easy. But seeing things from the vantage point of the whole universe, there is creation, there is truth, there is beauty, there is deep feeling, there is goodness: and all of these are founded in love.  

He felt that heroic sacrifices in wartime and vanquishing power by weakness, etc., were in themselves the victory of love. The world needs love, for love is God. T.C. Chao said something similar. "The greatness of faith does not lie in peace and happiness; the greatness of love is in direct proportion to adversity."

It is also worth noting how the different authors understand and interpret the biblical text from their different approaches to dealing with the war and their different theological reflections. Neither individuals nor groups explain and comprehend the Bible in a vacuum far distant from reality. In a famous statement from the biblical commentator Gerhard Ebeling, "The history of the church is the history of biblical hermeneutics." The main biblical passages interpreted in this book to understand and support Christian involvement in the movement for national salvation are as noted below.

The first comes from Leviticus: "Anyone who kills a human being shall be put to death. Anyone who kills an animal shall make restitution for it, life for life" (24: 17-18). The following verses advocate war on the basis of "a tooth for a tooth, an eye for an eye, injury for injury." This reflects the times, when the fate of the nation was at stake at the hands of a powerful enemy run rampant and the
wrath that came from the innermost heart of some Christians. But those who directly expressed such a view were very few, for such a message as this was at odds with New Testament ethics and the central message of Christian faith.

The second was to witness to the faith and to sacrifice oneself to oppose Japan and save the nation even if the price was death. This represents the theological thinking of the majority of Christians. "...unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (Jn. 12: 24). "I am the good Shepherd, the good Shepherd lays down his life for his sheep" (Jn. 10:11). "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). These biblical teachings encouraged Christians of the time who had been baptized in the fires of war to follow Jesus, to serve humanity, to be the light and salt of the times, even to the point of paying with their lives to safeguard peace and practice their faith.

Many of the authors quote the Beatitude which says "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 5: 10) for mutual encouragement. This biblical verse was never so real as it was then. Those who paid with their lives for a just liberation and for the nation were truly blessed. The price of discipleship, too, was never so real as it was in those times. The kingdom of heaven was no longer remote, and in the face of chaos and evil, Christians were willing to trade their lives for order and peace: "May your kingdom come!"

The third way was in seeing God acting in history. The movement to oppose fascism in this world was seen as God’s call to Christians. In an earlier paragraph we saw how Y.T. Wu was inspired by a passage in Luke. For a people who were in all the world oppressed to the utmost, this passage was a tremendous gospel, the good news of liberation and life. God stands with the people in their extreme suffering, God takes up the burden of our
suffering. Just as T.C. Chao says,

I believe God governs all in history. When humanity suffers, when the people are plunged in the abyss of misery, can we believe that God neither sees nor cares? I can directly and happily answer that God is even now suffering with humanity. God sees and cares.\(^1\)

When we consider Christian involvement in the anti-Japanese war and national salvation movements as part of the worldwide people’s liberation struggles, especially with the will of God there among them, this is an inspiring message. In basic Christian faith, it is commensurate with the will of God and its success is inevitable. Though the people suffer temporarily, they have the peace and courage that arise from faith.

2. Christianity’s Relationship to the Times: Meld and Transcend

All the contributors to this volume felt that Christianity and the times they lived in were inextricably entwined. The kind of thinking that says religious faith should hide itself high on mountaintops or deep in forests or found no response here. Xu Baoqian, for example:

Looking at the facts of history, the significance of religious faith may not be obvious in its own times. The ‘idle talk’ of the Jin, Wei and Six dynasties, the Mahayana Buddhism of India and the medieval monasteries of Europe, by and large, all hid themselves from reality and had no positive significance for their times. I have no use for such religious faiths as these.\(^1\)

In times like those, even the traditional Chinese moral cultivation of the individual self without regard for others had no place.
Engagement with the world—establishing goodness, universal love; love God and love your neighbor—was Christianity’s main tradition for two thousand years. Yet in China, especially among those at the grass roots, the “other-worldly” thinking of Christian faith was far more influential than “this-worldly” Christian claims. The bombs of war woke many who had been dreaming.

Before my Christian faith stressed personal salvation and ignored human society. Since the war, I have felt that if Christianity is simply a religion for individuals, then it’s too petty and low.\textsuperscript{16}

I believe that the Church today has a great mission, it must not only preach a personal faith, it must also take the responsibility to reform society. If the church distances itself from society and simply concentrates on its own growth, this will be the beginning of its defeat. Religion and life cannot be separated. If the church does not influence its environment then it loses its function as light and salt.\textsuperscript{17}

In the society of the time, which was suffering to the utmost, the hope to reform society through the Christian spirit was extremely powerful in the eyes of Christians concerned about their nation and their people. The “new China” of those days was not yet the “new China” that followed 1949, but simply the writers’ ideal of China, a vague hope and aspiration. But they embraced the Christian ideas of faith, hope and love and the determination to resist and were filled with hope for the future of their nation and people.

In addition to the side of Christianity that would meld with the times, it has a transcendent side. Xu Baoqian’s view is extremely representative. He felt that faith must be engaged with the times, but not necessarily be entirely at one with the spirit of the age. The transcendent side of faith meant that at times it would not
only be out of step with the times, but might oppose and challenge. There are clear examples of this: the critical spirit the Hebrew prophets adopted toward their own reality; Jesus’ opposition to ritualized religion; Christian opposition to the slave system, etc. And sometimes Christianity itself is tainted by the corruption of society—Xu Baoqian criticized European and American churches for becoming politicized; Wang Jihua criticized some churches in China at the time which had become mired in the secular world:

Many churches are no longer God’s churches, they are not churches which love the masses and serve them, they have become churches of Mamon, serving the wealthy … or before the cruel realities of life, have not the courage to conscientiously follow Jesus’ teachings, but deliberately join with evil.\(^{19}\)

The reason for the discontent of the masses with Christianity at the time, besides bias, was also rooted in these sorts of things. The spirit of the age need not necessarily be at odds with Christianity.

People’s self-rule, socialism, people’s self-determination, international cooperation and many other like principles, in their substance at the very least, are commensurate with basic Christian faith. Not only should Christianity not oppose them, but it should aid and strengthen and complete their task.\(^{20}\)

The revelation brought by the experience of the war of resistance is a case in point of the fusion of Christianity with the spirit of the times.

What is the spirit with which Christianity should fuse with Chinese society? From this book we can discover the following:

First, universal love and justice or righteousness. For it is only from universal love that the spirit of love of country and love of humankind emerge. Only the spirit of universal love can lead through
the narrow gate of self-centeredness. This is where the ancient Chinese philosophical ideal that one should not only favor one's own and the Christian spirit of "Love your neighbor as yourself" converge. The shift from "self-benefit" to "benefiting others," from "personal moral uplift" to fostering a healthy and responsible society of citizens. Victory in the war against Japan was a victory for the power of righteousness, the righteousness of God, a victory over the natural law that the strong devour the weak. History bears witness that whenever powerful forces of evil oppress people, we should not fear, for God always stands with the weak, the poor and the oppressed. The strength of a Christian faith that advocates impartial upholding of justice will become the light of the times.

Second, service and sacrifice. Ubiquitous post-war devastation and the work of rebuilding society required serving people and caring for their needs in a spirit of service. The Servant spirit was a virtue badly needed in Chinese society. Jesus said, "I came not to be served but to serve....." (Mk. 10:45). Not only does one need the intention to serve, but the spirit of laying down one's life in sacrifice. Sacrifice grows out of universal love and is diametrically opposed to profiting the self or to selfish individualism:

Today, Christians throughout the theater of war, whether at the front or at the rear are not terrified. They go about their work without thought of danger and the reason for this is that they are truly motivated by this spirit of sacrifice. And this kind of spirit is gained from their daily training. For a peaceful society, for a flourishing nation, this spirit is indispensable.²¹

Third, unity and union. Wherever they were during the war against Japan, at the front or at the rear, Christians brushed aside separation of family status, denomination, and theological disputes and truly achieved the heart of Jesus' teaching: "that they shall be one," becoming excellent witnesses in Chinese society to Chris-
tianity.

Looking at the nation’s experience over these last two years [1940s], suffering increased people’s patriotism and added to the good faith of unity and affection on all sides, promoting recognition of who is friend and who is enemy and moved their determination to attack aggression.\(^{22}\)

Chinese were also brushing aside the old ideas that “one sweeps the frost from his own door” and [that the Chinese nation was] “a sheet of loose of sand.” With every strength and with absolute sincerity, the people have been uniting, creating an unprecedented new scene of unity and patriotism. This was the most precious revelation the war experience brought to the Chinese people.

How shall Christians of today [2006], in this land once overwhelmed with disaster and now filled with opportunities, continue to witness to the Lord? How shall they continue to make their own contributions in building a harmonious society in a time of peaceful construction? Sixty years ago, T.C. Chao said,

God has already given us a long history and God will continue to lead us so as to enable us to bear a great mission for humankind. We are a people good at waging war; these two years [1940s] of the war of resistance against Japan are clear proof of this. But we greatly love peace, we are tolerant, adaptable, we are rational and we see things clearly. At the same time our history, our culture, our great country rich in natural resources, our thriving nation, all have the capacity to stabilize international relations. This strength is not armed might but the power of life.\(^{23}\)

The hopes of the previous generation should cause us to think deeply about who we are.

Having reflected on the tides of the times, not only was Chris-
tians’ faith in their faith, country and nation not shaken, but quite the opposite, it was strengthened. Their knowledge of the essence of Christian faith, tempered by fires of war as well as on society and human life, came from the hearts and precious reflections of all these writers and this is also an important contribution to Chinese Christian theology.


1. Y.T. Wu, Christianity and New China (Shanghai: YMCA Book Department, 1940).
2. Zhou Jishan, “Christianity and New China,” in Christianity and New China (Shanghai: YMCA Book Department, 1940), 4.
14. T.C. Chao, 166.
18. Xu Baoqian, 143.
20. Ibid.
22. T.C. Chao, 168.
23. Xu Baoqian, 169.
Toward an Ethical Reorientation of the Chinese Church: Christian Virtue Ethics
LIN MANHONG

Chinese society has experienced a moral crisis. Many social problems, such as corruption, producing and/or selling fake products and wage arrears for migrant workers, are evidence that Chinese society is in want of chengxin (honesty and credibility). There are many and complex reasons why some have abandoned chengxin, but one common cause is concern for temporary benefits or interests of the individual and their small communities coupled with total disregard for the interests of the larger society. Therefore, an effective way for the Protestant church in China to make contributions to the enhancement of social morality in society is to propose a Christian ethical response to the issue of the relationship between the individual, the community and the society. To do this, the church has to first prepare itself by renewing its ethical and theological perspectives and then fully participating in society. Christian virtue ethics, Chinese cultural resources and the insights of the early Chinese Protestant thinkers (mainly T. C. Chao and Y. T. Wu) will help the church prepare to respond to the ethical and moral needs of society. In this essay, I will focus on the role of Christian virtue ethics.

Some Ethical Issues among Chinese Christians

A brief introduction to the current ethics that many Chinese
Christians have embraced will be helpful in understanding the need to construct a Christian ethical theory by which the church may address socio-ethical concerns. Both theological and sociopolitical factors have impeded the Christian church and her members from actively participating in society or making helpful responses to the moral crisis in China. These are also the major factors that have caused the church to adopt her current ethic: an individually focused and otherworldly oriented one.

To better understand how theological factors have shaped the ethics of the Chinese church, it is necessary to briefly review the conservative theology that was popular in the 19th and 20th centuries and still lingers in the minds of many Chinese Christians.

This theology, possessing most of the characteristics of Protestant fundamentalism, highlighted the supernatural dimension of the gospel, personal salvation and the final authority of the Bible. It considered personal sin as the root of all social evils, and that “individual acknowledgement of sin, repentance, an emotional experience of rebirth, and a determination to lead a new life were essential to conversion.” This was a negative and otherworldly theology, oriented toward the end of the world and the Second Coming; therefore, evangelism was emphasized and social service and ecumenism were minimized. It also taught, according to historian Jessie G. Lutz,

a minimalist theology: God as the transcendent Creator and Ruler of the universe, Jesus Christ as the source of salvation for humankind through his sacrifice on the cross, and the Holy Spirit as the source of comfort and guidance.³

Perhaps it is due to their overemphasis on the gospel’s supernatural dimension that many Chinese Christians, especially those in the rural areas, do not have a clear understanding of the relationship between faith and works. Many of them deem that, because personal salvation lies in the grace of God rather than any human
work, faith weighs much more than works in the Christian life. Reinforced by the teachings of sin as the root of all social problems and evangelism as much more important than social service, faith for these Christians is simply understood as having a good personal relationship with God by constantly confessing sins and bringing people to Christ. They hold that converting people to Christianity will not only cover a multitude of their sins, but will also grant them great rewards in Heaven. With all these fundamentalist teachings in mind, moral activities for many Christians in China are easily limited to the individual dimension and closely related to seeking otherworldly rewards through personal evangelism.  

