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From the Editor

The five-year period culminating in the tenth National Chinese Christian Conference (November 2018) has been a time of continued growth and new challenges for Protestant Christianity in China. The Five Year Plan, included in this issue (see below), notes conferences, seminars and forums held by the CCC&TSPM at all levels, and at seminaries and bible schools across the country to address the study and promotion of Sinicization. Some of these included experts and scholars from government and academia as well as church figures from Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan and elsewhere, “creating a fine atmosphere and momentum for the study and promotion of the contextualization of Christianity.”

This issue of *Chinese Theological Review* begins with a listing of the new leadership and committees of the national CCC&TSPM, elected to five-year terms at the Tenth National Chinese Christian Conference that took place in Beijing from 28-30 November 2018. Both the new President of the China Christian Council, Rev. Wu Wei, and the Chairperson of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement Committee, Rev. Xu Xiaohong, are ordained clergy, members of a younger generation trained in the period of reform and opening-up. An addition to the leadership announcements was the institution of a Board of Supervisors, under the CCC&TSPM.

The January 2019 issue of *Tian Feng* 天风 provided a “witness of statistics,” gleaned from the Work Report presented by Rev. Gao Feng, outgoing president of the CCC, on behalf of the CCC&TSPM. These provide a quick guide to developments in the church over the past five years, including:

- 38 million Protestant Christians, 60,000 churches, 14,000 clergy and 22 seminaries and Bible schools.
- Preaching teams with a total of 117 members, active in 20 cities, counties and regions. 5 sermon books have been published.
- 6300 seminary students, with 78 candidates for M.A. and 5 for Ph.D. 85 students are studying abroad.
- 18 million Bibles published and distributed in China; 5,500,000 copies of *Tian Feng*; 77 distribution points.
- 27,700,000 *yuan* has been invested in some 200 church social service projects.

Further statistics and more detailed explanation of these can be found in the January 2019 issue of *Tian Feng*.

Speaking at the afternoon session on November 29, the incumbent president of the CCC, Rev. Xu Xiaohong, expressed the Conference's thanks to past and present leadership, including Elder Ji Jianhong, past chairperson of TSPM, and Rev. Cao Shengjie, a former president of the CCC, for their guidance. He also remembered the selfless service of Elder Fu Xianwei and others among the elder generation of church leaders now deceased.

A letter issued at the meeting urging active participation in society by Christians, joining with their fellow citizens for the betterment of all, follows the listing of new leadership.

"The Five Year Outline Plan to Promote the Contextualization of Protestant Christianity in China (2018-2022)," adopted by the CCC&TSPM in December 2017, provides a further and more detailed approach to making Christianity a truly Chinese religion, efforts that have been of great concern to Christians since Christianity entered China. In the English text, the authors have decided to use the term "contextualization" rather than the more commonly seen "Sinicization." In the Chinese original, the term is 中国化 *zhongguo hua*.

Professor Chen Zemin, theologian, theological educator, renowned religious scholar and pastor, musician, former vice-president and dean of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary and vice-president of the third and fourth China Christian Councils, died June 4, 2018, at the age of 101.

Government officials and leaders of the CCC&TSPM, past and current colleagues and students joined his family in honoring Prof. Chen at his memorial service and funeral. With Bishop K.H. Ting (1915-2012) and Rev. Wang Weifan (1927-2015), he was one of the older generation of leaders at Nanjing Union Theological Seminary who oversaw its reopening and growth following the Cultural Revolution.

Rev. Chen Yilu, executive vice-president of NJUTS, preaching from Proverbs, called Chen Zemin a true intellectual and highlighted four areas of endeavor Chen took delight in throughout his life: the study of religion, theological learning, music and pastoral care. As a former student, beginning in 1952, and later colleague, of Prof. Chen, Rev. Dr. Cao Shengjie, an accomplished musician herself, recalls their work with other colleagues on the committee to produce the *New Hymnal*. She highlights especially the hymns he wrote to traditional Chinese tunes as fine examples of the kind of Sinicization that would benefit the church and increase understanding.

Professor Chen's essay, "Theological Construction in the Chinese Church," written in 1956, is arguably his most influential and strongest work. Many of the issues he raised then remain relevant for Sinicization in today's Chinese Protestant churches and shed light on what has been achieved, as well as providing the background—through a review of the development of Western theologies and their impact on Western missionaries serving in China—and theoretical underpinning for the road ahead. The essay appeared in the *Nanjing Theological Review* in 1957 and was

reprinted in that journal with further reflections by Prof. Chen in 1991. *Chinese Theological Review* also published Dr. Don Snow's translation in that year. It is a fitting tribute to Prof. Chen's memory to reprint it here.

Details of Prof. Chen's youth, education and early career are set out in the essay by Dr. Liu Ruomin in this volume. To augment the remembrances, I would like to quote at some length here from further comments by Dr. Liu and a passage from her "Preface" to Prof. Chen's *Seeking and Witnessing* by Prof. Duan Qi 段琦 a scholar at the Institute of World Religions in Beijing:

...

Chen Zemin was a wise and broad-minded theologian. He was a generally happy person. On the one hand this originated in his faith and came out in his life; on the other hand, it was an expression of the vigor of the traditional Chinese gentleman.

The premise of his theological study [rests on] a wide acquaintance with Western theological schools but is not a simple clone of these. Rather it is a reflection of and conversation with the context in which the Chinese church is located.

For a variety of reasons, the *Systematic Theology*, which he wrote while in the US from 1995 to 1996, has not yet been published. The scholar did not see his own "systematic theology" in print. But choosing the title *Seeking and Witnessing* for his collected writings, he organized by the focal points of systematic theology. To some extent that book does reveal the sequence of Prof. Chen's system of a "theology of reconciliation." —Liu Ruomin

[Chen Zemin] 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.”

“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.” —Duan Qi, quoting Chen Zemin

...

Next in this issue is Hu Yingqiang’s essay on Wei Zhuomin 韦卓民 (Francis C.M. Wei, 1888-1976) that reflects recent interest in the Christian educator’s thinking on combining Christian faith with the thinking and practice embodied in Chinese culture as a means to creating a genuinely Chinese Christianity. Hu writes, “he made a profound analysis of the

reason why the record of Christian missions in China was rather unsatisfactory: because Western missionaries refused to understand Chinese culture through a Chinese cultural awareness and social background. Therefore, Wei Zhuomin advocates that Christianity should absorb Chinese cultural forms, and integrate Chinese culture into worship, clergy attire, church music and architecture as much as possible, using forms pleasing to Chinese people to build a sinicized Christianity.”

Su Zhiming then explores the role of theological education in the process of shaping a Christianity for the Chinese reality. “Theological education must establish itself in the Chinese context and the realities of the church (the incarnational nature of theological education, its ‘here-and-now-ness’), if it is to train fitting servants of God for the Chinese church in these times (the appropriateness of theological education), and meet the pastoral needs of the Chinese church in the modernization process (i.e., the ecclesiological nature of theological education).”

Following his discussion of how theological education should both lay a basis for the church’s self-construction and train pastors and church workers to respond to and play a role in China’s rapid development, he concludes, “Christianity must bring its ‘message to the people’ to the Chinese academic public sphere and contribute Christian wisdom to the enrichment of Chinese academic research and to the flourishing of Chinese culture. As China becomes a world power, telling its own story will be Chinese Christianity’s contribution to the universal church.”

The next two offerings in this issue deal with forms of Sinicization already in action on a practical level in the daily lives of people. Mr. Qiu Zhonghui, Director of the Board of the Amity Foundation, links the path of service long followed by the Foundation (www.amityfoundation.org) directly to the Sinicization of Christianity. “Social service is not only

the way to carry forward the spirit of the universal love of Christ, it is also the only way for Christians to fulfill their social responsibility and mission, as well as the only way for Christians and the Chinese church to think about and practice the Sinicization of Christianity.” He provides a short history or case study of Amity’s conception and growth from 1985 to the present and draws on a well-known phrase from Bishop Ting in his conclusion: “Theology is the church thinking” and goes on “and service is the church acting. Service brings us into closer harmony with society!”

Rev. Dr. Lin Manhong grounds the ideas of Sinicization in the realities of everyday encounters as Christians, a growing but still small minority in China, strive to witness to the gospel. “To follow Jesus in the Chinese context is to live out a Christ-like life. It is to let people see Christ in us. ... To do evangelism in the Chinese context is to sow the seeds of the Gospel and water them, in a Chinese way, and to pray for the growth with joy. ... The collective witness of the Chinese church is to serve as a positive form of criticism to show Chinese people, including Christians, what is good, equal and just, what is right to do, and what the Lord requires of us.”

The issue closes with a list of the Contents of the 2017 *Nanjing Theological Review*.

As always, I am grateful to the authors of these essays for sharing their work. Any errors in presentation are entirely my own. In this issue, we have again included Chinese characters for personal names, titles, some individual terms, and citations.

Author names are given in Chinese characters and format—surname + personal name—following the title of each article. For those who also use an English name, this is given with the bibliographic information that follows the article.

Please note the following abbreviations used throughout the journal: China Christian Council & Three-Self Patriotic Movement of Protestant Churches in China (CCC&TSPM); regional, provincial and local levels are referred to as Shanghai CC or Sichuan TSPM (or Three-Self Organization); National Chinese Christian Conference (NCCC) Nanjing Union Theological Seminary (NJUTS); State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA) or its predecessor the Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB); Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) Communist Party of China (CPC).

The *Chinese Theological Review* is a publication of the Foundation for Theological Education in South East Asia. As always, I am grateful to the Foundation and to Dr. H.S. Wilson, executive director, for their ongoing encouragement and support. I would also like to acknowledge the counsel and encouragement of Rev. Dr. Philip L. Wickeri in the preparation of this issue.

The *Chinese Theological Review* welcomes readers' feedback. Please feel free to contact the editor: ctreditor@gmail.com. We are especially interested to know whether you have found the journal useful in your work or study.

The *Chinese Theological Review* is available online at <http://www.amityfoundation.org/eng/publications>; new issues are posted shortly after publication.

Janice Wickeri, editor

Hong Kong

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The Standing Committee comprises 48 members, including 8 women and 5 ethnic minorities.

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* The Board of Supervisors was set up in line with the “Opinions on Reforming the Management System of Social Organizations to Promote the Healthy and Orderly Development of Social Organizations” issued by the General Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the General Office of the State Council, calling on social organizations (which include organized religion) to “improve their general meetings, boards of directors, supervisory systems, institute democratic elections and democratic decision-making and a sound internal supervisory mechanism.” Most social organizations in China have such a board aimed at strengthening organization and management.

Tenth National Chinese Christian Conference Initiative on Actively Promoting and Practicing Socialist Core Values

Dear Brothers and Sisters in the Lord,

Socialist core values are the concentrated essence of the contemporary Chinese spirit, concentrating the common value pursuits of Chinese sons and daughters, including Christians. On the occasion of the successful conclusion of the Tenth National Chinese Christian Conference, we offer the following proposals to Christians throughout the country:

1 Be patriotic, love the church and build a beautiful home that is prosperous, democratic, civilized and harmonious.

Patriotism and love of church have long been fine traditions of our church. We must adhere to three-self principles, and to the direction of Sinicization of Christianity, actively participating in the economic and cultural construction of a socialist modernized country, becoming active promoters and practitioners of socialist core values, so as to play an active role in maintaining social stability and harmony.

2 Be light and salt, promoting a harmonious atmosphere of freedom, equality, justice and the rule of law.

Christians should not only abide by the teachings of the Bible, but also abide by the laws and regulations of the state,

social morality, professional ethics and family virtues, and establish a positive image of Christians through our good deeds, making our due contribution to a good society of freedom, equality, justice and the rule of law.

3 Glorify God and benefit people, striving to be a good citizen who is patriotic, dedicated, honest and friendly.

A good Christian should be a good citizen. Christianity is a religion of love. Our love does not rest on words, but on the shoulders of love. We should transform God's faithfulness into inner character, embody sincerity through concrete actions, love what we do and devote ourselves to work, and be good citizens of China in the new era.

Let us actively carry forward and practice socialist core values, always adhering to the direction of Christianity in China, and contributing to the Chinese dream of building an all-round well-off society to realize the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

28 November 2018

Five Year Outline Plan to Promote the Contextualization of Protestant Christianity in China (2018-2022)

To deepen Theological Reconstruction in the new era, promote the harmonious and healthy development of the church, bring the positive role of the church into full play, practice core socialist values, and continuously improve the breadth and depth of [its] adaptation to socialist society, the China Christian Council and the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of Protestant Churches in China (CCC&TSPM), in accord with adherence to the direction of contextualization and the demands of actively and steadily advancing that contextualization, have formulated the “Five Year Outline Plan to Promote the Work of the Contextualization of Protestant Christianity in China (2018-2022)” [hereafter referred to as the Plan]. The aim of the Plan is to clarify the significance, basic propositions, goals and tasks of the Plan as well as specific measures and organizational guarantees to advance the contextualization of Chinese Protestantism, with the emphasis on implementation and effectiveness as the foundation for advancing contextualization in the next five years.

The Plan comprises four sections: General Introduction, Major Tasks, Key Work Arrangements, and Organizational Implementation.

1 General Introduction

- 1) Propositions, goals and principles of contextualization.

Persistence in contextualization by religions in China is guided by the core values of socialism, enhancing the fine traditions of the Chinese nation and nurturing concepts of unity, progress, peace and tolerance. While preserving basic faith, core doctrines and liturgical system, contextualization delves more deeply into doctrines and canons to discover content that is beneficial to social harmony, progress and a healthy civilization, and interpretations that are in accord with the needs of China's development and progress and its fine cultural traditions. The contextualization of Chinese Protestantism is founded on the Bible, observes basic faith, is heir to the traditions of the universal church and the Reformation tradition. In faith and social practice, it roots itself in the fertile soil of Chinese culture and follows the core values of socialism, spreading the gospel, witnessing to Christ and running the church well in its context.

The goal of contextualization is the establishment of a church that exalts Christ and maintains unity; a church that is loyal to biblical truth, rooted in Chinese culture and accepts a contextualized theology; a church that is bold in taking up social responsibilities and one that witnesses to Life through living; a church in communion with the saints of the church in every nation and place and one that makes its unique contribution to the worldwide church by realizing the transformation from "Christianity in China" to "Chinese Christianity." The contextualization of Protestantism is a major goal of running the church well according to three-self principles and the only path to adapting to socialist society.

This contextualization is not only an objective requirement for the Chinese Protestant churches in self-

development, but a sincere expectation of Party and government. In recent years, both Party and government have repeatedly stressed improving their efforts in religious work in order to fully implement the Party's basic policy in religious work, and to persist in the contextualization of Chinese religions, actively guiding their adaptation to socialist society. When socialism with Chinese characteristics has entered a new era it has become the common understanding among Protestant Christians to promote the contextualization of Christianity, to continuously strengthen consciousness in terms of contemporary political identification, cultural integration and social adaptation, and to establish a bond of kinship with the Chinese nation and the people in both prosperity and difficulty, there by making their proper contribution to achieving the nation's "two centenary goals"* and the Chinese dream.

The Chinese Protestant church in China and Protestant Christians are the pillars of the contextualization of Christianity. To promote this contextualization process, the following principles must be observed: Endorse the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, be guided by the core values of socialism and identify with the system, path, theory and culture of the country's development. Based on biblical teachings, adhere to our basic faith and core doctrines. Persevere in independence, autonomy and self-administration of the church and in the direction of unity. Take into account both the universal and the local nature of the church, and draw on the faith practices, spiritual experience and theological heritage of the universal

* The two centenary goals are: to finish building a moderately prosperous society in all respects by the time the Communist Party of China marks its centenary and to build China into a modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced and harmonious by the time the People's Republic of China celebrates its centenary. -ed.

church. Integrate the fine traditions and culture of China with advanced socialist culture. Be bold in assuming social responsibility and actively integrate into society.

2) The Current State of the Contextualization of Christianity.

The historical lesson of the repeated setbacks suffered by Christianity in its propagation in China ultimately lies in its failure to overcome its foreign nature. The Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) initiated in the 1950s realized the selfhood of the Chinese church in organizational sovereignty; the Theological Reconstruction of the 1990s was dedicated to establishing the selfhood of the Chinese church in theological thinking. TSPM and Theological Reconstruction both aimed at developing the “Chinese characteristics” of the Chinese (Protestant) church, making the church “Chinese.” These two movements were both the practice and achievement of contextualization of Christianity in different historical periods, furthering Chinese Protestantism’s adaptation to Chinese society, as well as laying down a firm foundation upon which Chinese Protestantism could carry forward contextualization.

In 2013, the Ninth National Chinese Christian Conference (NCCC) proposed to conscientiously study “how to promote and realize the contextualization of Christianity.” In 2014, it took the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the founding of the national Chinese Christian Three-Self Patriotic Movement Committee to hold a symposium, formally proposing that the church must begin in this new era to take the process of contextualization to a deeper level. In 2015, it held a joint symposium to mark the 100th birthday of Bishop K.H. Ting and to discuss the contextualization of Christianity, shaping a consensus on the content of Christianity’s contextualization. In 2017, coinciding with the

500th anniversary of the Reformation, another symposium proposed promoting contextualization in the spirit of the Reformation. In recent years, the CCC&TSPM at all levels and seminaries and bible schools across the country held their own conferences, seminars and forums, inviting experts and scholars from government and academia as well as church figures from Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan and overseas to engage in the discussions, creating a fine and enthusiastic atmosphere and momentum for the study and promotion of the contextualization of Christianity. The CCC&TSPM produced a number of books and photo books, including *Bishop K.H. Ting on the Contextualization of Christianity*, *Papers from the Symposium on the Contextualization of Christianity (2 vols)*, *Collected Sermons of the Theological Reconstruction Preaching Team*, and *Holy to the Lord: Glimpses of Chinese Church Architecture*. Some provincial bodies promoted the practice of contextualization through performances of original sacred music on contextualization themes or dramatic performances, innovative in form and rich in content.

However, there remain problems and persistent mistaken ideas along the path to promoting contextualization, such as the lack of a group of people accomplished in both traditional culture and theology. This has resulted in ineffective development of basic work, such as translation and introduction of Christian classics and contextualized commentaries on faith and doctrine. To a certain extent, while the national CCC&TSPM take contextualization very seriously, and some provincial bodies follow energetically, the understanding and enthusiasm of some grassroots Christian councils and TSPM organizations has not kept pace. And some church workers do not have a clear understanding of the internal links among the TSPM, Theological Reconstruction and the contextualization of Christianity, to the point that there

is still the mistaken understanding that this is some sort of “campaign” demanded by the government. They take a perfunctory attitude towards promotion work and tend to shift their responsibilities to others. In some places, promotion of contextualization has been mechanically and awkwardly reduced to restoring bygone ways, bordering on the vulgar. At the same time, overseas anti-China and anti-Three-Self forces have formulated a “three-fold vision”[†] to deceive people and create misunderstandings of the contextualization of Christianity, etc.

Therefore, in promoting the contextualization of Christianity, we must integrate into the real context of contemporary Chinese social development. We cannot fall into empty talk or criticism divorced from reality. This requires both in-depth theoretical study and practical exploration. This is a gradual, long-term historical process, a momentous task that cannot be quickly accomplished.

2 Chief Tasks

In the coming five years the major task of the contextualization of Christianity is to move gradually from the propagation and mobilization stage to that of implementation. At the national, provincial and local levels, CCC&TSPMs must strengthen their sense of responsibility and mission, do substantial work and move steadily forward in order to obtain achievements at this stage in such areas as improving patriotic education, cultivating and following the core values of socialism, consolidating the theological foundation of the contextualization of Chinese Christianity while continuously deepening theological reconstruction,

[†] Enumerated as 1) the evangelization of Chinese people; 2) the “kingdomization” of Chinese churches; and 3) the Christianization of Chinese culture. <https://www.cms-en.org/threefold-vision>. –ed.

enhancing our professional contingent while facilitating personnel training, articulating Christian faith through Chinese culture while taking firm root in the culture, and engaging in public philanthropy and serving society.

- 1) Cultivate and practice the core values of socialism to guide the contextualization of Christianity.

“Prosperity and strength, democracy, civilization and harmony, freedom, equality, justice and the rule of law, patriotism, respect for work, sincerity, honesty and friendliness”: promoted as the core values of socialism, these embody the fundamental nature and basic characteristics of the core value system of socialism and represent its rich connotations and practical demands. In promoting the contextualization of Chinese Protestant Christianity, we must take the core values of socialism as our guide, strengthen the “four consciousnesses,”[#] be steadfast in the “four confidences,”[♦] and bring them into theological thinking and the church order, as well as all aspects of concrete ministries. They should be reflected in believers’ faith practice and everyday lives, further stimulating the patriotic feelings of church workers and believers and their persistence in running the church according to the law.

- Delve into the Bible to locate biblical content compatible with core socialist values and allocate personnel and funds to produce books that are easily understandable. These should be provided to the grassroots churches, to church workers and

[#] The four consciousnesses: political awareness, overall awareness, core consciousness, and awareness.—ed.

[♦] The four confidences are: confidence in the path, theory, system and culture of socialism with Chinese characteristics.—ed.

to believers in general, extending their influence through wide dissemination.

- Core socialist values should be an important part of the content of the next stage used by the Theological Reconstruction (TR) preaching team, providing study and training for the group who will then guide grassroots believers.
- Promote core socialist values on campuses, in classrooms, in teaching materials, and in student thinking, organizing demonstration lessons and exchanges on core socialist values at the seminaries. At seminaries and bible schools, classroom teaching, social practice and campus culture should be an all-inclusive platform for promotion and practice.
- Make observing core socialist values an important criterion of assessment for establishing civilized and harmonious churches. Vigorously publicize advanced models, select and commend moral exemplars, and bring into play exemplary Christian models in all walks of life, to create an atmosphere conducive to socialist core values in Christian circles.
- Conscientiously organize publicity, study and implementation of the revised Religious Affairs Regulations, instructing believers to form a correct understanding of the relationship between national law and church rules, so that they may consciously observe these Regulations, and continually strengthen their awareness of the law, safeguard the dignity of the law, and make running the church according to the law an effective path by which Christianity integrates with society.

- 2) Continue to deepen Theological Reconstruction, strengthening the theological foundation of the contextualization of Christianity.

The core and soul of the contextualization of Christianity is the contextualization of theological thinking. Only when this has been accomplished can there be contextualization in a genuine sense. Without this, the contextualization of Christianity will remain a mere empty slogan, like a tree without roots, or water without a source. Through the deepening of Theological Reconstruction, the Chinese Protestant church will be led to find a development model suited to the country, the society and the church in China, and to gradually establish a Chinese Protestant theological system.

- The foundation of this deepening consists of strengthening biblical research, establishing a correct view of the Bible and a hermeneutics in accord with the context. We must purposefully nurture biblical scholars who can set to work on a new Bible translation or lay a firm foundation for writing biblical commentaries.
- Focus on theoretical discussion of ecclesiology and establishing positive, healthy religious relationships, in order to gradually create theoretical self-confidence in the Chinese church.
- Promptly restructure the current TR preaching teams, strengthen their training, bring their work to the grassroots and the churches, thus extending dissemination and education in the contextualization of Christianity through preaching.
- Set up academic journals of Chinese Christianity to encourage academic research. These will be the

platform for research results reflecting the theory of contextualization of Christianity.

- Draw on historical resources to collect, collate, and research the writings of the senior generation and theologians of Chinese Protestantism on indigenization, contextualization, the Three-Self Patriotic Movement and Theological Reconstruction for a series of publications.
 - Revise *The Catechism* and compile daily spiritual readings; guard against extremist ideas, resist heresy, cults and infiltration.
- 3) Continue to standardize theological education and accelerate the pace of personnel training.

The formation of personnel is the top priority for the healthy and harmonious development of Chinese Protestantism. It is the key to the promotion of the contextualization of Christianity, a task that requires the effort of succeeding generations. Thus, the goal of personnel training must be clarified on the basis of the requirements for persisting in the direction of contextualization. This means creating a top-level training model that optimizes a personnel training structure. The plan as a whole must foreground the role of theological education, integrating existing resources to set up a platform where all types of personnel can develop their talents, broaden the medium of communication and strive to train greater numbers of politically reliable, religiously accomplished and morally respected persons who will step up at critical times to infuse new vitality into the contextualization of Christianity.

