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From the Editor

Since its inception in 1985, the *Chinese Theological Review* has focused primarily on the work of contextualization in the Protestant churches of China: efforts to build the church up theologically and institutionally as a church engaged in the life of faith of the Christian community, and in relating to the rapid social and economic change China continues to experience. These overlapping contexts challenge and shape each other. As the selections in this and previous issues demonstrate, the churches in China increasingly play a more active role in society.

This issue contains work by or about three senior theologians who have been active in contextualization efforts throughout their long careers: Prof. Chen Zemin, Bishop K.H. Ting, and the Rev. Wang Weifan. Prof. Chen, retired professor of systematic theology and former vice-president of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, is a senior theologian and church leader. He was honored by the Chinese government in 2009 for his outstanding contributions to theological education in China. As this issue goes to press, Bishop K.H. Ting’s retirement from his position as president of Nanjing Seminary has been accepted by the Seminary Board of Trustees (March 1, 2010). He has been named honorary president; his successor is the Rev. Gao Feng, who is current president of the China Christian Council. Bishop Ting is a past president of the China Christian Council and a church leader of world renown. Rev. Wang Weifan has retired from his Seminary positions, but continues to preach as
well as to write on a wide variety of subjects. Over the years, many of the essays and sermons of these three authors have appeared in the *Chinese Theological Review*. (For those interested in reading further, a listing of their work that has been published in these pages is included in this issue.)

The Preface to *Quest and Witness: Selected Writings of Chen Zemin* is the work of Prof. Duan Qi, senior researcher at Institute of World Religions at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing and the author of a comprehensive study of the Protestant Churches in China, *Struggling Forward: The Indigenization of Protestant Christianity in China* (in Chinese). Prof. Chen has long recognized the importance of contacts with scholars of religion outside the churches and the respect and friendship evident in Prof. Duan’s preface reflects this. Her preface is also important in highlighting the contributions of Prof. Chen, himself an accomplished musician, to the contextualization of church music. He draws on traditional Chinese approaches to music, including the Buddhist cultural heritage. His longstanding efforts in this regard might be seen as a precursor to the image of the “harmonious society” and harmony among religions called for at the 17th Party Congress in October, 2007.

A number of authors have written on Bishop K.H. Ting’s role in initiating and promoting Theological Reconstruction. Mr. Zhou Jiacai’s essay in this issue is particularly interesting because the author is a former government and Party official from Jiangsu province. He has written a great deal on religion and religious policy, including a biography of Bishop Ting, titled *Love Never Ends (Ai wu zhi jing)* (Nanjing: Yilin Press: 2008). Readers will find that his language and perspective is not that of the church, but should not be put off by this, for his observations are important. He is a very sympathetic,
understanding, and insightful observer. His analyses are brief with an emphasis on the social function of religion. His is one view of the ways in which the Theological Reconstruction initiative can be measured and evaluated in church and society as a whole.

The Rev. Wang Weifan notes that Christian ethics and character have long been admired by non-Christians in China and Chinese Christians today feel they have a clear contribution to make in the area of ethics and moral values. Today, Christian values of love, aid for others, tolerance, and social equality are seen by many Christians as resources for creating a more caring, and in political parlance, more harmonious, society. In exploring what he terms contemporary spiritual reconstruction, the Rev. Wang Weifan cites a spectrum of examples of social and spiritual concern among secular and Christian academics and journalists, as well as personal examples. Rev. Wang demonstrates that concern for ethical values has become an important issue for many Chinese, a point where meaningful contributions can be made from a Christian understanding. His concern is the biblical basis of these values in the Christian context, not simply as an ethical code, but as an embodiment of the love and justice of God in our world.

The Rev. Dr. Lin Manhong’s paper brings traditional Chinese ethical concepts to bear on the issue of corruption in modern society. Her purpose is “to offer a Confucian ethical understanding of the positive role of shame in moral self-discipline and moral self-cultivation with a hope to contribute to an ethical discussion of anti-corruption.” In the course of her argument, she demonstrates through her use of Confucian sources that so-called “shame” cultures (often used to characterize Asian cultures) are not necessarily weaker in moral terms than so-called “guilt” cultures (European culture).
The government call to religions at the 17th Party Congress (2007) to actively participate in building up a harmonious society has been interpreted by Christian writers not only in terms of ethics, but in terms of reconciliation, tolerance, care for the environment, and fairness or social equality (as in the issue of wage arrears affecting migrant labor). In his essay, Mr. Hu Yingqiang discusses relations between Christianity and Chinese religions. This essay is taken from *Christianity and the Construction of a Harmonious Society: Essays from a Discussion Forum on “Christianity and Harmonious Society – Theological Seminaries on the contribution of Christianity to the Construction of a Harmonious Society,”* edited by the Rev. Gao Ying and published in 2008. Mr. Zhou Jiacai discusses and evaluates this conference in the last two pages of his essay on Bishop Ting.

In addition to his work as vice-president and academic dean of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, the Rev. Dr. Wang Aiming is also editor of the *Nanjing Theological Review* and has published extensively in its pages. The essay included here is the conclusion to his doctoral dissertation, “Church in China: Faith, Ethics, Structure,” subtitled “The Heritage of the Reformation for the Future of the Church in China.” His writings frequently explore the European background of themes that he sees as important for the present development of the church in China: the importance of ethics, concern for society and the need for a clearer ecclesial structure.

Finally, two essays by Catholic writers are included in this volume of the *Chinese Theological Review*. Both writers are Catholic religious who have studied overseas, and offer their perspectives on praying from the Bible and the future of Catholic Christianity in China. These essays show that Catholics and Protestants in China have many concerns in common.
The *Chinese Theological Review* has returned to its roots, with the editorial component once again based in Hong Kong, this time on the premises of the Sheng Kung Hui Ming Hua Theological College. Ming Hua’s generous hosting of this journal is acknowledged here with thanks. The new address and email for editorial and subscription correspondence are as follows:

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I am grateful to the authors of these essays for sharing their work. Any errors in presentation are entirely my own. I would like to thank Sr. Janet Carroll, MM, for bringing the essays by Sr. Rong Lina and Fr. Ren Dahai to my attention.

The *Chinese Theological Review* is a publication of the Foundation for Theological Education in Southeast Asia. As always, I am grateful to the Foundation and to Dr. H.S. Wilson, executive director, for their ongoing support of the journal.

Janice Wickeri  
Hong Kong  
Lent 2010
Preface to *Quest and Witness: Selected Writings of Chen Zemin*

DUAN QI

Not long ago, I received a call from Prof. Liu Ruomin of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, saying that the *Selected Writings of Chen Zemin* were to be published shortly, and that Prof. Chen, Vice-president of the Seminary, would like me to write a preface because he felt that I had the best understanding of his thinking. Prof. Liu asked me if I would be able to oblige. I really felt extremely flattered by the request, because I am deeply aware that my knowledge in this regard is superficial and I have no special qualifications for the task. But I also thought of the honor Prof. Chen did me by asking, and the profound meaning the publication would have for future generations. If I were to refuse, I would be letting him down. I gave it a lot of thought and the more I thought the more I felt that as his junior to turn down this respected elder would be a sign of oversensitivity. So I sought the counsel of two friends, Prof. Mou Zhongjian of the Central Nationalities University in Beijing and Prof. Wen Yong of the Beijing Foreign Languages University. As it turned out, both were very supportive. Prof. Mou said not to worry, students had written prefaces for their professor’s writings before. Prof. Wen said that I could not spurn the deep affection shown me by Prof. Chen’s request, for that would disappoint him. It was at these two friends’ urging that I finally plucked up my courage to write this introduction.

Some years ago I remarked to a friend of mine that among those published by contemporary Chinese Christian theological circles, Prof. Chen Zemin’s books and articles were particular favorites of mine. I spoke these words with
genuine feeling and no intention of seeking favor. When I first became involved in researching Chinese Christianity, it was Prof. Chen Zemin’s essays, especially his “Christianity and Culture in China: an American-Chinese Dialogue,” that attracted me to the field. But I would have to begin this story with an international conference, “Christianity and Modernization,” co-sponsored by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Institute of World Christianity and the Amity Foundation in 1995.

I remember that prior to this international conference, the Institute asked each participant to submit a paper. I felt that as a Chinese I should write something on the integration of the modernization of Christianity and Chinese culture, but at the time I was studying American Christianity and had never studied Chinese Christianity. I had no idea how to write such an essay. And so I began to read Selected Writings from Nanjing Union Theological Seminary (1952-1992), and when I came to Prof. Chen’s “Christ and Culture in China,” things suddenly became clear to me. His analysis in this essay really gets to the crux of Chinese culture and the position of Chinese Christianity within that culture. For example, he says that Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism (including folk religion) “are found to be in the blood and veins of traditional Chinese culture, often in a mixed way, both among the educated elite and the common people. Perhaps many people took an agnostic or indifferent attitude toward institutionalized religion. There were very few, if any, thoroughgoing rationalist atheists. But they were not immune to such cultural influences. Therefore, when we talk about traditional culture, we should bear in mind this compound nature. And when we talk about the indigenization of Christianity in China, if we confine ourselves to just point out the similarities and parallels of Christianity and Confucianism and/or Taoism and/or
Buddhism in juxtaposition, there is a danger of forgetting the broad masses, who are also bearers of Chinese culture. This seems to be what many scholars and theologians have done or are doing.”¹ This passage was a tremendous eye-opener for me. The explication in this essay of the way contemporary Christian theology could integrate (contextualization) with Chinese society and culture, including its view of God, Christology, theory of humanity, etc., was even more a timely help for someone like me who had never read anything of Chinese Christian theology. All at once, my mind opened up. So I “borrowed” a great deal of Prof. Chen’s thinking, added a few things, and wrote my first essay on contemporary Chinese Christianity: “The Contextualization of the Contemporary Chinese Church.” After this essay was published, and positively critiqued by a number of people, I understood that it was to Prof. Chen that the credit for this essay was due. In 1998, the Institute made “The Indigenization of Chinese Christianity” an Institute-level course, and because I had written an essay on the topic, the Director of the Institute, Mr. Zhuo Xinping, put me in charge of it. This was how I gradually became involved in the study of Chinese Christianity, finally resulting in my book, Struggling Forward: The Indigenization of Protestant Christianity in China.

There is much profound thinking in Prof. Chen’s Chinese Christian theology, including a sober recognition of the backward condition of theology in the contemporary church. “During the implementation of religious policy in the last twenty years, the restoration of church activities, and the rapid development of the church, theological thinking that was popular fifty years ago has flourished and been handed down nearly unchanged; we can call this ‘unchanged for fifty years.’² But during these same fifty years, Chinese society has undergone reform and opening and a sea change, entering on the initial period
of socialism. Many viewpoints and thinking incompatible with socialism remain in the church. That theology is behind the social reality. In this sense, it can be said that by comparison with the ideological awareness of people throughout the country, we are indeed behind. Looking at another aspect, during this fifty years, world Christianity has experienced many changes and there have been many significant new developments in theology, among them some worth our reference and study. In the past dozen or so years of reform and opening, we have just begun to learn a bit of these. In this sense, we are also a dozen years behind in theology compared to the rest of Christianity. Further, knowledge of Christianity in scholarly circles in China during the past twenty years has also undergone important changes. Many scholars have undertaken the study of Christianity, and have a deep understanding. They have outpaced us in theological thinking. They have written a not inconsiderable number of books on Christian doctrine and theology, more profound and advanced than ours. In this sense, we are far behind intellectuals outside the church who are sympathetic to Christianity.” On this basis he pointed out: “At this juncture between centuries, what will be the mental outlook of our Chinese Christianity as it enters the 21st century? Are we able to adapt to a socialist society? To a very large degree, this will be determined by our theological thinking.” ³

His views here have made him a great supporter of Bishop K.H. Ting’s proposal for theological reconstruction, and especially of Bishop Ting’s concept of the “Cosmic Christ.” This idea is rather advanced for our present world, because it connotes a profound meaning. Just as Chen wrote in his Foreword to Selected Writings of K.H. Ting: “His Christology posits the “Cosmic Christ” as an extension of “God is Love,” absorbing the “process theology” of Whitehead and Teilhard de Chardin’s
evolutionary thinking, taking the creation, safeguarding, redemption and sanctification of the cosmos to its ultimate completion, all as the entire process of God’s work through Christ; opening up the debate which has hovered around the concept of Christ as ‘fully divine and fully human’ for over a thousand years and correcting the one-sided and narrow traditional Christology which has made Christ only the Redeemer of humankind. There have been two paths in theology: creation-centered and salvation-centered. The first is more open and can easily accommodate all sorts of progressive thinking and adapt to social changes; the second is susceptible to a narrow exclusivism. In “Creation and Redemption,” Bishop Ting handles this question very well, alerting us to and providing a corrective for the tendency in Chinese churches today to stress salvation while undervaluing creation. On human nature, Bishop Ting points to the concept in Chinese culture of the “innate goodness of human nature.” He contrasts this with the Christian concept of original sin, reminding us that “humans are made in God’s image,” and are “unfinished creations of God,” “co-workers with God in the work of creation,” while also pointing out the necessity of saving grace and emphasizing the possibility of human responsibility and development.” 4 Though this passage reflects Prof. Chen’s interpretation of Bishop Ting’s Christology, it is in fact also a portrayal of his own theological thinking. We can also see from it the role the theology of these two men has played for the Chinese Church today.

With regard to theological reconstruction, Prof. Chen has paid great attention to communication with intellectuals outside the church, and beginning from this point, he has esteemed highly the idea of the “Cosmic Christ”; saying, “the good thing about the idea of the ‘Cosmic Christ’ first of all, is its expression that through
it a dialogue can be undertaken with educated youth and intellectuals in the wider society. Recently a group of ‘culture Christians’ has emerged ... by taking the theory or theology of the ‘Cosmic Christ’ as our basis we can open up a dialogue with them and have a common language through which to unite with and attract them.‘’

Prof. Chen strongly emphasizes dialogue between the church and intellectual circles. Not only does he pay great attention to articles and books on Christianity published by academic circles, he follows their scholarly activities with interest. He will accept an invitation to appear at any conference our Institute holds, in order to have the opportunity for direct exchange and dialogue with those in academic circles.

Prof. Chen’s own theology is extremely open, but he has never demanded that others be like him, and he is profoundly aware that the majority of the believers in the Chinese Church are “evangelical,” which means that in order to unite the majority, Chinese theology cannot move forward too quickly. “To unite with others we cannot proceed as quickly as we might like, if we do, we will become estranged from them and create a distance between us. We need to do Chinese theology, not just for the sake of doing theology, not just as a curiosity to amaze our foreign dialogue partners with ... so our theology develops rather slowly, more steadily, and the main reason for this is our concern for unity, our consideration for our believers’ capacity for acceptance.”

For this reason he takes a fairly understanding attitude to the more conservative theology that emphasizes salvation. Of course, he is not satisfied with this, and is gradually encouraging a capacity for change in such conservative theological thinking, a capacity to adapt to a changing society. “In times when the church found itself in extraordinary circumstances, the theology of our Chinese church concentrated only
on salvation, seldom touching on or discussing other theological themes, and this is understandable, but we never said it was entirely correct.”

Prof. Chen has done a great deal of probing into contextualization (or indigenization or Sinification) of the Chinese Church. In addition to theological exploration, he has done much toward the Sinification of church music. These efforts are reflected not only in his music theory, but in his use of Chinese tunes for hymns in *Hymns of Universal Praise*, and his promotion of the use of Chinese musical instruments such as the guqin, the Chinese seven-stringed zither, in worship. All this demonstrates that Prof. Chen is a first-rate church musician in addition to being a theologian. Speaking of research in the indigenization (or Sinification) of Chinese Christianity, though I have written books on the subject, these contain many references to his efforts in this regard, but all have been written from a theological point of view. Since I have no knowledge of musical theory, I have been unable to explore his work on the Sinification of Chinese hymnology and have avoided the topic in my own writing. Because I know next to nothing about his efforts in merging Chinese culture and *Hymns of Universal Praise*, it was only when I saw the manuscript of his *Selected Writings* that I learned of his profound contributions in this area. Not only did he advocate the use of Chinese folk tunes for hymns, he openly suggested using Buddhist tunes as well. Conservatives in the church criticized him, but he did not back down, seeing it as a beginning of interfaith dialogue. “Over eighty per cent of Chinese Christians are fundamentalists. Any absorption of Buddhist or Taoist elements into our Christian *Hymns of Universal Praise* (or our translations) will be subject to immediate opposition and protest (in “Holy, Holy, Holy,” the use of *miao shen* to translate “mystery” ignited an intense controversy,
because it is a Buddhist term! When I revised the tune of *Pu’an zhou* [The incantation of Pu’an] for Psalm 103, I changed the name slightly to *Pu’an song*, meaning a hymn of universal praise, but in Chinese the first two syllables [though the characters differ—ed.] sound similar to the original. In this way, the tune was fully accepted. Buddhism and Taoism are now using a really startling method of developing their monastic music ... I happened to discover that they also use Western tunes for musical performances in the temples and even Christian anthems or tunes, accompanied by traditional instruments as well as modern electronic ones. Perhaps Buddhist and Taoist adherents are not so fearful of Christian “influences.” It will be some time before it will be possible to have interfaith theological dialogue in China, but we now have begun a kind of musical conversation among different faiths. This should be not only possible, but beneficial.”

This passage shows that in his work of Sinifying church music, Prof. Chen is not only taking into consideration how to make Christianity Chinese, but also the issue of bringing Christianity into conversation with other religions. I sometimes think that if all Chinese Christians were able to attain Prof. Chen’s level, Chinese Christianity might have become thoroughly Sinified long ago and Christianity would long ago have become in Chinese people’s eyes a genuine religion “of Chinese people themselves” entirely on a par with Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism.

I have been greatly benefitted, not only from Prof. Chen’s masterworks of theology, but also from his work in Christian historiography. Due to Prof. Chen’s profound grounding in theology, his Christian history is also solid. His *Christianity Q & A* is the best and deepest of this type of book presenting basic Christian knowledge that I have seen. It not only introduces general Christian history, it
explains clearly the theological and philosophical aspects of the development and changes in the history of religion. When I wrote “The Historical Background Produced by Christianity,” to be included in Basic Knowledge about Christianity, edited by Zhuo Xinping, Prof. Chen’s book was my primary reference. In addition, in December 2005, at the Central Nationalities University in Beijing, while teaching a survey course to second-year students, “Introduction to Christianity,” that book became the major component of my teaching material. All in all, though I have never formally been a student of Prof. Chen’s, the influence his essays and books have had on me and the help they have given me has been very profound.

I also have a deep appreciation of Prof. Chen as an outstanding religious educator. His attainments here can be seen not only in the important speeches of guidance for seminary students, his speeches at opening of term and at commencement, but in the full use he makes of all scholarly resources to enhance the resources for studies available to students. In the few short days I spent at Nanjing Union Theological Seminary pursuing my research, Prof. Chen suggested that I share with students what I knew about the work of academic research. But actually, compared to Prof. Chen, what experience did I have? But he insisted and I could only do my best, such as it was, to speak to the students about my experience. From this small incident I saw the care for his students’ growth that Prof. Chen had as a religious educator.

Prof. Chen is not only my most respected teacher in terms of his knowledge, he is my model as a person as well. I have known him for many years and from our first meeting, my impression of him was that of a warm and humble senior. His learning encompasses East and West, but as a person he is very low key. Whenever I came to see him in Nanjing, he would come down to the entrance
of the office building himself to wait for me, much to my
embarrassment. I was especially moved in early December,
2006, when I came with Tang Xiaofeng, a young colleague
of mine, to gather materials at Nanjing Union Theological
Seminary. Because we were pressed for time, we had only
a day in Nanjing. Prof. Chen was at a meeting in Shanghai
that day, but in order to see me, he hurried back that
morning before the meeting had ended. It was noon before
he arrived in Nanjing and we were worried that he was too
tired. We planned to go later in the afternoon to see him.
Who would have imagined that this ninety-plus year old,
would forgo a rest to send Prof. Liu Ruomin to find us in
the library, and when we rushed over to his office, had
been waiting by the door for some time.

Prof. Chen has always been my model as a scholar.
His learning is extensive. Though he is well on in years,
he hasn’t slowed down in his scholarly pursuits and he
has his fingers on the pulse of Christian scholarship both
here and abroad. Several months ago, I phoned him and
he asked me to tell one of the young scholars in my office,
Dong Jiangyang, that he’d bought the book *Contemporary
Theologians*, which Dong had translated and that he
thought it was a fine translation, which he lent out to
his students. Just one thing, however, it wasn’t the latest
edition--it would really be great if Dong could translate the
latest edition. When I passed this on to Dong, he said that
in fact it had not been the latest edition that he translated,
but there was nothing he could do about it now.

I am also very appreciative of the guidance and
support Prof. Chen gives to younger scholars. In the early
‘90s when I returned from the U.S., at the urging of my
husband Dai Kangsheng I collected and organized what I
had seen of the situation of denominations there and wrote
*The Evolution of American Religion: American Religion as
a Chinese Sees It*. Following its publication in late 1994, I
sent a copy to Prof. Chen. I never thought he would read it so carefully. In 1995 I saw him at a meeting in Beijing and he said my book was the best book on U.S. religion that he had seen in China. At the time, I couldn’t believe my ears, because I had always lacked confidence in myself. His words were naturally a huge encouragement and incentive to me.

In sum, both as a scholar and as a person, Prof. Chen has had a tremendous influence on me. Though I cannot totally comprehend his extensive learning, I have been boundlessly benefitted by it. I’m sure that readers of Quest and Witness: Selected Writings of Chen Zemin will benefit as I have.

Duan Qi is a senior researcher at the Institute of World Religions in Beijing, author of Struggling Forward: The Indigenization of Protestant Christianity in China. Beijing: Commercial Press, 2004.


1. See “Christ and Culture in China,” in Selected Writings from Nanjing Union Theological Seminary (1952-1992); and in CTR, No. 8: 77.
2. A play on the phrase wushi nian bu bian (no change for fifty years), as applied to Hong Kong following the 1997 handover.
3. See “What Kind of Mental Outlook will Chinese Christianity Have as it Enters the 21st Century?” in Selected Writings.
5. See “On Theological Reconstruction in the Chinese Church,” in Selected Writings.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
Works of Chen Zemin Published in the *Chinese Theological Review*

“Remarks at the Close of the Fortieth Anniversary Celebrations for Nanjing Union Theological Seminary,” No. 9: 5.
“To Unite All in Christ, That We May Become One,” No. 12: 154 (sermon).
“Living is Christ and Dying is Gain” (sermon) No. 15: 112.
“Faith’s Journey” Foreword to Love Never Ends, No. 16: 63.
Corruption has become a global issue. As stated in the latest annual report of the worldwide anti-corruption organization, Transparency International (TI), there is “clear evidence that corruption affects ordinary people everywhere regardless of where they live or what they earn.”\(^1\) In other words, corruption has long crept into the different areas of people’s lives, including the social, the economic and the political. It has done great harm to the majority of people in society, because corruption is “breaking legal and organizational rules to use public goods or the power vested in one’s public office for private ends,”\(^2\) as concisely defined by scholars. According to the prediction of the Global Corruption Barometer 2007 surveyed by the TI, corruption will increase in the near future, and therefore, anti-corruption is a journey and not a destination.\(^3\)

Based upon the same survey, corruption has many faces around the world and the experiences of corruption among ordinary people vary. Hence, on the one hand, the anti-corruption strategies need to reflect these crucial differences at a country level, matching solutions to local concerns and problems. The worldwide consensus is that governments need to work harder to clean up basic services and to prove to their people that they are committed to fighting corruption in word and deed.\(^4\) On the other hand, corruption also has its common forms and character at a universal level and no government is the only group responsible for making anti-corruption initiatives effective. Joint efforts from all sectors of society in all parts of the
world are needed to fight against corruption. My guess is that the theme of this conference, “Religion, Ethics and Corruption,” serves to seek some possible contributions that theology and ethics can make to dealing with this global issue.

Before exploring how religion and ethics can contribute to the task of anti-corruption, it would be useful to examine some major reasons for corruption.

Low salaries of civil servants are often cited as a reason for corruption. However, most people with low salaries are able to stay honest, hard working and trustworthy, while many who are not able to do so are corrupt officials in high and responsible positions, and earning good salaries. Therefore, a low salary is not a valid reason for corruption, especially for greed-driven corruption as opposed to need-driven corruption. According to a global Q&A database, the following reasons cause corruption.

1) Greed is the root of corruption.

2) The lack of rules, regulations, policies and legislation is conducive to corruption.

It is believed that Corruption is more likely to flourish in an organization without clear rules, regulations or policies that guide employees in their work or in a country without clear policies and legislation that guide the behavior of all citizens and residents.

3) Unrestrained power and authority may produce corruption.

Corruption can easily take place in institutions where public officials have great authority, can exercise discretion with respect to interpretation and application of regulations, and are not required to be accountable to anyone.
4) The absence of transparency and accountability usually generates corruption.

Where there is no transparency in an organization, i.e. where tasks and functions are conducted in secret and are not open to examination by other government officers or the public, the opportunity for corruption increases. Accountability means that public leaders and officers must provide logical and acceptable explanations for their actions and decisions to the people they serve. Civil servants and officers in responsible positions must at all times adhere to the principles of transparency and be accountable to the people they serve.

Of course, accountability is dependent on the enforcement of rules, regulations and policies, if there is a lack of effective institutional mechanisms civil servants cannot be held accountable and corrupt practices can flourish.

5) The lack of a watchdog institution gives way to corruption.

If there are no internal or external institutions or bodies that investigate cases of corruption or complaints relating to corruption, employees may take advantage of the fact that the chance of being caught by doing something corrupt is remote. Even if the offender is caught, the consequences would probably be minimal if the system has no watchdog function.