This political and social climate precluded Chinese Christians’ religious and public activity and also contributed to a Christian morality limited to an individual perspective. Though the government at different levels started to abandon its negative attitude toward religion after China’s reform and openness, even up to the early 1990s, there were still places where Christians were regarded as anti-socialist and not considered as part of the local community. In such a milieu, it is difficult to imagine that Christian participation in society could go beyond the individual Christian’s bearing witness in his/her own profession. Although the external environment has recently changed significantly in a positive direction, the church has, as yet, been unable to keep pace with these positive changes.

The fundamentalist theology brought by the Protestant missionaries in the 19th and 20th centuries was further elaborated and popularized by some well-known Chinese conservative evangelists from the 1920s to the 1940s. This theology remained unchallenged even after the churches in China reopened in the 1980s. Moreover, some of the followers of those conservative evangelists started Christian gatherings in the rural areas in the 1980s, and they have received both spiritual and financial support from conservative Christians overseas. However, the Western conservative Christian influence is not the only factor that has caused Christian
fundamentalism in China, especially in the rural areas. Chinese folk religious traditions have assisted many new believers and poorly educated Christians in the rural areas to be receptive to fundamentalist teachings.⁶

In fact, Christianity, for many rural Chinese Christians, is a combination of folk religions and fundamentalism, whether they have realized it or not. Some rural Christians take the final authority of the Bible so literally that they assume that the Bible has all the answers not only to their Christian life but also to the specifics of their daily lives.⁷ When they need to respond to a situation or make a certain moral decision, many Christians go to the Bible to find answers or to look for God’s will. Unfortunately, they may find answers that the authors of the Bible hardly intended. For instance, a rural church leader wrote a letter to Tian Feng, the national magazine of the Protestant church in China, sharing that he was quite puzzled about knowing God’s will when he had to make difficult decisions in life. Later, he read Acts 1:26 and started to follow the example of casting lots to discern God’s will. He wanted Tian Feng to comment on his method as well as to advise on further ways to know God’s will.⁸

A more shocking story was that some even thought that Christians would not be harmed by poisonous drugs, for the Bible says, “if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them (Mark 16: 18).”⁹ Many rural Christians, in fact, do not understand the meaning of the final authority of the Bible, and they simply treat the Bible as a powerful book. In some rural areas, Christians always carry the Bible with them, for they think that the Bible could be used as the amulet to keep them from harm during the days and protect them from nightmares.¹⁰ It could be argued that the influence of Christian fundamentalism and Chinese folk religious traditions as well as inadequate pastoral guidance and poor education have caused these rural Christians both to interpret the Bible literally and to reduce biblical teachings to rules or principles.
For many rural Christians, the problems go beyond interpreting the Bible literally or treating the Bible as only a rulebook. These "folk Christians" are not clear about their Christian identity. With the influence of folk religious traditions and the fundamentalist teaching of "a minimalist theology," many of them understand God or Jesus Christ to function as a Chinese deity, and as a source from which to seek healing for illness, safety in times of danger, and other supernatural help. For them, God is the omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient and severe ruler of the universe, rewarding the good and punishing the wicked. As a result, many tend to relate illness, misfortunes or disasters to God's punishment for hidden sins, and believe that going to church on Sundays, or having a seminary student in the family would win God's pleasure and bring health and well being to the whole family. They also understand Christian prayer as addressing a new deity, serving the same purpose of asking for divine blessings of "material security, health, family harmony, the well-being of deceased relatives and advice for the future."

In sum, a conservative theology marked by a fundamentalist character, the socio-political situation in former times, and the Chinese folk religious influence have converged to encourage Chinese Christians to adopt an individually focused and otherworldly oriented ethic, and have also blurred their understanding of the meaning of Christian identity. People's lack of clarity about Christian identity and individually focused ethics have not only hindered Chinese churches from bearing effective Christian witness in society, but will also discourage Chinese Christians from actively participating in society or making helpful responses to the moral needs of Chinese society. To enable Chinese Christianity to play a more constructive role in society, the Chinese Protestant church needs to build a relevant ethical theory and to help her members develop a fuller sense of Christian identity.
Christian Virtue Ethics: A Resource to Construct a Chinese Christian Ethical Theory

To construct a Christian ethical theory to address current issues, it is necessary to follow the methodology of doing theology by starting with the context, for Christian ethics as moral theology shares the nature of theology. Nevertheless, as theologian Douglas John Hall points out, Christian theologians, who focus their studies on issues of the present and near future, should also take seriously the church’s past. His reasoning is that

Christian theology is never simply a religious stream-of-consciousness on the part of the present-day Christians[,] it is always rooted in a rich tradition, a reference to consult whether the present reflection is pertinent.\(^{15}\)

Hall is not alone in this opinion. In fact, in constructing a contextual theology, one must never disregard the foundational role of the church’s rich tradition, in order to address particular issues. As contextual theologian Robert J. Schreiter writes,

any local theology that is truly Christian has to be engaged with the tradition. . . . Without that engagement, there is no guarantee of being part of the Christian heritage.\(^{16}\)

Chinese theologians are also aware of the importance of taking seriously the Christian heritage.

The Christian heritage is of value to us as long as we can accurately understand, absorb and use it, because it is the distillation of many generations of accumulated rich Christian spiritual experience and achievements in the search for truth.\(^{17}\)

Just as theology is an understanding of Christian faith, which has to take into account the faith experience both past and present, so too Christian ethics, a means of expressing Christian faith, has
to be understood within both the inherited Christian ethical tradition and that of a particular cultural context.

From the time of the early church, many ethical theories have been developed to guide Christians to live a moral life. Nonetheless, generally speaking, there are three overall approaches — goals, rules and virtues — that are applied to thinking about moral choices in Christian life. These approaches accord with the three dominant ways of thinking about morality in philosophical ethics: consequentialism, Kantian ethics and virtue ethics. Consequentialism is also known as teleological theory; which emphasizes good results as the basis for evaluating human actions, and views rules and virtues as means to help people reach their goals. Kantian ethics, belonging to deontological theory, focuses on ideals of universal law as the basis for morality and encourages people to both pursue goals within the limits set by rules and seek virtues that enable them to better follow those rules. Virtue ethics, which sometimes is called arêteological theory, views moral questions from the standpoint of the moral agent with virtuous character or motives, and suggests that the cultivation of virtuous people has priority over right goals and proper rules.

Each approach of Christian ethics based on its corresponding theory in philosophical ethics may have its own insights to offer to the church in China. A closer examination of Christian virtue ethics will help answer the question of why we shall consider this theory an effective approach to address the moral needs of the Chinese church.

An Overview of Christian Virtue Ethics

Christian virtue ethics is to be understood in relation to virtue ethics in general, because both theories are constituent parts of the ethical studies of the subject of virtue. To introduce virtue ethics, it is necessary to present the concept of virtue first, for as scholars indicate, in contemporary theology and philosophy, almost any
theory that mentions virtue or human dispositions can be called virtue ethics.\textsuperscript{21}

From the time of ancient Greece, scholars of different times and with different backgrounds have offered different understandings of the concept of virtue. Virtue ethicist Alasdair MacIntyre also admits that it seems that no single core conception of virtue has been handed down to us; even within the early Western writers on virtue, there were at least three very different understandings of virtue, which can be summarized as follows:

A virtue is a quality, which enables an individual to discharge his or her social role (Homer). A virtue is a quality, which enables an individual to move towards the achievement of the specifically human telos, whether natural or supernatural (Aristotle, the New Testament and Aquinas). A virtue is a quality, which has utility in achieving earthly and heavenly success (Franklin).\textsuperscript{22}

Despite the fact that different thinkers have provided different and incompatible lists of virtues, given a different order of importance to different virtues, and produced different and incompatible theories of virtue,\textsuperscript{23} there is still a common understanding of what virtue is basically about, of some widely recognized key virtues, and of a kind of virtue theory that could be applicable to modern moral life.

Virtues can be generally termed as those admirable dispositions, habits, qualities, or traits of persons or souls that emerge from an examination of their narratives, that shape their moral lives, and assist them to reach their human telos.\textsuperscript{24} In other words, virtues, as the admirable characteristics of persons, are not to be understood as abstract principles, but through the narratives of virtuous people living moral lives. People learn virtues not by observing rules, but by following examples through practice. In fact, virtue is first learned through practice, and becomes a pattern of
behavior, a habit, that enables a person to constantly act virtuously and leads him/her to genuine human fulfillment.

There are numerous ways to categorize the various types of virtues, such as natural and supernatural virtues, acquired and infused virtues, intellectual, moral or theological virtues. There are also too many virtues to be listed comprehensively. Nevertheless, the four cardinal virtues — temperance, fortitude, prudence and justice — have long been recognized in the West as key virtues for people to cultivate; for Christians, three theological virtues — faith, hope and love — must also be added to the list. Hence, it is worth examining them briefly.

According to ethicists, the four cardinal virtues were identified by both Christian and classical writers as of special importance, because they are like hinges on which our moral life turns, and they help us develop other virtues important to us. The theological virtues are indispensable for Christians, for they will stabilize other virtues we have acquired. Robin W. Lovin defines temperance as a virtue that involves knowing what one's physical and mental health requires and regulating one's pursuit of one's goals so that everything one does contributes to one's long-term well-being. Fortitude, called the virtue of courage, is the habit that shapes one's choice to act courageously for a good purpose. Following Aquinas, James F. Keenan offers a concise definition for prudence, asserting that prudence is a virtue that guides the agent to live a self-directed life that seeks integration. Many modern philosophers still adopt the classical definition of justice, which is to regulate a person in relation with others, to dispose a person to respect the rights of others, and to give each person his/her due.

It is difficult to find any concise definitions for the three theological virtues because each of them, being a major doctrinal theme in Christianity, carries rich and profound theological and moral meanings, which have been elaborated in depth by many theologians and ethicists in voluminous works. Since the focus of this
section is not on the examination of any particular virtue, but on providing a sense of virtues by sampling a few widely recognized ones, I will simply draw from the classical definitions of the theological virtues.

Faith is a virtue that enables the will, perfected by a supernatural light, to assent firmly to the supernatural truths of Revelation on the sole ground of the infallible authority of God. . . . Hope is a virtue, by which one trusts, with an unshaken confidence grounded on the Divine assistance, to attain life everlasting. . . . Love is the virtue that enables one to love God and one’s neighbor due to God’s own intrinsic goodness or amiability.28

With a basic concept of virtue and a view of some particular virtues, we are able to move on to the introduction of one virtue theory. Just as virtues are diversely defined and categorized, so too there are numerous theories on virtues. I will present a teleological virtue ethic based on a neo-Aristotelian framework. It is teleological because it emphasizes the notion of human telos; it is neo-Aristotelian because while utilizing Aristotle’s understanding of virtue, it neither restricts itself to Aristotle’s list of virtues nor follows his attitudes towards slaves and women.29 I will later argue that this approach to virtue ethics, especially with its central theme of virtue cultivation in relation to the human telos, meets the moral needs of the church in China.

According to MacIntyre, this approach to virtue ethics emphasizes the human telos and “within its teleological scheme, there is a fundamental contrast between man-as-he-happens-to-be and man-as-he-should-be-if-he-realized-his-essential-nature.” For MacIntyre, ethics functions to enable men and women to understand how to “make the transition from the former state to the latter,” so as to reach “the essence of man,” which is “the human telos.”30 Joseph J. Kotva follows MacIntyre and further explains
that virtue ethics has a tripartite structure: (a) human-nature-as-it-exists; (b) human-nature-as-it-could-be; and (c) the transition from point (a) to point (b). Virtues assist people in making the transition from who they are to who they could be. In other words, virtues help people achieve their human telos; thus, the process of cultivating virtues is also the process for reaching the human telos. Because of the important role of virtues in this virtue theory, it is necessary to explore the steps of virtue development.

As mentioned earlier, virtues are acquired first through practice. In his account of virtue, Aristotle states:

The virtues we get by first exercising them. . . . For the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them, e.g. men become builders by building and lyre-players by playing the lyre; so too we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts.

Moreover, the cultivation of virtues requires not only actions, but also repeated actions, so that virtues become the habits of a person. One or a few virtuous actions will not lead to the formation of admirable habits or the acquisition of virtues. Virtues are the outcomes of the many repeated good actions, just as vices are the consequences of repeated harmful actions.

According to our definition, virtues are also dispositions, qualities or traits that involve a person’s attitude, affections and belief, and from these acquired virtues, actions flow. Therefore, the acquisition of virtues not only necessitates habits of good actions, but also entails sustained commitment to be a certain kind of person. For instance, as Aristotle indicates,

actions, then, are called just and temperate when they are such as the just or the temperate man would do; but it is not the man who does these that is just and temperate, but the man who also does them as just and temperate men do
them.”

In other words, those who do just or temperate acts are not necessarily people possessing the virtue of justice or temperance. Only those who do the acts of temperance or justice and also commit themselves to be temperate and just can be called just or temperate persons.