- In conjunction with relevant government departments, draft and implement a “Mid- and Long-Term Plan for Training Chinese Protestant Personnel,” to create a top-level design for personnel training and build a contingent of professionals.
- Promote development and educational reform in theological seminaries and bible schools and formulate an “Outline Plan for the Mid- to Long-Term Development of Chinese Protestant Theological Education” to standardize theological education.
- Maintain a correct direction in running educational institutions, strengthen standardized administration, strive to raise the quality of teaching in seminaries and bible schools, integrate the contextualization of Christianity into teaching and research, and bring the important role of theological seminaries and bible schools in the contextualization of Christianity into full play.
- Revise curriculum by increasing the proportion of courses in core socialist values and patriotism, and in the area of traditional culture, including Chinese history, literature, philosophy and art. Persist in bringing the contextualization of Christianity onto the campus and into the classroom to correctly guide students.
- Pay serious attention to on-the-job training of church workers and lay workers, gradually setting up a three-dimensional training system in which the national and local CCC&TSPMs around the country coordinate and interact with each other, sharing their strengths. Add the component of contextualization of Christianity to existing training at all levels.

- Organize teaching materials for seminaries and bible schools as well as for lay training that are compiled by Chinese Christians themselves. Strive to publish 1-2 titles per year that reflect the contextualization of Christianity.
- 4) Take root in Chinese culture, using cultural forms with Chinese characteristics to express faith.

Christianity is both a religion and an important component of world civilization. God is unique, but the expression of faith in God should be rich and varied. Chinese culture is age-old and resplendent, wide-ranging and profound, witnessing to the spiritual pursuits and great wisdom of the Chinese people. Persevering in contextualization requires Christianity to remove its Western “shackles” and put on a Chinese “explication,” interpreting its doctrines and canons in accord with China’s fine traditional culture and creating a contextualized expression of its Christian faith.

- Draw on and assimilate China’s fine traditional culture and its advanced socialist culture, consciously putting roots in the soil of Chinese culture, deriving beneficial nutrients with which to enrich itself.
- Initiate the integration of Chinese elements into liturgical forms, hymnody and sacred music, clerical attire and church architecture, so they may embody the spiritual ethos of the Chinese people and reflect Chinese characteristics.
- Encourage the use of Chinese church life, believers’ witness and the social context as sources for innovation and creativity in exegesis, spirituality and art and literature. Provide assistance and support in publishing and distributing the results.

- Organize the composition of hymns using traditional Chinese tunes or folk songs, compile and publish contextualized hymns and hold special performances or music festivals to promote them.
 - Use China's unique national painting, calligraphy, seal-carving, paper-cutting and other cultural forms people love to see and hear as vehicles for the expression of Christian faith, and organize art shows to stimulate contextualized creative works.
 - Advocate the diversification of church architecture and encourage the church to incorporate Chinese architectural styles or local architectural features into church buildings.
- 5) Engage in public welfare and philanthropy, striving to serve society.

Serving society and benefitting people is an important Christian path to witnessing to their faith, assuming social responsibility and integrating with society. The contextualization of Christianity requires Chinese churches to integrate with the traditional culture's concept of benevolence as expressed in "honor the elderly as we do our own aged parents; care for children as we care for our own children," practicing the biblical teachings and fine traditions to "Love others as ourselves, be light and salt, glorify God and benefit people," nurturing a culture of Christian philanthropic culture and actively developing social service.

- Let Protestant Christianity play its full positive role in humane care, ethics and morality and spiritual consolation, making a fine witness to God's glory and benefitting the people by properly handling relationships among all parties and striving to promote a harmonious society.

- Call on Christians to be dedicated to their work and professions, observing social morality, professional ethics, family virtues, personal morality, establish a positive outlook on life and correct values, and be light and salt, good citizens that observe discipline and law and do good for others.
- In line with the principle of “Adjust to local conditions, provide timely help, supplement shortages and work according to one’s abilities,” continue to provide social welfare projects, such as running senior citizen homes and kindergartens, providing financial aid to needy students and aiding the poor and providing disaster relief, building public facilities, environmental protections, medical and hygiene facilities.
- Explore effective mechanisms for Christian social service, promote registration of Christian social service organizations, emphasize the training of professionals, and improve operational management standards and professional skills of Christian social services.
- Continue to respond to and launch “religious charities week,” and organize and implement activities for “public philanthropy day,” to stimulate compassionate giving by believers and continue to expand participation in and the scope of charitable activities.
- Implement the CCC&TSPM proposal on “Responding to the National Strategy for Poverty Alleviation and Deepening Development of Poverty Alleviation,” and make our proper contribution to “ensure that all poverty-stricken areas and populations are lifted out of poverty by 2020.”
- Establish a Chinese Protestant brand of Christian care for the elderly, improving the standard of

Chinese Christian social service ministry across the board.

Section 3 2018-2022 Work Priorities

Promoting the contextualization of Christianity is the best way to continue striving forward in the direction Chinese Protestantism has always followed. While carrying out extensive promotion and mobilization, it is necessary that the goals and tasks set out in the Plan are implemented and embodied in concrete work practices so as to achieve substantive results. In the following five years, in addition to breaking down promotion objectives into daily tasks, the National CCC&TSPM will lay out a plan in sync with significant events at different times of the year for a dynamic progress and solid implementation of the promotion.

2018

- 1) Through in-depth study of the 19th Party Congress spirit, establish the contextualization of Christianity as the guiding thought and core content of the 10th National Chinese Christian Conference, coordinating efforts, focusing collective wisdom, pooling efforts to carry forward the contextualization of Christianity.
- 2) Hold a symposium to mark the 40th anniversary of the policy of reform and opening-up, strengthening Christian identification with the contemporary Chinese system, path, theory and culture.
- 3) Continue study and implementation of the revised Regulations on Religious Affairs and based on the spirit of these articles and rules, revise the Charters of the TSPM and the CCC and the Chinese Protestant Christian Church Order, adding content regarding the contextualization of Christianity's

major theoretical perspectives and development practices that reflect the latest accomplishments in the contextualization of Christianity.

- 4) On the occasion of the 20th anniversary of Theological Reconstruction, hold symposia and seminars elucidating the internal links between Theological Reconstruction and the contextualization of Christianity. Complement these with commemorative activities such as a contextualized Christian cultural festival, etc. Review and summarize the five years of work of the TR preaching teams and adjust the functional responsibility and work direction of the teams toward promoting contextualization.

2019

- 1) To celebrate the 70th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China, demonstrate the explorations and achievements of the contextualization of Chinese Christianity through exhibitions of calligraphy, painting, paper-cutting, seal-carving and photography, carrying forward patriotic education about being of one mind with the people, one path with the nation, and devoted to the construction of our great socialist motherland.
- 2) Make full use of the resources in the Exhibition Room of Chinese Protestant Patriotic Historical Relics and Heritage and other bases of patriotic education to strengthen the patriotic education of church workers and seminary students. Produce materials on patriotic historical events, so that patriotism assumes its proper meaning for Christians.

- 3) On the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the publication of the Chinese Union Version of the Bible, organize commemorative activities and seminars, promote the contextualization of hermeneutics by undertaking biblical commentaries written by Chinese Christians to provide foundational theological support to the promotion of the contextualization of Christianity.

2020

- 1) Commemorate the 70th anniversary of the initiation of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of Chinese Protestant Churches with essay contests and seminars, organically linking the deepening of TSPM and the strengthening of Theological Reconstruction with the promotion of the contextualization of Christianity in the new situation. Maintain independence and self-administration and resist foreign infiltration.
- 2) Organize exhibits of the achievements of the Three-Self Movement on its 70th anniversary; hold special performances of contextualized original sacred music and hymns; and set about publishing contextualized hymn books, to further promote Christian and Chinese fine traditional culture and advanced socialist culture.

2021

- 1) Celebrate the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Chinese Communist Party by launching activities on the theme of practicing core socialist values; locate and promote Christians exemplars in different times who were of one heart and mind with the Party and walked together in the same direction, in order to educate and guide believers.

- 2) By means such as themed articles in *Tian Feng*, exhibits and sermons by preaching teams etc., lead believers to be inheritors of their forebears' fine traditions of loving country and loving church, and promote conscious recognition of the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party and the socialist path.
- 3) On the occasion of achieving a moderately prosperous society and the goals of the "first centenary" of the "two centenaries" in the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, organize activities to honor Protestant Christian contributions to the development of the economy and society in order to stimulate churches and believers' awareness of serving the people to cultivate the philanthropic culture of Christianity, thereby better integrating with society.

2022

- 1) Organize conferences to share experiences in promoting the contextualization of Christianity. The sharing of good practices and experiences from across the country will spur local coordination in promoting the contextualization of Christianity.
- 2) Review and summarize the implementation of the Five Year Plan, outline a plan for promoting the work of contextualization of Christianity for the period 2023-2027.
- 3) Focus on training, recruitment and use of personnel to create a contingent of well-trained personnel and produce professional leaders for every aspect of promotion of the contextualization of Christianity.

Section 4

This Plan has been submitted by the Chairperson and President of the CCC&TSPM and the Executive Council to the meeting of the Joint Standing Committees of CCC&TSPM, deliberated and adopted. Under the guidance of the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA), the CCC&TSPM have the major responsibility for organizing and implementing the Plan, with the active assistance of the CC&TSM of every province, autonomous region and directly-administered municipalities, theological seminaries and bible schools, churches and worship venues. They should make concerted efforts in striving to accomplish the work program of this Five Year Plan. Specifics of implementation are as follows:

1. The CCC&TSPM will establish a leadership team composed of members of the Executive Council to promote the contextualization of Christianity. To strengthen leadership for the work of pushing forward the Plan as a whole, the Chairperson and President shall serve as team leaders, with the residential members of the National CCC&TSPM serving as deputy team leaders.
2. The leadership team shall submit a concrete implementation plan for promoting and organizing the contextualization of Christianity in the first quarter of the year. At the end of the year, they will report on the status of implementation to the Joint Standing Committee.
3. The CCC&TSPM along with local CC&TSMs will focus on the long-term goals of the contextualization of Christianity, furthering consolidation and improvement of all regulations, in order to provide strong institutional guarantees for the work, in order to achieve its institutionalization and normalization.

4. Ad hoc committees of the CCC&TSPM will make good use of their advantages in personnel numbers, strong representational character and close contacts with the grassroots to provide policy recommendations and decision-making consultation for the work of promotion and, when needed, assuming part of the actual work.
5. The various departments of the CCC&TSPM will formulate work plans around this Plan, sharing and undertaking the tasks, and putting the work into practice so it is verifiable. They will strengthen coordination and cooperation among departments to ensure quality completion of major activities on time.
6. The CCC&TSPM will encourage, guide, and promote CCC&TSPMs across the nation, seminaries and bible schools, churches and worship venues, basing themselves on the content and arrangements of the Plan, taking into consideration the actual situation in their locales, and through careful planning and organization, adopt a variety of ways to promote the work in various regions.
7. The CCC&TSPM will organize timely exchanges of promotion work experience, promptly summarizing and actively promoting good practices and effective experience in various areas to accelerate joint efforts around the country.
8. Step up publicity efforts to create an environment of public opinion beneficial to the contextualization of Christianity to win understanding and support from all sectors of society at home and abroad. The Protestant website <ccctspm.org>, the church monthly *Tian Feng, Church News*, the WeChat Public Account, and other timely reports of activities, the publication of books, hymnals,

calendars and audio-visual products relating to the contextualization of Christianity will all contribute to this effort.

9. As the Plan stipulates above, academic journals will be published to strengthen communication with the academic community and, with their intellectual and research support, make breakthroughs in theoretical research. We will promote friendly exchanges with other religions and learn from their useful experiences.
10. Maintain effective oversight and verification by establishing a mechanism for oversight and evaluation, conduct annual oversight and evaluation of the progress of promotional work to make necessary adjustments to our goals and tasks.

Socialism with Chinese characteristics has entered a new era and a new journey has begun. We are closer to our goal of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation than at any other time in history. Chinese Protestant Christianity will always breathe the same air and share a common fate with our motherland and people, persevere in running the church well on three-self principles, continuing to carry forward the contextualization of Christianity, to make positive Chinese Protestant contributions to writing a magnificent chapter of the new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and to building a modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, civilized, harmonious and beautiful.

Three-Self Patriotic Movement of Protestant Churches in China
China Christian Council
December 2017

**“Knowledge Will be Pleasant to Your Soul”
—Sermon at the memorial service for Chen
Zemin, Dean Emeritus of Nanjing Union
Theological Seminary**

你的灵要以知识为美—陈泽民老院长安息礼拜
上的正道词

CHEN YILU 陈逸鲁

Proverbs chapter 10 verse 2 says: “...for wisdom will come into your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul.” In Dean Chen Zemin’s 18th year, God’s wisdom came into his soul, inspiring him to dedicate himself to God’s service. At 20, he entered Zhejiang University, where he received his B.A. degree in 1941. In the same year he entered graduate studies at Nanjing Theological Seminary, and in 1950 he began teaching at the seminary. In 1952, with the establishment of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary (NJUTS), he joined its first group of teachers and remained there until his retirement in 2002. He served NJUTS his whole life and all through his life, “knowledge [was] pleasant to his soul.” He studied and conveyed his knowledge of religious and theological studies to others; he was a genuine “intellectual.” Knowledge made him scholarly and erudite, a modest and decent gentleman, a good teacher, a good friend and mentor, and a well-known theological scholar.

The study of religion was his pleasure

Religious studies were Dean Chen Zemin’s delight. Throughout his life he was immersed in study and research.

When he was at the Religious Studies Institute of Nanjing University, he directed students in their studies and writing. His “Theism Pilgrimage” 有神论巡礼 is an exquisite piece of writing, foregrounding the importance of religious thought in human history. He took part in the editing of the “Religion” volume of the *Encyclopedia of China* and was chief editor of the section on Christianity. The *Introduction to the Study of Religion*, co-edited with Mr. Luo Zhufeng 罗竹风, was long used as a text in university religious studies classes. He served two terms as deputy head of the Chinese Society of Religious Studies, and later received a special allowance from the State Council, the only Christian expert to receive this honor.

Dean Chen, as a Christian and a professor of theology, not only understood his own faith and religion, but had a thorough knowledge of other religions. He was an expert. He made a contribution to changing the bias toward religion in the intellectual world, and enabled theology and NJUTS to gain a place and influence in Chinese religious studies. He became our example in his pursuit of knowledge, exploration and scholarship.

Knowledge of theology was his pleasure

Throughout his life, Dean Chen studied, reflected on and taught theology. He was a man of great talent, an outstanding theologian of his generation who had many students as a lifelong teacher and educator. I once described him as a theologian like Anselm of Canterbury spending his whole life seeking to understand faith. Someone once said that on the NJUTS campus, President K.H. Ting was the red flowers and Dean Chen the green leaves. Yes, all his life he supported Bishop Ting’s work. But I want to look at it from another angle: if Bishop Ting was like Martin Luther, outstanding in his time, then Dean Chen was his Melanchthon, who

spent his life constructing a theology. As I found out, Dean Chen liked Melanchthon. In his “Theological Construction in the Chinese Church,” he praised Melanchthon’s theory that theology meant seeking the trajectory of God and that this path formed an ellipsis, with God and humankind constituting the two basic foci. Theology is different in different eras; theology is the church thinking. Chinese Christians, living in the new China in this new era, have their own theological reflections that differ from those of Western Christians, as well as from those of earlier Christians in history. Chen Zemin promoted practical theological reflection and pointed the way for the Sinicization of Christianity. The general opinion is that Dean Chen Zemin was the most qualified person to write a textbook in systematic theology. But he never did. I spoke with him about this once and even said I thought it was a pity. But looking at it now, Dean Chen broke the ice and pointed the way. To truly write such a systematic theology, one cannot simply copy Western theological methods, but should follow the direction of Sinicizing Christianity. It seems as if this is the mission Chen Zemin has given to us. Let us find pleasure in theological knowledge and, in this wonderful new era, continue the work he could not complete, dedicating ourselves to the Sinicization of Christianity.

Sacred music was his delight

Systematic theology draws on reason and abstract thinking, while hymns employ emotion and imagination. Theology seeks truth, while hymns pursue beauty. Theology seeks specialization, while hymns pursue popularization. It is rare for a theologian to possess qualities of both approaches. Dean Chen was one of those rare talents.

He was a member of the Chinese Protestant hymn committee and composed numerous hymns that were included in *The New Hymnal*. In No. 381, for example, he set Psalm 103 to a Chinese *guqin* (7-string plucked lute) tune. The hymn is extremely beautiful. His “The Creator’s Artistic Brush” is a beautiful patriotic hymn; “Easter Morn” has become popular with choirs across China. A southerner, Chen Zemin still created hymns with the flavor of the [northern] grasslands. Clearly, he was very deeply steeped in traditional Chinese culture, and his knowledge of hymnody was very broad as well. Moreover, NJUTS choir members never forgot his vigorous style in directing.

Dean Chen told us that theology is not some ivory tower metaphysics; it must embody the beauty of God and it must serve the church. Hymns are a form of theological expression that embody God’s beauty. They are vessels of grace in worship, conveying God’s call and blessing.

Pastoral care was his pleasure

Most people think that systematic theology is knowledge, while pastoral care theology is not. Actually, pastoral care theology is a form of knowledge, for practice is the criterion for truth. Dean Chen not only loved systematic theology—we could say he was the Chinese Protestant church’s first systematic theologian—he was also a pastor who valued pastoral care and counseling. In his youth he was a chaplain at the Fukang Hospital in Shaoxing, Zhejiang province. When St Paul’s Church in Nanjing reopened, Chen Zemin served as senior pastor, presiding there every Sunday, and was much loved by his pastoral colleagues and the congregation there.

Pastoral theology is not centered on the person of the pastor, but on God and the congregants, caring for believers’ spiritual growth and caring for every aspect of the church’s ministry. However trivial something may be, it

embodies God's consummate consideration for people and can enable them to deeply understand the meaning of God's redemption, as well as God's will for the church and the mission the church should take up.

What a beautiful thing is an understanding of the heart of God; what a wonderful thing is joyous service to others; and what a beautiful thing is building a healthy church!

How beautiful are the footprints of Chen Zemin; knowledge was ever pleasant to his heart! His whole life was a life of seeking knowledge, of teaching and educating, of serving others. His life is the best exegesis of Proverbs 2:10. Let us study his learning, his humility, his grace and his indifference to fame and wealth, always and ever taking pleasure in knowledge!

Chen Zemin, Dean Emeritus of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, rest in peace! May eternal God establish the ministry of your lifetime!

With this, we remember our beloved Chen Zemin.

Tian Feng 天风, The Magazine of the Protestant Churches in China (July 2018): 42-43.

Chen Yilu 陈逸鲁 is executive vice-president of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary.

Remembering Chen Zemin and His Efforts on behalf of the Sinicization of Christianity

追念陈泽民院长—为基督教中国化所做的努力

CAO SHENGJIE 曹圣洁

Our beloved Rev. Chen Zemin (I am more used to calling him Dean Chen) has come to the end of his 101-year-long earthly journey, and although by human standards this is not something unexpected, I am still grieved for the Chinese church that it has lost an erudite, wise, loyal and modest teacher and pastor.

I have known Chen Zemin since 1952. When I began my studies at Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, he was a teacher, appearing promptly every day at morning prayers. Through the ensuing decades, every time I returned to the seminary, if I went to morning prayers, he was there. His sixty years at the seminary passed like a single day, whether teaching systematic theology or other classes, or serving in other administrative posts—he was dean for a long time and then vice-president—he was always warm and cordial to every student. While his memorial service was in preparation, I read some of the letters of condolence that came from students whose heartfelt feelings could hardly be contained in words. His students were many, but it would be more precise to say that he made indelible contributions to Chinese Protestant theological education in serving the national Protestant church.

Chen Zemin was a “hands-on” pastor and a good one. After his graduation from theological studies, he first served as hospital chaplain in the Fukang Hospital in Shaoxing for six years. He had a profound grasp of the situation of

Chinese Protestant Christians, and his *Pillar of Cloud, Pillar of Fire* (a book on spiritual guidance for patients) was both deeply spiritual and integrated with concrete situations. It was reprinted in the early years following the establishment of the China Christian Council and later published by the Chinese Christian Literature Council in Hong Kong as well. Simultaneously with his work in the seminary, he was for many years senior pastor at St. Paul's Church in Nanjing.

His theological foundation was such that he could compile dictionaries. He knew the historical development of theology and the earliest world frontiers of theological research like the palm of his hand, but he never held that teaching theology meant introducing foreign theological theories, and even less showing off one's own learning. Throughout his life, he strove to undertake theological reflection on behalf of the Chinese church. Rereading his 1956 essay, "Theological Construction in the Chinese Church" recently (republished in 1991, as the first essay in his *Seeking and Witnessing*), I was reminded that the first and longest section focuses on "The church thinking." He writes that "Theology is the theory of the spiritual experience of the church; it is a summation of the religious experience of the church in a given historical period."¹ He emphasized the theological awakening of the Chinese church. It is the spiritual light we Chinese Christians have gained from our own life experience. In this work, he fully describes Chinese Christians casting off foreign mission board control to become spiritually and emotionally genuine Chinese Christians, and in our social life showing mutual respect for believers of other religions. He describes the theologies of revival and seclusion that have deeply

1 Chen Zemin, "Theological Construction in the Chinese Church," 《中国教会神学建设的任务》, trans. Don Snow in *Chinese Theological Review*: 1991, 53. See p.38 in this issue.

influenced the churches. It was extremely vivid to me as I read, for this is the path Chinese Christians took on the way to Sinicization.

In the 1950s Dean Chen already raised the idea that the Chinese church had to “face the new era boldly,” with “a new adjustment and adaptation,” taking the path of “seeking the cause in oneself,” that is, relying on our own explorations, seeking a resolution of issues through theology, including expressing religious faith through the serene temperament of Chinese culture. He wrote the “Preface” to *The Collected Writings of K.H. Ting* and in it strongly supported Bishop Ting’s theological view of the Cosmic Christ, for he believed that this represented creative and groundbreaking thought in the Chinese context. In 1998, the CCC&TSPM held an enlarged meeting in Jinan at which Bishop Ting proposed that Chinese Protestantism needed to undertake a reconstruction of theology. Chen Zemin was his staunchest supporter. I remember that in that speech he pointed out that in these 50 years, Chinese society had undergone the earthshaking change of reform and opening-up, and that the church had also seen rapid development, but that the theology circulating in the church was that of “no change for fifty years.” Many concepts and much thinking had not been harmonized or adapted to socialist society. “In this sense we are indeed decades behind foreign Christians in our theological thinking.” These words resounded to great effect on the need for Chinese Christianity to undertake Theological Reconstruction.

Dean Chen’s thinking was extremely open and lively. In foreign exchanges, he frequently introduced China and Chinese Christianity, and what he said reflects our distinctiveness, along with his own analysis. He had a great deal of contact with scholarly circles in China, listening to their opinions with an open mind, while making the Sinicization of Christianity his focus. Following his death,

Americans Mrs. Jean and Dr. Franklin Woo, Ms. Maggi Whyte from the U.K., and Dr. Glüer of Germany, as well as other friends all sent letters with their reminiscences, expressing their hope that his work could be translated and published in English. Many friends from scholarly circles also expressed condolences online.

Most of my direct contact with Chen Zemin took place around music. He was a very accomplished musician. In 1982, the CCC&TSPM set up the Chinese Protestant Hymnal Committee and under it, an editorial committee for *The New Hymnal*. Chen Zemin was one of eleven members directly involved in guiding the work of the editorial department. The guiding editorial principle of *The New Hymnal* was the promotion of Sinicization, which Chen strongly supported. He once organized those of us in the editorial committee for a working sojourn at NJUTS, gathering draft hymns and lyrics from faculty and students with the new works to be tried out at the seminary, and feedback sought. He led the way in the creative process.

Chen Zemin played the Chinese traditional instrument, the *guqin*, and he felt that some tunes were quite suitable for expressing feelings of reverence for God. He tried combining lyrics praising God with ancient Chinese tunes. In 1956, he had already set Psalm 103 to a *guqin* tune; in 1982, he set Psalm 100 to the *guqin* tune “Three Variations on the Plum Blossom” (梅花三弄 *Meihua san nong*) which he submitted to the editorial committee of the hymnal (Nos. 381, 380) and for “The Creator’s Artistic Brush” (No. 178) he used the tune “Wild Geese descend on a sandbank” (平沙落雁 *Pingsha luoyan*) for a lyric he composed. In this hymn, attachment to the country and Chinese Christians’ duty to the nation are vividly expressed, making it an immortal piece. Rev. Shen Mingcui 沈明燧 of Guangxi wrote the lyrics for “Glorify His Name,” (No.350). When Dean Chen read the lines, “If any honor have I, It all derives from the Lord. With single-minded

love run hard for the goal. Honor God, serve people,” he was greatly moved and inspired to write a tune for the lyrics. The lovely music gives this hymn a theme significant for the times, leaving an even deeper impression. In addition, he wrote a large-scale piece, “Easter Morn,” and did many hymn translations. As hymnal editors, we frequently proposed doing more to popularize the hymns and singing works by Chinese Christians ourselves, but at present how many can reach the heights attained by Chen Zemin, whether in lyrics or melody?