There may be other causes for corruption. Nevertheless, if we take the above-mentioned reasons seriously and respond to them appropriately, we can probably assume that the world will be less corrupt. Moreover, among the reasons that cause corruption, greed is the top one. What is greed? Greed can be understood as the excessive or rapacious desire and pursuit of money,
wealth, and power. Such unrestrained desire and pursuit are likely based upon an assumption that the more material wealth we get, the happier we will be. Nevertheless, according to studies of the economy of happiness, more wealth beyond the provision of a basic level of material comfort does not increase happiness. Just as Buddhists believe: the root of all evils is a mistaken view about the nature of reality.

Since greed is the root of corruption, anti-corruption requires moral self-discipline as much as structural control. This paper is in an attempt to offer a Confucian ethical understanding of the positive role of shame in moral self-discipline and moral self-cultivation with a hope to contribute to an ethical discussion of anti-corruption.

The concept of shame has a great significance in the Confucian ethical tradition, especially in the theme of moral self-cultivation and moral self-discipline. Because Chinese traditional culture has been so deeply influenced by Confucianism, it is legitimate to address Chinese culture as a shame oriented culture. This, however, does not mean that shame culture is inferior to guilt culture as some people claim. In her book, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture*, Ruth Benedict argued that guilt cultures were supposedly more advanced because they focused on individual autonomy while shame cultures were more group focused. She also wrote that guilt was the superior moral motivation because guilt was internally motivated while shame was externally motivated. Nevertheless, such a position is no longer tenable.

Etymologically, the composition of the word for shame in Chinese (chi, 耻) is two characters, ear (er, 耳) and stop (zhi, 止), which may imply that when hearing about criticism from others, one’s ears grew red, stopping one from wrongdoing. This could be understood as the
external aspect of shame in terms of moral motivation. However, another ancient form of the word for shame was composed of the characters for ear and heart (耳心) and could be interpreted to mean that because of one’s wrongdoings, one’s ears grew red and one felt regretful from the bottom of one’s heart. Some recent studies of shame done by both Chinese and Western scholars have indicated the existence of the internal aspect of shame. These scholars argue that shame in its essence is a kind of internal sanction. Shame is felt even when one is convinced that one is alone and it has little to do with outsiders. It is because one longs for an ideal realm or an ideal self-identification that a sense of shame is aroused when one is not able to reach such a realm or to identify with the ideal self. Shame is a kind of self-reflective consciousness of one’s whole being. Hence, it could be argued that shame is both internally and externally motivated because it has both moral and ethical dimensions. From the moral perspective, shame follows the law of autonomy; from the ethical perspective, shame follows the law of heteronomy. In what follows, we will examine how a Confucian understanding of shame can play a positive role in moral self-cultivation and in keeping one from corruption.

Some scholars argue that not only is the Chinese culture a shame culture but the moral character of Chinese people is also shame oriented. Confucius (551-479 BCE) considered shame as an important trait of an educated person (shi), as indicated in the Analects: “A man who restrains himself with a good sense of shame…can be called a Shi.” Mencius (372-289 BCE) even treated the sense of shame as a basic moral requirement of a human being. He taught that, “Men should not be without shame. A sense of shame is of great importance to men. . . . If one has no sense of shame, how can one be considered a proper man?” Based upon these understandings, a good
sense of shame had a great impact on the cultivation of one’s moral character, because it was used as a tool to restrain oneself from doing any shameful things. As a result, moral self-cultivation was to cultivate a good sense of shame. Having a good sense of shame was conducive to moral self-discipline.

When asked what the shameful was, Confucius replied, “Under wise and honest government, it is right that one takes office and lives on the salary at ease. But it is shameful that under dark and corrupt government, one still takes office and lives on salary at ease.”

This may imply that, for Confucius, being officials and pursuing wealth were not shameful; what would make one ashamed was to serve a dark and corrupt government. Serving a dark and corrupt government would make it more likely for a person to participate in the dishonest words and deeds of the authority, which would inevitably bring shame to this person. To avoid being morally ashamed, Confucius instructed that “Under wise and honest government, speak and act in a straight and upright fashion; under dark and corrupt government, act in a straight and upright fashion but in speech be affable and cautious.”

It could be understood that, for Confucius, in spite of any external change, to act straightly and uprightly was always important and was internally motivated. By doing so, a person would stay away from being ashamed due to collaborating with any dark and corrupt government.

Another core issue in the discussion of a Confucian shame culture is how to handle the tension between yi (義, righteousness) and li (利, interests). According to Mencius, a sense of shame would give rise to righteousness (yì). Righteousness or yi was regarded as an extremely important element for Confucian moral self-cultivation. As scholars argue, in Confucian understanding, “Li or interests is to pursue the good on behalf of the interests
of the ego-self and is associated with the conduct of the less developed individual (xiaoren, 小人), while yi or righteousness can be readily identified with the exalted-self and the conduct of the exemplary person (junzi, 君子) who pursues the broader good.”¹⁷ This understanding was based upon Confucius’ famous remark regarding the relationship between yi and li: “The gentleman sees righteousness [yi]; the petty man sees interests [li].”¹⁸

Confucius also considered yi as the most important virtue of a junzi. Confucius asserted that one ought to remember what was right or righteousness (yi) at the sight of interests or profit (li) and to take only when it was right for one to take. If one’s acts were motivated by profit, one would incur ill will.¹⁹

Mencius also shared a similar idea, but was more radical. Li, for Mencius, meant ego advantages; pursuing interests or profit, even not merely for the individual or smaller communities, could become selfish and therefore dangerous to the welfare of all.²⁰ Mencius even maintained that yi was more precious than life.²¹ Although Xunzi (335-238 BCE) opined that yi and li were both necessary for humans, yi also was considered far more important than li. Xunzi maintained that a well-governed society was to encourage yi to prevail; if yi was overshadowed by li, society would be chaotic.²² Xunzi envisioned that when the Perfect Way was embodied, “the way of public-spiritedness will prevail everywhere, and selfish private interests will be closed off. The public good will be made clear, and private affairs put to rest.”²³

As scholars argued, in Confucian understanding, the manifestation of yi within officialdom was being incorruptible, which meant having legal income. Officials with clean hands were able to define the boundary between public interests and private interests.²⁴ As Mencius noted, “It would be corruption to take if one could choose
between ‘to take’ and ‘not to take.’” That which the officials were able to choose between “to take” and “not to take” could be special gifts from civilians, commission from a business transaction, or a conventional tip and so forth. Mencius would consider such income as ill-gotten gain that would affect an official’s cleanness.

Being clean or incorruptible was a virtue for a Confucian official, but staying clean did not mean that an official had already reached a high stage of morality. Staying incorruptible was a necessary moral requirement for or a moral obligation of a Confucian official. Furthermore, Confucians also analyzed different motivations for one to remain incorruptible. According to a collection of Quotations for Engaging in Politics (《从政录》，薛宣) written in the Ming Dynasty, there were three reasons that would result in an official staying economically clean. 1) It was because of inner moral principle that one did not want to take what one was not supposed to take. 2) It was because of pursuing a good reputation that one did not take what one was not supposed to take. 3) It was because of fear of violating rules and regulations and losing position that one was afraid to take what one was not supposed to take. Having listed these three reasons, the book continued to explain that to remain incorruptible due to following the inner moral principle was at the highest moral stage, because it was a voluntary act. To be clean due to fear of being caught with dirt on one’s hands was at the lowest moral stage, because it was done out of outer pressures. To remain incorruptible due to wanting to keep a good reputation was in the middle.26

Such a Confucian understanding of the moral obligation for an official to stay incorruptible from three different motivations can be related to John Stuart Mill’s understanding of moral obligation in relation to punishment. Mill wrote,
We do not call anything wrong unless we mean to imply that a person ought to be punished in some way or other for doing it – if not by law, by the opinion of his fellow creatures; if not by opinion, by the reproaches of his consciousness. . . .

There are other things, . . . which we wish people should do, . . . but yet admit that they are not bound to do; it is not a case of moral obligation; . . . we do not think they are proper objects of punishment.

Mill’s argument seems to be that if people do not do what is good but not obligatory, they are outside the realm of punishment. However, if people violate moral obligation, they are liable to punishment, and there are three kinds of punishment: by law, by public rebuke and by the reproaches of their consciousness. These three types of punishment seem to parallel the Confucian analysis of three kinds of motivations that resulted in being incorruptible. If we put a Confucian understanding into Mill’s words, it might read like this: there were people who stayed clean because they either feared to be punished by law, or attended to rebuke by their fellow men, or followed their self-consciousness.

As mentioned before, to stay incorruptible which was a moral obligation for Confucian officials, was an important manifestation of Confucian righteousness, yi, which was generated from a sense of shame. Hence, it is not too farfetched to relate shame to punishment. In fact, shame, as noted before, is a kind of internal sanction, which can be understood in Mill’s words as the reproaches of one’s consciousness. Because of its external aspect in moral motivation, shame can also be used as a kind of moral punishment for those who violate moral obligations, including engaging in corruption. Thus, it can be argued that a good sense of shame can serve as
an effective force to prevent people from being corrupt. Such a force is both generated from the internal and the external. As suggested by Bernard Williams, the ethical value of shame can be suspect if thinking right and wrong can be determined simply on the basis of internalized law, because a socially isolated person is not ideally situated to make moral judgments. Right and wrong are also to be determined with recourse to a sense of one’s place within a society. Thus, shame, based upon the above-mentioned ethical understanding, has a positive role to play in anti-corruption, because of its internal sanction and external punishment of being corrupt.

As noted in the beginning, anti-corruption demands both moral self-discipline and structural control. Paul Knitter, when writing about ways of Buddhism and Christian Liberation Theology in regard to overcoming greed in a consumerist society, argues that both inner and outer changes are needed. He posits that we need to change hearts so as to change society, but changing our hearts is not enough to make social change. Inner change is a necessary requirement, but not a sufficient requirement for outer change. Accordingly, to overcome greed, the root of corruption, moral self-cultivation or cultivating a good sense of shame, which aims more to the inner change, is insufficient. Therefore, to set up rules, regulations, policies, and legislation to fight against corruption, to limit the unrestrained power and authority, to ensure transparency and accountability, and to establish and complete a watchdog institution are highly demanded. Though inadequate, the Confucian perspective of focusing on inner change will join in contributing to building a less corrupt world, just as Knitter argues that, “the Kingdom of God requires both the transformation of the heart and the transformation of society. Both transformations inhere in each other, but they cannot be reduced to each other.”

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4. Ibid.
12. “人不可以无耻”，“耻之于人大矣，……。不耻不若人，何若人有？”Mencius, 7A:6, 7。
20. A well-known example was when Mencius took a long journey to see King Hui of Liang (梁惠王), the king assumed that Mencius
must have some suggestion for profiting his kingdom (not the king himself). Nevertheless, Mencius replied: “Why must Your Highness mention profit [li]? What I have to suggest is ren and yi, and nothing more. If Your Highness says, ‘How can I profit my kingdom?’ the officials will say, ‘How can we profit our families?’ and the squires and the common people will say, ‘How can we profit ourselves?’ If superiors and inferiors contend among themselves for profit, the state will be endangered...Let Your Highness then talk only of ren and yi. Why must you talk of profit?”

Mengzi, 1A:1.

Mencius stated: “Life is what I treasure and righteousness is also what I treasure. If I cannot have both, I prefer righteousness to life. Though life is what I treasure, there is something that is more precious to me, and that is righteousness. So I will not draw on an ignoble existence.”

“生亦我所欲也，义亦我所欲也；二者不可得兼，舍生而取义者也。生亦我所欲，所欲有甚于生者，故不为苟得也。” Mengzi, 6A:10.

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30. Ibid., 68.
Protestant Christianity and Chinese Religions: an Ecumenical Perspective

HU YINGQIANG

Renowned German theologian Hans Küng has stated that, “There will be no peace among the nations without peace among the religions. There will be no peace among the religions without dialogue among the religions!” This insight is instructive for Christians in seeking both to further their own unity, and to coexist in harmony with other Chinese religions. This article provides an account of the formation and development of post-denominational unity in Chinese Protestantism from the perspective of ecumenical theology. I then proceed to investigate the most effective way of ensuring its harmonious coexistence with the other four major religions in China, and its contribution to China’s construction of a harmonious socialist society.

“Post-denominational” unity – the quest for church unity in the People’s Republic of China

In Christianity and Chinese Religions, which Hans Küng co-authored with Julia Ching, he summarizes the development of Protestant Christianity in China and its interaction with Chinese religions into seven models or stages of development.

The history of Christianity in China and its relationship with Chinese religions

The first model was characterized by “outward assimilation,” such as the Nestorians’ accommodation of religions such as Buddhism and Daoism when they were proselytizing in China. The second model was characterized by “syncretic mixture,” as in the case
of Manichaeanism, which in China was a mixture of Christianity, Buddhism, Confucianism, and traditional Persian religion. The third model was characterised by “complementary levels” – for example, while Jesuit missionaries like Matteo Ricci proselytized in China they also inquired into areas such as the relationship between Western learning (represented by Catholic culture) on the one hand and Eastern learning (represented by Confucianism and Daoism) on the other. The fourth model was characterized by “missionary confrontation,” such as the famous “Rites Controversy” in which conservatives within the Roman Catholic Church clung obstinately to their “traditions.” Accordingly, they viewed accommodation of Chinese religion and culture by Ricci and others as departing from the fundamental truths of Christianity, and considered the praise of Christianity by high Confucian officials such as Xu Guangqi as nothing but an expedient plot to use it “to complement Confucianism and replace Buddhism.” These missionary mistakes cost Catholicism the opportunity to gain a true foothold in China. The fifth model was characterized by “cultural imperialism”—the forceful missionary activities of Protestant denominations in China following the Opium Wars, which tarnished the image of Protestantism in China. The sixth model was characterized by “anti-missionary reaction,” and was a consequence of “cultural imperialism.” Christianity in China came under fire during events in modern Chinese history such as the Taiping and Boxer Rebellions and the anti-Christian movement. In order to survive, Chinese Protestantism cut ties with the Western church and changed its image. The seventh model is characterized by “contextual inculcation,” and in the modern era has been manifest in movements within the Chinese church for indigenization and independence. These have attempted to achieve fusion between Protestant
Christianity and China, in the hope of its truly setting down roots and growing to maturity here.\textsuperscript{2}

Thus it can be seen that Protestantism came to China from the West, and therefore inherited both the ecumenicalism of Christianity and—because of the direct influence of denominationalism within the Western church—a profusion of denominations. There was enmity and confrontation between them, weakening the Chinese church’s ability to bear witness as one body in society. Denominationalism seriously hindered the development of the Chinese church. Because they had suffered deeply as a result of denominationalism and were additionally encouraged by Chinese traditional culture to “value peace and live together in harmony,” and moreover because they were moved by Christ’s prayer for unity, people with high ideals from within the Chinese church initiated movements for independence and indigenization from the early 1900s. Unfortunately, however, the semi-colonial and semi-feudal nature of Chinese society at the time meant that the fragmented and troubled plight of Chinese Protestantism could not easily be changed.

Post-denominational unity—seeking unity and indigenization in the People’s Republic

The founding of the People’s Republic of China provided a secure base from which Chinese Protestantism could pursue unity. In the early 1950s, Chinese Protestants initiated the Three-Self Movement, which was to do away with denominational differences. The Three-Self Movement not only urged Chinese Protestants to free themselves completely from the confines and fetters of foreign missions in areas such as internal administration and exchanges with the ecumenical church, but also enabled the Chinese church to engage in independent reflection and decision-making. Moreover, the Three-
Self Movement was a non-denominational patriotic movement. Participating in the movement, churches of different denominations forged connections that were closer than ever before, facilitating mutual recognition and understanding and greatly reducing prejudice between denominations, leading to greater unity. This unity was initially manifest when seminaries that had previously belonged to different denominations began to hold joint classes. In November 1952, 12 seminaries in the east China region joined together to form the Nanjing Union Theological Seminary; subsequently, seminaries in north and northwest China joined together to form the Yenching (Yanjing) Theological Seminary. From this time onwards Chinese Protestant seminaries were set on “the way to cooperation, which was also the road to unity in the Lord.”

The Nanjing Union Theological Seminary advocated and implemented the principle of mutual respect concerning matters of faith in academic life. This principle “encouraged unity between different denominations, … swept away any ideological obstacles to implementing united worship in Chinese Protestant Christianity,” and provided a tangible instance of churches joining together. In 1958, prompted by “socialist collectivism and the Chinese cultural tradition of integrating diverse elements,” and arising from “self-awareness founded on participation in the Three-Self Movement,” “God, through the particular historical conditions of the time,” guided the Chinese Church towards united church services (lianhe libai). The success of these united services brought an end to the plethora of denominations and also meant that, “the unity that Chinese Protestants longed for had been achieved …”

After passing through the “valley of death” that was the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese church burst forth in resurrection. Following the opening of churches in Ningbo, Xiamen, and Shanghai in 1979, worship services gradually
resumed in churches throughout the country. After years of repression, the fervor of Chinese Protestants’ faith was unleashed. The denominational background of a church no longer mattered; the most important thing was that one could go to churches and hear sermons at all! Churches everywhere sought accessibility in rites of worship, and tried their utmost to adopt a style acceptable to the majority of people so as to unite believers from all denominations in participation. “Over the last two years, Protestants in this city have not distinguished between denominations … they do not ask which denomination you were originally from, for they all share one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God …”5 It was reported that in rural churches, which account for most Chinese Protestants, “The denominational issues of the Western traditions no longer exist. Few people know what Lutherans or Reformists are. They would not be interested in discussing the clash between Calvinism and Arminianism … doctrinal opposition of a purely philosophical nature is rare in the countryside.”6 This situation strongly reinforced the progress that had been made with the establishing of united worship in the late 1950s.

To sum up, despite the particular social and political conditions of the time, it was primarily cultural and religious factors that led to Chinese churches breaking new ground and holding united services. Since Protestantism had a short history in China, denominationalism was not deeply entrenched. Chinese Protestants usually joined together in a particular church due to coincidental factors such as the prompting of a friend or relative, or because it was close by; they had no understanding or expectations of particular denominations. The theoretical discussion that occurred around unity in the independence movement and indigenous church laid the ideological foundations for Chinese churches’ banding together, and the amalgamation
of seminaries throughout the People’s Republic provided a direct and tangible experience of it. More importantly, the Chinese traditions of equality and incorporating disparate elements called for unity and provided the cultural support for it. United church services were a practical example of Protestants in the new China seeking unity, and provided an organizational model for the ecumenical church movement that was full of life and vigor. At the same time, united services also laid a firm foundation upon which Chinese Protestantism could pursue post-denominational church unity with indigenous Chinese theological characteristics.

As the old Chinese saying goes, “When there is harmony in the home everything prospers.” The successful implementation of united services promoted unity in the Chinese church and thereby accelerated its revival and growth. The rapid development of the Chinese church in all kinds of areas also called Chinese Protestants to a further-reaching unity, and required that the church rouse from its slumber to establish a national church body. The establishment of a national non-denominational Protestant association in October 1980 signalled that Chinese Protestantism had formally entered a post-denominational era. The China Christian Council (CCC) serves to “unite all who believe in the one heavenly father and acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord under the guidance of the same Holy Spirit and in accordance with the same Holy Scripture to come together as one and run the Chinese self-supporting, self-propagating and self-governing church well. [The China Christian Council] advocates mutual respect in matters of faith, and the spirit of “bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” in relationships among its members.”7 In contrast to church associations and federations overseas, the China Christian Council
does not coordinate various denominations, but itself has some of the qualities of a combined church because it was formed after united services were introduced. “In the post denominational period, it has already undertaken many church tasks on a national scale … in some respects it has really already performed some of the functions of a church federation.”

The role of the China Christian Council is to encourage all Chinese Protestants to work together as one, to seek the greater common ground while reserving minor differences in matters of faith, and refrain from attacking each other; it also advocates that the church be independent and self-governing, that believers love both the nation and the church, and that they bring glory to God and benefit people. In the early 1980s, the Council formulated a *Catechism, the Constitution of the China Christian Council*, and produced the *New Hymnal*, which included hymns from all denominational backgrounds. In the process of producing these documents or hymns, the CCC tried to encapsulate the essence of each denomination’s background and traditions and enable them to be understood by all. Today most churches throughout China are happy with this approach and enjoy a stable church life.

Of course, unity does not imply centralization, and church life can be diverse; the influence and experience of each denominational tradition has been retained in the Chinese church. Our guiding principle is to seek the common ground while reserving differences in matters of faith. This philosophy originates from the Chinese cultural tradition: “The Confucian school of thought believes in the ideal of Great Harmony (*datong*). This does not equate to centralization or standardization; it refers rather to an over-arching harmony despite minor differences, and indeed can be fully understood only in connection
with these differences.”11 Thus, Chinese churches have retained liturgies of both christening and baptism, the Holy Eucharist as well as the breaking of bread; Protestants can choose for themselves. Experience demonstrates that a degree of diversity helps to maintain unity.

After more than half a century of Protestants working together, the post-denominational unity of the Chinese church has attracted worldwide attention. The World Council of Churches has hailed the CCC as a model for the ecumenical church’s unremitting quest for friendship and cooperation between different denominations. It is common knowledge that Chinese Protestantism has declared that it has entered a “post-denominational era,” and has overcome the prejudices that denominationalism causes in Western churches; this achievement has been noted by others.12 The Chinese church has some characteristics that are regarded as brave. For example, different styles of baptism can peacefully coexist without posing any obstacle whatsoever to unity. The post-denominational church founded by Chinese Protestants according to Three-Self principles is needed not only by Chinese Christianity, but also in order to reflect the true ecumenicalism of the Christian faith. Today, Protestant Christians are coming to the realization that China’s greatest gift to the ecumenical church may well be this view of the church.13

Towards the harmonious coexistence of Protestantism and Chinese religion

The construction of a harmonious socialist society has become a goal shared by all Chinese today. This goal has further promoted unity within Chinese Protestantism, and has also created political, social, and cultural conditions that facilitate the peaceful coexistence of Protestant Christianity with other religions. Joining in the construction of a harmonious socialist society is also
the unshirkable duty of the religious world, including Protestantism. Although Protestant Christianity differs from other religions in terms of faith, this does not prevent us from getting along and working together to build a harmonious socialist society.

The cultural basis upon which Protestant Christianity can harmoniously coexist with other religions in China

Chinese culture emphasizes reconciliation and seeking the common ground while reserving differences. Confucianism teaches unity between Heaven and humankind, Daoism teaches unity and harmony between humankind and nature, and holds that “knowing harmony is called constant.” The description “valuing harmony” best represents mainstream Chinese culture from time immemorial to the present day. For Chinese people, the essence of “harmony” is respect and gratitude; it means kindness in the heart, peace in the home, harmony in society, and Great Harmony on earth. The foundation of “harmony” is “harmony despite difference,” harmonious coexistence, forgiveness; the wonderful culmination of “harmony” is “Each has its own beauty, each praises the other’s beauty, each allows the other’s beauty, all beauties coexist.” Thus, “harmony” is a hallmark of traditional Chinese culture, and underpins the thought of the ancient sages. This “valuing of harmony” is increasingly well regarded by Western ideologues. In the 1930s the famous English philosopher Bertrand Russell wrote in “The Problem of China” of “the ethical qualities in which China is supreme, and which the modern world most desperately needs. Among these qualities I place first the pacific temper ...” He further expressed the heartfelt view that if this quality “were adopted throughout the world, this earth would be a happier place.”

China’s long history relating to “harmony” has had
a profound influence on the dissemination of religions in China and the relationships between them. Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism were all foreign religions, but in the process of propagating and developing in China they infiltrated traditional Chinese culture and engaged with it. When a religion enters a country or region that has its own longstanding cultural traditions, it cannot remain completely insulated from that culture, but must engage and merge with it. It is in this developmental context that the religion is able to grow in the longer term. The entry of Christianity into China and its subsequent development there is no exception to this. To give an example, when foreign religious vocabulary and scriptures are translated into Chinese, the religion is already entering the field of Chinese cultural sensibilities. The more a foreign religion comes into contact with traditional Chinese culture, the more evident its similarity to it becomes. Buddhism has completely fused with Chinese culture and together with Confucianism and Daoism is now an integral part of China’s magnificent traditional culture. Thus we can see that tradition and culture are important foundations for the harmonious coexistence of all Chinese religions, including Chinese Protestant Christianity.

It is precisely because they have been profoundly influenced by Chinese tradition and culture that the relationship between different religions in China has historically been one of peaceful coexistence, and that China has never seen large-scale religious war. China is a united country in which many nationalities and religions coexist in harmony. People of all ethnic groups and religions identify with the Chinese nation and Chinese culture while retaining their own respective cultures and faiths, creating a situation in which harmony allows for diversity, and is sought from within diversity.

We must investigate the reason different religions are
able to get along together so well in China. As the saying goes, “The place produces the people.” Whether it be Islam or Christianity, religions have made constant adjustments after arriving in this country in order to gradually adapt to its environment and climate. In entering into Chinese traditional culture, which upholds harmony, Islam became Chinese Islam, and Protestantism became Chinese Protestantism. They took on Chinese characteristics and qualities, and have been able to coexist in harmony. This is even truer of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism. Although there is reasoned and sometimes even heated debate between them, the man of noble character fights with the pen rather than the sword, and eventually they have gradually tended towards cooperation.

The model of harmonious coexistence between Chinese religions exemplified by Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism not only has deep cultural roots and a fine historical tradition, but is also consistent with the trend in the ecumenical church towards seeking unity internally, and seeking to get along with other religions externally. It has therefore attracted the keen interest of many eminent scholars in the West. American theologian Paul F. Knitter confidently anticipates that “If China uses its cultural and religious diversity and religious pragmatism to become a strong voice for and a living example of this message, then the world will change enormously; if China’s contribution to the global family is not just economic development but also harmony and cooperation between religions, then our world will have greater peace, or greater potential for peace.”

The Chinese social and cultural context is, unquestionably, conducive to the harmonious coexistence of Christianity with other Chinese religions.