It could be argued that it is the unremitting practice of individuals and the inspiration of those who are virtuous that help individuals become virtuous. Thus, the cultivation of virtues also requires communal relations and activities. In her discussion of Aristotle’s virtue theory, Professor Marcia Homiak points out that the full realization of human rational powers required by virtues is not something that individuals can achieve on their own. It also demands a community or a group of friends who share the same interests and aims, and who can provoke each individual to think more and to achieve a greater understanding of what he/she observes. Besides this kind of friendship, the full development of human rational powers also requires a wider social relationship, for humans are by nature political beings, whose capacities are fully realized in a polis. In other words, the cultivation of virtue largely depends on human relationships and corporate activities, for the practice of virtues and striving to be a virtuous person need to be carried out within the company and with the support of both one’s immediate community and the larger civic community.

Endeavoring to be a virtuous person is, in fact, striving to achieve the human telos. Based on the understanding of virtue theory regarding the human telos, virtues are not only a means leading a person to the fulfillment of the human telos but also the components of the human good; for instance, virtues, such as justice or love, are not external, but internal, to the human good. Hence, the cultivation of virtues can also be understood in relation to the human telos.

Although there is no scholarly consensus on the specific con-
tent or quality of the human good or the human telos, according to Kotva, there is still a basic agreement among scholars on the following three essential points about the human telos:

1) The human good consists largely of activities enabled by and consistent with the virtues; 2) the virtues are both means to and constituent elements of the human telos; and 3) the telos includes both individual and social dimensions.36

The notion of human telos parallels the understanding of virtue cultivation. Similarly, the development of virtues can also be understood in terms of the formation of moral character, because virtues are also called “the states of character” that make people act excellently.37

The English word “character” is derived from the Greek charaktēr, which was originally used to denote a mark impressed upon a coin. Later and more generally, character came to mean a distinctive mark by which one thing was distinguished from another, and then primarily to mean the assemblage of qualities that distinguish one individual from another.38 Likewise, moral character — the dispositions, habits, qualities and traits -- serves to distinguish one person from another and to identify who the very person is. Moral character, as defined by ethicists, refers to

the moral identity of persons, an identity found in the depths of their being, an identity which is both unique and self-chosen,” and which “holds persons together as coherent and integral beings.39

To say it differently, the formation of moral character that enables a person to live a coherent and integral life is also the course of the cultivation of virtues that leads a person to reach the human telos. This is why virtue ethics, emphasizing the cultivation of virtues, is also understood as an ethic focusing on the formation of moral character.
Virtue ethics, as an agent-centered ethical theory, according to virtue scholar Rosalind Hursthouse, does not totally exclude the standpoints held by deontology and consequentialism. As Hursthouse points out, virtue theory is agent-focused rather than rule-based or consequence-based because it introduces the concepts of the virtuous agent in the first premise of its account of right action, where utilitarianism and deontology introduce the concepts of consequences and moral rule respectively.\textsuperscript{40}

As a matter of fact, virtue ethics highly regards the importance of doing, for, as mentioned earlier, the cultivation of virtues, which leads to the fulfillment of one’s human telos, requires wide engagement in individual actions as well as many communal activities. Rules also have their role in virtue ethics, because they can serve as guidelines and references for an individual’s actions and the community’s policy.\textsuperscript{41} Like consequentialism, virtue ethics emphasizes the end, which is human excellence, but the end sought and the means for achieving that end differ. In consequentialism, any action is justifiable if it results in the right end; in virtue ethics, some actions must be prohibited as absolutely incompatible with the pursuit of the virtuous life and virtuous relationships.\textsuperscript{42}

This brief introduction to neo-Aristotelian teleological virtue theory seems to be more a virtue ethic in general than a Christian virtue ethic. If ethics is identified with rational reflection upon philosophical, scientific, and experiential sources, then, to shift to Christian ethics, as James Gustafson suggests, it is "nothing more than reflection that additionally takes Christian sources into account."\textsuperscript{343} Hence, if, within a framework of virtue ethics, we take into account Christian practice, Christian narratives, and Christian questions, such as what kind of people Christians should be or toward
what end or telos should Christians strive, we can formulate a Christian virtue ethic. Simply put, to make a virtue ethic Christian, "it must be filled with Christian content."44

It is beyond the scope of this discussion to construct a Christian virtue ethic; therefore, I will not follow scholars in arguing in detail how virtue theory can be an approach relevant to telling the biblical narratives and helpful in expressing the basic Christian journey founded in Scripture.45 What I want to explore is how to construct an ethical theory (not a Chinese Christian virtue ethic), which draws from the insights of Christian virtue theory and other Chinese resources to effectively address the moral issues with which the church in China has to deal. To be specific, the theory that is under construction should be helpful for Christians in China to bear witness in society in addressing the relationship between the individual, community and society. In order to do that, Chinese Christians should first have both a clear Christian identity and a proper understanding of the relationship between the individual, church and society.

Relevance of Christian Virtue Ethics to Chinese Christians

Just as virtues share a wide range of concerns and virtue ethics covers a large scope of theories, so too many themes appear in any particular virtue theory. To discuss the relevance of virtue theory to Chinese Christians, I will mainly concentrate on the theme of virtue cultivation or moral character formation because of its particular ability to address the ethical issues of the church in China as well as its central role in the virtue theory presented earlier.

With the earlier introduction to the formation of moral character, we understand that it is similar to the cultivation of virtues, which requires both individual and corporate moral activities and the striving to be a certain kind of person in order to reach the human telos. Moral character is also understood as the moral identity of a person because identity refers to the conscious dimension of
character and the deliberate core of personal experience shaped by a person’s most basic commitments and convictions. It is the basic sense of who we are, and so it is also molded in our relationships to others in the community. Hence, the formation of moral character can be comprehended as the formation of moral identity. Putting this concept into the framework of Christian virtue ethics, the formation of the moral identity of Christians can be understood as the formation of Christian identity.

What then is Christian identity? How can Christians form their Christian identity? According to H. Richard Niebuhr, to be a Christian is to follow Jesus Christ, to have the incarnated Christ influence and modify one’s person, life and destiny, and to identify oneself with the cause of Jesus Christ, which is to bring reconciliation between God and humans, among humans, and between humans and their world. William C. Spohn agrees that Christian identity comes from identifying with the person, cause and community of Jesus Christ. Spohn further explains that to identify with the person of Jesus Christ is to commit ourselves to the Lord, as Paul instructs, “we do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s” (Rom. 14:7-8). While presenting a similar understanding as Niebuhr’s of the cause of Jesus Christ, Spohn regards the community of Jesus Christ as the people Jesus calls to be disciples who are both loyal to the Master and to his cause.

Relating these understandings of Christian identity to the theory of moral character formation found in virtue ethics, the formation of Christian identity requires engagement in both individual and communal Christian practices, and the commitment to being a certain kind of person who follows Jesus Christ, remains loyal to his cause, and, together with all of God’s people, strives for Christian telos. Just as the formation of moral character requires repetitive moral actions, so the formation of Christian identity requires recur-
ring Christian spiritual practices. I will consider two Christian spiritual practices with which Chinese Christians are familiar — prayer and the Lord’s Supper — to explore how these practices can help form their Christian identity and transform their theological and ethical perspectives.

Prayer is one of the first spiritual practices introduced to Chinese Christians when Protestant Christianity arrived in China two centuries ago and has been highlighted and often preached about in the Chinese church. However, many questions about prayer are still raised by Christians all over the country. The editorial department of the national church magazine *Tian Feng* often receives letters inquiring about prayer. The commonly asked questions are: “Why do we need to pray?” “How often shall we pray?” “How shall we pray properly?” “What kind of prayer will God listen to?” “Why is my prayer not answered?” “Is it appropriate to ask God to do specific things for us?”

Some of these questions are also discussed among many seminary students in China with whom I am acquainted. Based upon the questions asked, many Chinese Christians do not seem to have enough knowledge about the meaning of prayer, much less about the role of prayer in the formation of Christian identity. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, with the Chinese folk religious influence in rural areas, many rural Christians do not at all fully know the meaning of prayer. Thus, it is necessary and relevant to select this Christian practice for further discussion.

To be a Christian is to be Christ-like by the imitation of Jesus Christ. To pray, then, Christians should first learn to follow the Prayer that Jesus taught us. Needless to mention, the Prayer that Jesus taught us has a significant role in the Christian church; as the reformer argued, “the Lord’s Prayer and the Ten Commandments teach more than all the councils teach.”

Truthfully, the Lord’s Prayer will teach Chinese Christians not only how to pray but also how to form their Christian identity.

As Christian scholars point out, as soon as we start this
prayer, we enter into an intimate relationship with God, brought by Jesus. The reasons that we can have the confidence to pray to God, Jesus’ “Father,” as “our Father” are because we are invited to experience God as father by following Jesus’ example, and in Jesus’ name the good news of being God’s children is offered to us.\(^{51}\) In other words, as soon as we pray the Lord’s Prayer, our Christian identity is disclosed because, by addressing God as “our Father”, we know who we are in relationship to God as well as who God is in relationship to us.

Here it is worth mentioning that to address God as Father does not mean to pray to God as “Male,” but to project God as a loving parent who cares and can be trusted to listen.\(^{52}\) This understanding of God echoes Bishop K. H. Ting, who has made great efforts to correct Chinese Christians’ distorted views of God.\(^{53}\) For Ting, God’s image is best understood as the one who secures us with reins of affection, leads us with bonds of love, lifts us as children to parents, and bends down to feed us (Cf. Hosea 11:4).\(^{54}\)

Douglas John Hall argues that the first person plural maintained throughout the Prayer has significant meaning over against individualism and spiritual egoism, as Luther explained,

The Lord’s Prayer binds the people together, and knits them one to another, so that one prays for another, and together with one another; and it is so strong and powerful that it drives away even the fear of death.\(^{55}\)

In other words, prayer not only leads Christians to a close relationship to God, but also strengthens the fellowship among Christians themselves and broadens their relationship with a wider community. Chinese theologian Y. T. Wu (Wu Yaozong) also sees both personal and social dimensions to prayer.\(^{56}\) Wu writes, if we only pray for our own needs without thinking about the needs of others, we do not pray properly. For Wu, self-centered prayers and selfish petitions will not draw people close to God; Christians have to
pray for themselves in relation to their family, friends, society, homeland, and the whole world. Wu’s understanding of prayer resonates with Hall’s argument that the public dimension of prayer also embraces the “communion with those who do not yet pray, perhaps, but for whom Jesus Christ prays, since he prays for human-kind as a whole.”

The Lord’s Prayer will also help Chinese Christians better understand petitionary prayer about which they frequently raise questions. William Spohn writes that intercessory prayer, asking God to do specific things for specific people, is a worthwhile activity. God knows our needs, but still wants us to ask; God desires to give, but desires us to ask first. Spohn continues, if we do not get answers, we should change our attitude in prayer by placing our needs in God’s care and relinquishing our specific desires in favor of a more radical trust that God knows and cares. Above all, we should first seek the very gifts that God desires most to give us: the justice of the reign of God and the Holy Spirit.

Spohn certainly is not alone in such an opinion about prayer. Joining Y. T. Wu’s understanding of prayer, K. H. Ting writes that the Lord’s Prayer is in harmony with the Jesus’ own prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. Ting argues that prayer is not to make God do what we want, but to readjust our relationship with God, by abandoning our own selfishness and seeking harmony with God’s truth. “In this way, we consecrate to God the potentiality within our own being so that . . . we may be made partakers in God’s work of creation, redemption and sanctification.”

Like the Lord’s Prayer, the Lord’s Supper also helps shape Christian identity through the relational identification with Jesus Christ and God’s people. The Lord’s Supper and baptism are the two sacraments that the post-denominational Protestant church in China has preserved and regularly practiced, and the various layers of meaning and implication of these sacraments are frequently preached among the congregations. Nevertheless, one important
implication of the Lord’s Supper is often missing in the church teaching: solidarity with people in the larger community.

According to the World Council of Churches, the Eucharist includes several aspects of meaning: “thanksgiving to the Father, memorial of Christ, invocation of the Spirit, communion of the faithful, [and] meal of the Kingdom.” The aspect of “communion of the faithful” includes the “responsible care of Christians for one another and the world,” which is a manifestation of “Christ’s own testimony as a servant, in whose servanthood Christians themselves participate.” In other words, taking the Lord’s Supper should both remind Christians of Christ’s love as manifested in his service in the world and laying down his life for humanity and strengthen their faith in following Christ’s example to have solidarity with people within and without the church.

Nevertheless, many Christians, including Chinese Christians, have often neglected the important component of service to and solidarity with those outside the church. As theologian Monika K. Hellwig points out, in most Christian churches today, “the eucharistic celebration looks undeniably ‘churchy,’ separate, ethereal, and remote from everyday life.” Such a tendency suggests that the Lord’s Supper has no relevance to the social affairs of the larger society. The Lord’s Supper, in fact, embraces all aspects of life. It “demands reconciliation and sharing among all those regarded as brothers and sisters in the one family of God and is a constant challenge in the search for appropriate relationships in social, economic and political life.”