Whenever the subject of Chinese sacred music came up, Chen Zemin was extremely enthusiastic and supportive. At the seminary he was chief editor of a series of four volumes of *Anthems for Choirs*. Later, the task exceeded his strength and he asked the committee a number of times to take over. At age 94, he still made the trip to Shanghai for the symposium on creating Chinese sacred music held by the committee, demonstrating through action his regard for that endeavor.

Another of Dean Chen’s characteristics was his great modesty. He was happy to guide and support the younger generation and students. Whatever spoke to the needs of Chinese Christianity, he would energetically encourage and support. In 2010, I sought his opinion on my plan to collect my essays for publication. He sent me back an enthusiastic reply, and even suggested he could write a preface for the book. I felt quite flattered. I was quite aware that this was not because my essays were so worthwhile; he was willing to write the preface in order to “preserve the historical witness,” or “order and compile materials of modern Chinese Christian history.”

After Chen Zemin had gone to rest in the Lord, a scholar of Christianity said, “All the old guard of Christians is gone; it’s the end of an era. Mr. Chen was a scholar and Christian leader. His passing is a great loss to the Chinese church.” I

too feel this deeply. In striving for the goal of the Sinicization of Christianity he set a towering example; yet the path to building up our Chinese church's own theology is still very long. Dean Chen worked his whole life to leave a model for the next generation, one that would constantly serve as an incentive to us to go bravely forward.

Tian Feng 天风, The Magazine of the Protestant Churches in China (July 2018): 40-41.

Rev. Dr. Cao Shengjie 曹圣洁 served as president of the 5th China Christian Council (2002), in addition to other posts. She is a well-known church leader, musician, writer and speaker who has travelled extensively overseas on behalf of the Chinese Protestant church.

Theological Construction in the Chinese Church (1956)

中国教会神学建设的任务

CHEN ZEMIN 陈泽民

The Church at Reflection

Theology is the theory of the spiritual experience of the church; it is a summation of the religious experience of the church in a given historical period. As a system of thought, it begins with traditional doctrines and beliefs, but then takes fresh and distinctive spiritual experiences, systematizes them and elevates them to the level of theory which is then used to guide the work of the church and to indicate the direction in which it should move. The truth of the Bible and the gospel of Christ are not limited by time and space. Theology, however, is limited by specific historical conditions, the particular era, people, nation, and church experiences vary with time and place. Certain individuals may, due to their religious endowments and experiences, have unusually outstanding theological insights and make special contributions. But if spiritual experiences, which serve as the basis of theology, are to have any influence on the broad masses of the church, they must achieve a certain level of popular acceptance and have the ability to call forth a response from other believers. We speak of the theologies of certain theologians (such as those of Augustine, Luther, Schleiermacher, or Ritschl), but these theologies represent only the experience and insight of a few individuals. It is only when these experiences and insights are broadly representative and reflective of the communities from

which they spring that these theologies will attract notice and be accepted. Theology is created by the church, not by individuals.

The church has historically been subject to the economic, political, cultural and social influences of its era, people and nation, therefore, there are theologies of different eras and regions, of peoples and of countries, such as the theology of the Greek Church Fathers, of the ancient North African church, Reformation theology, Germanic theology, etc. All these were responses to the different needs and special experiences of their times. Even though these theologies were all based on the revelation of the Bible and Christian faith and preserve to a certain extent the historical traditions of Christianity, they all reflect different Christian experiences and understandings as people sought to live out the gospel as inspired by the Holy Spirit in their own times. Because theology encompasses life experience, it is intrinsically alive and dynamic, and it grows and develops with the life of the church. It contains faith but is not equivalent to faith; it contains the truth of the gospel but is not the whole truth of the gospel. It is a commentary on the faith and truth of the gospel, an expression of the life of the church; it is the church at reflection. The content of that reflection is the faith and experience of the church. Reflection without content is mere formalism or dead dogma—it is not theology. Unexamined experience is simply immature feeling; it is puerile and may well be misguided and misleading. So religious experience precedes theology and is the foundation of theology. Any mature church must have its theology, just as a mature person must be capable of conscious, coherent thought.

The church of new China is growing, and with the development of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) it is now embarking on a new chapter in its life. In the five or six years since 1949, it has accumulated much precious

and significant new spiritual experience. The process of growth and maturation which the church is undergoing demands that the church sort out and make sense of these experiences. In order that the church be better able to reflect and become a self-aware and united church, it must have its own theology. This timely demand has been raised, and now a task lies before the church which has never and never could have arisen before. The young Chinese church stands now in the forefront of progress and faces a new historical era unlike any in the two-thousand-year history of the Christian Church. If the church wishes to continue to exist in the midst of a new socialist society, it must recognize its duty and complete its mission. It is now bearing witness both to itself and to its Lord Jesus Christ. It already has sufficient experience and material upon which to reflect and can review the road along which it has come. The church must tell the many Christians who live beyond the environs of this social system how the church has chosen its path and how it has moved forward. It must use the language of theology, a language easily understood by Christians and theologians, and through faith and in the context of the history of Christianity, it must tell the story of its spiritual experience to prove that it has chosen the right path. The church should also make use of this same mode of thinking to determine and indicate its future direction. This task is unprecedented in the experience of the Chinese church.

The Theological Poverty of the pre-1949 Church

It has already been one hundred years since Protestant Christianity entered China, and many Chinese have accepted the Christian faith and joined the church. But until the unfolding of the TSPM, a truly "Chinese" church had never been established. The word "Chinese" had been appended to the names of many churches, but this was not enough to

show that these were really churches belonging to Chinese believers. This obviously applies to those churches with a Western mission agency background. As for churches that called themselves 'self-established' such as the "Chinese Independent Church of Jesus" and the "True Jesus Church," though they had no economic or administrative links with Western mission agencies, their thinking was dominated by Western theology. The point is not that the Chinese churches must be completely different from Western churches in administrative forms and theologies. Since we are Christians, we necessarily have many things in common with Western Christianity. We cannot possibly cut ourselves off completely from the historical traditions of Western Christianity, nor do we desire to do so. If that were to happen, we would cease being a Christian church. The main problem is this: Before 1949, the introduction of Christianity to China was closely bound up with the process of colonialism, so it was impossible for the Chinese church to develop any independent theological thought that could be termed Chinese. Some Western missionaries, intentionally or unintentionally, used their mission work as a method and means of aggression. For some, their original intent was not the spread of the gospel. As E.C. Bridgman intimated, their purpose in China was not so much religious as it was political. Of course, such people could not possibly help us gain true spiritual experience of the kind that could serve as the basis for a theology of the Chinese church. When such people did discuss theology in China, as happened when missionaries established seminaries here, they only bandied about worn-out theological clichés and could not do very much to cultivate real theological interest.

There were missionaries who may not have consciously and actively used religion as a means of aggression, or who really believed that their purpose in China was to spread the gospel. However, guided by the erroneous policies of

Western mission agencies, in an environment of cultural imperialism, and in a period in which China was not a truly independent nation, the spread of the gospel and the spread of Western culture and lifestyles became inextricably intertwined to the point that speaking English and eating Western food virtually became necessary conditions for discussing Christian theology. A Chinese person who accepted this kind of Christianity was to a certain extent also accepting the influence of Western thought and lifestyles, and therefore to some extent abandoning the thought patterns and feelings of a true Chinese and becoming alienated from the masses of the Chinese people. In this way the Chinese Christian church actually became a parasitic “daughter church” of Western mission agencies. Because it was not a true Chinese church, how could it theologize in a genuinely Chinese way?

In the past, Western missionaries opened seminaries in China and taught “Christian theology.” Western missionaries brought the Bible to China, and through the guidance of the Holy Spirit we found the gospel in God’s word and revelation. We gained some knowledge of the Bible and the Christian religion from the West. We do not deny that such knowledge was of some help in our study of the Bible, in our search for truth, and in our acceptance of the gospel. But with regard to theology, which must be based on the spiritual experience of believers, we must plainly state that we cannot simply copy the theology of the West. If we were to swallow Western theology whole without critical examination, it would choke the Chinese church’s own theology and still the newly-born spiritual experience of Chinese believers. Here we must make a distinction between the age-old Christian theological heritage and harmful modern Western ideas. The Christian heritage is of value to us as long as we can accurately understand, absorb and use it, because it is the distillation of many generations of accumulated rich Christian spiritual

experience and achievements in the search for truth. Harmful Western ideas will only be an obstacle and a hindrance in our spiritual experience and search for truth. Yet it is frequently only through the latter that Western theologians introduce and explain the former. This serves to explain the pathetic state of theology in the pre-1949 Chinese church.

It may be helpful to mention a few examples to illustrate this situation. In the first decade of this century, American theologians wrangled endlessly over the issue of fundamentalism vs. modernism, and the fray was soon introduced into the Chinese church. Before most Chinese Christians had even figured out what fundamentalism and modernism were, and what these arguments represented in America, they had already fallen into blind, narrow denominational disputes, fighting vigorously and loyally for their Western teachers, and causing divisions in the young Chinese church. After the First World War, when Western nations sank into poverty, bitterness and despair, the Western church turned from blind optimism to pessimism and bewilderment. The "theology of crisis" was immediately exported to China, and China's theologians took pride in quibbling over Kierkegaard's "sickness unto death," and the paradoxes of "dialectical theology." When Catholic theologians tried to disguise medieval obscurantism under the high-sounding name "New Scholasticism," Chinese theologians lost no time in discussing Jacques Maritain and Etienne Gilson. When Western psychology and psychiatry began to make inroads into pastoral theology, many ministers tried to lecture on Freud and Jung's "depth psychology" from the pulpit, rather than preaching the gospel. Stanley Jones' *Victorious Living* became a bargain-basement gem in China and was passed around as best-selling spiritual nourishment. When Western rostrums blared opposition to the Communist Party and the Soviet

Union, many theologians in China abandoned the slogan of staying above politics and preached about the fundamental antagonism between Christ and Communism. Even the crudest distortions of the Bible (such as allusions to the red horse in Revelation and Rosh in Ezekiel) were all treated as reliable exegesis of prophecy. In reality, this so-called “latest Western theology” reflected the spiritual deterioration of the Western church, but because the Chinese church was the “daughter church” of the Western church, such rubbish was introduced into China as if it was treasure.

If we examine theological publishing in the pre-1949 Chinese church, we find little to recommend it. Most of the publications were translations, and most selections were made by Western missionaries. Most theological books edited or written by Chinese authors were compilations rather than original works or were general reviews. Genuinely creative works were rare. At such a time there could be no genuinely Chinese church, the Chinese church could not govern or support itself, and we had little authentic spiritual experience of our own upon which to draw for self-propagation. In such a situation, poverty of theological thought was only natural, and a theology able to transcend its times was an impossibility.

This explains the dispirited theological ambience of the pre-1949 Chinese church, and the meagerness of contemporary theological thought. It was not until the birth of new China that Christians were roused from their benighted and half-starved condition.

The Awakening of Theology in a New Era

Spiritual experience is the foundation of theology. In 1949, Chinese believers awoke to the clarion call of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement. In the beginning, many people looked on the TSPM as primarily a patriotic political movement.

Through this movement, they came to see the true face of imperialism and realize that Christianity had been used as a tool of imperialist aggression in China; they learned how to stand on the side of the people in making distinctions between friend and foe, and how to enthusiastically love new China; and they criticized some of the poisons of imperialism. However, until recently, many believers had not realized the religious and spiritual significance of the movement, and therefore had not taken the trouble to sum up its spiritual value and meaning. In fact, from the very beginning, this awakening from stupor, this move from darkness and ignorance into light, and this intense struggle against the forces of evil have all been precious spiritual experiences for Christians. In the last few years, both individuals and the church have been through a baptism of fire and have seen much new light. It is when we realize that it is the Spirit of Christ which has led us along this bright new road, when we suddenly realize the spiritual significance of this experience, that we naturally express a desire for theology. Through theology we hope to sum up the experience of these few years, through faith we desire to consolidate our gains, and we hope to point out the path we should travel in the future. Even though we firmly believe that it is Christ himself who has opened the way for us, these experiences are too fresh—we have never been through such experiences before—and they require us to reinterpret some traditional views to which we have long been accustomed. In the process of reinterpretation, we may experience doubt and pain. We need to pray and reflect much before we can have the confidence to lift our feet and stride forward. Under these circumstances we may feel spiritually starved and intellectually weak. Like someone just recovered from an illness, we may have a convalescent hunger—a craving for spiritual satisfaction. This is a healthy sign. The scraps that we ate in the past now disgust us; we demand more nourishing food.

Several factors have caused our theological awakening, and that made this work of theological reconstruction possible:

1) The Western mission boards and missionaries who controlled us for more than a century can no longer bind and direct us. Now we can completely throw off their restraints and manage our own church; relying on our own strength and piety, we can search for the light of Scripture. We have begun to think for ourselves and no longer need to rely mentally on others. No matter how fragmentary and incomplete, this preliminary experience of self-government and self-support—this road of our spiritual Exodus—is a most precious experience for the church and is the foundation for our self-propagation. It would have been unimaginable for the pre-1949 Chinese church, dependent on the West for finances, administration and personnel, to think independently or to have had any message of self-propagation. Today the church of China has begun to breathe the fresh air of freedom and independence, and in this new era of history it will continue to survive and be a vital witness.

2) Because the church has begun a free, independent existence, it has gradually come to realize that the Western “mother” did not do a good job of supporting and helping. Instead, in many ways this mother restrained, obstructed, even poisoned. We no longer accept things as blindly as we once did and have started to view Western theology with a critical eye. We must search for new light and revelation in the Bible to explain and guide our spiritual life. Whoever seeks will find, and we have indeed found. We have also made quite a few new discoveries. Our spiritual knowledge is gradually increasing, and God’s grace is being showered on us, ever more richly each day.

3) In this new era, Chinese Christians and the broad

masses are together actively building our great socialist motherland. In our social, economic, political and cultural lives, we have become a part of the new Chinese nation. In our thoughts and emotions, we are becoming true Chinese. This important turnaround has been acknowledged, accepted and welcomed by the Chinese people. In the midst of daily life, the church has begun to shine its light, and we have come to realize even more that the life of church in society cannot be separated from the church's spiritual life. The experience of our church is becoming richer, and this is providing us with an inexhaustible supply of theological source material.

4) In the church's life in society, through shared work and experience we have discovered much shared light. The separation and disunity created by the denominationalism of the Western missionaries is gradually vanishing. We have learned how to consider ourselves parts of the same body and how to build up the church; we have begun to see our own shortcomings as well as other people's strengths. We have truly experienced the daily richness of God's grace in the increase of our numbers. Different experiences and views need not create division. In fact, they enrich our religious life and thought. Mutual respect has already gained increased significance and has brought our church both richness and a lively atmosphere.

5) The church is living in the modern age and is in the process of exploring new paths. It is situated in an environment in which new China's academic and intellectual circles are broadly investigating materialism and freely discussing issues in accordance with the policy of "letting a hundred schools of thought contend." This forces Christians to re-examine the basis of their faith. Accepting religious faith is no longer a natural or casual matter, and theologians and ministers must convince people of the significance of Christianity. People with questionable motives no longer

surge into churches as they once did. Religion cannot be made use of for non-religious goals any longer. Judging from the demands of this situation, evangelism naturally seems somewhat more difficult than it once was, but this is now real evangelism. Difficulties only serve to purify the work of evangelism and clarify its goals and significance, thus making it more noble and precious. Because of this, theology is spurred on to further development.

6) In the course of social revolution, our whole lives—including our economics, politics, culture, customs, and even our thoughts and emotions—are changing according to a new model of socialist life. This thoroughgoing change must necessarily influence the life of our church and our social experience and requires new adjustment and adaptation. Now we are still caught up in these changes, but we firmly believe that these changes and adaptation will bring richness and glory to the life of our church. In our theology we must face such changes candidly and without reservation, we must not flinch, but believe that the socialist revolution will bring us good things. This obviously presents a new and stimulating task for theologians.

7) For the reasons mentioned above, we now have a new historical vantage point from which to view some Western “theologians” as they struggle in the adverse currents of their culture. In the long march of human history, we are moving ahead. When we look at Western theology, we no longer admire it blindly as we once did; we can see that many in the West are groping their way into blind alleys, having strayed from the true gospel of the church, and much that is precious in the historical tradition of the church has been lost. They are now gathering outdated, useless things left behind by earlier generations of theologians and using obscure ancient terms to cover over their spiritual poverty and ignorance of the truth. No one with any common sense would be in the market for such things, so they are

compelled to borrow dead Greek and Latin phrases praising the God of irrationality (*Deus irrationalis*), proclaiming the faith of absurdity (*Credo quia absurdum*) and extolling ignorance (*ignoramus et ignorabimus*). They feel that the gospel can only be established on people's sense of hopelessness. They feel that if the church is to have a future, then the human race must have none. Observing some of the developments in Western theology from our vantage point, we see that they are regressing in a direction exactly opposite of our progress; ahead of us, in contrast, there is endless light. Even though at present we have only limited material for theological construction, and some precious experience, we can confidently advance in the direction we have chosen. We know that we have the heavy responsibility and mission to lead people to God and to seek truth. We can proudly—but not arrogantly—carry out our theological task. As we realize the nature of the mission that faces us today and accept this heavy responsibility, we do not feel arrogant, nor are we unwilling to humbly assimilate the precious historical heritage of Christianity from the West. We are fully aware that in the past our theological foundation was relatively weak, and that in many areas we must painstakingly research and humbly learn. But God has already called us and placed us in this important position in history, so we cannot refuse this grace or responsibility.

Looking back at the history of Christianity, we see that Christian theology has advanced with the times and has already undergone many adaptations and transformations. The Church Fathers of ancient Greece expounded the Christian gospel to the believers of that day through Greek patterns of thought and language. The theological doctors of the Middle Ages attempted to use scholasticism in the interpretation of the gospel. The reformers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries found that the gospel could help

them throw off the shackles of feudalism, resulting in great developments in theology during the Reformation. Following the new view of the universe ushered in by the development of the natural sciences, theologians of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries expanded and deepened our faith in and understanding of the gospel. If the past two thousand years of theological work has indeed enriched our theological knowledge and expanded the domain of theology, it is only because theologians did not fail to promptly sum up those spiritual experiences characteristic of and significant for their times, organize them and elevate them to the level of theory, and add their achievements to the river of theological knowledge. Today we stand at an extremely important point in the history of human society, and the church is thus also brought to this critical stage in history. The church must bravely face this era and explain the changes which it has brought from a spiritual viewpoint. This is the theological task of our church today.

Loci and Foci

Although minute, fragmentary and incomplete, our experience, understanding and knowledge are not haphazard, chaotic and unrelated to each other. In this age of change, in this society brimming with creative energy, in this exceptional era in history, many things are advancing by leaps and bounds. Because of the dullness of our faith and our clouded spiritual eyes, our views and understanding often lag behind events. God's revelation appears in the earthquake and fire, yet our weakness causes us to cover our ears and eyes, afraid to face it. But we must never flee from the surging current of progress. Our faith is sluggish but not dead; our eyes are clouded but not totally blind. In the flood of history, we are still washed forward by an overpowering force. From amidst the scattered small whirlpools and the

spray of the waves, we can still make out the main current. If we carefully pick up the crumbs scattered on the ground, when we have collected twelve full baskets, we will see the goodness of the one who gives us the bread of life. Spiritual hunger compels us to grope our way forward. The road which we have traveled has been marked for us by God.

Our theological pilgrimage is much like the geometric process of connecting many points into a locus chart, seeing its significance and then systematizing and drawing deductions and inferences from it. The first Protestant systematic theologian, Philip Melancthon, called his systematic theological work *Loci Communesreum Theologicarum*. The marvelous works of God are something that our limited human intelligence cannot fully grasp and comprehend, but he has given us revelation for the salvation of the human race. In history the dim pattern of his truth, of his loving, holy and just nature, and of his holy will can be traced in outline.

Let us continue to use this geometric concept for a moment. We find that the locus we explore shows a certain pattern; an unlimited wisdom and unfathomable love are guiding us. His will is the pattern of the locus, and this locus appears to be an ellipse. The moving point endlessly orbits around two foci—God and humanity—the focal points of theological thought over thousands of years. As history progresses, the moving point of the ellipse sometimes moves closer to God, taking him as the center, and is relatively distant from humanity; but sometimes it moves closer to humanity and further from God. Between God and humanity, a certain relation or connection is always preserved, but there is also distance between them. If the distance between these two foci were to be reduced to nil, God and humankind would become one. God might be absorbed by humankind, and the resulting extreme humanism would end in a denial of creation, the atonement and the gospel; the ellipse would

vanish and become a circle. But if the distance between these foci were to increase infinitely, there would be absolute distance and opposition between God and humankind. The two end points would be pulling in opposite directions, resulting in the perishing of religious life. But history and experience tell us that the relationship between God and humanity involves both repulsion and attraction. God's love of the world and human dependence on God draw the two foci toward each other, but God's holiness and human sin prevent them from uniting and becoming one. This causes religion to become a necessary part of real life and makes theology possible.

However, this ellipse is not stationary. As the moving point orbits around the two foci, history progresses and the relationship between God and humanity also progresses in time. Our elementary geometric metaphor fails at this point. This locus actually becomes an oscillating line formed by the moving point as it moves along the circumference of an ellipse which is advancing in a certain direction; this is a very complicated and advanced oscillating line. At this point, this geometric maze no longer benefits our theological thought, and instead becomes a hindrance. Here we have to give up this Cartesian theological approach. Before putting aside this advanced locus model, we must also point out that the ellipse analogy contains another serious flaw: these two foci are not equal and symmetrical. God is always active, and humankind is always passive, though only relatively so.*

With the assistance of the locus model and the simple discussion above, we can easily grasp many of the central theological propositions debated in Judaism and Christianity over thousands of years. Many doctrines are actually

* I was delighted to read of Karl Barth's *The Humanity of God* in 1983 in which he used the idea of an ellipse with God and humanity as the foci. --author's addendum, 1992.

explanations of this model; they explain the relationship between God and humankind as reflected in human religious life. On the one hand, God is actively seeking humankind through his creative and saving love; on the other hand humanity is in the midst of sin and weakness, accepting God's grace, responding to his gift of salvation and seeking a life directed toward him. In this meeting between humanity and God, humankind has ever-changing religious experiences and produces many doctrines and theological theories. The final end of these is nothing other than to explain what kind of relationship should exist between God and humankind, and to solve the conflicts which exist between God and humanity. This contradictory relationship appears not only in human religious life, but everywhere in the relationship between people and society. Thus, our theological duty is not only a metaphysical theory; it also touches on a human existence which includes all of the life of society, and theology thus becomes a product of history and society, closely related to philosophy, anthropology and sociology.

Let us consider a few more examples to explain the relationship between the ellipse and its foci. A basic problem in Christian theology is the relationship between revelation and human reason. Are God's revelation and natural human reason in opposition to each other, or are they complementary? Is revelation opposed to reason, above reason or completely within the bounds of reason? Does so-called natural revelation really exist? Outside the special revelation of the Bible, can we see the movement of the will of God in the progress of history? Circling the two foci of a God who has revealed himself and a human race which has responded to God's revelation, there are different experiences and theories. There are extreme supernaturalists who totally reject natural revelation and repudiate the use of reason; there are also extreme

rationalists and naturalists who take reason as the absolute criterion for judging revelation, who consider natural revelation to be the only kind of revelation, and who reject any supernatural revelation. Between these two extremes there are a variety of compromising and conciliatory viewpoints which form a curve.

Let us also look at the doctrines of the Trinity and Christology. Historically, theologians have wavered in their emphasis between Christ's divine and human natures. Though orthodox doctrine holds that Christ was fully divine and fully human, it is not easy to maintain this delicate balance perpetually. So, in ancient times there was Modalistic Monarchianism, which emphasized Christ's divine nature while neglecting his humanity, and Dynamic Monarchianism and Arianism, which stressed Christ's subordinate status. In the Reformation period, many of the theological disputes between Luther and Calvin revolved around this question of Christ's dual nature. With regard to theories of the atonement there are extreme "objective" theories which place God at the center (like Anselm's substitution satisfaction theory), and there are also extreme "subjective" theories, which place humanity at the center (Abelard), and a variety of schools of ethics. Other issues closely related to this problem have to do with theories of human nature and of sin. Advocates of "objective" atonement without exception stress original sin, total depravity and the absence of freedom. Those who hold to "subjective" atonement tend toward a variety of humanistic Socinian and Arminian positions. In between these extremes there are many compromise theories. Another example is the problem of the attitude of Christians toward the world, and of their relationship to the world. There are "other-worldly" and "apocalyptic" schools which totally reject this world and place their hope in the life to come; there are also the "social gospellers" who stress the present life and take the afterlife only as a theoretical possibility or a symbol.