*Develop interfaith dialogue and discern the direction that Protestant Christianity should take in order to coexist*
harmoniously with Chinese religions

There are strong cultural supports for the peaceful coexistence of Protestant Christianity with other Chinese religions. There are also rich and precious theological resources contained within Protestant theology. We should seize the day and strive to access these precious resources so as to lay a solid theological foundation for the harmonious coexistence of Protestantism with other religions in China. Hans Küng shows great foresight as he points out that “Having one single religion is not possible; nor is it possible to use the values of one religion to unify all religions. However, what can unite different religions is peace; religious peace. In modern society, one religion cannot preside over all others. Between different religions, the first step is mutual understanding; the second step should be to find common standards and values. The third step is cooperation, and then bringing benefit to humanity. Different religions should be able to find common values, ethics and standards despite their doctrinal differences.”\(^{16}\)

The famous religious translator Wang Zhiju also sagely advises that, “Our theology must shift from traditional Protestant theology towards a pluralist Protestant theology.”\(^{17}\)

The founding of the PRC created a sociocultural context that was conducive to the harmonious coexistence of Protestant Christianity and other religions. Because the Chinese government has implemented a policy of freedom of religious belief and treated all religions equally, the relationships between different religions have been harmonious. There have also been areas of cooperation between them, such as planning for prayer for peace and joining in disaster relief efforts. But as multiculturalism increases today, the major world religions should also be unearthing and sharing those aspects of their doctrine that can contribute to world peace, the building of a
harmonious society, and human progress. The five major religions in China today all contain rich teachings that promote peace. For example a central theme throughout the Bible is reconciliation between humans and God, between people, and between humans and nature. In the area of ontology, Protestant theology holds that the Trinity is the model, means and ultimate reflection of humankind being reconciled to God and living in harmony with other people and nature. Protestant theology also teaches that the Bible reveals a “cosmic Christ” who gave his own life to achieve reconciliation between humans and God, and then rose again and ascended to heaven. It encourages believers to spread “the gospel of peace,” “urge people to reconcile with God,” and to become a person who is responsible and gets along with others. In addition, Protestant theology teaches that the church refers to the fellowship that people have with God, with others and with nature. In the area of eschatology, Protestantism follows the authoritative teaching of the Bible – “to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfilment – to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ” (Ephesians 1:10). In short, the treasure chest of Christian theology holds bountiful jewels when it comes to peace and harmony.

Daoism also has rich precepts pertaining to peace and harmony. It holds “The Way” (dao) as its supreme object of faith, and teaches that the most fundamental attributes of this Way are that it is the progenitor of all things, is naturally gentle and selfless, and avoids unnatural action (wu wei). Daoism teaches that “The Way follows only itself; To him by whom this harmony is known, the secret of the unchanging Way is shown.” It emphasizes the interdependence of all living things, and that the world can be full of life only while this harmony is maintained. If we make effective use of these teachings, they can lay a solid
theoretical foundation for the harmonious coexistence of all religions in China.

In November 2006 the Protestant and Islamic associations of Shanghai held an academic forum on “The harmonious coexistence of Protestantism and Islam in China.” This Forum not only saw Chinese Protestant and Islamic intellectuals engaging in deep and passionate theological discussion on the harmonious coexistence of the two religions and their contribution to the construction of a harmonious socialist society, but also saw well-known scholars presenting the fruits of their academic research. Both religious and academic delegates agreed that interfaith dialogue must seek unity amidst diversity, and commonality amidst difference, and from there lay a common platform for peace between religions. In fact, the varied yet united, different yet similar characteristics of religions are clear. Their varied or different natures do not necessarily cause conflict, and their united or similar natures do not necessarily lead to peace. As Confucius said: “Gentlemen live in harmony despite their differences; lesser men live in conflict despite their similarity” (Junzi he er bu tong, xiaoren tong er bu he). Emphasizing difference may create antagonism; demanding uniformity may also create a backlash. Only through respecting difference can harmonious relationships be built, not only in interfaith relations but also in international relations, interethnic relations and interpersonal relations. China’s interfaith dialogue should embody the spirit of China’s harmonious culture by adopting “seeking the common ground while reserving differences” as its guiding principle, and “harmony despite difference” (he er bu tong) as its chief goal. While commonality is important, diversity is likewise to be valued. Only in fully respecting “difference” while seeking “similarity” can religions join together in China’s harmonious culture.
In sum, after more than a century of unremitting effort, Chinese Protestant Christianity has finally found a developmental model for a post-denominational church that both accords with Protestant tradition and has Chinese cultural roots. This developmental model is able to promote unity within the Chinese church and set it along the road of post-denominational unity and steady movement towards the broader unity for which Christ prayed. Here, I would like to echo Hans Küng’s famous dictum – it is precisely because there is no peace among Christian denominations that there is no peace in the church; without peace in Christianity there can be no peace in religion, and without peace in religion there can be no world peace. In the same vein, post-denominational unity in the Chinese church models the harmonious coexistence of Protestant Christianity and other Chinese religions for the ecumenical church.

Of course, we are all patriotic. Protecting the dignity of the law, people’s rights and national unity is our shared responsibility; joining with all Chinese people to build “a harmonious socialist society characterized by democratic rule by law, justice, friendliness, vigor, stability, and humans living in harmony with nature“ is our shared mission, and the great revival of the Chinese nation is our common dream. The Chinese Communist Party and the government implement the principles of unity in politics and mutual respect in matters of faith, and also the policy of freedom of religious belief, creating a harmonious environment that is conducive to equality, respect, and cordiality among different religions.

Post-denominational unity is not only a fine witness on the part of the Chinese church to the unity that the ecumenical church has so longed for, but also contributes to the construction of a harmonious society. Chinese Protestants understand that ecumenicalism refers internally
to unity within Protestant Christianity and externally to harmonious coexistence with religions the world over. Therefore, visionaries within the Chinese church not only strive to lead Chinese Protestantism into post-denominational unity but also seek the harmonious coexistence of Protestant Christianity with other Chinese religions, so as to make a greater contribution to the nation’s construction of a harmonious socialist society.

Translated by Emily Dunn

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4. “Love country love church, stride into the new century – summing up 50 years of the Chinese Protestant Three-Self Patriotic Movement,” in Special Compilation Commemorating the Celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the TSPM (Shanghai: TSPM/CCC), 19.
6. Leung Kalun [Liang Jialin], China’s Rural Churches since Reform and Opening Up (Hong Kong: Alliance Theological Seminary, 1999),
156.

Bishop K.H. Ting and Theological Reconstruction
ZHOU JIACAI

It is well-known that Bishop K.H. Ting has always attached great importance to theology, publishing frequent theological essays as well as lecturing regularly on the subject. In 1940, while still studying theology at St. John’s University in Shanghai, he published a number of articles including “Reading the Bible at Christmas,”1 in the church magazine, Xiaoxi. During his studies and travels in North America and Switzerland, he published even more, essays which were thoughtful and incisive, such as “Intellectuals and Moral Responsibility,” “Christianity in Crisis,” “Hunger, Food, and Glory,” “The Power of Christianity,” “The Task of the Church in Asia,” etc. On returning to China in 1952, his first position was General Secretary of the Chinese Christian Literature Society, a publishing house in Shanghai. During this period he also began work on what eventually became a highly influential booklet entitled How to Study the Bible.2 Following his appointment as President of the Nanjing Union Theological Seminary (NJUTS) in 1952, he published a great deal in Tian Feng, Nanjing Theological Review and other periodicals. His writings evidence his solid background in theology and the concern and importance he attaches to the field.

The Origins of Theological Reconstruction
Most observers trace the start of theological reconstruction in Chinese Christianity to November 23, 1998 when the TSPM/CCC met in Jinan and passed the “Resolution on Strengthening Theological
Reconstruction.” Actually, Bishop Ting had been pondering the need for theological reconstruction for a long time prior to this. As early as September 23, 1984, in a lecture given at Doshisha University in Tokyo, “Theological Mass Movement in China,” he enthusiastically praised the national movement of theological rethinking (in the 1950s) initiated by the Christian masses and grass roots churches and meeting points, whose aim was to work out issues of how Christian theology could adapt to the Chinese national condition at a time not long after the establishment of the People’s Republic. Unfortunately, there were not many church leaders and theologians involved in or guiding the movement; in addition, extreme-left thinking was growing more and more severe at the time, and the issues, including the very existence of the church, were many. It was extremely difficult to contemplate further theological comparisons or debates in such a situation. Thus, the movement did not have the desired result, and Bishop Ting felt great regret over it. Placing this history beside so many of Ting’s other writings, we discover that in the early 1980s, Bishop Ting was already concerned about and had begun to ponder the issues associated with theological thinking.

In 1988 I took up the position of Vice-Director of the Provincial United Front Department (Jiangsu), and in 1993 concurrently began to serve as Head of the Provincial Religious Affairs Bureau. It was during this important period that Bishop Ting began to explore the issue of theological reconstruction. Because the two of us got along well, we had frequent, if intermittent, discussion of these issues. By way of summary, I think the causes for proposing theological reconstruction were many and varied. The primary ones were as follows:

The impact of the international environment,
especially the influence of the international Christian situation on Chinese Christianity. During the “Cultural Revolution,” due to the influence of pervasive extreme leftist thinking, Chinese contacts and travel to the outside were completely cut off, and religion was completely isolated from the outside. Bishop Ting’s channels for information about the outside world were blocked. Following restoration of order by the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Party Congress (1978), China implemented a policy of opening to the outside and contacts with the outside were also restored for religion, which meant that Bishop Ting was able to get increasing amounts of information about worldwide Christianity. As I recall, the issues we discussed the most during this period were:

- Christianity outside China, especially Christianity in developed nations. He introduced the way Christians participated in the life of the nation. In general, believers were at one with the state, adapted, and cooperation between church and government was rather good, while in China, what was being preached in some Christian churches and meeting points was that the believers should obey God, not listen to man. Relationships with the government were frequently harmonious on the surface but actually at variance;
- Christian theological thinking outside China was livelier, with all sorts of schools of thinking, and debate among them a normal thing, even if quite heated at times, while China was still immersed in the most basic tasks of restoring church buildings, training evangelists, and busy with recruiting members, etc. Theology was like a pool of stagnant water, so that some foreigners even said China had no theology. Bishop Ting found this terribly irritating. He undertook in-depth and detailed study
of international theological schools and discovered that there were some which were of no particular use to us—to Chinese Christianity—while others were: for example, liberation theology, process theology, Teilhard de Chardin’s theology, etc. Many of the ideas contained in these theologies were worthy of our study and reference. Therefore, Bishop Ting expended a great amount of effort in the study of these theological views, and wrote up his findings as lectures, which he then delivered to the students at Nanjing Union Theological Seminary. He also wrote articles and essays based on them that appeared in the *Nanjing Theological Review* and in *Tian Feng* for church leaders and believers throughout the country to read. He indicated which views could be admired and appreciated in China and which we might have reservations about or should reject.

- Many changes had taken place in Christianity outside China and we should seek to master an understanding of these changes. Some traditional Christian concepts had undergone great revisions, and even among fundamentalists and evangelicals, changes had taken place to differing extents, and if we did not grasp this information, we would have no way to communicate with them. And so on.

The transition in the domestic environment provided a very good opportunity for undertaking theological reconstruction. From the establishment of new China up until the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Party Congress in 1978, class struggle was a primary line of every Chinese policy. This situation had developed to the point that class struggle was stressed as the key link: clearly then class struggle must be a constant concern, every day of every month in every year, until the outbreak of the tragedy that
was the “Cultural Revolution.” Yet the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Party Congress marked a historical turning point. At this meeting, the Central Committee explicitly shifted the key emphasis of its work toward making economic construction its central concern, restoring the ideological line of Seeking Truth from Facts, particularly in Comrade Deng Xiaoping’s scientific elucidation of the fundamental issues of what constitutes a planned economy, what a market economy, what socialism is, and how to build a socialist society. He boldly proposed carrying out reform in China and opening to the outside world. Ideologically this was a turning from the old philosophy of struggle to one of seeking the common ground while reserving differences, of great unity and union, and bringing all positive factors back to the fore. In the area of religion, in 1982 the Communist Party Central Committee formulated Document 19: “The Basic Viewpoint on the Religious Question during China’s Socialist Period,” which opened a new situation in the United Front line during the new period and was a key link-type document which completely restored order in the area of religion. The document explicitly states that “the basic starting point and firm foundation for our handling of the religious question and for the implementation of our policy and freedom of religious belief lies in our desire to unite the mass of believers and non-believers and enable them to center all their will and strength on the common goal of building a modernized, powerful Socialist state.”

We are entirely justified in saying that with this document, China’s political life entered an unprecedented atmosphere of tolerance and harmony.

In 1993, Jiang Zemin gave an important speech at the National United Front Work Conference. What really stunned his listeners was the amount of time and emphasis he gave to the question of religion. He
made primarily three points (later known as the three statements): 1) to conscientiously implement the policy of religious freedom; 2) to strengthen management of religion according to law; and 3) to actively lead the mutual adaptation of religion and socialism. I attended this work conference, and like other listeners I felt that this was another extremely important document issued by the Party Central to guide religious work, like Document 19 in 1982. After the meeting, the National United Front Work Department and the National Religious Affairs Bureau invited the leaders of the five major religions in China to topical study seminars held in Hainan and the northeast on “Mutual Adaptation between Religion and Socialism.” Those in religious leadership circles found the seminars very rewarding. Bishop Ting felt that though the “active leadership” advocated by General Secretary Jiang was demanded of the Party Committee and government, and they were the main agents, those of us in religious circles also had to actively cooperate. Actually we ourselves should study the issue in order to achieve genuine mutual adaptation. The crux, what was most fundamental, was to undertake revisions in theological thinking.

The quality of Chinese Christian personnel was totally unable to meet the demands of the times. In the ‘90s, local church organization and united front and religious work departments in many provinces (municipalities and autonomous regions) and cities and counties undertook a survey of the circumstances of religious personnel. Thus Bishop Ting received quite a lot of material on the subject. Though the overall group of religious personnel was good, it could not be denied that there were many problems awaiting solution; for example, the concept of an independent self-run church was not on a solid footing among some in religious circles, and their theological level was low; some had low levels of political awareness and
education, and had not even adapted to the widespread social changes and developments under the policies of reform and opening, nor had they adapted to the situation of constantly rising educational levels among believers. There was an extreme shortage of pastoral workers, but rapid growth in the numbers of believers and the number of churches and meeting points—a contradiction that had been obvious for some time; there was a serious plethora of older pastoral workers who were not physically up to the task of serving the church over the long term. Bishop Ting recognized that the shortage and low quality of religious personnel were at present the most egregious and serious ways in which religion and socialist society were not adapting to each other. This situation was also one of the reasons impelling Christianity to initiate Theological Reconstruction. Bishop Ting hoped that by initiating Theological Reconstruction, he could on the one hand speed up the enlivening and renewing of theological thought and on the other hand, through this practice, foster and train a new generation of patriotic and church-loving persons.

As Christianity developed, old theological concepts surfaced and theology lagged behind. Bishop Ting told me many times that he often heard that the sermons of preachers in many churches and meeting points were fifty years behind the times, that many of their ideas were old and stale, conservative, with many theological ideas and thinking that Western Christianity had abandoned long ago. Bishop Ting felt that it was worth seriously pondering how this kind of preaching could possibly satisfy Christians or be acceptable to those outside the church, or enable Christianity to adapt to social developments. Just as Vice-Director of the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA) Wang Zuo’an said, “Under the conditions of reform and opening, a lot of misconceptions and fallacies...
have slipped in from overseas, out-of-date theological concepts have surfaced and had quite a negative impact, conflicting with social development and the progress of the times. Several decades of experience have shown that many problems existing with Christianity are at a deep level issues of theological impact. If we were to have a Christianity existing and developing in a socialist society with a code of conduct rooted in the outworn theological concepts of a colonial church, the only surprising result would be if no contradictions or conflicts emerged.”

The influence of Mazu. I first heard Bishop Ting speak of this at a formal dinner, though later, he was to speak of it many times. Bishop Ting doesn’t care for most socializing, because it is so exhausting: one has to listen so closely to what others say, giving careful attention to the points they raise and to how to respond. But he is very fond of getting together with friends he knows fairly well and gets along with, then there is a much more relaxed atmosphere in which one can speak one’s mind. In Nanjing, Bishop Ting and the then Vice-Secretary of the Jiangsu Party Committee Sun Han and the Provincial Party Committee United Front Department Head Mr. Sha Renlin were present at the latter type of gathering. They had maintained contact since a similar gathering over a decade ago. In the beginning, there were four—K.H. Ting, Wenzao Han, Sun Han, and Sha Renlin—and later I joined them. We usually met at the Western restaurant at either the Jinling Hotel or the Central Hotel. The atmosphere was relaxed and cordial and so every dinner lasted two hours or more. Once Bishop Ting mentioned that he’d had the opportunity to come into contact with people practicing the Mazu folk belief and had been greatly inspired by what he found. He said that in a conversation with Kuang Yaming, president of Nanjing University, the two had become very interested in this Mazu culture. Mazu was a young woman
born over a thousand years ago in Putian on Meizhou Island in Fujian. She understood the laws of astronomy and weather, so she could guide the fishermen about when to put to sea and when not to, thus saving many fishermen’s lives. Once she took out a small boat on her own to call the fishermen back to shore, but she fell into the sea and drowned. She was only 28 at the time. For this reason the people respected her and worshipped her and remembered her on special days each year, calling her the bodhisattva of great love and great sorrow. If Mazu is regarded as a god to whom offerings are made, then in Taiwan there are several hundred Mazu temples. But despite the fact that offerings have been made to Mazu for over one thousand years, this never developed into a standard religion. There are no priests, no religious doctrines, no theology; what is most distinctive are the ethics and morality, the teaching that everyone should be a good person. This phenomenon interested both Bishop Ting and myself, and with his encouragement, I made a special trip to Meizhou Island to take part in the Mazu Cultural Festival. This experience led me to think that if China’s religions could all go the road of emphasizing ethics and morality, then it would be a beautiful thing for our socialist motherland. This is relevant for Christianity, for it is worth studying how theology can be brought together with real existing society, and how it can better serve the needs of the masses. At that time, Comrade Sun Han and others greatly supported and encouraged Bishop Ting’s views on this subject.

The negative influence of heretical sects on Chinese Christianity. By the 1990s, there was a profusion of heretical sects in China, including in Jiangsu. The Spirit Spirit Sect, the Shouters, and Eastern Lightening were among the dozens of heretical sects that made use of Christianity. At the dawn of the 21st century, they spread rumors that the end of the world was at hand, that the
world would be destroyed and humankind would endure tribulation. The self-proclaimed heads of these heretical sects said that they were emissaries sent by God to save all who would believe in them. Under the pretext that people could attain salvation only through them, they amassed money for extravagant living, seduced women, and did harm to people. Some also incited the masses to sell their livestock and retreat to the mountains, thus destroying all means of livelihood, while others said they could drive away spirits that caused disease, so if you were ill, there was no need to go to the doctor. The Chinese people hated the heretical sects, and because the majority of these sects were of Christian origin, the image of Christianity suffered for a time in the eyes of the common people. Because of this, Bishop Ting and Mr. Wenzao Han discussed what should be done. They both believed that the root of the problem lay in theological thinking. The masses could easily be taken in and cheated because the theological views of Christians at the grassroots lagged behind and the theological leadership of pastors and church workers was insufficient. This added to the urgency of initiating theological reconstruction.

The immediate reasons for promoting theological reconstruction were a letter that Bishop Ting received from a pastor and a series of problems at Nanjing Union Theological Seminary that provoked Bishop Ting to take action. Because he is amiable and approachable, Bishop Ting customarily received all sorts of letters, from ordinary Christians, from pastors and church workers, from seminary students and their parents, from alumni, from overseas friends, and of course from local United Front Department and Religious Affairs Bureau officials. The great majority of these letters were reports on a particular aspect of the local situation, so reading them enabled Bishop Ting to get a handle on local news and an
important means through which he could understand the local situation. Reading these letters was a burdensome task of his daily work. As Bishop Ting was thinking about the theological reconstruction issue, he received a letter from an older pastor in Suzhou reporting on outdated theological views that were not appropriate for the church and that were inconsistent with ethics and morality. Some of these views he did not have the heart to speak about in the pulpit. This caused Bishop Ting to see that theological thinking had reached the point at which reform was absolutely necessary. In addition to this, a series of events at Nanjing Union Theological Seminary even more directly moved Bishop in the direction of theological reconstruction.

Nanjing Union Theological Seminary was originally a seminary with relatively open-minded theological thinking and without any denominational background, and Bishop Ting had served as seminary principal since its founding. In the 1990s, as a result of the policy of opening to the outside world, all sorts of international theological viewpoints infiltrated the seminary, especially the conservative forces of the Fundamentalists. In addition, seminary students were recruited from all over China, and the majority were from rural churches at the grassroots. They were very much under the influence of local churches and some were influenced by the “house churches.” Thus their theological views were for the most part old-fashioned and conservative. Many of the original seminary faculty began to retire, and they were replaced by younger faculty who had studied overseas, some of whom had returned with Western Fundamentalist views they had learned abroad. As a result, the relatively open-minded NJUTS became more conservative. The conservative “spiritual” atmosphere of some students and faculty became more intense and increasingly opposed to the
open-minded views of the seminary leadership, resulting in several instances of conflict and collision.

One factor in this conflict began with views about natural disasters. Devastating floods took place in China in 1991 and 1998. In the face of these sudden disasters, the masses and a great number of cadres, working under the leadership of the Party and the government at all levels, waged a fierce struggle in the flood stricken areas, performing many moving and heroic deeds. In his preaching and speeches at meetings, Bishop Ting expressed his view that even if those participating in the response and rescue operations were not Christians, their selfless efforts in saving people and their property were worthy of respect, thoroughly embodying the virtues of truth, goodness, and beauty. All true, good, and beautiful things should be welcomed, and NJUTS faculty and students should praise and study them. However, some NJUTS faculty and students held a different view, believing that the frequency of natural disasters in China was a sign of the end of the world because people had offended God and God was punishing us. Such opposing theological views made the atmosphere at the seminary very tense. Some at the seminary posed the question in the sharpest terms as to whether NJUTS was preparing a new generation of leaders or of future gravediggers. Bishop Ting fully recognized the seriousness of the problem, and in his analysis, it would be very difficult for the seminary to resolve its difficulties on its own. And so he proposed to the TSPM/CCC that an evaluation of the seminary be conducted by the National United Front Department, the State Administration of Religious Affairs, the TSPM/CCC, the Jiangsu Provincial United Front Work Department, and the Jiangsu Provincial Religious Affairs Bureau. When he proposed an evaluation, what he actually had in mind was a rectification, because there were so many problems
in the seminary. Bishop Ting suggested the evaluation team begin its work by focusing on two major areas: implementation of the NJUTS plan of study (encompassing spiritual, ethical, intellectual, physical and mass-based elements) and the direction of theological thinking (whether or not it was adapted to socialist society). These were of central importance. The TSPM/CCC adopted Bishop Ting’s proposal, and at the same time received the full support of the National United Front Department, the State Administration of Religious Affairs, the Jiangsu Provincial United Front Work Department, and the Jiangsu Provincial Religious Affairs Bureau. These five bodies formed an evaluation team that came to the school to conduct in depth and detailed ideological work so that the thinking of the faculty and students could be unified. It can be said incontrovertibly that the serious antagonism in theological thinking within NJUTS was the most direct reason that led to the theological reconstruction initiative.

In November, 1998, with the support of the TSPM/CCC, Bishop Ting called a meeting of some important representatives of the Christian Councils and Three-Self organizations in the East China area at the Xinde Guest House in Nanjing (the headquarters of the Jiangsu TSPM/CC) to discuss the lack of theological reflection in the Chinese Church, and its rigidity and conservatism. Bishop Ting advocated the need for greater theological pluralism, and called upon church leaders and pastors to convey more modern theological views to Christians so as to lead them to mutually adapt to socialist society. This meeting was in fact preparatory to the subsequent Jinan meeting of the TSPM/CCC that approved the resolution on strengthening theological reconstruction. By this time, Bishop Ting and TSPM/CCC leaders Luo Guanzong, Han Wenzao, and others understood that they were facing a variety of theological differences and disputes and were at a point
of no return. As Ma Jia wrote in his book on Bishop Ting *Discerning Truth Through Love*, “What was needed was a deep and wide-ranging discussion that was national in scope from which to develop a modern theological system that was China’s own, one which could lead the Chinese Church toward health and stability. The alternative was to follow a narrow Western denominational theology that was against the times and which would represent the return of the missionaries’ way for China. This would be on top of the confused and disordered situation of the underground house churches, which were themselves lacking a comprehensive theology. It would mean that the Chinese Church would be like a sheet of loose sand and would return to pre-1950s Three-Self denominationalism.”

A second major factor that underscored the necessity of strengthening theological reconstruction was the incident at NJUTS involving the so-called “first group of three students” and the “second group of three students.” In 1999, shortly after the Jinan meeting, a dispute arose at the seminary over the songs that would be sung by seminary students at a public celebration to mark the eightieth anniversary of the “May Fourth Movement,” (the historic 1919 movement of intellectuals that is sometimes called the “Chinese Renaissance.”) Three post-graduate students protested that the patriotic songs that had been chosen had not been selected by the students themselves and therefore they refused to take part in the evening celebration. It should have been possible to resolve this dispute by consultation and talking things over, but because the students had acted at the instigation of a few faculty members and were supported by some students, the students were adamant and there was no way that the seminary administration could reason with them. The seminary leadership saw that they were under pressure and after the evening celebration was over, Bishop Ting issued
an impromptu statement. He said:

NJUTS is a seminary run by the TSPM. We hold patriotism in high regard because our purpose is to train patriotic students who support the Communist Party and our socialist motherland to be church workers who walk the Three-Self road. We are determined to run this seminary well. There are now a small number of students who basically oppose our educational policy. Because of this, they cannot value our diploma and therefore they can leave the seminary voluntarily. We will let them do this, which they no doubt see as a glorious act. We won’t make things difficult for them and we don’t plan to expel them. We would rather politely send them off on their way. If the day comes when they support Three-Self patriotism and agree with the seminary’s educational policy, then we will happily welcome them back.