Spohn argues that the solidarity enacted in the Lord’s Supper entails the Christian’s willing identification with Jesus by identifying with the kind of gift Jesus is giving and with what he asks during the table fellowship. The gift that Jesus gives is his whole self as bread for the life of the world, and what he asks at the table is that his disciples “take and eat.” The disciples share his life by receiving the blessed bread and enter into a new covenant with
him by drinking from the cup; from then on, they are committed to strive to offer themselves, to become bread for the life of the world, and to pour out their own lives in reconciling service. Spohn points out that those who wish to be disciples must be drawn into this mission in order to share in God’s family with Jesus.  

Truthfully, the Christian mission to the world—a place “hungry with many hungers”—according to Hellwig, is

to enter into their need and find ways to satisfy their hunger, and to challenge the structures of the world that keep some peoples and some populations hungry…

In order to do so, Christians need to actively engage in the world in which they live. While following Christ’s example of having solidarity with the masses and bringing justice to society, we also form our own Christian identity, because this is the very way for us to identify with Jesus and his cause. Engagement in society is also an indispensable factor for the formation of Christian identity because it shapes our character by challenging us to extend our vision to include new perspectives and new people.

The above brief examination of the Lord’s Prayer and the Lord’s Supper gives a sense of how these two Christian practices can help form Christian identity. They are certainly not the only practices that help form Christian identity; other major Chinese Protestant church practices, such as worship and baptism, can also help with the cultivation of Christian moral character. According to Christian virtue ethics, all Christian practices help shape the Christian identity. Christian practices are called “practices” because they are never one-time activities for Christians and must be “practiced” on a regular basis. Just as repeated virtuous actions are required in the cultivation of virtues, so too recurring spiritual practices are needed in the formation of Christian moral character. As mentioned earlier, the cultivation of virtues involves both individual and corporate activities; similarly, these practices cannot be per-
formed only at the individual level. They are always carried out within community. Although Christian practices are done within Christian communities, their repercussions should go beyond the church to society. Just as the larger civic community impacts the cultivation of virtues and the striving to be a virtuous person, for Christians, in challenging society by having solidarity with the poor, the hungry, and the marginalized, the resources of society will also enrich the Christian moral character.

It is worth mentioning that the Christian virtue theory of character formation will not only help the formation of Christian identity for the individual Christian but also will help form the identities of Christian communities. The process of the formation of community moral character should be similar to that of the cultivation of individual moral character because a community can be seen as an individual entity within a larger society or community. For instance, the Protestant church in China is a single social community in Chinese society as well as a member of the Body of Christ, the universal church. Character formation for the Christian community, therefore, also requires repeated communal practices (such as liturgical, sacramental and spiritual practices), and the striving to be the kind of people Christians should be by actively participating in the common activities with similar interest groups and in the wider community. All of these are for the fulfillment of the church’s telos, which is to “witness to God’s truth in the world.”

Christian communal moral formation, according to Lewis Mudge, can be understood in two senses:

1) while the ecclesial life of the church shapes the Christian identity of individual members of the church, individual Christians foster the moral formation of the church, especially of its future, the next generation of the church; 2) while being a setting for moral formation in communities that embody the celebration of tradition and the life of the Spirit, the church has to continue to engage with the world and recognize that
the Spirit is at work both within and beyond the church.\textsuperscript{67}

In other words, both the individual Christian’s active participation in the church and participation in society by the church as a whole will be conducive to the formation of Christian communal character.

Furthermore, the church’s participation in society ought not be thought of only in order to help form its unique character, consistent with Christian virtue theory; more importantly, the church is called to do so in order to follow the example of Jesus Christ. It is true that, as has been prevalent in the minds of many Chinese Christians, the prior concern of the church goes to the spiritual food and the souls of people, but Jesus’ example of laying down his life for the salvation of many and his serving the people are not in contradiction. On the contrary, they are twin expressions of Christ’s faithfulness. As Stanley Hauerwas asserts, the church needs to interact with the world through the practice of Christian virtues within its own life. These virtues include accepting and loving the stranger, showing compassion for the weak, speaking the truth in love, testifying to the reality, power and grace of God, and living out of God’s resources and not their own.\textsuperscript{68} Chinese Christians should also come to know that although society is secular and not gospel-oriented, its resources certainly enrich our Christian identity, for the work of the Spirit is not limited to work within the church. Society is also a place that God’s work is manifest.

The formation of Christian moral character is complex, venturing further than the scope of this discussion; nevertheless, from what has been discussed, it could be argued that the theory of moral character formation in Christian virtue ethics will help Chinese Christians to shift from who they are to what they ought to be with the help of Christian spiritual practices. Then, knowing that they are God’s children and Jesus’ followers, and in identifying with the person, the cause and the community of Jesus, they will present a clearer Christian identity to the public. Thus their theo-
logical and ethical perspectives will also be renewed. Their understanding of Christianity will go beyond the "minimalist theology" taught by fundamentalism, and they will also discard the folk religious influence of treating God or Jesus Christ as simply a deity that rewards the good and punishes the wicked, or merely as a source for granting supernatural help.

Knowing who they ought to be, i.e. the kind of people Christians should be, through a proper understanding of their relationship to the Divine, the church and society will also help Chinese Christians embrace a communally focused and this-life oriented ethic rather than an individually focused and otherworldly oriented one. This is not only because Christian identity should be formed both within and beyond the church, but also because Christ has shown the example of serving people and laying down his life for the salvation of many. With these understandings in mind, Chinese Christians will no longer consider personal salvation as the only purpose of being Christian; they will also understand serving people as an important way of following Jesus Christ. They will realize that faith does not simply mean to concentrate on a personal relationship with God, but should be manifested through works of loving and caring for the needy. In a word, evangelism and social service, and the concern for this life and for the afterlife should all be considered as means of leading to the Christian telos.

Christian virtue theory, focusing on character formation, will also help the church understand that in order to form a Christian communal character, the church; as a whole should actively participate in society. In following and witnessing to Jesus Christ through engaging with the world, the church, with its unique Christian character, will exert more positive influence on both her members and society. In return, the church will be enriched by individual Christians and by society as well. Thus, in the process of forming the character of the Christian community, the fellowship of Christians is strengthened, and the mission of the church is extended forward.
As an agent-centered, rather than action-oriented or goal-oriented ethical theory, Christian virtue ethics will guide Christians to read the Bible more for insight about what kind of people they are to be than for insight of what they are to do (or not to do).\textsuperscript{69} In this way, Chinese Christians, with a clear Christian identity, will still highlight the authority of the Bible, but they will know that biblical teachings should not be reduced to rules or principles. The Bible should not be interpreted literally, let alone be used as an amulet, for what is powerful is the Spirit behind the words.

In sum, Christian virtue ethics, with an emphasis on character formation, will not only help Chinese Christians transform some ethical and theological perspectives influenced by fundamentalism and folk religious traditions, but also help them form their Christian identity and further have a proper understanding of the relationship between the individual, church and society. Such a renewal does not suffice for, but will inevitably contribute to an effective Christian response to the moral needs in society.

1. The following summary of the conservative theology, other than additionally indicated, is based on Kevin Xiyi Yao, \textit{The Fundamentalist Movement among Protestant Missionaries in China, 1920-1937} (Lanham: University Press of America, Inc., 2003), 281-282.


3. Ibid.

4. The Chinese Protestant church is quite aware of these problems. In fact, these issues have been widely discussed in reflections on theological reconstruction. One of the major tasks of theological reconstruction is a critique and subsequent lessening of the Christian fundamentalist influence in the church that hinders Christians in keeping pace with the times. See Ji Jianhong, "Shenxue sixiang jianshe de biran jiqi tujing (The Necessity and Methods of the Theological Reconstruction)," \textit{Nanjing Theological
These common problems in rural churches were also mentioned in Yao Zhiyi, "Hebei nongcun jiaohui shenxue sixiang jianshe (Theological Reconstruction in the Rural Churches of Hebei Province)," *Tian Feng* 11 (2001): 20-21.

5. See "Ying tingzhi zheyang de qishi (Such Prejudice Ought to Stop)," *Tian Feng* 6 (1991): 19-20. This is a letter from a rural Christian to *Tian Feng* reporting that Christians were looked down upon at various places in the county where he lived, and were excluded from many local activities.


7. In *Tian Feng*’s Q&A column, a person shared that he/she thought that the Bible would help him/her solve all problems, but it did not turn out this way. Hence, this person asked for better ways of reading the Bible. See "Dujing shifou you fangfa? (Are There Ways of Reading the Bible?)" *Tian Feng* 12 (1997): 32-33.

8. See "Neng yong yaoqian kanduan shen de zhiyi ma? (Can Casting Lots Be a Way to Discern God’s Will?)," *Tian Feng* 5 (1999): 43-44. It is worth mentioning that *Tian Feng*’s response did not recommend discerning God’s will by casting lots, but it taught the person how to categorize God’s will as found written in the Bible according to rules. It said that God’s will could be categorized as "general rules (zongze)" and "detailed rules (xize)."


10. See Xie Shenglian, "Xiaochu mixinhua, jiduanhua de xinyang, quebap zhongguo jiaohui jiankang de fazhan (Reducing the Superstitious and Extreme Character in Faith to Ensure a Healthy Development of the Chinese Church)," *Tian Feng* 10 (2002): 36-37. At a symposium held by the Protestant church in China at the American Bible Society during the Exhibition of the Chinese Bible Ministries in June 2006, I heard Rev. Gao Feng of Shandong Province share similar stories. In his province, some rural Christians still place the Bible on their stomach or forehead to cure stomach-ache or a headache.

11. Zhuo Xinping has observed that there are mainly three kinds of Christians in contemporary Chinese churches: 1) folk Christians, 2) church Christians and 3) elite Christians. “Folk Christians” are those in the rural areas who constitute the majority of the church. Zhuo asserts that due to the Chinese folk religious influence, their Christian identity is not at all clear. See Zhuo Xinping, “Discussion on ‘Culture Christians’ in China,” 285.


20. Ethics is understood as any scientific treatment of the moral order that can be divided into theological, or Christian, ethics (moral theology) and philosophical ethics (moral philosophy.) See http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05556a.htm.


23. Ibid., 181.


28. Ibid.


38. See Homiak, "Moral Character."


41. Martha Nussbaum claims that rules are guidelines in moral development, "for people not yet possessed of practical wisdom and insight need to follow rules that summarize the wise judgments of others." Even for virtuous adults, "rules are necessities because we are not always good judges," therefore, "it is better to follow a good summary of rule than to make a hasty and inadequate concrete choice." See Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 304. Rules also help with the formation of communities, see Lovin, *Christian Ethics*, 56-57.


46. See John W. Crossin, What Are They Saying about Virtue? (New York: Pauist Press, 1985), 45; Spohn, Go and Do Likewise: Jesus and Ethics, 24. British moral philosopher, Alan Montefiore, considers Charles Taylor’s account of identity as the clearest one: “To know who I am is a species of knowing where I stand. My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose.” See Charles Taylor, Sources of the Self (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 27; quoted in Alan Montefiore, “Personal Identity and Family Commitment’’ in The Moral Circle and the Self: Chinese and Western Approaches, ed. Kim-chong Chong, Sor-hoon Tan and C. L. Ten (Chicago: Open Court, 2003), 144.


49. These questions can be found in the Q & A column or even in sermons or reflections in issues of Tian Feng almost every year especially since the 1990s when a great influx of Christians joined the church. I will just list a few examples. Shi Boxiong, “Jidutu dang zhenyang daogao (How Should Christians Pray),” “You zheyang de daogao ma? (Is It Normal to Pray in This Way?)” Tian Feng 8 (1991): 9-10, 26; “Shengkou bing le ke fou wei ta daogao? (Can We Pray for the Animal when It Was Sick?)” Tian Feng 10 (1997): 38; “Weishenme fan qian yao daogao? (Why Do We Need to Say


53. This is also one of the tasks of the Theological Reconstruction, which is to enable Chinese Christians to have a proper understanding of God. See Wang Aiming, “Lijie zhongguo jiaohui shenxue sixiang jianshe shigong (Understanding the Ministry of Theological Reconstruction of the Chinese Church),” Jinlin Shenxue Zhi (Nanjing Theological Review) 51 (2002/2): 10-11.


56. Y. T. Wu’s thought will be further discussed in my dissertation, “Toward a Chinese Christian Ethic: Individual, Community and Society.”

57. Y. T. Wu, Jidujiao jianghua (Talks on Christianity) (Shanghai: Qingnian Xiehui Shuju, 1950), 12; Meiyou ren kanjian guo shangdi (No Man Has Seen God) (Shanghai: Qingnian Xiehui Shuju, 1950), 72.


59. Spohn, Go and Do Likewise: Jesus and Ethics, 115-117.


64. Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise: Jesus and Ethics*, 180-182.


68. This is a key argument of Stanley Hauerwas throughout his writings. See Frank G Kirkpatrick, *The Ethics of Community* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2001), 108.