These problems have been interminably debated by theologians over the ages. According to the spirit of the age, the social system and the experience of believers, the curving arc of the ellipse oscillates right and left, up and down as it circles the foci. Having stepped into this new era, we have the opportunity and the right to look back and study how this curve has changed in the past. Even more, we have the responsibility to explore the ways in which it will continue to develop in the future. We have seen many extremists and their fates; we also know that superficial compromise cannot last. In what direction is the experience of this new age pointing us? What problems will it solve? What unresolved problems lie before us, waiting for us to come to grips with them?

Continuity or Discontinuity

Before we examine the ways in which theology can sum up the religious experiences of the Chinese church, we must raise a question which has faced theologians for centuries. Actually, it is the question of the relationship between the two foci mentioned above but stated as a question of principles. We must decide: between God and humankind, between revelation and natural reason, between the gospel and ordinary ethics or cultural values, between Christianity and other religions, between faith and the absence of faith, between the church and society, between the kingdom of God and that of the world, between eternity and history—is there continuity or discontinuity? Over the ages, and with regard to many important theological questions, theologians have chosen their viewpoints and the foundation or standard of their faith from between these two contrasting principles. For example, with regard to the question of the relationship between God and humankind, those who hold to a discontinuity position

naturally emphasize God's transcendence and distance from humankind. Those who hold to continuity stress God's immanence and closeness to humanity. The former treat God as "wholly other," unreachably high, inaccessible to reason, and infinitely exalted; because of this, humankind's finitude and limitations are also seen as absolute, and humans are viewed as totally depraved, hopeless, and evil—as mere objects of God's wrath. The latter emphasize a God who lives among us, an affectionate, loving, forgiving father. Though humanity is fallen and evil, it is not to the point of hopelessness and death. Humanity is created in the image of God, we have freedom and moral obligations, we are objects of God's love and grace of salvation. The former stress God's act of salvation as the purpose of creation; the latter stress God's work of creation, with salvation as its fulfillment and completion. The former believe that God's revelation is absolute and special, they do not acknowledge natural revelation or natural theology, and they see human reason and knowledge as standing in opposition to God's revelation. While the latter admit that God's revelation is absolute and special, they do not deny that revelation can also be found in nature and history, and they see reason as the basis for accepting God's revelation. The former emphasize an absolute "quantitative difference" between eternity and time, so they view all movements in history through the eyes of eschatology and deny the possibility of any real progress within the realm of history. The latter see eternity as an endless extension of history, affirming that God's kingdom is both eternal and historical, and affirm that progress in history is under God's guidance and control. The former set the gospel and religion in opposition, seeing morality and salvation as in opposition, and feel that anything which is human—be it religion, morality, culture or arts—is of no value in God's eyes; it may even be evil, of the devil. The latter feel that all good things come from God, though

human morality and culture are not sufficient for salvation. The former consider human pride and self-satisfaction the greatest of sins; the latter have hope for and confidence in humankind. The former criticize the latter for being naive, shallow and presumptuous; the latter see the former as being too one-sided, arbitrary and negative.

There is no need to continue with an endless list of comparisons. However, it should be noted that it superficially appears that those who stress discontinuity are emphasizing God as the center, while those who accentuate continuity are humanists. In reality, this is not the case. The former have definitely always considered themselves as orthodox theists, and have criticized the latter for humanistic heterodoxy. The latter certainly do value human nature and reality as a special characteristic of their thought. However, the key issue is not which of the two above-mentioned foci they weight more heavily but lies in how they explain the relationship between the two. It is necessary to concede that both of the foci have unmistakable importance before there can be any discussion of the question of the relationship between them. For example, proponents of the discontinuity view do not deny that the problems of humanity, society and evil are important religious questions. So the "humankind" focal point is one of the central points of theology. But in the solution of these problems, they suggest that the absolute separation between God and humankind must be recognized before a way can be found to deal with this separation. Likewise, those who hold a continuity view do not deny God's transcendence, ignore human sin and fallenness, and do not oppose all supernaturalism. They are decidedly not simply extreme humanists. But they do feel that while God and humankind are distinct, they are not cut off from each other. Through a thousand ties and connections there is to a certain degree some kind of continuity, and this continuity makes atonement both necessary and possible. Since there

is continuity, there must also be distance. If two points coincide and become one, there is no continuity.

We must also point out that although in theory the discontinuity and continuity viewpoints appear to be diametrically opposed, isolated systems which cannot be reconciled, in reality a theologian may belong to both camps to differing degrees with regard to different questions. That is to say, with regard to one question he may hold to some kind of discontinuity position, while on another issue he may take some kind of continuity position. It is not only a few individuals or a minority of theologians who hold such dual positions. On the contrary, it is those who hold absolute continuity or discontinuity positions who are extreme cases. Our locus thus becomes an ellipse which is smaller at the two ends and broad in the middle. The real world is complex and changing, and pure theory easily leads people to forget reality.

Analysis of this kind of comparison may be helpful to our inquiry. It helps us to see more clearly the paths we had chosen and how theological studies developed in the past. It shows us that the church had often used the discontinuity view as the criterion of "orthodoxy," and it shows us the courageous spirit of the reformers who advocated the continuity view. It is only through the complementarity of these two views together that theology can progress with the times. They represent two kinds of attitudes, two tendencies and over the ages theologians representing a diversity of leanings have appeared. If Irenaeus is a "father of orthodox theology" who was relatively close to the discontinuity view, then Justin Martyr clearly represents the continuity view (although he has never been criticized as heretic). In the disputes after the fourth century, many extremely far-sighted and wise theologians balanced orthodox doctrine between two contradictory principles. In the debate over human nature and atonement, Augustine gradually moved toward

a discontinuity position, even to the point that he eventually became the predecessor and symbol for all those in later generations who held discontinuity views. The unfortunate Pelagius and the semi-Pelagians became scapegoats for the continuity position, but within that position there existed a certain inextinguishable truth and power, which even Augustine could not kill, and in succeeding ages many spokesmen for that position continued to appear.

Although medieval scholasticism produced proponents of the discontinuity position such as Anselm and the outstanding continuity advocate Abelard, the “school men” of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries wisely maintained a flexible compromise position. In reality they were using limited compromises to uphold the intellectual control which feudal papal authority had over people. By the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, philosophy had been freed from the bounds of theology, like a maid servant escaping the control of the queen. This signified human intellectual liberation. The rise of continuity principles caused a crisis in scholasticism and medieval orthodoxy. During the Reformation, Luther and Calvin were forceful representatives of the discontinuity position, saving theological orthodoxy from decadent Catholicism, but at the same time Zwingli and Melanchthon showed streaks of the spirit of the continuity view. Seventeenth century Arminianism, German Pietism and the spiritualist movements—as represented by Franck and Schwenkfeld—showed a tendency to move from supernaturalism to naturalism.

The Enlightenment of the eighteenth century was the high tide for the continuity position, creating a serious crisis for traditional theology. The nineteenth century was an extremely chaotic period in theology. Western theologians tried to build theologically on the ruins left by the “New Thought” of the eighteenth century, but we do not see that they established anything stable. They

soon encountered a series of unavoidable crises. Even in the nineteenth century, while most Western theologians still naively indulged in complacent dreams, the sensitive Danish theologian Kierkegaard was already sending out a discontinuity position alarm. He said that the basic principle of religion and human life was not “both/and” but “either/or.” He stressed that God was “wholly other,” that eternity was outside the realm of time, and that humanity was “sick unto death.” He foresaw the collapse of Western culture, but his melancholic prophecy was too much ahead of its time. It was only when Europe was awakened by warfare in the twentieth century that his pessimistic views found an audience. Today’s West has rapidly and broadly accepted the principles of the discontinuity view because from within their own “lostness” they could not see hope for the human race; they were hostile to all progress and insisted on taking historical progress as an illusion, as a plot of the devil. They cheerfully hailed the bankruptcy of nineteenth century liberal theology, the abandonment of the continuity position, and the trampling of the banner of freedom and democracy. They lauded the final victory which the discontinuity view has achieved. But in the midst of this tragic victory they united to sing the swan song of humanity. Like many theologians before them, they raised the banner of orthodoxy— “Neo-Orthodoxy.”

This was when the church of new China came on the scene. We have spent a little time above, using the principles of discontinuity and continuity, to briefly examine the path of the historical development of theology. Because we are in the midst of history, we cannot break its flow, but must instead inherit and develop it. Equipped with this preliminary historical perspective, we can even better understand our position and conditions, and clearly see our mission and the task before us.

Our Problem and Path

Upon first entering this new era, we did not immediately see the full nature of our problem—nobody presented us with a ready list of the issues. At first, we felt insecure and apprehensive about our future; we hardly dared open our eyes. Like someone who has long lived in darkness, our eyes could not bear the sudden light, and we were forced to squint. We were much like the blind man in the Bible who, after being cured by Jesus, could only dimly see figures that looked like trees walking about (Mark 8:24). Naturally, he first asked: Are those people or trees? How is it that they can walk? How are they going to treat me? In the past seven years, we have gradually come to realize what our problems are, have solved some, and have discovered others. As our field of vision expands, we see a little more, a little farther, and a little more clearly, but we also encounter increasing problems. From the beginnings of human intellectual development down to the present, knowledge has always increased in this way, and human character has also developed in this way. This is a process of spiritual exploration, and also a process of growth in spiritual life. The heritage of Western Christianity is rich, but to us it is the same as the entire historical and cultural heritage of the human race is to a new-born infant; he must learn and come to understand it gradually. It is only through the process of growth and his life experience that he understands that a part of this heritage does have significance for his life, because it is only as this heritage is gradually absorbed and assimilated that he can take it as his own knowledge, as a source of assistance in considering and solving problems. There is much other material stored in history which is precious but has no significance for him. Many problems and methods for solving them found in history can be of indirect assistance to us, but only as reference material; we cannot directly apply them to our own task of construction.

Here, let us simply list the problems we have encountered. All theological problems are very practical. First, we encounter the two problems of understanding our environment and understanding ourselves. These two problems are mutually related because it is only when we understand our environment that we can really understand ourselves, and it is only when we clearly realize our position and standpoint that we can clearly view our environment. As we come to understand our environment, we must first comprehend what is happening around us through direct observation and contact, which leads to some rational understanding. Finally, we must weigh and judge it on the basis of standards we consider reliable, using common sense from daily life and reasoning derived from practice. We must also use our moral principles and the spiritual criteria of our faith to weigh everything in new China. But it is precisely in this last task of weighing and evaluating that we most profoundly discern that we must first accurately understand ourselves, that we begin to doubt the validity of the criteria which we use for evaluating our surroundings, and that we begin to question the accuracy of our judgments. We must seek the cause in ourselves.

This process of looking into ourselves provides a most important experience, an experience of objectively and boldly examining ourselves in the face of historical fact. Letting God's just and holy light illuminate the dark corners of our hearts is a spiritual experience of true repentance. It requires each person to be fully honest toward self, toward the world's affairs, and toward others, with not the slightest hypocrisy or concealment. It requires of us the ultimate humility and sincerity, admission of our frailty, sins and errors. It is only when we have fully repented of our sins that we can experience the shared love of our brothers and sisters. These experiences have been the most precious experiences of these first few years since Liberation. It is

only on such a foundation that we can understand God's love, justice and forgiveness, and know what kind of standard to use in judging the people and affairs around us.

It was only in this way, through an experience of spiritual hardship, that we came to affirm the present situation and accept new China. In new China there are still weaknesses, errors and imperfections, but in view of these massive social reforms, of our sense of respect and concern for people, and of our hatred and disgust for the greatest sins of human history—war and exploitation—we confess from our hearts that our faith can only lead us to conclude that “all these proceed from God's justice and goodness.” We see God's activity in the movement of history, and see reflections of God's image in the natural reason of humanity.

In the last two or three years we have heard Christians in many places discussing questions like the following: Does Christian faith require us to withdraw from the world? Can we love this world (including the society of new China)? Should we love it? Is the world completely under the power of the Evil One? What should the relationship be between those who believe in Christ and those who don't? Is God pleased with the good works done by non-believers; are they also from God? Is God carrying out his acts of justice and love by means of self-proclaimed non-believers? What should the relationship be between the church and the social system? Is there really a conflict between loving our country and loving church (loving God); is there an irreconcilable conflict? Do we now have religious freedom? In accepting and affirming new China and the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, do we submit ourselves to some kinds of restrictions in our faith? We have already had clear answers to many of these questions, and there is no need to repeat them here, but we should point out that these answers point in a common direction: they point from Western twentieth-century discontinuity principles back toward a continuity

view, from a view of an utterly transcendent God back toward immanence, from one end of the ellipse back toward the other.

People can't help but ask: Is history only moving in a cycle? Will humanity endlessly spin in circles? Is this real progress or an illusion? Western theologians suspiciously ask: Are you returning to the path of nineteenth-century American liberal theology? We firmly and confidently answer: "No."

We must simply and frankly point out that liberal theology is built on capitalist laissez-faire and the profit motive, and its slogan of freedom and democracy is only for the purpose of achieving free competition so that dog may eat dog. Theologically it distorts the teachings of the Bible and reduces religion to social morality, so it has very accurately been criticized by neo-orthodoxy as shallow, naive, hypocritical and failing to understand the basic nature of sin. We agree with these criticisms, but do not accept their inferences. Liberal theology was established on the basis of a collapsing social system; we are hearing witness to a society which is built on sincere mutual concern and an equal, reasonable relationship. It is only where the greatest majority of people have happiness and freedom that each individual can enjoy true advancement and freedom; it is only where society has salvation that there can be individual salvation. But the social significance of the gospel does not submerge the spiritual freedom and the vibrant experiences of the individual. So we firmly state: History does not repeat itself. We see the erroneous paths of those who have gone before us; now we are avoiding those traps and following a newly opened road.

Thus, we must rely on our own exploration and experience to solve some other problems which lie before us. We must ask: What is our view of the problem of sin? Is it possible that with a general improvement in "social

moral order” sin will automatically “decrease” in society or in the individual? On the one hand, we must profoundly and frankly consider the problem of sin. We cannot take the approach of evading the problem or burying our heads in the sand like an ostrich. On the other hand, we should not exaggerate the problem or absolutize it, thereby frightening or numbing ourselves. Admittedly, the origin of sin includes social factors, but spiritually sin also represents humanity’s imperfection and pride before God. Therefore, spiritual problems will not be solved just by changes in the social system, and sin will not vanish with the advance of social moral consciousness. Sin represents the ugly face of human nature, and it forces humanity to eternally look to God and seek salvation.

With regard to the question of salvation, we oppose taking sin as the foundation of the gospel and making human despair the basis for the future of the church. Instead, within God’s just and loving nature we find the source of salvation. The reason the gospel is necessary, and the reason that the church has a future, is not that humanity has no future or that the world is without hope. Instead, the reason is that salvation is an act of God in his plan of creation. It is not because of our complete depravity that God seeks humankind. Humankind is the crown of God’s creation, created in his image to tend this world for and with him, and it is for this reason that it is worthwhile for God to save humanity.

How then should the gospel be preached? When everyone is yearning for socialist construction, when everyone feels that the world can be transformed for the better, does not the gospel become foolishness? This is the most important question now facing us, and it forces us to go a step further and ask: What is the gospel after all? Do the answers found in history satisfy us? We must return to the Bible, and in the experience of the believers of the early

church find the causes which led them to seek the good news. We must also look for the answer to this question in our own religious experience. Finally, we must admit that although this question has been raised, we still do not have a wealth of experience and understanding to help us answer it. Now this is a key issue in our theological construction.

In the future we will encounter many more new problems, problems more difficult to solve. For example, how to justify on theological grounds our opting for socialism and socialist construction? How shall we deal with the relationship between church and state? In this divided world, how shall we deal with the problem of worldwide church fellowship? There is also the problem of history and eschatology... But the duty of theology is not to create problems; it is rather to help us find good answers when we discover problems in our religious life. Our responsibility is to seek the "points" which are raised by our spiritual experience, to link these points into a curve, and then see where the curve leads us.

Finally, let us return once more to the problem of discontinuity and continuity. We have already pointed out that the two views are not entirely mutually exclusive, so after we turn back from an extreme discontinuity view, where shall we go? Since we are neither able nor willing to return to the old path, what should our direction be? In our experience we lack maturity, our vision is narrow and shallow, and we do not dare pretend that our ignorance is wisdom, but we firmly believe that a road leading to higher truth lies before us. It will break through the impasse of Western theology, cause people in the midst of new kinds of social relationships to better understand God's creative wisdom and saving love, and cause the gospel to truly become the good news for all humankind, just as the prophet announcing the coming of Christ proclaimed the good news that the human race would exist in harmony and peace, making God's glory shine over the whole earth.

This is the theological task given to us by God. With a pious and humble attitude, without flinching or boasting, relying on the guidance of God's loving wisdom, and with hearts full of confidence, we should run the race set before us.

Author's Comments, 1991

Thirty turbulent years have passed since I wrote this essay, and even I had forgotten it. A few years ago, I happened to come across it in some old theological journals kept by an alumnus, and some friends suggested that it should be republished. It is already covered with the dust of history, but I feel that its topic, the task of theological construction in the Chinese church, will never be out of date, and that some of the issues raised therein are worth exploring in today's new situation. I therefore decided to "cast a brick to attract jade," and hope for critiques, discussion and correction from co-workers who are interested in these questions. In order to preserve the original historical form of the article, it has not been revised, with the exception of a few words and phrases.

In the past thirty-five years there have been great changes in the world and in the national situation, and under the guidance of God the Chinese church has traveled along a rugged and tortuous road. It finally emerged from the valley of death and is now growing vigorously. There are many new spiritual experiences worthy of our serious attention and deserving of theological reflection and interpretation. There are now many things to be heard, seen and done which had never been thought of and could not have been imagined thirty-five years ago. The essay now seems one-sided, shallow and naive in many places. There are several areas which I think should be considered in present discussion of the theological construction of the Chinese Church.

Thirty years ago, China was in a state of isolation imposed from both the outside and from within. Hoisting the Three-Self banner, stressing an independent self-governing church, and casting off the control and restraints of foreign mission agencies were basic conditions for changing the countenance of the Chinese church and establishing a sense of self-identity. Theological thought necessarily reflected this spirit. But this does not imply that we would always be isolated from the world church. The independent, self-governing Chinese church has already won the approval and respect of world Christianity. Our witness has had a positive impact all over the world. In order to enrich ourselves, we should draw beneficial experience from world Christianity. Among the most important changes in world Christianity over the last thirty years are the awakening of the Third World churches and the consequent indigenization and contextualization movements, the secularism and pluralism of the “old Christian nations” after the “turbulent sixties,” the major reforms in Catholicism after Vatican II, and the development of the ecumenical movement over the last two decades. Under the open door and reform policies, the Chinese church has taken on a new stature as a part of the church universal, and as an active member of the world Christian family. This does not weaken our Three-Self consciousness, for it can even deepen and develop our Three-Self spirit. We should try to enrich ourselves by selectively absorbing some of the factors of the various theological currents and views which have emerged around the world over the last few decades, so that these may be reflected in our own theological construction.

In China, we have undergone both positive and negative experiences, and have discovered much new light on the path of the church’s progress. A question especially worthy of mention is that of how to sift through China’s rich historical and cultural heritage, appropriating that which is beneficial

and incorporating it into Christian doctrine in order to give our propagation work more distinctively Chinese cultural characteristics and make the gospel message easier for the Chinese masses to understand and accept. In every area there are many tasks awaiting our diligent and careful effort. I believe we will certainly reap a rich harvest.

The road of theological construction has no end. Before us lies a lofty peak, which calls us to unite our hearts and efforts as we struggle to climb it.

Written in 1956, this essay originally appeared in the *Nanjing Theological Review*, Nos. 5 and 6, 1957. It was later reprinted in *Nanjing Theological Review*, Nos. 14/15 (1-2, 1991): 7, with added observations by the author written in 1991.

This translation by Don Snow originally appeared in *Chinese Theological Review*: 1991 (No. 7): 53-76. It has been updated here to incorporate minor corrections and conform to the current format of the journal.

Faith Seeking and Theological Exploration —Chen Zemin and his *Seeking and Witnessing* 信仰寻求与神学探索—陈泽民及其《求索与见证》

LIU RUOMIN 刘若民

Professor Chen Zemin was born into a Christian family in Shantou, Guangdong province, in October 1917. His grandfather was one of the first group of evangelists in the Chaoshan area of the province. His father was a middle school teacher, his mother a devout Christian.

In 1931, at the age of 14, Chen Zemin was deeply moved on hearing the revivalist preacher Dr. Song Shangjie 宋尚节 (Stephen Song) in Shantou. He resolved to become an evangelist and thought of giving up his studies then and there to go out evangelizing. But he abandoned his plan to interrupt his studies on the advice of a foreign teacher at the Queguang Middle School in Shantou. As a student Chen Zemin not only worked hard, he had wide-ranging interests. Because he had come into contact with foreign missionaries and middle school teachers quite early on, he had a solid foundation in English. He also began studying Greek and Latin during middle school. His English fluency meant he was able to defray his expenses by doing some work to help his foreign teachers. Through industrious study and practice, his musical talent too became apparent in his middle school years.

In 1937, with the recommendation of a foreign teacher at the Queguang Middle School (now Jinshan Middle School), Chen began his studies at Hujiang University (Shanghai University), then a Baptist institution where he majored in sociology and minored in music and Christian theology,

receiving his B.A. in 1941. A paper Chen wrote in his junior year (1939), “The Practical Tasks of Building New China: The Contribution of the Christian Church” was published in *Truth and Life* 真理与生命.¹

After graduating from Hujiang University, Chen Zemin entered Nanking Seminary, which had temporarily relocated to the Shanghai International Settlement, to study theology in the graduate department. He received his B.D. degree in 1944. Following this, he served as director (hospital chaplain) in the Shaoxing (Zhejiang province) Fukang Hospital for six years. While in this position, he came into contact with a wide variety of people at different levels of society. As head of the Religious Social Services Department, he was able to approve applications for free medical services from patients in need and some of the many people he helped became lifelong friends.

In addition to what we now understand as the ordinary work of regular pastors, his work in Shaoxing required constant interaction with patients and their families, which meant that he was actually engaged in work which is extremely important in today’s church—pastoral care and counselling. He also translated some books on pastoral psychology that were published and distributed by the Chinese Christian Literature Society. Personally, he felt literary work was of great importance—his *Pillar of Cloud, Pillar of Fire*, a collection of essays and devotional writings for patients, was published during his time in Shaoxing. This book is still highly valued by Chinese Christians, who even now face a dearth of devotional works.

1 Chen Zemin, 《中国基督教在建设新中国努力的途径》, *Truth and Life* 真理与生命, Vol. 12, nos. 5-6 (October 1939): 301-332. English version: “An Overview of the Theoretical Foundation and Practical Tasks of Building New China: The Contribution of the Chinese Church,” Don Snow, trans. in *Chinese Theological Review* 23: 86-117.

In 1949, Chen Zemin was admitted to Andover Newton Theological School and began plans to study in the US for a master's degree in philosophy. He made two special trips to Shanghai to see Luo Zhufeng 罗竹风, who oversaw united front work in East China, and was director of Religious Affairs for the East China Military and Political Affairs Committee. Due to the unsettled social and international situation at the time, Luo asked him to postpone for a time. But the Korean War broke out shortly after and Chen could not realize his plans. Not until 1981, when the China Programme of the Canadian Council of Churches held its "A New Beginning" conference in Montreal, did Chen visit the US and Canada along with Bishop K.H. Ting and Dr. Han Wenzao 韩文藻. His experience was one of the reasons for his subsequent expanded efforts to train, encourage and support young students to go abroad for study. He believed that although there were many opportunities and methods for study, as well as many places to learn, the opportunities for each individual were limited. Thus one must study constantly and seize the chance for systematic study. Through a redoubling of efforts in study and exchanges, the disparity between the church in China and foreign churches, borne of decades-long isolation, could be remedied.

In the spring of 1950, Chen Zemin was invited to teach at Nanjing Theological Seminary as an assistant professor.² From then on, Chen Zemin worked and taught at the seminary until he withdrew from his administrative posts in 2002 and officially retired in 2010.