In mid-June there was another group of three upper-level students, who were outraged that “the first group of three students” had been requested to leave the seminary voluntarily, and so they themselves requested to leave without their diplomas. According to what I know, the seminary in fact had requested “the first group of three students” to leave voluntarily as a last resort, and even though the language used and the actions taken by “the second group of three students” was more radical than those of the first three, the seminary leaders tried to be patient with them. At a meeting of the students and faculty of NJUTS, the second three grabbed the microphone in an attempt to force their views on the seminary, but still the seminary leaders used every means possible to reason with them, including asking faculty, classmates, parents, and their home churches to intervene, but all to no avail. The three remained firm in their opposition, and the seminary
finally had no alternative but to make the decision to allow them to withdraw.

In the process of dealing with these six students, Bishop Ting and other seminary leaders were careful in their actions and extremely patient. It should be said that they showed extreme benevolence, but it was all in vain. From these incidents we can see the extent of the polarization at NJUTS. I certainly do not think that the responsibility for this lies entirely with the six students; there is no doubt that they were the victims of those who supported them behind the scenes and who encouraged them to oppose the seminary’s educational policy.

A third major factor that underscored the necessity of strengthening theological reconstruction was the student elections. Shortly after dealing with the first and second group of three students, there was the issue of electing of representatives to the student association. Under Bishop Ting’s leadership, this had generally been a democratic and harmonious process. The seminary leadership did not involve itself with election of any of the previous student associations, and the students respected the advice and opinion of the seminary leaders. But this time, the situation was different. Students sympathetic to the six who had left, with the support of some faculty and students, influenced the feelings of the student body. The scheming of a very small number of students made consultation about the student elections very difficult. They forced students willing to communicate and consult with the seminary administration to step down, and brought forth students who were opposed to the leaders. Bishop Ting concluded that such students did not come to the seminary for an education, but were like the worker, peasant, soldier students who went to universities during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). In the words of a slogan popular at the time, they wanted to “enter,” “run,” and “transform”
the university.

I was part of the NJUTS evaluation team, and so I am quite familiar with what was happening at the seminary during this period, including the events involving “the first group of three students,” “the second group of three students,” and the student elections. I was normally involved in ideological work at the seminary, and I was there when the students grabbed the microphone during the meeting. I had not seen or heard about such a scene since the times of the Cultural Revolution. This left me with two impressions: the first was that within the seminary during this time, there were a large number of people with a certain influence who were opposed to Bishop Ting’s open-mindedness in theological matters. This made Bishop Ting’s call for an evaluation of NJUTS absolutely necessary, and the development of theological reconstruction in Chinese Christianity an extremely urgent priority. My second impression was that even in this situation, when he was the direct target of many attacks, and many harsh words were said against him, Bishop Ting maintained his stately demeanor. He responded in timely ways and was extremely patient, painstaking, and meticulous in his thinking and action. He tried to get people to change right up to the end, and even when there was no other resort, he still thought of offering the students involved a way out.

The All-Out Promotion of Theological Reconstruction

In the work report of the Sixth TSPM/CCC in December, 1996, Bishop Ting’s proposal for a theological reconstruction initiative in Chinese Christianity had already been adopted. The report noted: “The central issue is, on what kind of theological thinking shall we base our theological education? Our basic faith cannot be altered, but theological thinking can develop over time,
because God’s revelation is revealed gradually and our understanding and knowledge of God’s revelation develops gradually as well.”

By 1998, after two years of practice and preparation, the issue of theological reconstruction was discussed at the Jinan meeting of the TSPM/CCC. After careful consideration of the necessity and urgency of taking on this responsibility, the “Resolution on Strengthening Theological Reconstruction” was approved. It pointed out:

It is the opinion of this committee that in order to run the church well according to the Three-Self principles, we must develop theological thought to function in guiding church construction. Through their participation in the TSPM, Chinese Christians have gained a great deal of valuable spiritual experience; a theological summing up of this experience is urgently needed. Even more, the deepening and opening up of self-propagation demands lively theological reflection and exploration of how to better spread the gospel; how to guide Christians in their daily spiritual lives; how to promote Christian ethics and morality; how to glorify God and benefit the people.

The conference decided to expand the work of theological reconstruction by making the small group on self-propagation research into a committee with corresponding responsibility for organized research on the theological questions we are all concerned about. Maintaining our basic faith and the principle of love-country-love-church, the committee will promote the free exchange of views, mutual respect, in depth exploration, and the sharing of results in order to unearth the hidden treasures of the Bible and establish the Chinese Church on the firm foundation stone of Jesus Christ, as well as facilitate mutual adaption to socialist society.
At the Jinan conference, Bishop Ting gave a speech entitled, “God’s Revelation in the Bible and our Slowness in Grasping It,” which encouraged a lively debate among conference participants. Some observed that there were places in China where the preachers had a low level of education and had not received any seminary training, making it impossible for them to come to a clear understanding of the Bible. In their preaching, they often said absurd things, causing some Christians (especially women in rural areas) to believe that Christian faith could help them avoid misfortune and heal all illnesses. Some Christians regarded all non-believers as heretics and would have nothing to do with them. Other participants at the Jinan conference said that over the past twenty years they had put all their energy into building or restoring churches and had given little thought to theology. Seminary graduates were mainly concerned with preaching, and they did not pay attention to theological construction; now, this should truly be the number one priority. Other participants said that the basic faith of Christianity was unchanging, but that our understanding of the Bible develops over time, and that only when there is lively theological reflection can the church truly progress. Some participants also suggested that the seminaries should take the lead in promoting theological reflection.

At the meeting, CCC President Han Wenzao called upon co-workers to take time out of their busy days to make lively and renewing theological reflection part of their official business. He also pointed out that lively and renewing theological reflection and the plurality of theological views “should not mean breaking off the flowers that are already open, but seeing that there are not enough flowers. What needs to be broken off are poisonous weeds and heretical ideas” to create “an atmosphere of mutual respect … Misunderstandings and oversensitivity
are not conducive to mutual respect, mutual investigation, and mutual learning.”

At this national Christian meeting, the discussion led to a coming together of views and a developing consensus that gave a clear direction for Chinese Christianity. The resolution that was adopted at the conference was a brilliant page in the history of Chinese Christianity. This was a decisive act in promoting theological reconstruction.

In addition, a number of organizational measures were adopted to follow-up on the new initiative.

• At the end of 1999, the TSPM/CCC meeting in Shanghai established a small group for the promotion of theological reconstruction, with Bishop Ting himself as the head. This group would help church co-workers understand the importance of theological reconstruction and the plan which had been adopted and was being implemented so as to raise the level of theological thinking in Christianity as a whole. All of the senior Christian leaders were members of this small group, including Deng Fucun, Sun Xipei, Shen Cheng’en, Chen Zemin, Ji Jianhong, Su Deci, Luo Guanzong, Cao Shengjie, and Wenzao Han. Bao Jiayuan, Mei Kangjun, and Wang Aiming served as the staff. The make-up of this small group was very strong, showing the importance and determination that the TSPM/CCC had attached to it. The small group met frequently to summarize and analyze the developing situation of theological reconstruction throughout the country, and to take the lead in making timely suggestions.

• The small group on self-propagation that had been made into a committee continued to do research on how to improve self-propagation and promote theological reconstruction. Everyone saw that “self-
propagation” was the basic key to “Three-Self.” Only if Christianity could be “well-propagating” would the church develop in a healthy way. “Well-propagating” included the questions of who would be preaching, what would be preached, and how would it be preached. Committee statements included:

Evangelizing, preaching, and writing sermons is not simply repeating the basics of faith, but rather, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, our own interpretation of faith using an appropriate language. The preacher and those who listen are particular individuals, and the content of what is preached is also particular, producing a particular result for a particular situation or occasion. This is what the question of “content” refers to. If the content of what is preached is not studied, how can the level of preaching be raised so as to satisfy the spiritual needs of the believers and ensure that the preaching is going in the right direction?

Whether we are conscious of it or not, every sermon we preach has an implicit theological direction. Borrowing from sermons preached in the past or using overseas writings for reference can be good; but this becomes problematic when it is done indiscriminately or when we simply copy what has been said before. We need our own theological reflection in order to raise our critical facilities and have a standard for what should and should not be used. We need time for careful reflection to compare different theological views and extract what is useful in order to develop our own theological viewpoint and construct a theological system. The “self” that is emphasized in “self-propagation” requires us to seek and investigate theology in order to gradually shape a system of theological thought that is suitable for our own times and our own context.
A variety of types of study meetings were organized at different levels. Theological Reconstruction was not only something for the TSPM/CCC, Provincial Christian Councils, and Three-Self Organizations, it was also a question that all church workers and Chinese Christians should be concerned about, and so it was necessary to mobilize people at all levels to ensure broad participation.

The TSPM/CCC directly organized study meetings at the highest levels and conducted research activity of the highest standard. They held study meetings in Nanjing, Shanghai, Qingdao, and other cities, and in addition to co-workers who wrote essays for scholarly exchanges, they also invited some local leaders of Christian Councils and Three-Self organizations for study, but also to promote theological reconstruction at the next level.

Seminars on theological reconstruction were also organized at China’s theological seminaries. Forty representatives from all eighteen seminaries and Bible colleges took part in a conference held in Nanjing from 19-23 August 2002. Bishop Ting spoke first at the conference and pointed out that for the seminaries only to train pastors and church workers was clearly inadequate; the theological seminaries should also be institutions for theological research by top-level theologians. Today, Chinese Christianity is in a very particular historical stage of development. It is a transitional stage from a colonial Christianity to a Three-Self Christianity in which we are transforming our theological thinking. The first responsibility of our theological seminaries is to interpret the theological trends of Chinese Christian theory for the Chinese Church so that through the work of our seminaries, the Christian leadership can understand the direction of Chinese Christian theology. In addition, the seminaries
should publish journals and periodicals, with essays that raise the level of our theological reflection. Presbyter Ji Jianhong spoke on behalf of the TSPM/CCC in his report, “Some Suggestions on the Promotion of Theological Reconstruction in our Theological Seminaries.” He spoke of the relationship between theological reconstruction and theological education, whose work was both different and yet related and inseparable; it was a relationship of mutual building up, mutual enrichment, and mutual effectiveness. At the same time, it is also important to see the character of each in leading and being led by the other, for theological education required the proper guidance of theological reconstruction to move in the right direction. The direction of theological education, in turn, had a direct impact on whether or not Christianity could be mutually adapted to socialist society, which is to say that the conference should decide how Christianity could exist and develop in a socialist society.

Nanjing Union Theological Seminary Vice President Wang Aiming, Yanjing Theological Seminary Vice-President Kan Baoping, Guangdong Theological Seminary Vice-President Chen Yilu, Zhongnan Theological Seminary Dean Xiao Anping, Jiangsu Bible College President An Xinyi, and Sichuan Theological Seminary Assistant to the President Long Shanyong all spoke at the conference. Conference participants gained greater resolve and a clearer sense of the direction of theological reconstruction. They said, “This is not a ‘movement’ (quotes added – ed.), but rather a mission of our own. We must have a sense of mission and a sense of responsibility about theological reconstruction, so as to create a systematic and theoretical framework for a theology suitable for the Chinese Church context.” For this to happen, the education at theological seminaries had to meet certain standards and continually mutually adapt to social progress and development.
The TSPM/CCC also held three meetings in Hangzhou from 12-15 August 2003 for a core of educators and church workers in order to consolidate efforts for theological reconstruction. The respective meetings were: “A Discussion Forum for Chinese Theological Seminaries on Theological Reconstruction”; “A Working Conference for Administrators at Chinese Theological Seminaries on Theological Reconstruction”; and “A Conference for Church Organization Writers on Chinese Theological Reconstruction.” The seminaries were the base for taking up theological reconstruction and so they were the source for implementing and giving direction to this work. About two hundred church organization writers, administrators at theological seminaries, and seminary teachers took part in these three meetings. Church organization writers had a second meeting on theological reconstruction in Shanghai from 8-10 September 2004, with about seventy people in attendance.

Regional and local discussion forums on theological reconstruction were also organized. The six provinces and the municipality of Shanghai had a number of discussion forums on the subject. Northeast and northwest China also had discussion forums, and even more were organized at the provincial, municipal, and autonomous region levels, including Jiangsu, Shanghai, Zhejiang, Beijing, Shandong, Hubei, Yunnan, and Xinjiang, as many as ten in all, with almost one a year, and several dozen participants each time. The extent of the mobilization and the number of participants was quite surprising for an initiative of this kind. Even in his advanced years, Bishop Ting personally took part in seminars organized in Nanjing, Shanghai, Jinan, Qingdao, Hangzhou, and Wuhan. Ji Jianhong, Cao Shenjie, Deng Fucun, and other TSPM/CCC leaders did even more travelling all over the country to give guidance, and they repeatedly spoke about the basic theme and train
of thought of theological reconstruction in the Chinese Church. For the development and long-range vision of the Chinese Church, the positive and effective promotion of the work of theological reconstruction proceeded in a healthy and orderly way.

From the present perspective, the way in which theological reconstruction has developed has been welcomed all across the country.

For example, speaking on 9 September 2007 at a symposium on theological reconstruction at NJUTS, Ren Jichun, deputy director of SARA said:

Over the past ten years, the TSPM/CCC and many local Christian Councils and TSPMs have consciously attended to their work and theological reconstruction has made significant progress. A major expression of this is that quality of seminars on theological reconstruction has gradually been raised and the depth and scope of discussions has continually improved because of the organization and staff that have emerged. Even more important is that the fruits of theological reconstruction have become evident in the preaching of local pastors and this had a positive impact on the words and deeds of rank and file Christians. The image of theological reconstruction in “sermon preparation, preaching from the pulpit and in people’s hearts” has been welcomed by everyone.

The general feeling is that theological reconstruction has already begun to have a positive impact on the Chinese Church. There is a clearer understanding that the conservative, backward, and biased theology of a the former age is not consistent with the original meaning of the theology of the Bible; secondly, there has been a consolidation and strengthening of running the church well according to the “Three-Self” principle; thirdly, the building up of the Chinese Church and its mutual
adaptation to socialist society, which in turn means active participation in the construction of a harmonious society, has now become the main theme of the Chinese Church in this age. Lively practice fully confirms that theological reconstruction is a response to the changing times, and is an important path toward the mutual adaptation of Chinese Christianity and socialist society.

The deputy director of the Jiangsu Administration of Religious Affairs also spoke at the 9 September 2007 symposium on theological reconstruction at NJUTS and said:

We can see from the situation in Jiangsu that theological reconstruction has made great progress, whether judged in terms of depth or breadth, as it has gone from planning to organization, from theory to practice, from content to form, from the work of a small group of people to the participation of the majority. From the sermons of preachers at the grassroots to the city and rural churches and meeting points you can now hear “theological reports” that are not obscure “mystical philosophies” but rather rich and living reflections with flesh and bones on the situation of churches in the province, the cities and the counties. Theological reconstruction has already born fruit in the spiritual and material lives of lay Christians and church workers, and Christianity in Jiangsu is now more rational, livelier, and more self-confident as it moves forward. I believe that in these respects, Christianity in Jiangsu epitomizes the changes that are taking place in Christianity in throughout China.

Speaking at a citywide symposium on theological reconstruction, Rev. Xu Lunsheng, chair of the Chongqing Municipal Three-Self Patriotic Committee, summed up the achievements and looked to the future:
(1) Each year we will have at least one citywide symposium on theological reconstruction for church workers; (2) In order to share the results of our seminars, we will publish collected writings on theological reconstruction from our seminars; (3) We will apply the results of what we have learned from the symposiums on theological reconstruction to preaching in the churches, using the sermon as a means to correctly lead believers to reject those world-denying misinterpretations of the Bible introduced by Western missionaries that are not conducive to social progress, and actively lead believers to enter and participate in society, becoming a positive social force for creating a moderately well off society for all the Chinese people; (4) We will introduce a special column on theological reconstruction in Tian Yun, the magazine of our Chongqing Christian Council and TSPM; (5) We will take the results of theological reconstruction to training classes for voluntary workers at the local and district levels so that they will go more deeply to the churches at the grassroots.

Churches and seminaries not only organized symposiums and seminars, but also put out special publications on theological reconstruction which detailed contributions from church workers and seminary students and faculty about what they had learned concerning faith and theology in the process of promoting theological reconstruction. NJUTS and Yanjing Theological Seminary produced materials for theological education including collections entitled “Theological Reconstruction” and “Bishop Ting’s Analysis of Theological Reconstruction.” The TSPM/CCC published a *Theological Reconstruction Series*. Similarly, many provincial, municipal, and autonomous region organizations also published pamphlets on the subject, and many essays on theological reconstruction were published in seminary magazines, including a collection of outstanding essays by NJUTS
students published in pamphlet form. During China’s SARS epidemic (in 2002-2003), the TSPM/CCC responded by producing a booklet in only two months’ time, *Christians Reflect Upon SARS*, stressing the need for church workers to face the challenges of their time and context in rational and ordered ways.

**Achievements in the Current State of Theological Reconstruction**

Since the start of the promotion of theological reconstruction at the Jinan meeting, the numbers of those who approve of the initiative have been increasing. Here I am of course speaking primarily of Chinese Christians, but I also include non-Christian intellectuals and clerics from other religious communities, as well as government and party officials in China. Internationally, Christians have gone from opposing theological reconstruction to understanding its importance, and from understanding to approval. This too is evidence of its success. According to an essay in the December 2003 issue of *Tian Feng* by Presbyter Ji Jianhong, he and Rev. Cao Shengjie represented Chinese Christianity at a luncheon meeting hosted by Fuller Theological Seminary in the United States.

There we gave separate talks on “Chinese Theological Reconstruction and Theological Education” and “Understanding Chinese Religious Policy and the Present Work of Chinese Christianity.” After the meeting, many who had heard the two speeches said that they now understood that theological reconstruction was based on the Bible and Christian faith and was only intended to readjust thinking which obstructs the will of God. This kind of theological reconstruction we can fully endorse, they said. One member of the audience shook Presbyter Ji’s hand and
said that he had heard Bishop Ting’s speech at Fuller ten years earlier and had at the time opposed him; today, after hearing the two speeches, he felt that he should apologize to Bishop Ting, because the theological reconstruction that he had advocated was not only necessary but imperative.

The immediate reason for opening up the topic of theological reconstruction was to resolve the question of the return of the conservative thinking of the Fundamentalists, and at the time, this centered on the issue of the relationship between belief and non-belief. Bishop Ting believed that for a religion to grow and develop in China, it would need to have roots in the soil of traditional Chinese culture and relate to what was essential in the Chinese national character. “Harmony is prized” (Analects 1:12); this is a central component of traditional Chinese culture. As far as Christianity is concerned, the concept is not only useful for developing good relationships between church workers and Christians, between Christianity and other religions, and between Christians and non-Christians, it is also useful for developing good relationships between the government and religious believers. Bishop Ting believed that God wants a good relationship between God and people and between people and people. This includes the relationship between Christians and non-Christians and between people of different faiths.

At the start of the theological reconstruction initiative, Bishop Ting told me that in Chinese Christianity, and this included Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, the focal point for the theological contradiction between two camps was the relationship between Christians and non-Christians and that therefore, he would begin by addressing the issue of “playing down the doctrine of salvation by faith.” This was not to abolish the doctrine of salvation by faith, which had a firm foundation for Christians. In fact, “playing down” like “Three-Self” was not something
which had been first been discovered by Chinese; in the United States, Canada, and even in Germany the home of Martin Luther, salvation by faith had already been played down, but in China, Asia, and Africa, which were economically rather backward, salvation by faith was strongly emphasized and still basic. Some religious leaders had urged Bishop Ting not to speak about “playing down” the doctrine, for it would offend the feelings and faith of Chinese Christians. Bishop Ting believed, however, that unless this question could be addressed, there would be no way to adjust theological thought and no way to mutually adapt Christianity to socialism.

In discussions around the question of “belief and non-belief” people became increasing clear that this would strengthen the faith of Chinese Christians and enable them to unite with the people. Because other people were not Christians was no reason not to unite with them, for relationships with compatriots should be friendly and intimate. In 2003, Bishop Ting made a very profound observation on this point. He said that the question of belief and non-belief was originally raised by 19th century Protestant missionaries in China to draw more and more Chinese into the church. For this purpose, they made a special point of emphasizing “heaven” and “hell,” saying that Christians would go to heaven and that non-Christians would go to hell, in this way frightening ordinary people into believing that heaven was where they wanted to go and hell was a place they needed to avoid. As a result, more people became Christians. Even now, many Chinese pastors preach about heaven and hell in the same way, urging people to accept Christianity and threatening those that do not. Theological reconstruction offers Christians a way of rethinking this question, and so we speak about playing down justification by faith. If because of faith we are deemed righteous before God, then we condemn
many good people outside the church to hell because they are not Christians, and by the same token we allow many Christians who are not good into heaven only because they believe. Isn’t there something wrong here? Bishop Ting reasoned. As a result of this kind of discussion and exploration in theological reconstruction, many pastors and church workers concluded that they could no longer bear to preach about heaven and hell as they once had. This “could no longer bear” shows that these pastors and church workers had a conscience and could no longer follow the way of the missionaries, and preach as they once had, negating the work of many good patriots and allowing bad (Christians) without any sense of ethics into heaven. This is an important result of theological reconstruction… It seems that “playing down the doctrine of salvation by faith” was not disastrous after all. On the contrary, it enabled the educational and theological standards of Chinese Christians to be raised, thereby establishing much better communication between Christians and the masses of ordinary people.

A second major theme in theological reconstruction that Bishop Ting and TSPM/CCC leaders agreed upon was a discussion of the view of the Bible. The Bible is the highest authority for Protestant Christians, and because its content is so very rich, different theologies can find support for their positions in the Bible. Rev. Cao Shengjie once said that our Christian faith is based on a thorough understanding and correct interpretation of the Bible. This cannot change, but Rev. Cao continues:

Theological interpretations of faith, that is, our knowledge of God, are continually developing and changing. It is not new or surprising that in two thousand years of church history, churches in every place have developed their own theological reflections. Christians all read the same Bible,
and rely on the Bible as the basis of their faith, but their understanding and interpretation of the Bible is not entirely the same. It is not that we can preach about certain parts of the Bible, but not about others; the question is how do we preach, and is our preaching based on a full and correct understanding of the Bible. We must understand that absorbing the fruits of modern theologies and biblical hermeneutics allows us to more deeply understand God’s revelation, which is preferable to rejecting rational thought on the basis of an “unchanging faith” and remaining stuck in our old ways.

Theological reflection should be brought together with our own culture, our times and our context. We are Chinese Christians with our own cultural background, and we have many spiritual experiences gained from living in a socialist society that are different from Christians in other contexts. We need to sum these up on a theological level, so that Chinese Christians can better adapt to a socialist society. This will also be our contribution to the church ecumenical. There is of course a difference between theological and political questions, but theological reflection is produced by people living in their respective societies, and they all have their own political positions and thought. It is natural that our patriotic thought will be reflected in our theological thinking.

Bishop Ting has said that discussion of our view of the Bible is important for theological reconstruction, and like the question of “belief and non-belief” it is an extremely important and urgent question to resolve. At the 2003 Discussion Forum for seminaries in the six provinces and one municipality in east China, he spoke of the many erroneous views on the Bible in Chinese churches. An example is the way in which some people muddle the Bible with the (literal) word of God, so that Christians and
church workers immediately think you are referring to the Bible when you speak of the word of God; whenever you mention the word “Bible,” they immediately think that this is God’s word. But this is incorrect. When some people hear what I have just said, they will immediately be shocked. But I hope that they will not be shocked, because what I am saying is that to muddle the Bible with the word of God in this manner, to regard the two as the same, this is itself a misinterpretation of the Bible. When foreign missionaries came to China they implanted this misunderstanding of the Bible into the minds of Chinese Christians, and it sunk deeply in. Because of this, many Christians believe that every paragraph, every sentence, and every word of the Bible is the word of God, and each word is absolutely correct. In so doing, the Bible is placed at the highest possible level so that it becomes the fourth person of the Trinity. After the (Holy) Father, the (Holy) Son and the Holy Spirit comes the Holy Bible. This is a revision of two thousand years of Christian faith, for in Christianity we have never said that there could be a fourth person of the Trinity. Bishop Ting went on to point out that the oldest parts of the Bible were written three thousand years ago. The Bible contains both God’s revelation and human beings search for God. Human searching is good, but in the process there will inevitably be misunderstandings, because the Bible contains not only God’s revelation but also words that were written by people searching for God. The human understanding of God’s word always has deficiencies and mistakes, and these mistakes have also found their way into the Bible. Bishop Ting offered some examples to clarify what he was saying about such mistakes. The Book of Deuteronomy, chapter 2 records the Israelites’ Exodus and their journey towards Canaan. But read in this and subsequent chapters how God commands the Israelites to occupy the land
and deal with the people who are living there. God tells the Israelites to kill all the inhabitants, men and women, young and old. When we read such parts of the Bible, we have to ask ourselves whether this is the word of God. Could the God whom we know in Jesus Christ be so cruel? In Deuteronomy 7, God commands the people of Israel to “utterly destroy” the nations who are their enemies, and show them no mercy. This also sounds unethical and cruel to us. If we say that every word of the Bible comes from God, then how do we deal with such verses? Please understand that it was not Bishop Ting’s intention to criticize the Bible or oppose God. Rather he was asking the question of how Christians should view and think about the Bible. If, after reading such parts of the Bible, Christians tell others that every word of the Bible is from God, then they won’t understand, even if they don’t openly disagree. People expect that God has a moral and ethical standard which is much higher than our own. The cruelty in some parts of the Bible that Bishop Ting alludes to can more appropriately be used to describe Hitler, the Fascists, and the Japanese Imperialists, and should not be seen as words that have been spoken by God.