Beyond What She Said: 
On the Syrophoenician Woman

ZHANG JING

There are two major elements that have influenced Chinese Christians’ interpretation and understanding of the story of the Syrophoenician woman, namely, the traditional Chinese understanding of women’s social position and function and the individual piety that exists in Christianity and has had a long history in Chinese popular religions like Buddhism and Taoism. In what follows, I will analyze these two elements and their influence on how the contemporary Chinese church has read this story. I will also look at how some postcolonial critics have read this story because like other Asian and African countries, historically the spread and growth of Christianity was closely related with colonialism and imperialism, and post-colonial criticism offers new interpretations of the story of the Syrophoenician woman from the colonized contexts. Finally, I will focus on the power and manner of this woman’s reply which embodies an important universal cultural element, arguing that the woman’s cleverness, namely métis, a gift from her own culture, plays an important role in her dialogue with Jesus.

I wish to argue that it is important for Chinese women to name and recognize the same power in our own culture, namely jizhi (quick-witted, resourceful), and its important role in our dialogue with Christianity, a religion that comes from another culture. I would propose that women in Chinese churches need to grasp
the power in their culture and in themselves so that they can “speak out” in their interaction with Christian faith and “speak for” women in China. Only in this way can Christian faith work as a tool for women’s liberation and present another possible reality for women with other faith traditions. We must first of all make clear who are we talking back to, Chinese history or Christianity from the west? Or both?

**Chinese Tradition and Chinese Women**

Chinese women have lived in an androcentric, patriarchal and hierarchical culture for more than two thousand years. In 11 BC when the *Books of Rites* was written, the concept of the “Three Obediences (obedient to father, husband and son)”¹ was recorded in the book as the important rite for woman. Around 100 CE, Ban Zhao (ca. 45-114/116)² put forward “Four Virtues (womanly virtues in *Nü Jie (Lessons for Woman)*). From then on, the phrase, “Three Obediences and Four Virtues,” became the popular formulation of basic social requirements for women. Ban Zhao, a pious female Confucius follower, consciously played the role of system sustainer, talking from a woman’s angle and setting up a perfect model for women in Chinese androcentric society. Her book was welcomed by men and used to educate women ever after.³ She placed emphasis on the cultivation, preservation, and exercise of womanly qualities, notably humility, resignation, subservience, self-abasement, and self-abnegation, advocating an unconditional obedience. Her most influential saying in this book affirms woman’s humility and weakness, which means that they need to depend on their fathers, husbands and sons. Because of this dependence, they are in an inferior and secondary position in the family and they must serve their husband like serving Heaven (God in Chinese ideology). Ironically, though Ban Zhao served as imperial historian to the court and later as the advisor to Empress Deng, as a woman she had no political power.⁴ So it is today. Economically, the do-
mestic work women undertake has no value in men's minds. Socially, women are inferior to men and elders. Because of Ban Zhao's impact, further moral handbooks written in various dynasties and employed in the curriculum of women's education have continued to present woman as inferiors. Patriarchy is well sustained by Confucianism and Taoism in Chinese ancient history. Before 1911, chastity, foot-binding and polygamy were like three huge mountains on the back of Chinese women.

At the same time, patriarchy and dualist ideas worked together with all kinds of power in Chinese tradition, and people are treated as distinctively different from one another in social status. Hierarchical binary oppositions like heaven/earth, man/woman, mind/body, pure/sinful, honor/shame, strong/weak, good/evil, are rooted in our minds: the former is always superior to the latter. Women are repeatedly told what the accepted social standards are: man is the head of the family; women are weaker and inferior to men; because of their natural disadvantage, women are not able to be independent and thus they need the protection of men; women need to take care of the domestic work, which is definitely inferior to their husbands' public work; women need to be obedient to their husbands because he is higher in status than she is; women need to be good mothers and able to take care of the children and herself; women are supposed to be voiceless and passive until they are requested to speak out; men cannot be controlled by women, and only foolish and unsuccessful men listen to their wives.

Women's situation in China changed greatly after 1911. The writings of early Christian women, for example, challenged those Christian teachings that circumscribed the power and role of women in the church and society. Zhang Zhujun, denounced Paul's teaching that women should not preach in Church; Cheng Guanyi, promoted the ordination of women, and she questioned the legitimacy of applying biblical teachings unconditionally within another cultural context. Today, polygamy and foot-binding have been elimi-
nated, and women enjoy the legal right to vote, education, marriage, divorce and inheritance. Superficially, this “poor woman” in *Nü Jie* has achieved her new life.

However, patriarchal ideas have never disappeared. Though we celebrate International Women’s Day on March 8th every year, family violence, unemployment, discrimination in the job market, abandoned girls in orphanages are still great challenges to us. Highly educated single women become genderless. Women not only need to be good at domestic work but also their careers and education. Men who are busy all day and night are praised as husbands working hard for the good of the family, while women who are busy all day and night would be accused of being unqualified wives.10

Contemporary Chinese feminist literary critics exposed the patriarchal and traditional subconsciousness of male writers in the early 20th century. These male writers were the initiators of women’s emancipation, calling for and supporting women’s liberation. However, they failed to notice that the patriarchal ideas in their own blood were creating another new image of women, requiring women to fit in according to their needs and expectations. The liberation of women cannot be complete unless women themselves recognize and reconstruct their identity.11 Patriarchal social structure and discrimination towards women have been sustained for more than two thousand years, and the remains of these bad traditional ideas still influences people’s way of thinking today.

**Individual Piety and Salvation History**

The history of Christianity in China dates to 635 CE when the Nestorians12 brought their ideas to China in Tang dynasty, but it disappeared completely in 845 when the emperor crushed the Buddhist temples. In 1289, Franciscan Friars came to China, but again in 1368, they were asked to leave. In 1582, Jesuit priests started their mission work in China, introducing western science, mathematics, and astronomy. Christianity expanded its influence
slowly and some Chinese intellectuals and high officials became Christians. But in 1720, because the Pope refused to allow Chinese Christians to "worship" their ancestors, the emperor Kangxi expelled the missionaries. The door was closed, and missionaries could only move around in a few coastal cities. In 1807, the First Protestant missionary, Robert Morrison (1782-1834), a Scottish Presbyterian, arrived in China secretly.\textsuperscript{13}

After the two Opium Wars (1840-1842; 1856-1860), the evangelization of China gained increasing legitimacy. More and more Catholic and Protestant missionaries came to China and their footprints can be found all over China, including Tibet.\textsuperscript{14} Christianity experienced harsh conflicts with Chinese culture in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, enjoyed relative peace in the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century, but was greatly challenged by a strong anti-Christian movement in the 1920s.\textsuperscript{15} Christians suffered with other Chinese people during the two world wars, but achieved financial independence and emerged again after 1949. Christianity was crushed during in the Cultural Revolution, but revived again after 1980.

In short, since 1807, when Robert Morrison first came to China, Protestantism has been in China for about 200 years. The membership has grown from 700,000 in 1949 to 17 million in 2003. It has become an important element in modern Chinese social life.

The history of Christian missionaries in China is complex. This movement was mingled with imperialist expansion and intrusion, but also contributed to the development of modern Chinese education, medical service and industry. Missionaries challenged the old backward customs like footbinding and enforced chastity for widows, helped with schools and hospitals, and provided practical help to ethnic minority people in China.\textsuperscript{16}

At the same time, "Tension mounted as the fundamentalist-modernist controversy grew acrimonious in the U. S. and spilled over into China."\textsuperscript{17} While the liberal missionaries promoted "indirect evangelism,"\textsuperscript{18} concentrating on influencing the Chinese up-
per-class intellectuals and respecting Chinese culture, the evangelical missionaries stressed “direct evangelism” to save more souls and convert more people, strongly opposing some traditions like “worshiping ancestors.” The earliest Protestant missionaries like Morrison and Milne were not highly educated. “What they lacked in erudition, however, they made up for in religious fervor.” Morrison and Milne devoted themselves to the ministry of translating the Bible into Chinese and wrote many tracts, such as the San Zi Jing (three character primer), to explain Christian faith. As Bohr comments,

The missionaries’ tracts were rooted in Evangelicals’ conviction that mankind could not be rescued from damnation except through the free gift of God’s grace. Man could receive this grace only by making a conscious act of conversion, which they urged, required the rejection of evil, compliance with the Ten Commandments, belief in Christ’s atonement, and receptivity to the transforming influence of the Holy Spirit. Acceptance of these doctrines promised eternal bliss in Heaven. Their rejection elicited God’s wrathful condemnation to hell.

Jessie Lutz also points out that most early missionaries were generally enterprising, dedicated and confident of the unique truth of Christianity, and the superiority of western civilization. Because the evangelical missionaries worked among the poor and powerless people in the vast interior places, their churches grew faster and became more influential among the lower-class people. The individual piety of these evangelical missionaries integrated well with the individual pietistic tradition popular among ordinary Chinese people. As a result, “A large number of Chinese sectarianists, including many from the White Lotus tradition, became Christian converts in the thirty to forty years between the opening of the interior and the turn of the century.”
This feature of individual piety can be seen from the writings of the early Chinese male converts, who often appealed to the desire for the protection and intervention of a more powerful God, one who could offer supernatural help in times of illness and hardship. They promoted strict monotheism in place of Buddhist, Daoist, and folk deities. This was often combined with continued admiration of Confucian ethics. That is to say, these Chinese evangelists integrated the traditional individual pietistic experience and traditional patriarchal ideas with Christian ideas. For example, the Christian ideas of sin, retribution, and salvation brought by the western missionaries had their analogues in popular Chinese religion. In addition, the “five constant virtues” (ren, benevolence; yi, righteousness; li, propriety; zhi, wisdom and xin, fidelity) also offered common ground between Confucianism and Christianity.

The first convert, Liang Fa, for instance, compares in his writings Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, admitting their similarities in ethical teaching but strongly advocating the monotheism of Christianity. He believed that filial devotion represented the best that both Confucian and Christian ethics had to offer. Christianity not only magnified but in fact perfected Confucian morality. Liang infused his traditional ideas with the powerful Christian motif of God’s judgment. The result was a simple equation: worship God, believe in Jesus Christ, follow the Ten Commandments and be rewarded with Heavens; fail to do this and be punished in hell. This stress on individual piety and salvation history exists even today. As Dunch notes, in contemporary China, the features of Protestantism are as follows:

- a warm, experiential piety, centered on a concern for salvation and for tangible blessings in this life; literal faith in the Bible; rapid growth accompanied by increase institutional diversity and fragmentation, expanding with China’s market economy, despite efforts to restrict and control it; detach-
ment from institutions giving continuity to the Protestant experience, including history and local or kin solidarities. All these elements tend towards making Chinese Protestantism an increasing individualized faith.31

Dunch goes on to say that these features of Chinese Protestantism have little uniqueness in the mosaic of world Christianity, despite the very specific history and circumstances of Chinese churches.

Institutionally, the erosion of denominational structures, the breakdown of the correlation of ethnic or communal with religious identities, and the proliferation of new sects, movements, and congregations are all recognizably part of the modern Protestant trajectory elsewhere. So is the tendency to place individual experience at the center of Protestant spirituality, at least since the evangelical revivals of the 18th century.32

The new Christian ideals mingled with Chinese traditions with mixed results. Backward and inhuman customs were harshly criticized, but the patriarchal and hierarchical social structure was never challenged. In the Bible, man is the head of the family, just as he is in the Chinese tradition. Jesus and twelve apostles are male, which constructs an androcentric world view that is similar to the Chinese androcentric social structure. When male Chinese embrace Christianity, they typically merge the patriarchal ideas in the Bible with what already existed in their blood.

Although Liang alluded to the Christian ideal of equality, he did not debunk the ‘three bonds’ (san-kang; the one-sided obligation of subjects, children and wives to monarch, parents, and husbands, respectively). Like the Evangelical missionaries who tutored him [Morrison and Milne] Liang was no champion of women’s rights. He recalled Paul’s counsel that wives submit to their husbands and slaves to their masters. Nor did he criticize China’s political order.33
It must be pointed out that at the early stage “direct evangelization” was not very successful, but regarded as heterodox by many Chinese people.\textsuperscript{34} Many male missionaries like Gützlaff and James Hudson Taylor encouraged mission societies to send single or married women missionaries to China.

For women can go to women with a sympathy and love that find their way through all barriers of ignorance, indifference, and superstition. And once the women are won, it is a comparatively easy matter to influence the families.\textsuperscript{35}

The women missionaries went to the homes and talked with the women, established schools for girls and trained “Bible women” for churches, which in turn resulted in the revival of self-consciousness and independence of the women.\textsuperscript{36} Women missionaries also strongly supported Chinese women to fight against foot-binding,\textsuperscript{37} enforced chastity for widows, arranged marriage and other inhumane traditions. After being educated in Christian schools, many Christian women devoted themselves to social reform, and many writers and active social reformers from the 1920s and 1930s were graduates of missionary schools.\textsuperscript{38} As Kwok Pui-lan notes, “The missionary movement provided both Western and Chinese women an opportunity to understand their own cultural conceptions and to learn something from another culture.”\textsuperscript{39}

In order to attract women, the missionaries presented Christianity as a contrast to the backward Chinese customs and traditions such as footbinding, concubinage, and arranged marriage. The life of Jesus, full of compassion and love, was presented carefully by the missionaries. The missionaries liked to merge the gospel narratives, which immediately increased the number of episodes wherein Jesus encounters women. Kwok compares three versions of narratives on the life of Jesus.\textsuperscript{40} Gützlaff’s focus was more on Jesus teaching to the people or Jesus performing miracles, so that the women are not so conspicuous in the narrative.\textsuperscript{41}
Holcomb follows the words of the scriptures more faithfully, preserving the original depth and detail of the stories. His account gives a more prominent place to women. Hartwell’s life of Jesus has a better writing style and was adapted to the Chinese context. Hartwell used Fuzhou dialects for his tract, which were easy for women to memorize and sing aloud. Hartwell highlights Jesus’ compassion for the widow of Nain, whose only son had died, as well as the mercy Jesus shows to the little daughter of Jairus and to the Canaanite woman whose daughter was possessed by an unclean spirit.