2 Nanjing Theological Seminary was the former "Jinling (Nanking) Seminary" that existed prior to the merger of 13 seminaries in East China in 1952. This new seminary was located on the campus of Nanking Seminary in Nanjing.

The editorial philosophy behind *Seeking and Witnessing*

The idea to publish a collection of Chen Zemin's works on the subject was broached early in the era of Theological Reconstruction. Professor Wang Peng 王芑, then in charge of the seminary's "three publications," and colleagues in the editorial office had already begun to gather materials. They invested a great deal of thought and energy in the project as well as organizing to encourage graduate students to translate some essays Professor Chen had written in English. But the book did not come into being (see Prof. Duan's "Preface" to *Seeking and Witnessing*) until late 2006, when, with the expressed interest and concern of many of the leaders of the CCC&TSPM at the time, the decision was made to select Chen Zemin's most representative essays and publish a *Collected Works*.

The title of the book was the result of extensive consultation and revisions by Professor Chen and a number of colleagues. Other titles that were considered at the time included *Explorations in Chinese Theology; In Search of Paths of Reconciliation with the People; Exploring the Truth; Efforts Exploring Faith and Practice*; and others. The final choice of *Seeking and Witnessing* was Chen's own, after Anselm of Canterbury's (1033-1109) "faith seeking understanding," as well as looking back to his "Theological Construction in the Chinese Church" 《中国神学建设的途径》, published in 1956, in which he had proposed the idea that "Theology is the church thinking." Theology is the reflection of the members of the Christian Church, characterized by soul-searching, criticism and ordering during the process of historical development and change. He felt that this was where the direction and meaning of his own faith and research lay.

The editorial reasoning behind the selection and arrangement of the manuscript was as follows:

- 1 From 1937, when Chen Zemin entered Hujiang University in Shanghai to major in sociology and minor in theology, his study and research in theology, and engagement in church pastoring and theological education covered 70 years. From 1950 on, he was involved in theological education at Nanjing Theological Seminary, and in the day-to-day work of the seminary for 57 years. His essays were representative of the Chinese church and the development of its theological thinking. His theoretical explorations and research in theology, theological education, church music and pastoral practice in the church were all representative. If these could be well organized and edited, they would gain the attention of theological researchers in and outside the church and moreover, could provide material for further research.
- 2 Editorial philosophy: The contents should focus on theological research, concepts in theological education, church music and pastoral practice.
 - A) Theological studies: Concepts in theological research; church history/ history of Christian thought; indigenization and contextualization (Christ and culture) of theological studies; the Chinese church/ Chinese Theological Reconstruction; the relationship between the Chinese church and Chinese society.
 - B) Research in theological education: focused on teaching seminary students; texts of important sermons and exhortations opening semesters and at graduation ceremonies.
 - C) Explorations in church music: theories of sacred music and hymns.

- D) Theological exploration in pastoral practice/practical ministry: important devotional works and sermons.
- 3 In addition to examining the theoretical aspects of Christian church music, Chen Zemin composed original hymns, such as “Resurrection Morn,” “Hymn for Easter,” “The Creator’s Artistic Brush,” etc.

His “translated” hymns were included because the translation of poetry is very different other forms of translation; it not only requires that the words (lyrics) be accurately translated but must also strive for a reasonable fit of the translation with the melody. The translation of this type of poetry is in itself a process of re-creation; thus their inclusion.

[N.B. Pages 71-74 of Dr. Liu’s essay, not included here, contain a listing of Chen Zemin’s work, arranged in three categories: Theology and Theological Studies; Theological Education; Hymnody and Hymns. Publication dates are given as well as details of general content, for example: Indigenous theology; sinicization of hymnody and hymns, etc.—ed.]

Forward-looking explorations in theology from the 1950s

In 1956, Chen Zemin published “Theological Construction in the Chinese Church.” It was in this treatise that he put forward the idea of “the task of building Chinese theology.” He set out a fully detailed proposal of the direction in which the construction of Chinese Christian theological thinking should develop. In his introduction to the historical development of systematic theology, he gives a systematic analysis of its endless orbit around two foci in an ellipsis, sometimes closer to God as center and sometimes moving away from God toward humanity as center, which leads him

finally to his proposal that “theology is the church thinking.” In other words, theology and faith cannot be completely equivalent. “Theology is the theory of the spiritual experience of the church; it is a summation of the religious experience of the church in a given historical period. As a system of thought, it begins with traditional doctrines and beliefs, but then takes fresh and distinctive spiritual experiences, systemizes them and elevates them to the level of theory which is then used to guide the work of the church and to indicate the direction in which it should move.”³

Some think that theology is an extraordinarily profound study, an unfathomable branch of learning. Others think theology is a purely scholarly pursuit, with little direct connection to the daily lives of Christians. Still others think it is enough for Christians to read the Bible and pray; theology is a task for theologians. Actually, theology is not solely the task of scholars. Theological exploration is in fact being carried out every day by every one of us Christians. The understanding and interpretation of our faith by Christians is in fact the beginning of the work of theology. Theology and theological study should be the mission of every Christian. When we begin our search for faith and begin to understand faith, this is when theological activity begins. The church’s pastoral work, as well as a believer’s understanding and interpretation of their own faith and life, are all concrete expressions of faith. Theology is the church thinking. It is the ordering and interpretation of the Christian’s church life and spiritual experience.⁴

3 Chen Zemin, “中国教会神学建设的任务,” (Theological Construction in the Chinese church) *Nanjing Theological Review*, nos. 5 and 6 (1957). Reprinted 1992 in 《金陵神学文选》(Writings from Nanjing Theological Seminary) (Nanjing: Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, 1991). Don Snow trans. in *Chinese Theological Review*: 1991, 53. See p. 38 in this issue.

4 *Ibid.*, 50 (Chinese version).

Christians talking about faith and life, instruction, preaching or public prayer are all “theology”; Christians cannot avoid applying some theological reflection. At the same time, theology is not some conventional established framework. Theology is lively and needs to keep moving forward. In addition, we cannot simply explain passages from the Bible, without showing others that we live according to the teachings in those passages. Thus, a healthy theology is one that takes seriously both the content of faith and the conduct of believers.

If, for Christians, faith is “all in all,” then faith is one hundred percent—one cannot believe only to sixty percent. Faith is either at 100 percent or at zero. If something is held back, then there is no belief. Faith itself must be with all one’s heart, all one’s nature, all feeling, all strength, completely given to the Lord: this is what we call faith.

Creed is what has been adopted by the Ecumenical Councils; these are the content of basic faith. Dogma is truth revealed by God and affirmed by the church, what believers must declare and hold to.

Doctrine refers to what a group of believers in a particular tradition hold in common to be true. But not all doctrines are dogma, for a doctrine has not necessarily attained the status of dogma. For example, the Orientalist Orthodox Church stresses the distinctiveness among persons of the Trinity, while the Western churches stress the unity of the persons of the Trinity, which implies a concrete community (*perichoresis*), its representativeness, and voluntary nature.

In general, theology refers to introspection on faith by individual thinkers; its content need not be regulated by the faith community or tradition. Christian thought is broader than Christian theology, and encompasses the economic,

political, social, aesthetic and cultural characteristics of Christianity at a given time.⁵

Faith must be a genuine submitting of ourselves to Christ. It is not just a matter of simply believing. We should also seek the truth and explore in scholarly research and theological studies. In short, we should be faithful to Christ and honest in learning.

Sections of Chen's 1956 essay include: "Continuity or Discontinuity"; "two focal points of theological study: God and humanity"; "Loci and Foci"; etc. and other theological analyses and ideas. These are tremendous breakthroughs in the methodology of theological studies, because these are attempts to establish a corresponding "inclusivity" in relation to "exclusivity" on a theological basis. In terms of methodology, this begins by breaking through self-confinement to bring about the de-idolization of a theology centered on itself.

Incorporating the social realities of the 1950s with the far-reaching influence of missionaries and mission boards, plus the fact that in its previous hundred years' of history, the Chinese church in China had not managed a systematic reflection and summing up, Chen Zemin suggested that by the 1950s, Protestant Christianity in China had no theology of its own. Therefore, in the 1950s, along with the transformation of the whole of Chinese society, as well as the real disruption in theological exchange between Christianity in China and Western churches, the church in China had theological work to do. Only in this way could the church's needs for development be met.

Previously, the Chinese church had been greatly influenced by the theological ideas of the earlier Great

5 Zheng Xunjia 郑顺佳, "历史神学"(Historical theology), in Shen Xuanren 沈宣仁, 《新世纪的神学议程》(Theology for the new century), 68.

Awakening and Revivalism. Basically, it had little knowledge of the theological debates and various theological understandings taking place in the wider world at the time. In what was actually a period when resources for theological studies and methodologies were relatively scarce, Chen Zemin had to focus on combining theology with reality. A possible way forward for Chinese theology was to turn from a redemption-centeredness to a creation-centeredness. Such a theology asserts its purpose as adaptation; that is, to enable Christianity in China to be truly able to adapt to the needs of Chinese social development and become a religion that could be tolerated and even understood by the larger society at the time. One urgent task of theological studies at the time was “survival”—there was a possibility then for the church to gain a foothold in society and to be tolerated. This possibility hinged on a smooth transition from being asked to renounce the label of “foreign religion” to actively seeking survival, to actively adapting. At the time Christians were a tiny “special group” in society. They were not the social mainstream, much less “something that captured people’s attention.”

We are Christians. At the same time we are part of humanity, like others. We, Chinese, have a specific religious identity and a cultural identity—non-Chinese and other nationalities can substitute other identities. Religion and culture represent things we are not willing to estrange ourselves from. We cannot have one without the other. When we speak of “Chinese (Christian) theology,” we are aware of the importance that we begin as both Chinese and Christians.

The issue of identity is a crucial issue for people’s lives. If theology is a form of self-reflection, it is self-knowledge and we should see its significance in our lives, that is, to see who we are through our relationships with religion, cultural background and basic commitment.

First of all, can we choose a Chinese identity or a Christian one? Christian faith should be conscious free choice. But from a theological perspective, some people may be “predetermined or predestined,” by which I mean by living under the consciousness of God’s grace, we learn our Christian mission through practice. This is a focal point of the Protestant tradition, by which the question of identity has a direct relationship to destiny. But looked at from a more profound level of self-awareness, couldn’t we say that this is also the way we become Chinese; that is to say, our being Chinese is also “predestined!?”

It seems that we are able to abandon our original faith or culture for a different faith or culture if we feel that the original has lost its meaning; or we might feel alienated from it, even disparage our own culture. This is not the way it should be, and it is a very shameful matter.

Conversely, some people cling stubbornly to our culture or our religious traditions, thinking that the meaning it gives our identities is eternal and unchanging. This is also wrong.

We should take the initiative to correct this, giving it a new meaning as we internalize it. We can look for an interpretation and lifestyle that fits our understanding of past traditions and future destinies. Thus, the task of philosophy or theology is to provide a range of instruction or course direction by which to find a meaningful identity.

Thus, a Chinese theologian can understand what it means to be a Chinese and a Christian from the relationship between Chinese and Christians. For instance, instead of revising the meaning of the two from a larger philosophical scope or framework (such as Confucianism) we should place them in more appropriate and contemporary ways of thought (socialism, liberation, humanism). Many Protestant thinkers seem to be engaged in the former, while current Catholic figures have taken the latter direction. In any event, while engaging in their theological work, there is no need

for them to deny our culture on principle for the sake of our faith, nor is there any reason to deny our faith for the sake of our culture. The tensions between faith and culture are sometimes very distressing and we may even be induced to abandon one or the other as a result, or one of them may be weakened. However, this tension is assuredly very creative.

Chen Zemin suggests that the Chinese church must bravely face this new era and explain the changes it has wrought from a faith perspective. The purpose of such a theological position is in fact to enable Christianity to truly be able to adapt to the demands of Chinese social development and become part of advanced culture. Prof. Chen thinks that “the work of reconstructing theology in the Chinese church should be the creation, ordering and interpretation of the life of the church and spiritual experience it witnesses to in socialist society. In the young Chinese church, seeking a new church life, summing up experience, should come first before the resolution of theological questions or the creation of a systematic theology Our present approach to theological questions ... is that experience precedes theory, that witness is more important than the metaphysical. This method of theological research is to first find problems in religious life and then to find a solution. Our responsibility is to seek the ‘points’ which are raised by our spiritual experience, to link these points into a curve, and then see where the curve leads us.” “Continuity: inheriting history and developing history”: “the two focal points of theological study: God and humanity, the “trajectory” and other methodologies of theological study Chen proposed at that time remain pertinent today, especially with post-modern trends and the mainstream era of peace and dialogue, and will continue to inspire in the decades to come.

Chen Zemin’s main theological thought may be summarized as follows: With regard to combining Christian

theology and Chinese traditional culture, he emphasizes that the Chinese church should focus on real, living Chinese culture, that which subtly influences and has penetrated into the daily thinking and habits of the people. His theory of God focuses on divine love (*agape*); in Christology, he highlights the idea of the Cosmic Christ; the Holy Spirit as the Giver of Life; and humanity as “made in the image of God.” His conception of Christian life emphasizes the unity of faith and works, love of country and love of church, glorifying God and benefiting humanity; and in eschatology, he emphasizes a bright and beautiful future, a new heaven and a new earth. In Christ, all are one.

Post-1980s: Theological Education Work

In 1958, during the Anti-Rightist Campaign, Chen Zemin nearly became a “Rightist.” As he recalls it, at the last juncture, because Bishop Ting and Luo Zhufeng felt that the seminary had enough Rightists, there was no need to make him one. However, many people thought he was a Rightist and over the next two decades, many still regarded him as such, though he had not been officially designated as one.

During the Cultural Revolution era (1966-1976), the seminary was closed, and all public church activities were stopped. Chen Zemin was sent down to the countryside for labor and study together with others classified as bad elements. At the end of the Cultural Revolution, through the efforts of Nanjing University President Kuang Yaming (匡亚明), Chen Zemin and his former seminary colleagues were assimilated into Nanjing University, and Bishop K.H. Ting was made a vice-president of the University (until 2002), where a research group on Western religion was set up.

Chen was mainly involved in a large amount of translation work, including translating UN documents into Chinese, and editing a Chinese-English dictionary.

In 1979, he began to participate in the editorial work for the *Encyclopedia of China*, edited by Bishop Ting and Luo Zhufeng 罗竹风. Chen Zemin was editor of the “Christianity section,” for which he wrote several entries. The volume was published in 1988.

In the late 1970s, the Institute for Religious Studies was established at Nanjing University. As a post-graduate tutor at the Institute, Chen Zemin and other former professors of the Nanjing Union Theological Seminary began to train religious researchers for the Institute. Many scholars now in important positions at university departments of religion and religious research institutes were tutored by Chen Zemin in their master’s studies. At the same time, Chen and other former seminary professors were invited to lecture on religious studies at Nanjing University. Many young and middle-aged academics still speak of these lively and fascinating lectures on religious studies in the early 1980s as if they happened yesterday. Many scholars admit their interest in theology began with these lectures.

With the end of the Cultural Revolution, Christianity in China experienced a springtime —the church was reopened. The roots of Christian faith remained, and this was a time of the reappearance of the power of resurrection in the church. In the spring of 1981, the Nanjing Union Theological Seminary enrolled its first batch of students following the resumption of classes in the very limited conditions of the time. What guaranteed that things went smoothly was that there were enough teachers still at the seminary. Chen Zemin served as the dean of NJUTS when it reopened and was mainly in charge of teaching and academic research. His idea of theological education was to train theological researchers and pastoral workers who practiced “reconciliation with the people.”

Students eagerly sought out Chen's lively, open-minded and fascinating lectures. His research interests and areas were very broad: theology, systematic theology, history of thought, church history, pastoral theology and worship; Christian music, whether theory or performance. Chen Zemin has been involved in all these, so people called him an "encyclopedia." He was very approachable and amiable as well, and the seminary students called him Uncle Chen.

In 2002, Chen Zemin retired from his administrative duties. However, he still insisted on teaching and mentoring graduate students. Only in 2009, when the seminary left the old downtown Nanjing campus and moved to the Jiangning University City, more than 20 kilometers distant, did the 93-year-old professor cease his daily teaching.

While still involved in daily teaching and administration at the seminary, Chen Zemin was also involved in the church. From 1985 to 1995, and from 2002 to 2007, he twice served as senior pastor of St. Paul's Church in Nanjing. *Faith Leads Us Forward*, published in 1988, is a collection of sermons Chen Zemin preached at St. Paul's.

In the 1980s, Chen Zemin had been vice-president of the Chinese Society of Religion, and achieved much in that post. In 1981, he presided over the translation of *The History of Christian Thought* (3 volumes). In 2002, Nanjing Union Theological Seminary produced a golden jubilee edition to commemorate the seminary's 50th anniversary. In 1991, he co-edited with Luo Zhufeng the three-volume *Introduction to Religious Studies*, published by East China Normal University Press; in 1996, *An Essential Christian Catechism* was published by Jiangsu Ancient Books Publishing House. Well received, the book went into a second printing; in 1992, six of his important essays were included in *Theological Writings from Nanjing Seminary*.

In addition to his important position in Chinese theological education and academic research, Chen

Zemin valued exchanges with the foreign community of theological scholars. He was invited to visit, exchange, and lecture at church institutions and theological research bodies around the world: Canada in 1981; Japan in 1983; the Czech Republic in 1985; he lectured at the Chinese University of Hong Kong in 1986; visited Britain in 1987; the United States in 1989; visited various countries and attended international conferences in 1991; lectured at the University of Hamburg in Germany in 1993; participated in international conferences in Singapore in 1993; visited and lectured at Columbia Theological Seminary in 1996-1997....

From 1995 to 1996, in his eighties, Chen Zemin spent a year at Columbia Theological Seminary. He planned to write his systematic theology while there and completed the first four chapters. On his return to China, his time was occupied by Theological Reconstruction and he could not complete his book as planned.

Overtures and efforts in indigenizing Chinese hymns

In addition to his efforts in theological studies and theological education, Chen Zemin was also a church musician who valued music theory education and worked in composition, performance and directing. On the one hand, Chen Zemin was committed to the sinicization and nationalization of Chinese Christian hymns. At the same time, he paid special attention to imbuing hymns with positive theological thinking. In 1983, he was a member of the editorial committee for the CCC&TSPM publication of *The New Hymnal* 赞美诗 (新编). Prior to his work on the new hymnal, Chen Zemin composed lyrics and music for a number of excellent Chinese hymns; four of his hymns were included in the new hymnal.

Written just after the Cultural Revolution, his “The Creator’s Artistic Brush,” was not only elegant and profound, but also reflected his theological views and his fervent hopes for the church and society, as the churches reopened. His “Resurrection Morn” is also well-loved; and “Rejoice Always,” a hymn that anyone related to NJUTS knows, reflects the true inner world of Christians—in spite of countless ups and downs, they treat people, the world and the society with love and sincerity, so that their hearts will always be joyful.

As longtime director of the NJUTS choir, Chen Zemin was also dedicated to the composition and arrangement of music for the choir. From 1984-1986, he served as editor-in-chief for the publication *Anthems for Choirs* (vols. 1-4). He also served as editor-in-chief of *Chinese Sacred Music* 华夏圣诗. Volumes 1-5 were published in Nanjing, while volumes 4-5 were published in Singapore, an expression of the concept of the sinicization and nationalization of Chinese church music.

Rev. Dr. Liu Ruomin 刘若民 received his M.Div. from Nanjing Union Theological Seminary in 2003 and his Ph.D. in theology from the University of Heidelberg in 2013. He is Head of Studies at the Mission Academy of the theological faculty at University of Hamburg. *The Church in China in the 20th Century: Collected Writings of Chen Zemin*, edited by Liu Ruomin and Richard Mouw, was published by Wipf & Stock, August 2018.

Nanjing Theological Review, No. 3 (2016): 67-82.

Works of Chen Zemin Published in the *Chinese Theological Review*

The *Chinese Theological Review*, vol. 22 (2010) included a list of works by Professor Chen Zemin that had appeared, whether in English original or in translation, in the *Review* thus far. Professor Chen was a prolific writer and his appearances in these pages did not end in 2010. Here is the complete list, a small sample of his oeuvre.

“Faith Leads Us Forward,” 1985: 127 (sermon)

“Self-Propagation in the Light of the History of Christian Thought,” 1986: 18

“On Nanjing Union Theological Seminary,” 1987: 45

“The Heavenly Vision,” 1987:93

“Living as Christians Today: Biblical Insights,” 1988:47.

“Theological Construction in the Chinese Church,” 1991: 53

“Pastor and Priest,” 1991: 121 (sermon)

“Christ and Culture in China: A Sino-American Dialogue,” vol. 8: 63

“Remarks at the Close of the Fortieth Anniversary Celebrations for Nanjing Union Theological Seminary,” vol. 9: 5

“Y.T. Wu: A Prophetic Theologian,” vol. 10: 148

“Introduction” (with Erskine Clark and Robert Evans) vol. 11: 2: 1

“Inculturation of the Gospel and Hymn Singing in China,” vol. 12:85

“To Unite All in Christ, That We May Become One,” vol. 12: 154 (sermon)

“The Church’s Approach to Intellectuals,” vol. 13: 37

“Intensify Theological Reconstruction in the Chinese Church,” vol. 14: 41

“Living is Christ and Dying is Gain” vol. 23: 123 (sermon)

“Faith’s Journey” Foreword to *Love Never Ends*, vol. 16: 63

“An Overview of the Theoretical Foundation and Practical Tasks of Building New China: The Contribution of the Chinese Church” (Shanghai, 1939), vol. 23:84

“God is with Us,” vol. 23: 118 (sermon)

“To Unite All in Christ, That We May Become One,” vol. 23: 123 (sermon)

“Retrospect and Prospect: October 2010 Alumni Retreat Address,” vol. 24:133

“I Still Have Something to Say,” vol. 25: 141

Wei Zhuomin's Theological Proposals for the Sinicization of Christianity*

韦卓民基督教中国化神学思想刍议

HU YINGQIANG 胡应强

Wei Zhuomin 韦卓民 (Francis C.M. Wei) is an internationally known Christian educator, philosopher, translator and theologian. He was a scholar of both Chinese and Western learning and made notable achievements in all these areas through his writing, translating, teaching and research. The influence of his numerous students in education and academia has been lasting and wide-ranging. He was also a highly creative theologian. In the 1940s and 50s, the phrase “Zhao in the north and Wei in the south,” was well-known in Chinese Protestant circles, referring to two representative Chinese Protestant theologians, T.C. Chao (Zhao Zichen 赵紫宸) in Beijing and Wei Zhuomin in the south. To date, Wei's writings and translations in the fields of philosophy, higher education, and even religious culture have attracted wide interest among scholars and have been quite thoroughly studied and organized.¹ However, compared to the many

* Paper presented at the 12th Forum on “The Role and Influence of the Christian Religion in Contemporary Chinese Society,” held jointly by the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in Hong Kong, S.A.R. with Nanjing Union Theological Seminary. With edits by the author.

1 The *Collected Works of Wei Zhuomin* has been published in Wuhan by Central China Normal University. Several generations of scholars from the university have collected and organized over 20 collections of papers totaling 7,200,000 characters in 11 volumes, a lifetime of Wei Zhuomin's academic achievements.

www.ccnu.com.cn/zonghe/2016/0912/16376.html

invitations he received during his lifetime to lecture and teach at world famous church universities such as Christ College London, Yale Divinity School, Chicago University, Columbia University, Union Seminary in New York, and Episcopal Divinity School in Boston, all theologically prestigious and influential in the church, the results of current academic and Chinese Christian circles research into Wei Zhuomin's theological thinking is clearly inadequate.²

In this essay I will first set forth the background and context that shaped Wei's theological thinking on the Sinicization of Christianity, and then explore his theological reflection on and church practice of Sinicization, finally summarizing the significance of his theological thinking on Sinicization. I hope that this essay can serve as an incentive to others and spur more penetrating and comprehensive research, as our humble contributions to the Sinicization of Christianity that is currently being promoted in Chinese Protestant Christianity.