More and more people now see what Bishop Ting was trying to say in his speech on understanding the Bible. There are those who now say that the Bible remains the norm for Christian faith, but that different understandings of the Bible inevitably produce different theological orientations. This follows Bishop Ting’s stress on squarely facing how we view the Bible, which helps in the hermeneutical process to reject conventional and dead dogma, so that we no longer blindly follow some authoritative “infallible law.” Others point out that preserving out-of-date teachings, or regarding the ways of the ancients as “sacred instructions” no longer has meaning. Still others say that the Bible is itself a
pluralistic book that was produced in different contexts. A Biblical hermeneutics requires people who live in different contexts to read and respond to the Bible in the contexts of the readers. The efforts of biblical interpreters in different times and places cannot depart from their own contexts of interpretation. For the Bible to have a truly useful function in different situations, readers must develop a correct interpretation for their own contexts.

It is now (over) ten years since Chinese Christians began to develop theological reconstruction, and there have been many theological issues that have been discussed throughout the country. Already in 2001, Rev. Wang Aiming, dean of NJUTS, at a conference organized in southern California by the Christian Leadership Exchange, summarized in fifteen points the important themes touched upon in Chinese theological reconstruction, drawing on The Collected Works of K. H. Ting and the numerous forums and seminars that had been held in China.

(1) God is love and all God’s attributes, such as justice or compassion, are rooted in love, God’s paramount divine attribute;

(2) Seek a proper understanding of “justification by grace through faith” that does not lead to “antinomianism” or the nullification of good deeds or morality;

(3) Affirm that Truth, Goodness and Beauty are created by God and exist outside (as well as inside) the Church;

(4) Christ is cosmic in nature; or, we might also say the nature of Christ’s Lordship over all creation is cosmic;

(5) God’s revelation is gradual and progressive, as is our human understanding of God;

(6) God’s work of creation is ongoing;
(7) Human beings are a work-in-progress in God’s creation. Martin Luther says we are all in an unfinished state;

(8) Christians should not regard themselves as righteous (or justified);

(9) At China’s current stage of social development, it is imperative that the moral or ethical aspect of Christianity be amplified to the greatest extent;

(10) It is insufficient to expound the “Three-Self Principle” merely in light of the historical background of imperialism and the corresponding Western missionary movement. Our understanding of the Three-Self Principle shall be first and foremost grounded in biblical and doctrinal evidences, with reference to its profound meaning in the history of Christian faith as a whole;

(11) The positive contributions of Western missionaries to China should not be denied. It is unacceptable to brand all Western missionaries as imperialists and dismiss their contributions;

(12) Efforts shall be made to adjust religious viewpoints and actively bring about the adaptation of Christian faith with socialist Chinese society. The aim is to bring the Church in China out of its marginal position and into that of a moving force contributing to Chinese social development;

(13) In administration, the direction should be toward a democratically run church. The Church is seriously concerned with avoiding the patriarchal and autocratic models prevalent in the Church and is determined to change this situation to bring about healthy development.

(14) To establish a correct understanding of the Bible requires us to anchor ourselves in the supreme authority of the Scriptures and in the two basic
Creeds of the Church (Apostle’s Creed and Nicene Creed), and to study and to preach the Word of God in response to the context of Chinese society. In other words, the most important ministry of the Chinese Church and the most important study of the Gospel ministry in China is how to establish a proper view of the Bible.

(15) The work of theological reconstruction in China should proceed according to three basic principles:
- upholding the Bible as the supreme authority (for faith);
- (b) preventing the use of theological reconstruction as a pretext sectarianism or splitting the Chinese Church;
- (c) promoting evangelism and the spread of the gospel.9

From these fifteen points, we can see the breadth of the content of theological reconstruction, but taken as a whole, I believe they can be brought together around three main issues: first, the relationship between belief and non-belief; second, establishing a correct view of the Bible; third, harmonizing religion and society. On this third point, already on 5-6 July 2005, when the Jiangsu CC/TSPM held its seventh discussion forum on theological reconstruction (with over 100 participants and 142 submitted essays), the main theme was on theological reconstruction and the construction of a harmonious society. In the course of the discussion, many said that if Christians fully developed its moral and ethical tradition, this would inevitably help promote the building up of society and social harmony. “...love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” (Gal. 5:22-23) These moral virtues are clearly prerequisites for social harmony, obedience to the law, industriousness at the workplace, honesty and truthfulness, loving one another,
enthusiasm for public service, social service, and concrete acts of goodness – they should be developed in all people by whatever means they can.

At the 2005 discussion forum, some people said that for the construction of a harmonious society, one level that has to be addressed is harmony within the Christian community itself. There are many unharmonious factors in today’s churches. Churches without denominational backgrounds have problems that create contradictions among Christians, including questions about church management, the establishment of church structures, the nurturing and employment of people, and salary arrangements for church workers. Churches with denominational backgrounds have their own contradictions, including those relating to opinions about faith, management of the community, the use of funds and relationships with the local Christian Councils and TSPMs. Some churches have inflated views of their own denominational traditions, and there has even been a return to denominationalism in some places. A harmonious church should have a spirit of “mutual love” and support among its members; they should be a living witnesses to “on earth as it is in heaven”; they should be filled with a broadmindedness derived from “God who so loved the world”; and they should be managed in ways that help them adapt to society. This is to say that there are a great many aspects to be considered in constructing a “harmonious church”: harmony between denominational traditions, between and among church workers, between and among preachers and lay Christians, among Christians themselves, between Christians and non-Christians, between one’s own faith and life, harmony between what is sacrificed and what is gained, harmony between this life and the next, and so forth. All of these are relevant in the process of our “construction of a harmonious society.”
In 2007, theological reconstruction discussion forums were organized by the TSPM/CCC in southern China (for Fujian, Guangdong, Guangxi, Yunnan, and Sichuan) and in northern China (Heilongjiang, Jilin, Liaoning, Hebei, and Inner Mongolia) on the theme of “Harmony, Unity, and Peace.” In addition, local churches and theological seminaries organized seminars and wrote many essays on the subject, which included both theoretical explorations and reflections on experiences. These seminars helped to develop a healthier theological reconstruction at deeper levels in local churches.

From 29-30 September 2007, NJUTS, with the endorsement and support of the relevant leaders and authorities, organized in Nanjing a discussion forum for all of China’s seminaries and Bible Colleges, on the subject, “Christianity and Harmonious Society – Theological Seminaries on the contribution of Christianity to the Construction of a Harmonious Society.” There were almost 200 participants in the discussion forum and 30 people presenting papers. The conference included papers in biblical studies (both Old and New Testaments), theology (systematic theology, ethics, and practical theology), history (church history and the history of Christian thought), and church practice, all of which were organized around five main themes: “Harmony Between Religion and Society,” “Harmony Among the Religions,” “Harmony in the Home,” “Harmony in the Church and Seminary Fellowships,” and “Harmony Between Humankind and Nature.” The participants treated Christian doctrines and concepts of harmony from different perspectives, and there were in-depth discussions on how the churches and the seminaries could contribute to the construction of a harmonious society. During the discussion, some speakers said that “The Resolution on Major Issues Regarding the Construction of a Harmonious Socialist Society” by
the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (October 2006) pointed out that “the positive function of religious circles in promoting a harmonious society should be enhanced” and that one of the five important relationships for the building of a harmonious society should be the appropriate handling of relationships with the religions. This shows the Party’s high degree of trust and earnest hope for the religious circles, whose response should be to concentrate all their effort on practical actions. Other speakers said the seminaries are both a base for the training of human resources as well as a base for developing theological reconstruction, which means that seminaries should be fully involved in capacity development, in developing collections of library resources, in communicating their message broadly through different channels, and in providing deep and solid theoretical training, while conscientiously developing theological reconstruction at deeper levels. Only in this way will they be able to put into practice the three harmonies for the new period which Bishop Ting has recently proposed for Christianity: harmony between Christianity and national interest; harmony between Christianity and a society governed by law; harmony within Christianity itself. This would enable Christianity to gradually adapt to society and move forward with the times. The general response to the many essays presented at this conference was that because they were inspiring and of high academic quality, NJUTS should put them together in a publication.

In her speech, Vice-Principal Gao Ying pointed out why the discussion forum was so successful: first, the support and importance attached to this conference by our leaders guaranteed that it would be a success. TSPM Chair Presbyter Ji Jianhong and CCC President Rev. Cao Shengjie personally offered guidance and participated
in the conference from start to finish. This boosted the morale of all in attendance. Representatives from SARA, the Jiangsu Religious Affairs Bureau, and the Nanjing Religious Affairs Bureau were all invited to take part in opening ceremony of the discussion forum. Vice-President and Standing NJUTS Vice-President Presbyter Ji Jianhong presided at the opening, and Vice-Principal Gao Ying presented the welcoming speech. CCC President Rev. Cao Shengjie, SARA (Section 2) Deputy Bureau Chief Mr. Ren Jichun, and Jiangsu Religious Affairs Deputy Director Mr. Gu Chuanyong all spoke at the opening ceremony, fully endorsing the significance of the discussion forum and emphasizing the importance of theological reconstruction and the contributions to this initiative by NJUTS under the leadership of Bishop K. H. Ting. All of these speeches foreshadowed the successful outcome of the discussion forum.

A second reason for the success of the discussion forum was the importance of the theme, the richness of the content, and the enthusiasm of all the participants. As Deputy Bureau Chief Ren Jichun said, “the theme was clear, appropriate for the times, and had significant and practical meaning.” Or as Rev. Cao Shengjie said, “(Theological reconstruction) was not simply a reflection of the times, and even less, as some overseas observers have said, for a ‘political purpose,’ but rather something that should properly be expected for the church and theological seminaries…it should cause us to think about the theological theme of this conference, to make better use of things that perhaps we had not paid enough attention to in the past, and reflect on what kind of message we should have for the churches, and it is related to the healthy development of the Chinese Church itself. All of this is of great importance for church construction.”

A third reason for the success of the conference was
that the speeches were of high theological and academic quality. All the participants in this meeting, whether they were official representatives or respondents from the floor, whether they were seminary teachers or students, developed their ideas not only from the Bible and their faith, but also from the perspective of theology and social science as they elaborated their understanding and view of the relationship between religion and harmonious society. Many teachers, in the process of preparing their remarks, consulted a variety of relevant materials and read a great number of books as they conducted their research. They had many references in their speeches, which had substance and reflected a high theological and academic quality.

A fourth reason was that there was a lively atmosphere at the conference, which also had a friendly and interactive character. The teachers who spoke were by and large clear in their viewpoints and their theological direction. There were active responses from the participants, as each offered their own views and challenged one another. It was especially the students who were active in their participation, sharp in their reasoning, independent in their thinking and who asked quality questions, even to the point of touching on sensitive questions of faith at a deep level.

The fifth reason for the success of the conference was the care that was taken with the preparatory work. In his closing speech, Presbyter Ji Jianhong emphasized that “the TSPM/CCC and theological seminaries sought to live up to the great trust and hope of the Party and the government, in reviewing the experience and learning of the past and seizing the present opportunities in the face of many difficulties in order to build up the seminaries and do all they could to construct a harmonious socialist society.”

Recently, I had a conversation with Bishop Ting who
noted that next year (2008) would be the tenth anniversary of theological reconstruction. He expressed the hope that this would be an opportunity to take theological reconstruction to a higher level. He went a step further to say that by higher level he did not mean some formal reinvigoration, but rather a step further in grounding theological reconstruction at a deeper level to ensure a healthy development for the future. I believe that Bishop Ting’s hope will certainly be realized.

Translated by Philip L. Wickeri

The author was formerly director of the Jiangsu Provincial Religious Affairs Bureau.


2. CTR 1985: 245 (excerpt).
6. CTR 12: 36.
7. Quoted in Wickeri, 348.
8. CTR 14:32.
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“Retrospect and Prospect” 1985: 1.
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“Closing Address to the Joint Standing Committees,” No. 9: 37.
“A Look Back at the Way We Have Come,” No. 13: 124.
“God’s Self-Revelation in the Bible and Our Slowness in Grasping it,” No. 14: 32.
“Some Thoughts on the Subject of Theological
Reconstruction,” No. 17: 110.

“Adjustments in Theology are Necessary and Unavoidable,” No. 17: 118.


Briefly, I would like to say that there are three Ideal Types of the ethics for me to study the basic issues of the ecclesial ethics in China. The Ideal Type I, the legacy of Martin Luther, supplies the fundamental theological principles to the Church in China; the Ideal Type II, the ethics of John Calvin, through the institutional way set up the special structural ethics for the church. The relationship between the Ideal Type I and II naturally shaped the equilibrium between the faith of the Church and the ethical order of the Church; the ideas and the institutions; and the theological principles and the ecclesiological constitution etc.¹ All of these are still empty in China although Protestantism has spread into China for the last two hundred years (since 1807). Without this model of balance, the principles of the Reformation remain the charismatic slogans in the Church in China.

My proper vocation will introduce and research the model of the historical Church with the proper traditions, especially the legacy of the Reformation for the Church in China.² My way is to study the basic principles of Luther and the practical initiatives of Calvin, and the correlation between these two models. Finally, I find that we must seek the available way for effective solution, after reflecting on the historical teachings of the missionaries and the actual situation of the Protestant Church in China. This solution is the ethical way, because the ethical way will reach the Chinese traditional culture, and then easily communicate with the Chinese people.

The Fourth Ideal Type should be the Ideal Type
of Confucianism. The *Li* will become the theological object regarding the ecclesial ethics. The *Li* includes so many ethical normative categories covering all the aspects of life in China. We must try to use the strategy of accommodation to do cultural and spiritual communication between the ecclesial ethics of the historical church and Confucianism first, and then, we will move toward ecclesial ethics of the church in China. Thus, the legacy of the Reformation will take the root on the ground of the Church in China through way of Confucianism. Additionally,

Confucius seems to take for granted […] that there is one *Li* and that it is in harmony with a greater, cosmic *Tao*. He assumes that this *Li* is the *Li* of the land in which he lives (other lands being barbarian), that the Ancients of his tradition lived this *Li*. He assumes that this *Li*, and the cosmic *Tao* in which it is rooted, are internally coherent and totally adequate, and that, finally, the only moral and social necessity is, therefore, to shape oneself and one’s conduct in *Li*. Each and every one of these interconnected and basic assumptions is initially placed in grave doubt when we take account of the now familiar facts of a plurality of great cultures each with its distinct history.3

Here, I think of the narrative of the “Unknown god” and St. Paul in Athens! (Acts 17: 23). The *Li*, as the structural order of the *Tao*, is just the ethical order of the Church to the Chinese Christians! The Chinese Christians live in the *Li* according to the moral norms of the *Li* in China, by which they communicate with their neighbors and others in society, deal with the various relationships including the basic attitudes with the state and the world.4 While the Communist revolution got the legitimacy of the state in 1949, the government with the ideology of Marxism, which totally differed from Confucianism and
other Chinese traditional cultures, quickly launched the political movements one by one to destroy all the Chinese traditional orders in the cultural and spiritual areas, especially in the religious aspects. They have essentially realized the totalitarian control of society through the ideological order! The Tao in the Chinese minds was replaced as the Communism Ideal by the state. And the Chinese traditional Li (the harmony order of the social life, the equilibrium institution, etc.) was changed into the class struggle through the new idea, namely, the eternal struggles between the Proletariat and the Bourgeois, the Socialism and the Capitalism, etc. Now, the government is recovering the state statue of Confucianism after the social shocks since 1977 from which the time of the socio-political reformation of Deng Xiaoping started.

To construct ethical pillars of the church in China, we must reflect on the three issues while benefiting the references of the Reformation and of the Western thinkers:

The Theological Level: to Avoid the Two Extreme Tendencies

We should avoid the two extreme poles of the faith:

1) The normalization of the syncretism in the post-modernity

The syncretism around Protestantism with the mysticisms and new religious movements including various philosophic schools is becoming more and more a growing spiritual phenomenon. This kind of spiritual tendency has benefited the tolerance and the freedom of modern order. Therefore, the identity of faith of the Church will encounter serious challenges from the religious dialogues and communication. The results of the interreligious communication should avoid the modern
form of Gnosticism, which appear with the powerful influences among the intellectuals in China now. The syncretism is imposing more and more danger to the identity of faith of the Church. In the countryside, the multiple religions are mixed together to be the faith of the masses, especially with the folklores, and with the names of well-known religions, such as Protestantism, Buddhism and Taoism, etc.

2) The religion of the Bible or the Church of the Biblicist

The religion of the Bible is the external impression to the public in China today. “In doctrine, most Chinese Protestants have a literal belief in the Bible as the inspired word of God, and the Bible plays a central role in preaching, which in turn is the core of the worship service in most Chinese Protestant churches.” The principle of the Scriptures in the tradition of the Reformation did not mean to exclude the theological tradition of the historical church. T. F. Torrance claimed:

It is to be remembered that for Luther the word of God means primarily Christ Himself, Christ through the Scriptures, but primarily Christ over against the Scriptures, so that if necessary we have to urge the authority of Christ against the authority of the Bible (WA 39/1, p. 47). The Bible cannot be used legalistically to provide the laws of the Church.

This problem historically originated from the missionaries who ignored so strongly the theological tradition of the historic church and stressed only their proper individual witness and the experiences directly with the Lord in the intimate minds while they worked in China.

According to Christopher J. H. Wright, the Bible is
“the production of God’s mission”, not God Himself. He said:

A missional hermeneutic of the Bible begins with the Bible’s very existence. For those who affirm some relationship (however articulated) between these texts and the self-revelation of our Creator God, the whole canon of Scripture is a missional phenomenon in the sense that it witnesses to the self-giving movement of this God toward his creation and us, human beings in God’s own image, but wayward and wanton. The writings that now comprise our Bible are themselves the product of and witness to the ultimate mission of God. Furthermore, the processes by which these texts came to be written were often profoundly missional in nature. Many of them emerged out of events or struggles or crises or conflicts in which the people of God engaged with the constantly changing and challenging task of articulating and living out their understanding of God’s revelation and redemptive action in the world. Sometimes these were struggles internal to the people of God themselves; sometimes these were highly polemical struggles with competing religious claims and world-views that surrounded them. So a missional reading of such texts is very definitely not a matter of (1) finding the “real” meaning by objective exegesis, and only then (2) cranking up some “missiological implications” as a homiletic supplement to the text itself. Rather, it is to see how a text has its origin in some issue, need, controversy or threat that the people of God needed to address in the context of their mission. The text itself is a production of mission in action.9

Obviously, the radical and fundamentalist view of the Scripture has formed the special fact in the church in China that there is nothing between the Bible and their leaders, including the doctrines and the dogmas of the patristic
tradition and the theological works of the Reformation. This is characteristic of fundamentalism now in China. The most urgent task for the Church in China is the theological research in order to establish the foundation for theological education in the Church.

I am afraid of the nationalism position of the theological tendency in China which shows often the reason of the contextualization for denying the universality of the Faith and of the Church.\textsuperscript{10} Surely, so many Western theologians have made self-reflection on Europeanism of Christianity, especially, the history of the mission in Asia and Africa with great minds. As to the considerations about the Christianity from the West with the universal teaching in China, Philip Wickeri claimed:

The expressions of Christianity which we reflect upon in the West today are seldom referred to as universal teachings. Rather, our focus is on contextualization and the particularity of all our reflections in the pluralistic situation in which we find ourselves. For Christians, the universal has to become particular if we take the Incarnation seriously.\textsuperscript{11}

However, we should think of the way to make the equilibrium between the unity, the catholicity, the holiness and the apostolicity of the Church and particularity, the diversity and the nationality of the Christians in the temporal state. The Unity of the Church is based on the Universal truth of Faith of the Trinity. The nationalism in the Faith of the Church will destroy the Catholiticity and the Unity of the Church through the relativism and the narrow national minds. In China, we must be aware of the danger of relativism of the faith and of the Church, on which Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger warned so often in his theological works.\textsuperscript{12} Any consequence from the relativism, which leads to the value of relativism and
syncretism, will not be in accordance with the hermeneutic theological position, by which the interfaith dialogue and communications become possible and reasonable.\textsuperscript{13}

**The Political Level: the Equilibrium between the Right and Duty based on the Ethical Principle of the Law-Gospel**

Actually, in the West, many theologians are engaging in social progress, human rights and political concerns. They have already widened the theological attention outside the Church for taking responsibility in society. The theological thinking on socio-political issues is becoming their ethical task. The ethical principles of the Reformation relate to modern values, especially democracy, human rights and the constitutional polity, which will show the great vocation of the Church in the process of the modernization of China.

The church in China is facing the serious challenges in the area of politics. The fundamental ideas of the Reformation remain much unknown to the intellectuals, although many of them dream of democracy and rule of law as an essential definition for the modernization of China.

The political concerns of the Christian thinkers have never ceased since the end of the Second World War.\textsuperscript{14} The significance of the Reformation is to maintain the order of justice in the secular world. The terrible memories of the totalitarian regimes made the Christian theologians to be reminded of many kinds of the totalitarian regimes no matter with what kind of the ideologies. The political ethics of the Christian theologians become the collective conscience of the church in the contemporary panorama. Even if they showed their thinking with the various names, deep concerns relative to the ethical duty and moral
responsibility for human beings are their deep motives and purpose. The political meanings of the legacy of Bonhoeffer in terms of the tradition of the Reformation in modern times could help the church in China know the ethical power of the church in the modern society. If the church becomes indifferent in the civil morality and public affairs, the ethical role of the church will become weak and die. Bonhoeffer was an isolated case in the Christian landscape of Germany at the period of the Nazi regime. There were many pastors and Christians as he with the sense of the righteousness in Germany against Nazism. So many good Germans died without their names and reputations in history. To us, from the non-European culture, they were the Christian conscience with the special calling of the Lord for human beings! Jürgen Moltmann warned:

The consequence for Christian theology is that it must adopt a critical attitude towards political religions in society and in the churches. The political theology of the cross must liberate the state from the political service of idols and must liberate men from political alienation and loss of rights. It must seek to demythologize state and society [...] If the churches become “institutions for the free criticism of society”, they must necessarily overcome not only private idolatry but also political idolatry, and extend human freedom in the situation of the crucified God not only in the overcoming of systems of psychological apathy, but also in the overcoming of the mystique of political and religious systems of rule which make men apathetic.

The elites with the moral duty and the spiritual subjectivity in China really need to listen to such a voice from human history!
The Ethical Level: the Civil Religion and Radical Nationalism Will Be Very Dangerous for the Church in China

To study the cases of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and that of Karl Barth is necessary for us to interpret the ethical value of the church based on the certain theological principles. They had also shown that their Christian conscience and responsibility while the church suffered together with nations, people and the world.

The phenomenon of civil religion was the background of the interpretation about the significance of Barth and Bonhoeffer in the ethical perspective. The totalitarianism and the state ideology with the holy and moral forces control the people in the spiritual aspect. The Western theologians have already warned the danger of the civil religion.18

“Civil religion” poses a more serious objection to the cooperative church-state arrangements of Christendom than religious coercion does. Both, of course, offend against the Gospel, not merely against natural justice: coercion violates the openness of unbelief to come to belief freely while God’s patience waits on it; civil religion wears the form of the Antichrist, drawing the faith and obedience due to the Lord’s Anointed away to the political orders which should have only provisional authority under him.19

The extreme nationalism with the cloth of patriotism is the cancer of the conscience of the nation, and the enemy of the Church. The most serious challenge to the Church in China will encounter the reasonable and doctrinal interpretations about the Christian patriotism based on the Tao of the Lord! Stanley Hauerwas warned the great danger in the U.S. of the purely worship sentiments on
the American ideology as the ultimate universal truth. Furthermore, the ideology of pluralism and relativism with the image of the absolute tolerance will become the new human religion in the West in the sense of the “civil religion”.

Civil religion is a corruption to which the church is liable when it enjoys a close cooperation with the state. It is not a matter of serving the interests of government solely – civil religion can flourish in opposition, too – but the interests of the state at large, bolstering its legitimacy, supporting its political philosophy, including virtues, both active and passive, which are useful to the political constitution of society […] However, civil religion is only one manifestation of a more general temptation: that of accommodating the demands of the Gospel to the expectations of society. Any successful mission will leave the church inculturated; any inculturated church is liable to lose its critical distance on society. Forms of prophetic criticism may persist, but they become increasingly intra-mural, taking up those causes which were controversial anyway rather than finding deeper grounds for an evangelical challenge.21

As the solution to the danger of the “civil religion” in this type of political ethics of Troeltsch to the church in China, I confirm the historical value of the doctrine of the Law-Gospel and the Two-Kingdoms from the heritage of Martin Luther! If we interpret the significance of Luther’s doctrines in Chinese, we could use the terms and the categories of Confucianism. According to Confucianism, the ideal state is the Harmony constructed by the equilibrium between the negative and the positive (Ying and Yang) of the world. It is the principle of Li to organize the proper order.22
Finally, in my vision, the Church in China will continue the holy and catholic way toward the future under the providence of God in the panorama of the human world. The Church in China must go beyond any kinds of the nationalisms with the patriotical reasons linked with the secular requirements in terms of the essence of the Church, although the Church always holds the responsibility and the duty in the socio-political areas historically. The research of the ecclesial ethics will serve for the Church in China. In the terms of Ernst Troeltsch, the constitutional and democratic ethics will be studied for the structural model of the church in China. In this case, the study of the heritage of the Reformation will become the first step in this demarche.

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1. Even if to the Western theologians, the ecclesiology remains one of the important theological themes today. George A. Lindbeck claimed: “Ecclesiology is a dogmatically undeveloped area. As historians remind us, there have been until recently no comprehensive pronouncements on the nature of the Church in any manor Christian tradition. Much has been said about it, but not what it is. There are, for example, the four *notae ecclesiae*, spoken of in the ancient creeds: one, holy, catholic and apostolic. The Reformation confessions add to the list. The Church is said to be, among other things, *creatura verbi*, the creation of the word (cf. Confessio Augustana VII), but it is also in its visible form a *corpus mixtum* of the elect and the reprobate (Westminster Confession, 25.5). These, however, are attributes that can also be predicated of other subjects. [...] Not only church doctrine but also theological reflection has been lacking in this area [...]
Among all the major theological loci, ecclesiology has been the last to develop.” George A. Lindbeck, *The Church in a Postliberal Age*, ed. by J. J. Buckley, Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2003, p. 146.