On the other hand, the majority of the women missionaries, especially those sent by China Inland Mission, subscribed to an evangelical understanding of faith. “They tended to emphasize salvation of the soul rather than critical involvement to change society.” While they were helping their male partner missionaries to “save the brown women from the brown men,” women missionaries wished to transmit their own life style, social manners, and cultural values onto their sisters in China, providing themselves as the models of liberated, elegant and civilized women. They wrote many articles and letters describing the miserable life of Chinese women, expressing their condescending attitudes toward Chinese women. Women missionaries stressed the Victorian ideals of women’s domesticity and female subordination. They prescribed that women should have “refined and womanly qualities,” keeping their homes comfortable and clean. Wives should win respect from husbands through their intelligence and learning, and they should handle relations with in-laws to the satisfaction of all. Their attitude greatly influenced the girls trained in the missionary schools, and to a certain extent they established a stereotype of the superiority of western culture to Chinese culture.

Both male and female missionaries inserted one understanding: only Christianity can save Chinese women from the oppres-
sion of Chinese tradition.

In summary, in the history of Chinese Christianity, male and female missionaries promoted the equality of men and women, helped with the liberation of Chinese women on many aspects, but they did not challenge the patriarchal structure in Chinese society, since they were themselves strongly patriarchal. Moreover, individual piety carried and supported by the evangelical missionaries united with Chinese pietistic tradition (especially the sectarian groups) and stressed personal salvation and individual piety, a legacy that exists still today.

Therefore, it is no surprise to find that sermons today on the story of Syrophoenician woman have not changed much when compared to what we may find in Chinese and western churches 100 years ago.49 This may be seen in three sermons in Tian Feng (Heavenly Wind), the national church magazine of Protestant churches in China, in two sermons from Taiwan and commentaries from Hong Kong and Taiwan, all published recently. Among the sermons from Tian Feng, two stressed the great faith of the woman, her persistence, her humility and her contentment with whatever is given, even though it is limited, and comes with being humiliated by God.50 "We need to learn from this Canaanite woman and to be faithful Christians. In our daily spiritual life, we need to constantly have these three prayers: 'Lord, have mercy on me!' 'Lord, help me!' 'Yes, Lord!'"51 Another very short article comments on the woman’s love for her daughter, her persistence in believing in Jesus, and God’s grace. And her wise mind is also praised. She is compared with the woman of virtue in Proverbs 31:10, who is smart, capable and good at handling all kinds of issues.52 In all three sermons, Jesus’ insulting words are explained as a test or a reflection of Jewish ideas. The love and compassion of Jesus, or God, to the woman is uplifted and highlighted and the woman’s persistence in faith, her correct use of address “Lord” and her contentment with the offer of “crumbs” are affirmed and listed in detail to present her
as a great model of faith and persistence. Pastors even offer an analysis of her way of pleading as a model for the members’ daily prayers.

Two preachers in the Taiwan Baptist Church gave similar sermons on this pericope in 2001 and 2005. Their insights are more elaborate and detailed than the mainland Chinese pastors, but by different routes they reach the same goal and stress the woman’s amazing faith, God’s testing, and the woman’s humility. Under the title “The faith of the Canaanite Woman: the Canaanite woman praised by Jesus,” Elder Zhou of one Baptist church in Taiwan stresses the evilness of Canaanite culture and the wisdom of this woman in leaving her own culture for Jesus, the true salvation.

The Canaanite woman knows that the culture, tradition, religion of Canaan cannot save her daughter. Only when she goes out, leaving behind the evilness and the bad tradition of worshipping idols, can she achieve God’s grace.

Elder Zhou goes on in detail to describe this woman as a persistent prayer, never giving up even if rebuffed by God, worshipping God with heart, and successfully going through God’s testing. At the end he summarizes the importance of receiving God’s testing like this woman:

1. Testing makes us humble. Even being addressed as a “dog”, a life after experiencing God’s temptation can receive that humiliating title happily. Through such humbleness, God is willing to grant us grace, because God bars the proud only granting grace to those who are humble. 2. Testing brings us submissiveness. The Canaanite woman obediently agrees that Lord gives the bread to the Israelites. She does not argue for the bread. She respects the sovereignty of God and God’s chosen people. 3. Faith after testing may broaden our views so that we may focus on the Lord who grants blessings. God so is almighty that crumbs of grace can sat-
isfy us. When we humbly come to the Lord and worship the Lord, we may see the Lord sitting on the high seat.\textsuperscript{55}

The commentaries in Taiwan and Hong Kong also give similar explanations, referring to salvation history, God’s unlimited grace, the test from God, and the woman’s great faith and humility. “In order to get help from Jesus, she is willing to be like a dog, which shows her faith. We need to learn from the woman for compassion and faith.”\textsuperscript{56}

Her faith in Lord is the source for her to have all kinds of virtues. The faith she exhibits in this story is a good example for us to learn from... She knows that she does not deserve the grace of God, but she prefers to be a dog in the kingdom of God so that she can have God’s grace. She would rather serve the Lord as a dog than serve a ghost as a human being.\textsuperscript{57}

It is amazing how all these sermons and commentaries like to go into detail on the woman’s action of kneeling, praying, pleading, persistence and clever answer. But such detailed analyses serve only to promote the woman’s great faith and humility, for the purpose of setting up a great model of faith. This is an effort which aims to explain away the harshness of Jesus’ words and offer an allegorical or “spiritual” interpretation to this story. This predisposition towards allegorical modes of understanding biblical texts is evident both in contemporary preaching in Chinese churches and in the writings of many Chinese Protestant leaders of the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century.\textsuperscript{58}

In short, in Chinese churches, the interpretation of the story of the Syrophoenician/ Canaanite woman has not changed in the least during the past century.\textsuperscript{59} Then as now, the following three points are stressed: it is a good example story of faith and humility and persistence; it is a proclamation story of Gentile mission; it tells us the salvation history that Jews were first but now it is the time
for Gentiles. 

No one notices that it is the cleverness of the woman that actually changes Jesus. Preachers like to focus on the faith of the woman, but no one pays attention to the fact that in Mark it is her "word" that saves her. They all picture the Syrophoenician woman as a gentle, tender, loving, persistent, clever and faithful woman. These are the qualities that Chinese tradition has expected of Chinese women.

At this point the patriarchal and dualistic ideas in the story of the Syrophoenician woman unite seamlessly with the Chinese traditional patriarchy and dualism. It is no wonder that this story about a woman cannot play any critical role in the emancipation of women but continues to serve as a tool to teach women the traditional virtues of submissiveness, meekness, humility and radical trust in higher power. Coincidentally, such virtues have been treasured and uplifted in the western Christian world for over 2000 years. The danger, however, of stressing her faith is two-fold: on the one hand, it tends to suggest that all disasters are the result of a lack of great faith. But how can we measure faith? If the woman's daughter were to die, must she suffer not only the loss of her daughter, but also the accusation of lack of faith? Can we use faith as a solution to domestic violence or social discrimination against women? Can such extreme meekness and submissiveness lead to real emancipation of women's mind and body?

On the other hand, it leads to the belief that we can earn God's grace by having great faith and that we can transform faith into a merit or virtue that human beings can achieve by themselves instead of relying on God's unconditional grace. Is not God's grace for all even before we merit it? The Syrophoenician woman has the right to claim God's grace because God loves all. The Syrophoenician woman confronts Jesus not with her faith, but with her word – the word of truth that even she is worthy, and God loves even her.
Postcolonial Reading: A Liberation?

The Indian theologian Sugirtharajah complained in 1986 that this story has been misread and misinterpreted in India, or Asia on two pre-suppositions:

1) The missionary motive: Jesus' encounter with the Gentile woman is seen as a sign of the gospel reaching the non-Christian world, an implied fulfillment – the Gentiles enjoying the children's bread and a new vista of the missionary enterprise looming large.

2) The prototype of authentic faith: the Syrophoenician woman is seen as a person of authentic faith who stands in sharp contrast to some of the Jews who exhibit a spurious faith by upholding Jewish ritualism and legal requirements.

Sugirtharajah concludes that such readings lead Christian interpreters to treat "any Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist or Sikh as a potential target for evangelization and absorption into the Christian community, while the other projects Judaism as a dead letter awash with legalism and ritualism."\(^{61}\)

Kwok Pui-lan notes that this story was brought to China and interpreted by missionaries a century ago. These missionaries accepted the notion of "salvation history" proposed by Reformationists, and preached the story to Chinese Christians with an anti-Jewish and sexist bias.\(^{62}\) What is worse, the anti-Judaism and sexism further intersected with colonialism, leading to the following conclusions:

1) The faith and humility of the Syrophoenician woman served as a model not only for Christians but also for "heathens," to ease the spread of colonialism and imperialism.

2) In order to appeal to a female audience, the missionaries highlighted Jesus' love and care for women in dire need. The fact that Jesus first ignores her and is rude in his answer is not mentioned.\(^{63}\)

As post-colonial theologians, both Sugirtharajah and Kwok refer to the imperial hints in the history of interpreting this story,
undertake to deconstruct the biblical text. Kwok exerts special effort in searching for an interpretation of the story that will further the liberation of Third World women and that will support a re-reading of the story to enhance respect for one another as persons of different gender, race, region, and social origin. She examines the dynamic of subject and object in the text by noting how the focalizing role of the narrator overpowers the woman’s limited voice and action to make her the model of “Otherness.”

Following Spivak, Kwok first of all argues that we need to challenge the power dynamics underlying how colonized people are inscribed in the text and how they are consigned to signify the Other in history.64 This story is carefully constructed by Mark and Matthew, being told and understood by many as a story about Christology. As a result, traditional scholarship focuses on what can be learned about Jesus from this story, namely the historical facts about Jesus’ life, the authenticity of his sayings, his attitude towards Gentiles and women, and his understanding of his own mission.65 As we have seen from the sermon examples, even today, preachers are inculcating this focus, teaching people to read this story as an example story, trying to highlight the Christological, missiological or even ethical ideas from the story. Thus, they can justify their behaviors and judge others accordingly. Moreover, Kwok points out that “through centuries, her story is not told by her own people, the Syrophoenicians with other religious beliefs, but by Christians, who appropriated her for their own specific purposes.” This is a shrewd and sharp insight. Ringe agrees with Kwok that western feminist biblical scholars have read the story of the Syrophoenician without problematizing it as a text that justifies colonization.66

African feminist theologian Musa Dube further sharpens the edge by decolonizing the similar story in Matthew (15: 21-28). Dube decolonizes the Canaanite woman and concludes that it is the intention of the implied author to redact Mark’s story and make
the woman submissively willing to admit her inferior status as "dogs" so that the woman can be a symbol of those Gentiles who are eager to be colonized and take the crumbs from the table like the dogs. The images of dogs and crumbs signify the longings of the colonized people for the powerful imperial religion. Thus the story embodies strong imperialist values and strategy. The woman has become a symbol foreshadowing the mission to the nations, without any value or integrity of herself. Pondering from her own specific stance, Dube comments that all of the western white male and female theologians have failed to recognize or realize the imperialist print in the text. Therefore, their interpretation cannot be a full emancipation for women in the Third-World. 67

Even though these theologians have contributed to a broader and different interpretation of this pericope, each of them is also limited in their critique of Syrophoenician woman. While offering analysis of the imperial hints in the history of interpretation (Sugirtharajah and Kwok) or in the authorial intention (Dube), they all tend to read this woman as a "weak" character in the story without her own power and identity. I would argue that in Mark this woman is presented in a manner that possesses great power, though her power has been ignored by interpreters and hearers of the story and no one has ever named this power.

Sugirtharajah, for example, notices the imperialist print in the Gentile motif and Jesus' comment about the woman's "word," but he concludes that the story is a typical miracle story which focuses on the miraculous power of Jesus. Thus, the woman came to Jesus as a modern sick woman goes to see the physician. "Her action is similar to what one sees in today's multifaith society - a Hindu, Muslim, or Buddhist consulting a Christian physician because his or her medical prowess is well known to the community." 68 This explanation presupposes a multifaith society, which is appropriate from a post-modern reader-response point of view, but it does not illuminate a point in the text. The woman then turns out to be weak and insignificant in the gospel.
Dube’s attention is on the imperial and colonial intentions of the implied author of Matthew, and her reading of the story of the Canaanite woman is closely related with the Great Commission in Matthew 28. Through the “prism of Rahab,” Dube deconstructs the woman’s role in the story, treating her as a puppy in the hands of the implied author. Dube keeps reminding us of the “patriarchal and imperialist ideological agenda” packed into the Canaanite woman. For Dube, this woman is “not a heroine but a victim of patriarchal and imperial ideology.”