A scholar accomplished in both Chinese and Western learning

C.M. Wei grew up in a traditional family in south China. As

2 Current publications from Chinese Christian circles include: He Wenbo 何文波, “道成人生—浅谈韦卓民本色化的基督论” (On the contextualized Christology of Wei Zhuomin), in *Nanjing Theological Review*, No. 1(2015): 205-216; Bao Zhaohui 包兆会, “历史文化名人信仰系列之二: 韦卓民” (Famous people of faith in history: 2: Wei Zhuomin), *Tian Feng*, No. 2 (2014); Xiao Anping 肖安平, “缅怀基督徒学人韦卓民先生,” (Remembering the Christian scholar Wei Zhuomin) in *Nanjing Theological Review*, No. 2 (1998); Mei Chuan 梅川, “缅怀教会前贤韦卓民博士” (Remembering Dr. Wei Zhuomin), *Tian Feng*, May (1996). Except for He Wenbo who considers Wei's contextualized Christology, all are mainly remembrances of Wei's life of love for country and love for church. It goes without saying that Wei's abundant thinking on the Sinicization of Christianity awaits more thoroughgoing research.

a result of having a Confucian scholar father, he began the study of the Chinese classics at home at the age of seven. It was his good fortune that since his father did business in Wuhan all year round, he realized the importance of English and so sent his just twelve-year-old son to a church school, exhorting him to do his utmost to learn English well, but on no account to pay attention to their religious education.³ As Wei recalls it: "Since I was studying in Boone Memorial School that later became Boone College, and went from middle school on to university ... I heard about the meaning of Christianity day and night, went to worship and was confined by school rules and regulations. Things did not turn out as father had wished. ... As time went on, the more I knew and thought and heard, the more doubts I had and so I turned to the Confucian classics. Gradually I began to feel that Confucian ethics and Christianity were not mutually exclusive."⁴ And so his interest in Christian faith and Western culture and philosophy was redoubled.

Though he learned a great deal about Christian theology at his famous church university, he also spent a lot of time studying the Chinese classics, and set about making a comparative study of Confucian culture and Christian doctrine, which led him to write an outstanding graduation thesis, "Religious Beliefs of the Ancient Chinese and their Influence on the National Character of the Chinese People." (This might be the first dissertation written by a Chinese undergraduate expounding the national character of Chinese religion, and because of this it was published in the university journal and shortly after reprinted in *The Chinese*

3 Winifred E. Hubert, "Dr. Wei: Builder of the Kingdom in China," in *The Spirit of Missions*, vol. 99, 19-23.

4 Wei Zhuomin 韦卓民, 《基督教的基本信仰》(Basic Christian faith), (Hong Kong: 1965), 1.

Recorder and Missionary Journal (教务杂志).⁵ In his thesis, Wei Zhuomin made a thorough exploration of the religious beliefs of the ancient Chinese, especially their concept of God and ancestor worship. He quoted passages from ancient works to show that these beliefs had deeply penetrated Chinese people's hearts and had become an integral part of the Chinese national character. He thus acknowledged the significance of these beliefs for Chinese people. At the same time, at his undergraduate graduation, he publicly stated that he was a Christian.⁶

In 1918, Wei went to study with the philosopher William E. Hocking at Harvard University. Focusing on the history of Western philosophy, he gained his M.A. within a year. In 1920, having completed the course work for his Ph.D. ahead of schedule, he returned to China where he became professor of philosophy at Wenhua University. In 1927 he was honored to go to England and study with L.T. Hobhouse at London University and B.H. Streeter at Oxford. While he was studying in England, he was asked to contribute to the series *China Today through Chinese Eyes*, and published an article titled "Synthesis of Cultures East and West." In this article Wei expressed his understanding of culture and a possible plan for exchanges and synthesis between Eastern and Western culture, which set the stage for his lifelong mission theology and research in education and offered major enlightenment for his contemporaries. Up until 1929, his research focused on traditional Chinese culture; his Ph.D. dissertation at the London University was titled *Confucian*

5 Yan Jiaqi and Gao Gao, *Turbulent Decade: A History of the Cultural Revolution*, D.W.Y. Kwok, trans. and ed. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1996), 67.

6 Ma Min 马敏, ed., 《韦卓民基督教文集》 (Wei Zhuomin's writings on Christianity), (Hong Kong: Institute of Sino-Christian Studies, 2000), 188.

Ethics. On receiving his degree, he returned to China to take up the position of president of Huazhong University.⁷

Exactly because Zhuo Weimin twice studied overseas with a number of famous scholars, he not only mastered Eastern and Western learning, he was good at explaining the profound in simple terms and at sharing his knowledge, which won him admiration among Western scholars. In 1934, he was invited to Yale University to attend an academic conference and the annual meeting of the Episcopal Church. During this time, he was invited to lecture at Yale Divinity School, the Columbia University Teachers College, the University of Chicago and Oberlin College. In 1937-38, he accepted a position as visiting professor of ethics at Yale Divinity School. In 1945-46, he was visiting professor at Union Seminary in New York City where he was honored with the inaugural Henry Luce Visiting Professorship in World Christianity. In 1946, at Andover-Newton Theological School, the Episcopal Theological School, and Union Theological Seminary he gave the Hewett Lectures and subsequently published these in New York as *The Spirit of Chinese Culture*. In sum, Wei persevered in his studies of China and his numerous experiences studying and lecturing overseas laid a solid foundation for his lifelong theological studies and practice in the Sinicization of Christianity with a global vision and regional concern.

Wei Zhuomin's theological thinking on the Sinicization of Christianity

This experience of academic research in synthesizing Eastern and Western cultures and that of studying and

7 Ma Min, "Preface," 弁言 in 《韦卓民基督教文集》 (Wei Zhuomin's writings on Christianity), (Hong Kong: Institute of Sino-Christian Studies, 2000), viii.

lecturing overseas gave Wei a solid academic grounding and broadened his vision. It gave him a universal vision of Christianity, while he also worked for the Sinicization of Christianity, that is to establish a contextualized Chinese Christianity. Wei pointed out that the Sinicization of Christianity meant interpreting Christian doctrine with a Chinese way of thinking and using Chinese culture to express a Christian faith: "Because China is one of the greatest nations on earth, with a quarter of the world's population and a 4000-year history and culture, and moreover, because no other nation on earth has been able to retain its form unchanged as China has ... completely isolated from outside thought, can we boldly suggest that from a Chinese standpoint, we use a comparatively ancient eastern culture to interpret Christianity, and begin the experiment by using Chinese culture?"⁸

In using Chinese culture to interpret Christian doctrine and establish a sinicized Christianity, Wei warned that one must be careful to avoid two types of extremist thinking that would lead in the direction of erroneous thinking. One type is to over-emphasize and even exaggerate the basic differences between Christianity and a Chinese traditional culture that prioritizes Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, maintaining that it is absolutely impossible for Christianity and Chinese culture coexist, and therefore to insist that only a Christianity with Western characteristics is true, universal Christianity. This view clearly smacks of Western centralism, because the universality of Christianity should transcend the cultural characteristics of a region or nation (people). The other type of wrong orientation is to simply synthesize Christian universality as if it had been part of ancient China

8 Wan Faxian 万法先 et al, trans. and edit, 《韦卓民博士教育文化论文集》(Dr. Wei Zhuomin's writings on education and culture) (Taipei, 1980), 118.

all along. This approach explains Christianity as being replete with Chinese ideals and attaches traditional Chinese concepts to Christianity, or is too loose and casual, as if using Chinese phrases to explain Christianity is a matter of course, while overlooking the many distinct characteristics of the two cultures. Christianity, after all, is a foreign import, and not intrinsically Chinese. Therefore, the understanding and interpretation of Christianity cannot deviate from Christianity's original basic doctrines. A proper approach would be to learn as much as possible from experience and observation whether or not there are, in the spirit of Chinese culture, points of mutual agreement and mutual harmony with the Christian view of life. Without contradicting Chinese people's ideas and feelings, are there any factors in the spirit of Chinese culture that can be used as a medium of expression or points of convergence with Christian doctrinal thinking to explain Christian doctrine, construct Chinese theology and Chinese Christianity, while at the same time enriching and refining the universality of Christianity.⁹

Wei Zhuomin conducted in-depth comparative studies and found that Chinese culture and Christianity had the following areas of correspondence

- the Word become human life and the union of heaven and humanity;
- Jesus' love and Confucian human-heartedness;
- the concept of eternal life and that of immortality;
- and the special emphasis in both Christianity and Confucianism on inner self-cultivation— achieving perfection through self-control and discipline.

Wei held that one had only to find the linkages between these areas of correspondence, respect the Chinese mindset

9 Wei Zhuomin, *The Spirit of Chinese Culture* (New York: Scribners, 1946), 28-29.

and habits and use these to advantage to promote the integration of Christianity with Chinese society and culture. It would then be possible to Christianize the lives of Chinese people and Sinicize Christianity.¹⁰

Wei was an advocate for the contextualization movement in the Chinese churches and a world-renowned scholar. In 1926, he was invited by the National Christian Council of China to speak to Chinese and foreign church leaders on the contextualization of Christianity, that is, the Sinicization of Christianity. He demonstrated that the source of such Sinicization lay within Christianity itself and had a deep theological foundation; firstly, its mystical Life which originated in the life of Jesus and pervaded the individual and the society; and second, the various forms through which people celebrate his life. In the first sense, Christianity is not native to China, but it is the one source of universal Christianity—God, and thus there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God. In the second sense Christianity as a life practice varies with time, place and people, meaning that it keeps developing and advancing as time passes, and preaches according to local conditions and people. As a bright moon casts different shadows onto different waters, everyone lives a unique life of Christ. This manifests Christ's abundance. Conversely, any attempt to force uniformity of expression will end in robbing the faith of its vitality. The same applies to the unique history and culture of every nation and people. Thus, it is imperative that all nations and peoples be given freedom to express and carry forward the life of Jesus. Only then can all nationalities in all parts of the world use their unique local forms of Christianity to demonstrate the universality of Christianity to all humanity. Specifically, in Wei's view, the contribution of the Chinese people to Christianity is to establish China's

10 Ma Min, "Preface to Wei Zhuomin's writings on Christianity," xxi-xxiv.

true or sinicized Christianity by using forms that please Chinese people to introduce the life of Christ to them! Once Chinese people's lives have come in contact with Christ's Life, they are free to carry it onward. Obviously, the concept of "place" in the "local Christian form" that Wei Zhuomin refers to here is not merely a geographical concept, or a kind of indication of a geopolitical region, but is based on the universal church movement, what has recently been termed the glocalization aspect of Christianity, a socio-historical concept. The simple concept of "place" is merely a static concept without an evolutionary history; it is only the social group, the community, or the cultural or faith group that can awaken, or switch on the meaning of the social, religious and individual faith connotations of this concept "place." Therefore, when Wei Zhuomin is using the concept of "local" or "local Christianity," this is already saying that this "locale" has become a dynamic construction in the context of glocalization. It can even become a basic conceptual tool of this study, discussing the two-way concern of universal Christianity in glocalization, a core issue of the localization of Chinese Christianity. That is to say, when Wei Zhuomin proposed the concept of "Chinese Christianity," "China," as a static place, has been activated by the Chinese Christian community. This shows that the local development of universal Christianity will develop and evolve in Chinese society and constitute a "Chinese Christianity." It will enter China's social-cultural structure and gradually form an indigenous and uniquely local Chinese belief organization.¹¹ After expounding on the basis and necessity of constructing a sinicized Christianity for China, he made a detailed analysis of the specific path for constructing it.

11 Li Xiangping 李向平, "中国 '地方基督教' 的关系建构" ("The construction of relationships in 'local Christianity' in China"), http://lxp0711.blog.hexun.com/20249327_d.html, original on 2008-06-20 22: 11: 37.

Wei Zhuomin believed that a sinicized Christianity can be constructed in a number of ways. The first step is to use sinicized forms to interpret and express the intrinsic nature of universal Christian faith. Wei Zhuomin once summed up the essence of Christian faith as the faith in God that Christians attain through faith in the Savior Jesus.¹² After clarifying the essence of Christian faith, Wei Zhuomin advocated in-depth investigation and compliance with the Chinese way of thinking, fully adopting the Chinese cultural forms that had become part of the Chinese way of life to preach the Christian faith to the Chinese. He made a profound analysis of the reason why the record of Christian missions in China was rather unsatisfactory: because Western missionaries refused to understand Chinese culture through a Chinese cultural awareness and social background. Therefore, Wei Zhuomin advocated that Christianity should absorb Chinese cultural forms, and integrate Chinese culture into worship, clergy attire, church music and architecture as much as possible, using forms pleasing to Chinese people to build a sinicized Christianity. He also advocated the compilation of a Chinese Christian prayer book in the Chinese style. In short, through these various approaches, Wei Zhuomin hoped to develop a Christianity that truly belonged to China. He wrote that when Christianity, the mysterious life of God in Jesus Christ, entered into the lives of the Chinese people and the Chinese nation, it would be naturally manifested by Chinese families, Chinese society, the Chinese nation and Chinese churches. If its form of expression is of China, Christianity will naturally be sinicized. If it expresses itself in full freedom, its form will naturally be indigenously Chinese.¹³

12 Wei Zhuomin, 《基督教的基本信仰》(Basic Christian faith) (Hong Kong: Fuqiao Press, 1965), 8.

13 Francis C.M. Wei (Wei Zhuomin), "Making Christianity Live in China," in *The Chinese Recorder* (Shanghai: American Presbyterian Mission Press, 1926, 2.

Wei Zhuomin also stressed the need to have a high regard for and stimulate the role of the church in building a sinicized Christianity. He went on to point out that the problem of a home-grown Christianity had from the very beginning been the problem of a home-grown church. Therefore, he called for the establishment of an indigenous Chinese church through which Chinese (sinicized) Christianity could be built. The members of a home-grown Chinese church would certainly be Chinese, its leaders would also be Chinese. And most of the financial resources supporting this church's activities and institutions would come from China. Obviously, the localized Chinese church Wei strove to construct would have a clear Chinese Christian local consciousness, its basis would be Chinese Christians, and with local leaders (native workers) in charge, it would truly be a Chinese church.¹⁴

Wei Zhuomin carefully designed a sinicized church organization suitable for the Chinese social context, the "Four-Center Church." The four center(s) refer to first, the cell group center, which Wei Zhuomin linked with the situation in the Chinese church, existing mostly in a non-Christian community, with the Christian group being in the minority. Measures must be taken to ensure the social interaction of Christian groups focused as much as possible around this center of Christian worship. This group we call the cell church.¹⁵ The remaining centers are the social service center; the Christian center of learning; and the

14 Li Xiangping, "The construction of relationships in 'local Christianity' in China."

15 Wei Zhuomin, "中国教会的四大中心—组建中国教会的一个建议"(A church with four centers—A suggestion for the formation of a Chinese Church). Translation of his English essay published in *International Review of Missions* No. 35 (1946): 271. Chinese version quoted from Ma Min, *Wei Zhuomin's Writings on Christianity*:133.

pilgrimage or retreat center.¹⁶ Among these four centers, “cell church” and “social service center” are important aspects of the Sinicization of Christianity. The cell church, especially, should be a group of Chinese Christians modeled on the doctrine of the “communion of saints” and deeply integrated and with the close social connections that characterize the Chinese,¹⁷ integrating church worship and interpersonal communication in a sinicized model of church organization. A church on this model consists of 30 to 50 families. The membership should be kept low, from as few as 100 to no more than 150, to conveniently serve the nearby community, and connect with the Chinese people’s social and personal relationships. The church building is the Christian center of worship and adoration of God. But this is not of itself essential. Each group may have some larger houses, one of which can be used for worship and gatherings by Christians. The ancestral hall or some other public place can also be used. At that time the Chinese church’s finances were relatively weak, and Wei Zhuomin somberly reminded churches all over the country that they must wait until they had sufficient economic power to build and maintain a church building independently. In order to win over the good opinion of Chinese people, Wei Zhuomin also suggested that the church should be built in the same way as the local ancestral temple, and that construction and maintenance can be completed at a small cost. The church building should

16 Wu Ziming, 吴梓明《全球地域化视角下的中国基督教大学》(*Chinese Christian colleges from a glocalized perspective*) (Taipei: Christian Cosmic Light Holistic Care Organization, 2006), No.179: 128-131.

17 Wei Zhuomin pointed out that the social characteristics of Chinese people are embodied in the small and compact groups in which they live, whose members are closely related, biologically and emotionally. It is these close social ties that embody coherence and give them a spirit of solidarity. These groups can be villages, family, or most commonly, neighborhoods. See note 15.

be the social center and place of worship of the church. All the social activities of the church members could be concentrated in the church, and the church congregation would conduct social networking activities in the church. It would be both a church and a club. It should be filled with a family atmosphere, a warm and homely place, a place people would love to go and so go often. A place where believers meet the Lord and gather with relatives and friends.

Based on his research, Wei Zhuomin pointed out that this type of cell church would operate differently from the Western mission-board model. It would easily take root and more easily communicate with the traditional cultures of non-Western societies. Its members would interact and network, and their spirit of small group fellowship and caring would replace those of traditional families. At the same time, its group fellowship and cell church form, with its varied and diverse evangelistic methods, could also break through the mainstream Chinese cultural value system's ideological constraints on the spread of Christian faith and greatly reduce the tensions between the church organization and the mainstream social environment and cultural value system, enabling smooth and successful communication between the church and the society and the people and the believers, thus building synchronicity between Christian church polity and Chinese social and group identity. This evolutionary orientation has, to a certain extent, surpassed the church/sect typology of Weber and Troeltsch, by being directly based on the organizational model of Christian globalization. Certainly this is an important concept in the globalization of Christianity, which includes Sinicization.¹⁸

Despite the fact that the church in China was generally financially strapped during Wei's lifetime, he still followed the Christian doctrine of "not to be served, but to serve," and

18 Li Xiangping.

proceeded on the basis of the real situation of the church. He proposed that several churches in a district should pool their efforts and set up a Christian service center as the second center of Chinese Christian life. Like the cell church mentioned above, these were also key to achieving Sinicization. In particular, the Christian Social Service Center differed from church organization in welcoming all denominations. The center serves the majority non-Christian communities around it, thereby preaching and witnessing to Christian life. They can adopt forms of service based on the actual needs of different groups—a clinic, a reading room, a community association and so on. Service center staff should be paid; volunteers are also welcome. Maintenance of the center need not be limited to the churches in the center. As long as it does not jeopardize the Christian service motivation and character of the service center, the center can accept donations from other parties, and can also cooperate with other similar centers. All in all, the Christian Social Service Center must fulfill its vocation to propagate and witness to Christian life.

Wei Zhuomin also advocated establishment of church schools that would be developed into centers of Chinese Christian thought, prompting Christians to maintain active and astute theological thinking. Wei Zhuomin emphasized that church schools were like the university research laboratories in modern countries. Christian scholars could engage in theological thinking in a pleasant atmosphere, reflecting on the life and ministry of the Chinese church, as well as social, national and world issues.

Last but not least is the Christian retreat center to which Wei Zhuomin gave careful thought. He pointed out that retreats or pilgrimages are the best and most natural way for Eastern people to express their religious beliefs and to satisfy their religious sensibilities. The pilgrimage sites of the three major schools of Confucianism, Buddhism

and Taoism in China attract their followers to journey to their spiritual homes, receive religious instruction, practice physical exercises, gain faith, spiritual fulfillment and well-being. Shouldn't Chinese Christians also have their own pilgrimage center? Such a center could receive Chinese pilgrims or Christians from elsewhere. A magnificent cathedral should be built near the pilgrimage center, and a library, a museum with a collection of the famous Christian relics, and hotel where rooms are rented at cost. The senior pastor of the cathedral should be a middle-aged spiritual leader who presides over the pilgrimage center, one known for his profound spiritual learning and godly devotion. Clearly the pilgrimage center is an indigenized retreat center for Chinese Christians.

In summary, it is not difficult to see that the Four-Center Chinese Christian church as carefully conceived by Wei Zhuomin is a form that organically combines the cultural context of the Chinese church and reflects his active efforts to build a sinicized Christianity in China.

Wei Zhuomin not only advocates the use of Chinese cultural forms, but further advocates a deeper understanding of the spirit of Chinese culture to discover points of convergence with Christianity, and then further use these to elucidate Christian theology and build Chinese Christianity and Chinese theology. Wei Zhuomin's Christology (道成人生) is an important achievement of his thinking on sinicized Christian theology and the key to constructing an indigenized Chinese systematic theology.

In his discussion of Christology, Wei puts aside the intricate traditional theological controversy about the two natures of Christ, nor does he highlight incarnational Christology (道成肉身) that arose to overcome the heresies of Gnosticism, Docetism, etc. He develops his sinicized Christology through a creative combination of the Chinese view that people should pay attention to their physical

health with the cultural importance attached to “being an upright person”: In God’s plan, how humans should conduct themselves as upright persons must involve a clear revelation of Godself in human life, thus “the Word becomes (human) life” (道成人生). In this “the Word becomes life,” Wei uses “life” (生 *sheng*) rather than “body” (身 *shen*). The Gospel of John clearly states: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. ... And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory.” Second John says that many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess that Jesus Christ has come into the world in the flesh. They are deceivers and the anti-christ. As Wei found through his research, the era of the Gospel of John and The Second Letter of John saw a flood of doctrines that promoted the flesh as evil. The Savior came into the world with a human body, a body of flesh and blood, not an illusory or evil body. The Jews did not believe that the flesh-and-blood body was filthy, and just as the Chinese do not despise the body, it was natural for them to believe that the Word became flesh, in line with historical facts.

However, in modern China, there is no such need. Wei Zhuomin was keenly aware that the Chinese stress moral rectitude and self-cultivation. Therefore, he creatively advocated a Christology for Chinese Christianity emphasizing that the Word of God is not only revealed in the fleshly body, but throughout the whole of human life. The flesh-and-blood body is born and dies, and human life has its beginning and end. At the same time, the Word become human life is not just a matter of a certain point in time and space, but a historical event that continues to occur over a long period (that is, throughout the whole life of Jesus, we know his whereabouts). Wei Zhuomin pointed

out that the Word incarnate in human life is a complete and fully human will, who, in a lifetime of words, deeds, thoughts and conduct, fully expressed the will of God.¹⁹ This is an unprecedented event. But we don't say that it will not happen again. If Christ became incarnate in human life in order to make our human flesh become Word, then for Wei Zhuomin, the purpose of Christ's incarnation in human life is to make the Word incarnate in our lives. Because each of us Christians is responsible to follow Christ and fulfill the will of God as our will.²⁰ Furthermore, Wei Zhuomin repeatedly stressed that the Word incarnate in human life is no accident, but is due to the nature of God; it was God's plan from the beginning to create heaven and earth, all creatures and humans. We must firmly believe this point in order to understand the meaning of the Nicene Creed: "...born of the Father before all ages, God from God ... begotten not made, of one being with the Father." The Word incarnate in human life was part of God's plan from the beginning.

To sum up, Wei Zhuomin's formulation of the Incarnation as "the Word become human life" not only develops and deepens "the Word become flesh" in the Christology highlighted by most theologians, but also closely links with the situation of Chinese Christianity, and links organically with Chinese culture and establishes an indigenized and sinicized Christology, laying a solid foundation.

Conclusion

Wei Zhuomin deserves his place as a theologian of prophetic vision in the 20th- century Chinese church. His vision and

19 Wei Zhuomin, "Basic Christian Faith," in Ma Min, *Anthology of Wei Zhuomin's Works on Christianity*, 70.

20 *Ibid.*

long-cherished wish to interpret the truth of Christian doctrine through Chinese culture to establish Chinese theology and a sinicized Christianity. For various reasons, Wei Zhuomin did not witness the full realization of Chinese theology nor the Sinicization of Christianity in China during his lifetime as he had wished. And for years, most ordinary Christians have not known of ideas on indigenized church form related to the Four-Center Chinese Church, or his theology of a sinicized Christology. Even more regrettably, Wei Zhuomin's theology of the Sinicization of Christianity in China was insufficiently recognized by the Chinese church in his lifetime. "Wei Zhuomin's contribution to higher education in the church was enormous, but in the same way as the cadre of brilliant theologians including Zhao Zizhen, the influence of Wei and others in the church is usually less than that of the well-known evangelists, that is, the 'giants' of the Chinese church... This shows that in the situation of the Chinese church at that time, although the Christian intellectuals represented by Mr. Wei could find an audience abroad, in China, it was difficult for them to influence the majority of believers."²¹ Certainly, Wei Zhuomin's theological thinking on the Sinicization of Christianity is now being more deeply pursued by the Chinese church. Theological Reconstruction, the goal of which is to realize the Sinicization of Christianity, has provided rich and valuable theological material. Dr. Wei's theological methods related to the growth of Christianity in China,²² that is, the Sinicization

21 Xu Yihua 徐以骅 and Zhang Qingxiong 张庆熊, 《基督教学术》 (Christian Academics) No. 9 (Shanghai: Shanghai Joint Publishing Co., 2011): 152.

22 Wu Ziming 吴梓明 "解读韦卓民博士之《让基督教会在中国土地上生根》 (Let the Christian Church take root in China)" in Liu Jiafeng 刘家峰, 《离弃与融会: 中国基督徒与本色教会的兴起》 (Abandonment and convergence: Chinese Christians and the rise of the indigenous church) (Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Press, 2005), 239.

of Christianity in China, are very enlightening and practical, and very worthy of our in-depth study and reference.