2. Because there is no any similarities between the West and China regarding the conflicts existed in the relationships of the Catholic with the Protestant in China, we should pay the attention to the theological thoughts of the Roman Catholic theologians at the ecumenical perspectives for the future of the Church in China. For instance, the theological views about the Church by the Catholic theologians are very profound and significant. J. Ratzinger interpreted “the three historical modifications” of the Church from the historical position with the special relevance to my concerns. He said: “1. The biblical-patristic notion: Church as the people of God that comes together in the Eucharist as the body of Christ. One could speak of a sacramental-ecclesiastical understanding of the Church; a valid comparison would be: ecclesia = communio = corpus Christi. 2. Next to that stands the understanding of the Middle Ages: the talk turns to the ‘mystical body of the Church’; the Church appears as the corporation of those in Christ. One could speak here of a jurisdictional-corporate conception of the ‘body of Christ’. 3. The modern period introduces a romantic notion: corpus Christi mysticum – the obscure, mysterious, living body of Christ; the word ‘mystical’ derives from ‘mystic’. We have here an understanding of the Church as a mystical organism.” Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Das neue Volk Gottes* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1969, p. 99), quoted from Miguel M. Garijo-Guembe, *Communion of the Saints, Foundation, Nature, and Structure of the Church*, trans. P. Madigan S.J., Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1994, pp. 82–83.


4. A. S. Cua claimed, “For more than two millennia, traditional Chinese moral life and thought have been much preoccupied with Li as a means for the realization of the Confucian ideal of Tao (Way) or human excellence (or goodness). Implicit in this notion of Li is an idea of rule-governed conduct […] The Liji is one of the three extant ancient texts on Li: Zhouli, Yili, and Liji. Zhouli deals with Zhou organization and institutions, Yili with codes of social conduct. The Liji mainly deals with the meaning and significance of organization and institutions as well as with rules of social life and certain related academic matters […] In the Liji, we find a wide scope of Li, ranging from the Li governing special occasions, such as mourning, sacrifices,
marriage, and communal festivities, to the more ordinary occasions relating to conduct toward ruler, parents, elders, teachers, and guests.”


9. He added: “This is easily demonstrated in the case of the New Testament. Most of Paul’s letters were written in the heat of his missionary efforts: wrestling with the theological basis of the inclusion of the Gentiles, affirming the need for Jew and Gentile to accept one another in Christ and in the church, tackling the baffling range of new problems that assailed young churches as the gospel took root in the world of Greek polytheism, confronting incipient heresies with clear affirmations of the supremacy and sufficiency of Jesus Christ, and so on.” Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God, Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative*, Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2006, pp. 48–49.

10. Karl R. Popper warned: “The tendencies denoted by this term have undoubtedly a strong affinity with the revolt against reason and the open society. Nationalism appeals to our tribal instincts, to passion and to prejudice, and to our desire to be relieved from the strain of individual responsibility, which it attempts to replace by a collective or group responsibility. It is in keeping with these tendencies that we find that the oldest works on political theory, even that of the Old Oligarch, but more markedly those of Plato and of Aristotle, express
decidedly nationalist views; for these works were written in an attempt to combat the open society with its new ideas of imperialism, cosmopolitanism, and equalitarianism.” Karl R. Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, vol. 2: *The High Tide of Prophecy: Hegel, Marx, and the Aftermath*, London: Routledge, 1945, p. 48.


12. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith, The Church as Communion*, trans. H. Taylor, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005, pp. 145–146. H. Richard Niebuhr put forth theologically critical positions concerning the plurality of the religious institutions in the USA in his *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* (New York, 1957). The ideal will be the interfaith dialogue and the mutual respect in the harmony with the proper identity, thus, the syncretism under the cover of the religious pluralism will lead to the disorder. In this case, the democratic method will be used as the method by some figures with the special ideology to control the masses and the state.


14. Jürgen Moltmann analyzed the origin and the negative results of the private tendency of the Religion in the Western society since 19th century with the critical position. He said: “‘Religion’ ceases to be a public, social duty and becomes a voluntary, private activity. ‘Religion’ in the course of the nineteenth century becomes the religiosity of the individual, private, inward, edifying. By giving free rein to religion and leaving it to the free unfolding of the personality in complete freedom of religious choice, modern society as a modern ‘society of needs’ emancipates itself from religious needs. This process was furthered by many revivalist and pietist movements within Christianity. There prevailed within it a pious individualism, which for its own part was romanticist in form and withdrew itself from the material entanglements of society. The Church thus slipped over into the modern *cultus privatus* and produced in theology and pastoral care a corresponding selfconsciousness as a haven of intimacy and guardian of personality for a race that had developed a materialist society and felt itself not at home there. This certainly means that the Christian religion is dismissed from the integrating centre of modern society and relieved of its duty of having to represent the highest goal of society, but that is not by any means the end of it.” The


18. “The term civil religion was first introduced by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his book The Social Contact (1762). Rousseau used the term in the context of the European Enlightenment and the revolutionary movement toward democratic statehood. The concept applied to the ordering and organization of modern democracies preceding the French Revolution and the overthrowing of religious and political hierarchies as the ordering principles of the state […] But even after their revolutions democratic European states still possessed the residue of ancient traditions embedded in their histories and institutions. In other words, they were already ‘a people’ prior to the foundation of democratic institutions.” Carole L. Stewart, “Civil Religion,” in: Encyclopedia of Religion, 2nd ed., vol. 3, ed. by L. Jones, New York: Thomson Gale, 2005, pp. 1812–1816.


22. “In the employment of ritual action (Li) to effect order, these Li and the people who perform them are mutually determining and refining, Li permits and in fact encourages an emergent harmony that is expressive of the demands of insistent particularity. The society in its reliance upon Li maximizes its possibilities for qualitative harmony. Where ritual action (Li) fails, however, Fa (law) simply serves as a coercive means to prevent decline into social discord from a level at which the more effective and enduring methods of ritual action (Li) can again be applied. In this vision of social order, the harmony which can be achieved through ritual action is an end in itself, whereas the imposed order achieved by Fa (law) has only functional, instrumental value as a temporary means to the higher end.” David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, *Thinking Through Confucius*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1987, p. 173.

23. “In itself, the democratic principle stands for the transcending of the class struggle; its ideal is social peace […] The idea of democracy is an ethical one, the great idea of human right. Human right signify the more right of the person to independent value, or, as Kant formulated it, the right never to be considered merely as a means but rather also always as an end […] The declaration of human rights in the American and French constitutions is therefore a fact not only of the greatest importance for modern history, but also of the greatest significance for ethic.” Ernst Troeltsch, “Political Ethics and Christianity,” in: *Religion in History*, Essays trans. J. L. Adams and W. F. Bense, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991, p. 181.
Christian Ethics and Contemporary Spiritual Reconstruction

WANG WEIFAN

“"It is an incontrovertible fact that, at least since the 1970s, the Chinese spirit has been in the depths of a tremendous crisis. By “spirit” I mean the religious faith on which we depend for our sense of security, to resolve questions of the meaning of life, the ethical rules by which we treat our family, our neighbors, and our fellow citizens; the similar the public and civic spirit with which we engage in social and public causes; the spirit of reason through which we see the world; and our cultural self-confidence. In the absence of these spiritual elements, ever-greater wealth cannot bring peace and stability to this society." 1

“For too long our human hearts have been superficially bent on knowledge and on reason in the narrow rather than the broad definition of reason. The result of this is that we ignore conscience, fairness, and creative or generous love. Faith transcends the other, it can go by other names; the spiritual outlook of faith determines the rise or decline of a culture and a people.”2

Chinese Communists must begin with the human spirit; they have never denied the Christian Jesus. Yun Daiying, who took part in the Anti-Christian Movement (1922-1927), shouted his opposition to cultural aggression, but said in a lecture at Lingnan University: “In my view, the man Jesus can in no way be despised. I believe Jesus was a “saint” of the ancient Jews, and moreover I believe that Jesus is actually in many ways greater than Confucius. As for those in churches, I have personally seen many good people there. Moreover, I want to admit that I myself
have in fact been influenced to some degree by the good people of the church.”

Chen Duxiu revered Jesus’ spirit even more, such that Hu Shi could write: “The Chen Duxiu of this time was practically a follower of Jesus.” He said this because Chen Duxiu had published an essay titled “Christianity and the Chinese People,” in which he wrote, “We should try to cultivate the lofty and majestic character of Jesus and imbue our very blood with his warm and rich passion in order to save us from the pit of chilly indifference, darkness, and filth into which we have fallen. . . . Chinese society is totally benumbed, and the lack of any feeling in the stream of culture is at least one serious reason for this. If we want to fix this deficiency, it seems that we must use beauty and religion to guide our affections . . . It is for this reason that I propose that we take Jesus’ great and superior character and imbue our very blood with his warm and rich passion.”

In 1982, the second generation of the Central Committee leadership brought order out of chaos and reinstated religion, implementing the religious policy anew. Document 19 was issued, and at the National Philosophical and Social Sciences Forum on the 6th Five Year Plan, Hu Qiaomu indicated that, “we must research the root causes of the emergence, continuing existence, and development of religious phenomena in China. How can religion, as part of China’s socialist society, adapt to socialist society and play its proper role?”

On this basis, Luo Zhufang, head of the Shanghai Institute for Research on Religion, proposed an “all roads lead to Rome” explanation. He felt that: “Since the founding of the People’s Republic of China, religious persons, steeped in patriotism and socialism, have proposed to develop religion’s positive factors that are advantageous to socialism, to progress through doing good,
and benefit socialism in “this world.” Certain religious doctrines and canons could become a progressive impetus for religious believers. And thus would emerge the “all roads lead to Rome” phenomenon: though the motivation behind individuals’ worldviews might differ, the actual result would be agreement on basic principles, all making contributions to socialism. Religion would be playing its correct role and would be able to adapt to socialist society. For religious adherents, no other moral teachings can replace the function of religion to do good and avoid evil through moral restraint; this is also a factor in adaptation.”

Frankly, it is as Luo Weihong of the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences said, “Luo Zhufeng personally led us in exerting ourselves in studying religious questions during China’s socialist period and to establish the field of the modern study of religion appropriate to China’s reality, where none had existed before. It can be said without apology that it was Mr. Luo who opened up and laid the foundation of the modern study of religion in China.”

The third generation of Party leadership repeatedly exhorted religious circles to delve into religious doctrine and find, organize, and emphasize those elements in harmony with developing trends of the times and the construction of a spiritual civilization, so that their positive potential might be realized. As Jiang Zemin stated, “Those in religious circles and religious bodies must through their own influence guide the masses who are religious believers to be patriotic and law-abiding, to reject evil and do good, and to serve society”

Li Peng said: “Among the doctrines of all religions, there are many with profound philosophical meaning, ideas as well as social ethics, and positive elements among these can be guided and enabled to realize their potential.” And Li Ruihuan frequently observed that “Among the doctrines of all the major religions in China there is much, for example demands
in the moral and ethical sphere, that is in harmony with modern social trends and the spiritual civilization we espouse. These are the things, advantageous to society and to people, that people in religious circles should bring forth, organize, and stress."\textsuperscript{10} . . . What the central leadership hoped for from religious circles was that from within “religious doctrine” and “religious culture,” they would uncover and organize ethical-moral material that would be beneficial to society; they did not want to deny the authority of religious scriptures.

In late 2001, Pan Yue, who was at the time the Vice-director of the Office of the Commission for Economic Restructuring, basing his thinking on the history of the Chinese Communist Party’s movement from a revolutionary party to a ruling party, was the first to suggest that, “a Marxist religious view must be in step with the times.” He felt that, “In order for a revolutionary party to truly make the transition to a ruling party, we must make a new examination of the function of religion by means of a new ruling ideology . . . human beings have a barbaric selfishness in their nature; if they rely only on their human volition, this will not be enough to restrain their behavior. Human desire to make use of the power of God to regulate themselves is born of fear and this is the grounds for the existence of religious morality. . . . the spirit of a people is born of culture, the soul of culture is embodied in the moral, morality is supported by faith, and a people without faith cannot establish itself in the family of world peoples—and this is much more so for China.”\textsuperscript{11}

At about the same time, Mou Zhongjian of the Central Nationalities University and Li Pingye of the United Front Department coauthored an essay titled “A New Understanding of Religious Questions in China is Needed,” in which they pointed out that “Zhao Puchu [1907-2000; then head of the Buddhist Association—ed.]
pointed out that the concept of “religion as culture” has broadened people’s vision, downplayed political ideology and enabled people to understand the whole rich content of religion more objectively and holistically. More and more people have realized that religion is not simply a faith, but an approach to life, a kind of value choice, a way to know human life and the world, a kind of human wisdom that reflects the mode of human existence as well as the predicament of human life, and is a kind of spiritual power that enables humans to escape their predicament and face life squarely.”

In June, 2006, the vice-president of the Buddhist Association of China, Xue Cheng, issued this call in the Buddhist journal Fayin: “We must treat the social and historical role of religion objectively, fairly, comprehensively, and scientifically, and guard against subjectivity and superficial judgments. We must understand religion anew, know the nature and function of religion and its significance in society, history, and humanistic education, and take a positive attitude toward it so its potential in society is realized. Religion is an extremely precious source for establishing social morals (including social ethics, professional ethics, and family morals). It is also an especially powerful motivating factor in the establishment of a socialist spiritual civilization. Not only has religion developed and continued to exist in this modern era, but it has been actively engaged in and has held together the moral system of modern society. This is an uncontested fact.”

In 2004, Yu Yujin of Fudan University suggested that, “in a modern society it is inadmissible for reason to be confined to experience, it needs to function on the transcendent level, and especially on the religious level. Just as Jung asserted early on, it is not possible for God to die, God cannot die, for “the transcendent dimension of
reason” can never be erased from human reason. And we know that Heidegger’s response to a modern age with its unprecedented development of “technical reason,” an age in which technology had already pulled people up by the roots, was this: “only a God can save us.”

We are in a time when spiritual renewal is needed, a renewal that includes ethics and morality, a civic spirit, social conscience, and even the confidence of faith. In March 2004, Xue Cheng spoke these words at an assembly of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC): “Religion is a special moral resource that functions as the foundation of value. The decline in human morals and the loss of pure religious faith frequently emerge together. The hope people have to be saved through establishing pure religious faith and a revival of traditional religion emerges from a humanity that is in the midst of moral crisis. Religious morality is an important constitutive element of religion, and a part of human morality.” He speaks from the conscience and confidence of a religious believer when he says, “religion is a special moral resource.” If religion itself had no basic moral resource, there would be nothing to uncover, to organize, or to develop; this is precisely the fundamental difference between “religious ethics” and “ethicized religion.”

Lü Daji of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) has said that “If religion were only to exist as religion, its nature would always be expressed in human faith in and worship of God. However, through the ages and throughout the world, there have been many proponents of the concept of “ethical religion”—an attempt to remake “god religion” with God as the center into a godless “moral religion” with ethics at the center. (But) we have yet to see an actual God-denying “moral religion”. . . . religion can give a religious and theological cast to moral rules, but it can in no way ethicize religion itself through a denial of
God.” Ethics as religion, sanctified ethics was the point of opposition where Judaism and Christianity transcended the shamanistic/magical religions of ancient Egypt, Canaan, and Rome.” And Chen Lai of Beijing University has also stated that “the development of religion in human society indicates that throwing off the primitive religion of the hamlet and tribe, and adapting to the emergence of the genuine religion of large social and ethnic groups, necessitates the integration of the religious mindset and ethical principles.” Considered from the perspective of Christian theology, this is in fact an “incarnational” process, the metaphysical “dao.” It is necessary to make the physical ethic understood, felt, and expressed by people. Without Jesus Christ’s “flesh,” people do not know where God is, for no one has ever seen God. There must be an “in the beginning there was (the Word),” and “(the Word) was with God,” and moreover, (the Word) was God, become flesh and showing forth God in the world. Conversely, if Christianity was left only with the secular “flesh,” only external ethics and service, while our reverence, the search for guidance, dependence on and love for God, were lost or watered down, it would become a dry husk, a body without a soul.

Yang Huilin of People’s University was quite correct when he pointed out: “Once Christianity had eliminated the passion of faith and the missionary impulse, thereby locating itself entirely within a secularized context, such that Christianity was cut off from its cultural vector, would there still be a reason for its existence?” These are precisely the questions and issues that this writer has been pondering in recent years: in this time of spiritual renewal in modern China, to draw out, organize, and develop certain “resources for moral construction” from Christianity’s inherent scriptures, faith, doctrine, and theology; could be to follow the old path of “ideologizing,”
falling into what Reinhold Niebuhr critiqued as two forms of “self-righteousness”: making Christianity’s transcendental ideals into the inner possibility of the historical process; or placing hope in the appearance of miracles in history and the ultimate construction of an ideal social order.\(^{19}\)

1

But let justice roll on like a river,
righteousness like a never-failing stream!
(Amos 5:24)

Hegel saw China, India, and the West as three progressive stages in human spiritual development, but Karl Jaspers (1883-1969) proposed instead his theory of the “axial age.” He believed that in the spiritual process from around 500 BCE, including 800 BCE to 200 CE, in China, India, Iran, Palestine, and Greece religious leaders and philosophers emerged separately and independently. As Jaspers saw it, humanity continued to rely for its existence on the thinking and creativity produced in the axial age, every new leap looked back to that age, and was fired anew by it; from that time on, this is how things were. The return to the potential of the axial age, or its renaissance, always provided a spiritual impetus.\(^{20}\)

As for Christianity, in discussing or studying any question, we must return to the Bible and search there for our spiritual motivation for our awakening and revival.

In chapters 3 and 4 of Genesis, the first book of the Bible, two questions are posed to humankind. The first, “Where are you?” (Gen. 3:9), is asked of Adam, the Adam who has wandered from, become alienated from, and abandoned God; here begins God’s call to, search for, and redemption of fallen humanity. The second, “Where is your brother?” (Gen. 4:9), comes following Cain’s slaying of his innocent brother Abel, the first time God heard cries
of supplication from humankind and God summoned, judged, and punished the murderer. The two questions are linked and it is here that the core of Christian faith and ethics resides. The entire Bible unfolds from this point.

After Solomon, the united Kingdom of Israel (BCE 1028-933) was divided into the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. Following the eighth century BCE, faced with the internal and external tribulations of its people, a group of prophets who spoke for God rose up in Palestine: Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah, and so on. Chinese theologian Zhu Weizhi thought that “the prophets of Israel were the merciless whistleblowers and scathing critics of the society of the day. They attacked the tyrannical and licentious officials who would stop at nothing, exposed the corrupt and repulsive profiteering customs of the society, and sympathized with the lower strata of society who bore the heavy brunt of disasters.”

They differed from those in other locales in that: 1) the prophets were God’s agents. Inspiration came to them when God had something to say to society (Is. 1:1; Amos 1:1; Micah 1:1). “Inspiration” originally meant “take up a burden” or “heavy burden,” like the ancient Chinese “outspoken minister who gives unpleasant advice” (lit. one like a fishbone in the throat). 2) the prophets spoke for the weak. Each and every prayer from God through the prophets was for social equality and justice, including equality and justice between nations of the time. The verses below are God’s cries, issued through the prophet Amos, focused on social equality and justice, when God was particularly repulsed by Israel’s false religion:

I hate, I despise your festivals,
And I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.
Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and
grain offerings
I will not accept them;
and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals
I will not look upon.
Take away from me the noise of your songs;
I will not listen to the melody of your harps.
But let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.
(Amos 5: 21-24)

Similar examples of God’s speech abound in “the
prophetic books”: “When you stretch out your hands,
I will hide my eyes form you; even though you make
many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of
blood. Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove
the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do
evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed,
defend the orphan, plead for the widow” (Is. 1: 15-17).
Of corrupt officials, God says: “Your princes are rebels
and companions of thieves. Everyone loves a bribe and
runs after gifts. They do not defend the orphan, and the
widow’s cause does not come before them” (Is. 1:23). “For
the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and
the people of Judah are his pleasant planting; he expected
justice, but saw bloodshed; righteousness, but heard a
cry!” (Is. 5:7); “You who hate the good and love the evil,
who tear the skin off my people, and the flesh off their
bones; who eat the flesh of my people, flay the skin off
them, break their bones in pieces” (Micah 3: 2-3); on the
atmosphere in society, “There is no faithfulness or loyalty,
and no knowledge of God in the land. Swearing, lying, and
murder, and stealing and adultery break out; bloodshed
follows bloodshed” (Hosea 4: 1-2).

In terms of ethos, the prophets in Palestine during
the axial era differed China’s Laozi, Zhuangzi, Confucius,
and Mengzi, and from the enlightened ones of India and the philosophers of Greece. Raising a cry for equality and justice, they were a unique element in Hebrew culture, and they then became part of the genetic material of Western culture. Engels said:

The history of early Christianity has notable points of resemblance with the modern working-class movement. Like the latter, Christianity was originally a movement of oppressed people: it first appeared as the religion of slaves and emancipated slaves, of poor people deprived of all rights, of peoples subjugated or dispersed by Rome. Both Christianity and the workers’ socialism preach forthcoming salvation from bondage and misery. But due to historical preconditions, early Christianity had to place its hopes “in heaven, in eternal life after death, in the impending ‘millennium.’” And, The parallel between the two historic phenomena forces itself upon our attention as early as the Middle Ages in the first risings of the oppressed peasants and particularly of the town plebeians.22

The Second American “Great Awakening” (a religious revival movement, 1800-1839), founded on a resurgence of Christian ethics, brought standards of good and evil to a critique of the slave system, bringing the idea that “all persons are equal before God” deep into people’s hearts. The evangelicals’ anti-slavery advocacy reached its most forceful expression in their pietist zeal. Allen Hertzke wrote that for many of the evangelical leaders of the time, the Civil War was not only a great moral battle, [but] in ending the slave system through such vast losses, the battle was sanctified.23

For over three hundred years following its establishment, the U.S. was an unequal society, where white oppression of black people was deemed reasonable and acceptable. In the dark days of 1963 during the civil
rights movement for social equality, at a huge rally of African Americans in Washington, D.C., Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968) said, “And so even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. . . . I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.’”

But at the same time he warned his listeners: “In the process of gaining our rightful place, we must not be guilty of wrongful deeds. Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred. We must forever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline.”

The result of this struggle for social justice was the passage of the Civil Rights Act by the U.S. Congress, which formally ended legal discrimination against African Americans. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated by a racist in 1968 and with his life and blood trod the way of the “ten commandments of non-violence,” he himself had defined/formulated, such as: “Struggle for justice and reconciliation, not victory.”

Christianity preaches “Love others as yourself,” or “love your neighbor as yourself.” This does not come from the Gospels of the New Testament but from the third book of the Old Testament, Leviticus, the passage that has been called the Holy Code. Looking at this together with the preceding and following verses, we cannot but discover that the essential spirit of God’s command here is that we must treat others with fairness and justice, especially society’s more vulnerable ones. As Leviticus 19 says:

When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. You shall not strip your vineyard bare, or
gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the alien: I am the Lord your God. (9-10)

You shall not defraud your neighbor; you shall not steal; and you shall not keep for yourself the wages of a laborer until morning. You shall not revile the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind; you shall fear your God: I am the Lord. (13-14)

You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord. (18)

You shall rise before the aged, and defer to the old; and you shall fear your God: I am the Lord. When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God. You shall not cheat in measuring length, weight or quantity. You shall have honest balances, honest weights, an honest ephah, and an honest hin: I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt. (32-36)

It is very clear from this that the “love” demanded for others means first of all respect, care, and good treatment. In an essay titled “An Exploration of the Foundation of Christian Ethical Thinking,” Huang Songjie of Fudan University points out that “the Bible is without question the source of Christian ethics . . . reverence for God and respect for people are two aspects of love that cannot be separated from it. Love for others means first of all to respect, care for, and treat others well, to do good to the best of one’s ability, to do things for others as if doing them for oneself. Essentially, to love someone is to respect the other as a human being, to help another cast off what suppresses or oppresses human nature. Even if that person
is an enemy, you must to treat him or her as a human being.” To interpret “love thy neighbor as thyself” in terms of respect, good treatment, and helping others in their difficulties, connotes a kind of “all are created equal” concept of social equality. Humans are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26); This is fundamental: all are created equal and deserve respect and good treatment.

According to figures given in the Jewish Talmud, the commandments, laws, regulations, and taboos given by God number 613, including religious, ethical, civil, social, ritual, and even in nature, with the “Ten Commandments” as the core (Exodus 20: 1-17). Before Jesus began his public preaching, Jewish experts on the law had summarized the commandments and laws found in the Old Testament as: “love God and one’s neighbor.”

For example in Luke 10, the lawyer seems to know the answer to Jesus’ question so well he could recite it backwards: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and [love: in the Chinese text] your neighbor as yourself” (10:27). In the original Greek, agape (love) occurs only once: You shall love the Lord your God. Since the Greek agape reflects both an emotional selfless and self-sacrificial love and expresses an inner reverence, respect, and sense of cherishing, to translate “love God and love humans (sic)” as “reverence God and respect humans” is rather fitting and adequately expresses that love for God and love for humans is an indivisible whole: reverence and love for God is also respect, reverence and care for the humans God created.

The crux of the issue lies in the fact that the society of Jesus’ day was a society lacking in fairness and justice and the injunction to “Love God and your neighbor” had become an empty phrase, words dissociated from action, a religious moral teaching completely untethered from
reality. A few days before Jesus was nailed to the cross, some groups whose intention was to kill him, asked him a number of very difficult questions on politics, law, and faith, their motive being to draw from Jesus’ answers statements that they could use to attack him. “Love God and your neighbor” had clearly become a universally understood and indivisible principle, but the lawyers, scholars, and Pharisees who were testing Jesus wanted to know “which” of these was the greatest commandment. So Jesus’ answers always linked the two, “Love God and your neighbor,” and added, “On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (see Mt. 22: 34-40). He thus avoided their trap.