But this interpretation does not separate the original authorial intention from the history of the reception of the story. It is fair to comment that the implied author curries the favor of the Roman Empire, however, this stance is understandable concerning the historical harsh situation of the Matthean community after the destruction of the Second Temple. It is also fair to assert that over the centuries, the story of Canaanite woman has been interpreted and applied as a justification of the Gentile mission and has been packed with imperial ideology.

It is, however, a truth as well that for the community of Matthew or Mark, the story is more about the inclusion of the Gentiles into a Jewish community than the Christian conquest of the Gentiles, because historically these communities were a marginalized, weak and powerless group. They hardly had the ambition to make imperialist claims when survival was still a critical issue they were facing every day. Hence, Dube also makes this woman a weak character by reading her as the channel of the author’s imperialist agenda. Such reading can not bring us to any positive conclusion from the story, so we are compelled to reject it completely.

Kwok agrees with Sugirtharajah in rejecting the elements of anti-Semitism and the missionary motif in reading the story. She is in line with Ringe and E. Schüssler Fiorenza in reconstructing the woman as the “subject of history,” and she is in consensus with Chung in establishing the new image of Jesus as the “suffering ser-
vant,” “liberator,” “political martyr,” “shaman, woman, mother, worker of grain,” in whom Asian women can find identity and true equality. She encourages Asian women to name the various pres-
ences of Jesus Christ in their own culture, indigenous religions, and secular political movements. On the other hand, Kwok agrees with Dube in opposing the colonized submissive image of the woman, contending that her story is told by others instead of her own people. Kwok notes that the woman may keep her original faith, because Jesus does not ask her to be a follower. At the end of the article, Kwok identifies this woman with women of higher social status, reminding the readers of their own privileges and the possibility of oppressing the others.

All these insights are very helpful and important. However, when given so many identities, the Syrophoenician woman loses her uniqueness as a Greek woman, Syrophoenician of birth, who exhibits an important value that can change Jesus and convince the Markan community. The woman’s unique contribution, her “word” and her clever manner of “talking back” is not highlighted.

In summary, post-colonial criticism opens another world of understanding the story in the Third-World context, helping readers realize the “otherness” in the composition of the story. However, while studying the Syrophoenician/Canaanite woman this way, they are making the woman an “object” as well. Traditionally, this woman is a passive model of faith employed by male authorities to their advantage. Post-colonially, this woman is a victim of the implied author, serving as a tool for imperial expansion. The power and identity of this woman is ignored in both interpretations. It is necessary and helpful to reclaim and name the power her reply embodies, the cleverness she possesses that changes her weak situation.

Feminist critics have noticed that historically women have rarely been allowed to name their experiences. Thus, one of feminism’s critical tasks is to recover and to reclaim these lost lives and voices
and values. When there are no new texts to be discovered, feminist critics read behind what men have written, dealing with texts that do not belong to women, texts that were not written for women or by women. Feminists "work with a feeling of estrangement, reading between the lines of alien texts, looking for invisible women, listening for muted voices."

In their practice, they set up many models. As the only story in the Gospels in which a woman changes Jesus, feminists or womanists won't give up their effort to build up a model from this woman. In contrast to the model of faith built by traditional Christian theologians, who portray the Syrophoenician woman as meek, inferior, weak, and submissive, some feminists like E. S. Fiorenza, J. L. Mitchell, Ringe, Kinukawa and Jim Perkinson, try to make her a model of women who are active in making decisions, persistent in humiliation, clever in thinking and courageous in danger. Their analysis proclaims that this woman is not presented as a victim, but contains powerful strength. Paying attention to her "word" and the manner of her response can bring us power and enlightenment.

Japanese theologian Kinukawa, for instance, sees the interactional relationship as the key to understanding the story. The interactional relationship in Kinukawa's mind is the discourse between Jesus and the Syrophoenician woman. Kinukawa proposes that through the interaction, the Syrophoenician woman challenges Jesus to ignore the barriers between Jews and Gentiles. It is this woman who creates an opportunity for Jesus to cross the boundary and submit to defilements "to become least in order to break through the exclusively group-oriented faith of his fellow Jews".

Jim Perkinson highlights the woman's power in her manner of speech, the reiteration, which is "an effective tactic where domination is dilatory." Perkinson thinks this woman helps Jesus practice the tactic of reiteration, which can be seen in his later conflicts with the religious power. The power of the Syrophoenician
woman even makes her speak in Jesus’ place for a brief moment. “She is made to carry out his agenda, enrich his presentation, submerge her difference in his sameness.”

Isn’t it the time that we give this power exhibited by the Syrophoenician woman a name so that women in the future can identify with it? I have argued that this power used to have the name, métiš, an important social and cultural value existing in every aspect of ancient Greek culture. Métiš, cleverness, was widely recognized and accepted by common people in ancient times to be used by weak and powerless people in ultra-adverse situations. In the ancient Chinese context, there is a similar social and cultural value, termed jizhi, a quality that is widely recognized and respected in Chinese culture even today.

**Jizhi: A power beyond what she said**

Jizhi is a highly valued social and cultural value that exists in every aspect of Chinese society. From early youth children are taught stories related to jizhi. In these stories, weak and powerless children employ their jizhi to reverse a bad situation and win over adults who want to take advantage of them, or to save their friends from danger when there are no adults around to offer help. In Chinese history and ancient literature, there are many stories and historical accounts of how a common, powerless person overcomes a more powerful evil person through their jizhi. For instance, the similar quality of cleverness, jizhi, can be seen clearly in a story called “Yanzi Shi Chu” (Minister Yanzi sent on a diplomatic mission to the kingdom of Chu):

In around 531 BCE, Yanzi (?-500BC) was a minister of the kingdom of Qi, a newly developing and weak country. One day he was sent to be an ambassador to the kingdom of Chu, a well-developed and strong country. As Yanzi was very short and from a weak country, the emperor of Chu counseled with his ministers on how to humiliate and make fun of this little
man and his country. They closed the gate but left a small door for dogs in the wall open, hoping Yanzi would enter the city through the dog’s door. But Yanzi said, “Am I sent to a country of dogs or of human beings, for they only have a door for dogs?” Thus Emperor Chu had to open the big gate for Yanzi. Later during their discussion, a criminal passed by under escort. Emperor Chu said, “That thief is from your country. I wonder why people in your country are thieves.” Yanzi replied, “You must have heard that the oranges in the south band of River Huai are sweet and good, but once they are planted on the north side of the river, they become tasteless. I wonder what is wrong with your country that good people in my country become thieves in your country.” Emperor Chu gave up any further attempt to humiliate Yanzi after hearing this reply.

Yanzi is one of the ancient Chinese who possessed jizhi and relied on jizhi to convert a weak situation.78

In her book, Knowing Words: Wisdom and Cunning in the Classical Traditions of China and Greece, Lisa Raphals compares the Homeric hero Odysseus with many similar figures in ancient Chinese writings and novels. For instance, she thinks that Zhu Geliang, a government minister in Romance of The Three Kingdoms, and the Monkey King in Journey to the West are similar to Odysseus in many ways. They are very clever, good at catching the shifting terrain in an ambiguous situation, knowing the psyche of their enemies, coiled with many counsels, etc. There are many other figures such as A Fan Ti, Monk Ji Gong and Nü Fu Ma in Chinese history and folk literature who possess the quality of jizhi, and their jizhi is loved, welcomed and recognized by ordinary Chinese people who are powerless and oppressed. Their names are widely known to every ordinary Chinese. The stories of these people who possess jinzhi normally deal with a situation in which poor and powerless people are pushed to the edge. As
Mark’s audience was familiar with the cleverness (mêtis) shown in the woman’s reply, Chinese people know jizhi as a social and cultural value. Jizhi lies in our culture, serving to teach us how to avoid attack from the more powerful.

I wish to argue that there is a need to promote the quality of jizhi in the story of the Syrophoenician woman so that Christian women in China can claim their own power and achieve the full emancipation of women. Because they had been so miserably oppressed before 1911, it has been a tradition that Chinese women are religious and likely to hold fast to any God that is propagated as powerful. They need to cling to some superior power to sustain them and give them hope to live on. They may believe in all kinds of gods at the same time or in a sequence, in the hope of finding the most powerful god that can bring benefits to them in this world. Chinese history is very long, but it has not been long enough for women to have the opportunity to become themselves or to allow men to get to know them. For instance, if we ask women in Chinese churches and society the following questions: What is happiness for a woman? or What makes a good woman?, most women find the questions hard to answer. Their concept of beauty and happiness is still prescribed by men, and their image of a good woman is based on tradition or authority.79

There are many similarities in women’s experience universally, but women in Chinese churches are very backward when compared to women in the rest of modern Chinese society. Though women achieved their liberation from foot-binding and arranged marriage as early as the 1930s, they have not made clear what their responsibilities and rights are. It is easy for women in today’s China to recognize the patriarchy and discrimination against women in traditional Chinese ideas, such as Nü Jie. However, it is not easy for them to recognize patriarchal elements in the Bible. Patriarchy and hierarchy are sustained very well in Chinese churches
because women never talk back, but behave like the Syrophoenician woman as she is usually interpreted: obediently and humbly waiting for God's grace of crumbs to satisfy them. They tend to explain all sufferings through the eyes of perseverance and faith. They are not empowered to talk back to tradition and authority.

Therefore, to ignore the power of the Syrophoenician woman, and to cling to the traditional interpretation that highlights her faith in absolute submissiveness and humility will not help women achieve liberation. The power of the Syrophoenician woman lies in her culture and her own mind, which can be the seeds of God's wisdom and God's grace. Chinese women have been dependent on western missionaries, male and female, to "speak out" about their miserable situation and sufferings. Where is their own voice? They have allowed male pastors and lay leaders to explain this story for them, but they seldom raise their own questions. When they encounter misinterpretation or a humiliating answer, can they draw upon their own jizhi to talk back? In the churches, women's stories and experiences are used according to the needs of men. Although 75% of church members are women and four of the eighteen seminary principals are women, the voices of women are still weak. Even Christian women themselves like to have a male pastor and they have more trust in male authorities.

Hence, the intelligent manner in which the Syrophoenician woman talks back to Jesus should be emphasized and applied to teach women in Chinese churches that with their jizhi, even though they are weak in many aspects, they are able to fight for their rights. God's grace descends on each and every one before we have faith. They cannot depend on others to save them or grant them "grace," but need to discover the strength in themselves that has been planted by God in our minds. The Syrophoenician woman is a model who talks back with her jizhi, her cleverness, and changes the situation radically. The voice of Chinese women has long been
suppressed by patriarchal and hierarchical tradition. I hope that the Syrophoenician woman’s story, if interpreted in this way, can empower women in Chinese churches to talk back and make their voices heard.

1. Three Obediences: Woman needs to be obedient to father before marriage, obedient to husband after marriage, obedient to son when widowed.

2. Ban Zhao was an ancient female historian and scholar in Han Dynasty (206 BCE - 8 CE). She was born in a famous family. Her father, aunt and brothers were famous and important people in that dynasty. She was educated and helped finish the history book *Han Shu* (*The History of Han Dynasty*). She married at the age of 14, had children, widowed prematurely and refused to remarry until she died at the age of 70. She wrote *Nü Jie* at the age of 54, a book purporting to be an instructional manual on feminine behavior and virtue for her daughters. In fact, she intended it for a much wider audience. Realizing that Confucian texts contained little in the way of specific and practical guidelines for a woman’s everyday life, Ban Zhao sought to fill that void with a coherent set of rules for women, especially young women. The book has 7 chapters, namely “Humility,” “Husband and Wife,” “Respect and Caution,” “Womanly Qualifications”, “Concentration,” “Implicit Obedience” and “Answers to Shu Mei” (Ban Zhao’s sister-in-law, who had different ideas than Ban Zhao and wrote a book to refute her, but this book was lost.)

3. Confucianism started the education system in China but usually women were not given the chance to read. In the *Li Ji* (*Book of Rites*) it says that “... He would seek instructions from an outside teacher; she would follow the teachings [usually female skills of embroidering and spinning] of a female teacher.” Only girls in some wealthy families might get a chance to learn reading and writing. In order to teach women such basic moral and ethical regulations, later Ban Zhao’s book was developed into short poems to make the words easier to remember. Girls learned such teachings orally from an early age.
4. In Chinese history the exceptional chance for women to be officially public is Empress Wu (A.D. 625-705) of the Tang dynasty, who later in 674 proclaimed herself the Divine Emperor. But on her death bed, she gave up her own power and preferred her identity as the wife of her husband. She deliberately and smartly made herself a wordless tablet on her tomb. She was fiercely accused by later generations as an ambitious evil woman, though it was a fact that she was more capable than her husband and the country kept developing under her management.