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Theological Education and the Requirements of Modern Church Development

神学教育与教会建设的时代要求初探

SU ZHIMING 苏志明

Theological education includes, at a minimum, three aspects: education, research, and training (the substance of theological education), aspects that are closely bound to the healthy and harmonious development of the Chinese church. The type of “person” trained by theological education directly impacts the “development” that takes place in the Chinese church, and theological education has a direct bearing on the survival of the Chinese church in the present and its future development (the foothold of theological education).

Theological education must establish itself in the Chinese context and the realities of the church (the incarnational nature of theological education, its “here-and-now-ness”), if it is to train fitting servants of God for the Chinese church in these times (the appropriateness of theological education), and meet the pastoral needs of the Chinese church in the modernization process (i.e., the ecclesiological nature of theological education).

Theological education must also enrich the self-construction of the church, provide Chinese society with moral guidance and spiritual value (the public nature of the theological education), and contribute the wisdom of Christianity to the flourishing of Chinese culture (the academic nature of theological education). This is the kind of theological education that may be able to satisfy and guide the present Chinese church in healthy and harmonious

development, so that the Chinese church can find itself in the midst of the nation's modernization process, establish and develop itself, and make its proper contribution to the ecumenical church in the globalization process.

Theological education should be based in the Chinese context and the reality of the church

Theological education must influence or inspire the growth of the church. It must base itself on China's national conditions (国情) and the situation of the church (教情), otherwise it will be very difficult for it to have a positive influence on the maturing Chinese church. Here we must first understand what the "national conditions" of China are and what the Chinese church's situation is; any one-sided, idealized or simplistic understanding will have a deleterious effect on theological education.

Different perspectives will result in different understandings of China's national conditions. Nor can we understand the Chinese church solely from an ideological perspective. We must understand it in terms of the political system, economic development, from a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural (a Chinese culture with Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism as the main part) and a multi-religious perspective. The greater our understanding of China's national conditions, the more cool-headed, rational, objective and pragmatic our view of the context in which the Chinese church exists and its space for development will be. Our perception of the reality of the Chinese church will be less subjective, less one-sided and sentimental, and we will not adopt a nihilistic attitude to that multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-cultural reality. Moreover, we need to understand the Marxist view of religion in China if the Chinese church is to find its identity and place in the modernization drive of our country. In this way, our busy

pastors will be able to achieve a sober self-knowledge, to regard themselves as conforming to a middle way and be unlikely to either become “arrogant” or feel “inferior.” Then theological education will be able to help the Chinese church develop in the “here-and-now”; that is, theological education must be grounded, leading the Chinese church in an incarnational way to survive, and even to thrive, in the Chinese political, economic, cultural and historical context.

Theological education must not only be based in the reality of the Chinese context, but also in the reality of the Chinese church, otherwise it will be very difficult to carry on theological education to train servants for the times and meet the needs of the Chinese church. Regarding the “conditions” of the Chinese church, the case lies in the eye of the beholder, different perspectives bring different understandings. However, we can generalize some distinctive features on the basis of some common phenomena to understand the “reality” of the Chinese church:

- (1) In 1950, the Chinese church initiated the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, realizing the view that the Chinese church should be an independent, self-governing church. When worship was resumed under the policy of Reform and Opening, the Chinese church proposed the goal of striving for “three wells,” namely that “self-government should mean governing well, self-support should mean well-supported, and self-propagation should mean doing the work of propagation well.” In 1998, in the midst of the nation’s modernization process, the Chinese church appeared conservative, negative, and anti-intellectual, and Bishop K.H. Ting put forward a resolution to strengthen theological reconstruction, the essential path for the Chinese church to develop from “three-self”

to “three well.” But there is still some way to go to achieve the “three well” goal; for instance: issues such as the improvement of church organization; improving the church’s social image; renewal of pastoral care in the church; the upgrading of church management; determining the church’s selfhood; as well as how self-propagation can be done well, etc. We must spare no effort to renew and enrich all these. The Chinese church’s story is not on a par with China’s image as a great power!

- (2) The Chinese church grew with the development of the motherland. Since reform and opening-up the number of believers has increased, and the church has begun to turn to seeking improvement in the quality of believers [i.e. education levels —ed.]. An illustration of this can be seen in the new and imposing church structures rising everywhere, and in the renovation or new construction of theological seminaries and Bible schools. The Chinese Protestant church is paying greater attention to the church’s internal construction, especially the phenomenon of “upgrading” of theological schools in various places, which shows that the internal demands of the Chinese church are constantly rising. There are the beginnings of benign competition. This is of great practical significance in improving the quality of pastoral staff and church workers across the board. At the same time, we should also see that there is still a certain gap between theological education and the development of Chinese churches. Theological education cannot completely address the increase of the number of believers in the churches, the slow change in composition of believers, and the problems in pastoral care brought on by

urbanization. When we attach importance to theological education, upgrade the software strength of seminaries—theological teachers—and improve the comprehensive quality of pastors and church workers, we are not far from improving the quality of the believers in the Chinese church. The number and quality of believers, theological education and church construction are out of balance.

- (3) In 1958, churches of various denominational and liturgical backgrounds in the Chinese church carried out “united worship” and the Chinese Protestant church entered its “post-denominational period.” The Chinese church cherishes the spirit of unity of seeking the common ground while reserving differences, of mutual respect and tolerance. At the same time, we should also continue to ask how Chinese post-denominational ecclesiology should be expressed, as well as what distinguishes theology of holy orders, sacramental theology, Eucharistic theology and theology of worship within this ecclesiology, as well as each theology’s connotations. There is some disorder in worship in Chinese churches and growing tensions between elders and clergy or between clergy and elders; this is closely related to the weakness of ecclesiology in the Chinese church. The Chinese church’s understanding of its “theological self” is unclear.
- (4) The development of the Chinese church during its growth process, has been uneven in various regions. The tensions between churches in urban (or suburban) areas, rural areas, Eastern and Western regions, coastal and inland regions is attracting greater attention. How to narrow the

gap between churches, and how to share resources and realize the spirit of Christian fellowship are issues that cannot be ignored. The problems reflected in this situation are: the widening of the salary gap among pastors and church workers, and the “serious shortage” of “persons of talent.” This gap has a real impact on the healthy, harmonious and orderly development of the Chinese church. The organizational structure of the church needs to be improved.

- (5) In the days to come, in order to establish a Chinese church with the goal of healthy, harmonious and orderly development, the Chinese church will continue to face balancing tensions between faith and reason, worldliness and spirituality, present and eternal life, church and society; as well as building dialogue between Christian and Marxist philosophy as well as with Buddhism, Taoism, Islam and other religions. How relations and dialogue with and among them can be coordinated and balanced or construction of a discourse theory are all very real problems that will otherwise affect the healthy development of Chinese churches. The church of China needs to mature.

Theological education must be based on the reality of China’s national conditions and the reality of China’s religious conditions. Only then will it be possible for the Chinese church to cultivate servants of God for the times who can lead the development of the Chinese church. This is of great practical significance and far-reaching influence, whether in terms of the self-construction of the Chinese church, for the Chinese church’s witness to the Lord in society, or for the management of the Chinese church.

Theological education must serve the pastoral needs of the Chinese church

The purpose of theological education is to help Chinese churches reflect on their faith in the real context, and to guide and serve the healthy and harmonious development of the Chinese church. Theological education should help the Chinese church reflect on what it believes, preaches, does and witnesses to in the real situation. With regard to the church's self-construction, we should reflect on whether our preaching is thoroughly prepared, whether it expresses and manifests the vitality of faith, the richness and fullness of the gospel and God's abundant grace; whether the preaching of the church has its focus on the pulse of the times; whether the church establishes the body of Christ in love and in harmony; and whether the church guides believers well to bear witness to the times, etc.

Bishop K.H. Ting's "theology is the church thinking" is undoubtedly of great revelatory significance for China's theological education and church self-construction. Bishop Ting's theological insights remind every patriotic theological worker and pastor who takes responsibility for the church (the mainstays of theology) in the Chinese context to reflect (the theological method) bravely on their faith and the church they serve. What should they reflect on (the matter of theology)? Bishop Ting left boundless space for imagination. He reminded every shepherd of the sheep in the context of China to:

Consider whether your world outlook, your outlook on life, and your values are in line with the Bible's teachings, are they theologically correct and do they have integrity? Do you care only about "the salvation of the soul," or do you care about the establishment of the whole person, as well as due social and ecological responsibility? Is the church you serve in agreement with the mind of God, does it build up the body

of Christ in love, does it feed the flock? Reflect on your own service to the church and to society (the community), is there a right relationship? Think about whether the church is light and salt, glorifies God and benefits the people. Reflect on whether you have run the church well, supported well, managed well. Reflect on whether the church has spread the message of reconciliation, harmony and peace among the people and made it a better place for harmony and co-existence. Has it considered the relationship between Christianity and other religions? All these questions are ones that every shepherd of the gospel of peace in China must reflect on. Such reflections are without doubt of great immediate and practical significance for “governing well, supporting well, and propagating well.”

Karl Barth has reminded us that the task of theology is a task it can and should achieve, that is, to serve the church and to serve its Lord. ... The task of theology is to constantly remind the ministers and people in the church that the church's life and work is under the authority of the gospel and the law, that the church should enable people to listen to God. ... Theology is also a watchman, cautiously watching for those errors that would decree the life of the church to be under threat and attack, because the church is composed of sinners who make mistakes and have already made mistakes. ... Theology and the church are closely related.¹ Barth's reminder tells us that theological education must become the church's watchman.

Therefore, regarding the self-construction of the Chinese church, one of the goals of theological education is to carry and convey God's rich revelation and preach

1 Karl Barth, "Theology," in *God in Action* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936), 39-57. Quoted from : Alister E. McGrath, ed., 《基督教神学原典菁华》(Classics of Christian Theology), trans. Yang Changhui 杨长惠 (Taipei: Campus Publishing, 1998), 38-39.

the full gospel in the present age, and to reflect on and critique (analyze, judge, standardize) the church's preaching (such as free interpretation and pragmatic exegesis) to see if it is faithful to God's revelation and the truth of the Incarnation; whether it enables the lives of God's people to be molded and renewed, whether it contributes to the enrichment of the whole person. At the same time, through reflection on preaching in the church, to guide believers in the life of the church and in social life, to practice the teaching to love country and love church, to honor God and benefit the people, to be light and salt, to love the Lord and love the people and enhance their social, ecological and cultural responsibility; and guide the Chinese church to adhere to the principles of three-self-patriotism, governing well, supporting well, and spreading God's kingdom in harmony, actively guiding the Chinese church to participate in building a harmonious society. Theological education is both a summary of spiritual experience and a guide to the advancement of the church. That is to say, theological education must serve the Chinese church well in order to tell the story of Chinese Christianity.

Theological education must enrich the self-construction of the Chinese church

Theological education should not only serve the pressing pastoral needs of the Chinese church (the ecclesiological nature of theological education), but also enrich the church's self-construction. This is mainly reflected in the fact that theological education should help the Chinese church to provide spiritual value (the public nature of theological education) to Chinese society and to contribute Christian wisdom to the flourishing of Chinese culture (the academic nature of theological education).

Professor Chen Zemin pointed out that “If theological study, in whatever place or time, cannot to some extent help or inspire the people of the time or those who come after, then theology cannot achieve the purpose of its proclamation (Kerygma).” Simply put, the purpose of theology is to help the Chinese church to make a beautiful witness to the Lord in a specific historical, social, political, and cultural situation, and to manifest Christ, glorify Christ, and serve God’s church in a specific time and space. Theological Reconstruction, initiated in the Chinese church in 1998, is aimed at running the church well. “The mission and purpose of Chinese Christian Theological Reconstruction is actually to enable the Christian church to develop in China in a healthy and orderly way” (Chen Zemin). David Tracy holds that theological studies have three distinct objects, namely, church, society and academia, and undertakes three different tasks depending on the object.² Tracy’s view can broaden our thinking about theological education. His theological study reminds us that theological education must, of course, serve the Chinese church, but we must in no way lose sight of the demands of society and the academy on the Chinese church. That is, theological education should not only serve the Chinese church, but also offer moral care and spiritual value to Chinese society. At the same time, it should also contribute Christian wisdom to the flourishing of Chinese culture (or the revival of Chinese learning). This is a heavy responsibility for China’s theological education and for the self-construction of the church. In fact, there is a long way to go and constant work to be done.

2 David Tracy is a lecturer at the University of Chicago Divinity School, his works include *The Achievement of Bernard Lonergan*, *Blessed Rage for Order*, *The New Pluralism in Theology*, *Dialogue with the Other: The Inter-Religious Dialogue*, *Plurality and Ambiguity*, etc. See Chen Zuoren 陈佐人, “Guide to the Chinese Edition,” in Feng Chuan 冯川, trans. 《多元性与含混性》 (*Plurality and Ambiguity*) (Shanghai: Joint Publishing, 1998), 1-17.

Firstly, vis à vis Chinese society, does the church have its own voice and values? Does the church speak the voice of conscience and the light of the times to guide people's value judgments and spiritual pursuits? Is the church the light and salt, a witness of the times to influence society and so on? The mission of theological educators and pastors is to integrate the theological heritage of the church and to interpret the faith of the Bible through cultural and philosophical media. Only by this means can the message of the Bible and faith in God be understood by modern people.³

Christian theology develops through encounters, dialogue, connection and conflict with different contexts. The same is true of the development of the church. It is the mission of theological education to be a bridge between the eternal truth of the kingdom of God and various changing societies. Theology should have a sure responsiveness and responsibility in social moral issues. On the other hand, society molds the individual's living conditions and experience, which in turn affect individual beliefs, choices and understanding of theological doctrines, and as a result, the social conditions such a faith involves cannot be avoided by any serious, full theology.⁴

Theological education, as a feature of God's kingdom, also belongs to the political, cultural, economic and ecological spheres of life, and is manifested in political theology, cultural theology, educational theology, ecological theology and natural theology. In these fields, the theology of the kingdom of God is public theology. It participates in the public affairs of society and intervenes in them with a critical

3 Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 20.

4 Xie Zhibin 谢志斌, 《公共神学与全球化: 斯塔克豪思的基督教伦理研究》(Public theology and globalization: Stackhouse's research in Christian ethics) (Beijing: Religion Culture Publishing House, 2008), 26.

attitude from the perspective of conscience. To examine the theological significance of society, politics, culture, morality, ethics, ecology and consumption from the perspective of the kingdom of God, and how these might conform to the principles of fairness and the righteousness of the kingdom of God is reflected in the theological concern for the present situation. According to the practical function of theology, this belongs to the category of practical theology or Christian ethics. Reflecting on and guiding the contemporary situation from the perspective of God's kingdom, we should consider a variety of perspectives. We can find inspiration for our thinking on theological education in the thought of Edward Farley.

Farley indicates that the object of theological reflection arises, more often than not, from one's living situation. Faced with various issues of the contemporary living situation, the first step in theological reflection is to begin from themes found in the Christian belief world, church tradition, and faith language and pose responses to issues in our life situation. Here we must refer to the religious thought of the whole of Christian faith, including Christian doctrine, basic symbols, themes in church preaching, traditional creeds, etc. The second step in theological reflection is to raise faith critiques of the modern situation. The third step is "critiquing while keeping a distance from tradition." This is a very important step, suggesting that tradition has been endowed with a position similar to revelation or the manifestation of the sacred, when at bottom tradition is just a historical human artifice, relative in nature. Giving tradition the position of eternal truth is no different from worshipping idols. The fourth step in theological introspection is a dialectical view that both affirms and negates tradition. Theology both examines the normative nature of tradition and acknowledges its relative nature. Faced with this contradiction, we need to return to the symbolic source of

the expression of eternal truth in Christian faith, to select and determine the content and standpoint of faith that correspond to the actual situation, and to interpret, discuss, develop and apply them. Finally, the fifth step in theological reflection is to return the interpreted and developed content of faith to the real situation and connect with issues in contemporary society. In this way, tradition and situation form a dialectical relationship and theological reflection is no longer a thought game that reconciles tradition. Rather, in the dynamic process of speculation, tradition can be freed of the rigidity that leads to dogmatism. Theological reflection becomes the key to discerning the kingdom of the Lord, by which the Lord gives support and guidance to the real situation, so that the real situation is constantly renewed until it reaches its best possible state.⁵

The Chinese church is one group living in Chinese society and must face the challenges posed by that society. Theological education should actively respond to various issues in society, reality and culture, speaking in a voice consistent with the church, and clarifying the values and ethical judgments of Christian faith. To achieve this function, theological education must take seriously biblical research and the development of Christian ethics (land ethics, climate ethics, consumer ethics, bioethics, etc.), as well as public theology, political theology, cultural theology, ecological theology and so on.

Secondly, *vis à vis* Chinese academics, the church should take a calm look at itself and think about why the voice of the Chinese church in academia today is so small—has it been marginalized, or self-marginalized, or is it because of

5 See Chen Shenqing 陈慎庆, “基督教神学的理念, 方法和运用,” (Christian theology: concepts, methods and application), in Guo Hongbiao 郭鸿标 and Tu Jianwei 堵建伟, eds, 《新世纪神学议程》 (Theological agenda for the new century), vol. 1, 28-31.

its own overall quality? Does the church sanctify Christ as Lord, always prepared to answer intellectuals both Christian and non-Christian who demand “an accounting for the hope that is in [it], yet do it with gentleness and reverence”? [1Peter 3:15-16]

If the Chinese church wants to dialogue with academia, theological education still has to do a lot of preparation, part of which involves improving in the areas of the humanities and academics in theology. The humanities aspect in theology⁶ can help the church to improve its theological interpretation and expression. The academic aspect of theology refers to the Chinese church’s interpretation of the truth of the Bible and the salvation of the Cross in a language and manner familiar to the Chinese people (Chinese or minority languages, or Chinese culture). This requires China’s theological education to constantly improve its comprehensive quality, including language, humanities, academic, philosophical, ideological, artistic, aesthetic and other aspects of human culture. Only in this way will it bring Bishop Ting’s “the church has a gospel to tell people,” into the academic public sphere, so that more people understand the humanistic value, spiritual value and spiritual wealth of Christianity.

Many outstanding theologians have contributed to the history of the Chinese church in modern times: T.C. Chao 赵紫宸 (Zhao Zichen, 1888-1979), Xie Fuya 谢扶雅 (1892-1992),

6 The humanism of theology refers to theological inquiry and interpretation done together with courses in the humanities, especially in language (including biblical language, Latin, English, and even ancient Chinese prose, etc.), literature, history and philosophy; biblical interpretation, theological research or understanding cannot be separated from these aspects. If theologians and preachers of the gospel have a firm basis in literature, history and philosophy, plus theological training, the effect will be to multiply the results with half the effort; conversely, without these, the depth and development of theological research will be limited.

Wu Leichuan 吴雷川 (1870-1944), and in more recent times, Y.T. Wu 吴耀宗 (Wu Yaozong, 1890-1979), Bishop K.H. Ting 丁光训 (Ding Guangxun, 1915 -2012), Professor Chen Zemin 陈泽民 (1917 -2018), Professor Wang Weifan 汪维藩 (1927- 2015), and Bishop Shen Yifan 沈以藩 (1928-1994). Their writings are the precious heritage of the Chinese church. Theological education today should continue their theological pursuits and enrich the academic nature of theological education. The academic development of the Chinese church today is a heavy responsibility. Pastors “need to think about how theology in the church can position itself in secular society and realize its own value”; scholars outside the church have called for this.⁷ “Only when theology speaks about the common situation of humankind by means of a more general mode of discourse, only when theology pays more attention to ‘public’ issues, and enters more frequently into the ‘public’ realm, will it have grounds to establish itself in secular society and the academic system, and become a legitimate topic in the humanities and academia, making it possible for the Christian ‘community of faith’ to realize its potential as a ‘community of discourse.’”⁸

In order to have a dialogue with the academic community, great improvements are needed in the humanities aspect of theology. Bringing the value of Christian faith to the public sphere through academia will make it possible for more people to understand the uniqueness of Christian faith, and its significance and hope.

7 Yang Huilin 杨慧林, “神学的公共性与人文学者的神学关怀” (“The public aspect of theology and the theological concern of humanities scholars,” (Editor’s Note) in “The public nature of theology,” (Journal for the Study of Christian Culture No. 11 (Autumn, 2004): 1.

8 Yang Huilin, “在其位置上的不在场” (Editor’s Note), in 《神学与公共话语》 (Theology and Public Discourse) , Journal for the Study of Christian Culture No. 14 (Autumn 2005): 1.

Theological education is closely related to the self-construction of the Chinese church. It is the “present” and the “future” of the Chinese church. Theological education must be established in the Chinese context, take root in the reality of the Chinese church, find and develop itself in the era of modernization and globalization, so as to cultivate servants for the times for the Chinese church, humbly “wash the feet” of Chinese society, serve the Chinese church and Chinese society, and strive to improve the humanities and academic aspects of theology. Christianity must bring its “message to the people” to the Chinese academic public sphere and contribute Christian wisdom to the enrichment of Chinese academic research and to the flourishing of Chinese culture. As China becomes a world power, telling its own story will be Chinese Christianity’s contribution to the universal church.

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**Not to be Served but to Serve:
The Path to Service for a Sinicized Christianity**
非以役人乃役于人: 基督教中国化的服侍之路
QIU ZHONGHUI 丘仲辉

The outstanding Chinese Christian leaders Bishop K.H. Ting 丁光训 (1915-2012) and Dr. Han Wenzao 韩文藻 (1923-2006), along with others of the older generation of church leaders, founded The Amity Foundation at the start of the era of reform and opening-up in 1985. All his life, Bishop Ting advocated the theological concept that “God is love.” His understanding and interpretation of love was the most important part of his theology. This was Bishop Ting’s great encouragement to the social service work of the church. If we say, “theology is the church thinking,” then service is “the church acting.”

Social service is part of the genetic makeup of the church. This gene for service originates in the Bible and in the incarnate God. The Bible says: “For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give up his life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 10:45). The Incarnation is God’s coming among humanity: supreme God took the first step to “contextualize.” The mission and work of the Son of Man Jesus was “not to be served but to serve.” The gospel of Christ teaches us to emulate Christ, to love others as ourselves, to serve society, and to be salt and light.

At the same time, we should see that Chinese Christianity and the church have always been closely connected to the development and changes in Chinese society. Without reform and opening-up in China, the church

would not have developed as healthily as it has. Likewise, without reform and opening-up, the Amity Foundation would not have begun and grown. Today, with the rapid transformation and development of Chinese society, the church needs to continue its theological thinking and construction. This requires us to think further about how Christianity expresses “God is love” through concrete action, and to explore how Christianity can display its work of glorifying God and benefiting people through social service. Bishop Ting said in his *Collected Works** that any reflection on the context of Chinese church theology must be rooted in China and closely related to the Chinese people.

Service is required by the gospel

The biblical basis

If we want to sum up the whole Bible in one word, no word is more appropriate than “love.” The biblical emphasis on “love” is expressed in the Greek text by *agape*, a special term used to refer to God’s unconditional love for human beings. God loves the people of this world, and God expressed this love by humbling himself, taking human form to serve among those in need, giving his life for people and shedding his blood. This is the gospel, this is the “love” advocated by Christianity, which is the core of Christian theology.

Because God loves people unconditionally, Christians, as recipients of God’s grace, should naturally model themselves on Christ and serve with God’s unconditional love. Whatever Christians do, this love should be their starting point. Whoever they serve, they should treat with

* K.H. Ting 丁光训, 《丁光训文集》 (Nanjing: Yilin Press, 1998) English version: *Love Never Ends, Papers by K.H. Ting*, Janice Wickeri, ed. (Nanjing: Yilin Press, 2000).

God's unconditional love. "We love because he first loved us" (1 John: 4:19).

The New Testament uses the word *diakonia* to express the actions through which Christians serve with God's unconditional love. The original meaning of the word is "to wait upon; to serve." When used as a verb it refers to the act of service; when used as a noun it refers in a broad sense to all types of service the church develops and engages in, including the compassionate actions the church carries out among those in need.

The early church was quite deeply influenced by Greek culture and so used the term to express service at meals. The term has long been used for church-related service, particularly to refer to some types of leadership in the church, as in for example 1 Corinthians 16: 15. Here Paul exhorts the church in Corinth to praise the faith of Stephan as and his household. This faith meant their devoting themselves "to the service of the saints."