The Jesus of the Gospels raised the idea “love your neighbor as yourself” and aimed it directly at the ungenerous and uncompassionate rich people and officials, demanding that they “sell what [they] have and give to the poor,” returning fairness to their neighbors and justice to society (Mt. 19: 16-27; Mk. 10: 17-27; Lk. 18: 18-39). But these people find the choice difficult and, between “the kingdom and eternal life,” and “riches and happiness,” they choose the latter pair. Only Zacchaeus chose the former. Zacchaeus was a chief Roman tax collector; his wealth came through fraud. [But] He said to Jesus, “Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much” (Lk. 19: 1-10). This is a full repentance before God, an inner acceptance of the principle of fairness, one who returns human dignity to the poor and those who have been defrauded, a fallen human being who is saved from a life of sin by Jesus. The kingdom and eternal life are not absolutely matters of the future, accepting the sovereignty and dominion of God is the beginning of entering the royal reign of God; acceptance of the unlimited transcendence and eternal life of God as one’s own life is the beginning
of entering eternal life. As for the hypocrites, whited sepulchers of the day who embraced falseness, including false religion, those who pass themselves off as good, Jesus said of them:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law; justice and mercy and faith. It is these you ought to have practiced …

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence …

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which on the outside look beautiful, but inside they are full of the bones of the dead and of all kinds of filth. So you also on the outside look righteous to others, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness …

You snakes, you brood of vipers! How can you escape being sentenced to hell?

Mt. 23: 23-33

The American theologian and Christian ethicist Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971) said that “Jesus ethics” are a logical extension of the faith of the prophets, “Jesus ethics” must be couched in purely religious terms and not simply be a restatement of social norms in other terms.29 The biblical quotes above are an example of just this sort of logical extension.

Gao Guoxi points out: “The issue of the gap between rich and poor is a huge question faced by the world today. In our modern world of one superpower and many powers, in the era of economic globalization, there is a serious disparity and gap between the rich and poor. The net assets
of the three richest people in the world exceeds the GDP of the citizens of the 41 poorest nations; if we compare one percent of the income of the richest people to 57 percent of the income of the poorest people, the income of the richest 5 percent of people in the world exceeds that of the poorest 5 percent 114 times. The market economy ordinarily can only solve the problem of efficiency; it cannot address the problem of injustice. Justice must be guaranteed by the social system.” And Zou Hengpu has said: “Developing countries easily fall into malicious cycles of economic corruption, inequality, violence and social unrest and even internal warfare; of these corruption is the pivot. According to the most conservative statistics, the annual cost of bribes totals a trillion U.S. dollars.”

Since the beginning of the period of Reform and Opening, China has been successful in reducing poverty considerably: nearly 400 million people have emerged from poverty. “But conditions of development since the late 1990s have shown that reliance on economic growth alone does not necessarily reduce poverty.” A survey of high-ranking cadres by the Central Party School found that “income disparity” was chosen as the leading serious issue in 2004 by 43.9 per cent of respondents. The editor of the China News Weekly commented that, “That the government adopts every kind of measure to help the poor is of course extremely important; that the government stands with the vulnerable and restricts capital is also important; but the most important thing may be place even greater restrictions on power, so that officials cannot take advantage of rent seeking, and business people are unable to rely on power to get rich.”

China News Weekly reporter Li Jingning recalls that, “Qinghua University professor Li Qiang said in a lecture that extreme imbalance in the development of Chinese politics and economy remained one of the noteworthy
issues in Chinese society. In the same historical period, there are both very primitive rural communities and post-industrial developed communities that have reached a level with Europe and America.

On the night of December 31, 2004, the Chinese website www.people.com (renmin wang) posted an article from the offices of its chief editor Liang Caiheng, called “Special Planning.” The theme of the article was “A historical overview of the migrant labor issue.” It contained some shocking statements that brought tears to my eyes: “On the last day of 2004, let us cast our eyes on them, on those who live in our midst, this group that has lost the power to speak for itself, and, regard them fairly and squarely. For no one should be left out of the process of building a harmonious society. From today on, let us care about them, these migrant brothers who live alongside us, just as we care about our families and friends, just as we care about ourselves. Because they are the same as us, they smile and they weep, have their dreams and desires, their eyes are on the future.” In the reality of China’s social conditions and public sentiment at this moment, this is simply the best interpretation of the Bible’s “Love thy neighbor as thyself” that I have found.

The Bible seems to pay special attention to the injustice of wage arrears. In the foregoing we have already quoted Leviticus, “… you shall not keep for yourself the wages of a laborer until morning.” Deuteronomy is even more heartfelt: “You shall not withhold the wages of poor and needy laborers, whether other Israelites or aliens who reside in one of your towns. You shall pay them their wages daily before sunset, because they are poor and their livelihood depends on them; otherwise they might cry to the Lord against you,
and you would incur guilt” (Deut. 24: 14-15). “James the Just” is even more emphatic: “Listen! The wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts” (James 5:4). Heaven listens as our people listen: this is an ancient Chinese saying and the Bible says the same thing. As far as Christian ethics is concerned, the storm of demand for wages in the last two years should be one hundred percent acknowledged and affirmed.

A Swedish economist has observed that educated young people in Western developed nations are being organized into teams to go to distant undeveloped nations, and frequently go to villages to help and to teach the poor. At the same time, school graduates of these undeveloped countries have no thought of doing likewise, but are willing to be crammed into cities as the educated unemployed, or, in order to created “appropriate” employment, they demand that our government expand its administrative agencies.”34 Ge Chenhong of People’s University, in answer to the question, “How should we supplement our moral education?” replied, “Strictly speaking, social morality should first of all safeguard social equality. Morality is about “shoulds,” and social equality is the greatest “should.”35

For many years, all of us in China, including Christians, have had too little to say about social equality, righteousness, justice, and so on. But what must not be taken lightly is the fact that without respect for justice, there will be no stable social order or lasting peace, neither can charitable actions take the place of a justice that has not been achieved.36 This is the caution of German Catholic ethicist Karl H. Peschke. This cause and effect relationship was in fact spoken by God through the prophet Isaiah in the eighth century BCE:
The effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever (Is. 32: 17).

Following the destruction of the southern kingdom of Judah in 586 BCE, God gave later generations a command and a promise through the prophet:

Maintain justice, and do what is right, for soon my salvation will come (Is. 56: 1).

A special advisor to the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences responded to a reporter’s statement that “we must pay greater attention to social harmony” with these words: “This is an age that longs for harmony. Equitable distribution of wealth and aid for the vulnerable will stimulate social equity and build a harmonious society. This was the focus of public opinion in 2004. Needless to say, the beginnings of social conflict were already to be seen in 2004. Our greater hope is that the new year (2005—ed.) will mark a new beginning for China to move toward social harmony.”

The ethics of the Confucian ideal of “great unity” meant a society where all the elderly were provided for, all children were tended, and all widows and widowers, orphans, the alone, abandoned, and ill were cared for; a society where all the vulnerable are accorded the dignity, care, and protection humans are entitled to (see the Book of Rites). However, though we cannot make a forced analogy between the new heaven and new earth promised by God that Christianity hopes and waits for, and the “great unity,” and though, speaking in Christian faith terms it is the transcendent, ultimate end of history in which God enters in, still, after its baptism of fire, its ethics are similarly characterized by yi (righteousness), where righteousness is at home (2 Peter 3: 13).
Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another (Jn. 13: 34).

Judas left the table during the Last Supper to go secretly and betray Jesus to the chief priests (Jn. 13: 21-30), while Jesus gave his disciples a New Commandment:

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another (Jn. 13: 34-35).

Then Jesus took the cup, saying: “This is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Mt. 26: 28). Paul records what Jesus said as “This cup is the new covenant in my blood” (1Cor. 11: 25).

The two parties to the covenant (as in “new covenant” and “old covenant”) were God and the people God wished to save. For a covenant, a guarantor is necessary (an intermediary, an agent) and blood must be the bond. For similar practices in ancient China, one’s life was the bond. Thus this was a “covenant of salt forever before the Lord”; an “eternal covenant” (Num. 18:19; Heb. 13: 20), expressions showing that the covenant would never be violated, nor the trust broken. In the Bible, the so-called “covenant language” is everywhere. The form of the language God uses is always: “I (do this), and therefore you should (respond by doing this)”; if you (act in this way), I will (do this).”

God made a covenant with the Israelites at the foot of Mount Sinai on the Sinai peninsula after Moses commanded the Israelites to leave Egypt. The Book of Exodus says that Moses first gave God’s commandments and ordinances (God’s speech and laws) to the people and
the people answered with one voice, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do” (Ex. 20: 22-23: 33). The next day the ritual of the covenant was held: an altar was built and the blood of the sacrifice was gathered into basins. Half of this Moses dashed on the altar. The book of the covenant was read out to the people, and the Israelites again shouted: “All that the Lord has spoken we will do.” And Moses took the other half of the sacrificial blood and dashed it on the people, saying, “See the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words” (Ex. 24: 3-8).

However, one party to the covenant, the Israelites, violated and betrayed it repeatedly until their exile in Babylon in 586 BCE. God spoke to the Judah through the prophet Jeremiah: “The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. … But this is the [new] covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (Jer. 31: 31-34). And through the prophet Ezekiel, in exile in Babylon, God said, “I will give them one heart and put a new spirit within them; I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, so that they may follow my statutes and keep my ordinances and obey them. Then they shall be my people and I will be their God” (Ez. 11: 19-20). In fact this is a question of “another’s law” vs. “one’s own law”; the commandments of the “old covenant” were moral precepts written on tablets of stone. The commandments of the “new covenant” were to be written in the depths of human hearts and souls, through a softening, an enlivening of the human heart by the Holy Spirit, the heart’s awakening to receive and obey God’s commandments and thus to resuscitate the harmony between humans and God and thereby, among humans.
The initiator of the renewal of the covenant is God. The other party has expanded from one people to the whole of humanity. The guarantor of the “old covenant” between the two parties was Moses, that of the “new covenant” is the incarnate Christ Jesus. The bond of the “old covenant” was blood; the bond of the “new covenant” is the blood of Jesus himself. As Augustine (354-430) said, he (Jesus Christ) is both priest and sacrifice and it is only because he gives himself as a sacrifice that he is able to become a priest. And it is in the ritual of the establishment of the “new covenant” that Jesus gave us a “new commandment.”

The Hebrew word for commandment is entole; at the time of the “old covenant” the plural of commandment, entolais, was used. It is worth noting that: this new commandment was not solely the purely ethical phrase “love one another,” but a redemptive and religious complete statement of faith, “Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.”

The Hebrew word used for “love” here is agape, agapao in its verb form, a love higher than that of family or friends—a self-sacrificial love. The Bible uses agape of true human affection, persons of lofty ideals and self-sacrificing heroes. Jesus said, “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (Jn. 15: 13). This is an affirmation of the human spirit of self-sacrifice. Peter’s highest demand of religious cultivation among believers was also agape: “...[support your faith with] ...godliness, and godliness with mutual affection, and mutual affection with love” (2Pet. 1: 7); this “love” is agape. This is love enlarged, deepened, and extended, an expansion, deepening and extension of religious cultivation. But the love of God and of Christ Jesus for humans is of another, holier, more transcendent, and unsurpassing plane. “For God so loved (agapao) the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in
him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him” (Jn. 3: 16). “Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us” (Rom. 5: 7-8). “We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another” (1Jn. 3: 16). God sacrificed his only Son, Christ Jesus who paid the great price of his blood to redeem sinners; this had its source in God’s “holy love.” This is “as I have loved you.” God so loved us that he sacrificed his only Son; Christ so loved us, that while we were yet sinners, he died for us. So we should also “love one another” and lay down our lives for our sisters and brothers so that the holy fire of God’s love, through Christ Jesus may catch fire in us and through us set the whole world alight. As the evangelical Chinese theologian Jia Yuming wrote in a poem: “The altar fire in God’s heart/ burns without beginning/ the more it burns the brighter, the fiercer/ the Lord’s sacrifice on the cross/ immolated by the fire of love; the holy, fierce redemptive love/ the fire of love will in the end set the world on fire.” (1948)

A person who is able to have the heart of sacrifice for another would not be unwilling to give material things outside oneself to others. This is what John is saying further on: “How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action” (1Jn. 3: 17-18). And not only in meetings, forums or turgid essays. Maximus the Confessor (c. 580-662) said that if a person could calmly and quietly take up his neighbor’s suffering and be tempered by lack and misfortune, as if all this were his
own, then that one was a true friend. St. Maximus was very influential in Russian Orthodoxy—it may be that Tolstoy was influenced by him in his disdain for empty ideas of love. True love is to share in the burdens of a neighbor’s suffering to the extent that “all this seems as if one’s own.” This is not moral theorizing nor political sloganeering. Christ Jesus is both the Son of God and the Son of Man. He possesses the divinity and power of God, but would rather call himself Son of Man, a clearer indication of his mission of entering the world as Son of Man. “For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10: 45). “Not be served but to serve” is the YMCA training motto, and from a faith perspective, this is sacrificial love in service to one’s neighbor and to society, like that of Mother Teresa (1910-1997) who said, “do small things with great love.” It is the great love of Jesus, his redemption of many through his own blood. . . . The original meaning of “to serve” is that of the servant serving the master (diakoneo, diakonos in the noun) meaning servant or attendant; in Christian usage, this is the origin of the term “deacon.”

The reason Jesus wanted to declare his mission in the world to the disciples can be understood from the verses surrounding this passage. The disciples had the impression that Jesus would one day be king, and that James and John would carry out his bidding, officials on his right and left. The remaining ten disciples were power-hungry as well. They became angry with James and John and argued over who was “greatest” among them (Mk. 10: 35-41). Jesus was facing suffering and death at that very moment to fulfill the Father’s will to redeem humankind. He was on the road to Jerusalem to die a martyr’s death (Mk. 10:32-34). So Jesus called them to him and said, “You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants
over them. But it is not so among you” (Mk. 10:42-43). Jesus is telling them that though under Roman rule, rulers rely on power and rule strictly over the common people, relationships among the disciples cannot be like this. He goes on to say:

But whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant;
And whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.
For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve
And to give his life as a ransom for many.

(Mk. 10: 43-45)

According to Augustine, when human beings sin and turn from God, all sorts of selfishness and greed arise in them, one example being to rule over others and control them—the desire for power. But “Jesus ethics” tells the disciples that humans were not created to satisfy their selfish desires, nor to be “greater” than others, nor to enslave or order others about. Each person is in the world to serve others and attend upon them, to make sacrifices for them, to pay the price for others. And Jesus himself was willing to be a “ransom” for many, that the Son of God would die and rise again to ransom humans from their sins.

Agnesë Gonxhe Bojaxhiu was teaching in a convent school in India when, following the Japanese invasion of India in 1946, she experienced her “day of decision” while traveling to Darjeeling by train. At each stop the train was besieged by refugees who stretched their hands through the windows, begging for food. And she heard a clear voice saying, “I was hungry and you did not feed me; I was naked and you did not clothe me … if you do not do these things for the least of my brethren, you do not
do them for me” (see Mk. 25: 31-46). In her subsequent work with the “poorest of the poor,” Mother Teresa and her order of sisters healed illness, fed and gave spiritual comfort, and opened homes for abandoned children, as well as tuberculosis hospitals. “Love,” she said, “love until it hurts”; and “In this life we cannot do great things. We can only do small things with great love.”

The ripples of such love whose source is Christ Jesus, have quietly spread to China. In an issue of Liaoning Youth, I read a piece by Luo Ke, “The Poor are Gifts from God,” a title which is a quote from Mother Teresa. Luo Ke has a poor friend, Huang Shaoqi, someone he met at the train station one winter around Spring Festival. At the time Huang was in dire straits. A thief had stolen his wages from a year’s employment at a shoe factory and he was shining shoes in order to raise the fare to go back to Sichuan for the festival. He couldn’t get a regular ticket and he couldn’t afford to buy on the black market. Determined to help him, Luo Ke used his Press ID to buy him a hard-seat ticket on the Sichuan train. And Huang said something Luo Ke will never forget: “This Spring Festival comes from you!” Luo Ke responded, “This cost me practically no effort,” but Huang said, “It cost an effort of ‘heart,’ and that is very important!” Luo Ke wrote of this, “He elevated my small effort. This is an example of Mother Teresa’s ‘do small things with great love.’ I’m still in touch with Huang Shaoqi, and every holiday he asks after me and sends good wishes. In this sense, I am the beneficiary. He makes me feel good about life. Echoes of love are everywhere in our world. Don’t just be dazzled by the fine clothes and cars of the wealthy. Do all you can to bring a little hope to those in need, be it only a piece of bread or a bottle of water.”

We are here for others, not for ourselves: this is Christian ethics.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) criticized the
churches of his day for their widespread pursuit of a kind of “cheap grace”: focused only on justification and not on repentance, even less with any desire to truly cast off sin; asking God for grace and blessings, but unwilling to pay the cost of discipleship. He called on people to fight for costly grace, and realized his theological ideas at the cost of his own young life. In his words, “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”

If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.

For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it. (Lk. 9: 23-24)

When Paul repeated Jesus’ words: “It is better to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35), he meant that when we receive what we need from God and from the church, that is of course a blessing; but a greater blessing, or the “highest blessing” (makarios, as in the Beatitudes) is to sacrifice and to give. Paul worked for the church in Ephesus a full three years, but he took no gold, silver, or clothing from the believers there. Instead he relied on his skill with needle and thread, supporting himself, as well as his more vulnerable companions, with his own two hands (Acts 20: 33-35). When Paul spoke of the church in Macedonia and how it had donated to help the afflicted believers in Jerusalem, he called this God’s generous act to the church in Macedonia. This is not what is generally thought of as utilitarian grace, but rather charin (the grace of God), an abundant joy [in giving] in the midst of extreme poverty. “For you know the generous act (charin) of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich” (2 Cor. 8:9).

Paul, though in poverty so deep one could not be
poorer, was asked not once, but many times to voluntarily to aid those in extreme difficulty, such that his charin was great. The church in Macedonia was especially spiritually rich, similar to the church in Smyrna (Rev. 2: 8-9); making a strong contrast to the materially rich, but spiritually poor church in Laodicea (Rev. 3: 17-18).

A survey in China found that in a relatively economically developed city, the total income in 2002 for the city’s religious venues exceeded that of 1999 by 42.3 percent, but that donations and expenditure from religious circles for the public welfare and charitable work per annum was no more than 1 percent of income. In response to the Indian Ocean tsunami, Chinese citizens launched their largest civil donor action. On Dec. 31, 2004, Shanghai launched a one-day fundraiser. The earliest celebrity to donate through the Chinese Red Cross was probably the 101-year-old writer, Ba Jin. In Shenyang, the first private donor was six-year old Mou Yi, who was later praised by Kofi Annan. The speed and strength of the response by the Chinese community surprised many international charities. China’s rising entrepreneurs were also part of the response; Andrew Carnegie’s famous dictum was on their minds: “the man who dies thus rich is disgraced.”

Jonathan Sacks, chief rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth said in response to the tsunami: “The religious question is, therefore, not ‘Why did this happen?’ ... The religious response is not to seek to understand, thereby to accept. We are not God. Instead we are the people he has called on to be his ‘partners in the work of creation.’” This is truly the best commentary on “As I have loved you...” for our times. This is the commandment Christ Jesus gave us over two thousand
years ago; the function of this commandment is to activate
the human conscience when special circumstances arise
(see Rom. 2: 14-16).

The chief commandment of the Old Covenant, “Love
your neighbor as yourself,” and the New Commandment,
“You must love one another,” are both similar and yet
slightly different. Their common point is that both have
their premise in faith in the Triune God. The prerequisite,
the foundation of the first, is love for God, reverence
for and obedience to God. The spirit and Life of the
second is Christ Jesus’ sacrifice, service to people, and
the heavy price he paid out in his blood. The difference
lies in the demand of the first that one respect people,
treat them fairly, and treat them with humanity out of
love and reverence for God; the demand of the second
is that one sacrifice oneself, hate oneself (hatred here
was originally translated as “to be indifferent to”) (Jn.
12:25), like a kernel of wheat that falls into the earth and
dies, but then bears much fruit (v. 24). In Romans, Paul’s
exposition brings out the slight difference between the two
commandments:

Owe no one anything, except to love one another, for the
one who loves another has fulfilled the law. (v. 8) The
commandments, “You shall not commit adultery; You
shall not commit murder; You shall not steal; You shall not
covet”; and any other commandment, are summed up in
this word, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no
wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the
law. (Rom. 13: 8-10)

In the second part of this passage, verse 9 on, Paul
focuses on the “old covenant” commandment of “Love
others as yourself.” The basic spirit of these verses is to
do no harm to others. The first verse stresses the “love one
another” of the new commandment, a debt that can never be cleared. This writer truly understands this. In 1988, 41 years since I had been baptized, a young man from Shihezi in Xinjiang returned to his local church following graduation from our seminary. Since the church was under renovation, he was given temporary quarters in an old and decrepit house that collapsed following several days of heavy rains. In the early morning of September 30, 1988, this good young man, Wei Zhichao, died. During a memorial service I was leading, many students recalled in tears how when he was at the seminary he quietly cared for, helped, and comforted so many of them. One of his classmates said Wei cared about each one, but there was no one to care for him. Through four winters in Nanjing, Wei wore an old thin jacket. I felt as if a knife had been plunged into my heart, I silently asked God: Am I, a teacher, so blind? A good student like this spent four years in my sight, how is it I did not see that he had no padded jacket? I owed young Wei a debt I could never repay.

Jesus exhorted the rich to “store up treasure in heaven,” for each one of us must sooner or later face the day when wealth is gone, that is, the day we leave this world. So we must be good at using this wealth that does not belong to us to “make friends” to help those in dire circumstances, those in need. Those whom we have helped will remember us and welcome us into their eternal homes (see Lk. 16: 9). This is the “Jesus ethics” that says: “Store up for yourselves treasure in heaven” (Mt. 6: 19-20). If we are able to do this, then our hearts will also be in heaven, in a realm of peace, detachment, and radiance. Those who only bury their treasure in the ground, will find their hearts buried there also and they will live as slaves to their treasure. As Jesus says, “where your treasure is, there your
heart will be also” (Mt. 6:21).

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2. He Guanghu, Why Do We Need Faith?
6. Xiao Zhitian, “Ethics and practice are ever integrated,” in Writings in Memory of Luo Zhufeng (Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 1997).
7. Luo Weihong, “In honor of Luo Zhufeng, who opened up and laid the foundations for the Modern Study of Religion in China,” see Writings in Memory of Luo Zhufeng.
16. Lü Daji, Human Ethics and God Ethics (Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1991).
25. Ibid.
31. Zou Hengpu, “Inequality leads to social disruption.”
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“Chinese Theology and its Cultural Sources,” No. 12: 76.
Western media often describes China as an “emerging giant” and a future “world power.” These descriptions might be true to a certain extent, but the word “world power” needs some clarification. Globalization is the dominant reality of the world. However, the modern global system is unjust at its core, the rich world, a little over twenty percent of world population, consumes eighty percent of the earth’s resources. The promise of a first world consumer lifestyle for all is simply impossible.

China has twenty-one percent of the world’s people and is commonly estimated to consume, at present, five percent of the world’s resources; an average American consumes twenty times more energy than an ordinary Chinese. China is the second largest country in the world in terms of greenhouse gas emission only after the US; yet China is still struggling to solve problems like unemployment, health, education, and degradation of the environment. It is clear that China could not really become a world power in terms of consumerism. The resources of the world are simply not enough.

A different way forward is needed. All humanity has to settle for a quality of life that respects the physical capacity of the earth. It is in this regard that China is most likely to play a crucial role in economic development and political reconstruction. China has the potential to make a difference in the future by its moderate prosperity, plurality in its economic and political systems and the unquenchable searching spirit of its people, especially among the young. China’s grounds for hope require “a real cultural
revolution” during which all that was valid in the past is brought forward but put in a new context. In this process, people of authentic faith “whose openness is not restricted, whose commitment is unconditional, whose minds are free of illusions and whose emotions are integrated”\(^1\) have a special role to play.

In this presentation, I will focus on the role of the Bible in forming people of authentic faith in China. The Bible is of the utmost importance for studying and doing theology in China and the content of the Bible is extremely rich. I will especially emphasize two parts in the Bible: the Lament Prayers which are essential for people of authentic faith and much neglected in our liturgy, and the Wisdom Literature which is similar to classical Chinese literature in many ways.

1. The Lament Prayers in the Bible

*Lament Prayers for Christians of Authentic Faith*

Lament prayer is an essential part in the Bible. Among the 150 psalms, two-thirds are lament psalms; yet these have been very much neglected in our liturgy and daily prayers.

We are trained as Christians to thank God and to praise God at all times. It is a curious fact that the Church has, by and large, continued to sing songs of orientation in a world increasingly experienced as disoriented. Such a “mismatch” between our life experience of disorientation and our faith speech of orientation could be a great block in announcing the word of God. This denial and covering up is not from faith, but rather from “the wishful optimism of our culture.”\(^2\) It is not true to our life experiences, it is not true to who we are, neither is it true to who God is.
Much Christian piety and spirituality is romantic and unreal in its positiveness. As children of the Enlightenment, we have censored and selected around the voice of darkness and disorientation, seeking to go from strength to strength, from victory to victory. But such a way not only ignores the Psalms; it is a lie in terms of our experience.³

We are often caught in the tension of the paradox that God can be known and yet remains hidden. The essence of the paradox is that it must not be resolved. It holds together two truths which at first sight may seem logically contradictory, but which need each other and interact with each other. The knowability and the hiddenness of God have to be held together, to take either one and lose the other is to go away from right speech about God. Questioning and doubting become necessary when belief does not fit reality, when God seems distant and hidden; this seems to be the right path to retain faith in God. Yet many, even within the believing community, find themselves forced to question and doubt, and often do so with an unnecessarily guilty conscience.⁴

While holding on to our compassionate and loving God, we cannot turn aside from the suffering of the world and the dark side of life. While believing God is the source of everything, we have to face squarely the problems of evil and injustice in the world. We cannot go on singing “happy songs” and hymns to God in face of raw reality and suffering. The conversation with God has to match our real life experiences.