5. For example, such literary works include *Nü Xiaojing* (Book of Filial Piety for Women) by Cheng Shi in Tang dynasty, *Nü Lunyu* (The Analects of Confucius for Women) by Sung Ruohua, a consort of Emperor Dezong and *Nü Sishu* written by Wang Xiang. In the Ming dynasty, the Confucian reformer Lu Kun's (1536-1618) *Guifan* (Standards within Women's Quarters) became the most influential. Lu Kun classified his collection of biographies taken from *Lienü Zhuan* (stories of women who died in defense of their honor, chastity or virginity) with seven or more additional collections, into three main categories — the way of maidens, the way of wives, and the way of mothers.

6. Chastity encourages women to keep their filial piety and refuse to remarry. They are prized if they choose death when suffering sexual defilement.

7. Zhang Zhujun (1876-1964), one of the earliest female doctors and head of a western hospital in China, the initiator of China Red Cross Association, an activist who liked to live out her faith.


11. In her article, "Imagine Women: Female Characters and their Fate from the Patriarchy Perspectiv," Li Ling, a feminist literary critic summarizes four images of women in the writings of the male writers in early 20th century:
   1. Angel-like women who are smart, pure, pretty, tender, obedient, chaste and self-sacrificing [Ba Jin, *Home*]; 2. Negatively-active women who are independent, clear about their own will, brave and smart, hard to control, tricksters who are not attractive in appearance but shrewd in trapping men
[Qian Zhongshu, *The Encircled City*]; 3. Positively-active women who are independent, beautiful, sexy and courageous, able to control their wills and bodies [Mao Dun, *Resistance*]; 4. Cowardly and traditional women who are holding to patriarchal and feudalist ideas [Lu Xun, *Shang Shi*]. For details please see http://www.frchina.net/data/detail.php?id=9654


16. Currently China Christian Council can print the Bible in ten minority languages because the missionaries helped to develop their written forms. The record of missionary help to minority groups in China please see Daniel H. Bays, ed., *Christianity in China*, 120-174.

17. Jessie Lutz, “China and Protestantism,” 188. The debates between fundamentalists and modernists in China were the same as that in the USA. For instance, among the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Mission, a liberal group of Congregationalists, in the 1880s, revolted against the idea that the heathen, who had never heard the gospel, would nevertheless be held responsible. They put forth the theory of future probation, teaching that those who had never heard of Christ might be
offered the gospel sometime after death when they would have another opportunity to gain salvation. The orthodox party (Dr. E. K. Alden) maintained that future probation is not biblical. The progressive Congregationalists were adjusting their theology to changing fashions of thought. While they did not deny the authority of the Bible, they opened the door to significant revisions of theological dogma by according equal authority to Christian consciousness, which they defined as the common feeling of the most enlightened and pious men in any age. [Robert H. Wilcox, "The Ultimate Criteria of Christian Doctrine," *The Andover Review*, Oct. 1887, pp. 345-6].

18. A method promoted by liberal missionaries such as Young John Allen, Timothy Richard, John Fryer and William A. P. Martin, who noticed the important role of Chinese scholar-bureaucrats in social structure and hoped to influence these scholars by introducing advanced western technology, economy, ethics and political system so that when these scholars were pursuing the development of China through social reforms, they might accept Christianity gradually.

19. A method promoted and practiced by Gützlaft (1803-1851) and carried on by The China Inland Mission (CIM) established by James Hudson Taylor (1832-1900) in 1866. These missionaries trained many Chinese preachers and they went to villagers to preach directly, calling on people to repent and convert. J. H. Taylor was an evangelical missionary from Britain, and his CIM can be a proof of the prevalence of missionaries in China. This all-denominational mission group gathered men and women missionaries from all countries and all denominations, sending them to all interior parts of China and grew fast in its outreach ministries. Taylor adopted Chinese dress and sought the growth of indigenous churches as opposed to missionary outposts under the supervision of Europeans. See Marshall Broomhall, "The China Inland Mission: A Jubilee Survey," in *The China Mission Year Book: Being The Christian Movement in China*, ed. D. MacGillivray (Shanghai: The Christian Literature Society for China, 1915) 123-134. The year book collects reports from different denominations, mission groups, organizations, covering ministries on general and religious education, medical help, women, press, Bible translation and printing, village mission, etc.

20. Duan Qi, *Fenjin De Licheng*, 66-75. J. H. Taylor and William A. P. Martin debated during the second national Missionary conference in 1890 on the topic of "ancestor worship". Taylor saw it as idol worship and felt the Chinese should be taught to break this bad habit. It is hard to generalize
the comments on China Inland Mission, which focused on individual piety and saving the souls but also treated Chinese people equally and supported the independence movement of Chinese churches. They worked among the illiterate and the poor, offering simplified Christian teaching and training many Chinese lay and clergy leaders in Christian churches. The missionaries in CIM were not well trained or educated theologically. Their strong pietistic spirit influenced and was accepted by many lower-class and not well-educated Chinese people, who later combined Christian pietism with their own pietistic tradition to form their own Christian experience. The Taiping Rebellion (1851-1864) is a good example of such a combination. (See Duan Qi, 21-54; Eugene Powers Boardman, *Christian Influence upon the Ideology of the Taiping Rebellion, 1851-1864* (New York: Octagon Books, 1972).


22. *San Zi Jing* is a popular and traditional tract used by Chinese for elementary Confucian education. Missionaries adopted this form in their Christian education. The American Board collection of Chinese tracts in the Harvard-Yenching Library has different versions of the Christian trinitarian classic, ranging in date from 1832 to 1913. e.g. Charles Hartwell, *Zhengdao qimeng* (basic instructions for truth); W. H. Medhurst, *Sanzi jing* (three-character primer); Sophia Martin Little, *Xunnü Sanzi jing* (three character instructions for women) etc.


25. A sect originating from Buddhism in the 4th century that has been regarded as dangerous sect to be suppressed by government ever since the 16th century. They have all kinds of denominations and scriptures, and their members are from all fields. The majority were the poor and powerless who are illiterate. They are congregational and women can rise to important positions. Daniel Bays compares this sect and Christianity and concludes that due to the similarities in doctrine, structure and practice, "for the years between 1860 and 1900, the sectarian origin of a large segment of the
growing Chinese Christian congregations was a key feature of the cross-cultural phenomenon of Chinese Christianity.” (Daniel H. Bays, “Christianity and Chinese Sects”), 134.


27. Lutz gives one example: The Basel associate Xu Fuguang (Tshi Fuk-kong) in conversation with a bandit-soldier, argued, “you heathens are ruled by the devil, but we Christians rule the devil.” The outlaw, to free himself from the devil’s influence, decided to join the ranks of the believers, 182.


30. Liang A-fa, Chüan-shih liang-yen (Good words to admonish the age) in Liang Fa chuan (Life of Liang A-fa) second ed. Mai Chan-ssu (Hong Kong: The Council on Christian Literature for Overseas Chinese, 1968). Appendix, 16-21; 21-25; 69-70. This little pamphlet of Liang is famous because it inspired Hong Xiuquan, the leader of Taiping Rebellion in forming his sect.


32. Dunch, 215. It is a very hard job to analyze the complexity of the history of Chinese Christianity in this thesis. I have tried to avoid oversimplification and overgeneralization. Many church leaders in the 1920s called for the establishment of independent churches because at that time Christianity was so closely entangled with imperial power that many Chinese made Christianity the target and the root of imperial oppression. Theologians like T.C. Chao, Wu Leichuan, Xie Fuya, and others, wrote many articles and books concerning the indigenization of Christianity and how to help Chinese people appreciate the truth in Christianity through the lens of Confucian and Taoist teachings. These theologians were famous for the liberal ideas they had received from Europe or North America. However, their liberal thinking drew a reaction from some foreign and Chinese evangelical missionaries and preachers. These evangelical thinkers established their own press to write articles and argue with the liberal ones. It is hard to say who won the debate, yet, the fact is that Chinese churches, even today, are more influenced by evangelical ideas. For more

33. Bohr, 43.

34. Duan Qi, 63.


42. Kwok, Christianity and Chinese Women, 48.


44. Kwok, “Chinese Women and Protestant Christianity,” 204. Kwok points out that the liberal missionaries influenced by social gospel affirmed Christians’ responsibility to society. The Christian women leaders at 1920s were mainly influenced by the liberal missionaries.

46. Wayne Flynt and Gerald W. Berkley, “I was a different person – my
girlhood was past,” Taking Christianity to China: Alabama Missionaries
in the Middle Kingdom, 1850-1950 (Tuscaloosa: The University of
Alabama Press, 1997), 202-205. The author recorded several letters of
women missionaries’ impressions of China, and only one of them said
something positive about Chinese culture. The others were criticizing these
“heathen” evil traditions. Another exceptional person who rejected the
stereotyped depiction of Chinese but reflected the valuable spirit and
virtue of the Chinese is Pearl S. Buck. She also challenged the evangelical
mission ideas in her polemic, Is There a Case for Foreign Missions? (New

47. Kwok, “Chinese Women and Protestant Christianity,” 107; Heidi A.
Ross, “Cradle of Female Talent: The McTyeire Home and School for Girls,
1892-1937,” 225-7. The missionary schools for girls in Shanghai and Nanjing
were training girls to be good wives. These girls’ schools in China were
copies of the girls’ schools in Europe and America, such as Wellesley
College at Boston before the 1950s.

Hunter, Gospel of Gentility, 28-29; 51; 265; Heidi A. Ross, “Cradle of Female

49. Before I go on with my discussion, I want to clarify that in the Chinese
Bible, the title for the pericope of the Syrophoenician Woman is “The
Faith of the Canaanite Woman.” People know it only as the Canaanite
woman, and Syrophoenician is only a footnote for her Gentileness. Pastors
treat this story the same as that in Matthew and Matthew has priority over
Mark. Therefore, in the following examples, the main verses the preachers
are discussing are mainly from Matthew 15: 21-28.

50. Sun Bin, “Jinan Furen de Xin (The faith and virtue of the Canaanite
Woman)” in Tianfeng, September 2004, 10-1; Zhong Shiji, “Hanjian de
Xinxin (The Unusual Faith)” in Tianfeng, August 1998, 3-4.


52. Vong Suoli, “Jinan Furen de Xin – Huixin (The Heart of the Canaanite

Satisfies Human Being’s Need.” Both Zhou and Zha are serving the
Taipei Huimu Tang (Taipei Baptist Assembly Church). Zhou is an elder
and Zha is a deacon. The church posts sermons online. http://
host.ccea.org.tw/~tbtc/pulpit/01/0715.htm
55. Ibid.
57. Chen Zhongdao, “Healing the Daughter of the Canaanite Woman,” in The Heavenly King: Sermons on Matthew (Hong Kong: China Alliance Press, 1993), 391-397. The author summarizes thus: her faith integrates with what she has heard from the proclamation of Jesus; she knows who she trusts in; she is brave to approach Jesus for mercy; she tells Lord the pain of her and her daughter; what she asks for God is what God likes to do; she asks for mercy of God because she has mercy to her daughter; her faith is humble and perseverant. Other commentaries (in Chinese) friends in Hong Kong have found for me are: Zhong Zhibang, “Drive the Demon from a Syrophoenician Girl with a Saying,” in Chinese Bible Commentary, vol. 29 (Hong Kong: Chinese Christian Literature Council Ltd., 1991), 152-155; Wu Le’en, “Jesus and Canaanite Woman,” in Commentary On Matthew (Hong Kong: Taosheng Press, 1977), 262-264; Peng Fu, “The Canaanite Woman,” in Two Hundred Lectures on the Bible, vol. 1 (Hong Kong: Lutheran Union Press, 1958), 100-102; Wu Luoyu, “Drive the Demon out for the daughter of the Canaanite Woman,” in The Righteous Servant and The King: Commentary on Gospel of Matthew, vol. 2 (Hong Kong: China Graduate School of Theology Press, 1996), 51-61. The content of these commentaries are similar to those by Chinese preachers in mainland China and Taiwan.
58. Dunch, 204.
59. The earliest commentary on this story I found is in 1894 done by a German pastor. “Israelites are God’s chosen people but we are heathens who are inferior as dogs and should be content with the crumbs. The story tells the humility and faith of this woman.” See Hua Zhi’an, Lectures on Mark (in Chinese) (Shanghai: Holy Christian Union Press, 1894).
60. I realize that it is unfair to criticize these sermons for ignoring the woman’s “word” and focus on the woman’s “faith” so much, because they thought Matthew is the original story and in Matthew, it is the woman’s “faith” that is praised and affirmed by Jesus. When they did go to Mark, they usually explained the story in the light of Matthew and made the same conclusion.


63. Kwok, 1995, 78. The contemporary sermons I referred to at the beginning of the chapter all paid little attention to Jesus’ words, stressing Jesus’ real action of the miracle, an action of God’s compassion.

64. Kwok, 1995, 72.


76. Jim Perkinson, 77. “I read the rhythm of riddle and riposte as pedagogic for Jesus himself.”

77. Jim Perkinson, 81

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