In addition, in the New Testament the term is also used to refer to the "aid ministries," organized by the church. For example, where Paul speaks of donations to the poor among the saints in Jerusalem, *diakonia* is directly used once in the text (Romans 15:31). In the early churches, those who participated in these ministries were called "servants" and the term later evolved to refer to those who led the church (Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:8-12).

That the New Testament and the early church used such a special word to express the service work of the church, not only refers to the content of such service, but also to the qualities and intentions people who engaged in this service should possess. Through the service of churches and believers, others can recognize the characteristics of the church fellowship in its practice of God's unconditional love.

The most important part of Bishop Ting's theology was his understanding and interpretation of "God is Love."

He put the precious message received from the gospel into practice in the ministry of church social service. The founding of The Amity Foundation was an embodiment of Bishop Ting's theology. He reminded Amity staffers time and again that "Christians should care for society; they should do things related to people's welfare."

The term "amity" (*ai de* 爱德) comes from the Bible. It is one of the three great virtues (faith; hope; love), and it is the highest moral character Christians should have. The Bible says love "binds everything together in perfect harmony" (Colossians 3:14). In Chinese, the term Amity is made up not only of the character for love (*ai* 爱), but also that for "virtue" (*de* 德). Whether love or virtue, contemplating the language of the term is not enough; it demands to be carried out in concrete external action. Therefore, in choosing the name Amity (*aide*) for the social service organization he established at the age of 70, Bishop Ting was not only representing the biblical teaching, but also the requirement in traditional Chinese culture for the cultivation of the individual person. These two words embody the thinking and practice of the Sinicization of Christianity of Bishop Ting and the older generation of church leaders; these words highlight the brilliance of sinicized Christianity.

Jesus' example

Speaking of humbling himself for his mission of coming into the world, Jesus proclaimed "For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). Reading this passage, we cannot help being deeply moved: Jesus' greatest mission in coming into this world was to serve, this was the mission Jesus proclaimed clearly, both in his own words and in concrete ways in the days to come in his preaching life. Looking at Jesus' life as found in the Gospels, we see that they are full of Jesus serving all sorts of people with different needs:

the sick, the blind, the disabled, the deaf, the mute, the hunchbacked woman, and so on; in Jesus' person service is clearly conveyed: his coming was to serve, to be a servant Lord.

A church is defined as the gathering together of those who have been called by God. The universal church holds with one accord that the mission of the church is founded on the ministry of Jesus Christ, especially on his greatest [act of] service—his crucifixion. After Christ's resurrection, the church took up Christ's mission on earth; the church is Christ's body on earth. Therefore, the ministry of the church takes the service of Jesus as its model in following the example of Christ, serving its neighbors and caring for those in need.

The church is a fellowship of Christians. Through care for society, through engagement in social service, Christians love one another and love unconditionally those not loved by others. Such actions are the hands and feet of Christ in the world. The church's engagement in social service brings the biblical teachings alive in daily life, and makes faith, which is invisible, visible through service to those around, who witness in it God's love and glory. God's love takes concrete form, rather than being an abstraction.

The Gospels record the many facets of Jesus Christ's ministry, including those concerned with people's health and the stability of human life. For example, Jesus Christ cared for the sick and healed them. At the pool of Bethzatha, he healed a man who had been ill for 38 years (John 5: 1-9); he cured a blind man in Bethsaida (Mark 8:22-26); he cured a paralyzed man (Luke 5:17-26); he cured the man at Gerasenes who had demons (Luke 8:26-31); etc. In his ministry Jesus Christ gave comfort to those in need; he was there with the vulnerable, personally solving the problems they faced, and so on. All this later became the specific content of the church's work in social service.

As the church in China begins to think about how to adapt and develop better in its context, we can see the church reflecting in this context, reflecting among those they serve in China now who are in need. Theology is the church thinking. Such reflection is the beginning of theological reconstruction in Chinese Christianity, and service in context also helps to promote further reflection in the church. This promotion is mutual, and both are indispensable. Chinese Christian theology must see that service is not a means of evangelism; there should be no other hidden agenda. It is rather a responsibility and a demand the gospel entrusts to Christians themselves. Chinese Christians' identity is entrusted to them by God's unconditional love. We must defend this noble identity and become transmitters of love.

Service is the only route to Sinicization

The church's tradition and experience

We can see from the preceding analysis that Christian social service is a requirement of the gospel, a biblical teaching, the theological thought of the church, and also the historical tradition of the church. The Jubilee Year of the Old Testament and the extraordinary kindness shown to the impoverished by Jesus in the New Testament are both concrete manifestations of Christ's care for the vulnerable, his involvement in social aid, and his service to those in need.

In the 1930s, the boards of foreign mission societies that came to China established diverse social service ministries, including hospitals, schools, relief work, orphanages, printing presses, and so on that gained social acceptance and recognition. Through the social service ministries begun by the churches, the gospel was put into practice, and at the same time, this positive action of the churches gave practical help to suffering Chinese.

For historical reasons, the development of Chinese Christianity and its social service ministry went through a period of stagnation. Following Reform and Opening Up, Chinese Christianity welcomed a period of rapid and smooth development. The Christian population grew and the church was maturing. This development spurred improvements in preaching and church self-construction and prompted the church to pay attention to the community around it and the development of Chinese society. At this time, encouragement for the church to initiate social services is all the more important. Social service is not only the way to carry forward the spirit of the universal love of Christ, it is also the only way for Christians to fulfill their social responsibility and mission, as well as the only way for Christians and the Chinese church to think about and practice the Sinicization of Christianity.

Guidance from Bishop Ting's theology for the work of serving

“God is love” is the core of Bishop Ting’s theology; he holds that love is God’s greatest attribute. In the great love created by God, humans are endowed with the spirit of God, which is the image and form of God, and the human capacity and power to love others. Bishop Ting’s thought is influenced by process theology. He believed that God’s creation did not stop at the moment of creation but is continuous. He said that the pinnacle of God’s creation is that a new kind of human will emerge in the universe, one willing to work with God in the creation project. From this point of view, the mission of humanity’s creation is to become co-workers with God, together transforming and renewing this world, serving the people with love in response to the great love of God. As co-workers in God’s continuing creation, Christians show their faithfulness by assuming their social responsibility.

God's creative love guides human beings to bring about a kingdom of heaven based on love. Therefore, to love each other and to protect God's creation is the mission of human life. Only through action, by putting love into practice through action, can we be gradually transformed into messengers of love and co-workers of God and so bring about the pinnacle of God's creation. Christians follow the command of God's love to reach the pinnacle of God's creation. Moreover, God encourages Christians to love others with God's own love.

Bishop Ting has said, "Love is not just an attribute of God, but is of God, for God is love. He is the Lover at the heart of reality. The disclosure that God is one who loves with the kind of love as enacted in Jesus Christ, crowns and corrects whatever else may be said about God. Love is creative and seeks the very best. Everything that is truly good will not be lost but will be preserved and transformed for that Kingdom to come in which Love will be supreme."[†] Bishop Ting understands that God's presence is that his love is always with creation. He stated that God is the Cosmic Lover who suffers with us and so understands us. God did not abandon sinners, nor this world corrupted by sin. God calls Christians to be his messengers of love in the world, taking up the responsibility to witness to God's love to those in need and for the world. Thus, Christians' genuine love and service for others is of eternal value. For us, through service, God shows forth his presence and transcendence in this world. This is the foundation of Amity's service and work.

[†] Ting, Sermon in Sydney Cathedral, 1984, 《在澳大利亚教会欢迎会上的演讲》, *Love Never Ends*, 163.

Service is the requirement for the era of Sinicization

In recent years, our government has actively promoted and encouraged participation by religious organizations, Christianity among them, in public service. In February 2012, the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA) and six ministries and commissions jointly issued “Opinion on the Encouragement and Standards for Religious Groups to Engage in Charitable Activities.” The “Opinion” holds that charitable activities by religious groups have a deep faith foundation, long historical tradition and high social credibility. Such activities are a necessary requirement in guiding the adaptation of religion to socialist society, an important way to bring out the positive role of religious circles and believers, and a beneficial supplement to promoting the healthy development of charitable enterprises in China. This document gained positive responses from local governments, especially in Jiangsu province, where 7 departments jointly issued documents to implement this “Opinion” and proposed further specific incentive policies.

In September 2014, General Secretary Xi Jinping 习近平, speaking at the 65th Anniversary of the CPPCC, pointed out that the ethnic and religious policies of the Party should be fully implemented, and that people of all ethnic groups should be actively guided to enhance their recognition of our great motherland, the Chinese nation, the Chinese culture, and the road of socialism with Chinese characteristics, so as to give full play to the positive role of religious circles and believers in promoting economic and social development, and to promoting national unity and religious harmony.

Clearly, the government has taken an unprecedented positive attitude of support and encouragement for religious charitable activities, whether in terms of support, equal treatment, or legal management and improvements in the mechanism, and has given considerable space for

activities and relatively clear provisions. Along with an improved and healthy Chinese charity law, as well as active local implementation of relevant policies, this not only strengthens the enthusiasm and initiative of religions' involvement in social services and charitable activities, it also opens up a new path for social practice for Sinicization of religion and Christianity.

In short, *vis à vis* society, for religions to carry out charitable activities for public welfare is conducive to the formation of a fine social image for religions, while for religious circles themselves, charitable activities are an innate religious attribute and main social function.[#] Social services provided by Christian churches and Christians is a way to practice and witness to their faith, and a spiritual requirement in the believer's pursuit of self-perfection.

The Amity Foundation: a case study

When Christianity emerged from Judaism and spread outward to various peoples and cultures, it identified with and adapted to them. In modern times, for certain historical reasons, Christian involvement in charities was used by Western missionaries as a means of evangelism. In the present, Amity's charitable activities have become an important carrier of self-adaptation and adaptation to the larger society during the transition from "three-self" to "three-well." The establishment and development of the Amity Foundation and the Amity Printing Company are events symbolic of this process.

The birth of Amity is an important event for the Chinese church in moving from "three-self" to "three-well. In the long course of human history, philanthropy has existed

[#] Han Song 韩松, 《我国宗教背景的公益慈善组织模式和未来走向》(Patterns and future trends of charitable organizations with religious backgrounds in China).

since ancient times. Development of philanthropy in China into organized and normalized social welfare enterprises is closely related to religion.

Following the foundation of new China, the separation of church and state and the policy of religious freedom were implemented. When the church engages in social welfare activities, it faces the immediate problem of how to adapt these to national conditions and changes in society. The Three-Self Movement (TSPM) severed relations between Christianity and foreign mission boards, enabling Chinese Christianity to begin adapting to Chinese socialist society and opening up a way to run the church well according to three-self principles and promote Theological Reconstruction.

The Amity Foundation is the result of Christians practicing in the new era principles they have always observed, originating in the Three-Self Movement's consistent commitment to society: "In the new era of reform, opening up and modernization, this commitment has taken a new organizational form, and made use of historical links with churches overseas." Dr. Han Wenzao, the first general secretary of the Amity Foundation, repeatedly stressed that "the Amity Foundation is a new way for Christianity to participate in social development in the new era." It should be emphasized that this is a way not previously found overseas, nor previously in China. This is the great practice of the Sinicization of Christianity in China's contemporary situation, one with distinctive Chinese characteristics, because it sprouted in the fertile soil of Chinese society.

Established in the early stages of reform and opening-up, Amity matured during the process of deepening reform. Thoroughly rooted in many communities in rural and urban areas of China, providing services for people in need, responding to national policies, and meeting social needs, it understands the urgent needs of the people.

Amity focuses on putting down roots in China and adapting to society. Over the thirty-plus years since its founding, Amity's development has undergone several stages. These stages took place during an era of drastic changes in Chinese society following the period of reform and opening-up. The development of each stage was closely bound to the needs of nation and society.

The first stage (1985-1994) was the initial stage. At the time, China was in the early stages of reform and opening-up. In March 1986, the Seventh Five Year Plan passed by the National People's Congress referred to "measures for the economic development of old revolutionary base areas, areas inhabited by ethnic minority groups, border areas and poverty-stricken areas." Amity learned to raise funds from overseas institutions, especially Christian-related development agencies, and started single and small-scale projects in East China—education, disability assistance and rural development projects, etc., providing timely and direct aid to many poor people, the most prominent example being the 1991 flood in East China. Amity raised nearly two million US dollars for emergency relief. Its aid and post-disaster reconstruction work were highly praised by government and society.

In 1994, the State Council issued the 8-7 Poverty Alleviation Plan, for which it selected 592 poverty-stricken counties. At this time, Amity's work had entered its second stage (1995-2004), the growth stage. In 1992, Amity gradually shifted the focus of its work to West China. Many poverty-alleviation and comprehensive development projects were launched in rural areas of provinces and regions, including Guizhou, Yunnan, Guangxi, Gansu and Ningxia. .

The third stage (2005-2014) was the innovation phase of Amity's work. During this phase, Amity created many new fields by acting on the basis of the changing situation

and social needs. In late November 2000, the Fifth Census found that China's over-sixty population had reached 130 million, 10.2 percent of the total population. According to international standards, China had become an aging society. The demand for an old-age pension was clear, and the demand for social services in urban communities had increased dramatically. Therefore, Amity launched urban community governance and services, community home care, community social organization cultivation and social enterprises, while also actively exploring ways to promote the development of religious charitable institutions.

Since 2015, Amity has been in its fourth decade of development. In the same year, the Chinese government put forward its "Belt and Road" initiative, and a large number of enterprises [extended their work] overseas. Amity too actively used the superior resources of its overseas partnership network to implement the dual-drive development mode of philanthropy and social enterprises. Coordinating with government and enterprises to go abroad, it set up offices in Ethiopia and Geneva in 2015 and 2016. Its charitable projects involve 23 countries, contributing to the development of China's soft power and the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

The development and changes in Amity in the past 30 years reflect the profound changes in Chinese society and changes in the ways of social governance. In the process of China's reform and opening-up, special economic zones have played an exploratory and exemplary role in the economic field. The establishment and development of Amity has followed these changes, with similarly satisfactory results. Amity has created a development path for special philanthropic zones in the social field. At the Third Plenary Session of the Eighteenth Central Committee, General Secretary Xi Jinping clearly put forward the idea of innovating social governance: "improve the way of social

governance, stimulate the vitality of social organizations, and innovate and effectively prevent and resolve social contradictions.” Amity’s 30 years’ development is just such a process of innovation and adaptation.

Speaking of Amity’s service and advocacy, its work adheres to the concept of “people-oriented, people-centered development.” God created human beings in God’s own image, bestowing God’s grace and blessings on each one. Everyone receives God’s grace and blessings. In the process of project design, planning and implementation monitoring, Amity does not base its procedures on its opinion of persons involved, but respects expert opinion while never ignoring the suggestions of the beneficiaries. Project design focuses on improving the self-development capacity of the beneficiaries, especially with regard to the equal empowerment of women.

We not only provide services, but also promote the spread of ideas. At the beginning of reform and opening-up, China’s social public welfare enterprises began from scratch. Amity actively “went out” and “invited in,” and has established partnerships with churches and development organizations in many countries around the world. Establishing cooperative partnerships enabled Amity to have an internationalized vision and space from the very beginning, to learn development concepts from international institutions, and shape a set of systems and methods in project management and financial management to ensure the public credibility and transparency of institutions. At the same time, Amity focuses on drawing lessons from and developing in practice, reflecting on and improving in context, and constantly improving its service.

In recent years, Amity has strived to promote the development of religious charities. In 2009, the Jiangsu Christian Charity Fund was established jointly with the Jiangsu provincial CC&TSPM. Following the establishment

of the fund, based on the development of the Jiangsu Provincial Social Services Ministry, the fund received strong support from the provincial CC&TSPM and local churches in the province, and carried out many capacity-building projects such as project management, senior services and disability services in Jiangsu churches. It can be said that the establishment of the Jiangsu Christian Charity Fund has offered the church in Jiangsu a suitable way to respond to social demands, and to step boldly out of the church door and into the society beyond to participate in the development of Chinese society.

In 2012, Amity assembled more than 150 social service organizations with religious backgrounds into a social service network to promote the development of social service ministries in religious circles throughout the country. In 2015, the Jiangsu Provincial United Front Department and The Amity Foundation, were designated as the Jiangsu Provincial Religious Charity Training Base by the Jiangsu Provincial Religious Bureau and encouraged to provide intellectual support for religious charity activities of the five major religions. Amity's "crowdfunding" initiative to build an Internet fund-raising platform for grass-roots public welfare organizations included Christianity, Buddhism and other religions, helping them foster capacity, access resources, serve the population and benefit society.

Although Amity is not a church institution, as an institution with a Christian background based on Christian beliefs, Amity's practice and advocacy of religious philanthropy has enabled people from all walks of life in China to understand an aspect of the contribution of Chinese Christianity to China's social development and the thinking and construction of Christian theology, thus enabling people to have a more specific and realistic understanding of the Christian image. With the application of Internet technology, Amity advocates and spreads the concept of "philanthropy

by all,” which provides an experimental platform for dialogue and cooperation among religions.

Love needs to be witnessed to and manifest through action. As Bishop Ting said, Amity “helps more and more Chinese Christians to realize how wonderful it is to devote themselves to serving people with all kinds of needs.” The service-based interreligious exchanges, dialogues, cooperation and sharing promoted by Amity are conducive to harmony between religious circles and harmony between religions and society.

In 2015, the United Nations adopted 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in its 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The primary goal is to “eradicate poverty in all its forms in all parts of the world.” The Chinese government is committed to fulfilling this goal ten years ahead of schedule, so as to carry out precise poverty eradication throughout the country. Religious circles and social development institutions with religious backgrounds, including Amity, should and must join hands in the cause of promoting human well-being and building bridges and platforms for service between churches and society.

In his “What Can We Learn from Y.T. Wu Today?” Bishop Ting says “To pay more attention to service goes hand in hand with putting emphasis on contextualization and on ethics in our theological work. It is integrating faith and works, knowledge and action. This is something that Christian faith implies; it is also what the church in the context of our country needs in order to renew itself and to witness to Christ.”[♦] From Bishop Ting’s reflections here, we can see that the significance of Amity’s work is not only to give full play to the social role of philanthropy, but also the

[♦] Ting, What can we learn from Y.T. Wu today? 《今天我们向吴耀宗先生学习什么? 》, *Love Never Ends*, 328.

social adaptation of religious philanthropy in the Chinese context.

The development of social enterprises needs the support of various kinds of public welfare resources. Just like the introduction of foreign capital for partnership and joint ventures for economic development, Amity actively pursues international cooperation in the social field, boldly introduces donated funds from overseas and uses them independently in our social development work, in cooperation with various social organizations throughout the country for various charity projects. Tens of millions of people have provided useful aid and promoted improvement in people's living and production standards, embodying the positive role of charitable organizations in realizing socialist core values. At the same time, such cooperation has greatly promoted the international community's understanding of the actual situation of Chinese society, won more friends, developed friendship and promoted world peace.

Theology is the church thinking and service is the church acting. Service brings us into closer harmony with society!

6 January 2019

Mr. Qiu Zhonghui joined the work of The Amity Foundation as a young man and became the second General Secretary in 2003. In April 2018 he was elected Chair of the Board.

Evangelism as Contextual and Prophetic: A Chinese Perspective

LIN MANHONG 林曼红

A good friend of mine once shared this story with me. When she was at college many years ago, she tried to share the Gospel with a classmate. But the classmate said that her whole family, including herself, were pious Buddhists and there was no way for her to be converted to a religion that was different from what her whole family embraced. My friend did not go any further to persuade her, not because she didn't want to follow the early missionaries' teaching by telling her that Buddhism was a bad religion for leading people's souls astray, nor because she knew how to respect people's choice to follow a different religion, but because she did not have the confidence to convince her.

Without much contact with each other after graduation, around ten years later, at a class reunion, to her great surprise, my friend got to know that her classmate had become a devoted Christian. My friend's classmate shared that one day during her time studying abroad, she felt so lonely that she desired to find something to meet her spiritual needs, and she happened to pass by a church where she overheard the beautiful singing inside. She had a strong feeling that this was a religion that could be trusted because it was once sincerely introduced to her by a classmate who was a trustworthy person. Then she started to visit that church and was later baptized there.

There might be various factors that brought this person into Christianity, but one thing worth mentioning is that the seed of the Gospel was first sown by a trustworthy person. A trustworthy person is someone who practices what s/he preaches. For Chinese people, the practice is often more important than the preaching, as the ancient Chinese philosopher Confucius has said: "Judge people by their deeds, not just by their words." Within such a Chinese cultural context, to follow Jesus is to demonstrate our "good works" that can be seen, so that the name of our heavenly Father can be glorified (Matthew 5:16), and to bear "good fruits" to witness to who we are (Matthew 7:16-20). The growth of the Chinese church does not rely on any door-to-door evangelism or popular evangelists conducting massive outdoor revival meetings, but on the personal witness of each individual Christian. Chinese Christians are always encouraged to strive to live a life that is transformative, both for our spiritual journey and our mundane daily life. The exciting part is that our good works may unexpectedly bring people to Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Nevertheless, Chinese Christians' good works do not merely serve the purpose of expanding the church, otherwise, it would represent the lack of a comprehensive understanding about evangelism, and it would also be discouraged in the Chinese context. Christians in China, like in most other Asian countries, are in a small minority, surrounded by a vast number of people who either have no religious belief or follow other religious traditions. It is quite unlikely that all people would embrace Christianity even if Christians made enough efforts, as envisioned by traditional missiology. At least this is not going to happen in the foreseeable future. Then, what are the Christians' "good works" and "good fruits" for? They exemplify the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. To follow Jesus in the Chinese

context is to live out a Christ-like life. It is to let people see Christ in us. As long as the image of Jesus Christ is manifested to people through our love for our neighbors, our care for strangers, our responsibility for society, and all other kinds of good works, whether or not they will join the church becomes less important. The church is more about quality and less about quantity. It is not about success in numbers, but about whether it is faithful to Jesus' teaching by truly being the light of the world and the salt on earth. To do evangelism in the Chinese context is to sow the seeds of the Gospel and water them, in a Chinese way, and to pray for the growth with joy.

Evangelism in China, a country with a more than 5000-year history, culture and civilization, without being contextual, is impossible. Evangelism in China is also prophetic, and in a Chinese way too. Prophecy in biblical narratives was about proclaiming the encouraging, liberating and reconciling good news from God, and passing criticism on religious unfaithfulness and social injustice. In the Chinese context, the prophetic good news should address the real concerns and issues of people's daily life more than the eschatological concern of soul-saving for eternity over emphasized by the old missionary movement, which was prevalent in the Chinese church, but is less relevant to the common Chinese people who have always had more concerns about the here and now and the "this worldly" since ancient times. (A pupil of Confucius asked the Master about the meaning of death. The Master replied: "Know the meaning of life first, and then the meaning of death.") The prophetic good news is about the transformation of the whole person: the soul, body and mind; it is about transforming people's ways of living and the values they hold. To actively participate and play a constructive role in society is an effective way for the Chinese church to bring good news to people, and to criticize the injustice in

society. Criticism usually tends to be in a more negative form to point out faults and to urge correction. The collective witness of the Chinese church is to serve as a positive form of criticism to show Chinese people, including Christians, what is good, equal and just, what is right to do, and what the Lord requires of us.

In his recent keynote address to the Christian Conference of Asia, Sri Lankan theologian Wesley Ariarajah pointed out that most of the prophetic criticisms in the Hebrew Bible and in Jesus' time were directed not only at social issues, but also towards the religious institutions of which the prophets were a part. To enable evangelism in the Chinese context to be more prophetic, the churches in China continue to engage in self-criticism and self-reflection to challenge our own belief and practices. These engagements include reflecting on whether we have enough humility to respect the traditional and contemporary Chinese cultures where the Holy Spirit is at work and where the Gospel has been rooted, and to respect other religions and their followers by seeing them as also on the pilgrimage of seeking wisdom, truth and goodness, instead of condemning them as paganism and pagans, as the early fundamentalist missionaries taught. Our self-reflections, among many, also include how to address issues of the negative influence of consumerism and the theology of prosperity in our church, and the trouble of proselytism coming from outside.

In conclusion, the endeavors of Christian personal witness, the church's living out a Christ-like life, being content to be a small minority, addressing people's actual concerns and problems, actively participating and playing a constructive role in society, self-criticism and reflection, and many other factors jointly make evangelism both contextual and prophetic in China.

Rev. Dr. Manhong Melissa Lin 林曼红 was an Associate General Secretary of the China Christian Council at the Tenth National Chinese Christian Conference held in Beijing, November 2018. She has also served as Associate General Secretary and Director of the Department of Education, China Christian Council, and Academic Dean of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary. This short presentation was written for the World Mission Conference of the WCC in 2018 in Arusha, Tanzania. Reprinted from the WCC website.

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