Then how shall one pray in these times of crisis and pain, of anger and confusion? Can we address God and describe how events really are and tell God how we really feel? Lament prayers are good models of prayer during times of crisis and deep pain. It is astonishing to notice how frank, daring, and direct these prayers are. They
hold God against God. They question honestly about the incoherence between actual events of life and the fidelity of God. This honest questioning is not an act of unfaith; on the contrary, it is an act of bold faith. The large number of lament psalms in the Psalter is a good testimony to the truthfulness of this honest questioning. What goes on in the psalms is peculiarly in touch with what goes on in our life. On the one hand, this honest questioning insists that the world must be experienced as it really is and not in some pretended way. On the other hand, it insists that all experiences of disorder are a proper discourse with God. As Brueggemann points out:

There is nothing out of bounds, nothing precluded or inappropriate. Everything properly belongs in this conversation of the heart. To withhold part of life from that conversation is in fact to withhold part of life from the sovereignty of God . . . Everything must be brought to speech, and everything brought to speech must be addressed to God, who is the final reference for all of life.  

It is by this honest questioning and candor about suffering that we reach a new level of understanding toward ourselves and toward God. The journey of our quest for God has its ups and downs. It is a journey of orientation, disorientation, and new orientation. It is like a spiral, it is never a straight line, but always moves forward and upward toward God. Our life is constantly on the move from one stage toward the other. The move is never obvious, easy or natural. It is often in pain and surprise, and each time a different move might have been made.

The faith community is not a community of “yes” men and women toward God; it is a community of mature people who can respond to God with courage and honesty, who can engage in serious conversation with God, and this conversation is dialogical.
Where there is lament, the believer is able to take initiative with God and so develop over against God the ego-strength that is necessary for responsible faith. But where the capacity to initiate lament is absent, one is left only with praise and doxology. God then is omnipotent, always to be praised. The believer is nothing, and can uncritically praise or accept guilt where life with God does not function properly. The outcome is “false self,” bad faith which is based on fear and guilt and lived out as resentful or self deceptive works of righteousness. The absence of lament makes a religion of coercive obedience the only possibility.\(^7\)

Hopefully our understanding of God will be changed through lament prayers. God addressed in lament is a God who knows sorrows and is acquainted with grief; such a God takes the divine-human relationship seriously; such a God is grieved to the heart when the relationship is broken; such a God is present when the people are suffering; and such a God is willing to immerse Godself in the depth of the people’s troubles in order to make deliverance possible, and to give them new life.\(^8\) It is more appropriate then to speak of this God in the categories of fidelity than of immutability; for when fidelity displaces immutability, our notion of God’s sovereignty and our image of God are fundamentally changed.\(^9\)

**Lament Prayers for Chinese Christians**

No matter how fast Christianity has been growing in China, Christians still remain a minority. It is not a casual decision to be and to remain a Christian in China. Since Christianity really entered China in 1583 brought by Matteo Ricci,\(^10\) Christians have often experienced misunderstandings, mockery, and sometimes, ill treatment. Our God talk and our retelling of the story of Jesus have to be matched with our personal experiences and our
experience as a community. Only through this can the Church in China be an active partner with God and to give effective witness to the kingdom of God.

However, the spirituality of Chinese Catholics is strongly sin-oriented. God is always right and we cannot complain to him. The Chinese were often taught politeness and good manners from a very early age, to be docile to parents and superiors and to obey them in everything. To question God is unimaginable. The gap between real life experiences and such one-sided prayer has often made Catholic belief irrelevant.

To restore Lament Prayers in the Church’s liturgy could have far reaching effects. A good example of its significance would be the rescue work of the recent Sichuan earthquake. The Chinese public has reacted to the 8.0-magnitude Sichuan earthquake with sympathy, compassion, and generosity. The Chinese people have become closer and the moral stance of the country is rising too. But the effects of the earthquake are still being experienced far and wide and the relief effort is just the beginning; more perseverance, patience, and endurance will be needed. People will start rebuilding and start a new life, but the pain of those who have lost loved ones, the parents who have lost their children, for many their only child, is beyond words and the healing process will last for the years to come. The Catholic Church can help people to articulate their pain and even their anger through prayers of lament. Knowing that God cares for them and suffers with them could be very comforting and liberating.

The importance of lament may also have practical pastoral implications in the Chinese context: First, it is helpful for many to understand that lament is a right form or even an indispensable and required form of prayer when God is absent. This understanding might take away our guilt for being angry with God. We do not need to hide
our anger before God; we can stand before God the way we are. God is gracious and God cares. Lament helps us to understand ourselves and God better so that we may become more responsible and committed believers in God. Second, language can shape reality. So the language of lament must be expressed. It not only balances the distribution of power between the one who is lamenting and God, but also puts the unjust social structure into serious question. Claus Westermann points out that it is valuable if some of the young churches take the initiative in restoring lament to its rightful place in prayer. He refers to the churches in the Third World that have been exploited and victimized under unjust social systems as in Latin America; the churches that have been experiencing discrimination and being marginalized; the churches that are minority groups in a region as in China, etc. Lament will give them the courage to hope and the strength to work out a better future.

The prayers of lament could have a social dimension in the context of China as well. Many people’s search for religion is stimulated by a crisis. The Chinese historian Sima Qian said a long time ago: “When human beings are sick, feel pain, they call their parents; when they are desperate and helpless, they call upon God.” Many people’s encounter with God, Christians and non-Christians alike, happens through a marginal experience. When one is down in a pit, one could hear God more clearly, like Jonah in the belly of the fish and Joseph in the dungeon.

Many Chinese, especially those who are honest and searching for the meaning of life are yearning for God. Searching for the meaning of life and seeking social justice will ultimately drive us to theological issues. Liu Xiaobo, a lecturer in Beijing University, has said that the tragedy of the Chinese is the tragedy of not having a God.
Can Chinese lament to God without knowing God? The answer should be yes, because God is nearer to us than we are to ourselves. When utter despair and pain cannot be humanly overcome, humanity merges with God. The Catholic Church in China could offer people a space for such an encounter. Lament is essential for such an encounter to happen and to form people of authentic faith.

2. The Bible and Traditional Chinese Literature

The Bible is an extremely rich book with various literary styles and genres. The Bible itself is a dialogue between cultures: Jewish, Mesopotamian, Greek and Roman. The Bible is often regarded as the core of Western culture, but it is actually very Asian-based. Most of the Bible was written in Asia.

“The thought structure of the Bible, its literary style, and manner of writing are all very oriental.”

First of all, the Hebrew language in which most of the Old Testament is written, is closer to the Chinese language than to Indo-European languages. Like Chinese, Hebrew is also a picture language in which the shape of the letter could give meaning to it.

Secondly, the Bible, especially the Hebrew Bible, is similar to the ancient Chinese literature in its subtlety and playing with words. One has to read between the lines and fill in the gaps in order to understand it. The traditional Jewish way of interpreting the Hebrew Bible is also similar to the teaching of the Chinese sages. They use simple words and daily stories to convey profound insights. They pay special attention to every letter and every symbol in the Torah (the Pentateuch); just like in Ancient Chinese literature, every word is considered.
Thirdly, the Bible is often written in layers and different schools of thought, all of which find a way to present their ideas; and the final editors often keep the diverse thoughts intentionally. The book of Job is a good example which provides three ways of looking at God’s relationship with humanity: (1) predictable causality according to Satan, which is represented in retribution theology: if you do good, God will bless you; if you do evil, God will punish you; (2) causality but no predictability according to Job; and (3) neither causality nor predictability according to God. God and the human person are both free partners. The three ways are interwoven in the book and none can be ruled out unequivocally. Traditional Chinese philosophy is often known for its inclusiveness. Confucianism and Taoism are often in dialogue with each other and they complement each other. Confucianism emphasizes social involvement and Taoism emphasizes inner freedom achieved by solitude. It is often said that for an individual person, the social ideal is Confucianism and the personal ideal is Taoism.

To read the Bible in the Chinese context will be rewarding. To interpret the Bible in the Chinese way to a Chinese audience will bear abundant fruits. The Bible will definitely enrich Chinese culture and vise versa, as reading the Bible in the Chinese context will benefit Biblical interpretation as well.

As China moves forward to become a more harmonious society, the Catholic Church, as a community of people with authentic faith, can play an essential role. The Bible is at the center and the lament prayers are indispensable. By keeping the honest dialogue with God going on, the Church becomes an active covenant partner with God and hope shines through pain and despair; the divine spark that is in every one of us will become more
visible and radiant in the vast land of China.

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3. Ibid., 11.
6. Ibid., 21.
10. The first time Christianity entered China was in 635, then disappeared. Second time was in 1294, lasted until 1368, and disappeared again. It is Matteo Ricci who helped Christianity to take root in China in 1583.
Some ten years ago the Asian bishops summarized the images of Jesus in Asia as “the Teacher of Wisdom, the Healer, the Liberator, the Spiritual Guide, the Enlightened One, the Compassionate Friend of the Poor, the Good Samaritan, the Good Shepherd, the Obedient One.” Doubtlessly, Chinese Catholics have no difficulties accepting all these images, but, which one is the best for us? This question leads me to reflect on the history of Christianity in China and the present situation of the church there. Christianity has been in China for nearly 1400 years, but is still a foreign religion to most Chinese and a minority religion in the country. Why has evangelization been, and still is, so difficult in China? China has a rich cultural tradition in which Confucianism is ethical, Taoism is philosophical, but Buddhism is spiritual. What in particular can Christianity offer to the Chinese people?

There has indeed been a striking revival of Christianity in China after China opened its doors in 1980s. The Church was overjoyed to gather all her strength to preach the good news, to build churches, and to reconstruct local Christian communities. The number of Catholics is dramatically increasing every year; both male and female vocations appeared so plentiful that many religious orders have gone to China to recruit their candidates. However, the rapidly developing society, with its new ideology and social system, brings challenges to the church and requires it to change. In fact, the Church in China is now changing. Some experts have already observed that the Church in
China at the present moment is a transitional one. In this paper I would like: 1) to briefly portray the changing church in China; 2) to discuss the current needs of the people and society; and 3) to present some prospectives on the best images of Christ and the church for the Chinese people.

**A changing church**

Throughout history the Church constantly made adjustments in response to changes in the world. This is what is now happening in China. Here I would like to examine the changes of the church from three perspectives, namely: religious education and missionary roles of the laity, vigorous engagement in social service, and the changing image of God.

First, religious education is found to be an important factor for the growth of the church in China. About twenty years ago, I heard someone from the Religious Affairs Bureau say that “most of your Catholics are women from the countryside.” What he really meant was that Chinese Catholics were poor and uneducated. It was true at that time. Fortunately, the situation is changing. There are two reasons for the change: 1) the church has put great efforts into the religious education of the laity, and, 2) there has been a national improvement of the education in the country. When the Church reopened in the early 1980s everything was the same as pre-Vatican II. Both the clergy and the laity were satisfied with having sacraments again after being deprived of them for nearly 30 years. Shortly, along with the social development, the hunger of the laity for exploring the depths of faith, and the mystery of God appeared evident with each passing day. People are no longer satisfied merely with receiving sacraments. Today, there is a variety of activities being held at almost every parish on weekends and holidays. Bible study,
catechism classes, marriage encounter, charity action groups, and youth camps are all good examples. Due to the present limited conditions there are not many academic theological courses open to the laity, but what is important is that people are eager to learn. In addition, the desire to seek deeper understanding of the faith is more evident among young people who have received a better education than their parents. Many new converts are well-educated intellectuals and they need far more than just sacraments.

What follows upon this improvement of religious education is a profound missionary role played by the laity. Some lay people are not only helping pastors in the parish, such as teaching Sunday school and visiting parishioners, but are also trained to be lay missionaries to spread the Word. (In Chinese they are called chuandao ren.) Lay missionaries often sacrifice their holidays to go to different places to preach the good news. They go before the clergy, and in a sense, are like St. John the Baptist who prepared people for the coming of the Lord. In an atheistic country with very limited freedom in using media for evangelization, it is those lay missionaries’ words and deeds that have become the living witnesses of Christ for the society.

The second important change is that the Church has moved from a stage focusing on self-development to one offering social service. When it reopened, the Church was not able to offer social service. With little resources, the first task of the Church was survival. Both the clergy and the laity spared no effort to build churches and develop local communities. Yet, the Church extended its service to society as soon as the situation became better, though it is still itself in need in many ways. To my knowledge, there are now three social service centers run by the Church doing charitable work, e.g., emergent disaster relief, supporting education for the poor, medical clinics, and also
the caring for AIDS patients. Besides these professional organizations, many dioceses and parishes also have their own programs operating in local regions. They collect donations for natural disaster relief, run homes for the aged, found orphanages for abandoned children, and organize charity groups to minister to the people in need in their administrative areas. Doubtlessly, social service is not only an effective way of preaching the good news, but also a sign that the Church is becoming more mature and forward looking.

The third change, the Chinese image of God, is not as obvious as the previous two, and is yet developing. With religious education and a deeper reflection on the mystery of the Incarnation, the image of God has been subtly altered in the minds of Chinese Catholics. In the past, God was portrayed as a severe judge, a king high above humanity; today God is more loving and closer to human beings. I often think there was a paradox. Because of the painful history of the Church in China, Chinese Catholics very often identified themselves with the suffering Christ – they love to pray the Way of the Cross, and offer their daily sufferings to God. But on the other hand, the image of a strict king or judge formed in the Middle Ages is nonetheless deeply-rooted. Fortunately, today a loving God is gradually replacing a judgmental one in people’s minds. Yet, it should be admitted that the change is still in process, because there are still a good number of people holding onto the old image. Here is an example. While American pastors may complain about their parishioners having no interest in going to confession, the priest who hears confessions in Chinese parishes, where long lines are waiting for absolution before Masses, would sigh that most of these “sinners” simply go to “wash” themselves out of the fear of hell or punishments. However slow the changing progress is, it is good to see that the people have
found God more loving than judgmental, and are able to make a close connection between their daily life and the incarnate God through Jesus.

It should be remembered that, besides the three changes I presented above, there are still other changes. The evidences include increasingly important roles in the Church played by Sisters who are becoming more independent; attention to inter-religious dialogue which holds a significant place on the Church’s agenda; and a wider use of publications and the internet communication for evangelization and so on. While these changes all seem positive, the negative changes should also be kept in mind. For example, today the news that some young priests have left the priesthood and that vocations have decreased because of the influence of materialism is no longer new. However good or bad the changes are, what is important is that through deeply reflecting on these changes we can come to know what we need and where we should go. In addition, in order to evaluate these changes and seek the best means for evangelization in the country, it is necessary to reflect more on the needs of the society and the people.

Reflections on the needs of the Chinese people in a changing society

Having drawn the world’s attention, the social changes in China in the last two decades are seen everywhere throughout society, the economy, culture, ideology, and people’s lifestyles. For example, the traditional agricultural-based and family-oriented society is no longer the same as in the previous centuries. More and more farmers from the countryside are rushing into cities to earn money and youngsters traveling with their degrees of all kinds are pursuing their ideals. Living in a dramatically changing society such as China, people are in
great need of security, self-identity, and spirituality.

I once had a conversation about Chinese culture with a Maryknoll priest who had been working in China and he commented, “Chinese people lack a sense of security.” I was surprised at first but immediately I realized that he is really an acute observer. He is right. Chinese are hardworking, but do not often spend their money to enjoy their lives. They carefully accumulate savings for family and their descendants in case some unpredictable crisis in the future may happen to them. I believe it is because of the long and painful history and cultural tradition that the Chinese feel the need of a sense of security. From 2100 B.C. to the last century China had gone through nearly twenty dynasties. One can imagine how many wars there had been during the interims between the old and the new dynasties, and the common people always suffered the most. The situation of the recent two centuries was even worse when the Qing dynasty, the last feudal dynasty, declined due to the implementation of the closed-door policy. China lost a series of wars with a number of foreign countries. Even after the 1950s, while other countries were summoning up their resources to develop their economies and societies, severe social disturbances were still going on among the Chinese people. In Taiwan, native Taiwanese had conflicts with the Nationalists; on the mainland, the Cultural Revolution from 1966-1976 took place. In a word, the Chinese people have never had an easy life for a long period of time. They lost any sense of security in their painful history.

If history has prevented the Chinese people from realizing any sense of security, the cultural tradition has likewise contributed greatly to the people’s undefined identity. One of the Chinese cultural characteristics is sacrifice. People are taught that individuals should sacrifice for families, and families for the country.④ Chinese are not
individualists. Their success is built upon the family and the country as a whole. Yet, overemphasizing the value of the bigger family has made the Chinese people unable to discern exactly who they are as individuals. Human rights and individual identity were swallowed up by cultural tradition and a social system. “I” disappears in the “we”. As a consequence, moral teachings and social conventions have served as important factors for the meaning of life and become the foundations for individual’s self-achievement. Not following the social system means having no foothold in the society. However, the need of self-identity is so basic that “who we are” cannot simply be replaced by “how to be a good person.”

The needs of self-identity and security for the Chinese are no more serious than their spiritual need. Whatever belief one may have, everyone needs or has a spiritual life. Having realized that God is addressing us from the depths of our humanity, we are now trying to find spiritual meanings everywhere, from kitchen, to market, to office. The term spirituality today is no longer heard only in the church or in confessionals. It has already entered into the category of our daily life, and this down-to-earth spirituality helps people enormously in today’s pressure-filled world. In fact, the need of spirituality is more urgent in China since there is a “spiritual void” due to the rapid social and cultural changes. After the country opened its doors, the Chinese people were suddenly exposed in a bright light like babies coming from the womb without any mental preparation. The attacks of materialism and consumerism appeared extremely severe on Chinese people who had no stable value system to hold onto because of the Cultural Revolution. Some people have realized their spiritual need and began seeking the meaning of life, but without spiritual guidance many have inevitably become more greedy and selfish and have been trying to use material
things to fill up their spiritual vacuum. This spiritual void can be easily recognized not only by the fast growing criminal rate and the increasing number of suicide cases among the young people, but also by some new religious practices derived from the existing religions, such as Falun Gong from Buddhism, and Dongfang Shandian (Eastern Lightning) from Christianity. Although these new practices are regarded as heresies, they have attracted many people in the country, because they are like fast food, able to temporarily satisfy people’s spiritual hunger.

Having discussed the needs of individuals, we now take a close look at the most pressing need of the country, which, I think, is harmony. In addition to the increasing criminal cases I have mentioned above, symptoms of the lack of harmony can also be observed in many political and economic problems, such as the contradiction between communist ideology and capitalist economy, and the lack of social justice and human rights. Living in such a society, interpersonal honesty, trust, affection, and friendship have declined dramatically. In fact, the Chinese government has already acknowledged the need of harmony in the country. While the need of harmony can be regarded as the result of the individual “spiritual void” in the contemporary society, I also believe the necessity of the realization of harmony is deeply rooted in Chinese cultures. Today, the society needs to regain the traditional value.

Being versed in the Chinese cultural tradition, Chinese philosopher John Wu maintained that “the idea of harmony is the keynote of three types of Joy” found in Daoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism. Some Chinese intellectuals have affirmed that Christianity would lose its attraction if it relates itself with Chinese cultural tradition since the tradition is not understood by the new generations. But, it is the unique cultural background that makes a person Chinese, and I do not think that our cultural roots can
be suffocated or uprooted simply by movements like the Cultural Revolution or the imports of Western cultures.\textsuperscript{8} In fact, going back to study and evaluate the cultural tradition is the latest trend in China.\textsuperscript{9}

Generally speaking, today in China there is a revival of religiosity. More and more people go to religions to seek spiritual help and the meaning of their lives. Both Buddhism and Christianity, one traditional and the other possessing Western cultural charms, have great attractions for the people. Therefore, how well the Church meets the people’s needs is extremely important, for a religion will die out if it fails to meet the spiritual needs of the people. Reflection on the needs of the people and the country unquestionably sheds light upon where the changing Church should go, because our mission obliges us to speak to the hearts of the people. With this in mind, I would make a partial forecast for the future Church in China.

**Harmony and Immanuel, a Church of Inculturation**

No one is able, with certainty, to predict either the future of the Roman Catholic Church in China, nor anywhere else. However, based on the changes in the Church and the needs of the Chinese people, my expectation for the best image of Christ is of Immanuel, and of the ideal church, Harmony.\textsuperscript{10} Immanuel reveals God’s self-giving love as well as the deepest human desire for God. Harmony, on the other hand, emphasizes relationships, with God, within the Church, and within the society.

In accordance with people’s needs of security, identity, and spirituality, I believe that the incarnate Jesus is the best possible response to our needs. Nothing can be more reassuring than to know that “Christ died for us while we were still sinners” (Romans 5: 8). Through believing in such a God who “so loved the world that he gave his
only Son,” (John 3: 16) both security and identity can truly be bestowed upon Chinese Catholics. It is because of the mystery of Jesus’ truly taking on our humanity that we come to be sure that “God is with us.” Consequently, through the revelation of the Son, we can give thanks to God the Father for embracing us as his children. We are God’s children and each of us is unique in God’s eyes. The lost identity and security are therefore restored. Again, it is Jesus’ paschal mystery that makes every single event in our daily life meaningful. Here the need of spirituality is met. Hence, while Confucianism is ethical, Daoism is philosophical, and Buddhism is spiritual, we can declare that our good news for the Chinese people is “God is with us!”

If a Savior – Immanuel—can meet the particular needs of the Chinese people, a church of harmony is likewise able to fit into the contemporary social situation in China today and to be compatible with the central theme of the Chinese cultural tradition. What we need to keep in mind is that there has been a long history of misunderstandings and conflicts between Christianity and China, especially since the Rites Controversy (1792). Today, as China is gradually opening to the world, the Church in China should also be open to society, so that people can come to see the loving Christ whom they need. Missionaries now are no longer described in military terms as before, but dialogically instead. Donal Dorr uses “crusader model” and “commando model” to summarize the missionary model of “conquering for Christ” from 1850 to 1960, and suggests “explorers” and “ambassadors for Christ” as today’s new models of discovering God’s spirit working in different worlds, searching for mutual understanding and reconciliation.11 In 1991, the universal Church issued a document entitled *Dialogue and Proclamation* which, emphasizing inter-religious dialogue, validates the efficacy
of dialogue for today’s evangelization. Dialogue is a harmonious start. In China, the church needs to be in dialogue with the tradition, with other religions, and even with the atheistic government. Dialogue demands us to investigate the differences in each other, but also leads us to explore the core of the truths that both sides hold. Yet, harmony does not mean compromising the essence of the good news; it is the true beauty of the Church, I think, when she is able to echo the inner communion of the Trinity.

Examining the cultural and social background and the needs of people, we know all the changes are parts of the process of enculturation and my discussion is, above all, about a Church of inculturation. When it comes to the term inculturation, what immediately comes to mind may be the use of native language, paintings, music, and architecture. Today there are more and more indigenous arts being used in China, but they are not being generally accepted by Chinese Catholics because people have gotten used to Western arts. In fact, as the history of the Church is one of inculturation, the true meaning of inculturation is far more than using native arts. True inculturation “occurs when there is a constant search for identification between Gospel and culture, and when there is mutual correction and adjustment between them.” Many theologians today have maintained that, decorated with Roman and Greek cultures, the Western theologies are unfit to Asian situations. If so, the word enculturation can be boldly defined as “to let Christ, not Christianity, incarnate into a certain culture.” A Chinese Protestant scholar, Wang Zhixin, even uses John 12: 24 to suggest that the shell of Western Christianity should die like the hull of a grain of wheat and let Christ be reborn in a given cultural background. His idea may include the danger of losing the essence and identity of the true message of Christ, but what we know for sure is that
Jesus, the true messenger, did his mission in an inclusive manner. We need to learn from Jesus and have confidence in the power of the Word of God since he is the foundation of our faith. In his book *Jesus through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture*, Jaroslav Pelikan maintains that the Word of God has helped many cultures produce their ideal self-images:

In seeking to know Jesus of Galilee they (different cultures) have come to know themselves, not as others say that they are, but as they truly are. This does not mean they have written a new gospel or merely adjusted the gospel to fit their needs, but that they discovered aspects of the gospel that others have not noticed or emphasized.

According to Pelikan, the realization of inculturation, the transcendence of a given culture, begins with the establishment of its unique dialogue with Jesus.

The prerequisite of inculturation is to have a true knowledge of a given culture, but it is not easy to define contemporary Chinese culture. It is a kind of mixture of Chinese tradition and Western cultures because of Western cultural influences after the country opened its doors in the 1980s. In addition, the political situation for the local church varies from place to place. However we understand the cultural and social background, one thing is certain, namely, that the Church faces challenges at all times. The challenges are from both the inside and the outside the Church. From the outside, standing between the traditional value system and modern ideology, Chinese are often confused and face tremendous challenges of materialism and consumerism more seriously than before. From the inside, the formation system for vocations needs improvement and there is a big gap between the old generation and the new both of clergy and laity.
These are just examples. I have confidence in the future of the Church in China because it belongs to God and it is the Holy Spirit who leads it. I am also convinced that challenges are often opportunities for a transformation of the church if we reflect on ourselves sincerely and depend on God humbly. As a Chinese priest I really feel privileged to have been a witness to this transitional period of the history of the Church in my country.

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4. It is not difficult to learn this as we saw today millions of people were displaced to other areas because of the Three Gorges Project and the construction for the Olympic Games in 2008.
6. Advocated by Hu Jintao in 2004, the political slogan “Building a Harmonious Society” now is the central agenda of the party and the omnipresent banner of the country.

9. A very good example in this regard is that many Chinese classics have come back to classrooms and are being studied through public media such as a TV program called “Lecture Room” (“Bai Jia Jiang Tan” in Chinese).

10. I also found that current theological tendency is in strong favor of the ideas of Immanuel and harmony. By studying the mystery of incarnation theologians are more confident of “God is with us”; similarly, from Trinitarian perspective the loving unity within the Three Persons is emphasized and the harmonious relationship between trinity and human beings is also in view.


14. John Paul II might be the first one who uses the word incarnate to describe the idea of inculturation, *Fede e cultura alla luce della Bibbia* (Turin, 1981), 5.


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